

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

The History of British Trotskyism to 1949

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by

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PREFACE

Trotskyism has been neglected by historians excavating those ever more popular quarries the 1930s and 1940s. Their disinterest is my main case for devoting a full-length thesis to Trotskyist activity before 1949. It may be objected that Trotskyism was unimportant throughout my chosen period. But while it was certainly no major influence before 1949, even in the restricted area of the labour movement during that time, Trotskyism maintained activity and conditioned in part the behaviour of other movements and individuals who are thought fit subjects for historical enquiry. There is therefore a job of recovery to be done in order to establish whom Trotskyism affected and why. Yet there is, simultaneously, a larger question to pose: if Trotskyism was unimportant throughout, why was this so? There is no iron law of labour movements which inevitably permits communist parties to eclipse Trotskyism. In a number of metropolitan countries Trotsky received early and significant support from noted communist leaders. Since this did not happen in Britain where the communists themselves never gathered mass support, the historian must ask why. It is also necessary to allow for those occasions when Trotskyism passed out of the shadows into the floodlights: these moments have also been skipped, for the most part, by historians, and need to be put in their proper setting within the labour history of the time.

My claim to have undertaken original work rests chiefly on the lack of secondary material on the subject. The main lines of development of the Trotskyist movement laid down in this thesis I have derived from contemporary manuscripts and published material, and from conversations with participants. Invariably my investigation took me

from a working knowledge of labour movement history into uncharted waters. Sometimes I floundered and occasionally I was misled by red herrings: at all events I had to make my own charts and I hope they will help others. Yet I do not seek to give the impression that there has been no secondary work at all. How do I relate to what has been written? The last five years have seen a spurt of scholarly interest in the non-communist left of the labour movement. Two theses on the I.L.P. have been written which span a period similar to that of this thesis and discuss Trotskyist influence on the party.¹ At the end of 1979 a thesis by John Archer was completed covering Trotskyist movements between 1931 and 1937.² Since I had at that time a first draft of my own thesis, I did not, on the advice of my supervisor, read Archer's work. There has also been written a shorter bibliographical thesis on the Trotskyist press by Alison Penn which is a useful tool although it lacks absolute authority.³

Published work which discusses British Trotskyism in whole or part falls into two categories. There are the articles written by Brian Pearce under a variety of pseudonyms some twenty years ago, several of which have now been republished.⁴ Pearce always went to the sources and unearthed many forgotten episodes or facets of better-known events. Hugo Dewar's Communist Politics in Britain (1976) is

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- 1 P.J. Thwaites, 'The Independent Labour Party, 1938-50', (University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1976); G. Littlejohns, 'The Decline of the Independent Labour Party', (University of Nottingham M.Phil. thesis, 1979).
 - 2 J. Archer, 'Trotskyism in Britain : 1931-1937', (Polytechnic of Central London Ph.D. thesis, 1979).
 - 3 A.M.R. Penn, 'A Bibliography of the British Trotskyist Press', (University of Warwick M.A. thesis, 1979).
 - 4 See M. Woodhouse and B. Pearce, Essays on the History of Communism in Britain (1975).

broader though less sure in content but only marginally concerned with the Trotskyists. Reg. Groves has published his recollections as The Balham Group (1974), an invaluable memoir which yet leaves much unsaid. Harry Wicks has also written briefly of the early years of Trotskyism.¹ Wartime and the controversy over Military Policy (q.v.) have stimulated interesting articles in the socialist press.² Finally there have been accounts of the post-war controversies within the Fourth International arising from European economic recovery.³

Consigned to the not recommended category must be those squibs written by political activists in order to cancel out the past or to justify the present: I have responded to these by seeking to establish fact and demolish myth but they are mentioned in my bibliography.

* * * * *

It seems to me that the history of Trotskyism in Britain has a natural periodicity. There was no organised movement in the 1920s. The years to 1938 when the Fourth International was launched were in Britain years of survival and sectarianism. Toeholds were established but conditions were most unfavourable for the gathering of support. From 1938 to 1944 there was a contradictory development as the official British Section of the Fourth International splintered repeatedly and finally ceased to be a coherent political force, while an unofficial group, regarded as a pariah by official Trotskyist opinion, built the strongest position yet for the movement in Britain drawing to it some who were disaffected and others who were new. The process was thus

1 H. Wicks, 'British Trotskyism in the Thirties', International, Vol. 1, no. 4 (1971), 26-32.

2 W. Hunter, 'Marxists in the Second World War', Labour Review (Dec. 1958), 139-46; B. Farnborough (B. Pearce) 'Marxists in the Second World War', Labour Review (April-May 1959); D. Parkin, 'British Trotskyists and the Class Struggle in World War 2', Trotskyism Today (March 1978), 27-30.

3 Notably P. Jenkins, Where Trotskyism Got Lost (1979).

simultaneously one of fission and fusion. 1944 to 1949 were years when the Revolutionary Communist Party declined as its perspectives collided with reviving capitalism and it was progressively debilitated by internal disputes. Just as in the 1930s, but now for quite opposite reasons, there were no major industrial conflicts and this absence blighted Trotskyism's prospects. My argument is that the major influences on the British working class were established at the beginning of the 1930s while Trotskyism was still incipient. Only the peculiar political conjuncture induced by the war permitted Trotskyist growth. The end of the war brought a return to traditional political loyalties, the objects of which had not yet been tested to the full. There was simply no room for a strong Trotskyist organisation and all the characteristics accurately or unfairly imputed to it were secondary in effect to the brutal centripetal tendencies of the British labour movement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis was begun as a piece of research in the Summer of 1972. In the eight years that have passed since then I have been helped in my research by a great many people. Whenever I needed it I have been assisted by my supervisor John Saville, who read critically whatever I wrote and made me a little less unscholarly than I originally was. It was he who was responsible for acquiring the Haston Papers, now lodged at the University of Hull, and who cleared the way for me to research them. Latterly, he carefully read my penultimate draft and his comments were always stimulating. I am deeply in his debt. Equally responsible for my research falling into the minority category of completed doctoral theses was my wife Chitra who encouraged me to take up anew a project which had all but lapsed and who transformed my scribbled first draft into clear typewritten pages. I also owe a huge debt to Sally Boston, Assistant Librarian of the University of Hull, whose responsibility it has been to classify the Haston Papers. She was heroic in coping with the arrival of a researcher so soon after they were deposited and helped me on countless occasions, sometimes at some personal inconvenience. To their names must be added those of Joyce Bellamy who put me to work to acquire the rudiments of scholarship on the Dictionary of Labour Biography even before my research officially began and from whom I continued to learn, together with those of David Rubinstein and other members of the Department of Economic and Social History at the University of Hull with whom I have had many rewarding discussions.

Among the others who have helped me, especially in the early stages of my research, were such former and continuing activists as John and Mary Archer, Margaret Johns, Brian Pearce, Sam Bornstein, Sam Levy, Reg. Groves, Harry Wicks, John Goffe, Ted Grant,

Jock and Millie Haston, Roy Tearse and Sid. Bidwell. My thesis would have had a very one-dimensional character without their help and - not infrequently - their hospitality. I have been most fortunate also in the help I have received from the staff of a number of libraries. Much of the early reading was undertaken in the Brynmor Jones Library of the University of Hull where I was able to feast off strong Labour and socialist history sources. I am grateful also to Richard Storey, Senior Projects Officer of the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, and his present and former staff on whom I often descended and demanded vast numbers of photocopies. This was of critical importance for one who had to work in his spare time. Special mention must also be made of Margaret Kentfield, Nick Wetton, and the staff of the Marx Memorial Library, an institution geared, in its opening hours and desire to place the minimum of obstacles between reader and source, to the needs of those who are not full-time students. I also worked at the L.S.E. library and that of Nuffield College at the University of Oxford, at the British Museum Reading Room and at its Periodicals Library in Colindale, at the Public Records Office and the Fitzwilliam Library, University of Cambridge.

In my first year of work I was maintained by the Social Science Research Council on the recommendation of the Department of Economic and Social History, University of Hull. In my second year I was fortunate to receive an award of equivalent value to that from the S.S.R.C. from the A.J. Horsley fund at the University of Hull. For a short time after the completion of that year I worked on a part-time basis for the Dictionary of Labour Biography under the direction of Doctor Joyce Bellamy and Professor John Saville of my department. After that I encountered the vicissitudes of completing this kind of work under part-time conditions, constrained by absence from easy access

to a community of scholars and a good library and by being unable to devote the whole of my mind to the project. It was therefore of tremendous assistance that I should be granted by my employers, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, a sabbatical leave of two calendar months in the Summer of 1980, during which time I was able to devote all my time to writing the penultimate draft. Mr. Bill Sirs, the I.S.T.C. General Secretary, showed no hesitation in granting me leave although my request came at a critical moment in the Union's fortunes.

Finally I am deeply indebted to Carol Tarling who quickly mastered the intricacies of thesis lay-out and the almost unfathomable mysteries of my handwriting to present me with a finished product which is a pleasure to the eye.

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A NOTE ON REFERENCES

In the footnotes to the text I have tried to reduce details in references to the minimum consistent with precision. Where possible details of references are given in full in the bibliography. There are no references to works published after 1979 at which date the first draft of the thesis was complete.

In the footnotes and in the bibliography the following abbreviations occur:

<u>B.S.S.L.H.</u>	<u>Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History</u>
<u>Inprecorr</u>	<u>International Press Correspondence</u>
<u>J.C.H.</u>	<u>Journal of Contemporary History</u>
<u>J.S.L.H.S.</u>	<u>Journal of the Scottish Labour History Society</u>
<u>P.Q.</u>	<u>Political Quarterly</u>

Unless otherwise stated in the bibliography, the place of publication is London.

INTRODUCTION

I TROTSKY AND THE BRITISH LABOUR MOVEMENT IN THE 1920S

The failure of Trotskyism to establish a presence in the 1920s is to be explained partly by reference to the character of the Communist Party of Great Britain and partly by the quality of British Marxism itself. Lack of interest in theory and the absence of intellectuals who would make major contributions to Marxist thought had already separated Britain from the Continent before 1914.¹ Detachment from ideological controversy was carried over into the infant C.P.G.B., whose formation had been the subject of historical debate.² Respect for Trotsky as a revolutionary leader spanned the labour movement spectrum at the start of the decade. By the end it had narrowed to liberal and independent socialist intellectuals. The Communist Party, which had promoted him enthusiastically up to the middle 1920s turned, with the Comintern, away from him. For the Labour Party, twice in government, he was too revolutionary. Trotsky had support against both parties, but no organised following. The low level of Party life, incomprehension at the debate within the Russian Party and the Comintern, a lack of intellectuals among the membership,³ all might be urged as reasons why the Communist Party produced no Trotskyist opposition for nearly ten years. The Party observed the line from Moscow until the late 1920s when a combination of Comintern pressure and a rank and file revolt precipitated a leadership purge. Support for Trotsky came from outside the Party, from people who had stayed

1 The link between Continental Marxism and actual revolutionary movements is discussed by P. Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism, (1979), 1-21.

2 W. Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, (1969), presents the launching of the C.P.G.B. as an unnatural distortion. R. Challinor interprets the decline of the C.P.G.B. from 1920 through the decay or removal of its S.L.P. cadre: The Origins of British Bolshevism, (1977), 215-77.

3 N. Wood, Communism and British Intellectuals, (1959), 22.

aloof from the attempt to build a Bolshevik Party in Britain or who had taken part and then left as individuals.¹ In neither case were they the people to organise a movement. Until 1930 Trotsky was left in Britain only with admirers.

No one in Britain in 1923 grasped the significance of the clash between the Left Opposition and the Russian Communist Party which burst into the open that year. In other countries there were fierce disputes within the Communist Parties over the critique advanced by the Opposition in its platform.² In Britain this did not occur. Lenin's death in January 1924 physically removed from Russia an influence neutralised for some time. Since the battle between the Party leadership and the Left Opposition continued, pressure began to build up for national parties to

- 1 None of the most eminent of those who left during the early 1920s attempted to justify themselves at any length. Their views on the C.P.G.B. have to be gleaned en passant from articles in The Plebs and elsewhere. There was thus no domestic critique of the C.P.G.B. from within the Marxist tradition which might, as news of Trotsky's fight in Russia became known, have become connected with the International Left Opposition. Marxism outside the C.P.G.B. receives masterly treatment from S. Macintyre, 'Marxism in Britain, 1917-1933', (Cambridge D.Phil., 1976).
- 2 The German, Polish and French Parties - all mass organisations - all came out for Trotsky before the Fifth (1924) Congress of the Comintern, (J. Braunthal, History of the International, 2, 1914-1943, (trans. 1967), 295, 296n). Leading figures who rallied to him now or later in the 1920s included Warski (twice General Secretary of the Polish Party), Cannon, an American leader, Nin, a founder and leading figure of the Spanish Party, and Bordiga, the Italian maximalist. In France, where the Party was initially stronger than the Socialists, Loriot and Souvarine, and Monatte and Rosmer from the Unions, all supported the Opposition, (F. Borckenau, World Communism, (Michigan 1962), 261-2). In Italy, Gramsci from jail criticised the Russians' preoccupation with domestic questions, (F. Claudin, The Communist Movement, (1975), 116-7). Togliatti and Thorez, each destined for the General Secretaryship of a major party, privately approved the Critique of the Draft Programme of the Comintern (1928), (I. Deutscher, The Prophet Unarmed. Trotsky : 1921-1929, (1959), 444). There is a useful summary of expulsions from the world's Communist Parties for Trotskyism in The Third International after Lenin, (1973), 282.

declare themselves. The British Communist press, like the bourgeois press, was at first content to report.¹ This was, after all, not the first instance of debate within the Russian Party. Inprecorr, originating from Moscow, mirrored developments there more closely and, moreover, without a timelag. Trotsky's views on the New Course were printed as well as those of Stalin and Zinoviev,² but Trotsky's progressive isolation would soon be apparent. 'Trotskyism' as an identifiable phenomenon was categorised as such by April 1924.³ But the Comintern journal Communist International ran no campaign against Trotsky until the broad offensive after the General Strike, and he himself was still a contributor.⁴ However, British representatives at the Fifth

1 Labour Monthly (Feb. 1924), Communist Review (Feb. 1924). This last is seen by a critic as a 'fair presentation', B. Pearce, 'Early Years of the Communist Party of Great Britain', in M. Woodhouse and B. Pearce, (eds.), Essays on the History of Communism in Britain (1975), 173-4. Publication of these articles has been attributed to partial apprehension by the C.P.G.B. of what was happening in Russia, (L.J. Macfarlane, The British Communist Party. Its origin and development until 1929, (1966), 92-3).

2 Inprecorr, Vol. 4, no. 12, (Jan. 1924), 83-94. Macfarlane comments that Labour Monthly for March 1924 gave a Trotsky reply to Stalin's accusations of factionalism 'with obvious approval' (op. cit., 92).

3 Communist Review in that month ran the resolution of the thirteenth annual conference of the C.P.S.U. condemning factional activity by the Opposition and classifying 'Trotskyism' as a petty-bourgeois deviation. But the same journal could carry articles by Trotsky ('Gorki on Lenin - Trotsky on Gorki', (Dec. 1924), 381-6) and others which praised him:

He himself is a magnificent exponent of the conclusion to which he comes, namely that we must not wait for a bureaucratic "introduction" of the new order from on high, but must try and find in our every day conditions, the embryo forms and movements of the new order amidst the lumber of the old.

('Trotsky on Culture', Communist Review, (Nov. 1924), 355). In each case, however, the theme of the article tended not to be of immediate political import.

4 'The Philistine discourseth on the Revolutionary', Communist International, (July 1924).

Comintern Congress in July 1924 endorsed the condemnation of Trotsky's attitude by the C.P.S.U. although no discussion in the C.P.G.B. had yet taken place.¹

In November 1924 a definite lead was given in Inprecorr as Russian and foreign communists began to react to Trotsky's The Lessons of October.² A sequence of rubbishing articles was begun which lasted until 6 February 1925.³ Trotsky's introduction to The Lessons of October only appeared after three months. No reader of Inprecorr could possibly doubt, after such a sustained onslaught, that this was more than an ordinary policy difference. The British Party reacted swiftly to the debates at the Fifth Congress of the Comintern. On 30 November, a party council approved the stand on Trotsky adopted there and in the C.P.S.U.⁴ Within a week Tom Bell had published the

1 L.J. Macfarlane, op. cit., 93.

2 Ostensibly an autopsy on the bungled German insurrection of 1923, The Lessons of October developed the argument to embrace the role of Zinoviev and Kamenev in 1917.

3 The sequence began with 'How one should not write the History of October', a reprint from Pravda, and continued with contributions by Kuusinen, Bukharin, Stalin, Rykov, Kamenev, Krupskaya and Sokolnikov. From abroad, V. Kolarov, (Bulgaria), the German Communist Youth C.C., and Bela Kun joined in. Even Brandler and Thalheimer, now in disgrace, attacked Trotsky but a corrective article by Ottomar Geschke was attached to their views.

4 J. Klugmann, History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Vol. 2. The General Strike 1925-1926, (1969), 327.

first authentic British article against Trotskyism.¹ Yet at this point the party leaders had not read The Lessons of October² and that certainly meant that the membership, in general, had not read it either.

One exception was Arthur Reade, member of the London District Committee and business manager of Labour Monthly, who read German and had access to Comintern documents. He knew Trotsky's views and expounded them at classes he gave to the Battersea Young Communist League.³ He and several of these young communists attended the Party's London aggregate meeting of 17 January 1925 to hear Andrew Rothstein and other speakers. When J.T. Murphy put down a resolution endorsing the Party's condemnation of The Lessons of October, Reade moved an amendment from the London District Committee supporting the Opposition and regretting the haste with which the Party Council had taken a

1 'The Truth About Trotsky', Workers Weekly, 5 December 1924. Bell recalled the Trotsky had criticised Party elder statesmen as early as December 1923 and claimed:

needless to say the ideas of Comrade Trotsky found ready support from the bureaucrats and Nep-men

He produced no evidence to support this assertion, however, nor did he show why this should be so from an exposition of Trotsky's views. But he emphasised that the British Party was in line with the C.P.S.U. endorsement of Comintern policy on Germany and Bulgaria and warned against splits.

- 2 L.J. Macfarlane, The British Communist Party, 92-3. Macfarlane argues that the swift British endorsement of the Soviet line pre-empted a purge. A purge was taking place in the Parti Communiste Francais at this time (A. Treint, 'The Bolshevising Party Conference of the C.P. of France', Inprecorr, Vol. 5, no. 17, 240). Treint, who was to align himself with Trotsky in 1927, crowed that Trotsky had been ousted from his early popularity in France.
- 3 Arthur E.E. Reade was an Oxford student rusticated at the end of the war for his political activities, (Interview with Harry Wicks, 30 November 1979).

stand.¹ He was defeated with ten or fifteen votes in support.² But an attempt was made to delay the vote until the case for both sides had been put and this fell by only 81 votes to 65.³ The meaning of these votes seems to be not an endorsement of Trotsky's views by a minority of London communists, but a fairly widespread feeling that party leaders had been too eager to put themselves on record. England could join the triumphant list of countries where Trotskyism was completely isolated,⁴ but it was the manner rather than the ideas of the leaders which had occasioned protest. Yet Rothstein's article of a week later suggests by its title more alarm among the party leaders after the aggregate than before.⁵

- 1 This aggregate meeting of the London District membership of the CPGB joins with the District Party Committee in regretting the hasty vote of the Party Council in condemning Comrade Trotsky without full information: and this meeting at the same takes the opportunity to express the London membership's emphatic support both of the left wing's minority fight in the Russian Party against bureaucracy, and equally of the Comintern's struggle against right wing divergencies from Leninism in the French, Bulgarian and German sections (quoted in H. Wicks, 'British Trotskyism in the Thirties', International, Vol. 1, no. 4, (1971), 27).
- 2 Workers Weekly for 17 January 1925 gives Reade 10 votes out of 300. Reade claimed 15 out of 200, (J. Klugmann, History of the Communist Party, 2, 327).
- 3 J.D. Young and W. Kendall, 'The Rise of British Trotskyism', The New Leader, 7 May 1960
- 4 'Trotskyism completely isolated in the C.P. of Russia and in the Comintern', (Inprecorr, Vol. 5, no. 7, 22 January 1925, 75).
- 5 C.M. Roebuck (Andrew Rothstein), 'Trotskyism - A Peril to the Party', Workers Weekly, 23 January 1925.

The introduction to The Lessons of October was published on 26 February 1925.¹ By then, however, the attack on Trotskyism had broadened out and stretched back in time.² Bell published Trotsky's 15 January letter to the central committee of the Russian Party with a preamble arguing that its rejection proved the Party to be still a Bolshevik one.³ He and Gallacher attended the extended plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International, which met from 21 March to 6 April. They took no part in the debate on theoretical matters, but in the eleventh session, devoted to Trotskyism, Bell followed Treint and Neumann in a speech composed entirely of slogans.⁴ The British delegates supported a motion calling for a drive against deviations to be conducted by all parties. Back in Britain Reade had been suspended from the London District Committee of the Party following the January aggregate. He appealed, but was turned down by the Party Executive on 26 April.⁵ Some time after this he left the Party and the country.⁶ Perhaps the first British Trotskyist had departed, apparently making little impression. The Seventh Party

1 It appeared, without comment, in Inprecorr, Vol. 5, no. 16, 209-26.

2 Bukharin savaged Trotsky's most distinctive theoretical contribution and asked,

'Is it not clear that this "permanent" question of a "permanent" theory is the "permanent" contradiction between Trotskyism and Leninism?'

('The Theory of Permanent Revolution', Communist Review, (Feb. 1925), 381-94.)

3 'Trotsky and the Party', Communist Review, (March 1925), 446-56. Trotsky's letter appears with the C.P.S.U. Central Committee reply.

4 'Discussion on the Question of Trotsky', Inprecorr, Vol. 5, no. 37 (23 April 1925), 485-6.

5 J. Klugmann, History of the Communist Party, 2, 327n.

6 In 1929 Reade was back in politics, now as Labour prospective Parliamentary Candidate for North Berks. That year he clashed with Arthur Henderson at Party Conference over N.E.C. vetting of election addresses, (LPCR, (1929), 242). Reade later left the Labour Party to become a Parliamentary Candidate in Bristol for Oswald Mosley's New Party. (Interview with Harry Wicks, 30 November 1979.)

Congress of the C.P.G.B. met at the end of May, and Bell implemented the E.C.C.I. decision by moving a motion agreeing with the Russian Party Central Committee in its estimate of Trotskyism and the measures taken against it.¹ There was now published The Errors of Trotskyism by Bukharin and Kamenev, a reply to The Lessons of October, with an English edition introduction by J.T. Murphy.² It has been suggested that, even at this late date, the British Party leaders had seen only a summary of Trotsky's book³ and indeed this was what was published with The Errors of Trotskyism.

There would be no support for Trotsky from Party leaders when he was out of step with Moscow, though for more than a year he was to remain a legitimate figure with the British Party. With a minor manifestation of Trotskyism in the C.P.G.B. dispelled, support for the Opposition leader now appeared outside the Party.⁴ The response to Lenin (1925) illustrated the point well. Reviewers in the Party press tended to regret Trotsky's loss of form.⁵ Communists writing in

- 1 J. Klugmann, History of the Communist Party, Vol. 2, 327. The motion was identical with that passed at the London aggregate and received unanimous support, (L.J. Macfarlane, op. cit., 140).
- 2 See C.M. Roebuck, 'Leninism and Trotskyism', Sunday Worker, 31 May 1925, a review of The Errors of Trotskyism, for an early attempt to depict Trotsky's principles as a discrete philosophy distinguished by its views on the peasantry and the Party.
- 3 L.J. Macfarlane, op. cit., 140.
- 4 The suppression of Lenin's Will was known to M. Phillips Price, a former M.P. and Party member, who dealt even-handedly with the struggle in Moscow, ('A Lion at Bay', The Plebs, (June 1925), 238-41). Price may have heard about the Will from Max Eastman, (see below), but he may not have known that it condemned Stalin, (D. Cauter, The Fellow Travellers (1973), 86).
- 5 T.A. Jackson believed that Trotsky overdramatised and was lost without Lenin, (Sunday Worker, 5 April 1925); A. MacManus thought Lenin lacked Trotsky's 'usual brilliance' and was 'quite his weakest piece of work'. Trotsky ought, he suggested, to publish a real book on Lenin, not just fragments, (Communist Review, May 1925, 35-41).

non-party publications were hostile.¹ The ex-communist M. Phillips Price was friendly,² and Frank Horrabin was able to enjoy himself over communist inconsistency.³ This divergence was important now and later. Many of the independent Marxists around The Plebs met Max Eastman⁴ during his 1924 stay in Britain following a twenty one months spell in Russia. Eastman had met Trotsky in Russia and witnessed the debate around Opposition criticism of the Party programme, details of which he must have passed on. In the spring of 1925 he published Since Lenin Died.⁵

Though formally disowned by Trotsky, Eastman offered a detailed account of the clash within the Russian Party during the last two years - the only one available. He analysed Lenin's suppressed Will, with its celebrated member by member assessment of the C.P.S.U. Central Committee. He reproduced a passage on Trotsky from Lunacharsky's Revolutionary Silhouettes. It was a definite and radical challenge to the prevailing version of recent events in Russia.⁶

- 1 M. Dobb, 'Lenin and Trotsky', The Plebs (May 1925), 184-91; W.N. Ewer, who worked closely with the communists and wrote frequently for Labour Monthly was spiteful in the Daily Herald and wrote in Labour Monthly of 'The Twilight of Trotsky'.
- 2 Lansbury's Labour Weekly, 4 April 1925.
- 3 He pointed out that part of the poorly received Lenin had been published by Labour Monthly the previous year! (B. Pearce, 'Early Years of the Communist Party of Great Britain', in M. Woodhouse and B. Pearce (eds.), Essays on the History of Communism in Britain, (1975), 175).
- 4 An American journalist, formerly an editor of The Liberator, and an early member of the C.P.U.S.A. For Eastman's relationship with Trotsky, whom he persuaded to allow him to write his autobiography, see D. Cate, The Fellow Travellers, (1973), 22. S. Macintyre discusses Eastman's links with The Plebs in 'Marxism in Britain, 1917-33'.
- 5 Published by the Labour Publishing Company.
- 6 It was not Trotsky's account however. Eastman believed that he had failed to take the opportunity to lead Russia after Lenin's illness. He anticipated later writers with his view that Trotsky 'had no idea of political manoeuvring. He has nothing but a complete incapacity for it' (17).

The Communist Party was accustomed to speaking with authority about the Soviet Union. Eastman could be the butt of unqualified attacks. For tactical reasons Trotsky had disowned the book¹ and Party reviewers in Britain therefore took the line of separating author from subject. Arthur MacManus bracketed Eastman with Party renegades Price and Levy. 'Under the guise of defenders of Trotsky' they were all attacking the Russian Party.² Jackson predicted that Trotsky would be furious at the way his name had been used.³ Palme Dutt ridiculed the book.⁴ The Party went to some lengths to separate Eastman from Trotsky which suggests considerable embarrassment.⁵ The belief that Eastman's account might be true and Trotsky deserving of sympathy surfaces only in the non-party press.⁶ Support from outside the Party was a mixed blessing when it was offered by lapsed members. Nor did it provide any profound analysis of what had taken place in Russia: Postgate, for example, expressed the wish that the two factions might speedily be united and win success for the revolution.⁷ A journal like The Plebs might be an alternate outlet for news, but was not likely to

- 1 Of necessity during the factional struggle, I. Deutscher, The Prophet Unarmed, (1959), 201-2 and n.
- 2 'Since Lenin Died. More facts and fiction. (A Review of the latest Menshevik Diatribe)', Communist Review (May 1925), 35-41.
- 3 'Poor Trotsky', The Sunday Worker, 10 May 1925.
- 4 Labour Monthly, (June 1925). See also 'Since Eastman Lies', Workers' Weekly, 8 May 1925.
- 5 The Sunday Worker considered Trotsky's first disavowal to justify front page treatment on 10 May 1925. On 31 May it ran Eastman's complaint at the treatment he had received in the communist press with Jackson's defensive note. Trotsky's second, less ambiguous denial appeared in full on 19 July.
- 6 R. Postgate, another ex-communist, defended Trotsky on the personal level but failed to see any deeper significance in Russian events, ('Why Trotsky Fell', Lansbury's Labour Weekly, 2 May 1925). M. Phillips Price drew on Eastman and reports now becoming available from Russia, ('A Lion at Bay', The Plebs, June 1925).
- 7 Eastman's emphasis in his book on Trotsky's personality had allowed MacManus to advise him to pay less attention to the psyche and more to the revolution.

provide fundamental criticism of the kind Trotsky himself had offered in The New Course. He was defended as a revolutionary hero, not as a theoretician,¹ a point sometimes overlooked.² The communist press continued its attempts to clarify the status of Eastman's book well into the summer.³ After the controversy died,⁴ the British Party seems to have been uncertain about Trotsky's status. He could still be reviewed⁵ but articles published were not on immediate issues.⁶ It was only his decision to devote his next important book to Britain which

- 1 R. Postgate and J. Horrabin, 'Trotsky's "Comrades"', The Plebs, (July 1925), 286-8. See also Gallacher's reply in August.
- 2 See for example R. Challinor, The Origins of British Bolshevism (1977), 273
- 3 'In the International : Comrade Trotsky's Declaration with regard to Eastman's Book : Since Lenin's Death' (sic), Inprecarr, Vol. 5, no. 60, 30 July 1925, 833-4; 'Final Text of Trotsky's letter on Eastman's book : Since Lenin Died', Inprecarr, Vol. 5, no. 68, 3 September 1925, 1004-6. Eastman replied to his critics in Lansbury's Labour Weekly for 29 August 1925 and rounded off the discussion with a well-written article in Plebs ('A Response to Trotsky', (Oct. 1925), 393-8) in which he attempted to explain Trotsky's disclaimers.
- 4 In 1926 Eastman published two further books, Leon Trotsky : The Portrait of a Youth, (reviewed in The Plebs (September 1926), 343-4), and Marx, Lenin and the Science of Revolution, a refutation of dialectical materialism which should have ended once and for all the belief that he was a Trotskyist, (S. Macintyre, 'Marxism in Britain, 1917-33', 105-6). In 1928 however he had gathered round him a tiny group of Trotsky sympathisers simultaneously with the emergence of a Left Opposition within the C.P.U.S.A. See C.A. Myers, The Prophet's Army. Trotskyists in America, 1928-1941, (Westport, Conn., 1977).
- 5 Charles Ashleigh discussed Literature and Revolution, ('Purges for the Highbrow', Sunday Worker, Nov. 1925).
- 6 'The Spirit of Moscow' (Sunday Worker, 21 June 1925) which appeared at the beginning of China's revolutionary phase; 'The struggle for the Quality of Production', Inprecarr, Vol. 5, no. 81, (19 November 1925), 1235-6; 'Towards Socialism or Capitalism? The Language of Figure', I, Labour Monthly, (Nov. 1925), 659-66, and II, Labour Monthly, (Dec. 1925), 736-48. This last was the first introductory section of a work already published in Russia. Later sections, criticising Bukharin, were omitted without acknowledgment by Labour Monthly, (B. Pearce, 'Early Years of the Communist Party of Great Britain', M. Woodhouse and B. Pearce, op. cit., 176). Trotsky's writings never appeared in the journal after this, though he was to be anathematized many times.

brought him again to the attention of the communist press.

* * * * *

Though certain subjects were taboo,¹ Britain was not one of them. Where is Britain Going?, a sparkling polemic against British labour and trade union leaders and their gradualist philosophy was published in February 1926. It was published not by the Party but by George Allen and Unwin who attached a preface by Brailsford.²

Where is Britain Going? was very much part of Trotsky's case against Comintern policy. It appeared during a phase of the struggle in Russia between the Joint Opposition and Stalin and Bukharin. It did not handle roughly the British Party's support for left wing figures on the T.U.C. General Council, but Trotsky later wrote:

The book was aimed essentially at the official conception of the Politbureau, with its hope of an evolution to the left by the British General Council, and of a gradual and painless penetration of communism into the ranks of the British Labour Party and Trade Unions.³

- 1 The history of the revolution was one. John Reed's Ten Days That Shook the World, with its accurate portrait of 1917 and a commendatory preface by Lenin, was suppressed shortly after it appeared in February 1926. Those with copies were confronted by footnotes correcting Reed's account and referring them to The Errors of Trotskyism, (J. Braunthal, History of the International: 1914-1943 (Trans. 1967), 244n).
- 2 See below. The first (Moscow) edition is dated May 1925. In September 1925 the book had appeared in the United States as Whither England? In October 1926 the C.P.G.B. brought out its own edition in which it dropped Brailsford's introduction and replaced it by Trotsky's own for the second German edition (dated 6 May 1926). For the diluting effect this had see B. Pearce, 'The Early Years of the Communist Party of Great Britain', in M. Woodhouse and B. Pearce, op. cit., 176-7.
- 3 My Life, (New York, 1970), 527.

It has been suggested that the British Party did not understand the book.¹ No other communist had written anything as relevant for the year of the General Strike, however, and it was well enough suited to the party mood after May for a second edition to be published. Trotsky confronted the entire working class leadership, left and right. His critics were the party's critics, and he wrote as a party member. The C.P.G.B. could only rally to him.

Where is Britain Going? scattered its shot so widely as to stimulate many of its victims into print. Norman Angell was provoked into writing a full length book to show 'the futility of revolution'.² For MacDonald, Trotsky was a pamphleteer not an historian, a devotee of theories not a slave to facts; he had concocted 'an oriental riot of fancy regarding facts and events'.³ Brailsford in his introduction to the first edition, had observed that the imprisoned C.P.G.B. leaders had been sentenced for the opinions expressed in the book. While allowing Trotsky force of argument, Brailsford did not believe his Russian approach would convince. Russell⁴ allowed that Trotsky was 'remarkably well-informed' on the politics of the British Labour movement, but considered that he was advocating an English revolution for Russian advantage. Lansbury⁵ gave much support to Trotsky while defending himself. Transport Workers' leader Robert Williams, a former Labour Party Chairman, and yet another former communist, had been

1 H. Dewar, Communist Politics in Britain, (1976), 65.

2 Must Britain Travel the Moscow Road? (1926). Angell claimed his book had been 'a thumping success' in publishing terms, (After All (1951), 268).

3 'Trotsky on Great Britain', The Nation, 10 March 1926.

4 'Trotsky on our Sins', The New Leader, 26 February 1926.

5 'Trotsky', Lansbury's Labour Weekly, 27 February 1926.

pilloried by Trotsky in the book for having 'ratted'. Like Lansbury he had both to defend himself against Trotsky and to defend Trotsky against his critics.¹ Cleverly he pointed out that the charge of renegacy presented by Trotsky against him was advanced against Trotsky himself by the Russian leadership two years before. He recalled the persecution of Trotsky and the suppression of Lenin's will:

'....those in charge of the machine were so afraid of the criticism of one who had rendered more service to the revolution than all of them combined that they deliberately suppressed it.'

The non-communist reviewers generally took the line that Trotsky did not understand the peculiarities of the English. Communist reviewers believed they detected another common factor in these reactions: hostility to the proletarian revolution.²

Through the reviews of MacDonald and, especially, of Williams, the fact of Trotsky's downfall was kept to the fore in the labour movement press. The Communists, with their front rank leaders in jail and their attention on the imminent expiry of the coal subsidy

- 1 'The Gospel According to Trotsky', Labour Magazine, (March 1926). The Daily Herald reviewed the book on 10 February. All these reviews appear in G. Novack (ed.) Leon Trotsky on Britain (N.Y. 1973).
- 2 T.A. Jackson: 'The Retreat Before Moscow', The Workers' Weekly. William Paul defended Trotsky against Angell and other critics unable to handle his 'unanswerable case', insisting that the course of the General Strike had confirmed Trotsky's estimate of ruling class intentions. Trotsky would not have approved of Paul's argument that gradualness comes after revolution and not before, evidence for which was the gradual building of a communist basis in Russia! ('Where Angell Dares to Tread', Sunday Worker, 18 July 1926). When he reviewed Towards Socialism or Capitalism?, Paul directly imputed this idea to Trotsky himself, ('The Path to Socialism', Sunday Worker, 8 August 1926). The last reply to Angell came curiously late in the year when J.T. Murphy studiously avoided taking a position on Trotsky's book. ('An Angel's Dilemma', Communist International, (30 November 1926), 22-3). Much water had flowed beneath the bridge by then.

showed no public awareness of Trotsky's deeper purpose.¹ His book was a welcome friend at a critical time as Palme Dutt strongly underlined:

'A challenge may safely be issued to the critics to name a single book by a single English author or politician, bourgeois or labour leader, which is as close to the essentials of the English situation as Trotsky's book'.²

Dutt was not prepared to allow the critics a single point, not even disavowing Trotsky's claim that the Liberal election victory of 1905 was partially a result of shock waves from the Russian Revolution of that year. Indeed, he continued,

The English working class has cause to be grateful to Trotsky for his book; and to hope that he will not stay his hand at this short sketch, but will carry forward his work of interpretation, polemic and elucidation, and elaborate his analysis further which is so much needed in England.³

1 'The Party Press gave the volume high grades for brilliance and apparently could not fault it ideologically', A. Calhoun, The United Front : The T.U.C. and the Russians, 1923-1928, (Cambridge 1975), 170. When T.A. Jackson reviewed Bukharin's Historical Materialism, he felt unable to do so without defending Trotsky against all critics, and notably Brailsford, ('Historical Materialism', Communist Review, (May 1926), 39-47). It is worth noting that the official history steers the reader through the party's experience of the General Strike without mentioning Trotsky's book once, (J. Klugmann, History of the Communist Party, Vol. 1, (1969).

2 R.P. Dutt, 'Trotsky and his English Critics', Labour Monthly, (April 1926), 223-4.

3 loc. cit., 241.

It may be that the British party leaders were mostly dense in matters of theory. They had, moreover, no public guidance from Moscow, where it had first been published, as to the attitude they should adopt to Trotsky's book. Trotsky's polemic could only assist those more astute party leaders who were later to gain control of the party. The authority of Dutt and Labour Monthly was growing and both must have influenced the reading of Party members.¹ It soon became impossible to quote Trotsky as an authority, but that did not prevent borrowing from the theoretical arsenal of one who had been cruelly vindicated by events.

International developments soon impelled Stalin to decisive moves against the Joint Opposition in Russia. Repercussions in the C.P.G.B. could not fail to follow. The British crisis of 1926 was merely the current event on which Trotsky was honing his polemical scalpel to a fine sharpness. He returned to the subject several times in an independent way during the General Strike. He pressed especially for severance of the trade union connections established through the

¹ The previous year Dutt had written:

'Thus the Left Trade Union leaders occupy at present the position, not only of leaders of the workers in the immediate crisis but also of the spokesmen of the working class elements in the Labour Party - it might almost be said, an alternative political leadership.'

('The Capitalist offensive in Britain', Inprecorr, Vol. 5, no. 62 (6 Aug. 1925), 856).

This was the very thesis against which Trotsky fought. After the General Strike, however, Dutt reverted to a position to the left of the leadership. He repeated Trotsky's later criticisms without acknowledgment, (L.J. MacFarlane, op. cit., 157). In this period he gained the loyalty of younger party members who, like Reg. Groves, were to become Trotskyists. See for example Groves's retrospective of Dutt's role in 1924-8, (The Red Flag, Aug. 1934).

Anglo-Soviet Trade Union Committee established in 1923. Under the title 'Problems of the British Labour Movement' some of Trotsky's later thinking appeared in the communist press.¹ It was a sterilised Trotsky that was allowed into English, free of uncompromising references to the left members of the TUC General Council, with whom the Soviets retained a connection until 1927.

In July 1926 Stalin spoke of the British party as being one of the best sections of the Communist International.² He made it quite clear, however, that his commendation did not derive its inspiration from the party's influence. It continued to gain members through 1926, even approaching 11,000, but then shrank.³ Yet Britain had held the attention of the entire Communist International during 1926 and the setback of the General Strike had to have repercussions. In Russia Bukharin and Stalin increased their power, while measures were taken rapidly against the Joint Opposition. Criticism of Trotsky grew more strident. Those who had access to Inprecorr could follow the new Comintern leaders' orchestrated attack. Articles in it were intended 'for the widest possible publicity'. Dead disputes with Lenin were resurrected. Opposition prophecies of doom were refuted by reference to the greater size and more proletarian composition of the party. The Joint Opposition was deemed to be a Social-Democratic deviation, a theoretic consensus with Otto Bauer. Communist International, no longer Zinoviev's organ, analysed the clash in the U.S.S.R., and attacked Trotsky by implication through Zinoviev and

1 Four chapters under this heading appeared in Russia. One of them was published in Britain, (Communist International, ns, no.22, 1926, 19-41).

2 'The General Strike in Britain', Inprecorr, Vol. 6, no. 50, (1 July 1926), 816.

3 H. Pelling, The British Communist Party, (1975), 192.

Kamenev.¹ Readers of Communist Review were treated to Bukharin's lengthy treatment of the Opposition platform between September and December. The actual words of the Opposition leaders were available to British communists only through Inprecorr.² Dire warnings were attached that 'Field Marshal' Trotsky wanted 'to lead the opposition of all countries' and that the dissidents must choose between Lenin and Otto Bauer.

'Problems of the British Labour Movement' had been allowed to surface in the English pond, but the C.P.G.B. was anxious there should be no misunderstanding about where it stood.³ On 9 August the political bureau adopted a resolution on the 'Discussion in the C.P.S.U.'⁴ which rejected Trotsky's call to sever the Anglo-Russian Committee and condemned 'Problems of the British Labour Movement'.⁵ It was still possible to discuss Opposition ideas,⁶ (those that were

- 1 J. Sten, 'Leninism or Trotskyism', Communist International, (30 Oct. 1926), 5-9. Attacks on the Opposition became frequent in the journal at this time.
- 2 Extracts from the speeches of Zinoviev and Trotsky to the plenum of the enlarged E.C.C.I. in December were printed. See 'A New attack of the Opposition' and 'After Zinoviev, also Trotsky', Inprecorr, Vol. 6, no. 87, 16 December 1926, 1501-2.
- 3 It had already complained to the E.C.C.I. about Trotsky's hostility towards it, (I. Deutscher, The Prophet Unarmed, 223n and 269n).
- 4 Workers Weekly, 13 August 1926.
- 5 Yet amid all this, the last ungrudging reference to Trotsky's role in 1917 appeared. Barret Robertson, 'The Life of a Red', Sunday Worker, 15 August 1926.
- 6 In 1926 or 1927 members were invited locally to approve the condemnation of the Russian Opposition by the C.P.S.U. and the E.C.C.I. Stewart Purkis and Billy Williams, future Balham group members, abstained or opposed the leadership on the Russian economic question in their St. Pancras branch. Reg. Groves himself abstained on the Russian economy and voted against the official resolution on China at a West London area aggregate (Reg. Groves, The Balham Group, (1974), 16). 'No-one', Groves records, 'showed any surprise or concern over our attitude'.

known), but the leading figures in Russia had little time left as party members. And in Britain even Opposition views on economics could be disregarded no longer.¹

After 1926 it took a determined party member to discover details of the much abused platform of the Joint Opposition. Communist International carried no articles by opposition leaders during 1927, but kept its readers informed about their successive downgrading. Tom Bell reported to Communist Review on the fifteenth conference of the C.P.S.U. but, while he witnessed the debate on Trotskyism and Trotsky's own speech in it, he passed little on.² Those who read Inprecorr would know that the opposition platform was a major preoccupation of the conference. Bell had spoken in the debate on the Opposition, but he was unwilling or unable to subject its ideas to any theoretical analysis. He condemned its factiousness and disloyalty however, and went on to reassure the Russian comrades:

Though our experience with oppositions is very limited (probably our time will come when we too shall have to deal with serious political oppositions) nevertheless, our experience, limited as it is, justifies our complete identity with the measures taken by the Party of the U.S.S.R. to deal with its opposition.³

Since there is little evidence to indicate any profound grasp among British communists of the Opposition platform, Bell's support for Stalin rested on a narrow base. Smith, a colleague, attempted to shore him up with some purely British complaints of

1 See Maurice Dobb's hostile review of Towards Capitalism or Socialism?, (Plebs, Oct. 1926).

2 '15th Party Conference of the C.P. of the Soviet Union', Communist Review, (Jan. 1927), 428-34.

3 Inprecorr, Vol. 7, no. 2, (6 Jan. 1927), 16.

substance. He objected to Trotsky referring to the British Party as a brake on the revolution and complained that Lansbury, Plebs, and other Lefts were using Trotsky's call for the exposure of left reformism: .

.... this group of liquidators, of renegade Communists, of Left elements in the labour movement, seize with joy on every attack which Trotsky makes upon the leaders of the Party and of the Communist International.

Comrade Trotsky's policy is objectively helping these liquidators, while the article to which I referred was of direct assistance to them. ¹

The climax of the clash in the C.P.S.U. was ill-reported in the British communist press: only publicity from outside forced the party to deal with it in any detail. Trotsky's own speech to the conference, and indeed Smith's, was reported verbatim only in Inprecorr. What was more, the performance of the more left wing members of the TUC General Council during the General Strike could only nurture doubts which Trotsky was free to nourish. The pride of the British party was punctured. C.P.G.B. membership continued to grow after the General Strike but apparently went into a consistent decline from Autumn 1926² which was not reversed until 1930. Factors in this

1 Inprecorr: Vol. 7, no. 4 (12 Jan. 1927). Smith was presumably referring to 'Problems of the British Labour Movement'. Some years later Bell himself repeated the allegation that Trotsky called the C.P.G.B. 'a brake on the revolution' (The British Communist Party: A short history, (1937)). In fact no such expression occurs in the original or published versions of the article, though Trotsky's main argument was the need for the utmost implacability on the party's part in its dealings with left reformism, and he did warn that development of the party might lag behind development of the revolution.

2 Official figures of party membership, derived from a variety of sources, are given in H. Pelling, The British Communist Party. A historical profile, (1975), 192-3.

decline were the effectiveness of Labour Party action against the National Left-Wing Movement, a natural depression following the failure of the General Strike and growing sectarianism on the part of the Party itself. There were some in the Party who leaned towards intransigence, but their influence was increased by pressure from Moscow which was displeased with lack of progress in Britain and at loggerheads with C.P.G.B. leaders over the colonial question.¹ Malcontents lacked the strength to displace the Party leadership at the January 1929 Party congress, but this was accomplished with Russian support at a special congress in December.²

The staggered passage into what became known as the 'Third Period', (following the years of revolution and then stabilisation), was accompanied in Britain by increased vigilance against Trotskyism. The honour of proposing Trotsky's expulsion from the E.C.C.I. in September 1927 fell to a British communist, J.T. Murphy.³

- 1 Ironically J.R. Campbell, at the Tenth Party Congress of January 1929, warned the party delegation to the Comintern that their stand on the colonial question was receiving support from Trotsky, (L.J. Macfarlane, op. cit., 209).
- 2 The detailed course of events can be followed in L.J. Macfarlane op. cit., 177-274. See also H. Pelling, op. cit., 36-53. Work is proceeding on the third volume of the official history of the C.P.G.B. which will cover this period. See also F. Borkenau, World Communism, (Michigan, 1962), 334.
- 3 See 'Expulsion of Comrades Trotsky and Vuyovitch from the E.C. of the C.I.', Inprecorr, Vol. 7, no. 56, 6 Oct. 1927, 1250-1 and I. Deutscher, The Prophet Unarmed, 359-61. J.T. Murphy's own account is to be found in New Horizon, (1932), 274-7. Murphy was to part with the C.P.G.B. in 1932 and was even to be loosely bracketed with Trotsky by communist leaders. But though no longer a party member he did not revise his views on Trotsky and continued to admire Stalin. See his Stalin (1944).

Murphy's own Sheffield District telegraphed Moscow endorsing disciplinary measures against the Opposition leaders and called for action to further the struggle against war.¹ The Russian leaders were pleased and noted that the British party was innocent of Oppositionism.² When British delegates attended the Moscow conference of the Friends of the Soviet Union a fortnight after Trotsky's expulsion from the C.P.S.U., they took the initiative in moving a resolution, (passed with one opposed), approving the measures taken against him for trying to set up a second party. Indeed they went further, and demanded 'more severe measures'.³ Inprecorr was deluged with anti-Opposition articles: 'Trotskyism' was assuredly the issue of the hour. The British Party ventured into the field of theory. Jackson, who had written of Trotsky with such awe two years earlier, now discovered that the Opposition leader's views on the danger of reaction were diametrically misplaced. It was, concluded Jackson, Trotsky himself, with Zinoviev, who represented the danger of Menshevism and Thermidor.⁴ His colleague Gallacher developed the theme for an international audience. 'In Britain every rotten reactionary, every reformist trickster, looks with hope to the Opposition',⁵ which statement he wisely left without explanatory footnotes, since Smith had been complaining the previous month that Trotsky handled the Left too harshly. Gallacher's claim that 'every attack on the party by the Trotskyists was hailed with

1 Inprecorr, Vol. 7, no. 57, (13 Oct. 1927), 1272.

2 'The "Victories" of the Opposition a "World Scale"', Inprecorr, Vol. 7, no. 58, (20 Oct. 1927), 1287-8.

3 Inprecorr, Vol. 7, no. 66, (24 Nov. 1927), 1485.

4 'Must Thermidor come in Russia?', The Communist, (Dec. 1927), 262-9.

5 'The Opposition - the Hope of the British Imperialists', Inprecorr, Vol. 7, no. 68, (1 Dec. 1927), 1534.

delight in the war mongering press of Britain' would have proved equally hard to sustain.

There were still traces of interest in Trotsky - pictures on walls, enthusiastic delegates to the Y.C.L. congress of 1928.¹ They added up to little. The parties had been warned that the exclusion of Trotskyism from the C.P.S.U. must of course, also result in 'the end of Trotskyism in the Comintern'.² Rust reassured the international that Trotskyism had no following among 'the active conscious sections of the workers',³ which verdict was confirmed.⁴ Yet the new broad definition of Trotskyism, obscurely commingling with reaction, is to be gathered from his affirmation that the British Party had 'tremendous duties' in the fight against it, especially since the Baldwin government led the Anti-Soviet bloc.⁵ Stalin's praise for the party gains in significance when the glassy smoothness of the British Party is compared to turmoil elsewhere.

1 M. McCarthy, Generation in Revolt (1953), 101, 121-2.

2 Communist International, (1 Feb. 1928), 52.

3 A.B. 'The International Countenance of Trotskyism', Inprecorr, Vol. 8, no. 9, (23 Feb. 1928), 196.

4 Britain is not among the countries cured of the bacillus in 'Trotskyism. Latest attack on the Comintern', Communist International, 1 March 1928, 106-111.

5 Yet the Comintern, in its debate at the Sixth World Congress, did not see fit to mention Trotskyism in the debate on the English question, (Inprecorr, Vol. 8, no. 10 (25 Feb. 1928), 222, 249-54.

The Communist press ground on about Trotskyism throughout 1928 and into 1929. Publicly it now presented Trotskyism as a non-communist current, supported by reaction and used (consciously or unconsciously) against the U.S.S.R. Original Opposition documents were rare. They were not being printed in Britain, and were only just¹ becoming available in English through the efforts of American communists sympathetic to Trotsky. The only exception, (and this partial because of Inprecorr's small print run), was the last letter of Adolf Joffe with its celebrated final words to Trotsky proclaiming that he had always had the better of the argument politically. But this was forced on the communists by publication in the Western press, and issued with a gloss.² Periodically, the Communist press would carry further material against the Opposition.³ The stimulus would invariably be external, as when Rothstein took the opportunity provided by Eastman's The Real Situation in Russia to reduce to rubble the Opposition documents of recent years.⁴ The C.P.G.B. had survived the twenties relatively intact by making the right noises, but its hour was approaching. Manuilsky wondered;

How does it happen that all the fundamental problems of the Communist International fail to stir our fraternal British Party? It is not that the British Communist Party does not pass resolutions or take a stand upon all important questions. No, this cannot be said. Nevertheless, one does not feel any profound organic connection with all the problems of the world

- 1 J.P. Cannon, History of American Trotskyism, (New York 1973).
- 2 J. Yaroslavsky, 'The Letter of A. Joffe' and 'The Philosophy of Decadence', (Inprecorr, Vol. 8, no. 3, 19 Jan. 1928, 81-6).
- 3 In (1928) the party published a pamphlet under the title Where is Trotsky Going?
- 4 'The Real Situation in Russia', Communist Review, (April 1929), 200-212.

Labour Movement. All these problems have the appearance of being forcibly injected into the activities of the British Communist Party.¹

* * * * *

Trotsky intruded once more into British politics in the 1920s, this time over an issue which would not alienate the liberal intelligentsia but draw them towards him. He had arrived in enforced exile in Turkey in February 1929 and shortly began to cast around for a visa. The possibility of British asylum for him was first raised in the Commons under the Tories that same month.² He told the press that his favoured place of exile would be Germany but Britain did appeal since it offered a chance to revisit the British Museum.³ He professed puzzlement that the subject of a visa for him should bring the House (of Commons) down in laughter.⁴

Before the second Labour Government was formed, Trotsky received several celebrities of the left in Prinkipo. Cynthia Mosley was one of them. She admired him greatly, though her esteem was not reciprocated.⁵ Sidney and Beatrice Webb called on him in May 1929. They were not impressed by his arguments and disputed that the Labour Government was obliged to offer him asylum.⁶

- 1 Inprecorr, Vol. 9, (1929), 1140, quoted by Pelling, op. cit., 45.
- 2 I. Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast. Trotsky : 1929-1940, (1963), 17-21, gives an account of Trotsky's quest for a visa during 1929. See also My Life (New York 1970), 574-8, (14 March 1929).
- 3 'Interview By The Daily Telegraph' (14 March 1929) Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 13-15.
- 4 'Interview By The Daily Express' (16 March 1929) Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 66.
- 5 J. Bellamy and J. Saville, Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol.5, 158.
- 6 M. Cole, Beatrice Webb (1945). Deutscher dates the visit in April, but My Life gives early May.

The return of Labour to office in May 1929 provided an opportunity for Trotsky to cash his cheque of goodwill - or at least to discover the extent of his credit. Two fairly sustained efforts were made to secure asylum for him in Britain, one in the early, the other in the dying days of the Labour Government. Those who favoured his entry included Emrys Hughes who compared his case with that of Marx, and many I.L.P. branches, who wrote to their Head Office urging his admission.¹ Perhaps in response the Party invited him to deliver a lecture at its party school.² Trotsky requested a visa of the British Consul in Constantinople and then, in early June, cabled MacDonald. He later wrote to Beatrice Webb and Snowden, and telegraphed Lansbury.³ To the public he declared that he hoped, given asylum, to supervise the publication of his books in England and to pursue (social) scientific work.⁴ What was more he had a special interest in seeing if 'the difficulties created by private ownership can be surmounted through the medium of democracy'. Democracy which planned to overlap the greatest obstacles, he observed, could hardly begin by denying the democratic right of asylum.⁵ An impressive list of celebrities of radical England spoke up for Trotsky's right of asylum, but the Webbs, (Sidney was now a minister), were crucial exceptions. Beatrice Webb wrote that those who preached the extension of revolution would always be excluded from the countries in view. As Cate remarks⁶ she thus

1 C. Holmes, 'Trotsky and Britain. The 'closed' file', B.S.S.L.H., (Autumn 1979), 33. Hughes continued to be interested in securing a British visa for Trotsky years later, even suggesting that he should be given exile on a Scottish island (Forward, 25 April 1934).

2 My Life, 574. The invitation was sent on June 5.

3 I. Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast, 17.

4 On 15 July 1929 he repeated his claim to be motivated only by personal considerations in a letter to The Daily Herald, (Writings: Supplement (1929-33), 195).

5 'Why I Want To Come To London' (11 June 1929), Writings: Supplement (1929-33), 153).

6 The Fellow Travellers, 204. For contemporary comment, see Manchester Guardian, 19 July, Daily Herald, 22 July, 25 July, 1929.

indicated her ability to miss the whole purpose of asylum. She also showed ingratitude for her reception by Trotsky when he was in and she was out. Of the major British papers, only the Manchester Guardian (which was to befriend him over the years) and the Observer supported his claim.¹ The Times believed his presence in Constantinople a ruse by arrangement with Stalin to screen revolutionary activity in Germany.² Other rumours abounded. There was a general disinclination to take at face value Trotsky's protestations that his interest in British asylum was exclusively personal.

Magdeleine Paz had been among the 280 signatories of a January 1926 complaint to the Comintern about dictatorship in the P.C.F.³ Later, her group Coutre le Courant, was an early vehicle for the ideas of the Left Opposition in France. She now became the central organiser of a campaign to win Trotsky a British visa, and she it was who put to the government the strict conditions which Trotsky was prepared to observe, if admitted.⁴ Clynes hesitated under the pressure

1 I. Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast, 20.

2 My Life (New York 1970), 568.

3 D. Cate, Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960, (1964), 91. Cate traces the emergence of French Trotskyism on pp 89-92.

4 After 1929 Trotsky broke with Magdeleine Paz. He allowed her grudging credit for acting on his behalf over the English visa and for her part in securing the release of Victor Serge from the Soviet Union. He viewed Paz and her husband, however, as mere liberals, (Trotsky to Serge, 29 April 1936 and 19 May 1936, Writings: Supplement (1934-40), 660, 665).

and then in July 1929 came out against a visa for Trotsky. The government seems to have feared that his entry would provide difficulties for them, found his ideology distasteful, and worried as to whether, once in Britain, he might be difficult to expel.¹ Clynes suffered 'a chorus of frantic personal abuse' but he had no wish to jeopardise his relations with Russia and stood firm. Later he was to find solace for his rectitude in the verdict of the Trials.²

There was another attempt to raise the matter in the House in November 1929, but the second sustained effort to secure entry for Trotsky occurred in the spring of 1931. Ivor Montagu,³ who had met Trotsky in Prinkipo, employed George Lansbury as an intermediary to Clynes. One request was that Trotsky be allowed to change boats at an English port en route for Norway.⁴ It is now clear that it was certain Labour ministers, rather than - as might have been expected - the Liberal Party, which barred Trotsky. Samuel, (who was related to Montagu), intervened repeatedly, as did Lloyd George himself. Keynes,

1 C. Holmes, loc. cit., 33.

2 J.R. Clynes, Memoirs, 1924-1937, (1937), 116.

3 Ivor Montagu (1904-) had, as a young man, admired Trotsky. Later he was baffled by the dispute between him and the Soviet leaders, (The Youngest Son (1970), 192, 339); in this, his autobiography Montagu omits any reference to his part in the asylum episode or to the visit he paid to Trotsky at Prinkipo in 1931. In view of letters from Trotsky, now published, it seems likely that Montagu was the British Communist, later famous for his orthodoxy, whose correspondence with Trotsky Deutscher described as a 'thick pile' of friendly letters, though he claims his correspondence was not extensive, (C. Holmes, loc. cit., 37n).

4 C. Holmes, loc. cit., 36.

Scott, Bennett and Garvin all urged the government to reconsider its decision. It is noteworthy that there was stronger support from Labour intellectuals at this time than there was to be later over the Moscow Trials. Laski protested to the government. Shaw wrote Clynes a lengthy letter,¹ and joined with Wells in composing two statements against barring Trotsky's entry. Ellen Wilkinson added her name. But there was no success in this classic liberal issue. MacDonald, Clynes and Henderson overrode Lansbury's protests in Cabinet.² Possibly they were still smarting from the treatment they had received in Where Is Britain Going? With only minority support, they may have felt their parliamentary position at risk. There might also have been a sense of insecurity in the labour movement. An astute cartoon by David Low in the Manchester Guardian depicted a supplicant Trotsky having the door shut in his face by the determined Clynes. 'But I am an old friend of the House', protests the exile. 'Yes, that's why', comes the reply.

* * * * *

No Trotskyist movement emerged in Britain before 1930 due to meagre awareness of, and involvement in, the Russian and Comintern debates by communists and, perhaps, the small size of the C.P.G.B. Party leaders dealt uncertainly with Trotsky as an individual and as a theoretician unless they first received guidance from Moscow. The Where Is Britain Going? episode occurred because of lack of this guidance and also because nobody in Britain, and perhaps elsewhere, was equipped to give the C.P.G.B. such a boost. Trotsky's standing in Britain, which was high at mid-1926, collapsed abruptly as a direct result of the new drive against Trotskyism in the Comintern.

1 Quoted at length in I. Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast, op. cit., 17-18.

2 *ibid.*, 20n.

Outside the Party, reactions to Trotsky separate into three groups. The Labour and Trade Union leaders had a conventional fear of him and their experience in 1926 and even in 1929 gave them no encouragement that he had changed from his days of power in 1917-23. The ex-communists admired him as a revolutionary hero and writer, but had no firmer grasp of the issues at stake in his decline than had the C.P.G.B. They had themselves left the Party for various reasons and had no following they could convert to 'Trotskyism' had they even wished to do so. Liberal and Socialist intellectuals also admired Trotsky, but they had always rejected Bolshevism. Some of them, like the Labour and Trade Union leaders, had crossed swords with Trotsky in the past. Had the Communist Party of Great Britain recruited them in significant numbers¹ it is conceivable they might have backed Trotsky. Certainly they might have forced the theoretical issues. As it was they rallied strongly to him as an exile seeking a visa, far more strongly than they would in the middle of the 1930s when he was a more remote figure, communist influence more pervasive, and the world a more threatening place.

There were a number of British journals which, like The Plebs, stood for independent Marxism, but they had no distinct world view. Throughout the 1920s Trotsky and the Oppositionists were at work developing their world view without any British contribution. A semi-finished product was available by the time some British communists finally came over to Trotsky in the next decade. At the same time, because there was no British Trotskyism there was no alternative view available when the crisis finally arrived for the C.P.G.B. Party members had a choice of the leaders who had not done well to date or

¹ M. Johnstone, 'The Communist Party in the 1920s', New Left Review, No -Vol: 41, (1967), 47-63.

new leaders with Russian backing. Falling membership rolls indicate their choice. A Trotskyist current might have been able to win support for ending the blurred boundary between communism and the Labour left, without retreating into a sectarian steadfast. But no via media was advanced with authority in Britain, and it is difficult to conceive of avowed Trotskyists surviving as party members any more easily after 1926 than they did in 1932. Even the old leadership had made short work of Arthur Reade. In the end the weaknesses of the C.P.G.B. must provide the main explanation as to why a following for Trotsky emerged later in Britain than almost anywhere else.

PART ONE

(1929 - 1938)

II ORGANISED TROTSKYISM TO THE FORMATION OF
THE BRITISH SECTION (1929 - NOVEMBER 1931)

An organised Trotskyist group emerged in Britain late in 1931 stimulated by dissatisfaction with communist performance and growing awareness of Trotsky's critique. The British Section of the Left Opposition emerged from the Communist Party, although there were others in Britain interested in Trotsky's ideas. It crystallized relatively late, without great impact, and conditioned by the Communist Party from which it sprang.

* * * * * * *

The first meeting of the International Left Opposition gathered in Paris on 6 April 1930 without British participation.¹ Later in the year, however, Trotsky wrote of the 'very promising ties established with Britain'.² In 1930 and 1931 the embryonic International had contact with three dissatisfied groups on the British left.

The first group included independent Marxists who were dissatisfied with the C.P.G.B. Among these was Dick Beech,³ with whom American Trotskyists corresponded as early as 1930. Beech knew a

1 This meeting, known as the preliminary conference of the I.L.O., elected a provisional International Secretariat and agreed to establish an International Bulletin. Representatives from France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Hungary, the United States, Czechoslovakia and a French Jewish Group attended. Groups in Russia, China, Austria, Mexico, Argentina and Greece endorsed the steps taken. (L. Trotsky, 'A Big Step Forward. Unification of the Left Opposition.', April 1930, Writings 1930, 187-90, 419-20n.) There is a critical discussion of the early I.L.O. in I. Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast, 57-60.

2 'How the I.L.O. is Doing', (1930), Writings : 1930, 304.

3 Dick Beech was a former Wobbly who had in 1920 accompanied the British delegation to the first congress of the Comintern. He ran a book society which, inter alia, circulated Trotskyist material. He had contributed articles to the Militant of the Communist League of America. Beech corresponded with Trotsky up to the end of 1931 and helped the Trotskyist movement subsequently from time to time. He later became president of the Chemical Workers Union.

number of leading Continental communists who had come over to the Opposition. These acquaintances he shared with Jack Tanner,¹ also formerly a party member. Others who were known to the Opposition included the photographer Clare Sheridan, then a close friend of Ivor Montagu, Flower, a Daily Telegraph journalist,² and Ellen Wilkinson.³ Pierre Naville, leader of one of the two French Opposition factions visited Britain in 1930 for talks with Beech.⁴

Beech, Tanner and Wilkinson all were trade unionists who had been Communist Party members. Ivor Montagu, who had remained a communist, but was not a trade unionist, had friendly relations with Trotsky at least up to the end of 1931,⁵ when he was seen as 'a very good comrade'. Also within the C.P.G.B. in 1931 were the middle class Freda Utley and the working class Margaret McCarthy, both of whom had witnessed in Russia the effect of the rout of the Left Opposition and silently favoured Trotsky's views.⁶ These names, or some of them, might have added lustre to the Opposition, but none of them joined it.

- 1 Jack Tanner was a foundation member of the C.P.G.B., national committee member of the A.E.U., and a leading spokesman of the Minority Movement in the 1920s. He left the Communist Party and rose as a right wing spokesman to the presidency of his union.
- 2 Interview with Harry Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979.
- 3 Trotsky gave Shachtman a letter of introduction to her the following year. (L. Trotsky, 'To Help in Britain', 9 Nov. 1931, Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 99)
- 4 Interview with Harry Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979.
- 5 Trotsky sounded him out about a new edition of Where is Britain Going? in that year. L. Trotsky to Shachtman, 'To Help in Britain', Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 9 Nov. 1931, 99.
- 6 Both women watched the demotions and dismissals for political reasons which took place in Russia with incomprehension, a legacy perhaps of the lack of knowledge in the C.P.G.B. of the debate in the Russian Party. Freda Utley might have openly joined Trotsky in 1931 but was dissuaded by Bertrand Russell, with whom she was staying. (F. Utley, Lost Illusions, (1949), 11, 57-8; M. McCarthy, Generation in Revolt, (1953), passim.)

The second cluster of contacts consisted of those in the I.L.P. and outside it, who had not been in the Communist Party and thought revolutionary politics had to make a new start. Sometime in 1929 and 1930, the Marxist League was formed, an independent revolutionary propaganda group. It was not large. Its leading figures were Frank Ridley,¹ Chandu Ram² and Hugo Dewar,³ the organiser of the League. The League, as such, stayed independent of all parties and spent its time selling literature and holding open air meetings in Hyde Park, Tottenham Court Road and elsewhere.⁴ In 1930 and 1931 it had contact with the Trotskyist Communist League of America. The C.L.A., to which Trotsky looked to help stimulate a British Opposition, invited Ridley to send reports to The Militant. The League sold this paper, together with American Trotskyist pamphlets, at its public activities.

In 1931 Ridley and Ram expounded the view that events were moving to a crisis in Britain. The National Government was the first stage of British fascism, which a reformist I.L.P. (still within the Labour Party) and a sectarian C.P.G.B. were inadequate to resist. 'It is socialism or starvation, communism or chaos', argued Ridley.⁵ There was little role for trade unions, since there was no scope for reform.⁶ What was needed was a new party and a new (Fourth) International.

- 1 F.A. Ridley (1897-) was a writer, secularist and historian who had left the I.L.P. in 1930.
- 2 Chandu Ram (d. 1932) was an Indian law student and member of the London branch of the Indian National Congress.
- 3 Hugo Dewar (-1980) joined the I.L.P. around 1929.
- 4 R. Stephenson (ed.), The Early Years of the British Left Opposition (1979).
- 5 F.A. Ridley, 'A Communist Party - The Problem of the Revolution in England', The Militant (N.Y.), 31 Oct. 1931, quoted in R. Stephenson, op. cit.
- 6 'Therefore, when capitalism reaches that stage of decay when no further reforms are possible - and that stage is here now (witness the coalmining industry) - the "raison d'etre" of trade unionism is gone. The end of trade unions as known at present is within sight', (D.E.W. [Dr. Worrall?], 'Trade Unions and Revolution', The New Man, 1 Jan. 1932, 5).

In Autumn 1931, Ridley and Ram formulated theses on Britain. The country was at a transitional stage between democracy and fascism, ruled now by an 'antiparliamentary' government. Trade unions were 'imperialist organizations', doomed to disappear now that the era of superprofits had gone. The Comintern should be entirely rejected, and with it the Communist Party of Great Britain.¹

Trotsky was unimpressed. He expected an Opposition current to develop from within the C.P.G.B. When it did it would stand on the shoulders of Bolshevik experience. Ridley and Ram advanced theses for a Fourth International but they had made no struggle against Stalinist control of the Communist Party.

'It would be very sad if the critical members of the official British Communist Party would imagine that the opinions of Ridley and Ram represent the opinions of the Left Opposition.'²

It would not do to declare the historical role of the Labour Party and the trade unions at an end. Nor was it possible to abstain even from a weakened communist party.

If the few hundred Left Oppositionists remain on the sidelines they will become transformed into a powerless, lamentable sect. If, however, they participate in the internal ideological struggle of the party of which they remain an integral part despite all expulsions, they will win an enormous influence in the proletarian kernel of the party.³

1 The theses perished with other of Ridley's papers during the blitz, but Trotsky quotes from them in his reply, 'Tasks of the Left Opposition in Britain and India', 7 November 1931, Writings (1930-31), 337-43. For factual data on the Marxist League, see A. Richardson, Some Notes for a Bibliography of British Trotskyism, dupl. (1979?), no pag.

2 'Tasks of the Left Opposition in Britain and India. Some uncritical remarks on unsuccessful theses', 7 Nov. 1931, Writings (1930-31), 342.

3 *ibid.*, 342.

Trotsky was speaking here of Germany, but he believed that in Britain also the Opposition would have to earn support by fighting false Comintern policies from within. An opposition which emerged that way would be more firm than one which drew facile, abstract conclusions, however willing it might be to engage in correspondence.¹ Ram expounded his and Ridley's views at an Autumn meeting of the International Secretariat in Paris,² but found no support there or among the American Trotskyists.

Trotsky participated in a discussion in Turkey at which Marxist League ideas were aired.³ The call to launch a Fourth International was not being made only in Britain.⁴ And the belief that the situation was at crisis point reflected the views not of isolated individuals alone, but also of the C.P.G.B., whose influence Trotsky believed he detected.⁵ Those communists who were questioning this very exaggeration of the prospects for fascism by their party were disturbed at the views of Ridley and Ram and were reassured by

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- 1 L. Trotsky, 'Better to seek the Solid', 30 Nov. 1931, Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 101-2.
 - 2 Held in or before October 1931. (A. Glotzer to R. Groves, 27 Oct. 1931.) Here and on other occasions Ram used the pseudonym 'Aggravaila' or 'Aggar Wala'.
 - 3 A. Glotzer to R. Groves, 27 Oct. 1931. Minutes were forwarded to all English contacts of the I.L.O.
 4. I. Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast, 43-4.
 - 5 L. Trotsky to M. Shachtman, 'What Is Fascism?', 15 Nov. 1931, Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 99-101. In 1929 the C.P.G.B. adopted a resolution that social fascism (i.e. the Labour government) was preparing the way for fascism, that the crisis was sharpening, and that 'militancy and solidarity similar to the great days of the General Strike are being displayed'. Stimulated by the protracted social crisis in Germany, Trotsky was at this time developing his analysis of the conditions under which fascism might grow. In England, Fascism was not ruled out, but would grow only with difficulty because of the social weight of the country's proletariat.

the Americans.

'It was the unanimous decision of the International Secretariat that at present there is not an organisation in England that represents the International Left Opposition nor its International Secretariat.'¹

This was thumbs down for the Marxist League. Hugo Dewar withdrew, dissenting from its view of trade unions² and prepared in practice to undertake the struggle Trotsky proposed. He joined the I.L.P. in Clapham and then moved to the Tooting local of the C.P.G.B.³ The Marxist League continued in being, and on 1 January 1932 launched a short-lived journal, The New Man.⁴ Ridley later rejected the Fourth International when the International Left Opposition decided to

- 1 A Glotzer to R. Groves, 27 Oct. 1931. 'Several fundamental questions', Glotzer told Groves, divided the I.S. from the Marxist League and 'the other groups in England'. Arne Swabek conceded Groves's complaints about Ridley's article in The Militant, (A. Swabek to R. Groves, 6 Nov. 1931), and told him that the C.L.A. had been compelled to excise from Ridley's article the view that the 1931 general election was the last Britain would have, (A. Swabek to R. Groves, 24 Nov. 1931).
- 2 H. Dewar to P. Thwaites, 24 Sept. 1975, lent to author by Mr. Thwaites.
- 3 R. Groves, The Balham Group, (1974), 61.
- 4 A.M.R. Penn, ('A Bibliography of the British Trotskyist Press', University of Warwick M.A., 1979, 22), was unable to locate any copies of The New Man. But Vol. 1, no. 1, 1 Jan. 1932 has survived and is located in the Watson collection of the University of Stirling. It was intended to publish the journal, which had eight pages, fortnightly. This issue contains articles by Ridley, D.E.W., [Dr. Worrall?] and 'Caius Gracchus'. It continued the catastrophic theses of the League and offered to provide leadership of a revolutionary character, but made no call for a Fourth International.

launch it.¹

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It was from disgruntled members of the C.P.G.B. that the British Section of the Left Opposition was finally to be launched. Any dissatisfaction these future Trotskyists felt before 1930 however, was with the C.P.G.B. as it was before the eleventh (special) party congress of November-December 1929, at which leadership was transferred to a new more intransigent group.²

The Opposition was a London affair. Reg. Groves,³ Stewart Purkis⁴ and Billy Williams⁵ had read Where Is Britain Going? and The Lessons of October before the General Strike. They worked together as members of the Clearing House Branch of the Railway Clerks Association in Poplar and were part of the influx of new recruits into the Communist Party immediately after the General Strike.⁶

1 See Below.

2 'One or two individuals were already moving towards an Oppositional position by 1929', writes Hugo Dewar, (Communist Politics in Britain, (1976), 150). Reg. Groves only appeared as a critic of the group now controlling the party in February 1930, however, though the London membership did have some independence of the Comintern supporters. (R. Groves, op. cit., 21-2; H. Wicks, loc. cit., 27-8.)

3 Reg. Groves, (1908-) joined the I.L.P. as a youth in 1924.

4 (1885-1969)

5 E.S. 'Billy' Williams, (d. 1963).

6 R. Groves, op. cit., 12-16.

By 1929 Groves and Purkis had worked their way up to the London District Committee, Groves serving as Assistant Organizer for most of 1929. Groves was a young turk pushing the party towards the new line being urged by the Comintern, though he was the only C.P.G.B. member invited to the Lenin School who refused to go. He had rejected the T.G.W.U. as a company union, and called for the political levy not to be paid in the G.M.W.U.¹ He urged an end to the 'old method' and called for a new leadership on the eve of the special congress.² Purkis wrote for the party press in industrial matters,³ and was active with Williams in the St. Pancras local.

Henry Sara, (1886-1953), the same age as Purkis, was moderately well known in the party. He was a former S.L.P. member and wartime conscientious objector, who had not joined the C.P.G.B. at its foundation, but came into it following a trip to Russia.⁴ He gave lantern lectures on his tour,⁵ had a taste, like Groves, for nineteenth

- 1 "'Mondism"and our Industrial Party', Communist Review, (July 1929), 409-14.
- 2 Like Murphy, he demanded a struggle against the 'Right danger', ('Our Party and the New Period', Communist Review, (Nov. 1929), 604-9). Groves was also corresponding with Dutt, (op. cit., 23). The interest Groves was to show in working class history was already in evidence in his Labour Monthly articles on Chartism.
- 3 He contributed to Labour Monthly on railway and Minority Movement problems on occasions in 1929 and 1930. He also obscurely challenged Dutt's interpretation of the 1929 general election result, (Workers' Weekly, 23 Nov. 1929). He was expelled from the R.C.A. for political activities and was joint editor, with Billy Williams, of The Jogger, a cyclostyled rank and file party bulletin.
- 4 For Henry Sara see R. Groves, op. cit., 19-20; R. Challinor, The Origins of British Bolshevism (1977), 142.
- 5 Sunday Worker, 11 Oct. 1925.

century history and, uniquely among the future founder members of the British Section, he had participated in theoretical discussions in the party press.¹ He wrote with independent convictions, authority and, occasionally, an academic air.² In 1929, he stood as parliamentary candidate in the General Election for Tottenham South, an area where he was well known.

The fifth key personality from the early cadre of British Trotskyism was Harry Wicks,³ another railwayman, who had first encountered Opposition ideas at Y.C.L. classes in Battersea given by Arthur Reade and attended the aggregate of 17 January 1925. Wicks was part of the strong organization which the C.P.G.B. had built in Battersea in the 1920s, at the apex of which stood Shapurji Saklatvala a communist Member of Parliament. In 1927 Wicks, unlike Groves, accepted an invitation to join the Lenin School in Moscow.⁴ He stayed there until 1930, attended the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern in 1928 and witnessed the final rout of the Opposition. He also met George Weston, a West London craftsman who backed Trotsky. Wicks returned in 1930 to find the C.P.G.B. isolated and its Battersea base in ruins.⁵

- 1 See 'The Class War', Communist Review, (April 1926), 538-42. In 1927 Sara attended the Hankow conference of the C.C.C.P. in company with Tom Mann, on whose friendship he would still be able to call after breaking with C.P.G.B., (H. Sara to C.A. Smith, 14 Sept. 1937, Warwick M.S.S. 15/4/1/27).
- 2 Compare his 'Further Jottings on R.W. Postgate', (The Communist, (May 1928), 290-6) with Harold Heslop's attempt the previous month to dismember the eclectic ex-communist.
- 3 Harry Wicks (1907-) joined the party in 1921 with most of the Daily Herald League and helped form the Battersea Y.C.L., and joined its national executive in 1926. (R. Groves, op. cit., 34-5).
- 4 R. Groves (op. cit., 19) argues the Lenin School had a harmful effect. A contrary view is put by S. Macintyre in 'Marxism in Britain, 1917 - 1933', 44.
- 5 This created a strong impression. Interview with H. Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979.

In 1930 the separate dissatisfaction of these five with the party became evident. Early in the year, Groves presented a series of complaints on the style and content of The Daily Worker launched on 1 January.¹ He began to contribute an information column, 'Workers Notebook', but editing of this caused disagreements as well.² Links between Groves and Purkis were reinforced through this clash³ and also through an abortive attempt by Groves to join the Marx-Engels Institute that summer.⁴ Meanwhile Sara, and to a lesser extent Purkis, clashed with the official line over two issues of theory. It was the year of Bukharin's ouster from the presidency of the Comintern. Sara, not intimidated, supported Bukharin's views on the effects of imperialism on

- 1 He proposed that the paper be reduced in size, that its articles be more educational, that more argument and less stridency be apparent in its pages. He was told in reply that reference resources were weak and that it was the application of policy, not policy itself, that was at fault. (R. Groves to Secretariat, 26 Feb. 1930; Daily Worker editorial board to Groves, 24 March 1930).
- 2 He resented alteration of his text without consultation and threatened to suspend the column. (R. Groves to Secretariat, 22 April, 14 May, 30 May 1930). The Secretariat supported the Editorial Board in seeking a full text that it could defend, (W. Rust to Groves, 1 June 1930; Secretariat to Groves (4), 8 July 1930).
- 3 Purkis had backed him against editorial changes, (Secretariat to Groves, 8 July 1930).
- 4 Groves requested of David Riazanov, director of the Institute and biographer of Marx and Engels, paid work in London on its behalf. Riazanov countered with the offer of a post with the English Cabinet of the Institute in Moscow. Groves accepted but was barred by the British Party. (D. Riazanov to Groves, 30 March 1930; R. Groves to Riazanov, 13 April 1930; draft by S. Purkis of letter to Riazanov explaining the block, Warwick M.S.S.). Later Jane DeGras filled a vacancy at the Institute, (Interview with Harry Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979).

competition at home and claimed, moreover, that Lenin endorsed them.¹ Purkis was implicated in passing, in the conflict between the party and Freda Utley over whether the working class of its own effort might achieve socialist consciousness.² Groves and Sara, members of the party agitprop committee, were by 1931 beginning like J.T. Murphy, another committee member, to make systematic criticisms of the party.³

Years later, Stuart Purkis recalled 'we came together in 1930, brought together by agreement on the need for propaganda for the United Front'.⁴ The marrying of disparate discontents into a Trotskyist critique occurred during 1931. Groves and Sara had seen the American Militant in London radical bookshops⁵ and read Trotsky's Autobiography,

- 1 He carried the controversy on Bukharin from The Daily Worker into the theoretical press. See his review of The Economic Theory of the Leisure Class, (Communist Review, (Feb. 1930) 84-8) for which he was criticised by Rathbone and the Politbureau. For a discussion of C.P.G.B. reactions to Bukharin's disgrace, see S. Macintyre, op. cit., 179-80
- 2 'The Theoretician of "Left" sectarianism and Spontaneity', Communist Review, (Jan. 1931), 11-19. Groves relates the views of Utley and Purkis in The Balham Group, 30-1. For a discussion of Utley's views and the impact on the party of the late availability in English of Lenin's What Is To Be Done? (1902), see N. Wood, Communism and British Intellectuals, (1959), 167-71 and S. Macintyre, op. cit., passim.
- 3 Interview with Harry Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979.
- 4 The Red Flag, (Jan. 1937).
- 5 R. Groves, op. cit., 48, explains that he saw Militant and Labor Action for the first time at Henderson's bookshop in March 1931.

My Life (1930). Trotsky's article 'Germany : the key to the international situation'¹ had also been widely noted, the first English presentation of his case for a United Front of the mass parties of the German workers against fascism. By 1931 the Communist League of America had behind it three years experience in running an Opposition group against a more ferocious Communist Party than the British one, but in a more open political situation.² One of its responsibilities was to stimulate the creation of a sister group in Britain. When Groves contacted it about the regularity of supplies of Militant to Britain a correspondence began in which the C.L.A. tried to capitalise on its opportunity.³

For the Americans, Arne Swabeck⁴ argued forcefully for the establishment of an Opposition group within the C.P.G.B. which would advance Trotsky's critique of Comintern policy.⁵ Groves was not convinced that discontent with the C.P.G.B. necessarily implied an alignment with Trotsky. Swabeck sought a fraction within the C.P.G.B. where a cadre might be built around criticism of the party line.

- 1 Twentieth Century, (May 1931).
- 2 J.P. Cannon and M. Spector led about 100 communists out of the C.P.U.S.A. of Joy Lovestone in late 1928, to which were added some intellectuals influenced by Max Eastman. The catalyst in the political evolution of Cannon and Spector from critics to Oppositionists had been the smuggling out of the Sixth World Congress, which they attended as delegates, of Trotsky's critique of The Draft Programme of the Comintern. (J.P. Cannon, The History of American Trotskyism, (New York 1972), for the early C.L.A. see J.A. Robbins, The Birth of American Trotskyism, 1927-1929, (U.S.A., 1973), C.A. Myers, The Prophet's Army. Trotskyists in America, 1928-1941, (Westport, Conn., 1977), 27-38)
- 3 R. Groves, op. cit., 46-7.
- 4 Arne Swabeck was a founder member of the C.P.U.S.A. who became secretary of the C.L.A. in 1932 and was a delegate to the Paris conference of the I.L.O. in Paris, February 1933.
- 5 A. Swabeck, 'To Our English Comrades', (n.d., 1931?).

'Is it the desire of the Left Opposition to make any split? We believe we must say decidedly: No'.¹ To the British, who had not, in any case, 'assimilated the litany of organised Trotskyism',² the prospects for making this critique and staying party members, appeared far less auspicious.

The British view diverged from that pressed upon them by the C.L.A. Groves and the others appear in 1930-2 as guardians of the new line proposed by the Comintern and its supporters at the special congress. They had played no part in the development of the I.L.O. critique.³ Unlike the C.L.A., they held that the party should not control the Minority Movement and that professional revolutionaries should not run the party. In the next year, they were to counterpose factory work to trade union work and thus make a mistake the C.L.A. had been careful to avoid.⁴ Following the August crisis, Groves foresaw a new 1926. He proposed Councils of Action and preparation for a new General Strike, fearful that the Left, as in that year, would again make the running

1 A. Swabeck, *ibid.*

2 S. Macintyre, *op. cit.*, 238.

3 In 1934 Groves wrote of the part he and other London militants had played in attacking the pre-1929 party leadership.

They did so partly out of revolt against the previous policy with its merging of the Communist Party in the loose Labour Left and partly because the struggle begun by the London membership against bureaucracy in the party was taken up by the Comintern and used by it, as part of its war with the party's own Right Wing. It must also be remembered that we know nothing of the struggle going on within the C.L. and nothing of the policy of the Left Opposition.

Reg. Groves, (Our Attitude to the Labour Party, (draft), Warwick M.S.S., 2).

4 J.A. Robbins, *op. cit.*, 76.

in view of the failure of the Daily Worker to make the party's role clear.¹

The critics were now an identifiable entity. The 'Balham Group' existed from some time in the later months of 1931,² though most of its members had been working in South-West London before that. From the end of 1930, Wicks, now returned to Battersea, was cooperating with them. Faced with the economies programme of the National Government, the Balham Group approached local I.L.P.ers, notably the Clapham branch, for joint resistance activities. This was a limited local united front and one tangible gain was Hugo Dewar, who split with the Marxist League and, effectively, followed Trotsky's advice by coming over to the Tooting Communist local from the Clapham I.L.P.

In the Autumn of 1931, the Americans began to force the pace. They had noted that these South London communists, for all their reservations, were more solid in their support than the other British contacts. The proposal for a C.L.A. leader to visit England for a lengthy spell had been under discussion earlier in the year.³ In September Swabek called on Groves to begin a definite group in Britain, albeit cautiously, and proposed a gathering of all C.L.A.

1 R. Groves to the Secretariat, 25 Aug. 1931; Daily Worker to Groves, 27 Aug. 1931; R. Groves to Editorial Board of Daily Worker 26 Aug. 1931, (Warwick M.S.S.). The party secretariat refused to publish his letters, feeling that 'the opening of a party discussion at the present moment is in no way desirable'. The assumption underlying Groves's argument seems to be that economic developments would stimulate militant movements which Councils of Action would harness, a concept the party, perhaps influenced now by What Is To Be Done?, increasingly rejected, (S. Macintyre, 'The Balham Group', Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists, B.R. 8-10).

2 Members included Reg. and Daisy Groves, Cyril Whiting, Maurice Simmonds, Bill Pyne, Isabel Mussi, Steve Dowdall and Nell Dowdall; a number of whom had been in the party for some time, (R. Groves, The Balham Group, (1974), passim).

3 L. Trotsky to Shachtman, 'Will Help New Publishing House', 4 April 1931, Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 78-9.

contacts to meet Albert Glotzer, who was about to visit Britain.¹ Glotzer,² in fact, went first to Turkey, where he met Trotsky, and wrote again to Groves. In October another letter from America promised that Max Shachtman also would visit Britain.³

In November a meeting was convened in the flat of Flower at which Groves, Sara, Purkis and Wicks⁴ agreed to establish a British Section of the Left Opposition.⁵ Shachtman urged the need for someone to be sacrificed in order to dramatize the existence of the group, but both Americans argued against a split. There was unease at Shachtman's suggestion, but agreement on the need to restore inner party democracy, reduce Russian influence and return to basic principles. It was later asserted that the Americans' anxiety to establish a group overrode the achievement of political unity, that organisational steps were taken,

1 A. Swabek to Groves, 29 Sept. 1931, Warwick M.S.S.

2 Albert Glotzer (1908-) was a youth leader of the C.L.A.

3 A. Swabek to Groves, 26 Oct. 1931, Warwick M.S.S.

4 H. Wicks, 'British Trotskyism in the Thirties', International, No. 1, (1976). Groves, op. cit., 49, writes that Billy Williams was present. Also in attendance may have been Weston (alias Morris), who had been with Wicks in Moscow and not allowed back into the party on his return to Britain, (Interview with H. Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979).

5 Though the Section seems not to have been recognised as such until the New Year, (R. Groves, (op. cit., 49)).

but that the group remained a circle of friends.¹

The plan was for Shachtman to visit Montagu, Ellen Wilkinson and perhaps others.² Nothing tangible emerged from this. A British Section constructed more widely from those with whom Trotsky and others were in contact, might have been a very impressive body indeed.³ What actually crystallized was a tiny body which, like the young C.P.G.B. was entirely working class and had only made a limited critique of Comintern theory.

It is arguable that the Balham Group was a product mainly of domestic discontents. The prime movers were fairly well known to each other, they had a common industrial background, and many were concentrated in South London. Inevitably they were a group held together by personal as well as political ties. The political ties centred on dissatisfaction with the performance of the C.P.G.B., first before the imposition of the new line at Leeds and after. But the Balham Group reacted to the impasse of the C.P.G.B. in its own way. By 1931, it is argued, it was closer to the 'class against class' line than

- 1 'The foundation meeting of the British Group was lamentably unconcerned with politics. It was marked by a vigorous determination to get an L.O. group set up in Britain at all costs, and also by the absence of any attempt to ensure political unity on the basis of an L.O. platform.' Statement From Members of the 1931-1933 Committee of the British Group of the Left Opposition, 18 April 1933, 1, Warwick M.S.S.
- 2 L. Trotsky to Shachtman, 'To Help in Britain', 9 Nov. 1931, Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 99. Montagu had to be contacted discreetly, Trotsky advised, in view of his job connections with Russia.
- 3 The closed section of Trotsky's archive was opened to the public on 1 January 1980. Folders 165-75 of the archive contain documents and correspondence on Britain (I. Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast, 530). Attempts to elicit any information about their contents before that date failed, though it is likely that they contain further information on Trotsky's British contacts at this time.

the party itself.¹ It rejected the catastrophism of Ridley and Ram, as had the C.L.A., yet it shared the belief that communist growth was imminent. But just as communist theory had in the C.P.G.B. of the 1920s largely been imposed from without, the new Oppositionists themselves were confronted with a mass of doctrine which they were expected to digest. Some of it, like the argument for the United Front, appealed at once, and those parts of Trotsky's critique, of which the Group were aware, acted as a yeast on its development. Balham's interests in Trotskyism were not abnormal² but the immediate future was to reveal a mutual lack of confidence between it and the international movement.

1 S. Macintyre, 'The Balham Group', Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists, B.R. 8-10. A good example is Groves's insistence, during the dispute over 'Workers' Notebook', that the Congress would be incapable of carrying forward the struggle in India against the British, the very view advanced by the Comintern against the Old Guard in 1928.

2 J. Jupp, 'The Left in Britain', (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of London, 1956), 229.

III THE BRITISH SECTION OF THE LEFT OPPOSITION

(NOVEMBER 1931 - DECEMBER 1933).

In the two years after the formation of the British Section, the Trotskyists made modest progress. Six months aggressive presentation of their views led to their expulsion in the summer of 1932. This event had only a limited impact on the C.P.G.B. though the Trotskyists had a cadre within the I.L.P. For a year and a half they functioned independently of parties but with an I.L.P. fraction. At the end of 1933, however, the organization split over the tactical issue of whether or not to commit itself entirely to entering the I.L.P.

* * * * *

In 1932 the C.P.G.B. began efforts to break out of its sectarian enclave. Under Comintern guidance the 'January resolution' was drawn up rejecting the excesses of the previous year which, supposedly, arose from misapplication of the line. The Balham Group challenged the resolution on two points: its thesis that trade unions might be transformed into instruments of class struggle, and the absence of any guidance for work on Germany and the Far East.¹ Balham did not reject trade union work, but it believed the principal emphasis ought to lie on an approach to the shop floor. The unwisdom of making this its main charge was illustrated by coverage of the disagreement in the Daily Worker,² and the tone of comments by communist leaders.

1 The Balham Group to the Secretariat, 1 April 1932.

2 'The Vital Importance of our Work in Trade Unions', Daily Worker, 14 April 1932.

It was in vain for Balham to protest that its objection was to the belief that unions might be transformed into instruments of class struggle.¹ It was equally naive to cite Dutt and Lozovsky in support.² The party replied that Balham's line was sectarian and hindering the work of the Minority Movement, and that it was not, in any case, carrying out factory work.³ It was also relatively easy to put the record straight both about Dutt and Lozovsky;⁴ with the passing of time the Balham Group began to be presented as an ultra-left faction which first deviated by its hostility to trade unions.⁵

Far more efficacious would have been a drive on the United Front, Trotsky's main preoccupation of these years. The criticisms that Wicks, Groves and Sara were making of the leadership might have obtained a stronger echo had they hit at this weakest point. In May the first issue of The Communist, published not without misgivings,⁶

1 'The machinery remains cumbersome, reformist in structure, and useless for the waging of struggle under the new conditions.' (Balham Group to Secretariat, 12 May 1932, Warwick M.S.S.).

2 Groves continued to admire Dutt for some years, and the Balham Group had called, not for a new communist leadership but for the introduction of new elements into the leadership, (Balham Group to Secretariat, 1 April 1932, Warwick M.S.S.). The illusion that some leading communists might back the Opposition took a long time to die, (see below).

3 The Daily Worker, 14 April, 27 May 1932.

4 *ibid.*, 9, 10 June 1932.

5 *ibid.*, 7, 10 June. See also J. Shields, 'Economic Struggles and the Drive Into The Trade Unions', Communist Review (Dec. 1932), 572-3. But Purkis, who had been condemned the previous year for holding local industrial work in disdain, was still covering affairs in the R.C.A. for the Daily Worker on 30 May.

6 R. Groves, *op. cit.*, 58-9. This was the first public statement that the Left Opposition existed in Britain. Trotsky was to congratulate the British on such an 'excellently hectographed' product, and indeed the typing and reproduction are superb.

sensibly played to their strong suit by leading with Trotsky's 1931 article, 'Germany : the key to the international situation'. But while calls were made for a discussion on the January resolution, and for the convening of the party congress, it was its trade union appraisal which identified the Balham group.

Sharp attacks on the leadership by Groves, Wicks and Sara at aggregates in Battersea on 20 April and 30 May, together with the publication of The Communist as the journal of the British Section of the Left Opposition, inevitably brought down the wrath of the party apparatus. Sara, who had a separate dispute with the Daily Worker,¹ Groves and Wicks were all condemned by the Battersea political committee of the party for underestimation of the party's role, defeatism, social democratic practices and 'unjustifiable and unsubstantiated attacks on the leadership'.² They continued as party members, however, pursuing unusual cooperation with the local I.L.P. and gathering an anti-war movement in South-West London which had genuine support. Parting of the ways with the C.P.G.B. may have been delayed by the party decision to close the discussion on the January resolution, notified on 24 June.

It was the war issue which finally brought matters to a head. Balham had criticized the Comintern drive for the World Congress Against War which was to be held in Amsterdam later in 1932 with strong support

1 He had been charged with spreading 'pacifist stuff' for his view that the paper had overestimated the prospect of war, (Secretariat to Sara, 13 April 1932; H. Sara to Secretariat, 16, 23 April 1932, Warwick M.S.S.).

2 R.W. Robson (London District Organizer, C.P.G.B.) to Sara, 31 May, 13 June 1932; H. Sara to Robson, 7 June 1932 (Warwick M.S.S.).

from non-party intellectuals. In South West London, Balham was advancing a strong Leninist line. Trotsky was arguing that unity with writers such as Henri Barbusse implied pacifist concessions and that this approach was a substitute for a working class united front.¹ Pollitt and leading party members had seen The Communist and on 17 August they confronted Groves, Wicks and Sara, demanding of the first two that they submit to discipline. They would not commit themselves and were expelled.² When a majority of the Balham Group refused to disown Groves, it was liquidated and surviving members left in a party branch covering the Battersea and Wandsworth area. Hugo Dewar was expelled soon after for his defence of the Balham line at his Tooting local. Stuart Purkis, who identified himself with Balham and The Communist was also expelled.³ Twelve members of the dissolved Balham Group circulated a statement as widely as they could setting down what had happened,⁴ but the repercussions were limited. The only

- 1 His case against the congress is set out in 'The Coming Congress against War', 13 June 1932, and 'Declaration to the Antiwar Congress at Amsterdam', 25 July 1932, (Writings, 1932, 113-7, 148-55). 2200 delegates attended the Amsterdam Congress. Ten were Trotskyists but none of these were British, (D. Cate, op. cit., 107).
- 2 R. Groves, op. cit., 66-9. Sara was suspended on 17 August, the same day, anticipating expulsion, he wrote for The Plebs an article defending Trotsky's role in 1917 which J.P.M. Millar attempted to advertise in the Daily Worker. Sara was expelled a few days later. (J. Robson to Sara, 17 Aug. 1932; J.P.M. Millar to Sara, 3 Sept. 1932; H. Sara, 'Trotsky and the Russian Revolution', The Plebs, (Sept. 1932), 196-8.)
- 3 His letter of affirmation to Harry Pollitt is given in full in R. Groves, op. cit., 86-90. See also L. Trotsky to Groves, 'After The British Expulsions', 6 Sept. 1932, Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 149, for comment on Purkis's estimate of Dutt, Pollitt and Burns as 'men of outstanding gifts'.
- 4 To Our Comrades in The Communist Party From the "Liquidated" Balham Group, given in full in R. Groves, op. cit., 81-5.

leader who departed around this time was J.T. Murphy and he left over an entirely unrelated issue, though attempts were made to construct a link.¹ The second issue of The Communist appeared in September and the group set about building itself up.

The Balham Group found itself outside the party, with less than a dozen supporters. It was classified as a Trotskyist faction but it had a strong foot in the camp of the 'third period'.² It was criticised by the Americans for its trade union stand,³ but Trotsky

1 L. Trotsky to Groves, 27 May 1932, (Warwick M.S.S.). See also the Daily Worker for 10 May 1932 where the political bureau alleged, 'Murphy has left the line of the International and moved towards the camp of the counter-revolutionary Trotskyists, who have always denied the possibility of building up socialism in one country and continue to assert that the Soviet Union is an integral part of the world capitalist economy'. Shortly afterwards the theme was developed by Idris Cox, (17 May), the Scottish District Committee of the Party (18 May) and Hasleden (19 May). See also W. Joss 'The Expulsion of J.T. Murphy and its Lessons', Communist Review, (June 1932), 298-301. For Murphy's own case for trade credits and democracy within the party see 'Why I Left the Communist Party', Forward, 20 May 1932, where he condemned 'the unthinking automatic way in which the party regime operates and churns out its approval of resolutions - a process against which I have constantly fought'. Ironically, it had been Murphy who moved the expulsion of Trotsky from the Comintern five years earlier.

The other leading figure who might have been connected with Balham was Bell, an irregular attender at Group meetings, who had been deposed with the Old Guard in 1929. (R. Groves, op. cit., 52). However Bell made a hostile reference to the emergence of Trotskyism with the Group in The British Communist Party. A Short History, (1937), 150.

- 2 Groves's call for the introduction of new elements into the leadership (Balham Group to Secretariat, 1 April 1932, Warwick M.S.S.) repeated the call he had made on the eve of the eleventh congress in 1929.
- 3 M. Shachtman to Groves, 17 August 1932. Shachtman warned Groves against falling into an 'ultra-leftist pit', arguing that the International Left Opposition's view of trade unions was unchanged from that advanced by the first four congresses of the Comintern.

approved its intention, after the expulsion, to continue to project itself as a communist faction.¹ It was to emerge that the British and Trotsky had a different understanding of what this meant.²

The Communist remained the voice of the party members in exile. It even declared its interest to be confined only to those prepared to join the party.³ Trotsky wanted the British to go as communists into the wider labour movement. The Balham Group sought to restore the Communist Party to health.

This was particularly so up to the time of the Twelfth Congress of the C.P.G.B. in November 1932. Chance convened this gathering in the Battersea Town Hall, heartland of so many of these first Trotskyists. They made a written intervention, but not a verbal one,⁴ and were denounced from the platform by Pollitt.⁵ The absence of a

- 1 L. Trotsky to Groves, 'After the Expulsion', (6 Sept. 1932), Writings : Supplement, (1929-33), 149.
- 2 On 27 May 1932, Trotsky had invited Groves to set down his views on the left of the I.L.P., now about to force disaffiliation from the Labour Party. Now, (6 September, above) he called for the devotion of 'a great and growing part' of Balham's forces to a speedy intervention in the mass organizations.
- 3 The Communist, (Sept. 1932), 1
- 4 Leaflets were distributed from the Left Opposition and from the Balham Group, and slogans painted on nearby walls. The Communist was sold. But it was thought wise for the Opposition delegates in the Hall not to speak. (Groves) to A. Graham (Chicago), 7 Jan. 1933.
- 5 Unlike others Pollitt did not link Murphy and Balham. Their defections were the removal of 'poisonous elements', right and left. The Balhamites had the full Trotskyist line, he stated: socialism could not be built in one country; united fronts should be made with Social Democratic leaders; factory councils and committees should be built and unions ignored; and war could be prevented only in alliance with those helping war preparations. Pollitt made it clear that he knew of Balham's French and American contacts and alleged, 'if they wanted to raise genuine bona fide political questions in the ordinary way of communist discussion on a footing which was up and above board it would have been allowed'.

significant response left little room for illusions about a fight back,¹ although the tone of some distributed literature suggested illusions were still nourished at least in the breast of Groves.² The Communist³ reflected that torpor in the C.P.G.B. was created by the physical absence of opposition, right (defined as Horner and Hannington), and left. It added that sluggishness also arose from the resolving of disagreements by references to decisions of the Comintern as expounded by the Party Central Committee. This was an anticipation, in microcosm, of Trotsky's argument for breaking with the German Communist Party when it did not analyse its own failure to prevent Hitler taking power,⁴ but not of the conclusion he drew.

What impact did the emergence of an open Trotskyist group have? The unavoidable answer is very little. The extent of communist attacks may reflect insecurity of the C.P.G.B. leaders at this time, however small the secession. Factors bearing on the reception the Balham Group received included the timing of the expulsions⁵ and the

1 The Congress was 'the most docile in the history of the party', (Groves) to Graham, 7 Jan 1933.

2 'We were told that we were 'quibbling'. Yet the party discussion has revealed acute differences within the leadership on this question, and has found R.P. Dutt defending a view very similar to ours', An Appeal to Congress Delegates from the Balham Group, reprinted in R. Groves, op. cit., 92.

3 In its issue for January 1933.

4 'Only one valid objection to this writing off the K.P.D.-M.U. could have been raised at the time: perhaps the party will save everything if, under the influence of the terrible defeat, it clearly and sharply changes its policy and regime, beginning with an open and honest admission of its own mistakes..... On the contrary, the last sparks of critical thought has been stifled', ('The Fourth of August', Writings : 1932-33, 260).

5 Groves argues that the party leaders had to clear up Trotskyism before a party congress could be convened, and points out that pre-congress discussions were opened on the Monday following the expulsions, (op. cit., 69). Wicks reverses this order of events, (loc. cit., 29). A more general argument must be the timelag of four years between Britain and the U.S.A., and even longer between Britain and France, bringing a British following for Trotsky at a time when his wider reputation was in decline.

issue over which they took place.¹ This may explain in part the disparity of Trotskyism in Britain and abroad. A consideration that must also be weighed is the phase of its fortunes the C.P.G.B. had sunk to by 1932. The expulsions caused no crisis within it and were barely noticed elsewhere.²

* * * * *

The turn of the year saw the British Section building up its independent activity. Most promising was the South-West London Anti-War Committee, where the Balham Group was represented through trade union and Co-op Party members and had even been unintentionally complimented by Robson, the local C.P.G.B. organiser.³ Even at this point however, a conflict was evident between those who still looked towards actively reforming the C.P.G.B., an approach reflected in Purkis's Open Letter to Harry Pollitt, and those who followed the tactics of the Balham Group in more complete opposition to the party.

1 It has been suggested that the C.P.G.B. was anxious to prevent Trotsky's critique of Germany becoming known (B. Pearce, 'British Communist History', M. Woodhouse and B. Pearce, (eds.) Essays on the History of Communism, 138-9). In 1932 and 1933 criticisms of Trotsky's views were published by the party: A. Thaelmann, 'On our Strategy and Tactics in the Struggle against Fascism', Labour Monthly, (Sept. 1932), 583-90; R.F. Andrews (A. Rothstein), 'The German Situation', Labour Monthly, (April 1933), 252-6.

2 Emrys Hughes, editor of the Glasgow Forward, first acknowledged the existence of organised Trotskyism at the time of the appearance of The Red Flag. He greeted it under the title 'Another Sect', but wrote:

'.... if the Red Flag could eradicate Stalinism from the working-class movement in Britain it would please many more than the adherents of the "International Left Opposition"'.
(Forward, 9 May 1933)

At the time of the expulsions however, Hughes argued that Trotsky had exaggerated Stalin's policy setbacks and regretted that the two had not worked together, (Forward, 16 April, 2 and 9 July 1932).

3 (Groves) to Graham, 7 January 1933. For the anti war campaign of the Balham Group at this time, in conjunction with the I.L.P., see R. Groves, op. cit., 72-6.

At this time the Opposition numbered less than thirty, all of them in London. It had about a dozen contacts. About half the membership of the former Balham Group was within it and this was still the main base of activity. It had established an existence, though a regular press only came with this New Year.¹ Yet it was hampered by a semi-legal existence which created a dispute over future tactics.

Politically, the Opposition had begun the task of making available in Britain Trotsky's own writings, notably on Germany, the issue of the hour. But this did not yet imply the integration of the British within the International Left Opposition. Wicks was present at the informal international gathering convened in Copenhagen during Trotsky's lecture visit to the city in November 1932. Groves attended two days of the international pre-conference held in Paris on 4-8 February 1933. Neither visit led to a satisfactory discussion about the problems the British now faced.²

These problems centred on the intimidating disparity between the agenda set for itself by Trotskyism in Britain, and the forces available to it. This was to cause a severe tactical dispute which would in the end destroy the group. At the beginning of 1933 there were within the British Section not only the former members of the Balham Group and their associates, but also members of the I.L.P. who supported Trotsky's policy.

1 The January 1933 issue of The Communist was only the third to appear in eight months, but it now came out monthly. In May The Red Flag, British Trotskyism's first printed paper was to appear.

2 Purkis criticised Wicks for not presenting accurately differing British views on how to approach the future, (For Discussion, 8, 6 July 1933). For Wicks's involvement at Copenhagen, see Writings: 1932, 405-6n and Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 390, and I. Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast, 181-7. Groves recollection of the pre-conference is to be found in The Balham Group, (1974), 74-5. The pre-conference wished to hold a discussion about Britain but was constrained by the absence of written documents. Despite plans to convene a more representative gathering in July 1933 no conference was held until 1936.

These I.L.P. Trotskyists traced their provenance to the Marxist League and to the formation in 1930 of a faction within the I.L.P. which sought to disaffiliate it from the Labour Party and make it a revolutionary organisation. This faction, the Revolutionary Policy Committee, later became dominated by fellow travellers of the C.P.G.B. At this time however, it was dissatisfied with the communists and open in its views. Its leading members were aware of the ideas of Heinrich Brandler, former general secretary of the K.P.D. deposed after that party's failure to seize power in 1923, and also of the critique developed by Trotsky and the Left Opposition. Early members included Bert and May Matlow, Ernie Patterson and Sid Kemp. Harry Wicks had attended R.P.C. conferences,¹ which of course had only a semi-legal character. In 1931, Patterson and Kemp were, as members of the Clapham I.L.P., working with Reg. Groves and the Balham Group in local campaigns against imperialist war.²

Disaffiliationist pressure actually led to the calling of an I.L.P. conference to discuss the matter in November 1931, but it was cancelled in the belief that the secession of MacDonald, and the holding of the general election, might impel Labour to the left.³ At a meeting of the Party's National Administrative Council that month Feumer Brockway urged careful choice of the time for a split and the issue over which to break.⁴ In the months to come his phrase 'a clean

1 Interview with author, 30 Nov. 1979.

2 R. Groves, op. cit., 60-2.

3 R. Dowse, Left in the Centre, (1966), 178. There were some grounds for this hope. In October Herbert Morrison, recently in the Cabinet, had written 'Labour must move to the Left in the true sense of the term - to the real socialist left. Not the spurious left policy of handing out public money under the impression that we are achieving a redistribution of wealth under the capitalist system. That is one of the illusions of reformism', quoted in B. Donaghue and T. Jones, Herbert Morrison, Portrait of a Politician, (1973), 183.

4 R. Dowse, op. cit., 179.

'break' was to dramatize a widespread feeling in the party that it must cut itself completely free of Labour if it was ever to make progress.¹ The April 1932 Conference of the Party did not pull out but brought to the fore the essentially secondary issue of Labour Party Standing Orders which were inhibiting I.L.P. M.P.s from pursuing I.L.P. - as distinct from Labour Party - policy. A special conference of July 1932 resolved to come out,² and the I.L.P. set about cutting itself off not only from the Labour Party but from the labour movement in suicidally sectarian fashion.

Disaffiliation occurred over the relatively unimportant issue of the obligation of I.L.P. M.P.s to observe Labour Party Standing Orders. It was also exceedingly ill-timed, since it occurred when the Labour Party was surrendering itself to just the kind of maximalist programme so many I.L.P. members favoured. Instead of leading to the erection of a mass socialist base, the 'clean break' was an almost total disaster.³ Those R.P.C. members who looked kindly upon Trotsky's

- 1 Later Brockway wrote that he was 'not greatly excited over the disaffiliation issue' and placed first emphasis on the development of revolutionary policy, (Inside the Left, (1942), 239-40).
- 2 The hand of the R.P.C. can be discerned continuously in the events leading to disaffiliation, and much care should be taken over the suggestion that the loss of Clydeside I.L.P. votes to the C.P.G.B. in the November municipal elections was an influential factor. (See J. Foster, 'The Industrial Politics of the Communist Party', B.S.S.L.H., (Spring 1979), 57).
- 3 653 branches at the July conference were reduced to 450 by November. One third of the Yorkshire branches and 128 of those in Scotland were lost. London however lost only one of its 89 branches and formed most of the new ones. (R. Dowse, op. cit., 185). London was the centre of the R.P.C.

programme favoured it however as did the Opposition leader himself.¹ It was felt that the I.L.P. might be won for revolution, but only if it freed himself from the reformist embrace. This belief on the part of Trotsky and some of the Opposition was to become increasingly important in 1933.

Complex differences developed within the British Opposition during this year. Although there were now I.L.P. members within its ranks, these debates were conducted largely by the ex-communist cadre. Were the members of the Opposition to content themselves with publishing the views of Trotsky or were they aiming more ambitiously to build up a new organisation? If the second, what were the tactical means to this end? Wicks and Weston (Morris)² seem to have favoured the view that the aim was to build up an Opposition group, perhaps through work in the C.P.G.B. Purkis favoured advocating a critical but positive platform in communist circles. Critics of this second view saw it as merely a propaganda exercise.³

1 The following year Trotsky wrote,

'True, one can object that the I.L.P. just recently broke away from the Labour Party, and that we evaluated this as a step forward. That is absolutely correct! And of course we are by no means suggesting now that the I.L.P. go back into the Labour Party and submit to its discipline. Such a policy would be a complete betrayal of the revolutionary tasks facing the British proletariat.'

'After the British Municipal Elections', 14 Nov. 1933, Writings: Supplement (1929-33), 323-4.

Trotsky did add however that the I.L.P. having established a separate identity, must turn towards the Labour Party and trade unions or disappear.

2 Weston had not been a founder member of the British Section but had joined by the summer of 1933.

3 For Discussion, 6, 20 July 1933. Purkis believed Wicks to have presented the differences this way at the Copenhagen gathering of November 1932. He believed that there were three positions within the League: that work should be confined to the C.P.G.B. (this he thought was held only tentatively); that work should centre on aggressive presentation of Opposition material, and the recruitment of Oppositionists to the C.P.G.B.; that the main task was to build a new organization which involved work within the C.P.G.B. (For Discussion, 6 July 1933).

Should the British Section try and rival the C.P.G.B. in all spheres of activity?¹ This was a utopian aim for such a tiny group, even faced by a weakened Communist Party. Less ambitiously it could use its press to expound a revolutionary alternative to C.P.G.B. policy which might guide communists. Would that mean ceasing to publish Trotsky's articles plus material on Germany and historical issues?² Davis, Purkis, Wicks and Williams came together to propose that the Opposition's main tasks were to publish essential I.L.O., documents, train cadres in Opposition theory, organize Opposition work in the C.P.G.B. and project general 'Bolshevik-Leninist' propaganda at the mass organizations.³ Typically of the discussions of this time, the authors blurred their priorities.⁴

Mixed in with this confusion was unease at the slant Groves, effectively the leader of the Opposition, gave to its work. His critics thought he made the wrong criticisms of communist policy and attacked its leaders too strongly.⁵ The composition of the executive changed

- 1 An anonymous document, Mass Work, (3 Feb. 1933) suggested such a course.
- 2 An anonymous resolution of the time suggests devoting The Communist regularly to England and agitational articles, establishing the nuclei of firm Opposition groups, contacting the 'Left Wing Youth', and preparing a pamphlet setting down the views of the Left Opposition. It proposed deadlines for the appearance of The Red Flag, The Communist and bulletins.
- 3 Statement From Members of the 1931-33 Committee of the British Group of the Left Opposition, 18 April 1933, 1. No evidence as to the identity of H. Davis has been located.
- 4 An example of this is that an experiment issue of The Red Flag was produced probably in October or November 1932. Swabeck, when he saw it expressed disquiet that publication of this together with The Communist might tend to 'diffuse the energies of a small group'. (A. Swabeck to Groves and Sara, 29 Nov. 1932, Warwick M.S.S.)
- 5 The manifesto Even now they blunder, (Spring 1933), a collection of compromising quotations from C.P.G.B. leaders, was thought to have neglected to provide an explanation of the united front and therefore to be anti-party in content.

twice in the early months of 1933, first to increase Groves's influence and then to reduce it.¹ Part of the problem was that the group had continued to function informally since its establishment and proper conferences had not been convened. On 18 June a gathering was held, (called variously a members' meeting and a conference), which had before it an ambitiously detailed constitution² and a national committee resolution specifying the group's main tasks as: clarifying ideas and holding regular conferences; a continuous intensive campaign on the C.P.G.B.; paying attention to the left wing youth and especially the Y.C.L.; selling a minimum 1000 Red Flags; publishing The Communist when necessary; participating more fully in the I.L.O.

The National Committee had followed Trotsky when the Opposition leader called for a radical reappraisal following Hitler's seizure of power.³ Trotsky advised that summer that if the Comintern failed to conduct an honest inquest on such a serious defeat it was moribund. He concluded that it was time to prepare a new international. The N.C. presented this view to the League with an individual gloss. It suggested that a discredited K.P.D. leadership could not be entrusted with organizing illegal work under Nazism, that ruin of the U.S.S.R. or Comintern collapse would signify the need for a new international. Trotsky had gone further by arguing that the time to

1 Davis et. al., loc. cit.

2 This constitution, several pages long, put a ceiling of 20 on local membership, though this would have represented half the national figure; it proposed a developed distinct structure, though there were no members outside London; and it recalled recent experience in the C.P.G.B. with its devotion of a whole article, (Article VII) to 'Organisational Democracy Safeguards', (For Discussion, 6 June 1933).

3 Trotsky's thinking can be followed in the articles 'K.P.D. or New Party?', I and II, (March 1933), Writings (1932-33), 137-40 and 'The Collapse of the K.P.D. and the Tasks of the Opposition', (9 April 1933), Writings (1932-33), 189-97. He returned to the subject of a complete break with the Comintern and its sections several times that year.

rebuild had arrived already. With few exceptions however, the British Section seems to have accepted this turn,¹ recognising explicitly that a new party was needed in Britain.

The British Section celebrated May Day 1933 with the first printed Trotskyist newspaper the country had produced, The Red Flag.² It did not normally report the work of the British Section. It was a propaganda vehicle, aimed at a revolutionary audience. The stress on Trotsky's articles on Germany and (later) Austria reflected the interests of the International Left Opposition, though from July unsigned British articles begin to appear.³ In the first three months of publication sales of The Red Flag advanced from more than 900 to nearly 1250. Sales, which had been divided 3:1 in London's favour were now more healthily distributed in the ratio of 7:5.⁴ In the autumn however, The Red Flag entered a decline,⁵ perhaps as a casualty of the factional struggle.

- 1 The members were invited to submit statements on the proposition that a new party was necessary in Germany. Only the Battersea group and Purkis demurred. For the statements of the National Committee and Purkis see For Discussion, 24 May 1933, n.p.
- 2 Number One, Vol I, Sub-titled, 'Monthly Organ of the British Section, International Left Opposition'. In June '(Bolshevik-Leninists)' was added to the sub-title.
- 3 In May The Red Flag carried Trotsky's 'The German Workers Will Rise Again - Stalinism Never!' on its centre pages, and in the June issue 'It is now the turn of Austria!'. July brought a domestic contribution on the differences of Brockway and Pollitt over foreign policy, but also carried Trotsky's 'A Letter on the Work of the British Section' and 'The Problems of the Soviet Regime'. One minor coup was the eliciting of a reply from Tom Mann to an open letter in The Red Flag for September 1933 calling on him to speak out for Chen Du Siu, a C.C.C.P. leader who backed Trotsky and was now in a Nationalist jail (The Red Flag, (Oct.-Nov. 1933)).
- 4 For Discussion, 28 Aug. 1933, n.p. The July Red Flag carried an impressive list of nine bookshops where it was on sale.
- 5 October's issue appeared, late, as a joint issue with November. December's issue did not appear at all.

In its short life the British Section of the Left Opposition achieved four publications which aspired to regularity. The Communist continued despite the appearance of The Red Flag, though there was discussion about retaining it for occasional needs.¹ For Discussion, the internal bulletin, appeared in sixteen issues up to 24 October 1933.² The League had also undertaken in August 1932, to supply Trotsky with clippings from the British press and in the autumn of 1933, it offered these to members as an information service under the title Excerpts and Summaries.³ While a successful press was clearly essential, there was a tendency that such a small group might overreach itself.⁴

* * * * *

The life of the British Section of the Left Opposition was dominated, during the six months following the June members' meeting, by a radical shift in international policy and the implications of this for its tactics in Britain. From July 1933 Trotsky was urging the sections of the I.L.O. to follow closely the evolution of new parties, which had in Western Europe split from social-democracy to the left.⁵

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- 1 The ninth issue of The Communist appeared on 6 January 1934, after the split in the Communist League, leading with Trotsky's article 'A Letter to an I.L.P. member'. It is thought that circulation of The Communist reached 4-500, (A. Penn, op. cit., 86).
 - 2 Sub-titled 'Internal Bulletin - British Section - International Left Opposition (Bolshevik-Leninists)'. Some of these were double issues.
 - 3 For Discussion, 28 Aug. 1933. After numbers 1 and 2, (September and October 1933) no more seem to have appeared despite the promise of No. 3 'early in November'.
 - 4 An August statement of the N.C. called for the raising of a £50 press fund. Late that month the League was considering further expenditure to produce The Communist. It also planned to publish a translation from the German by D.D. Harber of Oskar Fischer's Leninism Versus Stalinism, a compilation of quotations.
 - 5 In 'The Left Socialist Organizations and Our Tasks', (15 June 1933), Writings : 1932-33, 274-8, Trotsky analysed such parties as the German S.A.P. and the British I.L.P. as centrists moving to the left and predicted that some Oppositionists would refuse to take them seriously.

He next argued that the Comintern, generally, was beyond revival and that the orientation towards reforming it must be abandoned.¹ The National Committee of the British Section supported Trotsky's views but interpreted them to prescribe independence without foreseeing the full tactical implications they carried.² The late development of Trotskyism in Britain scarcely left it time to learn the old perspective before it adjusted to the new.

The British example of a 'Left Socialist Organisation' was the I.L.P. Groves was alive to developments within it but when called on to produce a guiding document proposed no special emphasis.³ Calls for greater emphasis on the I.L.P. came from Graham⁴ and the Translators' Group of the British Section.⁵ From abroad Trotsky and

- 1 See 'It is Necessary to Build Communist Parties and an International Anew', (15 July 1933), Writings : 1932-33, 304-11. The article was published in For Discussion (12 Aug. 1933).
- 2 In a statement dated 9 September 1933 the National Committee declared its intention to go further along the path of 'independent action', with the perspective of a new party. The Section now styled itself Communist League, a terminological change made also by the International Left Opposition, (see For Discussion, 27 Sept. 1933). First public evidence of this was The Red Flag for Oct. - Nov. 1933.
- 3 The national committee of 20 June 1933 instructed Groves to draw up a document on the I.L.P. His response noted that revulsion from the C.P.G.B. had led some I.L.P.ers to make a doomed attempt to turn their party a revolutionary one. He proposed special Opposition material dealing with both parties, the formation of fractions within the R.P.C. and 'other I.L.P. units' and joint activities with the I.L.P. where possible. ('Our Attitude Towards the I.L.P.', (6 July 1933), For Discussion, 20 July 1933). A special committee of the British Section was established to watch the I.L.P.
- 4 W. Graham, 'Statement to the N.C. re the Resolution of 23 June on the I.L.P.', (11 July 1933), For Discussion, 20 July 1933. Graham had been a member of the Hackney local of the C.P.G.B. for fourteen months to June 1933 when he was expelled for anti-party work and association with the Balham Group, (Red Flag, July 1933). Graham singled out the R.P.C. as that part of the I.L.P. deserving of special attention.
- 5 'The New Content of the Slogan "Reform of the C.P.G.B."', 3 July 1933, For Discussion, (3 Aug. 1933). It seems likely that D.D. Harber (q.v.) was a member of this group.

the I.L.O. began to exert pressure on the British to take up urgently work within the I.L.P. They were in closer and closer contact with it on the international plane and sought to group it with those other Left Socialist parties who were prepared to work for a Fourth International. The Declaration of Four was to be the link between the open work of the I.L.O. and the more covert activities of its British members.¹

On 19 August 1933 a plenum of the I.L.O. unanimously resolved that its British Section should enter the I.L.P. Trotsky began at once to press the point in private correspondence² and devoted public space to discussing the fate of the party.³ The I.L.P. sent delegates to the conference of Left Socialist Organisations held in Paris on 28 August, but did not adhere to the Declaration of Four.⁴

- 1 Trotsky noted in August that Inprecorr was already attacking the I.L.P. for its association with expelled Trotskyists.
- 2 He told J.P. Cannon (and also Shachtman) the I.L.P. was a young party led by 'a few old men' which had executed 'an enormous shift towards a revolutionary position'. The more established Americans had to help the British concretize their already good connections with the party. ('The I.L.P. and the British Section', 22 Aug. 1933, Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 276-7) To Jacob Walcher of the S.A.P. he wrote linking I.L.P. hesitation over aligning itself with the Fourth International to its domestic fate. Entry of the British Section would create urgently needed pressure, he argued. 'A few more months of vacillation and there will be nothing left of the I.L.P. but a memory'. ('As It Is' and 'As It Should Be', 26 Aug. 1933, Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 283.)
- 3 His thrust was at the I.L.P. conception of the united front (with the C.P.G.B.) and what he considered its vagueness on international issues. ('Whither the Independent Labour Party?', 28 Aug. 1933, published in The Red Flag for Oct. - Nov. 1933.)
- 4 The Declaration of Four, signed by the Independent Socialist Party (O.S.P.) and the Revolutionary Socialist Party, (both of Holland), the Socialist Workers Party (S.A.P.) of Germany, and the International Left Opposition called for revolutionary forces to build a new international. The I.L.P. never signed it, but the British Section published it as The New International : a document of the Paris Conference, (Warwick M.S.S./15/3/1/15). For Trotsky's high expectations of the Declaration of Four, see 'A Discussion with Pierre Rambert', Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 287-8.

Yet Trotsky met John Paton and C.A. Smith the next day and gained a favourable impression of Smith.¹ Time was to show that the I.L.O. was not in fact homogeneous in regarding an I.L.P. turn for the British Section, and the Declaration of Four as auspicious tactics.² This had implications for the development of debate within the British Section, but the I.S. pressure was unrelenting. Its case was that the Section must face not a declining C.P.G.B. but the I.L.P., that it must help the I.L.P. to become 'the revolutionary lever influencing the masses of the Labour Party and of the trade unions'. There was a detailed difference between Trotsky's view and that of the I.S., which had formulated its own by amending an original proposal from Trotsky

- 1 They travelled to meet Trotsky at Royan after the conclusion of the Left Socialist conference. Maxton, another I.L.P. delegate, had originally intended to make the trip but had to return home. Smith's account of the interview was published in The New Leader, 13 Oct. 1933. The circumstances of the meeting between Trotsky and the I.L.P. leaders were to be recalled for forensic purposes by the Trotsky Defence Committee at the time of the Moscow Trials, (The New Leader, 9 April 1937). It has been suggested that Jennie Lee was also of the party, (I. Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast, 263). Smith was the I.L.P. leader who most impressed Trotsky, ('From A Letter of L.D.', 3 Sept. 1933, For Discussion, 24 Oct. 1933).
- 2 Witte, leader of the Archio-Marxists of Greece and secretary of the I.L.O. was despatched to inform the British of the I.S. proposal but appears to have communicated instead his own misgivings. ('Comrade Witte's Violations of Bolshevik Organizational Principles', 28 Sept. 1933, Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 308-11.)

himself, but the general argument was the same.¹ On 5 September the I.S. repeated its plea, arguing that the race with the communists would fall to the swiftest and that a prolonged dispute would be a luxury.

The injunction 'our comrades must actually enter the I.L.P. and give full effort to building up the revolutionary element in this party'² did not meet with clear assent in Britain. Initially there was a failure to communicate clearly, due to a lack of direct contact.³ As it became clear that the Communist League - as the British Section was known from late August 1933 - was faced with a firm proposal, it began to define its own tactical position in response. Publicly it recorded its interest in the I.L.P. but did not elaborate a detailed programme for transforming it into a revolutionary party.⁴ Privately

- 1 The distinction was that the I.S., lead by Bauer its other secretary, believed two members should stay outside the I.L.P. and publicly maintain an independent press. Trotsky thought an external presence would lead to charges of factionalism being levelled by the I.L.P. Suspending publication would avoid an occasion for expulsion. ('From a letter of L.D.', 3 Sept. 1933, For Discussion, 27 Sept. 1933. In Writings : 1933-1934, 71, this appears as 'How to Influence the I.L.P.'). Trotsky seems to have weighed the consideration that the articles published by the British would still be available in the American Militant.
- 2 L. Trotsky, 'To Jacob Walcher On the Declaration of Four', 21 Aug. 1933, Writings : Supplement (1929-33), 275.
- 3 In Trotsky's correspondence there is mention of proposed discussion on the I.L.P. with a delegate from 'the English Section' (ibid., 275). But the I.L.O. plenum had already been held and this may be a careless reference to the impending visit of Smith and Paton. If so, then Trotsky had met no C.L. members since Wicks attended the Copenhagen gathering of late 1932. This may have made it easier for Witte to give the impression that joining the I.L.P. was a proposal of individuals not a firm directive and even, as Trotsky believed, to put the British into opposition, ('Comrade Witte's Violations of Bolshevik Organizational Principles', 28 Sept. 1933).
- 4 It was argued that the I.L.P. could staunch losses of membership on its right and its left, but only by standing for a Marxist policy. Abstract proclamations would prove no more efficacious for it then they had for the C.P.G.B., (The Red Flag, Sept. 1933).

it interpreted the I.S. proposal as further support for a perspective of achieving independence.¹ In its reply the National Committee of the Communist League challenged the impression the I.L.P. had created abroad, dismissed the specific I.S. proposal for an outside presence, and suggested that apparent surrender of Bolshevik-Leninist principles to the I.L.P. 'would deal a serious blow at the prestige of the Opposition'.²

I.L.P. entry was a major preoccupation of Trotsky's during September 1933 when he made four separate contributions to the discussion,³ combining public argument with private cajolery. His case to the I.L.P. was that it must now break with Stalinism just as the Opposition had, but after a decade of struggle.⁴ He first

1 The arguments of Trotsky and those of the I.S. were held to be 'irrefutable' by the C.L. National Committee on 12 September ('Statement of the National Committee upon the Question of New Parties and a New International', For Discussion, (27 Sept. 1933)).

2 'Our Relations With The I.L.P.', 5 Sept. 1933, For Discussion, 27 Oct. 1933.

3 'How to Influence the I.L.P.', (3 Sept.); 'The I.L.P. and the New International', (4 Sept.); 'Principled Considerations on Entry', (16 Sept.); 'The Fate of the British Section', (25 Sept.). See Writings : (1933-34), 71-8, 84-7, 100. A further minor confusion was introduced into the debate when Trotsky wrote 'Principled Considerations on Entry' over the pseudonym G. Gourov. It seems clear from For Discussion that the C.L. was unaware that Gourov and Trotsky were one.

4 C.A. Smith's account of his interview with Trotsky appeared, late, in The New Leader for 13 October 1933. Trotsky advised Smith that the I.L.P. must retain its independence at all costs until it had become revolutionary which meant a transition 'from an empirical to a theoretical basis' and, concretely, recognition that formation of the Fourth International was the task of the hour. In December Sara and other C.L. leaders were to allege that Trotsky, following his meeting with Smith, looked to the I.L.P. rather than the C.L. Though he later disclaimed it, he seems to have entertained some hopes of at least a section of the I.L.P. leadership.

anticipated the objections of the C.L. Independence, he suggested, must be striven towards but could not always be immediately achieved and there was, moreover, a desperate need to act swiftly to forestall Stalinist penetration of the I.L.P.¹ The Bolshevik-Leninists, he later urged, would be the conduit for Marxism into the I.L.P., the only means whereby that party's further disintegration might be prevented. On 2 October 1933 he applied further public² and private³ pressure. He analysed the position in the British labour movement as a series of potential levers. The tiny C.L. might shift the larger I.L.P. The I.L.P. in turn might move the Labour Party. I.L.P.ers would not abandon their party for an organisation forty strong but within its heterogeneous environment the C.L. might have great effect. He handled the practical arguments of the National Committee with only limited patience and clearly regarded the actual mode of entry into the I.L.P. as a secondary question.⁴ Salient points in his case were that penetration of the I.L.P. should be for a brief period, aimed at recruiting the 'revolutionary kernel' (sometimes called the revolutionary majority) of the party, and that it was a viable proposition because the party was factionalised.

- 1 'Another couple of months and the I.L.P. will have completely fallen between the gear-wheels of the Stalinist bureaucracy and will be lost leaving thousands of disappointed workers'. ('Principled Considerations on Entry', Writings : 1933-34, 86.)
- 2 In a letter to The New Leader Trotsky corrected what he considered was a fallacious impression of the Paris Conference of Left Socialist Organizations given by C.A. Smith to The Daily Worker, ('To Dispel Misunderstandings', 2 Oct. 1933, Writings : 1933-34, 123-4.)
- 3 When he had received the C.L. letter of 5 September Trotsky replied under the title of 'The Lever of a Small Group' (Writings : 1933-34, 125-6.)
- 4 Trotsky favoured a public approach but considered that however it was achieved the C.L., once in the I.L.P., would in practice be a faction with common discipline. In practice this was to take some time to achieve.

The October-November 1933 issue of The Red Flag led with the Declaration of Four.

October also saw factionalism develop within the Communist League. It emerged that there was a minority on the national committee, which supported Trotsky's view while initially having little of its own to add.¹ At a second attempt this minority tried to develop a case which centred on the responsibility of the C.L. to ensure that the I.L.P. retained its independence (from Stalinism).² The earlier the disintegration of the I.L.P. the greater the benefit to the C.P.G.B.³ A battle must therefore be fought, it reasoned, on the ground where Trotskyism was strongest - that of principle. Its most powerful argument however was a negative one: a challenge to the majority to demonstrate where prospects were brighter than in the I.L.P.- and the best chance of winning the party lay on the inside.⁴ When the National Committee replied, it was clear that they were on the defensive. The attempt to marshal concrete alternatives to I.L.P. entry served only to reveal how threadbare the case for independence

- 1 'H. Allen', possibly a pseudonym for an American Trotskyist resident in Britain, advanced an argument leaning on the threat from the C.P.G.B. and was much impressed that the I.L.P. had broken with social democracy before Hitler came to power. ('The Struggle to Win the I.L.P. from the control of the centrists', (hand-dated 5 Oct. 1933), Warwick M.S.S. 15/3/1/50 (1). This document is incomplete).
- 2 H. Allen, F. Chalcroft, W. Graham, 'Statement On The I.L.P.', 12 Oct. 1933, For Discussion, 24 Oct. 1933.
- 3 'The basic strategy of the Stalinists is to rob the I.L.P. of its independence as a party in one way or another and to accomplish this task at the earliest possible moment, before these 'Trotskyist objections' have time to become more deeply rooted in the rank and file.' (ibid., Mi. 3)
- 4 Chalcroft, one of the authors, recorded his scepticism that the whole I.L.P. could be convinced.

was.¹ The I.L.P., it was claimed, was best influenced from the outside, nor would its fate be settled in the short term.² The Communist League ought to continue with its fingers in several pies and not confine itself to the I.L.P.³ Finally, either mode of entering the I.L.P. would discredit the Communist League. Definite positions on the National Committee were established at its meeting of 5 October 1933;⁴ after that it was essentially a question of the membership delivering its verdict.

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- 1 'All the many phases of work which have been possible through our independent organisation would also cease (in addition to losing the Red Flag and withdrawing fraction members from the C.P.G.B. - M.U.) and we should become a fraction, a very crippled fraction, in the I.L.P.' (H. Sara, R. Groves, H. Dewar and S. Dowdall, 'The Work In, And Relation To, The Independent Labour Party', (n.d.), For Discussion, 24 Oct. 1933.)
 - 2 The majority believed that the decisive moment was far more likely to strike at the 1934 annual conference of the I.L.P. at which time the Party's National Administrative Council would have to explain the deterioration of relations with the C.P.G.B.
 - 3 It was claimed by the majority that a quarter of the C.L. was still working in the C.P.G.B., and that a Scottish contact, not an I.L.P. member, was selling the remarkable number of 300 Red Flags. It seems possible that this was Frank Maitland (q.v.), then running an Edinburgh socialist bookshop.
 - 4 Jottings of one majority member for the meeting have survived: Notes for Discussion of I.L.P. questions at National Committee meeting, 5 Oct. 1933, Warwick M.S.S., 15/3/1/49.

The decisive members' meeting was convened in London under the chairmanship of Groves on 17 December, with at least three quarters of the British Section in attendance.¹ On the proposal of Max Nicholls, the meeting endorsed the Declaration of the Four Parties (for the Fourth International) and called on the National Committee to detail how this might be implemented in Britain.² This decision put the Communist League within the movement of the Opposition towards the Fourth International; it now had to face the tactical recommendation of most of its international comrades.

The debate opened with speeches by Sara and Graham.³ Sara moved the rejection of Trotsky's proposal to enter the I.L.P., arguing that the Opposition leader valued it more highly than the League⁴ and did not appreciate the technical difficulties of working within it. Allen, who formulated the Minority view was only repeating Trotsky's

- 1 Near the end of the year there were 40-50 members of the Communist League (anon., On The I.L.P., n.d., Warwick M.S.S. 15/3/1/18). 37 members participated in the final vote on 17 December. The meeting supported a proposal from Kaye that the majority and minority should both keep minutes.
- 2 The way had been prepared for this step by the National Committee which had asked each member for his or her views. No reply had been received from Williams, in whose residence the League duplicator was situated, and he now disappeared from the scene. There was controversy at the meeting over the views of Wicks, who had also failed to indicate clear support for steering towards the Fourth. The meeting know of a report by Witte, joint secretary of the I.C.L., that Wicks and Purkis had both retained contacts with the Third International. But Witte was becoming discredited at this time, and while Purkis was to withdraw from the League the following year, Wicks continued to be a member. For Trotsky's estimate of Witte, see 'A False Understanding of the New Orientation', 8 Oct. 1933, Writings : 1933-34, 127-8
- 3 W. Graham had been expelled from the Hackney local of the C.P.G.B. in June for criticising the party's line on Germany.
- 4 (Majority) Minutes of Members Meeting, 3

opinions. Graham's speech was a frank reply to Sara.¹ I.L.P. members would be far more likely to join a Communist League which fought with it side by side. He developed the 'split perspective' of working within the I.L.P. in anticipation of a break and rejected in advance the compromise proposal of the International Secretariat. Matlow it was who advanced the I.S. view that those who agreed on entering the I.L.P. should do so and formally repudiate the Communist League. Once within the I.L.P. they could make themselves an organised fraction: Wicks, less realistically, urged the transformation of the C.L. into an open organised fraction² which would then join the I.L.P. If the I.L.P. refused, he added, present policy should be continued.

There was thus four proposals before the membership. Sara had backing from Barrett, Hanton, 'Oscar',³ for insisting on independence from the I.L.P. The C.L., they argued, and not this muddled party, would be the future new revolutionary organization. Minority spokesmen included Kirby,⁴ Worrall, Kaye, Nicholls and Harber.⁵

1 (Majority) Minutes, 4-5.

2 (Minority) Minutes of the Members Meeting, 1.

3 A member of the Translators' group, possibly a foreign Trotskyist.

4 There is a conflict in the minutes as to whether or not he accepted the Minority concept of fractional work.

5 Dr. Worrall and Max Nicholls were former members of the Marxist League. Max Nicholls was a garment worker, then a member of the Hackney local of the C.L. Denzil Dean Harber (1909-1966) went to the L.S.E. in the late 1920s and took a degree in Russian Commerce. As a boy he taught himself Russian and he joined th C.P.G.B., perhaps while at the L.S.E. In 1931 he travelled as interpreter with a Canadian journalist on a trip to Russia. He stayed there for three months and contemporaries recall his disillusionment on his return. He discovered the Russian Bulletin of the Opposition in bookshops however, and made contact with the Balham Group. (Information kindly supplied by Mr. Julien Harber; 'Obituary', British Birds, 60, (1967), 84-6; interview with Mr. John Archer, (Nov. 1973).

who felt that the importance of a continued existence for the Communist League was not great. Wicks's proposal, advanced on behalf of the Battersea and Chelsea groups of the League, received support from Dibden, Temple, Lee Bradley¹ and Rowlands.² They insisted that work in the I.L.P. could not be efficacious without an organized fraction and differed also from the Minority in disbelieving that the party as a whole could be won.

Sara replied to the debate, restating his view that Trotsky undervalued the Communist League³ and that the ex-communist members had taken a far larger step than had the I.L.P. members because they had split with their party. His speech expressed the disquiet felt from the start by the leading cadre about aligning themselves with Trotsky.⁴

Only two votes were cast for Matlow's compromise amendment, all the other 35 delegates voting against. The Battersea-Chelsea amendment was also lost, but more narrowly, with 10 in support and 14 against. The Battersea-Chelsea votes then moved almost entirely behind the Majority whose resolution was passed 26:11.⁵

Harber, for the Minority members now declared they were going to join the I.L.P., guided by a letter from the International Secretariat,

1 Lee Bradley, who like her husband Gerry had been a member of the Marxist League, was a member of the Chelsea local of the C.P.G.B. expelled earlier in the year.

2 A member of the Hackney group.

3 Sara alleged that Trotsky thought The Red Flag a mere reprint of the American Militant, (Minority) Minutes, (8). There is no definite evidence for this, but see above.

4 'Problems of international organisation have never been L.T.'s strong point', (Majority) Minutes, 10.

5 Three absentee votes included in the Majority total, and two among the Minority, (Majority) Minutes, 11.

to Groves which had not been published.¹ Groves countered that the letter had been read at the N.C.² but Harber then proceeded to read its text to the effect that the Minority must be allowed to follow its own star.

By withdrawing from the meeting the Minority made its feelings clear. Then with only the Majority voting, Wicks and Lee Bradley were put on the National Committee in place of its Minority members. This separation in the voting procedure was the parting of the ways and the meeting closed.

There was a brief time for obituaries. The Majority referred to the weighty and decisive³ vote of 17 December. In its view the Minority argument that organisational unity could not exist without policy agreement, could not be sustained for a tactical quarrel. As a general rule majority decisions had to be respected. If they did not prevail in the I.L.P. fraction, there would be a split at the first disagreement. Prophetically the Majority warned:

We are aware of the difficulties that many of the sections have experienced from weakness on matters of this kind. The history of many opposition sections has been and still is one of continual factional struggles and breakways. One of the reasons for this is undoubtedly, (Sic) an absence, both internationally and nationally, of a leadership which has earned the respect of the members.⁴

1 This letter has not been located.

2 The Minority had, seemingly, withdrawn from the National Committee, (Majority) Minutes, 11.

3 Draft Statement of the present Position of the Majority and Minority, 19 Dec. 1933, Warwick M.S.S., 15/3/1/52i, 1.

4 *ibid.*, 1. This view was to be echoed from abroad.

The Majority made a final offer: let the Minority enter the I.L.P. and make a formal repudiation of the Communist League. It could still work under the direction of the National Committee. Refusal must mean exclusion from membership. There is no record of any attempt to take the offer up.

* * * * *

So ended the first phase of British Trotskyism. It had been a brief marriage of very different experiences. In the end most of those who had not been in the C.P.G.B. remained in, or returned to, the I.L.P. The ex-communists opted for an open organisation.

There was also a differential willingness to follow Trotsky's advice and that of the International Secretariat. By the end of the discussion the Majority were speaking of both in very critical terms. They had not participated in the long struggle of the Left Opposition against Stalin, and they did not feel under compulsion of loyalty. Did Trotsky himself see more future for the I.L.P. than for the Communist League as a revolutionary alternative? His writings underpin this accusation to a certain extent. Ironically, none other than Trotsky himself had criticised Stalin for expecting in 1926 a mass revolutionary current from left wing members of the General Council of the T.U.C. rather than from the C.P.G.B. and Minority Movement. The first split had come ominously soon. It occurred over an issue which history failed to resolve and was to bedevil Trotskyist politics for many years. The Majority's darker predictions were borne out. This phase of Trotskyism in Britain has not been well treated.

'This initial split took place without any thorough discussion or preparation, the factional lines running parallel to the personal alliances of the various individuals.'¹

¹ WIL, Internal Bulletin, [Sept.? 1943], H.P., D.J.H., 14 A/8, [History of British Trotskyism].

But the Communist League spent quite a long time debating whether or not to enter the I.L.P.: indeed Trotsky's complaint was that they spent so long that crucial months were allowed to pass while the C.P.G.B. built up its influence. As for the second charge, which smacks of the folk-lore of the movement, it does seem to be true that no one changed sides during the debate, but this seems attributable to political alliances. Almost all those who were still or formerly in the Communist Party opted for an independent League,¹ while those who had been won from nowhere or from the I.L.P. set up the Marxist Group. The Communist League was an unconsummated marriage but it was politically and not personally dissolved.

W.I.L. was also to charge that it was the transition from critical circle to real organizing which ruptured the Communist League. Without doubt there was an element of posturing in the 'independence' of Groves et. al., who seem to have hoped for an extended period in which they might develop a leisurely critique of the C.P.G.B., but such opportunity was unlikely to arise. And it was in any case unlikely that they could make an original contribution to Opposition thought ten years after Trotsky had written the Platform of the Left Opposition.

Trotsky rebuked Ridley and Ram in 1930 for making a separate experiment from the Communist Opposition. Yet the Opposition made no headway in the C.P.G.B. and was forced out where it surfaced. Progress became possible only because the I.L.P. existed, a confused ocean in which many exotic revolutionary specie could flourish. Was an error committed by discouraging Ridley and Ram? Surely not. The I.L.P. of

¹ Allen was the exception. Dewar hardly counts in view of the brevity of his sojourn in the Party.

1930 was not that of 1933. It was two years from its split with the Labour Party and did not then see itself as a revolutionary organisation. By 1933 the I.L.P. was in transition: to what destination turned on the strongest political influence. Trotsky foresaw working within it only until its fate was resolved. The intervention of Trotsky and the I.L.O. had been decisive. Otherwise a minority with support short of a third of the Communist League could hardly have expected to survive. They had forced the issue at the time of the break with the C.P.G.B. and now did so again, though it seems implausible to suggest that international influence turned Trotskyism onto an unnatural path.¹ The work of building a viable British Section had scarcely begun when the split took place, reflecting the absence of a tradition of joint work among these dissident C.P.G.B. and I.L.P. members and of a shared experience with international Trotskyism.

1 This is, of course, the thesis of W. Kendall in The Revolutionary Movement in Britain, 1917-21, (1969), an account of the early years of the C.P.G.B.

IV THE MARXIST GROUP IN THE I.L.P. (1933-1936)

Trotskyists were present in the I.L.P. in significant numbers for three years. Those who followed Trotsky's advice to join the party were the least experienced of his followers in revolutionary activity. There was little prospect of converting the whole party into a following of the International Left Opposition and the Trotskyists were always weaker than the various advocates of joining the C.P.G.B. After two years of working within the I.L.P. the Trotskyists ceased to advocate critical support for the Labour Party in the belief that the I.L.P. was the only truly anti-war party. This hope was falsified and they left the I.L.P. as individuals and small groups throughout 1936.

* * * * *

Ten branches supported the Trotskyist line at the January 1934 conference of the London I.L.P. This represented the influence of thirty members of the secret Bolshevik-Leninist fraction which had been established,¹ but not of those C.L. Minority members who were to join the I.L.P.² A handful of the fraction had some training in the Communist Party behind them, but many had known only the I.L.P.³

- 1 A.B. Doncaster et. al. to the International Secretariat, I.C.L. [April ? 1935], HP, DJH 5/2.
- 2 See below. H.N. Brailsford thought a hundred Trotskyists had joined the party (A. Weisbord to Sara, 22 Oct. 1934, Warwick M.S.S. 15/3/1/60). This is a not uncommon overestimate of the membership of a revolutionary group and may also reflect the extent to which I.L.P.ers and Trotskyists shared ideas.
- 3 This seems to be true of Max Nicholls (who later moved to Glasgow), Bert Matlow, Arthur Cooper, Tony Doncaster, John Archer (known in internal documents of the Trotskyist movement as 'Barclay' or P.J.B.) and Hilda Lane. Lane had in June 1932, as Chairman of the I.L.P. Women's Committee, led the walk-out from the Labour Women's Conference. Harber and Graham had briefly been in the C.P.G.B. Allen, and C.L.R. James (q.v.), whom they were soon to meet, were foreign.

The task they faced required great sophistication; they brought to it only part of what was in any case one of the weakest and least tested national sections of the International Left Opposition. They had to pioneer a trail, that the French, Belgians and Americans were to follow in the next two years.¹ Nor had they, in Trotsky's view, started well. He fretted over the delay which occurred early in the year before there was a full entry into the I.L.P. The Minority was holding back because of inhibitions over the continued activity of the Majority under the name Communist League. Trotsky urged it not to delay over practical considerations, but to repudiate the League and justify its split by energetic work in the I.L.P.² It finally took his advice and wrote to Brockway to ask if it could join as a group. When this was refused it announced the 'liquidation' of the Communist League and those still outside the I.L.P. joined as individuals.³

1 'Boring from within' a Social Democratic party became known in Trotskyist circles as entrism. Before that, following a prolonged debate in the middle of which the French Trotskyists entered the S.F.I.O., it became known as the 'French turn'. The arguments deployed by Trotsky in favour of the French turn in 1934 were all anticipated in his writings proposing entry by the Communist League into the I.L.P. It is singular that the official historian of the Fourth International should ignore the British experience and speak of the French turn being 'subsequently extended' to other countries. (P. Frank, The Fourth International, (1979), 51-4.)

2 The Minority had written to the I.S. on 5 January and to Trotsky on 7 January. Trotsky's reply of 23 January indicated that the Minority had complained of the continued links between the Majority and the International, had criticised an I.S. draft of a declaration disclaiming the League, had dismissed the Majority as incorrigible and asserted the existence of differences in Britain other than those on the merits of joining the I.L.P. Trotsky advised,

'At this moment you should forget the existence of the majority of the section, enter the I.L.P. and develop energetic activity. Then all the difficulties will be solved by themselves.'
('Differences With The British Minority', Writings : Supplement (1934-40), 442-3.)

3 The New Leader, 23 March 1934. Brockway reported that former C.L. members would be allowed in as members if they respected party policy and the I.L.P. constitution. As for the Fourth International, this would be discussed at the forthcoming conference, (The New Leader, 23 March 1934). The C.L. Majority wrote to Brockway that it still existed but no confirmation of this was printed, (Interview with R. Groves, 23 April 1980). The statement misled Dowse, (op. cit., 192).

I.L.P. interest in Trotsky had grown after disaffiliation. No party leader was ever a Trotskyist, despite accusations from the C.P.G.B. But the party did publish and review Trotsky,¹ and the imprint of his thought is apparent on Brockway and other leaders. For his part, Trotsky used the I.L.P.'s interest in him and the friendly relations he had developed with some leaders to put his analysis before the party membership. Throughout the presence of the Opposition in the I.L.P. his prestige and thought were, arguably, its strongest weapons.²

Trotsky attributed the decline of the I.L.P. after disaffiliation, a step he supported, to its decision to face not the masses but the C.P.G.B.³ Being formless itself, representing no distinct

- 1 It was the I.L.P. which published his Copenhagen lecture on the Russian Revolution, albeit with an introduction by Maxton, which Trotsky challenged, ('Trotsky on Maxton', The New Leader, 25 Aug. 1933). See also the interview with him, 'Can Comintern be reformed?', (The New Leader, 13 Oct. 1933). Joseph Kruk, in his review of The History of the Russian Revolution for the I.L.P. praised the book's 'studied Marxist objectiveness' and lamented Trotsky's exile as 'the greatest of revolutionary tragedies', (The New Leader, 8 July 1932, 20 Jan. 1933).
- 2 On his return to the editorial chair, Brockway expressed the hope that all shades of opinion might flourish in the Independent Labour Party, welcomed the discussion on Trotskyism and thought it would be a disaster only if a split resulted, (The New Leader, 29 Dec. 1933).
- 3 'Cardinal Questions facing the I.L.P.', 5 Jan. 1934, Writings (1933-34), 186-90.

idea, the I.L.P. was certainly in no condition to reform the Comintern. He was particularly savage with I.L.P. oscillations between the internationals.¹ The I.L.P. should stop seeking a formless unity for which there was no political basis. Otherwise it faced extinction.

Within the I.L.P. communist influence was strong and grew up to 1934. The C.P.G.B. sought at first a united front with the I.L.P. to be followed by actual unity.² Up to sometime in 1933, the Revolutionary Policy Committee, while favouring a united communist party, still made criticisms of the communists.³ In the next twelve months this began to change. The leaders of the C.P.G.B. were

- 1 Having broken with the Labour Party, and therefore with the Labour and Socialist International, (L.S.I.), the I.L.P. grouped around itself other ex-social democratic parties in the International Labour Community, (I.A.G.), later to be known as the International Revolutionary Bureau of Socialist Unity (I.R.B.S.U.) or London Bureau. This was a repetition, on a lower plane, of developments in the early 1920s, and the Trotskyists, borrowing Lenin's scornful appellation of the time, referred to the London Bureau as the 'two and a half' international. Trotsky pointed out that through the I.A.G., the I.L.P. was aligned with the Norwegian Labour Party, (moving towards the Second International) and with the S.A.P. (of Germany) and the O.S.P. (of Holland) which were moving towards the Fourth International, while in Britain it was holding discussions with the C.P.G.B., i.e. the Third International.
- 2 C.P.G.B. influence in the I.L.P. had a lengthy provenance. In the late 1920s the Young Communist League had hoped to poach Guild of Youth members and precipitate that organisation's collapse (W. Rust, 'The Derby Conference of the I.L.P. Guild of Youth', Inprecorr, Vol. 8, no. 31, 7 June 1928, 579). Five years later Pollitt prodded the Y.C.L. along the path which would give its sympathisers a Guild majority the following year ('The Tasks of the Congress of the Y.C.L. of Great Britain', Inprecorr, Vol. 13, no. 26, 14 June 1933, 584). The C.P.G.B. was uneasy at the R.P.C. slogan of a 'United Communist Party' though it sought unity in action. Its treatment of the I.L.P. was generally combined with attacks on those who opposed this course, whom it portrayed as an amalgam of Right-Wingers and Trotskyists. (J.R. Campbell, 'New Opportunist Arguments Against the Communist International', Inprecorr, Vol. 13, no. 33, 28 July 1933, 730-1). An extreme of C.P.G.B. worry and distaste for the I.L.P. is shown in Gerhard, 'The Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Great Britain, (Communist International, 15 March 1932, 155-64).
- 3 The R.P.C., up to 1933 published a paper entitled Revolt, no copies of which have been located. But its relations with the C.P.G.B. as late as the York Conference of the I.L.P. may be gauged from the fierce criticism it suffered at that time from Pat Devine, ('Annual Conference of the I.L.P.', Inprecorr, Vol. 14, no. 24, 20 April 1934, 614-5).

sensitive to Trotskyist influence in the I.L.P.¹ and to a certain extent had to engage in a rare debate with it in the party press.² The most rapid success achieved by the Communists was in the I.L.P. Guild of Youth which declared for the Young Communist International at its Norwich conference in 1934.³ But it was the party itself which was most promising to the C.P.G.B.

The Revolutionary Policy Committee was to become an outpost for the communists. At first, however, it preserved its independence. R.P.C. leaders hoped initially that the I.L.P. would outstrip the

1 Pollitt told the Thirteenth Plenum of the E.C.C.I. of 'the Trotskyist Group of petty-bourgeois and student elements without any mass influence or connections', he had watched at the Derby I.L.P. conference of 1933, ('On the United Front in Great Britain', Inprecorr, Vo. 14, no. 5, 30 Jan. 1934, 129-39). Pollitt's fears led him to exaggerate by putting the Trotskyists on a par with the N.A.C. and Elijah Sandham's supporters. Gallacher showed that criticisms of communist hostility to a united front were beginning to hurt when he warned that the inevitabilism of some of his comrades was giving openings to 'Trotskyists and other counter-revolutionaries', ('On the United Front in Great Britain', Inprecorr, Vol. 14, no. 18 19 March 1934, 463) See also Inprecorr, Vol. 14, no. 25, 23 April 1934, 646).

2 Notably in Controversy, the internal discussion journal launched in 1933 under the editorship of C.A. Smith. Controversy began publication with a Trotsky article raising C.P.G.B. suspicions that it was intended to obstruct closer relations between the parties.

3 On the National Committee there were many opposed to a close association with the C.P.G.B., but no Trotskyists. Guilders had met young Trotskyists however at a gathering of youth sections of parties which had attended the August 1933 Paris conference, convened in Laren on 24 Feb. 1934. (For the Laren conference, reconvened in Brussels on 28 Feb., see Writings : Supplement(1934-40), 893-5)

Following the Norwich vote, Guild representatives travelled to Paris with John McGovern M.P. to meet the delegates of the Young Communist International. They were urged to abstain from a 'new splitting international' organised by the Trotskyists, indeed, this was a condition for joining the Y.C.I. The watchful McGovern refused to believe that Trotsky was a counter-revolutionary, (Young Workers Advance! (1934), the agreed verbatim report of the Paris negotiations of May 5/6 1934). The I.L.P. finally intervened to prevent the passage of the Guild into a Y.C.L. merger.

C.P.G.B. as the revolutionary party of British Workers,¹ and that was the motivation behind the drive to disaffiliate from the Labour Party.² In this period, with several of Trotsky's supporters working within it, the R.P.C. was, if anything, nearer to the Right Opposition of Heinrich Brandler than to the C.P.G.B.³ After the 1933 Derby conference of the I.L.P., the R.P.C. began to aim at a united communist party. This objective was not shared by the Trotskyists on the Committee, four of whom resigned.⁴ The R.P.C. faltered, and then

- 1 Associated with the R.P.C. at this time was Dr. C.A. Smith, who had met Trotsky, a pacifist who had fought Dulwich and the New Forest, the second as one of the last I.L.P. candidates approved by the Labour Party. Smith's path was to cross with that of Trotskyism many times during the 1930s. Leaders of the R.P.C. were C.K. Cullen, (q.v.) and Jack Gaster, a Jewish solicitor and son of a famous rabbi. Brockway worked closely with the Committee for a time. I.L.P. leaders knew of the R.P.C. machine before disaffiliation but were inhibited from acting against it by Maxton's 'supreme tolerance', (J. Paton, Left Turn, (1936), 392; see also R. Dowse, op. cit., 180, though he makes no international parallels and tends to treat the R.P.C. as monolithic).
- 2 Dr. C.K. Cullen, an East London doctor and former N.U.W.M. activist, elected unopposed as first chairman of the R.P.C. in March 1932, wrote of the reference back of an insufficiently revolutionary N.A.C. motion at the 1932 annual conference:
- 'This was carried by a good majority. No mention of the reason for the reference back was made in the Daily Worker. Why, I wonder? (Or perhaps I don't.)
- Can it be that the Daily Worker really does fear that the I.L.P. is becoming revolutionary after all? An innocent would think that a revolutionary party would welcome the accession of another big group to the revolutionary movement even if it hadn't reached the 100 per cent purist revolutionary outlook on tactics.' (Daily Worker, 11 April 1932)
- 3 Supporters of Brandler had speedily taken over the S.A.P., a small German party evolving like the I.L.P. away from Social Democracy. In the United States, Jay Lovestone, ousted from the leadership of the C.P.U.S.A. with similar policies to Brandler and Bukharin, represented for a time, a parallel trend. For the American Revolutionary Policy Committee, see D. Bell, Marxian Socialism in the United States, (Princeton 1967), 164-5, 172, 178.
- 4 H. Edwards and J. Pawsey, 'The Organic Development of the Marxist Group', Marxist Group Bulletin, 4, (April 1935), 3. Edwards, Pawsey and Matlow were three of those who resigned, to be drawn increasingly towards Trotsky's analysis of the failure of communism in Germany. This I.L.P. loyalty was to be an important factor for the future of Trotskyism.

after Spring 1934 resumed activity steering closely towards the C.P.G.B. It was noticeable that the party's attitude towards the R.P.C. underwent a change.¹ In December 1933 it was warning of Trotskyist influence in the R.P.C.² and it set up the Affiliation Committee with the aim of rallying all those who were steering towards the C.P.G.B.³ After this hopes in the R.P.C. were renewed and Cullen - plus to a lesser extent Jack Gaster - became a direct communist spokesman.⁴

- 1 In March 1933 Labour Monthly had warned 'the rank and file of the I.L.P. must look past Maxton and Gaster if they wish to find the true path' (quoted in R. Dowse, op. cit., 187). The 1935 Derby conference saw the C.P.G.B. writing of the R.P.C. in friendly fashion, (R. Bishop, 'The I.L.P. Conference', Inprecorr, Vol. 15, no. 18, 27 April 1935, 479-80).
- 2 See remarks of W. Rust in 'On the United Front in Great Britain', Inprecorr, Vol. 14, no. 15, 5 March 1934, 381-2. To this period belong the nominations by Gaster of Brockway to replace Paton as national secretary of the I.L.P. and the phase when the R.P.C. 'innocently imagined that if it could take over the I.L.P. it would supersede the C.P.G.B. as the British Section of the Comintern', (R. Dowse, op. cit., 253; B. Pimlott, Labour and the Left in the 1930s, (Cambridge 1977), 79).
- 3 The I.L.P. Affiliation Committee arose from communist dissatisfaction at R.P.C. inability to answer attacks by I.L.P. party leaders. For its manifesto see the Daily Worker, 16 Dec. 1933, and for its policy see E. Whalley, 'Towards the I.L.P. Easter Conference-Trends in the I.L.P.', Labour Monthly, (March 1934), 90-6. The C.P.G.B. seems to have hoped that the Derby 1933 conference vote, against an N.A.C. recommendation, for I.L.P. - communist cooperation would speedily be followed by unity, but this was not an immediate perspective of the R.P.C., (H. Pollitt, loc. cit., 135).
- 4 The Marxist League and the R.P.C. were not the only formations which attempted to rival the C.P.G.B. from the left while eschewing Trotskyism. Richard Rees and J. Middleton Murry turned the literary journal The New Adelphi into an ethical Marxist magazine. From 1931-2 a debate on communism was held in its pages. Murry resigned the editorial chair, joined the I.L.P., campaigned for disaffiliation and debated from the left with the C.P.G.B. Among those who assisted him was F.A. Ridley, ('Marxism, History and a Fourth International', The New Adelphi, (May 1932), 494-502), who may have seen it as a replacement for The New Man. The Daily Worker refused articles from Murry. In 1934 Murry left the I.L.P. with Elijah Sandham to form the Independent Socialist Party and the political bent of The New Adelphi declined from this date. (See: The New Adelphi, passim; R. Dowse, Left in the Centre, (1966), 188-9; B. Pimlott, Labour and the Left in the 1930s, (Cambridge 1977), 221-2).

It is impossible to make sense of Trotskyist behaviour within the I.L.P. without allowing for the effects of communist policy. The I.L.P. as a whole was drawn towards the C.P.G.B. because it apparently embodied the Russian Revolution and Marxist authority. Close cooperation in a united front was another matter and revolts in Glasgow, Wales and Lancashire were all traceable to association with the communists. The Trotskyists noted this, and some of them were to strive to appear as a loyal opposition within the I.L.P. And some I.L.P. leaders, notably Brockway, found Trotsky's thought a useful proof that King Street did not possess a monopoly of revolutionary wisdom.

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The 1934 conference of the I.L.P. at York was a disappointment to the C.P.G.B. and an encouragement to the Trotskyists. Trotskyists in the Holborn and Finsbury, South Norwood, Clapham and Islington branches all came together after the London divisional conference at the beginning of the year and formed a Bolshevik-Leninist faction. They called for an organisation which could advance a clear revolutionary line as an alternative to that emanating from the R.P.C. and the N.A.C.¹

It was clear that in the present state of the I.L.P. there might be a response to such a stand even from those who did not consider themselves Trotskyists. At York, in the debate on international affiliation, the communist motion was rejected almost four to one and the R.P.C. motion (putting conditions on affiliation to the Comintern) by nearly two to one. The Trotskyist motion called for direct support for the Fourth International and fell 20:137. The encouragement to be derived from this vote lay in comparing it with the thirty four votes cast for direct Comintern affiliation as advanced

¹ H. Edwards and J. Pawsey, loc. cit., 3.

by C.P.G.B. supporters. Moreover, when conference was invited expressly to condemn affiliation to the Fourth International. It declined to do so by 107:64.

This was an uncomfortable jolt for the C.P.G.B.,¹ Among the Trotskyists there was some elation. They had been led to believe that the I.L.P. must come over to the Fourth International or collapse, a prognosis which determined that entering it must prove a short-term venture. Instead the I.L.P. had vacillated on the Fourth International and survived communist encroachment. D.D. Harber concluded that it had been wrong to anticipate the party's early demise, that a definite field of work remained open for Trotskyists. He counselled setting the target of a majority by the next I.L.P. conference or even forcing an extraordinary conference if support grew sufficiently fast. The communists, he believed, would now withdraw. The Bolshevik-Leninists ought to support the N.A.C. if it took disciplinary measures against communists and after that make the centrist N.A.C. itself the main target of criticism.²

Harber deceived himself and others about the possibilities in the I.L.P. Communist withdrawal was eighteen months off; so was disciplinary action, and when it arrived it was not aimed only at the communists. There was also a tension among the Trotskyists as to the

1 Communists had noted little support for Trotskyism in the I.L.P. during the winter of 1933-34, (J. Shields, 'The Issue before the I.L.P. Conference', Inprecorr, Vol. 14, no. 19, 23 March 1934, 487-9). After York the party concluded that I.L.P. oscillation between the two and a half and four internationals had allowed some branches to go over openly to Trotskyism. The I.L.P. was 'becoming a breeding ground for open counter-revolutionaries', (P. Devine, 'Annual Conference of the I.L.P.', Inprecorr, Vol. 14, no. 24, 20 April 1934, 615).

2 D.D. Harber, The present position in the I.L.P. and how we should react to it (1934), (Warwick M.S.S.),

node of organisation they needed to achieve their ambitious end. They were able to use single I.L.P. branches as activity and publishing centres, and would continue to do so.¹ Should they coalesce in a form to which others, who were not Trotskyists, but supported particular Bolshevik-Leninist policies might be attracted? The idea seems to have been Harber's,² and his also was the belief that within the larger organisation the Bolshevik-Leninist fraction should be retained. In the Autumn of 1934 the larger organisation was established under the name of the Marxist Group in the I.L.P., and it began to publish a bulletin. But Group members were still protagonists, albeit critical ones, of the I.L.P. and they continued to sell the eclectic New Leader.³

By this time Trotskyism was a recognised force in the I.L.P. It was the protagonist of a policy against war, of a mass united front and for the Fourth International. Like the R.P.C., whose principal antagonist it was, Trotskyism was strongest in London. Indeed Trotskyist influence in the provincial I.L.P. can be seen only from 1935. In London the paper membership claimed by the Marxist Group, at seventy, was in excess of that of a year earlier, but the active membership was not much grown.⁴ It was claimed that no new I.L.P.

1 Action I.L.P., Leon Trotsky on Centrism, (1934); E. Robertson (q.v.) Holborn and Finsbury I.L.P., Conversations with Trotsky, (Nov. 1935); Islington I.L.P., L. Trotsky on the I.L.P. Leadership (1936). Leaflets were also produced by Trotskyist-controlled branches from time to time.

2 *ibid.*, 3.

3 When the Islington I.L.P. published the I.C.L. declaration 'France is now the key to the situation' (Writings : 1933-34, 238-44) as France's Turn Next! For The Fourth International, it added that a new revolutionary party was not necessary since the I.L.P., on a Marxist basis, could play that role.

4 A.B. Doncaster et. al. to the International Secretariat, I.C.L. (April ? 1935), HP, DJH 5/2. The comparison is between the positions at the time of the 1934 and 1935 winter conferences of the London divisional I.L.P.

members were recruited to Trotskyism after the C.L. Minority joined the party.¹

The four London branches under Trotskyist control convened a meeting on 3 November to establish the Marxist Group. Sixty I.L.P.ers attended and vowed to transform the I.L.P. into a revolutionary party.² This represented a new departure from the original aim of accumulating basic cadres. Having committed themselves to the I.L.P. however, they had to turn it towards the Labour Party and trade unions: at present the I.L.P., under the R.P.C. influence, was in their view engaged in 'spasmodic anarchist stunts'. The concrete meaning of this lay first in a drive to make the I.L.P. work systematically in trade unions, and second, in an attempt to commit it to critical electoral support for the Labour Party except where the I.L.P. itself had a greater following. Close attention to the trade unions was advocated by Bert Matlow,³ Sid Kemp⁴ and Ernie Patterson,⁵ all members of the Clapham I.L.P. Bill Duncan of Islington, proposed that the I.L.P. 'support social democracy in order to destroy it' in

1 *ibid.*

2 J. Graham, 'The Meeting of November 3rd', Bulletin of the Marxist Group, 1, (15 Nov. 1934), n.p.

3 'Towards A Correct Revolutionary Party', *ibid.*

4 Kemp, one of the original Clapham I.L.P. contacts of the Balham Group called for the abandonment of the party policy of unofficial committees and for the unions instead to organise the unemployed and enforce compulsory membership ('Our Work in the Trade Unions', Bulletin of the Marxist Group, 2, (1 Dec. 1934), 4).

5 Patterson, a N.U.D.A.W. member who was to stay with the I.L.P. until the end of the decade had, at the York conference, criticised the London division stand on trade unions and its failure to involve itself in recruitment drives. See also his article 'Our Leaders', Marxist Group Bulletin, 4, (April 1935), 3.

elections,¹ though his view was challenged by Max Nicholls who thought it possible there would be no more elections.²

At the Winter 1934 London divisional conference of the I.L.P. the Marxist Group had behind it sixty or seventy followers, though the active number was less. The R.P.C., however, had ceased to be amorphous and remained strong in the division. It was powerful enough to take disciplinary action against six Marxist Group members.³ The two currents clashed on the meaning of the united front and on other issues where the R.P.C. reflected communist policy.⁴ Matlow also attacked the division's international resolution as 'loose phrases strung together; the stock-in-trade of pseudo revolutionaries'.⁵

1 'Towards a Correct Electoral Policy', Bulletin of the Marxist Group, 2, (1 Dec. 1934), 2.

2 'Prepare The Fight Against Fascism', ibid., 6-7.

3 J.L. Robinson, 'Gasterism Mis-States A Policy', Bulletin of the Marxist Group, 3, (Jan. 1935), 4.5. John Robinson was a member of the Finchley and Hendon I.L.P. and the author of the most able contributions to the Bulletin.

4 The party itself discerned R.P.C., Trotskyists and 'others' as the recognisable political forces at the conference, The New Leader, 22 Feb. 1935. The R.P.C. had begun a new drive within the party, on Pollitt's advice, to win it for the Communist International, (J. Mahon, Harry Pollitt, (1976), 203). This left it vulnerable to enquiries as to why, if it considered the I.L.P. so imperfect and the C.P.G.B. so sound it stayed with the one and not the other, (J.L. Robinson, ibid.). As for the 'others' in London, if they voted together they outnumbered either faction and a Hampstead resolution outlawing unofficial groups from holding office fell at the divisional conference by only four votes, (The New Leader, 22 Feb. 1935).

5 The New Leader, 22 Feb. 1935.

Despite the presence at the forefront of the Marxist Group of Matlow, who was at this time close to international thinking, Trotsky was not impressed with the progress made. A full entry by the British Section in the summer of 1933 would, he thought, have changed the I.L.P. As it was he tended not to offer tactical advice to the Marxist Group for some time, though he was interested in entrism elsewhere.¹ Within the International Communist League debate on 'entrism' began to shift to a discussion on the fate of the Ligue Communiste for whom Trotsky was advocating joining the S.F.I.O. Trotsky urged that all sections actively participate in the debate over the French turn, and some of his followers took his advice to the point of splitting with the movement. No British seem to have attended the crucial extended plenum of the I.C.L. convened on 14-16 October, however; there the leadership of the international movement resolved that new parties could not be built on abstract formulas but in actual circumstances. These included the emergence of parties breaking free of social democracy yet retaining their independence due to the 'total loss' of attraction by the Comintern.²

From early 1935 the Marxist Group could have steered a course out of the I.L.P. While it had not greatly grown, the party itself was

1 Entry, he told the French, was not a principle but an opportunity. Only I.C.L. ideas could resist in the S.F.I.O. a disintegration which had occurred in the I.L.P. ('The Stalinist And Organic Unity', 19 July 1934, Writings : Supplement (1934-40), 505.)

2 'The Present Situation in the Labour Movement and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Leninists', Documents of the Fourth International (New York, 1973), 61-2.

in decline.¹ Whatever attractions there were in the I.L.P. were now rivalled by developments in the Labour Party whose younger members, like those of the S.F.I.O., were now showing signs of life. The communists, while turning the R.P.C. back towards the I.L.P., were already paying attention to developments in the Labour League of Youth, showing again that flexibility of tactics in which they were to outstrip the Trotskyists throughout the decade.² Some time early in 1935 Harber and Kirby slipped out of the I.L.P. and began to work in the League of Youth and the Socialist League.³ But the recruitment which had taken place in the I.L.P.,⁴ together with the knowledge of

- 1 One of the interesting features of the first half of the decade is the inverse relationship between the I.L.P. membership and that of the C.P.G.B. In 1931, its last complete year in the Labour Party, the I.L.P. claimed 21,000 members; in 1932, the year of disaffiliation, 16,773. By 1935, this figure had shrunk by almost three quarters helped by sectarianism towards the trade unions, Labour Party and Coops., association with the communists and the act of disaffiliation itself. The C.P.G.B. on the other hand claimed 2,724 members in June 1931 and 7,700 in July 1935. Both sets of figures are unreliable, but the trend is clear, (R. Dowse, op. cit., 193; H. Pelling, op. cit., 192).
- 2 Olive Bell had noted in the summer of 1934 that the Labour Party, like the I.L.P., was beginning to encounter demands from its youth for organisational independence, ('The Leftward Development of the British Youth Movement', Inprecorr, Vol. 14, no. 33, (8 June 1934), 890-1). That winter T. Harvey praised the 'big breakthrough' by the League into united front activity, (Inprecorr, Vol. 14, no. 59, (24 Nov. 1934), 1590-1).
- 3 Two young South African Group members, Sid Frost and Ted Grant, seem to have raised the possibility of Labour League of Youth work in Spring 1935, but stayed in the I.L.P. Harber and Kirby withdrew early in the year, however, though they continued in connection with their erstwhile comrades of the Marxist Group, (A.B. Doncaster, et al., to the International Secretariat, I.C.L., [April? 1935], H.P., D.J.H. 5/2).
- 4 The most illustrious of those recruited to the Marxist Group was Cyril Lionel Robert James (1901-), a Trinidadian writer and cricketer who came to England in 1932 as a constitutional radical. That year, while living at Nelson and playing cricket in the Lancashire League, he published chapters of his The Life of Captain Cipriani as a pamphlet under the title The Case for West-Indian Self Government (1932). Neville Cardus offered him a post as a cricket correspondent for The Manchester Guardian, which he kept for some years. For James's political evolution see Ivor Oxaal, Black Intellectuals Come to Power, (1966), 66-7 passim and James's own collection of essays, The Future in the Present (1979). See also Brockway's portrait of James in Inside the Left (1942), 326.

Trotsky's lengthy polemic with party leaders, was a powerful force pulling the Marxist Group back. Some time in the spring of 1935, the inner Bolshevick-Leninist fraction dissolved leaving only the Marxist Group.¹ And the Marxist Group's existence was premised on the belief that the I.L.P. could be convinced of a revolutionary line.²

The Marxist Group issued a call for the like-minded to contact it in anticipation of the Derby conference of the party,³ due at Easter 1935. This may have been the means by which it broke out of London for the first time.

When the national conference convened, the Marxist Group launched its most forceful attack so far. In several debates it was chief rival to the R.P.C. as a critic of the National Administrative Council. Matlow again it was who flayed the leadership for its vague policy statement on the crisis of capitalism. A full Trotskyist critique was set out in a series of amendments from Clapham, Holborn and Finsbury, and Finchley and Hendon, which he moved. Supported by Robinson and Marzillier (Islington) he clashed with both the N.A.C. and Cullen of the R.P.C., in his view that Russia's trading policy tended to ease the capitalist crisis. Cullen's speech was more of an attack on Matlow than a positive presentation of the amendments of the London Division, which the R.P.C. controlled.⁴ While neither the R.P.C. nor the Marxist Group met with success in this debate, that did not

- 1 Attempts were made to revive it from time to time, (A.B. Doncaster, et. al., *ibid.*).
- 2 A declaration of belief in this thesis was part of the membership form, though the Standing Orders (HP, DJH 5/5, n.d.) required copies of minutes and discussion papers to be sent to the International Secretariat.
- 3 Bulletin of the Marxist Group, (Jan. 1935).
- 4 The New Leader, 26 April 1935.

necessarily imply total isolation. Robertson¹ failed by only one vote to carry an editorial board for the New Leader, a proposition which must have weakened Brockway's grip.

But the tireless Matlow found no support from beyond the Group when he turned to the 'Method of the I.L.P.'. An even longer list of amendments moved by him included the name of the East Liverpool branch, a first swallow hinting at a summer of influence outside the capital.² Matlow took his stand on the need for systematic trade union work, compared with which street recruitment was of no value. Smith for the N.A.C. was able to secure the defeat of all amendments with the argument that Matlow sought to concentrate on industrial activity to the exclusion of all other work.

As in industrial policy, so on electoral policy, the Marxist Group found itself not on the ultra-left but urging the I.L.P. back into the labour movement mainstream. Marzillier argued for critical support for Labour candidates in the forthcoming election and advanced the slogan of a third Labour Government. The I.L.P., he suggested, would have to go through this struggle with the workers while working for disillusionment with 'boss-class democracy'. This was too much for an old timer like Joseph Southall, and Robert Smillie of the Guild of Youth weighed in for the platform with the observation that critical support would mean the I.L.P. sharing responsibility for the failure of the next Labour Government.

1 'Robertson' (Earle Birney, 1904-) was a Canadian journalist and member of the Canadian Workers Party living in England.

2 In the debate on the International Statement of the N.A.C., support for the Fourth International came from Kingston, another new area.

In the 'Danger of War' debate, after Jennie Lee had clashed with Jon Kimche over allegations of vagueness in the N.A.C. statement, Robertson and Robinson argued the classic Trotskyist analysis of the U.S.S.R. Robertson also challenged the long-standing partiality of the I.L.P. for a general strike against war, which would not, he declared, be possible without cleaving to a new international.

The N.A.C. had made no reference to the Fourth International in its international statement, a point Matlow seized upon. Gaster for the R.P.C. observed that a Fourth International was indeed the logical end even of the N.A.C.'s present connections with the left socialist parties. But the N.A.C. knew where it stood, and C.A. Smith reminded the conference that it was the I.L.P. itself which was the principal stumbling block to the Fourth International within the London Bureau.¹

The Marxist Group intervention at the 1935 Derby conference of the I.L.P. was a high point of Trotskyist penetration. It had managed to deploy its limited strength to best advantage at the conference by means of frequent speeches from its few delegates and a phalanx of identifiable Trotskyist resolutions on each subject. None of its positions was passed by conference, but it had attained status almost as a balancing force to the R.P.C. This was Brockway's view:² it suited him to contrast the 'revolutionary socialist' view with communism and Trotskyism, both of which doctrines were supported only by factions resembling each other in their call for association of the

1 The New Leader, 26 April 1935.

2 'Reflections after the I.L.P. Annual Conference', The New Leader, 3 May. 1935.

I.L.P. and the Labour Party.¹ The Communist Party also weighed up the Trotskyists against the R.P.C. While the Trotskyists never secured more than ten votes for their block amendments, they appeared to the communists to be boosted by the leadership of the I.L.P.:

It is quite clear that a large section of the leadership is striving desperately to take the I.L.P. back to reactionary reformism, and to this end are prepared to make an unprincipled - even if unavowed alliance - alliance with any elements - even the Trotskyists (sic) - who will aid them in the calumination of the Soviet Union, the Communist International and the C.P.G.B., and in breaking off the united front which even in its present limited form has already achieved so much in cementing the workers in their struggles.²

But Derby had also been a successful holding operation for the N.A.C. R.P.C. support never passed forty votes against the backing of two-thirds of conference for the leadership. Cullen failed in his bid to be elected to the N.A.C. For the Marxist Group things were worse still: its best vote count was ten. The N.A.C. felt strong enough to assert itself in the youth field and it was possible the measures against

1 Brockway at this time easily slipped into that third periodism the R.P.C., like the C.P.G.B., had abandoned. The third Labour Government might come about, he conceded, but the I.L.P. need not help it:

'One might as well say that because Oswald Mosley realises that the failure of a Third Labour Government will give him his chance, that the British Union of Fascists should support the Labour Party at the next election!' (ibid.)

2 R. Bishop, 'The I.L.P. Conference', Inprecorr, Vol. 15, no. 18, (27 April 1935), 479. Bishop complained that the R.P.C. seemed abstract theorists because they were, like the Marxist Group, based in London. This may have been an attempt to explain why Cullen had failed to gain an N.A.C. place in elections at the conference.

factionalism in the party might follow.¹ The Marxist Group line was to support measures against the R.P.C. because that body was based outside the I.L.P. When Aplin, London Divisional Organiser, charged Cullen, Gaster and Hawkins with preparing a split, Joe Pawsey, editor of the Bulletin supported him:

'We must have no weakness, no hesitation to rid the I.L.P. of anti-working class elements.'²

* * * * *

At this point, in mid-summer 1935, the Marxist Group was still the clearest advocate within the I.L.P. of a true united front with the Labour Party and electoral support,³ though the communist line, and therefore that of the R.P.C. was now changing in that direction too.⁴

- 1 Maximum membership age of the Guild of Youth was cut to twenty one and the Guild subjected to conference decisions. The I.B.R.S.U. ended cooperation with the Trotskyists following a sharp polemic against it by Trotsky himself, ('Revolutionary Youth. A Break with the Trotskyists', The New Leader, 30 Aug. 1935).
- 2 'Notes of the Month', The Bulletin of the Marxist Group, 5, (June 1935), 1-2.
- 3 F. Marzillier, 'The United Front Tactic of the I.L.P. On The Electoral Field', *ibid.*, 4-5. Marzillier argued that the I.L.P. and the C.P.G.B. had a futile approach to elections, the former by its absentism, the latter by stressing only the reactionary side of the Labour Programme.
- 4 At the Seventh Congress, Dimitrov guided the Comintern to the united front, recognising that experience - notably in France - was pushing it that way. Pollitt did not criticise the change but warned that support for Labour in Britain would be different from that extended to its first two governments, (Communist International, 20 Sept. 1935, 899). Changes in the Comintern policy had been brewing for two years, certainly since the spontaneous coalescence of French Socialists and communists against an attempted fascist coup in February 1934. For united front policy see F. Claudin, From Comintern to Cominform (1975), who goes so far as to suggest on pp 124-5 that the Comintern was not dissolved at the time of the Seventh Congress because it was feared the Fourth International might benefit thereby.

But instead of following the logic of critical support for Labour into transferring its faction to the Labour Party it now adopted a kind of I.L.P. patriotism and prolonged its stay.

This reversal was brought about by the crisis after the Italo-Abyssinian war and its impact on British politics. The corollary of the united front advocated by national communist parties from 1934 was the Comintern policy of League sanctions against fascist Italy to restrain it from a colonial war. This was the line of the C.P.G.B. and also, after its 1935 conference, of the Labour Party. But the I.L.P. and the Socialist League, while firmly against Mussolini's colonial adventure, were conscious of the threat of war, sought to advance an independent view and advocated therefore a policy of workers' sanctions against Italy.¹

The policy of workers' sanctions was strongly urged by Brockway in The New Leader. When he echoed Lenin's denunciation of the League of Nations as a 'thieves kitchen' in which he would have no part, he was advancing a policy with which Trotsky agreed.² The view of the Fourth International was, uniquely, being advanced in Britain with authority on the main political question of the day. It was a great opportunity for the Marxist Group, strengthened by the confusion into which the R.P.C. was thrown.³ Within the Group, the best chance fell to C.L.R. James, now chairman of the Finchley I.L.P., the most prominent

1 For Socialist League policy see The Socialist (1936 passim) and chapter five, below.

2 Trotsky had some reservations, for which see 'The I.L.P. and the Fourth International: In the middle of the road', Writings : 1935-36, 69. He also later called Brockway's policy a lucky hit.

3 For Brockway's policy see The New Leader, passim and Inside the Left, 326. The split in the R.P.C. is described below.

black in the party, indeed in British politics.¹ The party promoted him to the status of leading spokesman² and he used his status to advocate setting aside the League of Nations report and fighting not only Mussolini but also 'the other robbers and oppressors, French and British Imperialism'.³ He had a slightly individual approach to the issue,⁴ and this together with his savage handling of communist inconsistencies probably increased his appeal to I.L.P. leaders.

The question of workers' sanctions introduced confusion into the R.P.C. and switched the Marxist Group into reverse gear. In the R.P.C. Jack Gaster broke ranks and came out for Brockway's policy on the League of Nations.⁵ The Marxist Group had resolved on 20 October to oppose League sanctions and to call on I.L.P. branches to motivate their response to the coming general election by reference to the imminence of war. War would destroy workers' freedom, sanctions led to war, Labour favoured sanctions and so the progressive features of its platform were now defunct:

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- 1 James was at this time writing for The Keys, journal of the League for Coloured Peoples and his prestige among blacks in Britain carried him in 1936 to the editorial chair of International African Opinion, journal of the International African Service Bureau, which George Padmore had founded.
 - 2 With Maxton and Brockway he addressed an audience of 1,200 at the Memorial Hall in early October and from then on was a popular speaker.
 - 3 'Is This Worth a War?', The New Leader, 4 Oct. 1935; 'The Game at Geneva', *ibid.*, 18 Oct. 1935.
 - 4 James thought Litvinov, the Soviet foreign minister, had to observe League policy, ('The Workers and Sanctions. Why the I.L.P. and the communists take an opposite view', The New Leader, 25 Oct. 1935). Litvinov's behaviour was contrasted by James to that of the C.P.G.B. which, he claimed, would have supported workers' sanctions a year earlier. The I.L.P., he asserted implausibly, would remain true to the principles of Lenin.
 - 5 B. Matlow, 'A Criticism of the London Division's Statement on the Abyssinian Situation', Marxist Bulletin, (Oct. 1935), 4.

'Critical support cannot be implemented in the forthcoming election.'¹

Opposition to war, the united front and the Fourth International had been the planks of the Marxist Group platform. One stand of the I.L.P. had sufficed to overturn them. The Marxist Group argued for I.L.P.ers to be adopted wherever possible in the coming general election, that only anti-sanctions Labour candidates should get support, and indeed that if the pro-sanctions party kept control of the Labour Party the I.L.P. should oppose all its candidates, demanding a general strike and direct recruitment. Workers' sanctions had reversed roles in the I.L.P.: the Marxist Group which had advocated I.L.P. - Labour unity against R.P.C. - C.P.G.B. sectarianism now found itself a recruiting sergeant for the I.L.P. And yet, while the conformity of the workers' sanctions policy to Leninist principles cannot be challenged, the gloss put on it by the Marxist Group was sheer revolutionary posturing. Labour's ability to issue a call for a general strike against war was in doubt:² how much more so was that of the I.L.P., which had no trade union influence at all?

The Trotskyists were supposed to have a militantly anti-pacifist line. And yet in 1935, and again in 1939, many British Trotskyists found themselves effectively endorsing pacifism by their argument that policy on war was the touchstone of all policy:

1 B. Matlow, *ibid.*

2 The revulsion of Ernest Bevin and other trade union leaders at the call for industrial action against war by the largely middle-class leadership of the Socialist League was one facet of the reversal of Labour's policy at its 1935 annual conference, (see R. Miliband, Parliamentary Socialism, (1961), 224-6).

'The imminence of war must force us to concentrate our attack on the L.P. support of a war which will sweep away all democratic liberties The only basis for advocating critical support does not therefore exist.'¹

For the Marxist Group the task was how to build 'our' revolutionary party. A special conference of the I.L.P. must be convened: it must aim to fight for power. This of course was not entrism but one hundred per cent commitment to the I.L.P. Trotsky, allowing that The New Leader had carried the best articles in the labour press on the crisis, advised that there was more to a revolutionary party than writing good articles.² There were dissenters in Britain too. Robinson charged that the new Marxist Group policy sprang from a misunderstanding of the united front:

'The I.L.P. can adopt more progressive demands than the Labour Party bureaucracy, but this does not dispense with the need for a united front with the Labour Party.'³

Policies for workers were fine but Marxist Group and I.L.P. policy cut them off from the workers. These workers did not make a distinction between Labour's membership and its leaders. Robertson tried to puncture illusions about the I.L.P., pointing out that the N.A.C. retained pacifist pretensions such as over the refusal of

1 'Elections and the Coming War', loc. cit., 6.

2 'The I.L.P. and the Fourth International. In the Middle of the Road', 18 Sept. 1935; Writings : 1935-36, 64-9.

3 'The Marxist Group's Third Period', loc. cit., n.p.

military service, in its letter to I.L.P. branches of October 20. He also put Trotsky's analysis of the I.L.P. position before the party membership.¹

But Robertson and Robinson were in a minority. The Group drew close to the N.A.C. for six crucial months during which time Trotskyist forces in the I.L.P. would have been valuable reinforcements for their comrades elsewhere. When five Group members voiced criticisms at an F.S.U. meeting, the London division of the I.L.P., under R.P.C. leadership, suspended them. Matlow was kept off the divisional speakers' list. Another member was barred as organiser for a London area though nominated by his federation. When the party N.A.C. intervened and rescinded the suspension, the Marxist Group triumphantly taunted the R.P.C. for disloyalty: 'let them join the party whose policy they are trying to carry out - the C.P.G.B.'.

This was what now happened: sixty three R.P.C. members withdrew to join the C.P.G.B.,² demoralised by failure.³ Other R.P.C.

- 1 Writings: 1935-36, 69. Robertson visited Trotsky with Ken Johnson, another Canadian, in Norway in November 1935. On his return he published conversations with Trotsky and Once Again the I.L.P. An interview with Leon Trotsky, (Nov. 1935) from his party branch in Holborn and Finsbury. The second interview is also reprinted in Writings: 1935-36, 69-73.
- 2 D. McHenry, The Labour Party in Transition, 1931-1938, (1938) quoted in S. Hornby, 'Left Wing Pressure Groups in the British Labour Movement, 1930-1940' (University of Liverpool M.A. Thesis, 1966, 70). Gaster and Cullen went on to some prominence in the C.P.G.B., Gaster as a member of the London district committee and L.C.C. member for Stepney in 1946. Eric Whalley, of the Affiliation Committee was killed in Spain 1937.
- 3 C.K. Cullen, 'The Revolutionary Policy Committee and the I.L.P.', Inprecorr, Vol. 15, no. 59, (9 Nov. 1935), 145, 147-8, and 'Why We Broke With the I.L.P.', Labour Monthly, (Nov. 1935), 741-6. Cullen blamed the I.L.P. for standing candidates against Labour, but did not recall the identical policy of the C.P.G.B. in 1931.

members remained within the I.L.P. but seem to have achieved minimal impact.¹ The R.P.C. walk out occurred at a special London divisional conference of October 26-27. There the Marxist Group scored success with the passage of a Holborn motion condemning peace councils and one from Clapham attacking Soviet patriotism. Generally, however, decisions of the conference were not clear cut. The debate on electoral policy split communists and Trotskyists. Gaster joined Aplin, the chairman of the London I.L.P., on the Marxist Group platform; Hilda Lane, who supported the Robinson line, voted with Cullen and the R.P.C. for critical support.² The Group backed Aplin's nomination for the chairman's post and called on the party to realise that it, and not the C.P.G.B., had the future of the working class in its hands.³ Outside London, Marxist Group influence in the Liverpool Federation had been strong enough to secure a special conference of the Lancashire division. Yet against protests from Marxist Grouper Reg. Collins of East Liverpool, the conference was confined to a discussion on war. But Don James, another Group member successfully seconded an amendment to a motion by Hicks of Stockport calling for revolutionary propaganda to be carried into the army,⁴ moved a further amendment urging the need to

- 1 Twenty three R.P.C.ers remaining in the I.L.P. conferred after the withdrawal of the main body and decided to battle on against Trotskyism and the 'semi-Trotskyism' of the N.A.C. (Communist Unity, Dec. 1935, 10). Like Cullen this jump also identified R.P.C. failure with the neglect of organisational for political duties.
- 2 Marxist Bulletin, 25 Nov. 1935, 2.
- 3 M. Nicholls, 'The Dis-United Front', *ibid.*, 4.
- 4 The amendment was a specific rejection of pacifist refusal to serve. Under a party directive all conscriptable members would join the army.

prepare for going underground, and called for work for the Fourth International.¹ He still failed to carry the Marxist Group line against a divisional council resolution which urged critical support for Labour.²

C.L.R. James used his prominence over Abyssinia to launch himself into domestic issues. He predicted a mass swing to the left, a bourgeoisie that would act against Parliament and turn to fascism.³ He was patronised by the leadership and Marxist Groupers could be found in a number of provincial areas.⁴ Yet the secession of the R.P.C., far from clearing the way for the Group, merely opened the path for the N.A.C. to put its own house in order. The annual London divisional conference rejected the Marxist Group critique of the London Bureau by three to one and passed by almost two to one an instruction to the

1 But the Marxist Group did not feel able to sign the Open Letter for the Fourth International, an updated version of the Declaration of Four, issued in July 1935. Trotsky proposed that they should instead state their policy in a letter to I.L.P. leaders, ('The Open Letter and the I.L.P.', Autumn 1935, Writings : Supplement (1934-40), 616). For the text of the Open Letter, which argued inter alia that a Labour victory in the general election would precipitate civil war and the consolidation of reaction, see Writings (1935-36), 16-20.

2 'Electoral Policy', loc. cit., n.p.

3 "'Honest" Stanley in a fix', The New Leader, 27 Dec. 1935; 'Baldwin's Next Move', The New Leader, 3 Jan. 1936. Brockway thought James's view 'interesting', but gave full publicity to a speaker's tour he made of South Wales mining areas.

4 John and Mary Archer had been in Liverpool, and later in Leeds and Durham respectively; John Goffe (1917-), an ex public school boy who had been introduced to the Bloomsbury I.L.P. and Marxist Group by Tony Doncaster, now was in Sheffield as a steel industry trainee manager. From this base he visited Guild of Youth and party branches in Yorkshire. Earl Robertson, like James, had spent time in South Wales, and Nicholls and Robinson were in Glasgow.

N.A.C. to disband all unofficial groups.¹

From now until the Keighley conference, due at Easter 1936, there was a period of high activity for the Marxist Group. It aimed to sustain the revolutionary line over Abyssinia, which was now under attack from some I.L.P. leaders who had remained pacifists. Abroad the International Secretariat was faced with a Marxist Group still in the I.L.P. more than two years after it had been urged in for a short stay. The Group's tendency to blur differences with Brockway and some I.L.P. leaders was not shared by Trotsky who, in a series of writings, now again paid close attention to party affairs.² Some I.S. members were not as critical of the I.L.P. as Trotsky, however, and there was some conflict as he now urged the Group to draw its I.L.P. experiment to an end.

Trotsky's view was that the I.L.P. still did not represent a clear alternative. It had split from the Labour Party primarily to maintain the independence of its M.P.s; its critique of Labour's right wing leadership was hollow. If valid there was a duty incumbent on the I.L.P. to enter the Labour Party and advocate a Marxist alternative. As for I.L.P. electoral policy, Trotsky flatly opposed the line of the Marxist Group. Eight million Labour voters had not, he suggested, seen through Morrison and Clynes as Marxists had and it was therefore better to put them in power where their limitations would be apparent. I.L.P. policy amounted to a partial boycott of Parliament when the party was in no position to overthrow it. Meanwhile it was still flirting with the C.P.G.B., which had all the defects of the Labour Party with none of the advantages.

1 The New Leader, 7 Feb. 1936.

2 'The I.L.P. and the Fourth International', 18 Sept. 1935, Writings: (1935-36), 64-9; 'Once Again the I.L.P.', Nov. 1935, loc. cit., 69-73; on the eve of the conference he returned to the subject with 'Open Letter to an English Comrade', (3 April 1936), Writings: (1935-36), 73-5.

Trotsky was now urging close attention to the Labour Party, but the situation within the I.S. was now more complex than it had been in 1933 when I.L.P. entry had first been mooted. The two I.S. secretaries now were Sveevliet, a Dutch signatory of the Declaration of Four, who was to part with it in revulsion from the French turn and Schmidt, an S.A.P. leader and former London Bureau comrade of Brockway. Schmidt visited England in January to meet the Marxist Group and other Fourth Internationalists and Trotsky watched his dealings with some disquiet.¹ Schmidt advised staying in the I.L.P. for a further period, and for a short time Trotsky did not advocate a break.² For some Marxist Groupers, however, there was no point in remaining in the I.L.P. and in February they began to withdraw to join Harber in the League of Youth.

Others redoubled their efforts contrasting the Group with the 'disloyal' R.P.C.,³ and a drive on the Yorkshire Party⁴ led to that division's conference rejecting a ban on groups.

1 'I would like to underline the fact that Schmidt is tied by a long friendship to the head of the I.L.P. and that he has perhaps a certain uneasiness, not to say mistrust, towards our friends as "sectarians"', ('Schmidt's Trip to England, 19 Jan. 1936, Writings : Supplement (1934-40), 639).

2 Trotsky had originally drawn up a plan with Robertson and another to issue a manifesto of the Group for signatures prior to a split, ('The Dutch Section and the International', Writings : 1935-36, 41).

3 'P.J.B.' (untitled manuscript), 10 (15?) Sept. 1935, H.P.

4 'The R.P.C. disrupted the party not because they were an organised group, but because they were under orders from the C.P.G.B. A Marxist Grouper is first and foremost a loyal and hardworking I.L.P.er', (J. Goffe) et. al., 'Letter from M.G. members to (I.L.P.) members', 6 March 1936, H.P.

Trotsky continued to debate with the I.L.P. ever more sharply. He argued the irrelevance of it considering its relationship with Labour, while it failed to build a revolutionary policy. While this continued, leadership would pass elsewhere, perhaps by means of the Right Wing employing left phaseology. Above all, there was a chance for the Stalinists, the most dangerous 'radical phasemongers' of all:

'The members of the C.P.G.B. are now on their bellies before the Labour Party - but this makes it all the easier for them to crawl inside.'¹

Once within the Labour Party the communists' revolutionary aura would allow them to pose as the left: only a clear and courageous I.L.P. policy could prevent it. Trotsky delivered a prescient warning about the critical position of the Labour League of Youth; 'Do not only build fractions - seek to enter', he urged. The young were at once more easily confused by, yet suspicious of, attempts to drive them to a new war. They would listen more easily to the Fourth International if it was there to speak to them. 'The British Section will recruit its first cadres from the 30,000 young workers in the Labour League of Youth.'²

The I.L.P. as a whole should sever its bogus united front with the communists but preserve the right to internal fractions. The success or failure of these clearly depended on leadership quality. He applauded the purging of communists as a sign that the I.L.P. meant business. Until that was sure, such organisational measures might equally be used against the Marxist Group. But the main question was the international one: if it was honest the I.L.P. would now come out in favour of the Fourth before its London Bureau fell apart.

1 'Once Again the I.L.P. An interview with Leon Trotsky', (Nov. 1935) Writings (1935-36), 71.

2 Trotsky also developed the concept of 'illegal work' in mass organisations. 'You do not enter a reactionary trade union and cry "I am a revolutionist"', (ibid., 72).

On the eve of the Keighley conference, Robertson published another article by Trotsky from the Clapham I.L.P.¹ The interview carried a strong attack on the London Bureau which Brockway countered.² Trotsky had concluded that the idea of turning the I.L.P. into a revolutionary party 'must now be described as utopian', and was talking - ambiguously - of 'an independent perspective for the revolutionary party'.³ His arguments for critical support had convinced at least the Marxist Group, which called for it at the Keighley conference, without success.⁴ This led to a series of defeats on the Parliamentary Report⁵ and on the establishment of fractions in the unions and the Labour Party.⁶

The setpiece conference debate occurred over Abyssinia. Brockway had indeed been ploughing a lonely furrow over workers' sanctions, and his line in The New Leader had been reversed by the National Council.⁷ C.L.R. James, the party member most identified with this position, moved reference back, arguing that fighting capitalism

- 1 'Open Letter to an English Comrade', 3 April 1936, Writings (1935-36), 73-5. The Clapham edition carried the revealing overprint 'For Sale to I.L.P. Members Only and Circulation Within the Party'.
- 2 'Where Trotsky Goes Wrong', The New Leader, 20 March 1936.
- 3 'Remarks For An English Comrade', 8 April 1936, Writings : Supplement (1934-40), 653.
- 4 A resolution calling for critical support was attacked both by those who wanted a Labour Government and those who did not!
- 5 Margaret Johns failed to obtain reference back after being rebuked by Maxton.
- 6 Arthur Ballard it was who called for the I.L.P. to 'assist the leftward and moving elements against the reactionary leadership'.
- 7 The N.A.C. stuck to a pacifist line and believed workers should take no part in the war.

at home was not some sort of alternative to this international stand. If the working class had taken industrial action to support Abyssinia, it must have led immediately to a conflict with the British bosses. Brockway justified his line with reference to the Derby decisions, and was supported from a far wider constituency than the Marxist Group was able to provide. McGovern summed up along neutralist lines, but was unable to prevent reference back by one vote. It may have been distaste for the Marxist Group which led conference to give to a Lancashire resolution endorsing the original New Leader line a bigger majority of thirteen.

But there was a warning sign when, in the private session, Aplin was able to carry overwhelmingly the banning of groups, against the opposition of Matlow and Goffe. Ominously they received no vocal support from the floor.

And the true significance of I.L.P. policy was about to be revealed. The following day, Maxton and other party leaders resigned their positions because they could not accept the conference decision on workers' sanctions. Alarmed, Brockway reopened the vote and this time the N.A.C. stance was endorsed by ninety three to thirty nine! This was the critical moment. The chief reason for a continued Marxist Group presence had vanished. At least one participant believed it should have walked out of the I.L.P. there and then.¹ Instead the Marxist Group persisted with the debate on the International but found little reward. Brockway, unrepentant, spurned a united revolutionary international formed from the small groups adhering to Trotsky, which would 'from the heights of Oslo, foma new International'. This did not prevent Drew, a Hackney delegate, jeering at the N.A.C.'s Bureau as

¹ Interview with M. Johns, (Oct. 1973).

'Trotskyism without a Trotsky',¹ but pleas_ure by Matlow and James were overridden: conference knew the difference between Drew's accusation and the real thing.

Trotsky's reply to Brockway showed him at his most vituperative.² An inability to see more in the war than a struggle between two dictators displayed 'the moral impotence of pacifism'. But it was the reversal of the vote which incensed Trotsky most: Maxton, 'putting the revolver of an ultimatum at the breast of the conference', was no less dictatorial than Haile Selassie or Mussolini; and Brockway's incorrigible centrism was illustrated by the higher value he put on Maxton's chairmanship than on a principal policy plank. 'That', observed Trotsky, 'is the fate of centrism - to consider the incidental seriously and the serious thing incidental.' He concluded that the I.L.P. cause was hopeless and that the thirty nine firm delegates must seek ways of building a truly revolutionary party.³

* * * * *

Disagreements over what was the best next step after Keighley shattered the Marxist Group. It split three ways: those who thought that the I.L.P. phase might usefully be prolonged; those who felt an independent organisation might now be launched with success; and those who, after Trotsky, believed the time was now ripe for entering the Labour Party.

1 The New Leader, 17 April 1936.

2 'On Dictators and the Heights of Oslo', Writings : 1935-36, 22 April 1936, 75-6. As he remarked, he did not live in Oslo, nor was that capital situated on the heights.

3 ibid. See also 'Our Kinds of Optimism', 27 April 1936, Writings : Supplement (1934-40), 684-5.

Cooper, Pawsey, Ballard and Marzillier advocated the first option. Unity was the issue of the hour. The turn of the C.P.G.B. from sectarian opposition to the united front to unity at any price was permitting Citrine and others to use their slogans in order to sell an anti-working class policy. It was but a short step to conceding communist affiliation to the Labour Party, argued Cooper et. al. Trotskyism should oppose C.P.G.B. affiliation to the Labour Party on the grounds that it would create a powerful opportunist front:¹ correct propaganda about real unity would expose the communist drift as a betrayal. While the Marxist Group itself might eventually desire affiliation, it could only be on a principled basis and it would arise from present preparations.

Cooper and his colleagues believed mass work to be the task of the hour; their construction of mass work was involvement in the unions, factories and co-ops. Trade Unions ranked first in importance, and from them would be won the most active Fourth Internationalists. Even a short spell in the Labour Party (the only kind they would countenance) was permissible only within this framework. Gains in the Labour Party would be directed to the unions, so that a ready basis would be prepared for the political split from the Labour Party. The one part of the party where the 'Bolshevik-Leninists' were obliged to work was the Labour League of Youth. But notwithstanding these ruminations about prospects in the Labour Party, Cooper felt the Group must continue in the I.L.P. with a short term split perspective. A national campaign should aim at splitting off the best elements from the I.L.P. leadership, (Cooper showed prudence in not filling in any

¹ 'Once inside the Labour Party, it will grow and become a mighty ally of the 'Labour Lieutenants of Capitalism'. There it will be a thousand times more dangerous and difficult to crush.' (Unity and the C.P. affiliation to the L.P., Warwick M.S.S. 15/4/1/14, n.d.)

names at this point). Failing an intervening crisis, the Group should leave at the next I.L.P. conference. As for the 'consolidated' Bolshevik-Leninist forces, if there was a chance of returning to the Labour Party, it would be impossible to ignore the presence there of others claiming to stand for the Fourth International. Cooper and his comrades stood for the amalgamation of all Bolshevik-Leninists at the time of the Marxist Group's rupture with the I.L.P. provided there was an agreement on a short-term Labour Party perspective and adequate provision for organising mass work. If the Marxist Group chose an immediate walk-out from the I.L.P., Cooper proposed an organisational break so that those who believed I.L.P. work might still be fruitful could continue. The rest could join the other Bolshevik-Leninists in the Labour Party. Thus was the seed sown in December 1933, beginning to sprout weeds.

There was in fact a laughable disparity between the imposing list of tasks drawn up by Cooper and the size - even the potential - of the Marxist Group. In one document he proposed the drafting of all available forces into the Labour League of Youth, that Marxist Group members be the most active I.L.P.ers, the building up of the I.L.P.'s skeletal fractions in the unions, and, altogether, 'concentrated, ceaseless, wholehearted activity'. It seems unlikely that Marxist Group membership exceeded fifty at the time of the Keighley conference: the Cooper document gives the impression that he had an audience of thousands.

The second group gathered around C.L.R. James, for whom some sort of party position remained open even after Keighley. He was still able to write to The New Leader.¹ He was in touch with publishers and was to be the first British Trotskyist to make a substantial theoretical

¹ 'Fighting for the Abyssinian Emperor', a letter of July 1936.

contribution. But James's energies had been sparked by the I.L.P. line on Abyssinia: now, as Trotsky had observed, the serious was trivial. Without an anti-imperialist stance the I.L.P. was a meaningless arena. Yet the Labour Party was more repellent still.

A document of this period¹ has survived, which may have expressed James's own views. It analysed the Communist and Labour Parties and found the only movements of note among the I.L.P. left and the Labour League of Youth. 'Of political groupings the I.L.P. alone moves towards a correct revolutionary line.' The author conjured up the fantasy of expulsions from the Labour Party, with the victims moving towards the I.L.P. - the reverse of what was actually happening. In the Labour Party, Trotskyists ('theoretically equipped workers') would be used by the bureaucracy against the communists. Rather than repeat there the experience of being used by Maxton it was better to stay aloof. The author proposed no single party commitment but Fourth International Groups which would bisect partisan boundaries. This grandiose perspective flowed from a gross overstatement of Marxist Group strength. The author believed it was one-third of the active London I.L.P. membership and an important influence in the North-West. He reeled off an impressive list of branches that the I.L.P. could not afford to lose: this in turn meant that the Marxist Group could do anything it liked. Such a struggle could not be waged in the Labour Party, the officialdom of which was much more entrenched. Objections to joining it were: that unlike the French socialist party it was at a low level of political life; that the fight within it would be on organisational and not political grounds; that Group members would become embroiled in routine non-political activity; that Labour Party work easily led to neglect of the unions; that the Group would be too weak to prevent

¹ Bolshevik-Leninists and the I.L.P., Warwick M.S.S. 15/4/1/7. n.d.

a mass exodus of the best militants from Labour - the cream might pass the group by; that Labour Party entry would be misunderstood by the 'leftward masses' as a move to the right or dishonest; finally, that membership could easily lead to opportunism, along which road Groves and Harber were considered to be travelling already.

These were objections in principle to membership of the Labour Party: they would apply at any time. The whole drift of Trotsky's argument in the thirties was that this sort of ideological baggage was too crushing a burden to be carried by the small groups who followed him. A sense of proportion was entirely absent. Who were these 'leftward masses' who would misconstrue a move to the Labour Party by the Marxist Group? Certainly not the I.L.P., now shrunk to a fifth of its former size. Nor the C.P.G.B. whose members were opposed to Trotskyism wherever it surfaced. And the Labour Party 'masses' would surely not be repelled because Trotskyists joined their party; it marked a step towards them, not away. Indeed it was the right wing, not the left, who sought to keep revolutionaries out.

A lingering love for the I.L.P. pervaded these lines. Their author proposed a split at the next conference, in the event that the party failed to adopt a minimum programme. Leaving the I.L.P. intact, he argued, would be to permit the continued existence of a dangerous rump. Abandoning a smashed I.L.P. would mean carrying a large body of sympathisers.

The third strand of the rope comprised those who were for entering the Labour Party, and joining Harber who was already there. They had the inestimable advantage of support from Trotsky himself, who ridiculed any 'independent' posturing. The Marxist Group was so tiny that its policies were barely noticeable in any case. 'A few

hundred comrades is not a revolutionary party.¹ Their job was to oppose reformism within the mass parties. Debating whether or not to support communist affiliation was an irrelevant luxury while one was isolated from the mass party. And the mass party was the Labour Party. Clinging to the I.L.P. was ridiculous. Its best members would leave in any case, and the time spent on them might be passed more profitably with the hundreds of potential Labour Party recruits.² 'We are' observed Trotsky, 'too generous with our time'.

Trotsky advised the group to pick an issue that would have a wide impact and break with the I.L.P. on that. Not the dispute over fraction rights in the party but 'a political issue comprehensible to the broad mass of workers': the committal of it to the Fourth International thesis perhaps, or even I.L.P. affiliation to the Labour Party.

Trotsky impatiently flicked aside any hairsplitting about methods of joining the Labour Party. Whether as a faction or as individuals the important thing was to get in. Once there the Bolshevik-Leninists would establish themselves by their attacks on centrism, not by their critique of the leadership. That, like raising the banner of the Fourth International, could wait until their footing in the Labour Party was more sure.

Of course, re-entry into the Labour Party brought again to the surface relations with others aligning themselves to the Fourth International. Trotsky stood for unity. He urged that every effort be made to merge with Groves and Dewar in order to utilize the Red Flag, now appearing again after an eighteen month silence. Resistance to

1 'Interview by Collins', Summer 1936, Writings : 1935-36, 76.

2 'In any event, the suggestion of a time limit such as the next annual conference of the I.L.P. in April is incomprehensible to me. The European situation is developing so rapidly that history will not wait for the I.L.P. conference.', *ibid.*

unity by Groves and Dewar would result in their members joining the Marxist Group, now in the Labour Party. Failure to obtain access to the Red Flag might mean a new Marxist Group paper in the Labour Party, or the launching of a 'Lenin Club' independent of all parties which would also have a paper. But again, in the case of the Lenin Club, Trotsky insisted that it must be an organisation for all Bolshevik-Leninists.

Harber and C.L.R. James attended a conference of the I.C.L. on July 29-31 1936 at 'Geneva'¹ with two observers.² Conference discussed Britain and concluded that the existence of three groups was a luxury since no 'apparent political divergencies' divided them.³ Geneva was not neutral on the tactical issue however. It passed a resolution regretting the absence of the Marxist League, and its failure to submit a political statement, and insisted that the Marxist Group once and for all transfer its interests from the I.L.P. to the Labour Party and the League of Youth. The I.L.P., declared the resolution, was not a good base from which to conduct the trade union work proposed by Cooper, and it set up an inpenetrable barrier between the Bolshevik-Leninists and the mass youth movement: 'It is necessary to understand not only when it is fruitful for the revolutionary Marxist to enter a

- 1 This conference, like that of 1938, was held in a Paris suburb. For security reasons the venue was referred to as 'Geneva'.
- 2 The Marxist League was invited, but failed to attend 'for material reasons'. Harber would have participated in the Youth conference with which the main conference concluded on 1 August, and at which a report from England was given. The Youth conference adopted the F.I. Youth theses and elected a new Youth Bureau of nine.
- 3 None of the three groups was allowed to be the British Section, yet all three stood for the Fourth International. Conference only devoted a small amount of its time to Britain. For the main theses and resolutions of the conference, see Documents of the Fourth International, (New York, 1973), 84-152.

reformist or centrist organisation, but also when it is imperative that they leave it and implant their movement and ideas in other milieu'.

A surprising concession was made in the resolution to the Marxist Group which was virtually invited to launch a journal, The Fourth International,¹ the reception of which by the I.L.P. would speedily convince them to leave. But a caveat was attached even here in the form of a warning of the dangers of the Group being without a clear perspective for so long.

Back in the I.L.P. a party plebiscite had confirmed the second decision of Keighley on workers' sanctions. This drew a definite ceiling on the growth potential of the Marxist Group. Within the Group support was growing for pulling out.² Passage of the Geneva resolution and the pace of events in Britain led to the first national meeting of British Bolshevik-Leninists being convened for 11 October.³ The day before, a Marxist Group gathering met to debate further its internal differences. At the Marxist Group meeting, C.L.R. James proposed that all Bolshevik-Leninists should join in one independent central organisation. Since this would still be small, faction work would be undertaken, but loyalty would be to the centre for whose sake recruitment would be made. This centre would issue the independent journal

1 This was to appear as Fight!, with 'For the Fourth International' beneath the masthead. See below.

2 Leigh Davis and Starkey Jackson argued for a majority of the Group to enter the Labour Party, Socialist League and League of Youth, leaving a small independent organisation outside. Within the Labour Party all Bolshevik-Leninists ought to fuse, publish a paper and set the objective of a short term split. (The Role and Tasks of the British Bolshevik-Leninists, (Sept. 1936), H.P., D.J.H. 5/3). For awareness that the wisest step would have been a split at Geneva, see Anon., Towards a New Revolutionary Party, [Sept. 1936], HP, DJH 5/1. This author argued for a full and open conference to turn all Trotskyists towards the Labour Party.

3 That weekend the Marxist Group, in collaboration with the other Trotskyist factions launched Fight! For the Fourth International in response to the invitation of the Geneva conference. The first issue of this newspaper sold 1,800 copies.

of the Fourth International.¹

Cooper and his allies claimed an equal commitment to unification. Unlike James they set their tactical proposals in a political perspective. It was a pre-war period and, moreover, one in which the proletariat had regained its confidence internationally. The Bolshevik-Leninists' task was therefore to wield a mass influence with minimum restraint on speech and action. Militancy was at present expressed largely on the industrial plane; its political reflection was pale, except in the Labour League of Youth, which 'offers great opportunities for the Bolshevik-Leninist group to gain the leadership'. The Socialist League was a petit-bourgeois trend in which the Trotskyist position need be stated no more. The C.P.G.B. was prepared 'to crawl still further' towards the union bureaucracy to achieve Labour Party affiliation. The I.L.P. appeared revolutionary by comparison with the Labour and Communist Parties, but was disintegrating organisationally and drifting towards political futility: there was a danger that its membership would, by stages, be stampeded into the popular front. Here was the kernel of the Cooper case. He believed the I.L.P. was a hindrance to the development of Trotskyism, but its decline did not necessarily mean extinction. Simply pulling out might allow the best elements to rally round the leadership leaving a potentially dangerous centrist party like the German U.S.P.D. or the

¹ The account which follows is drawn entirely from For Discussion (Internal Bulletin of British Bolshevik-Leninists), 28 Nov. 1936, M.S.S. 15/4/1/15, the only account of the meeting extant.

P.O.U.M. in Spain.¹

'Any split-perspective must be aimed at the decisive smashing of this party. In the process of splitting the best elements must be won against the leadership and for a mass exit.'²

For Cooper great freedom of action was still possible in the I.L.P., whereas Labour Party activities could only be generally left. It was the unions and the Co-ops which offered the chance to pursue political demands. Cooper reiterated his conclusions drawn earlier in the year: work should be centrally coordinated; all available forces should work in the unions; all available forces should also be drafted into the Labour League of Youth, but Labour Party involvement should be of a short term character preliminary to launching an open revolutionary party. As for the Marxist Group in the I.L.P., all its members must work for 'a short term split perspective'. Those who did not feel they could do so should leave and join the other Bolshevik-Leninists in the Labour Party.

1 Trotsky had urged the tiny Spanish Bolshevik-Leninist Group to join the leftward moving Socialist Party of Largo Caballero. They rejected his advice, unifying instead with the left nationalist group around Joaquim Maurin to form the Workers' Party of Marxist Unity, (P.O.U.M.). This party achieved significant support among the working class, notably in Catalonia up to the time of its suppression after the Barcelona events of May 1937. But the absence of Trotskyism from the Socialist Party facilitated a communist entry far more extensive than that carried out in Britain. In 1935, the whole Spanish Socialist Youth, which the previous year had invited the Trotskyists to join them, declared for the Third International. The communists were eventually to become the most powerful political force in the Republic, but the P.O.U.M. was to disappear. For a contemporary Trotskyist appraisal see F. Morrow, Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain (first published New York 1937, 1975 ed.).

2 A. Cooper et al., 'Tasks of British Bolshevik-Leninists' *ibid.*, 7.

The third position was that advanced by Collins, whose interview with Trotsky on tactics in Britain had been circulated during the summer.¹ He had been denied minority representation at the joint conference due to take place the next day, despite the preponderance of the full Marxist Group vote.

Collins's paper was a precis of Trotsky's replies to his interview. He only added that the Marxist Group's theoretic acceptance of the need one day to leave the I.L.P. was avoiding the issue. An umbilical cord tied them to the I.L.P. Meanwhile European revolutionary developments were preparing a similar pattern in Britain, and the communists were meeting with great success in their unity campaign and penetration of the Labour League of Youth. No justification remained for staying within the I.L.P., which was not a mass party but a small propaganda machine. There was no longer even the excuse that the I.L.P. line was the most nearly correct of all parties, since Maxton was beginning to slide towards a popular front. The urgent need was for a break with the I.L.P. within a few weeks.

In this discussion on 10 October, it rapidly became clear that James was proposing a complete reshuffling of members between the groups. Essentially he and Cooper rejected Labour Party entry whether for immediate independence or for an extended stay in the I.L.P.; they were united in their opposition to the view expressed by Trotsky and by the International Secretariat, which James had heard at Geneva.

Those broadly on this side of the argument questioned Trotsky's grasp of the organisational structure of the labour movement in Britain. Had he had greater authority among British Bolshevik-Leninists the discussion might have been constructively resolved. As it was all

¹ Trotsky had emphatically supported the thesis, advocated by Matlow, that there should be immediate entry into the Labour Party. Cooper's views on the matter had, he thought, 'no relationship to Marxism at all' ('Interview by Collins', Summer 1936, Writings (1935-36), 76-7).

sorts of discontents surfaced. Liverpool (Don James), Islington (Collins) and Glasgow were not prepared to stay in the I.L.P. any longer. Matlow, now in the Labour Party, was quoted to the effect that the Marxist Group had become integrated in the I.L.P. Don James observed that internal life had ceased within the group: no bulletin had appeared since before Keighley, when the group should have been preparing to split.

Harber, like Matlow, was already in the Labour Party, and attended this preliminary meeting as a fraternal delegate. He claimed that the fecundity of the Labour Party was illustrated by the growth of his L.L.O.Y. group in London from six to sixty since February 1936. Twelve were old Bolshevik-Leninists, thirteen from the Marble Arch group¹ and the rest new recruits. But those who had stayed in the I.L.P. rested on a majority in the Group. A Don James amendment to C.L.R. James's resolution, putting the Geneva resolution position was lost eight to thirteen, and C.L.R. was also proof against an amendment to his statement from Cooper calling for a continued commitment to the I.L.P. This fell ten to thirteen. James's original resolution was passed eleven to ten, and Cooper's full statement was also carried in amended form, thirteen to eight. This left the Marxist Group in rejection of Trotsky's view and the urgings of the International, with James's resolution as the basis on which it would approach the other two groups the following day.

11 October saw the first broad gathering of the Trotskyists since December 1933. Thirty nine Marxist Group delegates were present and twenty six from the Labour Party group (the 'Bolshevik-Leninists', those largely in the Labour League of Youth). The Marxist League sent three delegates and there were 'fraternal delegates and unattached

¹ A loose association of those prepared to sell Fourth International literature in Central London. See Chapter VII.

comrades' in attendance as well. The Marxist League's attitude was that the widest possible diffusion of Bolshevik-Leninists was desirable. This view was no surprise, being essentially a restatement of the Communist League majority view. The League believed itself free of blame for the division of forces in Britain but also held that some degree of cooperation might now be achieved. To the Marxist League the present discussion oscillated between false parameters. Taking 'a purely formal decision' between the reformist Labour Party and the centrist I.L.P. did not raise the Bolshevik-Leninists' status in the eyes of the advanced workers. Rather than appear like splitters the Marxist Group ought to set out its programme and seek to win the I.L.P. to it. Agitation around the demand for the Fourth International might be a bridge across which local Labour parties could become involved. Abandoning the I.L.P. for the Labour Party because it did not support a Fourth International was asking to become a laughing stock.

The League went further: it believed the time for exclusive work in the Labour Party was coming to an end. Growing collaboration of the Labour Party with the government would drive the workers leftward,¹ possibly in the direction of a new revolutionary party comprising the left, the League of Youth, and the I.L.P. To achieve this there was required simultaneous pressure from within the Labour Party and the I.L.P. A concerted drive by the Bolshevik-Leninists would bring the creation of the new revolutionary section nearer.

The Marxist Group was governed by its decisions of the previous day. It would work towards unity along the lines proposed in some detail by C.L.R. James, but it would simultaneously intensify its I.L.P. activities in order to speed up perspectives.

¹ This idea is developed by Trotsky himself in Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay.

After the Marxist Group, the Bolshevik-Leninists in the Labour Party represented the most sizeable force. Essentially they were a fusion of Roma Dewar, and her associates who had published the Youth Militant,¹ and those members of the Marxist Group who had already joined the Labour Party. They reported sixty members in London, forty of whom were in the Labour League of Youth, plus small groups in Norwich and Sheffield.² Sales of Youth Militant had more than trebled from their March total of 250. The Bolshevik-Leninists clearly believed their own rapid growth in 1936 stemmed from the opportunities offered by the Labour Party. Part of the strength of this group was that it stood on the Geneva resolution. It was able to complain that its attempts to fuse with Groves had been unavailing; a joint E.C. with the Marxist Group had functioned however and guided common activities such as trade union work and agitation over the Moscow Trials.³ The Bolshevik-Leninists now went further, and offered to cooperate on the basis of the James resolution from the Marxist Group.

The three groups, as represented at the meeting agreed to appoint two representatives each to form a central coordinating committee. The C.C.C. would oversee each faction's journal and keep them as supplements rather than competitors; it would produce a regular bulletin; it would draw up joint plans and theses to be presented to separate aggregates and a delegate conference.

While the national meeting went on to discuss Spain and the Trials, unity was felt by all concerned to be the main achievement. They were cruelly deceived. After the meeting the Bolshevik-Leninists

1 See Chapter VII.

2 Total membership was claimed to be around eighty with fifty contacts.

3 See Chapter VI.

in the Labour Party reflected belatedly on why the Marxist Group had passed the Cooper paper with its I.L.P. perspective. They decided to reject organisational fusion until there was some definite agreement on tactics; they also condemned the Marxist League for still being unprepared to enter an immediate fusion. The Bolshevik-Leninists declared themselves ready for fusion with any Fourth International Group which could reach agreement on tactics on the basis of the Geneva resolution. Since it was precisely the Geneva resolution which divided the groups, this was disingenuous.

While the Bolshevik-Leninists pulled away from the Marxist Group, the Group itself changed. On 15 November C.L.R. James, with the support of Ballard (who earlier had backed Cooper) convinced the Group to break free of the I.L.P.¹ There should be, it resolved, an independent organisation of the Fourth International in Britain. Factions might be permissible, but they would be subordinate to the main task of establishing a separate identity. There was to be an immediate split from the I.L.P. with the aim of launching the Fourth International.² On 21 November the Group informed the Bureau for the Fourth International of its decision, and set about preparing the next issue of Fight! as an independent paper.

The Marxist Group's rapid shift did not please the Bureau. At a 13 December meeting it declared the decision for 'independence' invalid: it rested solely on a sixteen to six decision of the London group to reverse a vote taken only four weeks earlier; there was no fundamental discussion involving all members; no balance sheet had been drawn up. The decision of James and his comrades to opt for

1 For Discussion (28 Nov. 1936), 18.

2 The decision for independence was taken sixteen to six at a meeting of London members of the Group.

leaving the I.L.P. tacitly confirmed the Geneva resolution. The Bureau still found it reprehensible since no honest accounting of the I.L.P. experience had been made, and particularly since James's continued presence in the party had contributed to the decay within the group which was now advanced as a reason for leaving. Departing in this way started the independent group on false premises: 'instead of repairing the damage you will greatly increase it'.

James's predicted numerical reinforcement had not materialised. Cooper's anticipated mass withdrawal had not occurred. The Marxist Group had, in six months, recruited no-one and lost half its members. No member of the I.L.P. was likely to follow such a group into isolation; some might well opt for the nascent Labour left however.¹

And there was a further ground for criticism. The impromptu split from the I.L.P. would not only have negative impact, but it would also obstruct the fusion of all groups deemed a necessity by the Geneva conference. James rejected fusion. The Bolshevick-Leninists were growing rapidly with a principal aim 'to inoculate British youth against the Stalinist plague', that is, to prevent a repetition of the events in Spain or Belgium. Fusion would strengthen the serum; but fusion was now impossible.

Meanwhile important developments were unfolding within the Labour Party, where a left analogous to that of the French and Belgian Socialist Parties was crystallizing:

¹ James had written to Brockway declaring the intention to withdraw and form a separate organisation. Brockway circulated his branches on 5 December 1936 estimating that only thirty members of the I.L.P. would be involved, mostly in London but possibly in Liverpool too. (Jupp, op. cit., 233-4; The New Leader, 11 Dec. 1936).

'Only someone politically blind could fail to see that the Bolshevik-Leninists, protected by the growing opposition coming from the radicalised worker masses demanding democracy in the Party, contains enormous possibilities of development.'

The Bureau impatiently swept away James's pretensions. The split of this left wing away from Labour would not lead to it falling in behind the tiny Marxist Group:

It is only in the closest contact with this Left Wing, it is only as active members of this Left Wing, that you will obtain sufficient possibilities of influencing it, to win the revolutionary part of it for Bolshevik-Leninism. From outside, you will be regarded as impotent and hopeless sectarians, who fear contact with the masses, but who want to impose themselves on the masses from outside as sage counsellors. ²

The Marxist Group offer to help the Bolshevik-Leninists in the Labour Party was in reality no help, declared the Bureau. The Labour Party Fourth Internationalists were 'severe opponents of this over-hasty independence' which could only harm them by contagion. And in any case practical experience argued against the feasibility of such joint operations.

The Marxist Group was, concluded the Bureau, most likely to cultivate sectarian and opportunist tendencies within itself which would fasten on personal *chique* politics. It was already 'full of personal bitterness', unlike the Fourth Internationalists in the

1 Declaration of the International Bureau For the Fourth International on the subject of the English Marxist Group, (13 Dec. 1936, 4).

2 *ibid.*, 5.

Labour League of Youth. In practical terms therefore the Bureau called for a new decision by the Marxist Group recognising the opinions of these who had voted with their feet by joining the Labour Party. There should be a constituent conference of all of those who recognised the authority of the Geneva conference to create a single homogenous organisation. The majority view of the English Bolshevik-Leninists must prevail: anything less than a majority would not automatically enjoy relations with the Secretariat.

Before the view of the Bureau reached Britain, the Marxist Group had taken irrevocable steps. The second issue of Fight! was not the product of cooperation with the other factions but a plain appeal for an independent presence. On 16 December the first open meeting of the Group declared itself as an independent party for the Fourth International.

Some years later Trotsky reflected on the Marxist Group experience:

It seems to me that our comrades who entered the I.L.P. had the same experience with the I.L.P. that our American comrades made with the Socialist Party. But not all our comrades entered the I.L.P. and they developed an opportunistic policy so far as I could observe and that is why their experience in the I.L.P. was not so good. The I.L.P. remained almost as it was before, while the Socialist Party is now empty. ¹

And yet the American Trotskyists came out of the Socialist Party much strengthened and ready to form the S.W.P. The Marxist Group made progress for nearly two years and no serious accusations of

¹ 'Fighting Against The Stream' (a conversation in Mexico with an English Fourth Internationalist (C.L.R. James), April. 1939) Writings 1938-9, 150n.

opportunism could be levelled before autumn 1935. Nor was the I.L.P. largely unchanged: by 1936 it was a shrunken shell and replaced as an alternative to Labour by the Communist Party.¹ But the Marxist Group failed in the objective of winning the whole I.L.P. and even in the lesser one of splitting a large portion away. Nor can the limited success of the C.P.G.B. be attributed to Trotskyist intervention. The best that can be claimed is that Trotskyism did not become extinct, that the existence of an alternative Marxist critique was maintained which the communists sometimes had to challenge. But the chaos in the Marxist Group during 1936 demonstrated again the preoccupation of Trotskyists with internal and secondary tactical disputes while great events were taking place.

1 Even in October 1936 however the communists were still concerned about a possible Trotskyist takeover of the I.L.P. See R.P. Arnot's fears in London Monthly, quoted in B. Pearce, 'The British Stalinists and the Moscow Trials', in M. Woodhouse and B. Pearce, op,cit., 225.

V THE COMMUNIST LEAGUE AND THE MARXIST LEAGUE,JANUARY 1934 - OCTOBER 1937.

The Communist League did not remain long outside all parties. By the middle of 1934 discussions were taking place about joining not the I.L.P. but the Labour Party, and it quickly entered that autumn. Within the Labour Party it rediscovered access to a South London following and found a ready platform in the Socialist League. For a time it ceased to be an identifiable faction, but began again in 1936 as the Marxist League, principal exponent of Trotskyist views and opponent of the Unity Campaign from within the Socialist League. The demise of the Socialist League in 1937 ended effective activity despite attempts to replace it, and the Marxist League dissolved that October.

* * * * *

The Communist League complained to the I.S. that the December 1933 split flouted majority rule. In a sharp reply it was told that respect for majorities had to be earned and that there were international as well as national boundaries to them.¹ The I.S. further considered the C.L. narrow in outlook and experience² and effectively withdrew official status from it.³

1 'The I.S. Reply To The British Majority', 23 Jan. 1934, Writings : Supplement, (1934-40), 440. In 1947 when a split over entry also took place the International again backed a Minority and there was a reversal of roles with an international leadership acting against established leaders in Britain.

2 This reference to the C.P.G.B. background of many in the C.L. was not absolutely correct since there were ex-Marxist League members among them. It could also be argued that by its desultory fashion of joining the I.L.P. the Minority had shown itself devoid of that very communist quality, organisational discipline.

3 *ibid.*, 441. Trotsky's draft of this letter was refashioned by Bauer with the chief effect of explicitly taking away British Section status and conferring sympathising status on both Majority and Minority, *ibid.*, 892n. The League shortly concluded that struggling for status in the I.C.L. was 'a losing battle', (Warwick M.S.S., n.d., (Jan. or Feb?) 1934).

The split was a blow, as eleventh hour concessions by the Majority indicated. Yet the C.L. was now free of pressure from an international body in whose grasp of British affairs it did not have complete confidence. Events were to give some support to the argument that the C.L. rather than the international was in closest touch with affairs in Britain. When the new national committee met early in the year it held a broad discussion about entrism¹ and showed awareness of Labour's rising fortunes and the importance of this for Trotskyist growth: the Communist League would have to be part of the movement to put Labour back in power.²

The C.L. view was now that the fragile eggs of Trotskyism could not be entrusted only to the leaky basket of the I.L.P. Indeed Dewar and Groves were coming to believe that of the internationals only the second looked likely to revive.³ The Red Flag perceived a strong link between the fortunes of social democrats everywhere. Most notably the great Labour victory in the L.C.C. elections of March 1934 was connected with the decision of socialists in Vienna to mount armed

- 1 Notes for guidance at this meeting under the title Our Attitude to the Labour Party have been located. There are two drafts: one - apparently the earlier - is dated 20 Jan. 1934 (Warwick M.S.S.)
- 2 Labour's electoral revival of the early 1930s is discussed by C.T. Stannage, 'The East Fulham by-election, 25 Oct. 1933', Historical Journal, Vol. 14, (1971), 165-200 and R. Heller, 'East Fulham Revisited', J.C.H., Vol. 6, no. 3, (1971), 172-96. See also M. Ceadel, 'Interpreting East Fulham', in C. Cook and J. Ramsden (eds.), By-elections in British Politics, (1973), 118-39 and The Red Flag, (Jan. 1934).
- 3 R. Groves to Sara [Feb.? 1934].

resistance to Dollfuss.¹ The C.L. strongly backed Labour in the elections. To communist criticisms it replied:

Actually the result of the election was a striking confirmation of the opinion previously expressed - that the anger of the workers against the National Government would find its expression at the present stage, through the Labour Party: that the policy of contesting any or every constituency would only result in the further isolation of the revolutionary movement.²

Like Harber in the I.L.P. at this time Groves was sensitive to Labour's revival. The Red Flag even argued that a rising vote indicated an industrial upswing also.³ The League was becoming scornful of any activities outside official movements. It admonished communist fondness for rank and file organisations⁴ and scorned the I.L.P. for turning towards the C.P.G.B. rather than the Labour Party and trade unions.

1 The Red Flag, (March-April 1934). The C.L. detected a feeling of hope in the labour movement in 1934 as a result of these struggles, (interview with H. Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979).

2 *ibid.*

3 In its January 1934 issue.

4 The Red Flag presented rank and file trade unionism as the result of false political perspectives: economic recession, it argued, meant a weaker not a stronger movement. New unions or workers' councils meant only isolation. Even the usefulness of the N.U.W.M. was doubted: the T.U.C. or Trades Councils could develop far more impressive agitation over unemployment. Yet N.U.W.M. success was due if anything to resistance by its leaders to King Street directives. See H. McShane and J. Smith, Harry McShane : No Mean Fighter, (1976), 215, *passim*.
For the N.U.W.M. generally, W. Hannington, Unemployed Struggles, 1918-1936, (1977, first published 1936).

Communist League advice did not rest upon underpinning official activities. Part of its argument about the orientation of the N.U.W.M. was that within the mainstream the movement would have to broaden its political outlook. Yet at least until the middle of 1934 the Communist League was still issuing ultimatums to the labour movement. When the I.L.P. - C.P.G.B. drive for May Day brought forth only a limited response, it concluded:

'.....it drives home the very real and urgent need for the assembling of all left wing (sic) and revolutionaries behind the banner of the Communist League, as a step towards the establishment in this country of a new fighting party of the British workers.'¹

In the pages of The Red Flag a critique of the I.L.P. and the communists, similar to that of the Marxist Group, is made. But the C.L. was in an inferior position to make it since there was no reason why it should be able to participate in debate.² Until the Communist League entered the Labour Party after the summer, it lacked a positive direction for its work and its energies were apparently diffused in several directions.

Internally, League affairs were not happy. Groves thought the national committee 'very feeble' and functioning as a collection of factions rather than as a national body.³ The League's main strength was the two strong locals of Balham and Chelsea, though there were

1 The Red Flag, (May-June 1934).

2 'Will the I.L.P. Break at York', The Red Flag, (March-April 1934). The article argues that the 'nerveless hands' of I.L.P.ers must save their party and turn it to the Fourth International.

3 R. Groves, Warwick M.S.S., (Jan. or Feb.?) 1934. Hugo Dewar was secretary of the N.C. which was seven strong.

several smaller local groups.¹ It had a definite asset in The Red Flag² and continued to turn out its distinctively produced leaflets on issues of the hour.³ But there is no evidence of significant growth by the League⁴ in its phase of standing apart from all parties, although it had survived against predictions.⁵

The League's international standing was uncertain. It had lost official status but was still part of the I.C.L. It continued to campaign for the Fourth International yet apparently took no part in gatherings of that body.⁶ It was approached by Albert Weisbord, whose

1 L. Bradley, untitled Warwick M.S.S. (n.d.). Bradley, a member of the Chelsea Group brought onto the N.C. after the split, proposed a tighter, more centralised structure and made severe criticisms of the League's failure to intervene effectively at a recent Conference of Action.

2 The Red Flag failed to appear in December 1933, and in the new year sometimes came out in joint issues.

3 See below and also the leaflet Five Communist Reasons for Voting Labour, an early attempt at Labour Party orientation, issued during a 1934 by-election at Hammersmith North.

4 High spots in 1934 were the recruitment of five expelled Croydon communists and three from Tottenham, (The Red Flag, Oct. 1934).

5 The Red Flag, (May-June 1934). On 3 May, Stuart Purkis resigned from the League. No reason was given in his letter of resignation but he had dragged his feet at the time of the turn away from Communist Parties a year earlier. Purkis now concentrated on trade union activity rising to the position of executive member of the R.C.A. and president of the St. Pancras Trades Council. He continued to assist his comrades from time to time, notably during the Moscow Trials.

6 No-one from Britain attended the I.C.L. plenum of October 14-16 1934. Only Harber and Kirby joined the extended plenum of the following spring.

Communist League of Struggle had split from the American movement¹ but continued in correspondence with Trotsky.² Perhaps a prime catalyst of continued loyalty to the I.C.L. was the League's growing interest in social democracy, which was paralleled by the thinking of Trotsky and the International.³ The Red Flag policy of faithfully publishing the writings of the Opposition leader now brought it the reward of articles which supported its own inclinations.⁴

Yet this did not imply monolithic support in the Communist League for Trotsky's views. The publication of War and the Fourth International,⁵ a manifesto which decisively wrote off the Comintern and the Labour and Socialist International and anticipated the

- 1 Albert Weisbord (1900-77) expressed disquiet to Henry Sara about the role the I.S. had played in the December 1933 split in the Communist League and called for an international congress of Opposition groups. (A. Weisbord to Sara, 6 June and 9 July 1934, Warwick M.S.S. 15/3/1/54 and 55). The Red Flag contented itself with announcing in its April-May issue that a plenum of the I.C.L. was to thrash out the British problem.
- 2 In July Trotsky wrote to all the British groups seeking their attendance at a proposed international conference where a British Commission comprised of 'our best international comrades' would with their help determine perspectives. [Trotsky] to [British groups], n.d., Warwick M.S.S. This may have been an early attempt to convene the conference which actually met in July 1936.
- 3 Trotsky had now concluded that the trade unions were the most important field of work and that 'the I.L.P., in this respect, is becoming more of a handicap than an aid', *ibid.* In the late summer of 1934 the French Bolshevik-Leninist group entered the S.F.I.O., not without internal anguish, but under pressure from Trotsky.
- 4 'V', 'The French League and the Socialist Party', The Red Flag (Nov. 1934). This was a compression of two articles from Trotsky which urged the French turn. They were pseudonymous because of the conditions attached to his presence in France.
- 5 Writings (1933-34), 299-330.

Transitional Programme of 1938 in its catastrophist predictions provoked a minor crisis. War and the Fourth International, together with Trotsky's urgent appeals for unity in France¹ had the effect of predicting an immediate decision between fascism and revolution. In Britain, Lee Bradley demanded clarification as to how an immediate perspective of civil war accorded with C.L. support for the return of a Labour Government. Since the Fourth International was so weak it needed to gather strength before it could bring the social crisis to a head.² If anything, this marked a misconstruction of War and the Fourth International, since its author was also forcefully advocating entrism by the French, Belgian and, soon, the American Trotskyists. Trotsky's argument was that the case for a united front against fascism was best advanced from within a mass party. The League as a whole rested strongly on Trotsky's analysis of fascism in Germany³ with its powerful call for unity, but communism was about to dish Trotskyism en passant by moving towards a united front.

- 1 'France is now the Key to the Situation', (March 1934). Writings (1933-34), 238-44. The article appeared under the title 'For the Fourth International' in The Militant, (New York), 31 March 1934.
- 2 L. Bradley, untitled manuscript, (1934), Warwick M.S.S.
- 3 See Forward Against Fascism, a leaflet forbiddingly sub-titled 'a Thesis for Labour Youth', (July 1934), Warwick M.S.S. 15/3/1/56. See also Groves's review of Fascism and Social Revolution by R.P. Dutt, a book which loaded the blame for Hitler taking power on 'social fascism'. Groves wrote:

'Fascism derives its support from the middle classes and from the lumpen-proletariat. Social Democracy is based upon the workers. Parliament is the main arena of Social Democracy and the workers' organisations upon which it rests.'

(The Red Flag, Aug. 1934)

Growing League interest in the Labour Party culminated in entry into the Balham and Tooting D.L.P. in the summer of 1934.¹ In July of that year dissident members of the Labour League of Youth were urged not to be enticed out of it by the Y.C.L., but to stay in the Labour Party and build a mass base.² Within the League several drafts were made of statements of immediate intent. One by Hanton startlingly concluded that the League should concentrate on the I.L.P.³ This was rejected for Groves's draft, a frank statement of entrust purpose. In its printed version⁴ the C.L. stated it would work loyally in the Labour Party. A new Labour Government would, it believed, be seen by most workers as 'the path to emancipation'; whether it would be a Government of real advance would depend on the success of the left in obtaining commitment to a socialist programme and unity of the labour movement. The present National Government was seen as the last strong popularly elected parliamentary administration of the bourgeoisie. Without labour action, fascism would quickly loom.

Groves spelled out the implications in a gloss.⁵ The time had come, he suggested, to draw conclusions from 1934 discussions on the Labour Party. There must be an end to internal wrangles and spasmodic street activities. In their place must come systematic

1 In July 1934 The Red Flag commended the division's resolution to Labour's annual conference though it need 'clarification in a number of important details'.

2 See Forward Against Fascism.

3 W.G. Hanton, Draft for Immediate Programme, 17 Aug. 1934, Warwick M.S.S. 15/3/1/59.

4 A leaflet printed on both sides, (1934), Warwick M.S.S.

5 Statement to all members concerning the present policy of the League and its International, 23 Aug. 1934, Warwick M.S.S. 15/4/2/12.

fraction work in the Labour Party: this would be the prime means of recruitment to the C.L. For the time being, the League would have to settle for the establishment of a national base, an objective less ambitious than launching the Fourth International.¹ This last argument was not confined to Britain and was vehemently opposed by Trotsky.²

In the Left Socialist Parties there had been great interest in the programme of the Opposition. But horror at Hitler's ability to take power had in the C.L. view, led the mass of people to hurry into ill-conceived unity:³ new alternatives to the major parties had been by-passed and the Fourth International had not been built. It was still needed, 'now more than ever', but until the time was ripe a road to the masses must be found via their day-to-day concerns. Some workers had understood the meaning of recent defeats, and it was to them that The Red Flag would address itself.⁴ The task was complicated by the new advocacy of a united front by communists.⁵ The call for such

- 1 He argued that the reawakened interest of the I.S. in social democracy was 'a striking justification of the stand we had made many months ago, and a tribute, although possibly unintended, to the political sense of the majority comrades', (ibid., 4). While the majority had the previous year proposed a diffusion of energies it had not suggested the concentration on the Labour Party that was now proposed.
- 2 See for example 'To Comrade Sneevliet on the I.A.G. Conference', 26 Feb. 1935, Writings (1934-35), 187-95.
- 3 'We can see now that, whilst, as a result of our work, the reasons for Hitler's victory and the defeat of the workers' organisations were made clear to scores, perhaps hundreds, (the mass) either drew back in confusion or pressed forward for a hurried consolidation of the workers' ranks, irrespective of political ideas or party divisions', (The Red Flag, Oct. 1934).
- 4 It would speak to 'revolutionary Marxists'. In the autumn the enlarged plenum of the I.C.L. declared not an independent party but an instrument for creating them. ('The Present Situation in The Labour Movement and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Leninists', Oct. 14-16, Documents, 61-2).
- 5 One account of the development of Comintern policy, with particular reference to events in France is in J. Braunthal, History of the International, Vol. 2, 1914-1943, 415-46.

an alliance had been a cardinal principle of Trotskyism. Now it was dished by Stalin and Thorez. But the C.L. critique of suspending criticism within a united front could still be made.

The C.L. turn towards the Labour Party is a rare instance from the annals of British Trotskyism where joining or leaving a larger party did not cause a split. Participants recollect that they had a following immediately they joined the Labour Party. Those who were well-known figures in their locality (Wicks in Battersea, Groves in Balham) started with an advantage. In Wimbledon, Henry Sara was short-listed for a parliamentary candidature.¹ Groves was actually selected as delegate from the Balham and Tooting division to the 1934 Labour Party conference with near unanimous backing, though he was in the end barred by the N.E.C.² The division's membership almost trebled in the immediate aftermath of the League moving in. Also on the wider stage, Wicks was now able, as a Labour Party member, to secure a delegate's place at a conference summoned by the London Trades Council, from which body he had been excluded for many years.

The N.E.C. did not prevent the League entering the Labour Party. It was of course tiny in comparison to the C.P.G.B., the main preoccupation of those whose responsibility it was to watch infiltration. The previous year the Labour Party had published The Communist Solar System, a forceful rejection of communist tactics. It may well be that

1 Interview with H. Wicks, (30 Nov. 1979).

2 He was replaced at the last minute by J.N. Pyne, a former Balham Group member. In a speech seconding the reference back of a passage on the united front in the N.E.C. report, Pyne accused the executive of not being serious in its call to boost Labour Party membership since it did not welcome the adherence of a C.L. repelled by dictatorial communist methods, (L.P.C.R. (1934), p.135).

Morrison, its author and hammer of the left throughout the decade, had his own reason for turning his blind eye to the Communist League.¹

The Red Flag appeared in a new series in November, more of a magazine than a paper and carrying trenchant criticisms of the united front as proposed by the communists.² It turned out to be the first and last of the new series. Having marched back into step with the International Communist League, the British seem to have marched away again. For more than a year, until the start of 1936, there is no evidence of internal life inside the C.L. Possibly the loss of a paper which could only claim a limited impact in any case was considered only a small sacrifice for securing a place inside the Labour Party.³ Additionally it could be argued that new arenas of work were opening up. The C.L. was aware of communist penetration of the League of Youth,⁴ but its main interest was the Socialist League.

In November 1934, the Socialist League, which had achieved an important impact on Labour Party conferences, resolved to turn itself into a 'mass organisation'.⁵ This was fortuitous for the C.L.

1 Morrison might never have quoted British Trotskyists against the C.P.G.B., but he did use Trotsky himself in this way to rebut left critics of the S.P.D.'s part in failing to prevent Hitler coming to power:

'Trotsky himself has criticised the Communist International for its handling of the situation, and Trotsky is right and Miss Wilkinson is wrong.'

(L.P.C.R., (1933), 221)

Morrison was to be well informed about Trotskyist movements in Britain for a decade. He may have appreciated that only an ex-C.P.G.B. member like Groves would be well equipped to handle such arguments as those of Dutt. See Groves's lengthy review of Fascism and Social Revolution, (The Red Flag, Oct. 1934).

2 It carried sixteen small pages, poorly laid out.

3 Trotsky himself had considered it fair exchange for I.L.P. entry during the debate of the previous year, (see above,

4 The Red Flag (Nov. 1934)

5 B. Pimlott, Labour and the Left in the 1930s, (Cambridge, 1977), 91.

which must also have been aware that Trotsky was still considered legitimate in this sector at least.¹ The C.L. established a Balham and Tooting branch of the Socialist League in time for it to move resolutions at the League's Bristol Conference.

The C.L. arrived in the Socialist League² at exactly the right time to advocate to a willing audience the case which came most naturally to it: the need for an industrial drive. One Balham and Tooting motion declared trades councils 'local unifying centres of the Movement'; the other called for a drive to commit trade unions to Socialist League policy.³ Locally the Balham and Tooting branch campaigned against the Unemployment Assistance Act. The Socialist League was trying to transform itself from an association of middle class radicals into a movement with a working class base. Groves and his colleagues were uniquely placed to make efforts in this direction. Perhaps as a result of rapid success in the Socialist League the Communist League as an identifiable faction ceased to exist. Its 1935 influence is apparent in the activities of Groves who was speaking on League platforms from May and in the autumn published a pamphlet on the importance of trades councils on the League's behalf.⁴

1 The editor of the S.L. journal Socialist Leaguer was Frank Horrabin who had defended Trotsky in the 1920s. The journal thought Trotsky's History 'the authentic voice of the proletarian revolution' early on, (Oct. - Nov. 1934, 77) and a year later H.H. Elvin in the course of an otherwise favourable review of A Handbook of Marxism regretted an excess of Stalin and the absence of Trotsky, (The Socialist, (Nov. 1935), 6).

2 C.L. members were by no means the only ex-communists drawn to the Socialist League. J.T. Murphy, a contemporary evacuee, was first League secretary. His successor William Mellor had, like Frank Horrabin, briefly been a party member in the early 1920s.

3 Socialist League, Third Annual Conference, preliminary agenda.

4 Trades Councils in the Fight for Socialism, (Sept. 1935).

The relationship of the Communist League to organised Trotskyism, never unambiguous, progressively dissolved. The negative meaning of joining the Labour Party was that it felt no confidence in establishing a separate organised presence. An attempt to link up with Harber who abandoned the I.L.P. for the Labour Party early in 1935 foundered on Harber's objections.¹ What the ex-Communist Leaguers established during this year was a current of opinion rather than a disciplined fraction.

By the autumn Groves had advanced to a position of prominence within the Socialist League. He became one of the most regular contributors to The Socialist Leaguer and its successor The Socialist, ably contrasting the rightward trend of communism with the leftward trend of socialism.² When the League, like the I.L.P., adopted the workers' sanctions line on the Italian invasion of Abyssinia,³ he was prominent in its mobilization against war.⁴

- 1 After this a tacit division of labour developed between Harber and Groves. Harber did obtain the position of West London Sales Leader for the Socialist Leaguer in May 1935, (see June 1935 issue), but nothing significant resulted. The base of Harber became the Labour League of Youth. The Communist League had a slim interest in youth work via Socialist Youth, a paper launched by the S.L. But this had only a limited impact. An informal and personal link between the two factions existed in the person of Roma Dewar, younger sister of Hugo, who had launched the duplicated Trotskyist journal Youth Militant in the Labour League of Youth.
- 2 'After the French Socialist Congress', The Socialist Leaguer, (July/Aug. 1935), 214.
- 3 Somewhat unfairly to the I.L.P., Daniel Waley finds the S.L. the principal upholder of the anti-imperialist, anti-sanctions view, British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War, (1975), 25-6.
- 4 The League launched an anti-war campaign in September 1935, centred on area conferences. Groves was the secretary of the London conference held that month and a week later was elected to the area committee at an aggregate meeting.

At this time a remarkable opportunity was presented to the Trotskyists with the I.L.P. and the S.L., both still organisations of some account, advocating a line on the issue of the hour of which they could approve. Yet their forces were divided between these two organisations and the League of Youth, and no common campaign was launched. United Trotskyist activity did not take place until a year later, at the time of the Moscow Trials, and by this time the arch-enemy, the C.P.G.B., was far deeper entrenched. Not only had tactical differences led to a diffusion of the weak Trotskyist movement, but they had led also to some adaption by the respective factions to the organisations which they were working. In that autumn of 1935, the Marxist Group was projecting the transformation of the I.L.P. into a revolutionary party, a thesis explicitly rejected by the Communist League.¹ Groves and his comrades meanwhile mounted no systematic criticism of the Socialist League.

* * * * *

In 1936 they made a new attempt to pull together their support. A bulletin was launched in the name of the 'Marxist League', its main content two articles from the pen of Trotsky.² Its editor, Hugo Dewar, recognised the sea change which had occurred in communist policy since The Red Flag had ceased publication in November 1934 and promised that the paper would now reappear. New Comintern policies, he suggested, had wrongfooted the Trotskyists, who must now make a critique

1 The Red Flag (Oct. 1934).

2 Marxist Bulletin (Jan. - Feb. 1936). No further issues have been located.

from the left instead of the right.¹ 1936 brought an inquiry from Trotsky as to the progress made in the Labour Party and seeking an exchange of information. There seems to have been little awareness in the international of what was happening in Britain, but Trotsky knew enough to inquire whether members had been lost from 'the opportunist adaption to the party apparatus'.² He may have had in mind Groves, who in 1936 was a favourite speaker at Socialist League rallies and its authority on trade union affairs.³

The new Red Flag appeared in May as the 'organ of the Marxist League'. It noted how the policies against which it had campaigned previously were now abandoned, and that 'the battleground for the creation of the new revolutionary leadership is, at present, within the organised labour movement'. Within this entrust perspective, albeit qualified, The Red Flag promised a propagandist contribution towards policy, the building of a strong left wing and 'the presentation and application of revolutionary Marxism'. The paper promised to maintain contact with groups abroad working for the same purpose. All

- 1 'This, (the dropping of sectarian policy by the Comintern) together with the special position our group holds in the organised workers' movement more than justifies our re-entry into the sphere of publication.' Dewar went on to imply that The Red Flag had last appeared in Feb. 1935; in fact it ceased publication in November of the previous year. His expressed hope of re-establishing contact with erstwhile readers of The Red Flag is an admission that the League had effectively been liquidated in 1935.
- 2 Warwick M.S.S., 15 Jan. 1936. The letter was not addressed but contextually would appear to have been destined for a member of the Marxist League. It consisted of a list of questions which it undertakes to consider on a private basis.
- 3 The M.L. handled trade union matters more confidently than the other two factions, but at this date it had an unimpressive record by comparison with the American Trotskyists, who had led two important strikes. For the New York hotel workers' strike, led by B.J. Field, who was a C.L.A. member for its first weeks, and for the Minneapolis teamsters' dispute, see C.A. Myers, The Prophet's Army (Westport, Conn. 1977), 63-4, 82.

this came without a word about Trotsky and the Fourth International, but the Marxist League was alive, as was Trotsky himself, to developments within the Labour League of Youth. Conflicting political groupings had combined at the League of Youth conference to carry demands for autonomy against N.E.C. opposition. The Marxist League thought futile the perspective of 'a quick, snap division and the subsequent dragging out of a small section', a slap on the wrist for Harber's Bolshevik-Leninists. As for Advance, its campaign for organisational independence was belied by its political dependence on reformism. Turning to the other arena of Trotskyist activities, the Marxist League had few kind words for the I.L.P., whose conference had shown itself willing to throw over pacifist policies but not the leaders who advocated them. I.L.P. opposition to the bankrupt second and third internationals focussed on the London Bureau, but that body, by refusing to come out for a new international, condemned itself to swing between the other two. Yet The Red Flag had nothing at all to say, in this its first issue of the new series, about its own theatre of operations, the Socialist League, although it was the only Trotskyist journal in regular printed publication during 1936. It gave Trotsky's writings regular publication, something they had not had in Britain since the paper's first series.¹ There remained from 1934 a propaganda tone, concentration on issues of history and theory, and

1 There is at least one Trotsky article in each of the early Red Flags of the new series, including his comments on Stalin's interview with Roy Howard, (May), extracts from his introduction to the second French edition of In Defence of Terrorism (June-July); an article on Spain (September) and an extract on the peasantry from The New Course (Jan. 1937).

zeal to debate with communist policy.¹ The paper was strong on the need to retain rights of criticism within the united front² and on the developing revolutionary situation in Spain.

Groves's progress within the Socialist League - London area secretary from September 1935, London Region representative on the National Council from September 1936³ - tended to outdistance the others. None of them seem to have obtained League positions, though Jack Winocour⁴ wrote for The Socialist. Hilary Sumner-Boyd had his hands full as business manager of The Red Flag and, the following year, as secretary of the Trotsky Defence Committee. Hugo Dewar was the organiser of the League, and Wicks and the more distant Purkis were busy on trade union matters.⁵

Without The Red Flag that summer no Trotskyist analysis would have been made in printed form at all of the Moscow Trials and the revolution and civil war in Spain. There were many papers in the labour movement which did not swallow the Stalinist line on either, but none could be relied upon to put the Trotskyist view. In

- 1 A lengthy critical review by Wicks of Ralph Fox's Lenin under the title 'Some Notes on the History of Bolshevism' appeared first as a serial in The Red Flag and then as a pamphlet in 1937.
- 2 See Henry Sara's review of William Gallacher's pamphlet Pensioners of Capitalism, where great play is made with the reversed communist stand on the united front.
- 3 B. Pimlott, op. cit., 218n. This was a significant achievement in the London-centred League.
- 4 'Spain has Lighted a Torch', (Oct. 1936). The article was a strong argument against coalition with bourgeois parties. Winocour, who wrote for The Red Flag under the pseudonym Bill Commoner, was an American who returned to the United States in 1938. I am grateful to Mr. Harry Wicks for this information about Winocour's pseudonym. The S.L. was always attracted to a class analysis of the Spanish struggle, see its manifesto A Workers' or a Fascist Spain? (1936), Warwick M.S.S. 15/3/8/227, ii.
- 5 Purkis was president of the St. Pancras trades council. He helped over the Trotsky Defence Committee from the outset and contributed to The Red Flag after the Unity Campaign was launched in January 1937. Another contributor to the paper, probably pseudonymous, was Jack Glasgow.

September The Red Flag tried to relate the two issues by a novel argument that those being purged in Moscow were the most enthusiastic protagonists of assistance to the Spanish workers. But this was during the non-interventionist phase of Soviet policy; when that came to an end it was politically far more difficult to argue against Russia, seemingly the only friend the Spanish workers had. The Red Flag sought for Spain the independent working class policy that had received support during the Abyssinian crisis. Trade Union action was advocated to bar supplies to the rebel forces and those countries backing them, to 'stop the press lies' and obtain provisions for the Republic from the Cooperatives.¹ In the early phases of the war, The Red Flag was searching for a Marxist policy. Its opposition to the Popular Front principle was already set down. But it parted from Trotskyism in its failure to keep an independent distance from the P.O.U.M. in Spain. It published a resolution of that party's central committee, hailed the party's growth and declared:

'Upon the rapid evolution of P.O.U.M. Central Committee into a Bolshevik Party depends the fate of the Spanish Revolution.'²

The P.O.U.M. was not a Trotskyist party, though there were Trotskyists within it. It had close relationship with the I.L.P. (its sister party) and the Socialist League.³ The Red Flag might be expected to be among P.O.U.M.'s few defenders in Britain, but it failed

1 The Red Flag (Sept. 1936).

2 'Who Leads the Fight for Workers' Party in Spain?', The Red Flag (Oct. 1936).

3 It was linked to the I.L.P. through the London Bureau, while the Socialist League published a bulletin on its behalf in Britain.

to make simultaneously the standard Trotskyist critique of the party's 'centrism'. It commented 'many of its (the P.O.U.M.'s) friends have criticised it because it made so many concessions to the demands of the other parties'. In fact the P.O.U.M. had, from September 1936 to the time of its ejection on 16 December, been a member of the Catalan coalition government, a popular front of the very kind to which The Red Flag was so strongly opposed,¹ and the orthodox Trotskyist denunciation of this was fierce.²

The personal position of Groves, if not that of all members of the Marxist League, was strong as the projected Unity Campaign began to build up in the autumn. Groves joined the National Council of the League as representative for its London Region in September and was to be for once in a position to mount an effective rather than a propaganda opposition to the communist version of a unity pact. He also bade fair to be the League's chief pamphleteer with two more

1 The paper's claim that it 'defends P.O.U.M. when even its closest allies in Britain remain silent for their own fractional advantage', was an effective riposte to the I.L.P., but also perhaps a concession to feelings within the Socialist League. The Bolshevik-Leninists accused the Marxist League of supporting P.O.U.M.'s 'opportunist policy' by organising distribution of the P.O.U.M. bulletin, (E.C., B/L Group, Statement to the Bureau for the Fourth International, 29 Dec. 1936). In February 1937 The Red Flag advertised the Red Aid Fund of the P.O.U.M.

2 See F. Morrow, Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain (New York, 1974), 112-20. Morrow's book was published first in 1936.

contributions during 1936.¹

But the Marxist League did not cover Socialist League affairs at all: effectively it pursued the very policy of suspension of criticism for which it attacked parties to the Unity Campaign. Nor did the Marxist League use its paper to expound a policy on immediate issues for which it might hope to capture the Socialist League. Of the trouncing of the left at the Edinburgh conference, The Red Flag wrote,

It is only the lack of organisation and the confusion created by the Communist Party's retreat from revolutionary Marxism that has prevented the creation of a powerful militant movement within the unions and the local Labour Parties. With a correct policy and leadership such a movement could transform the political situation in this country.²

But what would this powerful militant movement be? An improved Socialist League? And if so, what improvements needed to be made within it? These questions remained unanswered. Curiously the League considered that its support had grown to the point where it

1 East End Crisis! (1936), 6p. was an anti-fascist pamphlet aimed at the Mosleyite offensive in London. It made a standard Marxist analysis which blamed exploitation on class not race and its intensification on increased competition in a dwindling market. British financiers backed Mosley so that divided East Enders might be rendered helpless before them, suggested Groves, and proposed combination of workers against sweating, bad housing and the Means Test. Arms and the Unions (1936), 12p., called for the maintenance and extension of trade union organisation in the face of rearmament.

2 In its October 1936 issue.

might consider breaking away¹ though lack of distinct policy meant it had not put its backers to the test. To the other groups it spoke of the possibility of the 'existing left in the I.L.P., a considerable section of the youth and of the discontented rank and file, and the I.L.P.' blazing, through a breakaway, the trail of a future revolutionary party. Seemingly the Marxist League foresaw the Socialist League breaking away en bloc: it would have a rude awakening.

The first and last big political division within the Socialist League came not from inside but from outside. During the closing months of the year secret negotiations between the leaders of the I.L.P., C.P.G.B. and Socialist League led to the signing of a Unity Agreement.² There is no doubt that the accession of the Socialist League, a Labour Party body, was the crucial step for the I.L.P. and the C.P.G.B., both of whom were outside. Rumours abounded in and out of the League that a pact between the parties was under preparation. It is remarkable that Groves should have been absent from the vital meeting of the S.L.

1 'The time is approaching when that support will have to be organised independently and openly', (ibid.). At the meeting of Bolshevik-Leninists on 11 October the League declared it now believed the time for exclusive Labour Party work to be coming to an end, (A Short Statement from the Marxist League to the delegates from the Youth Militant Group and the Marxist Group, (11 Oct. 1936), Warwick M.S.S. 15/4/1/13).

2 The background to this agreement can be followed in P. Seyd, 'Factionalism Within the Labour Party : The Socialist League 1932 - 1937' in A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds.) Essays in Labour History, 3, 1918-1939 (1977), 219-224. See also B. Pimlott, op. cit., 94-7, which absorbs the treatment in his earlier article 'The Socialist League : Intellectuals and the Labour Left in the 1930s', J.C.H., Vol. 6, no. 3, (1971), 35-8. More general are M. Foot, Aneurin Bevan, 1, 1897-1945 (1966), 169-210 and F. Brockway, Inside the Left. (1942), 264-75.

executive on 20 November 1936 which approved the agreement,¹ and that The Red Flag should fail to appear during the three critical months during which the fate of the League was decided.² When Groves and the paper joined battle in January 1937, the issue was already resolved.

A better organised Marxist League, and one moreover which had fought every inch of the way on S.L. policy in 1936 might, arguably, have had substantial backing against Cripps when the terms of the Unity Agreement became known in December. More important still, the Marxist League was propagandising against the Socialist League when it was divided from other Trotskyists over tactical issues, a damaging example of disunity which did not pass unnoticed.³ The January 1937 Red Flag led with an open letter to Fenner Brockway by the hand of Stuart Purkis.⁴ It reminded the I.L.P. leader that Trotskyism had a consistent record on the united front and argued that seeking a split over a constitutional issue was not the way to achieve it. Purkis implied strongly that Brockway's attacks on Trotskyism were not unconnected with the negotiations to launch the Unity Campaign,⁵

1 P. Seyd in A. Briggs and J. Saville, op. cit., 229n.

2 After a six page issue in October, The Red Flag did not come out until January 1937, when it carried a strong attack on the Unity Agreement by Stuart Purkis.

3 Trotsky Defence Committee members met Fenner Brockway on 27 November 1936 for a broad discussion. On 4 December The New Leader carried an article, 'What Price Unity?', in which Brockway sharply condemned Trotskyists as destroyers not builders. This was of course the moment of the split of C.L.R. James and the Marxist Group from the I.L.P. to attempt an independent existence.

4 For which he borrowed Brockway's title 'What Price Unity?'

5 Brockway had been sharp not only in The New Leader but also in 'A New United Front', Controversy, (Dec. 1936).

and enquired how parties so divided over Abyssinia, the Trials, the Comintern line and Spain could possibly unite.¹

This attack, well-argued as it was, fell almost completely beside the point. Why should The Red Flag take on Brockway? It had no members in the I.L.P. Was Brockway's involvement in the Unity Campaign in some way less important than that of Cripps? There was no critique of the role Cripps had played in negotiations, even though there was ample room and opposition was growing strongly.² The best prospect of torpedoing the Campaign was to concentrate all strength at the point of attack: the leaders of the Socialist League. By its silence The Red Flag could only have sent messages that it considered all was well.³

When Groves acted, he apparently did so as an individual, not as a member of an organised faction. He circulated all S.L. branches with a confidential letter against the agreement in January 1937, and a copy of it came into the hands of The Daily Herald who published

1 The Red Flag carried an editorial note declaring some differences with Purkis's views, though no details were given. Purkis's concession that Brockway had fought for the right to maintain criticism within the United Front may well have caused disquiet.

2 See below.

3 The decision of the S.L. executive on 20 November had been that the League would make a campaign with the C.P.G.B. even without I.L.P. involvement, (P. Seyd in A. Briggs and J. Saville, op. cit., 220). This made The Red Flag line even more fatuous. It was remarkable that even in the New Year no analysis was made of Cripps's role in the steps which were to lead to the dissolution of the S.L. The nearest it came was a warning in February 1937 that the course of events would punish those who lent themselves to communist falsehoods.

it.¹ The special conference of the Socialist League convened on 16-17 January 1937 to consider the executive proposal did endorse it but only against stiff opposition. It was done on a minority vote, fifty six to thirty eight with twenty three abstentions,² and there were doubts about the validity of the majority.³ Two days later the agreement was signed. The appearance of Groves's letter in the Herald led to a strong attack on him by John Strachey in

1 The Daily Worker, (18 Jan. 1937) named Groves as the source of the leak and accused him of 'opposition to any attempt at building the unity of the working class movement in Britain'. Groves wrote to the paper that he supported a united front but that he objected to 'sacrificing the Socialist League's position in the organised Labour Movement without sufficient advantage to the revolutionary left in return'.

He went on to argue, like Purkis, against suspension of the right to criticise, reasoning:

No revolutionary fears an open discussion of policies. The Communist Party enforced this kind of agreement precisely because it was preparing to put over a campaign designed not only to destroy a handful of Trotskyists in this country but to destroy revolutionary socialism generally.

The Daily Worker printed only part of Groves's letter. The full text appeared in The Red Flag (Feb. 1937). The Red Flag had always opposed the suspension of criticism in a united front. See 'W.H.', 'The United Front in Britain and France', (Oct. 1934).

2 B. Pimlott, op. cit., 97.

3 M.S. Davidson of the Manchester Socialist League argued that the agreement had been negotiated without their mandate, that vital information had been withheld from branches until the day before the conference, that some branches were not represented at the conference, and that others who did attend broke their mandate, (letter, New Statesman and Nation, 30 Jan. 1937).

The Daily Worker¹ but the battle had been lost. Movement by Transport House against the Socialist League because of its support for the campaign was predictable and predicted. Threats culminated in a March decision by the N.E.C. to proscribe League membership.

After the event an effort was made to rally those who wished to continue the work of the Socialist League inside the Labour Party. A bid was made in May 1937, at the annual conference of the League, to repudiate the agreement and maintain an active independent League. Its Hendon Branch argued for keeping the agreement and the League, but withdrew to give a straight vote between the M.L. amendment and a recommendation from the leadership to dissolve the League. Conference voted by fifty one to ten to dissolve and thereby pre-empt expulsions of individual members.² An important platform for mounting a non-

1 John Strachey wrote:

'The fact that Mr. Reginald Groves, the proponent of Trotskyist views in the Socialist League, was, on his own admission, willing to make desperate attempts to stop the conclusion of the recent unity pact, and that it was through his efforts that the Daily Herald was given the full particulars of this pact, is a serious instance of this activity. (i.e. Trotskyist willingness to collaborate with Labour's right wing - M.U.) (Daily Worker, 22 Jan. 1937.)

That he had revealed details of the pact was a new accusation against Groves. He countered the earlier one of leaking his circular letter by suggesting, perhaps tongue in cheek, that 'a disloyal branch secretary' might have been responsible, (The Red Flag, Feb. 1937). J. Jupp, with his belief that Groves repeated arguments advanced by League officials, seems to reflect the Strachey view, ('The Left in British Labour 1931 to 1941', Univ. of London, M.A. thesis, 1956).

- 2 R. Bishop, 'The Socialist League Suspends Activities', Inprecorr, Vol. 17, no. 22, (22 May 1937), 517. Bishop refers to 'a small nest of Trotskyists' who opposed this tactical move backed by the C.P.G.B., but others opposed dissolution as well, including the absent Brailsford, (Pimlott, op. cit., 104-5).

Stalinist critique from within the movement had been destroyed.¹

It was now Labour or communism.²

The Trotskyists' best hope was to gain support from within a thriving organisation. Launching a new one was entirely a different matter. The S.L. had been born of the maximalist wave of 1932, when all leading party members sought to make their distance from MacDonaldism by espousing undiluted socialism. In 1937 this type of rhetoric was found predominantly on the right wing while the left and the communists had shifted to seeking any form of coalition, however broad, which might dislodge the National Government.³

An intended replacement for the Socialist League was launched in June, one month after the decision to dissolve.⁴ The Socialist Left Federation seems never to have exceeded 100 members.⁵ The leading cadre of the Marxist League, Sara, Wicks and Sumner-Boyd were all

1 'The net result of the Unity Committee's activities was a further weakening of the moribund I.L.P., to the benefit of the C.P.G.B., and the dissolution of the Socialist League. Thus vanished the only body within the Labour Party offering some possibility of revolutionary socialist propaganda against the policy of the party itself and of the communist 'cells' within it.' (H. Dewar, Communist Politics in Britain, (1976), 111-2.)

2 B. Pearce, The Left in British Labour, (author's unpublished manuscript), 9-10.

3 This evolution is well illustrated by the development of Tribune, which effectively replaced The Socialist, into a fellow-travelling journal immediately before the war, (M. Foot, Aneurin Bevan. A biography, Vol. 1 : 1897-1945, (1966). (See Appendix B)

4 The New Leader, 18 June 1937.

5 This was the belief of Don James who, as a Militant group member in 1937 challenged its involvement in the S.L.F. (See Chapter VII, below.)

involved, and Groves was chairman. There was some non-Trotskyist involvement, with the secretaryship falling to the ex-communist Margaret McCarthy, who had sympathised with Trotsky in the early 1930s.¹ But she and a handful of others did not make an army. Nor could the largely unemployed membership hope to match Cripps's financial support for the S.L. The S.L.F. held meetings, but its executive proceedings were perhaps most notable for bitter clashes between Groves and D.D. Harber, who sought to swing it behind the line of Militant.² Harber's strivings for a Trotskyist front did not appeal to Groves who sought to keep non-Trotskyists within it. It mattered very little, as the S.L.F. died in the New Year after achieving little impact.

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The factional clash at the S.L.F. merely illuminated the continuing division of Trotskyist forces. The Marxist League had failed to send delegates to the pre-conference of the International Communist League convened in July 1936³ but was sufficiently moved by the ('Geneva') resolution on Britain to send three delegates to the national meeting of Bolshevik-Leninists on 11 October.⁴ It had attempted to unite with Harber in 1935 when he joined the Labour

- 1 P. Seyd in A. Briggs and J. Saville, op. cit., 230n. Though repelled by Trotskyists she had met in Glasgow sometime after she resigned from the C.P.G.B., McCarthy came to be intellectually convinced of Marxist League policy, (M. McCarthy, Generation in Revolt, (1953), 258; M. McCarthy to Sara, 27 Jan. 1938, Warwick M.S.S.).
- 2 Interview with R. Groves, April 1980. For Harber's view and that of the Militant Group, on replacing the S.L., see the discussion on the Socialist League at Minutes, London E.C., (Militant Group), 20 Feb. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2A/4.
- 3 'For material reasons'. British Trotskyists may have met Shachtman and Muste as they passed through Britain on their way to Geneva, (L. Trotsky to Muste, 'How the Conference Was and Wasn't Prepared', 17 July 1936, Writings : Supplement (1934-40), 698-703).
- 4 For Discussion, 28 Nov. 1936.

Party from the I.L.P. Attempts were being made in 1936 by Marxist League members, and notably Wicks, to gather the factions together round a strong Trotsky Defence Committee. But the Marxist League was resistant to the Geneva resolution, and especially its emphasis on Labour Party work. The only tangible gain of the national meeting was a commitment by all participants to set up a national coordinating committee in response to Trotsky's suggestion of a Lenin Club to ensure cooperation.¹

The M.L. viewed the existence of a separate Bolshevik-Leninist group in the Labour Party as impossible to justify and a fault not of its making.² The Bolshevik-Leninists themselves saw the M.L. by its presence in the Labour Party as closer to the Geneva resolution with its emphasis on concentration of forces within Social Democracy than was the Marxist Group, which was in late 1936 leading an independent existence.³ Spurred by the crisis surrounding the Unity Campaign the Bolshevik-Leninists approached the Marxist League for a meeting to discuss joint activity. The Marxist League, however, insisted on the presence of the Marxist Group since it placed far less value than did the Bolshevik-Leninists on tactical agreement over the need to be within the Labour Party.⁴ The meeting of all three on

1 *ibid.* Trotsky had suggested the Lenin Club in the 'Interview by Collins', Writings (1935-36), 77.

2 A Short Statement from the Marxist League to the delegates from the Youth Militant Group and the Marxist Group, 11 Oct. 1936, (Warwick M.S.S. 15/4/1/13).

3 For the views of the Bolshevik-Leninists, see Chapter VII.

4 It reasoned that the need was to draw together all those who stood for the Fourth International rather than make decisions for or against the Labour Party or the I.L.P., *ibid.*

14 February 1937 failed to solve any problems.¹

Still separated from the other groups by tactical differences and personal antipathy, the M.L. faced 1937 without even a base for activity. The Red Flag appeared sporadically after February² and was published for the last time in October 1937. Differences developed within the League. Groves had perhaps ceased to believe in the need for an organised Trotskyist faction. His rapid advance within the Socialist League may have been due to this as well as to his undoubted ability as a propagandist. In April 1937 he had become prospective parliamentary candidate for Aylesbury, where he was the following year to fight an important by-election.³ After years of sectarian politics he, and also Hugo Dewar, put value on the Socialist Left Federation, a body which kept them in touch with people outside the factional struggle.⁴ They had enough support behind them in October for agreement to be reached on dissolving the Marxist League and putting an end to The Red Flag.

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1 See Chapter VIII.

2 It came out in three issues after this date, perhaps chiefly deserving attention for the way it put before British readers statements from the P.O.U.M. revealing the murderous course of events in Barcelona. See especially its issue for May-June 1937.

3 See Appendix

4 Dewar explained his views to the fusion conference of 27 Feb. 1938, (R.S.L., Internal Bulletin, 1, (April 1938), 14-15.). He flatly opposed any attempt to transform the S.L.F. into a Trotskyist body.

The history of the Communist/Marxist League is a lesson in the damage brought by disunity. It had capable members who lacked sufficient flexibility and sense of proportion to seize an opportunity provided by the I.L.P. in 1933. Their political independence led them to see that in 1934 there were greater prospects in the Labour Party and especially the Socialist League. But just as the I.L.P. Trotskyists lacked the C.L. leaders' greater organising ability, derived from a communist training, so they in turn lacked sufficient members to turn the tide their way in the S.L. Worse still they proved unable to keep in being as an organised fraction and insufficiently firm in their politics to withstand the pressure of an unaccustomed environment. It is possible that greater firmness in 1935 and 1936 might have led to action being taken against them by the Labour Party apparatus or even the Socialist League. As it was they were unable to rally a majority against Cripps when it really mattered. They had failed to unite with Harber's Bolshevik-Leninists in the League of Youth. They lacked a long term perspective of working within the Labour Party. It is therefore difficult to see what alternative they had to dissolution in October 1937, though external events were to haul them back into the British Trotskyist mainstream.

VI TROTSKYISM AND BRITISH RESPONSES TO THE
MOSCOW TRIALS, 1936 - 1938.

The Moscow Trials offer a plateau from which to observe the limited progress of Trotskyism in the 1930s. There was more criticism of the Trials in Britain than is generally appreciated, but this was outweighed by the heavy pressure of official opinion and strong communist influence. The period covered by the three trials and the Generals purge (August 1936 to March 1938) was one of dramatic political developments: nearly two years of civil war in Spain and of the popular front government in France; the march of Hitler, first into the Rhineland and into Austria; the progressive reversal of Labour's earlier opposition to rearmament; the move of the bulk of the Labour Left and the communists from a working class united front to support for a popular front and then a peace alliance.

In such a world as that of the years before 1939, there was a disposition on the part of many to seek unity, in alliance with the Soviets abroad, and all available forces at home, in the face of a mounting fascist threat. This made easier the efforts of British communists to secure acceptance of the verdict of the trials, however bizarre in style and content. Russia, it seemed, was the only hope,¹ and it took more than eighteen months of trial and 'plot' finally to alienate liberal opinion.

It has been argued that the trials were less controversial in Britain than in America because of Trotskyist weakness and lack of support among the intelligentsia, because the Spanish Civil War

1. 'When reports of labour camps and rigged trials and forced confessions came through, it was easy to discuss them as yet another example of capitalist hostility', Ted Willis, Whatever Happened to Tom Mix? (1970), 171.

diverted attention, and because influential press reporting accepted the official line.¹ Without a doubt, concern over the menace of fascism and war, the central political controversy of the day, was far more immediate in Britain than in the United States. It was to be suggested that the Trials themselves weakened Soviet Russia, considered the main bulwark against fascism. But more difficult to resist was the argument that it was Trotskyism, all-pervasive, nebulously defined, which caused disunity in the battle against reaction. The Trotskyist case that the Soviet economic systems must be supported but not its political regime was difficult to carry. Indeed, in the west, the opening of the first trial marked the moment when communists ^{parties} were no longer prepared to concede to Trotskyists a legitimate place in the labour movement from which they might advance their critique.

* * * * *

Early in 1936, Trotskyists in the Labour League of Youth were being relatively gently handled. Communist sympathisers had withdrawn by then from the I.L.P., but the enmity between them and the Trotskyists did not approach the pitch of later years. In the Socialist League, Groves and Marxist League members did not face accusations of being agents of counter-revolution. As for the intellectual world, destined to be most scarred by the trials, it was still possible for writers to be reviewed on the merit of their work.²

Trotsky himself was closely observing Soviet affairs. In May 1936, he observed from his Norway exile that Stalin was facing a

1 N. Wood, Communism and British Intellectuals, (1959), 47-8.

2 In 'Writers under two flags', (Left Review, (Feb. 1936), 228-30), Charles Madge felt able to review Problems of Soviet Literature, a symposium which included essays by Bukharin and Radek, without any gratuitous cuffs.

greater threat than before, but that his methods, and those of Yagoda, the G.P.U. chief, had been refined.¹ Even he cannot have expected anything as grotesque as the trials. When they began he immediately bent every effort toward debunking the charges cascading upon him from Moscow. He had time to rush out several statements to the press² and, crucially, to call for an investigation by the world's labour organisations, or better still their leaders. Within days however, Soviet diplomatic pressure led to him being placed effectively under house arrest and then suppressed by a legal gag which prevented him replying to the charges.³

Some of Trotsky's early opinions appeared in Britain. His 15 August statement, 'Let Us Know The Facts', in reply to charges rehearsed by the Tass Bureau, was printed by The New Leader with Tass's comments.⁴ He also told the News Chronicle that the trials were 'one of the biggest, clumsiest and most criminal plots against world

1 'The Spiciest Dishes are Still to Come', (May 1936), Writings (1935-36) 109.

2 Notably 'To the Public Opinions of the Workers of the Whole World', (4 July 1936), Writings (1935-36), 35-7.

3 After August 1936, Trotsky was effectively silenced for four crucial months, the time remaining to him in Norway before his removal to Mexico at the end of the year. His enforced silence clearly helped the Trials with their stunning verdicts to gain credibility. His fate was for this time in the hands of his followers in the West. The shifting attitude of Norwegian Social Democracy towards Trotsky, changing from warm comradeship and hospitality when he arrived from France in 1935, to frigidly forcing him out, is chronicled imaginatively by Isaac Deutscher in The Prophet Outcast (1963), 292-355.

4 'Trotsky Accused and Trotsky Replies', The New Leader, 21 Aug. 1936.

opinion.¹ Emrys Hughes in Forward, and - initially - Fenner Brockway also supported his call for an international commission of investigation to which he would present evidence.² This demand became refined to a call for an international working class inquiry into the first trial, which was backed by the Spanish P.O.U.M. and the London Bureau.³ Finally, The Red Flag, at that moment the only Trotskyist journal in regular publication, also published Trotsky's statement of 15 August with a call for resolutions to be sent to the Labour Party N.E.C., the T.U.C. General Council and the Norwegian government.⁴

But while all this provided an input into the labour movement, it was of very limited importance compared with the general press. It might only have been the Daily Worker which headlined a report 'Shoot the Reptiles!', but there was a general disposition to take the trials as Moscow intended. The News Chronicle did sound a note of editorial doubt, but A.J. Cummings, its reporter, was impressed by the confessions of the defendants. The other daily paper to sound a sceptical note was the Manchester Guardian, which had carried occasional articles by Trotsky during the 1930s. Support for Trotsky in the right-wing press was widely commented by communists.⁵

1 (Interview), 26 Aug. 1936.

2 The New Leader, 28 Aug. 1936. The London and Southern Counties divisional council of the I.L.P. also supported the inquiry call 'without associating itself with Trotsky's views'.

3 Reported by Brockway in The New Statesman, 19 Sept. 1936.

4 With Dewar's account of the events leading to his confinement, 'Fascists and Stalinists Hound Leon Trotsky', The Red Flag, Sept. 1936.

5 No study of the attitude of the Tory press in Britain has been undertaken.

In a hostile atmosphere, the British Trotskyists faced their sternest test. Success would not only vindicate Trotsky but confirm their right to be part of the labour movement. Some early efforts were made. A crowd of 2-300 gathered in Hyde Park on 31 August 1936 to call for an international investigation and support Trotsky's right of asylum.¹ On 9 September the first indoor meeting against the Trials was held. But the British Trotskyist movement was at a low ebb. Marxist Group members were dribbling out of the I.L.P. into the Labour Party where they had not yet hardened into a coherent faction. The Marxist League, though small, was advancing in the Socialist League but it was, of all the British factions, the most distant from Trotsky, who had advised his British supporters to struggle against Groves.² None of the three British groups was in a position within social democracy even comparable to that obtained by the American Trotskyists, who entered the Socialist Party on the very eve of the first Trial. Divided, and lacking in influence, the British Trotskyists were not well placed for a fight against the odds.

Each British group turned its meagre propaganda resources over in part to putting Trotsky's case against the Moscow charges. But so isolated were they before the first Trial that the key to success palpably lay in mobilising liberal and radical opinion on Trotsky's behalf. In the United States and in France, where defence committees were also to be established, there was a non-Stalinist sector within the left intelligentsia including numbers of writers at

1 Fight, 10 Oct. 1936. A delegation sent to the Soviet Embassy did not gain entrance.

2 'Interview by Collins', Writings (1935-36), 77.

one time associated with Trotsky. This was much less the case in Britain and the Trotskyists had to create a favourable atmosphere if they were to make progress.

The British Defence Committee was primarily a product of work undertaken by the Marxist League. Harry Wicks approached the Marxist Group about the possibility of forming one soon after the August trial.¹ A provisional committee was established, but it led only a precarious existence during the rest of the year.² After several others declined to act as provisional secretary³ the position fell to Wicks. He set about circulating left celebrities to gain their backing for an appeal for an inquiry.⁴

The response was not encouraging. In 1929-31 Trotsky's had still been a name to conjure with in Britain. By autumn 1936 his appeal had palpably shrunk. A changed world political context made unity a far more seductive call at the later date, and the Communist Party, no longer at its sectarian nadir, was incomparably better placed to put it out.

1 Dewar to Wicks [Jan. ? 1937].

2 Only Wicks and another turned up for a 16 October meeting. Not more than three meetings could have been held in 1936, ('Charles Sumner' to C.L.R. James, 10 March 1937). The University of Hull papers contain no minutes of meetings before 1937.

3 One who declined was Stuart Purkis, who had parted with the League in 1934, since which time he had devoted himself to trade union affairs, rising to the executive of the Railway Clerks' Association and the presidency of the St. Pancras Trades Council. He was to be a stalwart of the committee, the only active participant not a member of one of the Trotskyist groups, (S. Purkis to Dewar, 12 Oct. 1936).

4 The first circular from the Trotskyist movement was of Trotsky's reply to Tass to which was appended a petition to the Norwegian government over the Norwegian gag, over the name Judith Walters, (n.d., Warwick M.S.S. 15/3/1/75).

Kingsley Martin was asked to lend his name. He had initially found the August trial wholly inconvincing, though he failed to report that the Norwegian government had imposed silence on Trotsky by judicial means. He argued that the trial helped Conservatives, Transport House and opponents of the popular front. Following letters to the New Statesman from communists and other supporters of the trial, his condemnation became more cautious, focussing on the need for a national explanation and the insubstantiality of confessions which lacked corroborative evidence.¹ He felt there was a plot but believed the Trials argued widespread discontent in the U.S.S.R. Privately he told Purkis an inquiry would be a good thing and he would be pleased to discuss it in the New Statesman if it was proposed 'by responsible people'.² He would not associate himself with it however since his partisanship would then inhibit him from joining the discussion.

D.N. Pritt, K.C., M.P. for Hammersmith North and a close adherent of communist policy, predictably refused to sign.³ He had been present in Moscow during the August trial and pronounced it judicially fair. His verdict was given wide coverage in the British press, and he was shortly to write the introduction to W.G. Shepherd's pamphlet, The Moscow Trial.⁴ Trotsky believed Pritt's presence in

1 The New Statesman and Nation, 22, 29 August and 5 September 1936.

2 This presumably meant people who were not Trotskyists, (Kingsley Martin to Purkis, 15 September 1936).

3 D.N. Pritt, M.P., to J. Walters, 17 Sept. 1936. He took the opportunity, in declining, to correct her account of the trial.

4 This pamphlet of the Anglo Russian Parliamentary Committee explained that Trotsky was a bad organiser and had not in fact organised the 1917 revolution, (B. Pearce, 'The British Stalinists and the Moscow Trials' in M. Woodhouse and B. Pearce, Essays on the History of Communism in Britain, (1975), 221).

Moscow at the time of the trial to have been more than a coincidence,¹ though the Norwegian gag made him unable to express this view publicly.² When Pritt saw the coverage given the Trials by Emrys Hughes in Forward, he broke off a longstanding friendship.³ Hughes, who had been friendly - if occasionally mocking - towards Trotsky over the years, gave over much space to his defence and ridiculed the August Trial as 'crazy stupidity'. Yet the Trotsky Defence Committee seems not to have been aware of the potential of this unsolicited friend who was engaged that autumn in an extended debate with Zelda K. Coates of the Anglo-Russian Friendship Committee, a persistent apologist for the trials.⁴ Its contact with Hughes apparently dates only from late 1937, by which time the game was won and lost.

Fenner Brockway was under instruction from the I.L.P. executive not to sign the appeal⁵ but he told Wicks he might be allowed to examine documents from the trial with other prominent persons with the intention of publishing a report.⁶ This came to nothing, though he was informally helpful in providing Wicks with a list of intellectuals

- 1 'Two Crooked Lawyers', 1 Feb. 1937, Writings : Supplement (1934-40), 729. In later years Pritt continued to believe that reactions to the trial were a straight index of friendship or enmity to the U.S.S.R. There had been 'tragic abuses' during the Stalin period but the trials were not among them, From Right to Left, (1965), 108-115.
- 2 'In 'Socialist' Norway', Writings (1935-36), 129.
- 3 Emrys Hughes to 'Sumner', 15 Feb. 1938.
- 4 See for example Forward for 12 Sept. 1936.
- 5 F. Brockway to Dewar, 22 Oct. 1936. Dewar sought to allay his fears by expressing the hope that an authoritative committee might be built.
- 6 H. Wicks to Denise Naville, 29 Nov. 1936. Denise Naville lived with Trotsky's son Leon Sedov, the coordinator of the European Trotskyist anti-trial drive. Wicks may have addressed the letter to her for security reasons.

likely to prove amenable and making suggestions.¹ But he would prove the biggest obstacle within the London Bureau to backing the inquiry campaign.

In the Labour League of Youth, the Militant Group was embroiled in an increasingly bitter fight with the Advance faction led by Ted Willis; the Marxist Group was in the process of severing all connections with the I.L.P. and in December 1936 it publicly declared its independence. None of the Trotskyist groups had a significant trade union following. It is not therefore surprising that the best source of support for the provisional committee late in 1936 came from the milieu of the Socialist League, now approaching the climax of its tense relationship with Transport House.

On 1 December 1936, the Manchester Guardian published A letter from the Provisional Committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky over the signature of H.N. Brailsford, Frank Horrabin, Conrad Noel, Fred Shaw, Rowland Hill, Eleanor Rathbone and Garry Allingham, as well as those of Groves, Wicks and Purkis.² The letter protested at the continued legal gag on Trotsky in Norway and called for an international inquiry. Wicks's hope was that this would break the ice and lead to better things.³ It was misplaced. This was a moderate list and even

1 One of which was the possibility of taking action for libel against communist and fascist papers. Though Brockway undertook to obtain a legal opinion it was Wicks who approached Arthur Reade, now a prosperous lawyer for advice. Reade thought the odds were stacked against success but was prepared to make the attempt, given solicitor's instructions. He made it plain, however, that while he considered Trotsky as 'the most superb warrior in the cause of the working people in modern history', he had no sympathy for the Fourth International. Wicks knew of his association with the New Party and was interested only in his legal advice, (A.E.E. Reade to Wicks, 2 Dec. 1936; author's interview with Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979). Reade did, however, write to The Times and The Spectator supporting Trotsky.

2 It also appeared in The New Leader for 4 Dec. 1936 and in the January 1937 Red Flag.

3 Wicks to Naville, 29 Nov. 1936.

so it was to prove impossible to maintain.¹ By the same date the Americans had gathered Norman Thomas, Dewey, Eastman, James T. Farrell, Dos Passos, Sydney Hook and Suzanne La Follette. 'Surely', asked The Red Flag, 'there are in Great Britain sufficient forces to strengthen the work of our own Defence Committee?'

The answer was in the negative. It has been argued that the reason may lie in the split within the British intelligentsia not between Stalinism and Trotskyism, but between commitment and the lack of it.² But an intellectual who was aware only of the broad issues of war or peace, fascism or democracy, was likely to see only hair-splitting in Trotsky's cause. And yet some of the blame for the lack of initial impact must also lie with the weakness of the Trotskyists themselves. Rousing the intellectuals was of prime importance, as Sedov insisted. Yet C.L.R. James, the most eminent of the Trotskyists intellectually, played no central role in the committee, failing to attend its meetings and preferring to counter the Trials through his new paper Fight. The proletarian character of the early Trotskyist movement in Britain might be seen as an advantage. But the Americans gained crucial assistance from their acquisition, through their 1935 fusion with the American Workers Party of A.J. Muste, of an impressive layer of intellectuals who were to prove

- 1 Brailsford and Horrabin, the two signatories best known in the labour movement were to curtail their support. Rowland Hill, the Bradford Trades Council president and Conrad Noel, Christian Socialist and Vicar of Thaxted, were minor figures. There was no one on the list with a major reputation outside politics which makes a strong contrast to the position in the United States.
- 2 S. Samuels, 'English Intellectuals and Politics in the 1930s', P. Rieff (ed.) On Intellectuals, (New York, 1969), 242. There was certainly no English equivalent of Partisan Review, (J. Gilbert, 'Literature and Revolution in the United States', J.C.H., Vol. II, no. 2, (1967), 161-76).

their worth the following year.¹ And starting with some of the intelligentsia made it far easier for the Trotskyists in America to recruit more.

At the end of 1936 the Provisional Committee had little on which to congratulate itself. It had failed to persuade numbers of celebrities of sufficient prestige that Trotsky's cause needed their support. It had organised few public activities. The most successful work on Trotsky's behalf had been done in the pages of Forward by Emrys Hughes, with whom they were not in contact.² Since 1935 Forward had appeared in a London edition and was circulated by Herbert Morrison's Labour machine in the capital. Morrison, hammer of the communists, had his own, more traditional, reasons for taking an interest in the trials,³ but his attitude confirms the way that labour movement critics of Moscow increasingly could be found only among the opponents, right and left, of the projected popular front.⁴

- 1 For the work of the American Committee, J.P. Cannon, The History of American Trotskyism, (New York, 1973), 241; C.A. Myers, The Prophet's Army, (Westport, Conn., 1977), 133-7; Shachtman's powerful polemic Behind the Moscow Trial, (New York 1936) clarified by the context of its thesis just how much assistance the American Trotskyists received in the work from their presence in the Socialist Party. (Shachtman's book was first published in Britain in 1971.)
- 2 For two years Hughes engaged in a running debate with Zelda K. Coates of the Anglo-Soviet Friendship Committee over the form and significance of the Trials.
- 3 He thought the Trials one reason for the rebuff suffered by the communists at the Plymouth T.U.C., (Forward, 19 Sept. 1937).
- 4 Into this category also would fall the Independent Socialist Party, I.L.P. dissidents whom Elijah Sandham had led out in 1934 in protest against working with the communists. The I.S.P. welcomed the idea of a commission but advised against a meeting in Manchester, its base, unless success was certain, (I.S.P. to Trotsky Defence Committee, 9 Dec. 1936 and 5 March 1937);

It is scarcely a surprise to learn that the dying weeks of 1936 saw the British Trotskyists engrossed in faction-fighting which left little space for a sustained effort to lift the Trotsky Defence Committee.¹ The papers of the factions, and notably the Red Flag and Fight, were each devoting space to arguments against the trials but they were mutually estranged over essentially secondary tactical questions. Success might have drawn them together, but it now became clear that even the ground they thought they had gained was slipping. Brailsford, whose backing for the 1 December letter had been taken as indicating adherence to the Provisional Committee, withdrew when this construction was put on his signature in the American press.² He had vacillated for some time, airing in public the inner anguish many others must have felt who wanted to criticise the Soviets.³ The Militant group at least saw the importance of drawing together in view of the events of January 1937,⁴ and regular meetings of the Defence Committee seem to have occurred in the New Year.

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- 1 Wicks recorded this as a constraint in his letter to Denise Naville of 29 November 1936. He confided to May Matlow that the stature of the Committee was at risk in view of the failure of other Trotskyists to send in material and complained of 'a complete absence of cooperation', (letter of 31 Dec. 1936).
 - 2 Reynolds News, 4 April 1937. Summer wrote to the paper's editor on 8 April to try and limit the damage, arguing that the Committee was not partisan but existed to achieve an international inquiry. This was an honest statement of intent, but simply did not square with Committee composition.
 - 3 Brailsford was impressed by the fact of confession, yet thought the guilt of all save Stalin not 'plausible history', ('Moscow Trial must not shake our Faith in Russia', Reynolds News, 7 Feb. 1937.) The Reynolds postbag was dominated by critics of Brailsford's misgivings.
 - 4 They proposed common action with the Marxist League because of the advent of the Unity Campaign.

1937 brought with it the second Trial. Unlike previous key events in Russia involving the Opposition, there was this time no shortage of information. It was a question of interpretation not discovery. There was an extensive and factual coverage in The Manchester Guardian throughout January.¹ The letter page of that paper provided a fascinating mixture of responses to the Trials. In its columns could be read the views of Dr. Steinberg, a Menshevik who even-handedly attested the isolation of Stalin's regime and the eager desire of the opposition for war; of Joan Beauchamp, an apologist; of A.J.P. Taylor, no longer a party member, who commented on Lenin's 'infallible gift' for choosing counter-revolutionaries as his closest associates, and asserted that the achievements of the Revolution would survive Stalin and socialists cease to be Stalinists.² On the same day as Taylor's letter was published, Low's cartoon portrayed Hitler equipped with a shotgun on an 'anti world revolution expedition' unaware that nearby his quarry 'the Trotsky Policy' had been buried. The Manchester Guardian, of course, was no more fond of 'the Trotsky Policy' than anyone else, though this did not prevent Moscow being sufficiently stung by its coverage and publication policy³ to allege Trotskyist sympathies among its staff,⁴ and denounce its as a 'fascist-speaking trumpet'. Pat Sloan, presenting himself somewhat coyly as

1 '..... of all the liberal and radical newspapers, the most cogent and compelling in its scepticism', J. Saville, 'May Day 1937', in A. Briggs and J. Saville (eds), Essays in Labour History, 1918-1939 (1977), 266.

2 The Manchester Guardian, 2 Feb. 1937.

3 On 25 January 1937 Trotsky's cable replying to allegations made at the Trial was printed in full. The following day his second cablegram appeared, as did a denial by Erwin Wolf of the I.S., that Piatakov had ever made an alleged visit to Trotsky in December 1935. An article by Sedov was also published. Trotsky's denunciation of the Trials was printed by the Daily Express, also on 26 January. Trotsky had arrived in Tampico, Mexico, on 9 January 1937 and was able to reply point by point to the charges made against him in the second Trial.

4 C.L.R. James was, of course, one of the paper's cricket correspondents.

'an Englishman who has lived in the U.S.S.R. for five years', replied to Trotsky and Sedov. He disputed that Zinoviev and Kamenev were leaders of the Revolution and pursued the argument that Trotsky's analysis of the nature of the regime necessarily led to belief in the need to use force to overthrow it. But 'Y.Z.', a Menshevik, called for an independent court, and concluded that the charges would discredit the Soviet dictatorship more than the Opposition.¹

D.N. Pritt marched toward the sound of gunfire on 5 February. His case was not a model of jurisprudence. Contacts between Germany or Japan and the Trotskyists should surprise no one familiar with diplomatic methods, he argued, and anyway (echoing Sloan) forcible overthrow followed necessarily from Trotsky's political estimate of the Stalin government.² He detected, however, a reluctant move by British opinion towards acceptance of the genuineness of the Trials, and he clinched his argument with this question:

'If it were not so why would the government have introduced the November 1936 constitution, a relaxation of the power of the Executive, and the increase of individual freedom?'³

More perceptive was the letter of 'a former member of the Comintern Executive' which appeared the same day.

1 The Manchester Guardian, 3 Feb. 1937.

2 This line of reasoning was much in favour, as is shown by the letter from William Rust to The Manchester Guardian on the same day. Dudley Collard, a Fabian lawyer and author of another pamphlet upholding the trials, refined the argument to explain Trotsky's plans as desperate measures born of knowledge that he would get no support in view of 'the rapid progress toward general prosperity', (The Manchester Guardian, 5 Feb. 1937).

3 Central to Marjorie Pollitt's pamphlet, Defeat of Trotskyism, (Dec. 1937) was the argument that the Soviets, if they were unsound, would not dare to introduce a new constitution. This was a popular argument among defenders of the Trials as the pages of Forward and The New Statesman and Nation testified.

'If the Nazis (not the Trotskyists) had wanted to show the world the rottenness of the whole Stalin regime they could not have improved on the two great Moscow Trials.'

This writer cautiously predicted a move by Stalin in a German direction, the very crime of which Trotsky and his associates had been accused.

Communist polemics against Trotskyism accelerate from 1936.¹ Trotskyism, a pamphlet by many hands appeared in 1937, as did a pamphlet by Marjorie Pollitt entitled Defeat of Trotskyism. The Daily Worker and Labour Monthly were busy. To counter this the Trotskyists had only their own papers, cruelly dubbed 'miserable little rags' by Orwell. Yet in the labour movement there was a debate about the trials. Advance in 1937, Controversy (until the communists withdrew from it), Forward, The New Leader and The Plebs all gave space for the expression of different points of view, sometimes by Trotskyists. This did not sustain Trotskyism, but it certainly contributed to the eventual disenchantment of liberals and non-aligned socialists with the Soviets.²

The second trial was simultaneous with critical events in Britain. The Unity Campaign was launched in January 1937, and a chain of events begun which would lead to the voluntary dissolution of the Socialist League in May. Hopes were high, but the communists had extracted as a price for cooperation, that criticism of the Soviets be suspended. Cripps, in the eye of the storm, rebuffed an approach from the Defence Committee. Horrabin, of whom much might have been expected,

1 One publication remarkably uninterested in the Trials and Trotskyism was the internal organ of the C.P.G.B., Discussion, which appeared from 1936 but never matched Controversy for interest.

2 There is an extensive discussion of the reactions of many fellow-travellers to the Trials in D. Cate, The Fellow-Travellers (1973), 86, 115-26.

turned down a request to preside at a February meeting in a letter at once warm and frank:

'I sympathise very much indeed with its object, but I feel that the success of the Unity Campaign may mean a great deal to the Movement here, and I ought not to prejudice it by any individual action which might cause friction. Believe me, I have thought this over seriously before replying.'¹

Brailsford, who had been sympathetic the previous year, now refused to send a letter to the Memorial Hall. Despairing Wicks informed Dewar that their efforts looked likely to be fruitless. 'Sumner' was convinced that the Unity Campaign prevented I.L.P. and S.L. leaders offering any help.² He wrote in March:

'Unlike the American Committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky, which contains some of the best known leaders of American thought, the British Committee has remained a small body. We are doing our best to enlarge it'.

The American Committee was able to convene a rally 7,000 strong at the New York Hippodrome on 9 February to call for an international inquiry.

1 Horrabin to Wicks, 26 January 1937.

2 'Sumner' to Bertrand Russell, 10 March 1937. Once Russell had helped secure the release of a political prisoner he allowed the Committee to use his name but made it unmistakably clear that none of his time or money would be at its disposal.

The next day a British audience of 500, at the Memorial Hall, heard Sidney Silverman,¹ and Garry Allingham² with Socialist League and Trotsky Defence Committee speakers making a further appeal for an international commission. Silverman, the main speaker, scorned the notion of a Trotsky-Japanese link, and stated that the exiled leader, and not Stalin, was Lenin's heir. Y.C.L. members disrupted the meeting, but it backed the call for an investigation into the charges.³ The following week a further meeting was held, this time by the Friends of the Soviet Union, under the chairmanship of Victor Gollancz. James, Purkis and Matlow were invited to put their view of the Trials from the Platform. The Manchester Guardian reporter felt that James had made out a 'rather stronger' case than Purkis. Pritt added his weight to the views of Gollancz. This appears to have been one of the few cases where a debate took place about the Trials on equal terms.⁴

The Memorial Hall meeting was a financial success though dogged later by a misunderstanding typifying inter-group relations, when, through an oversight, the name of E.L. Davis of the Militant Group was not advertised with those of other speakers.⁵ Among the

- 1 Sidney Silverman had concluded as early as September 1936 that a Trotskyist plot with the Nazis against Stalin's life was impossible, (E. Hughes, Sidney Silverman : Rebel in Parliament, (1969), 60).
- 2 A member of the London Area Council of the Socialist League, war-time Daily Mirror journalist and later Labour M.P. for Gravesend.
- 3 The Manchester Guardian, 11 Feb. 1937; Fight, Feb. 1937; Sara and James were on the platform, (J. Saville, 'May Day 1937', in A. Briggs and J. Saville, op. cit., 284n). With the establishment of the full committee, Harry Wicks, the provisional secretary, was succeeded by Hilary Sumner-Boyd (q.v.). Reports of the contributions by Silverman and Groves also appear in The Star, 11 Feb. 1937.
- 4 The Manchester Guardian, 18 Feb. 1937. The previous day John Paton, no longer an I.L.P.er, had, in a long letter to the paper's editor, drawn on his personal acquaintance with Trotsky and familiarity with his ideas to dispute salient points of the prosecution case.
- 5 Minutes of the Trotsky Defence Committee, 19 Feb. 1937.

active workers for the committee was May Matlow,¹ of the Militant group, who seems to have undertaken much of the typing. Wicks, Sara, Dewar and Boyd² commonly attended meetings. Groves seems never to have come, but Purkis was a stalwart. From the other groups Alexander and Jackson might appear for the Militant, but the Marxist Group apparently went its own way. When Harry Wicks pleaded excess of work and resigned the secretaryship in March 1937, it was Hilary Sumner-Boyd who, on Dewar's proposal, replaced him.³ One of Sumner's functions was to circulate Trotsky's articles to the British press. His success in 1937 was limited and he had none at all with

- 1 A Marxist Group member and wife of Bert Matlow, who had her own links with the International Secretariat in Paris.
- 2 Hilary Sumner-Boyd (1910-76) was born in Boston, Mass., and educated privately there and at Christ Church, Oxford. He spoke Greek, German, French, Turkish and the Latin languages. His father had known John Reed and Trotsky appears to have been acquainted with his mother. He was business manager of The Red Flag of the Marxist League and his flat at 238 Edgware Road, a centre for League activities, (The Times, 18 Sept. 1976; L. Trotsky to Sumner, 21 May 1937, (Writings : Supplement (1934-40), 738); Interview with Harry Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979).
- 3 Minutes of the Trotsky Defence Committee, 5 March 1937. Boyd took the name 'Charles Sumner' in committee work, as it was felt the name of its secretary should not be one which appeared on The Red Flag. ('Sumner' to C.L.R. James, 10 March 1937). He also occasionally used the pseudonym A. Boyd. On 16 April 'Hausa', and on 30 April 'Raja Rao' attended the Defence Committee. Possibly both were foreign Trotskyists.

his own articles on Spain.¹ Forward, the New Statesman and the Manchester Guardian did publish his letter of 27 March pleading for affidavits pertaining to Trotsky's movements during the past seven years and for funds, but the response was negligible.² In March 1937 the committee began arrangements, on the request of Erwin Wolf,³ for sworn statements to be made by Maxton, C.A. Smith and John Paton concerning their visits to France in 1933, when the last two had met Trotsky.⁴ Wicks also had to draw up a statement concerning his visit to Copenhagen in 1932.⁵

I.L.P. attitudes towards Trotsky fluctuated. They were not as close to espousing his cause as the communists alleged. The New Leader had publicised the withdrawal of his correspondence rights,⁶ and Brockway attempted to gather what he saw as an impartial

- 1 The Manchester Guardian editor wrote 'we do not think, however, that the Manchester Guardian can fairly be criticised for having closed our pages either to Trotsky himself or to his sympathisers during the last few years', and declined Sumner's articles. Only late in the year and in 1938 did the most willing Labour journal editor, Emrys Hughes, start to have exclusive articles from Trotsky for Forward. Sumner had played a part in ensuring that he would not have to pay Trotsky royalties, (Writings (1937-38), 177).
- 2 He did receive an invitation from G.T. Hudson, Fellow of All Souls and secretary of the Thursday Lunch Club for Oxford Socialist Dons to address the club (G.T. Hudson to Sumner, 18 May 1937).
- 3 Erwin Wolf (1902-1937), a Czechoslovak refugee, was Trotsky's secretary in Norway. He made the request under his pseudonym of Braun to May Matlow. Later that year Wolf fell into the hands of G.P.U. agents in Spain and was never seen again.
- 4 Minutes of the Trotsky Defence Committee for 19 March 1937.
- 5 Sworn declarations were made by the three late in April 1937 but unfortunately they arrived in America too late to be useful, (C. Sumner to Brockway 1 May 1937).
- 6 In its issue for 20 Nov. 1936.

commission with French, Scandinavian and American personnel.¹ But during the Unity Campaign the party distanced itself from Trotsky by attempting to occupy a kind of middle ground on the second Trial:

'We acknowledge that we cannot answer the doubts raised by the Trial - neither the evidence given by Radek on the one side, nor the questions put by Trotsky on the other.'²

While the I.L.P. urged the Soviets not to implement the sentences passed at the second Trial before an international commission had met, it also refused until that time to join Trotskyists in declaring the Trials to be frame-ups.³ When the composition of the Dewey Commission was first announced, the I.L.P. found it impressive. On 21 May 1937, however, Brockway announced that the London Bureau would not back the Commission since it had been set up through the efforts of the American Trotskyists, who were partisan. He urged an investigation which would deal not only with Trotsky's charges, but also Stalin's and which, moreover, would be a political inquiry. Trotsky exploded, dubbing Brockway 'Mr. Pritt No. 2'.⁴ To him the

1 Trotsky's removal to Mexico in December frustrated this effort, (Inside the Left, (1942), 258-9).

2 The New Leader, Jan. 1937.

3 The Scottish I.L.P. expressed disquiet at the new trial, following a heated controversy at its conference of January 1937, (Forward, 30 Jan. 1937) but Caermichael, on behalf of the N.A.C., told the National Party Conference at Easter that 'the evidence at present available is inadequate to reach a final judgment', (The New Leader, 2 April 1937).

4 An article of 6 March 1937. Brockway published it with his reply. 'The Tragedy of Trotsky' restating the impartiality argument in The New Leader for 3 Sept. 1937. Sumner analysed Brockway's attitude in 'The Case of Leon Trotsky', Information Bulletin, 2, (July 1937).

the whole value of the Dewey Commission¹ lay precisely in the political differences he had with its members. There were no Trotskyists upon it as Brockway and Martin were to claim.

The Committee never shook itself free of internecine quarrels. It was primarily the Marxist League which provided the impetus for activity: it also produced the two secretaries. The Marxist Group was interested in Trotsky's case, but considerably less so in the Committee, which its representatives attended only rarely.² Yet the Marxist Group was holding meetings of its own on the subject of the trials.³ Relations were no better with the Militant Group, as Boyd observed:

'The Committee has to contend with so many obstacles, above all the United Front, that it is very difficult for it if it does not receive regular collaboration from the three Trotskyist groups in this country.'⁴

It did not help matters when Erwin Wolf communicated with Britain through May Matlow and not the secretary of the committee.⁵ Lack of coordination also showed up when the Committee made arrangements to print Trotsky's Hippodrome speech simultaneously with a Militant

- 1 The Dewey Commission was formed by an initiative of the American, British, French and Czech defence committees in March 1937. It was established to stage a counter-trial which was held in April, and that year published two volumes of evidence, The Case of Leon Trotsky and Not Guilty! Deutscher's account of the Commission proceedings is in The Prophet Outcast, 371-82.
- 2 A Marxist Group delegate was present at only one of the eight committee meetings up to 5 March 1937 ('Charles Sumner' to C.L.R. James, 10 March 1937).
- 3 This matter was discussed, though no action was taken, at the Defence Committee meeting of 5 March.
- 4 'Charles Sumner' to C.L.R. James, 10 March 1937.
- 5 Minutes of Trotsky Defence Committee, 19 March 1937.

Group deal to import the American edition in bulk.¹ Possibly it was lack of success which contributed to the fractions atmosphere at committee meetings - though a plausible case could be constructed in reverse. At the end of April 1937 there was a sharp disagreement over whether the Bulletin should be a vehicle carrying news of successes (at home) or information (from abroad). As secretary, Boyd was responsible for its content and the dispute was resolved in a sound British way - by the appointment of May Matlow and Jackson to make with him an editorial committee of three.² Marxist Group cooperation did not increase markedly, despite occasional attendance at Committee meetings by Ballard. Committee publications seem to have been sold only by the Marxist League.³ These were not great in number. Only two issues of the Information Bulletin appeared and they reveal narrow interests and participation.⁴ The accounts for May-July 1937⁵ indicate a considerable operating deficit. Another aspect of

1 The speech is known under the title I Stake My Life! Shaw was to be asked to write an introduction to the English edition which never materialised due to imports of the American edition undertaken by Sid Sandel, Militant Group literature secretary and English agent for Pioneer Press, the New York Trotskyist Publishing House.

2 Minutes of Trotsky Defence Committee, 30 April 1937.

3 'Neither in the meetings of the committee, announcements of which have been regularly sent, nor in the selling of its publications, nor in the production of its Bulletins has the committee received the least help from the Marxist Group.' (C. Sumner to Ballard, 16 July 1937.)

4 And, perhaps, attacks on the wrong people: see Sumner, 'The Case of Fenner Brockway', Information Bulletin, 2, (July 1937). Elsewhere in the same issue were a review by Sumner of The Revolution Betrayed and World Revolution and an article by Hugo Dewar, 'The G.P.U. in Spain'. It has been suggested that there were five Information Bulletins (A. Penn, op. cit., 117).

5 Warwick M.S.S.

Committee work was contact with the United States, the main centre of activity. There was hope of obtaining the services of an English socialist for the Dewey Commission. Sumner proposed in early April that George Novack be urged to invite Morrison or Sydney Silverman to join it.¹ Later that month the Committee decided to approach Pritt and Collard to attend.² The proposal foundered later in the year through shortage of cash.³ Sumner also made appeals for cash to help finance the Dewey proceedings,⁴ but it seems unlikely that large amounts were forthcoming.

Criticism of the trials did not break through in the Left Book Club machine. Ivor Montagu, who admitted his earlier pilgrimage to Prinkipo wrote important articles in Left Book News, conveying the sentiments of the trials. He urged young men not to be seduced by Trotsky's magnetism as he himself had been in 1931. Trotsky was now desperate, he explained, because of the impregnable strength of the U.S.S.R. Even in this journal Montagu did not feel obliged to treat critics of the trials seriously.⁵ An outraged Dewar complained to Gollancz, but was told that the journal could not carry 'all points of view', being constrained by space. Montagu's writing, Gollancz thought, had justified itself.⁶ The Red Flag asserted that Gollancz had received letters of protest.⁷ It called on all local Left Book

1 Minutes of the Trotsky Defence Committee, 2 April 1937. Silverman was chosen at the next meeting.

2 Minutes of the Trotsky Defence Committee, 16 April 1937.

3 The Dewey Commission was prepared to have a British member, but could not finance the visit, (Suzanne LaFollette, secretary of the Commission, to Sumner, 29 July 1937).

4 Warwick M.S.S.

5 'The U.S.S.R. Month By Month : The Trial', Left Book News, (Oct. 1936, 123-8; 'The U.S.S.R. Month By Month : The Guilty', Left Book News, (April 1937), 326-32.

6 [Victor Gollancz] to Hugo Dewar, 17 Oct. 1936.

7 It quoted only one instance however, (The Red Flag, March-April 1937).

Clubs to raise the matter and secure 'freedom of opinion inside the Left Book Club and in the pages of the Left News'. Yet when the Defence Committee circulated twenty four Left Book Clubs it drew no response. Sumner had to use The Red Flag to challenge Montagu and showed that he had misrepresented Trotsky by quoting him out of context.¹

Things were not greatly different at Left Review, which supported the trials and was impatient of doubts. T.A. Jackson uncritically reported the proceedings and declared that Trotsky had behaved to Stalin just as he had to Lenin.² Earlier in the year, the willing Pat Sloan had savaged Gide's chronicle of disillusionment, Back from the U.S.S.R. When a further volume of Gide, Afterthoughts on the U.S.S.R., had been printed, Warburg placed a provocative text in an advertisement for it in Left Review, challenging communists to read a view opposed to theirs.³ John Strachey, like Montagu, admitted to having been impressed by Trotsky in the past. He claimed his mind had been changed by Trotsky's reversal of views on the united front: he just opposed whatever Stalin said. The united front was in fact a supreme example of consistency in Trotsky's thought, but this did not shake Strachey's conviction, by the time of the second trial, that Trotskyists had to be driven out of the working class movement.⁴

1 The Red Flag, (May-June 1937).

2 Left Review, (April 1937), 116-8. When a second edition of his Marxism and History was projected Jackson was reduced to trying to remove Trotsky and Bukharin from the reading list, (R. Challinor, John S. Clarke, (1977), 77-9.). Neither Left Review nor Left News told their readers that the 'transcript' of the trial was not a full one.

3 Left Review, (Sept. 1937)

4 J. Strachey, 'Trotskyism', Daily Worker, 22 Jan. 1937.

Controversy over the Left Book Club list was to reach a climax late in 1937, but even before then there was disquiet. The Left Book Club by no means confined itself to communist writers, but it published no critics of Stalinism, particularly if they stood on the left of the labour movement. In April, J. Allen Skinner floated in the New Statesman the idea of broadening the Club and, in particular, of snapping its exclusive ties with one publishing house. An ensuing correspondence broke evenly between supporters and opponents of the idea.¹ By the middle of the year the idea of a rival book club had gained ground² but it seems to have faded later. Orwell's belief that 'the central stream of English literature was more or less directly under communist control'³ for the three years before the war,

- 1 One enthusiast was Frank Horrabin, who had earlier suppressed his inclination to support Trotsky. Frederic Warburg, head of Secker and Warburg ran a provocative advertisement capitalising on the correspondence in The New Statesman for 15 May.
- 2 Skinner claimed the backing of Brockway, W.T. Colyer, Ernest Fernyough, Horrabin, Arthur Creech-Jones, M.P., J.P.M. Millar, John Parker, M.P., Reginald Reynolds, Sydney Silverman, M.P., and others, (ibid., 12 June). On 7 May Reginald Sorenson wrote to defend the idea from a right wing point of view. In his broad 'The Left in Britain, 1931 to 1941', Jupp justifies Left Book Club selectivity by reference to an alleged absence of alternative socialist writing, but Warburg's lists confound this belief. An interesting post-script is the letter by 'Critic' (Kingsley Martin?) to Forward, 25 June 1938. For Skinner see J. Bellamy and J. Saville, (eds), Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. 5, 198-9.
- 3 Inside the Whale and other essays, (1967), 32. Orwell was never a Trotskyist. He thought their papers 'miserable little rags' and held Trotskyism one of 'the ruthless ideologies of the Continent'. It was the ex-Trotskyists Burnham and Souvarine, rather than Trotsky himself, who inspired 1984 and Animal Farm, (William Steinhoff, The Road to 1984, (1975), 32-3). Orwell did sign the Breton-Rivera manifesto Towards A Free Revolutionary Art, which Trotsky endorsed, (The Collected Essays, 1, (1971), 416).

has been challenged by a contemporary¹ but C.P.G.B. influence was enormous during the period of the Trials.

Kingsley Martin's puzzlement and scepticism about the trials is less interesting than the correspondence which it stimulated. Dudley Collard, Roy Pascal and Pat Sloan, (especially the third), wrote adding correctives to his doubts. After wobbling, Martin declared in 1937 that he would not take sides until he saw the evidence presented to Dewey,² though he doubted the impact of the Commission in view of the presence of Trotskyists upon it.³

Martin had at least met Trotsky, though he was shaken by his vehemence.⁴ Had he known Trotsky's view of the encounter he might have been more shaken still.⁵ Martin's treatment of Orwell later in

1 George Woodcock suggested that those younger poets who began to write in the later 1930s were anti-Stalinists of one or other kind, (The Crystal Spirit, 1970, 198). T.S. Eliot, whom Woodcock quoted as an exception contradicting Orwell's charge rejected Animal Farm on behalf of Faber and Faber in 1944, apparently for political reasons, (W. Steinhoff, The Road to 1984, 116).

2 The New Statesman and Nation, 10 April 1937.

3 *ibid.*, 22 May 1937. This belief, which Brockway shared, was of course false, (see above). N. Wood describes the 'critical independence' of The New Statesman with useful references, in Communism and British Intellectuals (1959), 49-50.

4 The New Statesman and Nation, 10 April 1937. Martin told his readers that Trotsky's anger made him think there might be something in the Moscow charges.

5 It was Martin's defence of Pritt which enraged Trotsky, who described the interview publicly as 'rather piquant' but privately believed Martin to have been drunk and to have attributed instability to him because his condition had been apparent ('Opinions and Information', 12 May 1937, Writings : Supplement (1934-40), 736-7).

the year was appalling¹ and it is hard to see why he believed Trotsky thought his journal one of the few honest and genuinely radical papers.²

The communists were not content that writers should not support Trotsky: all trace of doubt about the Trials must be expunged. Brailsford had done more than most writers were prepared to do by signing the 1 December 1936 statement. After he retracted that, he floundered in public confusion in Reynolds News. In the summer of 1937 Palme Dutt drubbed him in The New Statesman: Lenin's and Stalin's enemies were the same 'bourgeois press, Independent Labour Party, Liberals, etc.'. When Brailsford sought cover by reference to his record in support of correct causes, Dutt showed his concern about the left, not the right:

'But cannot he see that these services, so far from mitigating the danger when he comes out from time to time on the enemy side, can only make such an attack more serious?'³

Strachey and Spender, both much closer to the party than Brailsford, had their knuckles rapped for unguarded remarks.⁴

- 1 He would not print two articles by Orwell, who had earlier respected the New Statesman's coverage, on the situation behind the lines in Spain, nor a review by him of Franz Borkenau's The Spanish Cockpit. For a discussion of his motives see C.H. Rolph, Kingsley, (1973), 225-30. See also 'Spilling the Spanish Beans', The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, (1971), 305.
- 2 Editor, (1968), 232-4.
- 3 The New Statesman and Nation, 24 July 1937.
- 4 H. Thomas, John Strachey, (1973), 164-5; Spender's observation in Forward from Liberalism, (1937) that the party line on the trials 'insulted the intelligence' and had been prejudged was sourly handled by Randall Swingler, 'Spender's Approach to Communism', Left Review, (1937), 112.

Within the Committee, Sumner fought hard for a heterogeneous front,¹ arguing that a paragraph should be inserted in a Committee circular, explicitly stating that support did not involve endorsing Trotsky's politics.² He was under pressure from Sedov, whom he met in Paris in March 1937, to achieve a broad committee.³ In search of it Alexander was commissioned to secure the adherence of F.A. Voight and David Low.⁴ But no one who was not in some way connected with the Trotskyist movement ever attended Committee meetings. Only five intellectuals replied to an April 1937 circular letter from Boyd, and of these Llewellyn Powys alone agreed to join the Committee.⁵ Brockway, who had proved informally helpful, was prepared to collaborate with the Dewey inquiry but would give no undertaking to endorse it.⁶ Trotsky deceived himself as to the ease with which the Defence Committee might progress. Once the investigation was begun, he told Sumner, 'the truth will reveal itself almost as automatically as a natural force'; a favourable shift in United States opinion would also facilitate the work, he suggested.⁷ In the summer the Committee

- 1 'Charles Sumner' to Noel, Shaw, Hill, Rathbone and Allingham, 10 March 1937. He also informed them that Ethel Mannin, as well as Russell, was now of their number. She was a writer who had joined the I.L.P. in 1932 and whose articles on Russia were admired by Trotsky ('Schmidt's Trip to England', 19 Jan. 1936, Writings : Supplement (1934-40), 639-40). For an example of her analysis of the Soviets see The New Leader for 17 Dec. 1936.
- 2 Minutes of the Trotsky Defence Committee, 19 March 1937. Wicks, May Matlow and Jackson backed him, but Dewar, Purkis and Hilda Lane favoured an approach to working class organisations.
- 3 'Charles Sumner' to K. Alexander (2 April 1937). Sumner reported Sedov's views to the committee on 2 April. Sedov and Trotsky seem to have differed on this point: Trotsky reproached the Americans for failing to involve workers in their Defence Committee, (I. Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast, 367).
- 4 Minutes of Trotsky Defence Committee, 2 April 1937.
- 5 Minutes of Trotsky Defence Committee, 30 April 1937.
- 6 Brockway to Sumner, 9 April 1937. Sumner's sharp reply, dated 1 May 1937 sarcastically inquired just how far collaboration went.
- 7 Trotsky to Sumner, 21 May 1937, (Writings : Supplement (1934-40), 738).

again approached a number of socialist celebrities. Shaw had not ceased to admire Trotsky, but thought his appearance before the Commission would be a mistake. He should stick to pamphlets, where his enemies were at his mercy.¹ The Webbs of course declined.² H.G. Wells wavered but then decided against joining in. No real progress was made.

In the autumn, the Unity Campaign collapsed. Communist attacks on the P.O.U.M., sister party of the I.L.P., had not ceased in Britain or elsewhere. In Spain they were now reaching murderous levels. The suppression of the P.O.U.M. has been linked with the Trials as the cause for the campaign's collapse.³ Contemporaries like Martin in 1936,⁴ and Laski early in 1937,⁵ had both warned of the danger presented by the Trials to a British popular front. The October 1937 Bournemouth conference of the Labour Party had made it clear that there would be no participation from that quarter and Morrison had taken the opportunity to contrast a united front with a popular front. Despite this decisive setback the idea lived on in

1 Letters to the British Committee dated 20 June, 21 July 1937.

2 Beatrice Webb told Madame Halévy on 1 September 1936 that testimony had to be accepted in law as conclusive evidence in view of the lack of stability in Russia, (The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Vol. 3, N. Mackenzie, (ed.), Pilgrimage, 1912-1947, Cambridge 1978).

3 See M. Foot, Aneurin Bevan, 264, and B. Pimlott, Labour and the Left in the 1930s, 81.

4 The New Statesman and Nation, 22, 29 Aug. 1936.

5 'British Labour Comes to Life', The Nation (New York), 20 Nov. 1937.

different form. Together with a still more immediate threat of war, which brought an increasingly desperate search for any alternative to the National Government, it was enough¹ to set a firm ceiling to any further progress by the Trotsky Defence Committee.

* * * * *

Publishing was a theatre in which pressure on rivals and critics of the C.P.G.B. was strong. Trotsky does not seem to have had difficulties over bringing out his own books. He was a marketable commodity, even for the bourgeois houses. In 1937 British publishers released The Stalin School of Falsification and The Revolution Betrayed.² In the first part of 1938 he signed contracts with Nicholson and Watson for Stalin.³

Deutscher⁴ held that the title of The Revolution Betrayed had more impact than the argument of this, arguably Trotsky's major book. Maxton, who was always interested in what Trotsky wrote, felt there would have been no talk of betrayal had Lenin still been in Moscow.⁵ Tribune commissioned Pat Sloan to review the book with, presumably,

1 For the electoral facet of the Popular Front case see M. Foot, op. cit., 242-3.

2 Published by Faber and Faber.

3 I. Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast, 445n. As late as 28 September 1933 Trotsky had hopes that Gollancz, who had published The History of the Russian Revolution (1930) might bring out his Lenin, (and that Arthur Ransome might edit it), *ibid.*, 260n.

4 The Prophet Outcast, *ibid.*, 321. J. Jupp, on the other hand believes it made an impression, ('The Left in Britain, 1931 to 1941', 6.).

5 The New Leader, 11 June 1937.

the intended results,¹ but Fight thought 'no such piece of social analysis had been produced since Lenin died in 1924'.²

1937 saw also the publication of World Revolution, dedicated 'to the Marxist Group', the major historical-theoretical contribution from these islands to the Trotskyist canon. It was a massive tour-de-force reviewing the 'rise and fall' of the Comintern up to 1935. Perhaps most interesting in its account was the concentration on Lenin's key role in 1917 and later: James was one Trotskyist not in awe of the leader of the Fourth International. Trotsky himself thought World Revolution good but detected 'a lack of dialectical approach, Anglo-Saxon empiricism and formalism'.³ To Orwell the book was 'very able'.⁴ Brockway, James's former patron, who had introduced him to Frederic Warburg, thought it 'will influence substantially the thought of the time' but criticised Trotsky and his followers for seeing only the mistakes of Russia and the Comintern.⁵ Emrys Hughes prescribed World Revolution with Back from the U.S.S.R. as the antidote to Soviet Democracy by Pat Sloan.⁶ For The New Statesman, Postgate could find no errors of fact, and considered it 'badly needed and likely to excite more anger than anything yet published this year.'⁷

1 D. Cauter, The Fellow Travellers, 158.

2 Though it thought a lack of references might prevent Trotsky's text moving hardened sceptics, (Fight, Aug. 1937.).

3 'On the History of the Left Opposition', Writings : 1938-39, 61-2.

4 Time and Tide, 9 Oct. 1937, from The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, (1971), 320-2.

5 The New Leader, 16 April 1937. Brockway's dismissal, in his review, of the Trotskyists as 'the merest trifling sects' stung James into replying the following week that the Fourth International, though small, still constituted a threat.

6 Forward, 15 May 1937.

7 The New Statesman and Nation, 8 May 1937.

The Communist press was certainly not pleased to see the book, but they did not ignore it.¹ Within the Trotskyist movement no theoretical criticisms of James were made,² though there was scope in his account of the events of 1917.

In November, the British Committee announced publication of The Case of Leon Trotsky,³ being his case to the Dewey Commission.

Brockway for once was positive: the book showed the evidence so far lay with Trotsky.⁴ Hughes projected the book less forcefully than might have been expected. Martin, having read the proceedings of the trials as well as this volume concluded 'the one court heard only the case for the prosecution, the other court only the case for the defence'.

In a statement probably reflecting the views of many, he wrote:

'The more closely I follow the present controversies about the U.S.S.R., the more convinced I am that the only honest attitude for a Socialist is to give general, but critical support to the one country in the world which has adopted a planned socialist economy'.

He continued,

'The Socialist's duty is to watch the tendencies at work in the U.S.S.R. with the closest and most critical attention and to be outspoken when they appear to be directed away from the ideals that the U.S.S.R. set out to realise.'⁵

- 1 R.F. Andrews, 'Leninism Trotskyified', Left Review (1937), 291-9.
- 2 Hilda Vernon for Youth Militant thought it filled 'a considerable gap in revolutionary literature'. Harry Wicks, who had assisted the author in his work was asked in a non-sectarian gesture by Fight to review it in May 1937. In the United States, the Trotskyists had their own press, Pioneer, which they used to bring out World Revolution in 1937.
- 3 Warwick M.S.S. 15/4/1/17 (1).
- 4 The New Leader, 26 Nov. 1937.
- 5 See footnotes on next page.

The Case of Leon Trotsky was published by Secker and Warburg. Frederic Warburg was refused an advertisement for it in Left Review, a ban which, he observed, was 'striking at reason itself'.¹ J.P.M. Millar gleefully ran 'The Left Book Club's Suppressed Editorial' in The Plebs in November 1937,² as a counter to Left News. Yet Left Review did allow J.R. Campbell to review the book whose advertisement it had refused.³ In the years before the war non-communist writers on the left would have been lost without Warburg. His 1938 list included not only The Black Jacobins by James but also The Conquest of Power, by Albert Weisbord, Ethel Mannin's Women and the Revolution and The Jesuits, by F.A. Ridley.⁴ So books of unorthodox Marxist

5 From previous page. The New Statesman and Nation, 6 Nov. 1937. The following week Sumner wrote that Dewey was examining not only verbal evidence but documents as well, and that factual errors in the Moscow case had been decisively established. But the same issue also carried a letter from Randall Swingler who thought there was a distinction between criticism and destructive attacks, and that 'this line separates us both from Dr. Goebbels and from Leon Trotsky'.

1 The Plebs, (Dec. 1937), 298. Warburg wrote to The New Statesman (6 Nov. 1937) and The New Leader, (5 Nov. 1937). In the Statesman he declared:

'We must all fight for liberty against fascism but we need not all fall in behind the communist steamroller'.

It was revealed early in 1938 that the communists had stopped advertising in Controversy.

2 See also F. Warburg, An Occupation for Gentlemen, (1959), 201-2, 250.

3 'Trotsky's 'Explanations'', Left Review, (Dec. 1937), 685-8.

4 The relationship between Warburg and unorthodox intellectuals of the left is discussed in Ivor Oxaal, Black Intellectuals came to Power, (1971), 70-1. See also F. Warburg, An Occupation for Gentlemen. The story of Orwell's difficulties with Homage to Catalonia are well known and representative enough, though Orwell later came to feel that he had marred the book by being soft on the Trotskyists ('Why I Write', The Collected Essays, Vol. 1, (1971), 29).

inspiration were available, if not as well publicised as orthodox left works. It was not then for this reason that Trotsky's works had a 'minimal influence'.¹ More to the point is the meagre output of the Trotskyists themselves: C.L.R. James alone was an exception, and his work was known.² But most compelling was the general perception on the Left that the central issue of the time was one between a national government which given a choice between Stalin and Hitler would choose Hitler, and a popular front (later a 'peace alliance') of all those opposed to it. The Trotskyist view that unity should be a principle within and not beyond the working class movement could easily be presented as sectarian hair-splitting.

The Trotskyist press was small and tended to be spasmodic.³ Those with access to it could read regularly Trotsky's replies to the charges and critical articles by British and foreign Trotskyists.⁴

- 1 G. Werskey, The Visible College (1977), 180. Werskey devotes negligible attention to the Trials though it is remarkable that scientific inquirers did not raise questions about Russia.
- 2 Communist historians, at least, read The Black Jacobins, (E. Hobsbawm, 'The Historians Group of the Communist Party', M. Cornforth (ed.), Rebels and their Causes (1978), 23).
- 3 The Red Flag was more regular in 1936 than in 1937. Fight began publication late in 1936 but appeared fairly regularly in 1937. In February of that year the printed Militant appeared and it came out monthly.
- 4 The Red Flag and Fight gave the strongest coverage. Among The Red Flag articles were 'Trotsky's Traducers' (Oct. 1936), 'The Novosibirsk Trial' (Jan. 1937), and some of 'Shame!' in March-April 1937. Fight discussed the Report of the Proceedings in the Case of the Zinoviev - Trotskyite Centre in April 1937 and in July 1937 printed an extract from Trotsky's opening speech to the Dewey Commission. His closing speech appeared the next month.

But Emrys Hughes was also a strong friend of Trotsky's cause, even at the cost of his friendship with Pritt.¹ In view of his early stand the Committee seems to have dilatory in making contact with him. When they did he was helpful, inviting Sumner to use the pages of Forward to address an open letter to Pritt and Collard on the eve of the third trial.² He told Sumner that he was in complete agreement with the Dewey verdict and that neutrality was 'impossible' in a so great an historical controversy. To a London meeting he declared:

'It is the duty of all socialists whether Right or Left to stand fearlessly by the truth always. That is why in this particular controversy I am on the side of Comrade Trotsky.'³

The Committee would have had more to show for it had they given Hughes the attention they gave Brockway. Their relationship with The New Leader editor had finally dissolved in an acrimonious correspondence with Sumner.⁴ Yet curiously it was the third (Bukharin) trial of March 1938 which finally led the I.L.P. to make up its mind. In the dock were some of those who had levelled accusations against Zinoviev and Kamenev in 1936. The New Leader called for an end to the

- 1 Pritt ceased to read Forward because of its coverage of the Trials, (Hughes to Sumner, 15 Feb. 1938).
- 2 C. Sumner to Hughes, 15 February 1938.
- 3 From a letter to be read out at an Essex Hall meeting, 25 February 1938.
- 4 Of which the last shot was F. Brockway to Sumner, 7 February 1938. Hughes's correspondence with Trotsky and related papers are held at the Hardie/Hughes Collection, National Library of Scotland, M.S. Dep. 176, Box 1, File 4.

Trials and on Jay Lovestone's suggestion wrote to Stalin to protest.¹ Hughes maintained his policy of enthusiastic and independent criticism to the end. From December 1937 his arrangement to publish Trotsky was in evidence² and a long debate with stalwarts like William Gallacher and Zelda Coates stretched through to spring 1938.³ Trotsky also had the occasional opportunity still to give his views to the capitalist press,⁴ which indeed continued to cover the trials.⁵

The third trial was almost exactly contemporaneous with the Anschluss, which coincidence muffled the impact of Bukharin's appeal.⁶ By the time it took place, the News Chronicle, which had thought they would end in February 1937, was disenchanted.⁷ The Manchester Guardian

- 1 'Stalin - Stop!', The New Leader, 11 March 1938; The Times, 10 March 1938. Brockway had now concluded that the Stalin-Trotsky clash sprang from a fundamental conflict between the economic and political structures in Russia: the absence of workers' democracy, he decided, was the root cause, (Inside the Left, (1942), 260). When Not Guilty!, the second Dewey volume, was published he concluded, 'of the evidence against Trotsky I will say only that in every case where it could be tested it has been conclusively disproved', (The New Leader, 11 Nov. 1938).
- 2 See Trotsky's Forward articles, 'Cain in the Kremlin' (11 Dec. 1937), and other contributions on 15 January, 16 April and 20 August 1938.
- 3 Forward, 18 and 25 December 1937 and passim. See also the exchange between Charles van Gelderen and Gallacher, 22, 29 January 1938. W.P. and Z. Coates published The Moscow Trial, which included two speeches by Stalin, a 1937 pamphlet for the Friends of the Soviet Union.
- 4 'Behind the Moscow Trials', Sunday Express, 6 March 1938.
- 5 This was notably the case with the Daily Express and the Daily Mail.
- 6 J. Saville, loc. cit., 268.
- 7 Although A.J. Cummings's direct coverage had been favourable to them an early editorial had expressed doubts and by late 1937 Cummings himself was writing of 'Trotsky-crazy Russia'.

had, of course, always allowed criticism. The New Statesman thought the third trial 'even more appalling' than the others and was puzzled at Kremlin unconcern at the effect it had on outside opinions. Its tone was now frank incredulity rather than the scepticism of the previous year. The change was noted by the active army of fellow travelling and communist correspondents whose letters now had the tone reserved for Forward. Albert Inkpin, now of the Friends of the Soviet Union, told Martin that all the bitterest enemies of the U.S.S.R. would applaud his 'Diary'. But Martin pertinently enquired, 'What Soviet hero dare we praise today? Who is tomorrow's carrion?'¹ Yet recoiling from the bizarre trials left Martin no more favourably disposed towards Trotsky. He still believed there was no value in Trotsky's oppositionist movement and he felt forced to believe in an extended plot.

Disillusionment with communism may not have strengthened Trotskyism,² but it did fatally weaken the popular front in Britain.³ Russia's image was harmed but the belief of some Trotskyists that they were put centre-stage as a result was quite misplaced. Communist dissidents questioned Marxism per se rather than moved to the left.⁴

1 The New Statesman and Nation, 12 March 1938.

2 George Orwell for example became disillusioned far earlier than his contemporaries, but though he used Gollancz to stop attacks by the Daily Worker and denounced communism as a counter-revolutionary force he never became a Trotskyist. Similarly, the development of the Labour League of Youth was stunted, but Trotskyism did not significantly grow, (T. Willis, Whatever Happened to Tom Mix?, (1970), 185).

3 J.F. Naylor, Labour's International Policy (1969), 236-7; Inside the Left, 269; B. Jones, The Russia Complex (1977), 24-6.

4 The 1930s recruits to the party had no background in its history, (W. Kendall, 'The Communist Party of Great Britain', Survey, no. 1, (1974), 118-31).

While firm Trotskyists were toughened by the experience, the older cadre of British Trotskyism shifted from the centre of activity about this time, perhaps not coincidentally. And at least one prominent Trotskyist, Arthur Ballard, lapsed from the movement because of the trials.¹ At this distance it might be easy to ask, with Shachtman,

'Who can believe that the men who literally taught the Russian proletariat the difference between Marxism and terrorism should now, under the workers' state, have taken up (in company, moreover, with Hitler and Himmler!) a weapon which they had rejected even in the struggle against Tsarism?'²

But they did believe it, or at least did not strive strenuously to disbelieve. As for the purveyors of the big lie, there were few limits to what they could now say. A choice morsel from a virulent feast is J.R. Campbell's Labour Monthly article 'Munich'.³ The 'servile grovelling' of Maxton and McGovern before Chamberlain on his return was evidence in the I.L.P. of Trotskyist fifth column activity he declared. Impatient of nice distinctions between Trotskyism and the I.L.P., he asked if any British Communist would have been given the freedom allowed McGovern to tour Germany? It was now possible to say more or less anything about Trotsky and the Trotskyists. Reuben Osbert pioneered new psychoanalytic territory in 1938 with his

1 Interview with Harry Wicks, Nov. 1979. Ballard resumed connections with the I.L.P. and wrote for The New Leader on colonial affairs from 1938. He was a delegate to the I.L.P. annual conference in 1939.

2 Behind the Moscow Trial, (1971), 7. Trotsky's In Defence of Terrorism, in which he opposed individual terror, was republished in 1938.

3 "'Left", Socialism and the Crisis : A study in Fifth Column Activity', Labour Monthly, (Nov. 1938), 690-8.

discovery that Trotskyist theories were a mask for personal ambition;¹ this was why the unstable, unhappy, neurotic types on trial in Moscow abandoned their theories so easily. Trotsky and Zinoviev might have been inspiring figures in 1917, but 'other tasks became necessary later'. The 1936-7 trials, he concluded, showed that many of the leaders of the Russian Revolution were 'akin to Fascist leaders in the subjective factors'. Such books were a threat to the already precarious existence of Trotskyism in the labour movement.² Strachey, writing after the cycle of trials was concluded, thought no one who read the various reports would not be 'wholly convinced of the authenticity of the confessions'.³ Trotsky might pose the unanswerable question, 'if all the key positions were occupied by Trotskyists who submitted to me, why, in that case is Stalin in the Kremlin and I am in exile?'; it was a debate, however, not of truth with untruth, but of hugely unequal political forces. We can reflect, with Hugo Dewar,

'There can be little doubt that they (the communists - M.U.) did finally succeed in diverting the attention of left-wing opinion and those others whom they courted from the essential issues raised by the trials, and in persuading a very large body of public opinion that Stalin's policy was right'.⁴

1 Writing under the pseudonym R. Osborn, Osbert devoted a whole chapter of The Psychology of Reaction (1938) to the dark forces of the id which created Trotskyism.

2 The culmination of communist attacks on Trotskyism was J.R. Campbell's full-length Soviet Policy and Its Critics (1939) in which the author, who quoted from British Trotskyists as well as those abroad, sought to demonstrate that Trotskyism was the source of all streams of criticism which confuse and weaken the working class.

3 He accepted the whole farrago of links between Trotsky, Hitler, Yagoda and Bukharin but his article, unlike his books, did not rest on a single quotation, 'Topic of the Month : The Soviet Trials', The Left News, (July 1938), 885-91. In 1936, however, he had shown himself far more fastidious than others. See The Theory and Practice of Socialism, (1936), 431-2.

4 'The Moscow Trials', Encounter, (1962), 93.

Inevitably, the work of the Trotsky Defence Committee suffers by comparison with its counterpart in the United States and, to a lesser extent, that in France. Why was this? Clearly the Americans gained strength from fast work. They had broadened before the end of 1936 to embrace an impressive galaxy of intellectuals,¹ so much so that Trotsky called for the inclusion of more workers in the committee. By this date the British had only a dull list of adherents to offer and were to prove unable to retain them all. But this begs the question of why this early success was possible. In this respect the Americans had made a crucial break-through within the intelligentsia by their fusion with the American Workers Party in 1935. In the end, a number of intellectuals gained thereby became alienated from Trotskyism, but they retained a respect for Trotsky and their influence in 1936-38 was critical. A second vital factor bringing success in America was the presence from June 1936 of the entire Trotskyist movement within the Socialist Party. The trials were a live issue in the party and one reason for the willingness of Norman Thomas and others accepting the Trotskyists into membership. Finally, the Americans had from 1937 a positive immediate domestic focus for their work in the gathering of the Dewey Commission, whose impact on public opinion was strong. For the Americans, this was more than an intellectual debate. They actually doubled the size of their party in their short stay in the S.P., the most successful entrust experiment ever conducted by Trotskyists.

The British were fully aware of the importance of a broad committee, but their efforts were not fruitful. Intellectuals had not rallied to Trotsky during his battle with Stalin in the 1920s. Indeed intellectuals did not come to communism in significant numbers

¹ James T. Farrell organised an early committee to win right of asylum for Trotsky during his incarceration at Honefoss.

until the 1930s after Trotskyism had been routed. They could feel no continuity with an earlier experience they had not shared. And they came to communism, or to belief in the need for a united or popular front, because of the threat of fascism and war, immediate geographically and in time. 'Unity' had necessarily to be a more powerful rallying cry in Europe than in the United States. If British writers and intellectuals doubted the trials, it did not imply support for Trotsky. Sturdy Anglo-Saxon empiricism kept them aloof from another totalitarian ideology, particularly one which had put on such a poor showing in its short life. Had the Trotskyist movement scored one direct political success, had it, for example, kept the Socialist League out of the Unity Campaign, things might have been different, but it was worsted at every stage.

In France, the threat of fascism was more immediate still, and the country had a far stronger Communist Party. Trotskyism had appealed to some intellectuals since the 1920s however. In 1936 the Pazes were available and Victor Serge had been released from Russia. France was also the home of the International Secretariat, the centre of the world Trotskyist movement. Sedov, Trotsky's son, was an important figure within it and the chief organiser of evidence to be presented to Dewey from Europe. Yet it is thought that the Trials did 'not materially alter the balance of opinion on the French extreme left', even after the Barcelona events.¹ The French Trotskyists were just as fractious as the British and certainly no more successful in their entry work within social democracy. The significance of the popular front was an immediate matter in France where the fate of the Blum government was linked to that of Spain. In Spain the Trotskyists were physically liquidated or driven out; in

¹ D. Caute, Communism and the French Intellectuals, 1914-1960, (1964), 127.

France their influence declined; in Britain a definite limit was drawn to their growth. Only in America was the campaign against the Moscow Trials a bridge to progress. There, in the view of Shachtman, the anti-Trials campaign of Trotskyists split the radical intellectual world wide open. It happened nowhere else.¹ In Britain especially, there was enough diversity on the left to prevent the Communist Party version carrying all before it,² but communism's loss, given that third parties had survived, was not Trotskyism's gain.

Given the balance of forces on the left in mid 1936, there was no question of the Trotsky Defence Committee decisively discrediting the Trials. Something less than that would have counted as success. It has to be recorded, however, that the sense of malaise many liberal and socialist intellectuals felt by 1938 was traceable not to the Committee's efforts but to the grotesque spectacle of medieval witchcraft trials in what was supposed to be the world's first socialist state. A depressing codicil to the Trotsky Defence Committee was a letter to the International Secretariat just before the Bukharin Trial. In it the three British groups, so fractious in other respects, united to condemn Lee and his group for publishing Workers International News and, as a pamphlet, the summary of Dewey's final report, 'without the permission or even the knowledge of the Trotsky Defence Committee, and without mentioning the Committee on the title-page of the pamphlet'.³ It is lamentably significant that the three groups were able to avoid fractiousness only in their condemnation of a fourth. After Wicks and James had spoken on the Dewey Commission on 4 March 1938, little further activity seems to have been organised.

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- 1 In The Prophet's Army, 1928-41, (Westport, Conn., 1977), C.A. Myers quotes from Shachtman's unpublished reminiscences.
 - 2 J. Saville, 'May Day 1937' in A. Briggs and J. Saville, (eds.), Essays in Labour History, 3, (1977), 264-70.
 - 3 'C. Sumner' to the International Secretariat, 6 Feb. 1938. Sumner sent copies to Trotsky and Sedov.

The 'Bolshevik-Leninists' in the Labour Party worked in the political area with the greatest potential for Trotskyist growth in the 1930s: the Labour League of Youth. It took two years for them to concentrate in the L.L.O.Y., and they thus lost their best chance to rival communist sympathisers on equal terms. They were also hampered by arguing a tactical case for which it was difficult to obtain support. In 1937 communist pressure on the League became more intense and a debate between Stalinism and Trotskyism took place, with Trotskyism on the defensive. The Bolshevik-Leninists gained sufficient backing to pass beyond exclusively youth work, but remained confined within Labour Party boundaries. This circumscribed growth. Differences of style among the Bolshevik-Leninists, now known as the Militant Group, maintained their organisation at the end of 1937.

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Within the Labour League of Youth there was throughout the 1930s a strong desire for autonomy and widespread political criticism of the party's leadership. The League was small in 1934 when Ted Willis, a Tottenham Leaguer who had moved to the left and Roma, younger sister of Hugo Dewar, combined in opposition to Labour's Peace and War policy at its 1934 conference. Willis successfully moved rejection of the League of Nations and a call for the formation of anti-war committees by ninety to seventeen.¹ There were at this stage no definite factions either of communism or Trotskyism,² though

1 Advance (April 1938); J. Cleary and N. Cobbett, Labour's Misspent Youth, (P), [28 July 1979], 6.

2 However, Trotsky believed that there were three groups in Britain as early as July 1934, (L. Trotsky to H. Dewar, July 1934, Warwick M.S.S.).

C.P.G.B. interest in the League was growing.¹ It was possible for Dewar and Willis to collaborate in a small unofficial journal Youth Forum.² During 1935 and 1936 communist influence grew on Willis and other leading activists within the League. The Trotskyist presence hardened with the departure from the I.L.P. for the League of Youth and, (initially), the Socialist League of Stuart Kirby³ and D.D. Harber early in 1935.⁴ It seems no definite faction was formed at once but in October of that year with Roma Dewar, they published Youth Militant, a duplicated journal.⁵ Two months later a group of London League members led by Ted Willis launched the duplicated Advance with an initial print run of 500.⁶ Around these journals rival factions would crystallize.

- 1 O. Bell, 'The Leftward Development of the British Youth Movement', Inprecorr, Vol. 14, no. 33, (8 June 1934), 890-1.
- 2 N. Cleary and J. Abbott, op. cit., 6.
- 3 Kirby was a minority spokesman during the debate within the C.L. of December 1933. Sometime after this he left Britain for Japan, returning later to pursue an academic career, (Interview with J. Archer, Nov. 1973).
- 4 They withdrew individually, a step they later considered a mistake. Others with whom they were in contact with the I.L.P. also were interested in the League of Youth, (A.B. Doncaster et. al. to the International Secretariat, I.C.L., ([April? 1935], H.P., D.J.H. 5/2). Both Harber and Kirby attended the I.S. plenum of spring 1935.
- 5 Beneath its masthead the journal proclaimed itself 'the first result of a Committee of Young Socialists in Organised Youth Movements', (A. Richardson, op. cit.).
- 6 Advance was printed from June 1936.

1936 was a critical year for the League of Youth. Within its ranks there was mounting resentment at the N.E.C. policy of curtailing political debate.¹ Defenders of the official position were few and on the defensive.² Youth Militant supporters, six strong, formed themselves into the 'Bolshevik-Leninists in the Labour Party' in February of that year.³ At that time they controlled the League's London Advisory Committee and were selling 250 copies of their journal.⁴ They shared with Advance an intransigent opposition to a memorandum from the National Executive which sought to restrict League activity to social matters. But whereas Advance favoured a merger with the Young Communist League to form a mass youth movement, Youth Militant argued for a breakaway from the Labour Party and the establishment of an independent League.⁵ In the Spring months of 1936, Advance gained ground against Youth Militant in the London Region. Youth Militant was unable to transform its position on the Advisory Committee into strength at quarterly conferences.⁶ Advance carried its views forty two to sixteen at the first of the year against not only the Bolshevik-Leninists, but others of different persuasion as well.⁷ The League

- 1 For the running battle between young Labour Party members and the National Executive see J. Ferris, 'The Labour League of Youth, 1924-1940', (University of Warwick M.A. thesis, 1977), and Z. Layton-Henry, 'Labour's Lost Youth', J.C.H., Vol. 11, (1976), 275-308.
- 2 Arthur Peacock, editor of The New Nation, the official League journal, gave his account in Yours Fraternally, (1945), 18-26.
- 3 'Statement by the Bolshevik-Leninists Group to joint session of British Trotskyists', For Discussion, no.1, 28 Nov. 1936, 15.
- 4 Advance (April 1937); *ibid.* The N.E.C. memorandum reduced the League's age to twenty one and forbade it to discuss policy.
- 5 J. Ferris, *op. cit.*, 108 and *passim*; Advance (Nov. 1936). For the memorandum, see L.P.C.R. (1936).
- 6 On many occasions the London Advisory Committee was deadlocked five to five, (letter from Ernest Harrison, Advance, Aug. 1936).
- 7 At conference and on the N.A.C. Roma Dewar was accused of making 'unity with reactionary elements', *ibid.*

met in national conference at Manchester that summer. There was only one dissenter from a South Tottenham resolution condemning the memorandum. Roma Dewar was returned to the National Advisory Committee as its only Trotskyist,¹ but a narrow majority backed unity of the left parties.² Following the Manchester decisions the Y.C.L. approached the League of Youth to propose a Y.C.L.-L.L.O.Y. merger.³

Through 1936 the Bolshevik-Leninists built up their support in the League of Youth. Sales of Youth Militant more than trebled to 800 by October.⁴ In the same period they grew from six to sixty members, mainly by recruiting people new to Trotskyism. Forty of these were within the League of Youth.⁵ Harber attended the youth conference of the I.C.L. of 1 August 1936 following the international pre-conference. The youth conference resolved that the Fourth International could be built only by a resolute struggle against the Second and Third Internationals and the International Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Youth Organisations.⁶ Taken with the 'Geneva' resolution and Trotsky's writings, this was a strong inducement for assembling all personnel in the Labour League of Youth. Some former Marxist Groupers came over to

1 J. Ferris, op. cit., 94.

2 Youth Militant, (April 1937).

3 For the merger proposal of John Gollan, Y.C.L. national chairman, see Advance (Aug. 1936). Gollan cited as proof of the worth of his proposition the merger of socialist and communist youth in Spain and their imminent fusion in Belgium. These were the very developments that most alarmed Trotsky and increased the urgency of his plea for concentration in the League of Youth.

4 A Short Statement, loc. cit.

5 *ibid.*

6 'Youth And The Fourth International', Documents, 108-112.

the Bolshevik-Leninists following the debacle at the Keighley conference of the I.L.P.¹ On 11 October 1936, twenty six Bolshevik-Leninists attended the national meeting of the groups and put a strong line based on the Geneva conference. The Marxist Group conference of the previous day effectively marked off those I.L.P.ers who were now prepared to join the Labour Party.² The autumn Don James and two others came over from the Liverpool I.L.P.³ The Bolshevik-Leninists also encountered a loose association of dissident Marxists who sold Trotsky's pamphlets and the American Militant in Hyde Park and at Marble Arch. They were inducted before 1936 was out.⁴ Against these accessions had to be balanced the failure to achieve a modus operandi with the Marxist League⁵ although both it and the Bolshevik-Leninists had an interest in each other's field of work.⁶ But Bolshevik-Leninists had played some part in launching Fight as an F.I. journal in October.⁷

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- 1 Among those stimulated by the 'Geneva' resolution and the 'Interview with Collins' were John Goffe and John Archer (P.J.B., 1910-), two Yorkshire activists (Interview with J. Goffe, July 1974).
 - 2 After this Marxist Group conference Max Nicholls, Bert Matlow and John Robinson entered the Labour Party. E.L. Davis and Starkey Jackson, who were to take leading positions, came over in September 1936. Davis had been introduced to Trotskyism by Margaret Johns, whom he met at a union meeting. Jackson was an ex-communist.
 - 3 This branch was to grow to eleven members by August, retaining one Harry Cund, as an official of the I.L.P. who had not been asked by that party to leave, ([Militant Group], Minutes of National Conference, 1-2 Aug. 1937).
 - 4 It effectively became the Paddington branch of the Bolshevik-Leninists by 1937. Most prominent among its tiny membership was Jock Haston, (1912-), a former seaman and steeplejack who had left the C.P.G.B. in disagreement with its line on Germany (J.P.M. Millar, The Labour College Movement (1979); interview with J. Haston, July 1973; J.H. to [members of the Club?] 10 June 1950, H.P., D.J.H., 158/111).
 - 5 Each organisation blamed the other for this. For the Marxist League, see Chapter V. The Bolshevik-Leninists claimed they had made a number of approaches to the Marxist League for unity.
 - 6 At the time of the Unity Campaign there were claimed to be five followers of the Militant in the Socialist League. The M.L. was involved with the Socialist Youth Committee, an outgrowth of the Socialist League, which tried unsuccessfully to gain support in the League of Youth during 1936.
 - 7 'Interim Reply of the E.C., Militant Group', 5 Aug. 1937, Inter-Group Relations, [Sept.] 1937, 2.

The Bolshevik-Leninists, (who from summer 1937 became known as the Militant Group), operated within what became known as a 'split perspective'. They intended, like all other Trotskyists who in these years joined larger parties, to leave with the foreseeable future. Hopefully, this break would be made with an enhanced membership.¹ But the corollary of aiming at a breakaway was that the entrists and not the party apparatus would decide the timing. It therefore became vital that they should not be compromised by unconstitutional activities before they had sufficient opportunity to gather support. This was not a new problem: it had preoccupied members of the Marxist Group in the I.L.P. Some of them were now among the Bolshevik-Leninists and fear of premature expulsion was to be a steady influence on their behaviour. The Bolshevik-Leninists knew they had to establish a separate identity and give the appearance of intending a permanent Labour Party presence.² For the moment they had strong backing from Trotsky and the International in their stress on party activities. The International Bureau, when it rapped the knuckles of C.L.R. James for an ill-considered departure from the I.L.P., endorsed the Bolshevik-Leninists' fear that an outside group for the Fourth International would compromise them.³

- 1 See R.W., On the Work of Bolshevik-Leninists in the Labour Party, (Sept 1936), Warwick M.S.S. 15/4/1/10. R.W., who did not show great knowledge of Labour Party procedure, foresaw establishing independence from the party, within a year of joining, with a following of hundreds of workers.
- 2 R.W. advised his readers not to act as 'wise strangers' or declare their future exit from the rooftops, (ibid.). Trotsky had also remarked that one did not enter the Labour Party and declare 'I am a revolutionist', (see above,
- 3 The Bolshevik-Leninists launched a duplicated paper, Militant, in February 1937. Its circulation was below 500 (Minutes, 20 Feb. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2A/4). On 13 December the Bureau wrote of the Bolshevik-Leninists, 'they declare that an independent group outside could only cause them harm because they would in that case be regarded as agents of an alien organisation', (Declaration of the International Bureau). By 1939 Trotsky had apparently moved away from this view. See note to 'Fighting Against the Stream', Writings : 1938-39, 150n.

Thus while the Socialist League, with communist support, confronted the Labour Party apparatus virtually courting expulsion, the Labour League of Youth, also with communist support, backed away from a clash and restrained its demands.¹ Trotskyism found itself arguing for the Socialist League to stay within the party and the Labour League of Youth to come out, though in both places it opposed the imminent Unity Campaign.² Youth Militant rejected the Advance policy of local fights against the memorandum and proposed an independent League.³ Although Advance was to weaken its resistance to the memorandum, it was Youth Militant which had the more difficult case to argue. Its strategy was less concrete, more speculative, and as well as the contemporary spectacle of the doomed Socialist League, there was the salutary example of the fate of the I.L.P. to hold up as a warning of what happened to those who defied Transport House.⁴

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- 1 From late 1936 Advance campaigned for building up membership within the Labour Party, a policy the League of Youth endorsed on 8 May 1937. Meanwhile Challenge was made into a weekly journal in the effort to build up Y.C.L. membership too, (J. Ferris, op. cit., 107-8). Ferris attributes L.L.O.Y. resistance to the memorandum to pressure from leading League members being due to pass twenty one in 1938. Communist advice was now that the League of Youth should turn its back on 'splitters' and devote itself to youth activity 'and not only to a fight against the L.P. Executive', (W. Cohen, For Discussion, (Dec. 1936), 7; Z. Layton-Henry, 'Labour's Lost Youth', J.C.H., 11, (1976), 283). There was some communist bewilderment at the change in Y.C.L. policy to opposition to a merger, (For Discussion, Nov. 1936, 32).
- 2 F.L. Brown, Advance (March 1937).
- 3 Youth Militant (Sept. 1936).
- 4 Advance for March 1937: this example was given by Ted. Willis. The influence of the C.P.G.B. on Advance during 1937 is marked: Gollan, Sloan and R.P. Dutt all wrote articles for it that year.

In 1937 there was far more sourness than before in the debate within the League. The change of mood coincided with increased communist bitterness towards Trotsky and his followers arising from the first Moscow trial of August 1936 and the development of the revolution in Spain. It turned on the different reactions of the two factions to the decision of the Edinburgh conference of the Labour Party to uphold the N.E.C. memorandum. Ted Willis and Advance concluded that the battle against it had failed to rouse youth and ascribed this failure to introspection and deadlock in the London area where three papers other than theirs circulated.¹ From this time they discouraged the projected Y.C.L. merger and advised against the split policy of Youth Militant, described as 'throwing in the sponge'. Youth Militant persisted with its policy of fighting for an independent League and became principal advocate of defying the N.E.C.²

With the Socialist League decision to join the Unity Campaign three discernible groups within it were left with the problem of how to react. As well as the Marxist League and the Militant Group (who had five S.L. activists) there were those like Margaret McCarthy and Garry Allingham who had no group. Within the Militant Group a speedy dissolution of the Socialist League was anticipated and a proposal by Harber that it seek a merger with these 'centrists' was discussed.³ Had his proposal been adopted and the attempt met with success it is possible that a step away from isolation, similar to that

1 Advance (Nov. 1936).

2 A third policy proposal of this time was that of Bob Edwards of the I.L.P. Guild of Youth who projected all three youth movements as obstructed by their parties and recommended unity between them, *ibid.*

3 Minutes, London E.C., 20 Feb. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2A/4.

taken by the Communist League of America in 1935, might have considerably enhanced Trotskyism's clout.¹ But there is a depressing significance in discussion of merger with these individuals rather than with the Marxist League. On the Trotsky Defence Committee² and in the S.L. it was clear that membership of the Labour Party was practically the only thing these two factions had in common. But the Militant Group did feel keenly the need for common Trotskyist action in face of the Unity Campaign and its January initiative led to the meeting of all factions on 14 February 1937.

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Youth Militant's circulation was 1600 in February and it had established contact with 70 Leagues,³ but a February 1937 gathering of the Leagues showed it to be on the defensive. In the spring it printed its programme for youth, a platform intended to revive the League and prevent membership loss to the Y.C.L. or Mosley. The League was faced with the N.E.C. memorandum. To capitulate meant extinction; to reject meant dissolution. Youth Militant proposed that the League should take its own organisation into its own hands and build a mass base. It would then seek affiliation to the Labour Party (from which it would sever no ties in the interim) as an autonomous unit. The programme provided by Youth Militant was for the most part a standard Trotskyist analysis of imperialism, the danger of war and the rise of fascism.

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- 1 In 1935 the C.L.A. fused with the American Workers Party of the Rev. A.J. Muste. This merger took place outside a social democratic milieu however.
 - 2 It was Marxist League domination of the Defence Committee which repelled the Militant Group, who hoped to replace Harry Wicks, its secretary, with their own member May Matlow, (Minutes, London E.C., 20 Feb. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2A/4).
 - 3 Minutes, London E.C., 20 Feb. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2A/4.

Its immediate demands were for a total rejection of all activities connected with war preparation - rearmament, industrial conscription - and exposure of the League of Nations; for resistance to fascist advance not by employing state forces but by use of workers' defence corps; for industrial action to prevent arms being sent to suppress colonial movements; for the right of all working class parties to affiliate to the Labour Party; for the closed shop, industrial unionism and the forty hour week; for a labour movement campaign against the embargo on arms for Spain and the banning of volunteers, and for an international commission of enquiry into communist allegations against the P.O.U.M.¹

On 4 April 1937, the London Leagues met and condemned Youth Militant by a majority of three to one. It had committed a tactical error by condemning a summer campaign projected by Advance as a non-political concession to the requirements of the memorandum. In February a Youth Militant supporter called for a League conference to be summoned.² The National Advisory Council of the League, dominated by Advance supporters, shortly moved to convene an unofficial conference. Youth Militant criticised the nature of its arrangements³ and insisted that a healthy youth body could only be built outside the

1 Youth Militant (April 1937).

2 S. Bone, Advance (Feb. 1937), advised one to free the League of Labour's 'throttling control'.

3 Under the arrangements, two resolutions, both submitted by the N.A.C., were to be the only ones tabled. One effectively yielded to the memorandum, the other committed the Leagues to a campaign around Labour's Immediate Programme. Local Leagues could only table amendments. Youth Militant threatened a shadow agenda.

party.¹ The conference, it predicted, would decide if there was to be 'a Revolutionary Socialist Youth Organisation, or ... a pale and feeble imitation of the Young Imperialists?'² The debate between Advance, (assisted by the Y.C.L.), and Youth Militant grew increasingly sharp. Indeed from the time of the second Moscow Trial of February 1937, there is little to choose between Y.C.L. attacks and those mounted by Advance on the Trotskyists.³ Programmatically they were accused of lining up with the bourgeoisie and the gutter press over the Trials, with Transport House and The Times over the Unity Campaign and with the P.O.U.M. against the Spanish Government 'objectively aiding the fascists'.⁴ When the unofficial conference convened at Whitsun 1937, it upheld the Advance perspective for League growth and trounced the Trotskyists on Spain. Conference was held in London, the base of Advance and provider of more than seventy five per cent of the delegates.⁵ The debate on Spain occurred simultaneously with the

- 1 To remain in the party is to commit suicide, to end the League as a political organisation. The only road for the League is to part company with the party for a while, to form an independent Socialist Youth organisation, with its own programme. Having developed a programme on a political basis, the Socialist Youth organisation could then apply to the L.P. as an autonomous body, retaining its right to discuss policy and its right to call national conferences and elect its own Executive body. On this basis only can the League go forward.
(Youth Militant, April 1937.)
- 2 Youth Militant, (May 1937).
- 3 To Advance they were 'middle class types' with a disruptive record. It declared there was no place for them in a living movement 'as there is no place for boils on a healthy human'. They produced no concrete proposals, only 'monotonous talk of splitting', (Advance March 1937).
- 4 *ibid.*
- 5 130 out of 170 delegates came from London but the capital had only one fifth of total L.L.O.Y. membership of 3,500, (Youth Militant, June 1937). Of course London was also the chief base of Youth Militant itself which controlled branches at Stoke Newington, East Islington, Peckham and Golders Green.

Barcelona uprising. Emergency resolutions were allowed and Sid Bone and Charles van Gelderen put forward the case against suppression of working class parties. In a tumultuous debate delegates' indignation was restrained only with difficulty and a different resolution was carried by acclamation.¹ Trotskyist strength among the delegates did not rise above a dozen votes on any issue.² It can only have been potential rather than present Trotskyist appeal which sparked the vituperation of Y.C.L. and Advance attacks on Youth Militant after the conference.³ Spain⁴ and the unofficial conference marked off a phase in the development of the League of Youth and a stage in the growth of the Militant group as well.⁵

- 1 Willis, Harry Rigg and Alec Bernstein spoke for the Advance majority deploring the 'treasonable role of the Barcelona insurgents', Advance (June 1937), Youth Militant (June 1937).
- 2 'Carried with twelve votes against - carried with twelve votes against - this is the story of the conference as far as voting was concerned', A. Bernstein, Advance, (June 1937).
- 3 John Gollan at the Y.C.L. annual conference declared 'these people have been sheltered too long in the hospitable ranks of the League of Youth. These people must be driven out of the working class youth movement for the enemies they are'. Conference passed a resolution, 'Drive Out the Trotskyists' which insisted expulsion of the Trotskyists was a pre-requisite for unity, (Youth of Britain Advance!, 1937, 31-2; See also J. Gollan, What Next for Youth Unity? (1937), 13). The N.A.C. of the League of Youth was aware that Trotskyism was being suppressed within the Socialist Youth of Belgium and France, (Advance, May 1937). The next month Bernstein informed Advance readers that 'the link up between the Trotskyists and the Fascists is shown clear for all to see' and called for Roma Dewar, Van Gelderen, Fred Emmett, Ken Alexander and Bone to be cleared out as wreckers.
- 4 Only in the I.L.P. was there a comparable debate between followers of the communist and Trotskyist lines. Space was also given in Advance for June 1937, but see A. Marwick, 'Youth in Britain, 1920-1960 : Detachment and Commitment', J.C.H., Vol. 5, no. 1, (1970), 49 for the handling of Spain by youth movement papers.
- 5 Fight for June 1937 declared its opinion that the L.L.O.Y. would rapidly decline if Youth Militant did not increase its influence, a development it thought unlikely.

Youth Militant did not pull out of the League after Whitsun, but the group felt its limited opportunities in the youth movement rivalled by Labour Party potential. Carriage of the Advance programme by the L.L.O.Y. meant 'complete oblivion of the League as a political organisation'. The only hope was felt to be links with the Socialist Left fighting for party democracy.¹ Youth Militant supporters were to have a hand in launching the Socialist Left Federation in June 1937 though this initiative came to little; Advance on the other hand did lead the League to a spell of rapid growth even with its less ambitious orientation. When the 1937 Labour Party conference reinstated Willis, his paper and the N.A.C. with official status their prestige as people who had argued that a modus vivendi might be reached was much enhanced.² Youth activities by the Trotskyists continued but they never passed the strength reached by the time of the Whitsun conference.³ They retained control of some London Leagues and even expanded, but their own coverage of their activities reads as a catalogue of defeats. At quarterly conferences of the London Leagues they were steadily and depressingly voted down.⁴

1 Youth Militant (June 1937).

2 Advance (Oct. 1937). Outside the Trotskyist movement there seems to have been little comment on the modification by Advance which had allowed the N.E.C. to come to terms with it.

3 Youth Militant sellers covered the Battersea conference of the Y.C.L. This may have encouraged Gollan to urge young people to 'expose the wrecking aims and activities of the Trotskyists' in his Y.C.L. pamphlet What Will London's Youth Do? (1937), quoted in R. Black, Stalinism in Britain, (1970), 110.

4 The 27 June 1937 conference heard delegates from Trotskyist branches at East Islington and Peckham. Paddington, East and West Islington had resolutions on the agenda. Trotskyist views on unity and workers' sanctions against the Japanese were crushed at the autumn conference, (Militant, Oct. 1937).

It may have been this impasse as well as lack of money which led to the absence of a delegate from Britain's Trotskyist Youth from the August 1937 meeting of the International Youth Bureau. One attempt to concretise the Trotskyist alternative was a startling proposal that the L.L.O.Y. should merge with the Y.C.L. That body had no enthusiasm for it and Advance, which had itself moved in this direction a year earlier, now opposed the plan.¹ The Trotskyists stayed within the League of Youth but felt they now had outlets in the Labour Party itself. The last Youth Militant for the time being² offered model resolutions for submission to party conference that autumn. In July 1937 the duplicated Militant^{2A} absorbed the printed Militant to give one printed monthly.³ Under the editorship of E. Starkey Jackson, with assistance from Margaret Johns, the Militant was a less introverted paper which dropped its knockabout lampoons of Willis et. al. for a broader appeal. It had some claim to being the best paper yet produced by British Trotskyism and was certainly the first to appear with consistent regularity. But it is arguable that the change from a youth paper was made late⁴ and certain that the Group had not yet shown it could transcend mere commentary on union affairs.⁵

1 J. Jupp, op. cit., 223-4.

2 This was the issue for June 1937.

2A. Militant was launched as a duplicated monthly on 15 January 1937.

3 The Militant, sub-titled '(Incorporating Youth Militant) Organ of the Militant Group in the Labour Party'.

4 The democratic ferment among Labour Party members had been commented upon by the International six months earlier, (Declaration of the International Bureau, (13 Dec. 1936). For the successful campaign of D.L.P.s to increase constituency representation on Labour's N.E.C., see B. Pimlott, op. cit., 123-38.

5 See 'Bus Militants Expelled', of August 1937, with its list of propagandist 'warnings'. Only in October 1937 did the paper report participation in an actual struggle, that to organise a Croydon engineering firm. The author, John Goffe, was an apprentice manager in Sheffield.

Militant's real drive was towards Labour Party change. It insisted - quite wrongly as it turned out - that the only hope for the League of Youth was as part of the movement for democracy now accelerating within the party. This was a time when defeats for the Divisional Labour Parties led them to rally and secure constitutional success in their drive for expression within the party.¹ The first printed Militant declared:

We therefore call for the immediate creation of a left-wing organisation which will include all Labour Party workers who are willing to struggle for a revolutionary programme and leadership, an organisation which can offer to the workers a clear socialist alternative to the policies of treachery and despair of the existing leadership.²

For a time the Militant Group hoped, like the Marxist League, to fill the vacuum with the Socialist Left Federation, formed by twelve Labour Party members in June. Led by a Bureau of seven, whose members included Groves and Harber, it managed some initial growth. Militant's hopes were to be dashed, but it did take the opportunity here and elsewhere to explain its conception of unity in opposition to that in the name of which the Socialist League had sacrificed itself.³ Because

1 A meeting of D.L.P.s after the crushing of the Left at Edinburgh in October 1936 led to agitation which resulted in the constituency section being expanded from five to seven seats, (B. Pimlott, op. cit., 112-5). Militant welcomed the extension of the constituency section on the grounds that this part of the party was more sensitive to the mood of the masses than 'the bureaucratically controlled trade unions'. But little improvement was foreseen since celebrities like Cripps and Mellor were more likely to secure election than members of the rank and file.

2 Militant (July 1937).

3 Militant condemned in August 1937 the unity programme which 'consisted of piffling reforms and contained no more radical demands than can be found in the Immediate Programme of the Labour Party'. Its conception of unity implied temporary agreement on specific issues by labour movement organisations, and it had available the precepts of early Comintern congresses for support.

of willingness on either side to engage in war, Militant's shots were aimed equally at right and left,¹ with the League of Nations singled out for particular attention.

* * * * *

By August 1937 Militant had established a national identity. Its paper, whether in its youth or adult incarnation, was probably the best known Trotskyist journal and certainly the chief organ of the movement within the Labour Party and the League of Youth. Circulation was still below 2,000 although it was known that it could pay on a 3,000 print run. Militant was to make an admirable break with Trotskyist tradition by appearing monthly for several years. Members were separately organised not only in eight London areas but also in groups in Liverpool, Sheffield, Leeds, Hull, Glasgow, Norwich and Leicester. Membership was in double figures in London and Liverpool. It was still overwhelmingly a Labour Party group, though I.L.P. members had been retained in Liverpool, Glasgow and elsewhere.² When delegates gathered in London for the annual conference on 1-2 August 1937 they had every reason to believe they had established the most stable organisation yet in British Trotskyism's chequered history³

- 1 'The Communist Party and its henchmen of the "Unity" bloc are using this confusion in order to foist policies on the workers which, although they are trapped out in left-wing phrases, in actual fact are every whit as reactionary as those of the Labour bureaucracy', Militant, (Aug. 1937). The alternative policy can be seen in resolutions on Spain which Militant influence had brought on to the 1937 Labour Party conference agenda: Fairfield (Liverpool) called for a workers' boycott of arms and goods for Franco; East Islington sought a workers' republic in Spain.
- 2 Militant Group, Minutes of National Conference, 1-2 August 1937, 1-3.
- 3 The success - and failures - of the Militant Group must be attributed in large measure to the leading cadre which it had established. D.D. Harber was the dominant political influence within the Group and E.S. Jackson, its secretary. With E.L. Davis and Margaret Johns they remained its leading figures to the end of the decade.

and certainly that they had convened the most representative gathering to date. Yet the same conference revealed that different local groups were operating in different ways. Some were working secretly and presumably not selling papers at all. The August conference was confronted by an executive resolution, moved by Harber, which called for the setting up of a front organisation to advance most of the Bolshevik-Leninist programme in the Labour Party. It would not, he suggested, call for the creation of a new party and the Fourth International. So long as the Bolshevik-Leninists continued as a disciplined group within it, steering towards a split, centrist degeneration like that shown by the I.L.P. and the Socialist League could be prevented. During the debate there was some unease. After all, there had been a vacuum at the heart of the Marxist Group in the experience of some of those present.¹ Harber's proposition for such an organisation to be set up was carried easily, but the majority for keeping a Bolshevik-Leninist faction in being was far narrower.² This debate overlapped a tactical dispute over whether or not to enter the Socialist Left Federation. The Liverpool Group proposed staying clear of 'centrism' which, moreover, it believed to be very weak in this case. Jackson explained the E.C. fear that ignoring it might isolate the group from the left of the old Socialist League and permit the emergence of new centrist currents. Before he carried the day³

1 K. Alexander was also aware of the difficulty the Americans had experienced.

2 The first point was carried forty eight to thirteen with one abstention. the second thirty eight to twenty with one abstention. (The Militant Group, Minutes of the National Conference, Aug. 1-2, 1937). The Liverpool Group favoured having no secret faction and merely using the Militant Labour League which was the name the front organisation was given.

3 By a vote of forty to eighteen on the E.C. report, *ibid.*, 8.

there was the expression of much misgiving. Essentially the Liverpool/E.C. clash on the S.L.F. was over timing, since the decision to set up what was to be the Militant Labour League was already made and the whole group would give up the S.L.F. in September. Once again however, the important and the unimportant had been inverted. It was true that Militant was easily the premier British group, but the moment for maximum impact in the Labour Party had been six months earlier. Militant had managed a leaflet to the special conference of the Socialist League which had decided to join the Unity Campaign, but, as Jackson reflected,:

'When the S.L. capitulated to the Stalinists we were unable to capitalise (on) the situation because of our unpreparedness. At that time we had five members in the S.L.'¹

In the trade unions the Militant Group was doing practically no work. This was a general weakness of Trotskyism in the 1930s. For this particular group it might be disastrous because, as Davis observed, when the intended split from the Labour Party took place, trade unions would be its lifeline. Of course the split perspective maintained for the Labour Party was not applied to the trade unions: Trotskyism had no time for 'red unionism'. But when discussion took place at conference there was a revealing confusion between rank and file organisation and strike committees, and all references to disputes were clearly made by observers.² Two months after conference trade union activity extended only to the semblance of an A.E.U. fraction,³

1 ibid.

2 ibid., 9-12.

3 Minutes of Executive Committee, 9 Oct. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/6.

a foothold in the N.U.R.¹ and the Musicians Union² and a presence (shared by the Marxist Group) on the Metro Council of the Shop Assistants' Union.³ When a comparison is made with the capable industrial workers the C.P.G.B. had within its ranks, this was poor. John Goffe, a management trainee, was industrial organiser. An attempt was made to improve matters in November with the decision to promote joint fractions with the Marxist Group in the A.E.U., S.A.U., and N.U.C.⁴ When, following workers' sanctions policies over Abyssinia and Spain, the Trotskyists proposed blacking war supplies for Japan in 1937-8, they lacked the influence to make the policy stick and the policy's fortunes varied with communist interest.⁵

The August conference was noteworthy, finally, for the introduction to the Militant Group of four recent arrivals from South Africa, best known of whom was Ralph Lee, a Trotskyist well known in

- 1 Sydney Bidwell was on the London District Council of the union and assistant secretary of his branch, (Minutes of G.M.M., 14 Nov. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/7).
- 2 Principal activist was Michael Kemp Tippett (1905-) a Royal College of Music graduate who taught French at Hazlewood until 1931. He then entered adult education in music, working for the L.C.C. and the Royal Arsenal Cooperative education departments. Tippett had worked for a time with the Marxist League and Marxist Group and was now the organiser of Socialist International Press a translators' group service formed on an I.S. initiative on 1 March 1937, (Who's Who; 'Statement of M.T.', 8 Jan. 1938, H.P., D.J.H. 2A/100).
- 3 Each group had one member there in 1937.
- 4 Minutes of Executive Committee, 27 Nov. 1937, Har. P.
- 5 Militant, I.L.P. and C.P.G.B. all called for a ban on munitions to Japan in October 1937 and the N.U.R. Executive was deadlocked on an embargo motion. Some action was taken on the docks. In 1938 however, the C.P.G.B. ceased to support the policy, (B. Pearce, 'Stalinists and Blackshirts', The Newsletter, 19 Nov. 1960).

the Johannesburg labour movement.¹ They had given up hope of further progress in South Africa although they had played a leading role in some industrial struggles. On Haston's proposal, all four were made members of the Group but they took no part in the proceedings and for the time being proposed no new departures.

1 Ralph Lee, Millie Kahn (1913-), Richard Frieslich and Heaton Lee (1916-), left South Africa in June. On arrival, Lee met Trotskyists from different organisations but several meetings with Harber convinced him to join Militant (Interview with E. Grant, Jan. 1973). His induction was later considered by Jackson to be a great mistake since the only information to hand about Lee was that which he himself had provided, (E.S. Jackson to [South African Trotskyists], 30 Dec. 1937, H.P., 2B.3.15.). Ralph Lee had been a communist since 1923 and had risen to the executive of the South African party. Possibly it was in 1930 that he left it and joined the International Workers Club, modelled on the Cape Town Lenin Club, which was not Trotskyist but interested in the Fourth International. He was a pioneer Trotskyist in Johannesburg, advancing Trotsky's views in the Club and one of the founders, with Millie Kahn, of the Workers' Party of South Africa (Johannesburg branch). After a 1935 split these two rebuilt the branch. He helped organise the Bantu laundry workers, who struck in 1934 and, through the revived Workers' Party, the African Metal Trades Union in January 1937. His record led the Metalworkers to ask his help when on 23 February they embarked on a strike which they abandoned, defeated, ten days later, (Sapire to Militant Group, 21 Feb. 1938, H.P., 2B.3.26; Anon., Report on R. Lee; reports on metalworkers and laundry workers disputes in Fight, May 1937). Heaton Lee, who was no relation to Ralph Lee, was a mining engineer who had met Ann (Angel) Keen, a non-political South African Jewess, on the boat to England. She became politically convinced and joined the Trotskyist movement the following year. In Johannesburg the other three had also known Ted Grant, who had travelled to England in 1934 or 1935. This strain of South African Trotskyism should be distinguished from that in Capetown in the English speaking division, whence Charles van Gelderen, his brother (who remained there), and Millie Matthews hailed, (Interview with M. Haston, July 1973; interview with A. Keen, 30 July 1974). For a communist impression of the South African Trotskyists in 1936, see G. Hardy, Those Stormy Years, (1956), 228-36. More detached is H.J. and R.E. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950, (1969), 503-4, 508-16.

The decision to set up its own front organisation within the party did not mean that the Militant Group had given up the Socialist Left Federation. Faced with the historic decision of the Parliamentary Labour Party not to oppose the arms estimates Militant declared:

'Here too is an opportunity for the newly formed Socialist Left Federation to win its spurs by showing the workers how the capitulation of Cripps and Co. to the Communist Party has inevitably led to the desertion of the socialist anti-war struggle'.¹

War was the paramount issue for all Trotskyists, a prime source of their hostility to the Unity Campaign. They did not believe action by capitalist countries, however presented, or by the League of Nations, could be progressive or a means of keeping peace. It would lead instead, he believed, to a new imperialist conflict. Hence their distaste in the autumn of 1937 for League sanctions against Japan: this would lead to a war not for democracy but for plunder.² But while Militant could see no difference between Attlee and Morrison and Cripps and the C.P.G.B. in view of their common willingness to countenance a war, it was not sure everyone else had grasped the point.

The only reason why the minority and the communists do not openly support the arms plan is because they do not 'trust' the National Government to carry out this line in a sincere manner. If the interests of British Capitalism demanded a temporary alliance with France or the Soviet Union this opposition would collapse immediately³

1 Militant (Aug. 1937).

2 Militant (Sept., Oct., 1937)

3 Militant (Sept. 1937)

In Militant's view resting on imperialist alliances was a false policy: it was the working class which could prevent war. The paper criticised the S.L.F. for condemning the right and not the left for this folly. It committed itself to pushing the Federation¹ and applied as a body to join it. Refused, it took up an invitation to its members to participate on an individual basis. As a result it now found itself in difficulties on its right and on its left. It clashed bitterly with the Marxist League and Groves, who believed that the S.L.F. should not be made into a Trotskyist body for this would narrow its appeal.² Militant sought to become the official organ of the S.L.F. and the Group took factional steps to bring this to pass.³ Clashes occurred every month at S.L.F. bureau meetings, without Groves's domination ever being challenged. On 23 September 1937 the S.L.F. called on Militant to cease publication and rally all forces behind the broad body.⁴ But Militant concluded that the Marxist League

1 By printing membership forms for the S.L.F. in its pages, *ibid.*

2 Interview with R. Groves, April 1980.

3 In September 1937, it resolved to recruit to the S.L.F. only those sophisticated workers who were ready for it, to form new S.L.F. branches under its own control, and to make Jackson its factional organiser, (Militant Group, [E.C.] Minutes, 19 Sept. 1937). The aim was to win an S.L.F. majority.

4 Militant (Oct. 1937)

had parted from Bolshevik-Leninism¹ and in October disappeared from the S.L.F. Within the Group there was disquiet at these efforts, notably in the Liverpool Group, led by Don James. On 18 September it resolved not to implement the S.L.F. tactic; a week later it stopped selling Militant which, it claimed, was giving one third of its space to S.L.F. affairs.² The Liverpool Group was suspended on 9 October 1937 just before the Militant leadership as a whole itself despaired of the S.L.F. and turned away from it. Militant now launched its own front organisation against war, the Militant Labour League, and in November 1937 printed eight pages for the first time. The League was the public presence of the Group in the Labour Party. Group members were active in other organisations,³ but it was the Labour Party which really interested them. M.L.L. members were expected to be in the party, membership of which was considered to be a badge of political understanding.

In the autumn of 1937 the Militant Group had behind it a year's steady activity, but it could not claim the kind of progress which would make possible a strong Trotskyist impact. Increasing emphasis on the Labour Party conflicted with the extravert inclinations of the former Hyde Park group, which had dwindled almost to nothing before it was reinforced by Ralph Lee and his comrades from South Africa

1 Minutes of Executive Committee, 9 October 1937. This same month the Marxist League dissolved itself thus bearing out Militant fears. It wrote that the Bureau included those 'who, by their weakness and vacillation contributed to the defeat of the left wing in the Socialist League' (A. Dean, 'S.L.F. Leaders Sabotage Left Wing', Militant, Oct. 1937).

2 Minutes of Executive Committee, 9 Oct. 1937.

3 Margaret Johns was secretary of the Co-op political council in St. Pancras; both the Militant and Marxist Groups had members on the Islington Co-op political council in 1937. Margaret Johns also joined the London Labour Party executive in November of that year.

at the August conference. There was some awareness within the Group leadership that activities around their paper were too much confined¹ but it was the revived Paddington Group which really pioneered street and canvassing sales.² Ralph Lee joined the National Committee in September in recognition, it seems, of his ability and energy. The Paddington Group worked on its local Y.C.L. as well as the League of Youth and began to recruit from its outside activities.³ There is no evidence in 1937 of actual political disagreements between Paddington and the rest of the Militant Group.⁴ Its internal regime was considered a model by the centre. On the resignation of K. Alexander from the executive, Haston was elected to the vacant position.⁵ There was a minor clash over the centre's ban on the issue of an anti-fascist pamphlet, but the partisans here bisected the December split. And when stylistic criticisms of Militant were made the response of the Group was to place Ralph Lee and Richard Frieslich on the editorial board.⁶

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- 1 Jackson had told the August conference that a Labour Party sales base for Militant was too narrow and advised that an outside drive should be mounted.
 - 2 Only one or two groups had contributed to the increased sales recorded in the autumn, (Minutes of G.M.M., 12 Sept. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/5; 10 Oct. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/6; 14 Nov. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/7).
 - 3 It claimed these had led to the disbandment of the Paddington Y.C.L., (Minutes of G.M.M., 12 Sept. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/5). In November it took control of the Paddington League of Youth, (Minutes of Executive Committee, 11 Dec. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/9c). Among the recruits made around this time was Gerry Healy, another ex-communist seaman, encountered in Hyde Park sales.
 - 4 None of its members had dissented from approval of the E.C. report to the August conference which included, inter alia, the S.L.F. tactic they were later to condemn.
 - 5 Minutes of G.M.M., 10 Oct. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/6.
 - 6 *ibid.* The Group also prepared local supplements to Militant, (Minutes of Executive Committee, 11 Dec. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/9c).

The worm in the apple was a series of rumours which reached Militant Group leaders in October 1937 about the record of Ralph Lee, and about which they received confirmation in the second week of November.¹ Lee was accused of calling out 300 Bantu workers in February on a hopeless issue and of leaving for Europe in the middle of the strike. Money collected for the strikers' benefit was also said to be missing. Even before the rumours were confirmed, Group leaders had acted upon them.² Lee himself was only informed of them late in the day and the assurances given him of confidential treatment were false.³ A special executive of 13 November, from which

- 1 The source of them was Charles van Gelderen's brother in Cape Town. Charles van Gelderen reported confirmation to Jackson, the Group secretary, on 11 November.
- 2 When Sid Sandel, Group literature and secretary and British agent for Pioneer Press was forced to resign due to failing eyesight, it was proposed to replace him by Millie Kahn who had been agent for Pioneer in South Africa. Pioneer raised no objection to Kahn, but it was Margaret Johns who, after a slight delay, replaced Sandel. Kahn lived with Lee and the doubts about him inhibited Group leaders from letting Kahn have the post. She was finally approached only after the eruption of the affair had led to the suspension of Harber and Jackson, (Jackson to Pioneer Publishing Association, 4 Oct. 1937; Pioneer to Jackson, 14 Oct. 1937; Jackson to Pioneer, 26 Oct. 1937; H.P., D.J.H. 28/2; Minutes of Executive Committee, 20 Nov. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/7.)
- 3 Jackson informed Lee of the rumours verbally, gave him a copy of the 11 November letter, then wrote to him on 12 November. He told him not to be inhibited in his activities and that the accusations were probably Stalinist fabrications. Jackson added that Harber and van Gelderen alone were privy to the charges, but they certainly reached Johns, Goffe and Archer, who also relayed them to I.S. member 'Camille' while in Paris as an observer at the P.S.O.P. conference, (van Gelderen to Jackson, 11 Nov. 1937; Jackson to Lee, 12 Nov. 1937; Lee to Archer, 16 Nov. 1937; Archer to Lee, 19 Nov. 1937). At a special executive of 13 November Lee obtained confirmation that knowledge of the charges had leaked out, (Minutes, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/7).

Harber and Jackson were absent, unanimously recorded its confidence in Lee. The next day the matter surfaced lengthily at a General Members' Meeting, where Lee charged that the Group was under control of a bureaucratic clique who feared loss of control to him. Jackson, Harber and others had admitted they had handled the affair badly, but protested no evil intention. It was Lee who stated that the group was faced with a split over whether or not the leadership should be expelled. At the conclusion of discussion the meeting resolved by only one vote to take the soft option of reducing Harber, Jackson and van Gelderen to probationary membership.¹ It then proceeded to elect a new executive which included neither Lee nor them. But when this executive met on 20 November it considered correspondence from parties to the quarrel, including a letter from Harber, Jackson and van Gelderen claiming their suspension as full members to be unconstitutional. This argument was upheld and, on Haston's proposal, the new executive dissolved itself in favour of the old!²

The discussion over Lee, which seems to have occupied the whole Militant organisation for two months reveals little sense of proportion. In their letter to the executive Harber, Jackson and van Gelderen spoke of it being the 'only revolutionary group'. A letter from Harber to Betty Hamilton, (a French member of the Central branch who had backed Lee), talked of only fifty functioning members in London, ten of whom were on the E.C.³ One group member who tried

1 Minutes of G.M.M., 14 November 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/7. In December these minutes were challenged by Frieslich, Haston, Healy and Grant as distorted to show Lee in an unfavourable light.

2 Minutes of Executive Committee, 20 November 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/7. Haston later explained that his motivation was that this second step logically followed from the first, (Minutes of Executive Committee, 27 November 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/9a).

3 D.D. Harber to Hamilton, 25 November 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/9a.

at least to understand how such a minor affair could gain this importance was Michael Tippett, who detected a residue of the 'low political and moral level of the past', (by which he meant the Marxist League and the Marxist Group). Those longest in the movement were, he thought, the most likely to be drawn into personal recriminations. Exhibitions like those at the General Members' Meeting, which he had not attended, would be 'unthinkable in a group of comrades that felt the living revolution as at all imminent'. Tippett thought the situation was worsening and called for a new leadership, free of suspicion.¹ Another explanation was volunteered by Hamilton who thought group members were recruiting their personal friends rather than working in the wider movement.² Tippett's fears were confirmed in December. Camille (Klement) the I.S. secretary expressed alarm at the 'bad internal situation' in the group,³ and the centre was deluged with letters from members levelling (and occasionally retracting) charges. Frieslich and Lee failed to attend editorial board meetings; Lee⁴ and Haston⁵ refused to turn up at

1 As from the Central Group, 26 Nov. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/9a.

2 B. Hamilton to Harber, 8 Dec. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2B/3/7.

3 'Camille' to Jackson, 5 Dec. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/9b.

4 His attitude was thought not 'Bolshevik' by the Group leaders.

5 Haston was protesting at the minutes of the 14 November G.M.M. and declared he no longer expected objective records of meetings, (Minutes of Executive Committee, 11 Dec. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/9c). He charged that the manoeuvres of Harber et. al. had 'a deep political significance' (J. Haston to the Militant Group, 12 Dec. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/9c). What this might have been is a mystery.

the executive. Tippett at least attempted to generalise,¹ but it is impossible to dissent from the lament of K. Alexander who had witnessed two months of strife and frenzy from afar:

'I sign for the translation of all that labour power into the more fruitful channels of work in the Labour Party'.²

On 19 December 1937, a G.M.M. heavily condemned splits and called for adherence to Group decisions. But Lee and his supporters insisted on the expulsion of the officials who had mishandled the affair. When this did not happen they withdrew.³ Tippett and Hamilton, nominated for the vacant E.C. places, refused to fill them. There is some evidence that Lee himself anticipated independent activities and he and his supporters certainly began at once to seek outside backing⁴. The Militant Group set in train its cumbersome

- 1 M. Tippett [to the Militant Group], 11 Dec. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/9c. Tippett linked the Lee affair to the suspension of the Liverpool Group and concluded that in the face of war those anticipating illegal or semi-legal work would have to look elsewhere for leadership.
- 2 K. Alexander to Jackson, n.d., H.P., 2B.3.33. Alexander was the only opponent of Lee in the Paddington group. During the affair he was out of the capital.
- 3 The withdrawal took place early in the meeting during discussion on matters arising from the minutes of the November G.M.M. They may have just pulled out of the meeting, (Interview with E. Grant, Jan. 1973). Group leaders believed they were leaving the Group, (Comments of E.C. on Statement of Former Members of Paddington, Central and North Groups, [March?] 1938, H.P.). Tippett, who was well-disposed towards them, believed they should have followed the meeting through, (Statement of Comrade M.T., 8 Jan. 1938, H.P. 2a/10a). Everyone who accompanied Lee was from his own Paddington group, (E.S. Jackson to [South African Trotskyists], 30. Dec. 1937, H.P. 2B.3.15).
- 4 In October Lee had written to Camille (Klement) of the International Secretariat concerning the founding of a Marxist theoretical journal in England, (Statement of P.J.B. (Leeds), 8 Dec. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/9b). A pilot issue of Workers International News appeared on 18 December, a day before the final meeting and regular monthly publication of it from 1 January 1938 (although the January and 18 December issues are similar) argues more than twelve days preparation. Lee obtained the participation of former Marxist Leaguer Hilary Sumner-Boyd, and with other Paddington group members he approached disenchanted Advance followers in the East End with whom the local Militant group had been in contact (H.P., D.J.H., 2B.3.16).

expulsion machinery.¹ A few days later the Central Group withdrew, and on 16 January a majority of the North Group ended its participation in the main organisation.

Jackson believed Lee intended 'a publishing centre independent of the Groups',² and the Marxist Group joined him in protesting at such a project. Workers International News, the first theoretical journal of British Trotskyism had been under discussion on the Militant executive, but it now became Lee's flag-bearer. He and the others were expelled formally on 17 February 1938,³ and faced the united opposition of the other groups.⁴

The split was formalised the following year by a letter from nineteen former Militant Group members to the Group.⁵ Much of the letter was concerned with the Lee affair, but what seems to have rankled most within it was the failure of the group majority to curb a leadership 'untrustworthy, incapable, irresponsible and dishonest'. The letter also alleged that the confidence of the signatories in the Group had been 'long undermined' by the way it functioned,⁶ that the

- 1 This existed as a result of a Paddington proposition introduced at the time of the disciplinary action against the Liverpool group. It amounted to a national consultative referendum on expulsions.
- 2 E.S. Jackson to Sapire, (Johannesburg Group), 17 Feb. 1938, H.P., 2B.3.25.
- 3 E.S. Jackson to Lee, H.P., 2B.3.25.2.
- 4 C. Sumner to I.S., 6 Feb. 1938, (See Chapter VI).
- 5 To the Militant Group, 10 March 1938. Signed by K. Chapman, F. Clifford, T. de Moor, B. Fisher, R. Freislich, B. French, T. Grant, J. Haston, B. Hamilton, G. Healy, D. James, K. Kemshead, M. Kahn, H. Lee, R. Lee, T. Mundy, H. Ratner, M. Tippett, E. Truman.
- 6 There had been a clash in September 1937 over the suppression of an anti-fascist leaflet by the leadership, but leading Group figures were ranged on both sides over the issue. As the Group pointed out in its reply, there was no record of objections by Haston or Lee, both of whom were members of the leading bodies.

Lee affair was a symptom. The failure of the membership to replace its leaders is thus presented as a last straw. Politics, however, did not intrude into the list of indictments. The Militant Group countered that there was no evidence of this alleged long degeneration, that it was being produced ex post facto. In its view it was Lee who had a degenerate history as the letters from South Africa suggested, and who had now split from 'insane egoism'.¹

The 'Lee split' was not the first in British Trotskyist history, but it was to be the most controversial.² Previous splits had all been difficult to defend since they had in each case occurred over a tactical difference. This split was also difficult to defend since no political differences emerged at all. It can only be explained by a personal clash and divergence of style. The Militant leadership had crystallized during 1937, not a long period for a stable cadre to hang together. Lee and his comrades represented a different political tradition and Lee in particular had a talent for the vivid or cruel phrase. Had Militant been progressing rapidly in the later months of 1937, factionalism would have taken root only with far greater difficulty. What also lay behind the split was a growing emphasis on exclusive Labour Party work by the Group and its leaders, while Paddington was a marriage of two extravert experiences. Group leaders and Paddington foresaw a different path to growth, and by the empirical test of results it was the second which would be most successful in the next ten years.

1 Comments of E.C. to Statement of former members of Paddington, Central and North Groups, [1938], Warwick M.S.S.

2 Nor has the controversy died. See the account in M. and J. Archer, 'Notes on Healy's Role in Early Days of the British Trotskyist Movement', Intercontinental Press, 10 May 1976, 772-5.

In 1938 the Militant Group attributed the failures of Trotskyism in 1937 to 'the weakness of our forces and their dispersal in several organisations'.¹ This empirical verdict could be applied to the whole decade, but it does not provide a full explanation. Certainly a full Trotskyist mobilisation in the Labour League of Youth in 1934 or 1935 might have radically altered that movement's subsequent history; at the very least communists and their sympathisers within the League might have been counter-balanced. But the Trotskyist appeal was vitiated by forces beyond its control, notably the flexibility of communist policy and the international campaign against Trotsky. The communists also showed themselves able to adjust their tactics at every stage. The Militant Group seemed by contrast to be arguing an abstract strategy for pulling young people out of the Labour Party, and it involved communist co-operation which would certainly not be forthcoming. Although the organisation established by 1937 was superior to its predecessors it did not represent an impressive alternative to the other political movements of the time: it showed an unhealthy preoccupation with the activity of its Trotskyist rivals, and an overweening fear of the Labour Party apparatus. These features blunted its cutting edge and contributed to an atmosphere where a split which was to have far-reaching consequences could take place.

1 Militant Group, Statement on Fusion with the R.S.L., 27 May 1938, R.S.L., Internal Bulletin, 3, (July 1938), 4.

In the two years from 1936 to 1938 British followers of the Fourth International made their most sustained effort to date to achieve a united body which might have some impact on events. There were many difficulties on the way. Those pressing hardest for unity were outside the Labour Party and therefore in living contradiction of the 'Geneva' resolution. Those within the Labour Party were opposed to unity which did not resolve tactical differences. These objections were partly overcome by the intervention of the International which sought to pressurise an unready British movement into its own timetable for unity. The result was an inherently unstable British Section and confirmation of the pessimistic forecast made by WIL, the only group to stay aloof.

* * * * *

Fight appeared on 10 October 1936 in a sixteen page issue appended to which was a four page supplement on the Moscow Trial. It led with a statement on the need for a new international and launched an attack on Brockway who - unlike Maxton, it was felt - knew the right course and shunned it. It carried an interview with Trotsky, and much other material on the Trials including a document of the Geneva conference. Right from the start Fight ran advertisements for The Red Flag and Youth Militant. This brotherliness originated in joint control of the paper by the Marxist Group and the Bolshevik-Leninists in the Labour Party. The paper's statement of intent declared:

'We, the Bolshevik-Leninists of Britain, whether we are in the Labour Party, I.L.P., Co-op or Trade Union, will fight with the workers'¹

¹ Fight (10 Oct. 1936).

Around the time of the first trial the Marxist Group had worked closely with the Bolshevik-Leninists. There had even been a joint executive formed from the two to control whatever I.L.P. union factions were under Marxist Group control.¹ At the national meeting of 11 October a Central Co-ordinating Committee was established for all three groups. It met twice more in 1936, but then lapsed for a time.² Chief obstacle to regular functioning was the blurring of the decisions taken at the October national meeting by the sudden decision of the Marxist Group to withdraw from the I.L.P., motivated by that party's decline since its Keighley conference. The Marxist Group informed the National Administrative Council of the I.L.P. that it would withdraw and call on all revolutionaries to join it.³ On the eve of the launching of the Unity Campaign the Group held its first meeting, began to imitate the action of a full-blown party⁴ and made its counter proposals for unity.⁵ By February 1937 it had pulled out of the I.L.P.

1 'Bolshevik-Leninist statement to Joint Session of groups', 11 Oct. 1936, For Discussion, 1, (28 Nov. 1936), 15.

2 Statement to the Bureau for the Fourth International from B.L. Group in the Labour Party regarding the fulfillment of the Geneva Resolution on the question of the Unity of the British Groups, 29 Dec. 1936.

3 In the view of the Marxist Group the I.L.P. had fudged on Abyssinia, the Popular Front, the Trials and Spain. The leadership was 'a body of political manoeuvrers without vision or principle' (Towards the New Workers' Party, (Statement to the I.L.P. N.A.C. from members of the former Marxist Group), Fight, 12 Dec. 1936.)

4 The Marxist Group was proclaimed as an independent force at a public meeting on 16 December 1936.

5 The Marxist Group analysis of the Unity Campaign was rather more concrete than that offered by the other Trotskyists. If there was agreement between the I.L.P., C.P.G.B. and Socialist League, it asked, why were they not all in one party? There were differences and they could not be blurred:

The Marxist Group will therefore not apply to join this bloc as outlined by the I.L.P. and it warns the workers that no ultimate good will come of it. The C.P. will swallow the majority of the Socialist League and half of the I.L.P. for its counter-revolutionary policy. The I.L.P. will capitulate entirely to the C.P. or run for shelter into the Labour Party.

(Fight, Jan. 1937.)

A Marxist Group outside all parties had implications for Trotskyists elsewhere. Independent existence had been adopted in defiance of the Declaration of the International Bureau. Joint control of Fight ceased at once, since the Marxist Group majority on the editorial board imposed its view.¹ The rapid shift in Marxist Group policy is difficult to explain. The Bolshevik-Leninists attributed it to middle class influence, but this cannot be empirically sustained.² It shivered a not overlarge organisation into three fragments.³ There were international parallels to the step now taken by the Marxist Group and knowledge of them helped reinforce

- 1 The Bolshevik-Leninists had sold the first (10 Oct.) issue of Fight but withdrew from any contact with it after this to avoid embarrassment in the Labour Party, (E.C., Bolshevik-Leninist Group in the Labour Party, Statement to the Bureau for the Fourth International, 29 Dec. 1936, 3)
- 2 In opting for independence C.L.R. James, chairman of the Group, had the support of Arthur Ballard, its secretary, who was a Croydon carpenter, Jock Milligan, a building worker and Karl Westwood. The charge of middle class influence is levelled in E.C., of the Bolshevik-Leninist Group, Statement to the Bureau, 4.
- 3 Arthur Cooper (who had voted with James on 15 November at the crucial London meeting of the Group), Frederick Marzillier and Ernie Patterson stayed within the I.L.P. These three were all Londoners, but they were thought to have more support among provincial Marxist Group members than among those in the Capital. They were a minority sufficiently sizeable to retain fraction status within the Marxist Group, though this seems to have meant very little. Cooper, at least, left the I.L.P. later. A third part of the Marxist Group was identified as the former members of the Communist League minority, all but one of whom now joined the Labour Party.

the reaction of other Trotskyists.¹ The Bolshevik-Leninists, for whom presence in the Labour Party was the Ark of the Covenant, were naturally inclined in favour of the Marxist League, though they differentiated between Groves and Dewar and its other members. But the League had concluded by late 1936 that the time for exclusive Labour Party work was nearing its end and when it looked for unity it was the Marxist Group, not the Bolshevik-Leninists, which interested it.² The Bolshevik-Leninists, known from January 1937 as the Militant Group, not unreasonably concluded that new efforts to achieve unity were not likely to be efficacious. They were larger than the other two groups put together; there were many workers among their members; they were moving out of a purely youth milieu: they considered that they now had a case for recognition as the British Section of the international movement.³

1 There was strong hostility within the International Communist League to entering social-democratic parties. Joining the I.L.P. provoked no crisis outside Britain, but the French turn followed by that of the Belgians was denounced by many leading figures. When the Americans entered the Socialist Party in 1936, the dispute was extended. C.L.R. James was in touch with Creme who belonged to the Canadian followers of B.J. Field, who had split from the C.L.A. during his leadership of an industrial dispute in 1935. Whatever the significance of this and other contacts in terms of influence, James argued along similar lines to those of Bauer against the French turn and Hugo Oehler against the American turn. The views of Oehler, a veteran labour organiser, who split from the C.L.A. in 1935 are well expressed in his remark at an October 1934 Plenum of the League:

'In fact, French, Belgium, (sic) and British entrism were disasters (and) because of excessive organic unity, virtual capitulation.'

(quoted in C.A. Myers, op. cit., 16)

2 Wicks may have joined the Fight editorial board early in 1937, (A. Cooper to Wicks, 25 Jan. 1937. This information is crossed through in the letter). He was also collaborating with James on World Revolution (1937). It was to be the League which secured the Group's attendance at the February 1937 national meeting against Bolshevik-Leninist inclinations (see below).

3 Additional arguments they deployed were that they were the only group in Britain following international recommendations, and that conferral of official status would hasten the disintegration of the other two, a process already underway, (E.C., Bolshevik-Leninist Group, Statement to the Bureau, 5-7).

The International Bureau did not move this far but it did encourage the Bolshevik-Leninists to build up the strongest organisation they could. By a December 1936 declaration it had called for a conference of those of the country's Trotskyists who accepted the Geneva resolution.¹ The Militant Group reacted along slightly different lines, with a February call for unity with the Marxist League on the basis of the Geneva resolution.² All three groups had members at the national meeting of 14 February 1937, convened in the presence of Braun of the International Secretariat.³ The Militant case for unity in the Labour Party was countered by a Groves-Wicks bid for unity of all three factions. Braun seems to have endorsed the Militant approach, by opposition to an early split from the Labour Party, though he expressed reservations on its youth line.⁴ He concluded that little progress was likely to be made towards fusion and encouraged it to concentrate on its own work.⁵ It was ironic that

1 Declaration of the International Bureau for the Fourth International on the subject of the English Marxist Group, 13 Dec. 1936, n.p., kindly lent to author by Mr. John Archer.

2 Minutes B/L Group Secretariat, 13 Feb. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/3a.

3 'Braun' was the pseudonym of Erwin Wolf (1902-37) secretary of the I.S. until his murder in Spain, probably by the G.P.U., late in the year. The initiative for this meeting came from the Militant Group who sought a common approach to the Unity Campaign, 'Interim Reply of the E.C., Militant Group to the Marxist League', 3 Aug. 1937, in Inter-Group Relations, [Sept.] 1937.

4 These are likely to have been misgivings about its campaign for early independence for the League of Youth, (Secretary, London Group, [Militant Group], Report to Provincial Branch on Joint Meeting, 14 Feb. 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2A/3B.)

5 'Statement of the Executive Committee of the Militant Group on Inter-Group Relations', 20 Aug. 1937, in Inter-Group Relations, [Sept.] 1937.

the two groups closest in their tactical views should in practice be so bitterly divided as were the Militant Group and the Marxist League.¹

Yet it is impossible to understand their actions or those of the Marxist Group except in the light of a deeply held conviction that every possible step must be taken to rally the workers against war.² Militant propaganda against the Unity Campaign was galvanised by the certainty that the Left and the C.P.G.B. would accept a war for democracy. Fight insisted that every form of war preparation must be opposed: war could be supported only when Britain was in the workers' hands. All of them were haunted by 1914 when socialist leaders in every country had yielded to a chauvinist mood. During the years immediately before the war this lent their writings an abstract slant as they fought old battles. It was a sense of approaching war which led the Marxist Group to seek independence from the I.L.P., even at the risk of expulsion from the international movement.³ The new

- 1 The Marxist League never sold Youth Militant but did put efforts into a short-lived and narrowly based Socialist League journal Socialist Youth, of which, suggested Militant, it had control. The League also circulated the P.O.U.M. bulletin in England. The irony that two groups who vehemently opposed the Unity Campaign could not themselves unite, passed without comment.
- 2 Without this sense of time running out, it seems unlikely that the Marxist Group would have made its rapid turn away from the I.L.P. This explains the willingness of Cooper to reverse his earlier view and move into independence. Other prominent members of the Group with I.L.P. connections were Arthur Ballard, the Croydon carpenter who had once run the Strand I.L.P. bookshop with Jon Kimche and was now Group secretary, and Jim Wood, who was married to Audrey Brockway.
- 3 This threat was scarcely veiled, see the concluding words of, (Declaration of the International Bureau, 13 Dec. 1936).

party had to be built:

'Do not hesitate, do not put it off. Above all do not be disconcerted by the fact that we are not a large organisation. Particularly we appeal to old revolutionaries, disillusioned by the crimes and treacheries of the Stalinists. Everyone who comes makes us larger'.¹

Repetitive appeals of this kind did not make a strategy for producing a powerful Trotskyist movement. They flew in the face of Trotsky's own pleas of 1933 and 1936 for a sense of proportion, but they were also an anticipation of the 1938 decision to launch a Fourth International in the hope of holding the revolutionary forces together. James shared an international illusion that successive labour movement defeats left workers looking for an alternative. Hence Fight had the tone of a paper merely drawing attention to the obvious. The Labour Party, it declared, would only bring disillusionment. 'The sooner this happens the better. To be disillusioned with Labour Party reformism is the first step to revolutionary clarity'² When confronted by the London Busmen's Strike, Fight observed that the behaviour of the L.P.T.B. and union officials 'occasions no surprise'. 'The mere substitution of, say, Bevin by Papworth would achieve nothing', it warned.³ Fight and the Marxist Group did not deceive

1 Fight (April 1937). Nevertheless, the Marxist Group had Labour Party members. One of them, 'P.T.', spoke at the Fusion Conference of 27 February 1938, (R.S.L., Internal Bulletin, 1, (April 1938), 11).

2 Fight (July 1937).

3 *ibid.*

themselves that they were a party. But they believed that coming disaffection from established parties would lead people to look for one:¹ the Fourth International had to maintain an independent presence so that it could be found. Other Trotskyists, engaged in entry work, had, in Fight's view, a futile task. The I.L.P. had reached the limit of its leftward swing in early 1935. 'To think that the I.L.P., as a party, can be won for revolutionary Marxism, is, in fact, not to think at all'. As for the Labour Party, a Trotskyist presence within it was usually justified by reference to the presence of the masses: Fight expressed great scepticism as to whether this was indeed where they were. It also felt that earlier objections to being separate from all parties were no longer valid. Trotskyism was better known in 1937 than in 1932 and the capitulation of the Comintern more abject than before. Advanced workers searching for international socialism would not find it 'hidden away in the rotten archives of the Labour Party'. They were also moving away from Stalinism. On these doubtful arguments was predicated the Marxist Group case for independence.²

1 James, with his relatively wide reputation, had an appeal to those of other parties and of none. The years immediately before the war were intensely productive for him. He published The Black Jacobins, a study of the Haitian slave revolt of Toussaint L'Ouverture, in 1938 and the following year translated Boris Souvarine's Staline. His later fame as a theorist of nationalism in developing countries was anticipated in his last years in Britain by his pivotal position in the London community of black radicals. He was editor of International African Opinion, the journal of the International African Service Bureau, of which George Padmore, Jomo Kenyatta and Kwame Nkrumah were members. Padmore's wife had acted as James's secretary during the writing of World Revolution.

2 This argument can be followed in Fight throughout 1937, and especially in its August issue.

The existence of the Marxist Group was an invitation to other Trotskyists to realign. It had personal links with some Marxist League members, perhaps made easier by the departure of former Group members who had been in the Communist League minority for the Labour Party.¹ It was also pursuing a policy of publishing Fourth International documents and seems to have consciously followed a tactic of regroupment. In July 1937 discussions between the Trotskyists began again, precipitated by a call from the Group at its half-yearly conference for an aggregate of all Bolshevik-Leninists. But this did not imply an altered view by the Group of the need for an open identifiable Fourth International fraction:

'The methods of a fused group can be none other than the maintenance of an independent platform and propaganda allied to correct fraction work in the mass organisations'.²

In its view the Marxist League and Militant Group were making sacrifices in the Labour Party in return for access to potential which was less than that available outside the party. Not surprisingly Starkey Jackson of the Militant told the conference that there was little basis for cooperation. He was unmoved by a Group offer to canvass in local elections. This was no less likely, he thought, to

- 1 Harry Wicks assisted C.L.R. James with World Revolution (1937) and had helped him as early as Minty Alley, a novel written while the Marxist Group was still in the I.L.P., (Interview with H. Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979). Wicks was also a member of the Fight editorial board in 1937 and, as first secretary of the Trotsky Defence Committee, in contact with all groups. His Notes on the History of Bolshevism (1937) were drawn up with help from D.D. Harber whom he would encounter in the British Museum.
- 2 'Statement of Marxist Group from its half-yearly conference', 11 July 1937, (Inter-Group Relations, [Sept.] 1937, 1). The Group's favoured sectors for joint fraction work were certain local co-ops, union branches, trades councils and the Socialist Left Federation. There was not unanimous support within the Marxist Group for its interest in the S.L.F.: objections were raised - and sustained - by Bill Duncan and Hilda Lane, (see below).

jeopardise a Labour Party presence than it would have been six months earlier.¹ Militant perceived, not surprisingly, that nothing essential had changed. It decided to abstain from the Central Co-ordinating Committee until that body's affairs were covered by a definite remit.² It was prepared to continue cooperation with the Marxist Group over such activities as the Trotsky Defence Committee or the Committee for the Defence of the P.O.U.M. It did not, however, feel able to speak on public platforms as this would invite 'premature expulsion from the Labour Party'. Tactics were as important as principles and it saw no reason to change them. It foresaw only limited possibilities for cooperation.³ Militant's preference was still for unity with the Marxist League since both were operating in the Labour Party sphere. It had experienced little encouragement in response to its advances,⁴ and saw only limited value in joint meetings with the others unless they were to assist joint work in the Socialist Left Federation. Morally its position was strong. It continued to feel it was pursuing the line of the Geneva conference resolution; Braun had on his February visit advised consolidation of its own position, rather than fusion, as a main immediate task; in the summer it had convened what it felt was the most successful Trotskyist conference to date.⁵ It was more entrenched by August than

1 'Marxist Group Proposals for Joint Work', 28 July 1937, Inter-Group Relations, [Sept.] 1937. Other suggestions included were a central London meeting on 'Stalinism and the Colonial Struggle' and a system of exchange sales for the three group papers.

2 *ibid.*, 4-5.

3 'Interim Reply of the E.C., Militant Group', 5 Aug. 1937, Inter-Group Relations, [Sept.] 1937, 2.

4 'Interim Reply of the E.C., Militant Group to the Marxist League', 3 Aug. 1937, Inter-Group Relations [Sept.] 1937, 3-4.

5 The August 1937 Militant Group conference is described in the previous chapter.

it had been at the National Meeting of February 1937. If offered joint fraction work where it and the Marxist Group found themselves in the same organisation, but declined all joint activities which would compromise it within the Labour Party. It agreed to a swop arrangement for all three papers and went so far as to propose phased publication so that a new Trotskyist paper appeared at fortnightly intervals, with each - if it wished - carrying articles from members of other groups.¹

But there was more interest in the Marxist Group initiative² in the Marxist League, which did not operate in the Labour Party within a long term perspective. Marxist Group interest in a combined drive within the S.L.F. had some appeal when the League discussed it at a members' meeting of 23 July 1937. The Marxist League did not consider that all Trotskyist activity should take place within the Labour Party. It had recognised, for example, the importance of work within the I.L.P. Nor did it concede to the Marxist Group that revolutionary questions were subordinated to immediate issues: the problem was to relate immediate issues to the struggle for workers' power. Like the Militant Group, the Marxist League immediately perceived the Marxist Group's fusion proposals to consist essentially in the addition of a Labour Party fraction to its independent presence. Its counter-proposal was a committee composed of three members of each faction to meet monthly, arrange joint meetings and monitor the work of the two groups and the League. After six months, during which all three factions would refrain from public attacks on each other, 'concrete proposals for fusion' would be submitted.³ The C.C.C. met on

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- 1 'Statement of the Executive Committee of the Militant Group on Inter-Group Relations', 20 Aug. 1937, Inter-Group Relations [Sept.] 1937.
- 2 'Statement to the M.L. from the Marxist Group', Marxist League Information Bulletin, 20 July 1937, Warwick M.S.S. 15/4/1/16.
- 3 'Marxist League Reply to the Marxist Group and Proposals of the M.L.', Inter-Group Relations, [Sept.] 1937, 2-3.

12 August 1937 and Starkey Jackson there proposed a joint meeting of the groups. This should have been decisive since Militant's objections were the most deep-seated. But the Militant executive withdrew Jackson's proposal after they saw the editorial in the August Fight, which attacked the presence of revolutionaries in the Labour Party.¹

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The Marxist League had continued to publish The Red Flag on an occasional basis, and also to put out Trotsky's writings.² Its members persisted with the Socialist Left Federation. But in October 1937, the Marxist League officially dissolved itself and suspended publication of The Red Flag. Some time later a majority of former M.L. members gathered and considered the overall position of Trotskyism in Britain. They set up an ad hoc committee and approached the Marxist Group for fusion. Late in January 1938, a joint commission was established with three members from either side and it was this body which drew up a political statement and constitution which each party then discussed. The political statement called for 'a strong centralised independent organisation (to) be built on the platform of the Fourth International'. The problem of where to be in the short term had been resolved in favour of a body separate from other parties, though the new body would aspire to organise workers in the established organisations. There would eventually be a revolutionary party under

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- 1 'Reply of the E.C., Militant Group, to Proposal of Co-ordinating Committee for Joint Membership Meeting to Discuss Perspectives', 27 Aug. 1937, Inter-Group Relations [Sept.] 1937.
- 2 In attractively designed cyclostyled editions it brought out Of Those Who Forget Their ABC and A Letter to a Social Democratic Worker concerning the United Front of Defence, (Warwick M.S.S. 15/3/1/70 and 71).

whose discipline militants in reformist and centrist parties would work:

This would end the situation which confronts many today of being the "left" critics, who, as time drags on, soften and adapt themselves to the so-called "long perspective" of protracted work in the reformist organisations which is a renunciation of the task of preparing the revolutionary party.¹ Clearly this fusion was a conscious rebuff to the chosen method of the Militant. The renunciation of abstract discussion in small closed circles however, might have been applied to all three factions. There was thought to be some ground for optimism in differentiation in the Labour Party which the policy of Cripps and the communists during the Unity Campaign was thought to have delayed: there were now 'signs of the emergence of a militant opposition on the crucial issue of war'..

On the eve of their fusion, the Marxist Group and the Marxist League joined the Militant Group in united condemnation of Lee. The occasion of their formal protest was the Lee group's action in starting publication of Workers International News:

Each of the existing groups wishes to dissociate itself entirely from this enterprise; deplores the attempted creation of a fourth Trotskyist "group" in this country; and objects particularly to the impression given by Lee's journal that it represents and is under the patronage of the International Secretariat.²

1 Political Statement, Revolutionary Socialist League, Internal Bulletin, (April 1938) Special Number, 2.

2 'Charles Sumner' to International Secretariat, 6 February 1938.

Summer-Boyd, the author of these lines, had been a participant in the first two issues of Workers International News, but now informed the I.S. that he had formed 'an erroneous impression' of WIN's object and policies and ceased collaboration. Lee, complained the united British groups, would run the journal as a personal vehicle and not submit to discipline. He had also published, in pamphlet form, the summary of the Dewey Commission's final report.

But collaboration against Lee was not enough to break down all barriers. The Marxist Group and the former Marxist League members were alone the active parties to the projected fusion. The Fusion Conference convened on February 17 1938 with Henry Sara in the chair. Wicks introduced the discussion, arguing that the standing distinction between those in and those out of the Labour Party could be overcome. There would be an independent organisation with more successful fraction work in the mass parties. He quoted the Communist Party as proof that this duality was viable. Two years in the Labour Party had been, for the Marxist Leaguers, a 'bitter experience'. With the party moving towards war, there was no organisation or paper which represented the policy of Trotskyism.¹ They needed an 'open voice, an unambiguous and revolutionary paper'. The discussion revealed that the protagonists of fusion had not achieved unanimity. Cooper argued that the statement blurred differences over the Left Federation. Frost proved him right by categorically rejecting work in that body, and Lane pointedly enquired what the attitude of the Federation was to the Militant Labour League. Sumner-Boyd only went some limited distance towards meeting these objections with his argument that there had to be some organisation such as the S.L.F. in

¹ Militant presumably did not qualify because it did not call for the Fourth International or for an independent revolutionary party.

order to provide a platform within the Labour Party. There were, effectively, three attitudes towards the Labour Party: Jackson, a fraternal visitor from the Militant, expounded the standard entrism case; the Marxist Group had no time for any kind of contact with the Labour Party; the former Marxist Leaguers were largely in agreement but still favoured participation in the S.L.F. What should also be stressed is that the cause of the new intransigence towards the Labour Party was its slide towards support for a putative anti-fascist war. In the end C.L.R. James put it as the view of the commission that those within the S.L.F. should attempt, in their near future, to evaluate their experience within it. Only then could a decision be made. After the conclusion of discussion Jackson indicated that the Militant Group was quite prepared to discuss fusion of the M.L.L. with the S.L.F. Hugo Dewar, however, one of those who had remained aloof from the fusion made it clear that he saw the prime task as building up the S.L.F., that the independent group was secondary, and that 'we' (he and Groves presumably) were not prepared to see the S.L.F. made into a Trotskyist organisation.¹ With one encouragement and one warning in its ears, the Fusion Conference elected a central committee of seven and took the name Revolutionary Socialist League.² The R.S.L. affiliated at once to the Bureau for the Fourth International.

The R.S.L. did not conceive itself as starting from scratch:

'We do not need to create all our cadres. The work of the Communist Party in its early days has not been without results.'³

1 For the record of the debate, see R.S.L., Internal Bulletin, 1, (April 1938), 8-15.

2 This name may have been suggested by a desire to attract radical former members of the Socialist League.

3 C.L.R. James, 'Revolutionary Socialist League', Fight (April 1938).

There were, it argued, thousands of disillusioned revolutionaries around who had been alienated by the Trotskyist analysis, but the Trials had opened their eyes. This was an expectation carried over lock, stock and barrel from the Marxist Group. Fight, cheaper and livelier than before, became the official paper to tap the mood.¹ The R.S.L. took on an aggressive propagandist plan of public meetings. It was the last great era of the open-air gathering² and with unemployment high, a speaker could still draw a crowd. The R.S.L., launched on an independent tactic, had to put an emphasis on direct appeal and ran a summer campaign of open-air rallies in London, Sheffield and elsewhere.³ Some members were picked up by this method, but the sought-for thousands never materialised,⁴ and some time in the summer the R.S.L. had to give up an asset unique among Trotskyist groups, the tiny premises from which C.L.R. James worked in Grays Inn Road.

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- 1 Sub-titled, '(Organ of the Revolutionary Socialist League affiliated to the Bureau for the Fourth International)'. It appeared every month until July 1938, the month of the second merger, when shortage of funds stopped it coming out.
 - 2 R. Barltrop records the S.P.G.B.'s attempt to rally support by open-air meetings in The Monument (1974).
 - 3 One of the speakers used was Hugo Dewar, who had not participated in the February 1938 merger. Apart from the Marxist League cadre, there were within the R.S.L. Cliff Stanton, Ivor Cresswell, Rowlands and Bradley (whose connections stretched back to the Communist League).
 - 4 On the eve of the second fusion the R.S.L. claimed a fifty per cent increase in membership since the first, (R.S.L., On The Necessity for an Independent Bolshevik-Leninist Organisation in Britain, 24 July 1938, National Bulletin, H.P., D.J.H., 2A/12A/ 3-4). Other fields of work open to the R.S.L. were the trade unions and co-ops. Its members intervened in the Mens' Guild of the Co-operative Movement, but were unable to prevent support for the peace alliance launched by Reynolds' earlier in the year from sweeping on. Fight recorded in May 1938 that the communists, formerly 'uncritical and subservient lackeys of the Labour Party', now rejected resolutions for a Labour government in favour of a peace alliance.

The Militant Group faced 1938 without its most dynamic branch but this was not a fatal blow. It retained a national framework. The Militant Labour League had been launched and Jackson had felt confident enough to tell the February 1938 Fusion Conference that roots had first to be sunk in the Labour Party before independence could be achieved, and to underpin his argument with Trotsky's 1933 thesis on the I.L.P.¹ He and Harber, Lee Davis, Margaret Johns, John Archer and John Goffe held together as a leading cadre. Militant continued to appear regularly and, though the organisation lost members to WIL, it gained some too.

In what had been its main field, the Labour League of Youth, expansion was blocked. In 1937 there had been a limited debate between Trotskyism and Stalinism in Advance; in 1938 there was none.² The 1938 conference of the League marked no advance from the previous year.³ But the Militant did not now rest mainly on its youth presence. It subordinated its other activities to the M.L.L. since it seemed likely that the approach of war would bring with it illegality. Militant knew it could not prevent war and would only make limited progress during a war. Its hope therefore was to dig in deeply within the Labour Party, a body it tended to equate with the mass movement.

1 R.S.L., Internal Bulletin, 1, (April 1938), 12.

2 There were denunciations however. Willis and Bernstein warned delegates to the approaching annual conference that the Trotskyists would put amendments which, if accepted, would put the stamp of impossibility or unreality on its programme, (Advance, March 1938). Their views were echoed in a warning from Gollan that Trotskyists would 'hinder and disrupt' the development of the League of Youth into a mass force and 'confine it to an oppositional movement', (Defend The People, Easter 1938).

3 Fight (April 1938) noted few had rallied to the Youth Militant proposal of a campaign against conscription. The New Leader (11 March 1938) saw its delegates as 'small, hopelessly outnumbered'.

The Group resolved therefore to prepare for illegal conditions and resist adventurist pressures which might lead to premature separation:

'Naturally our work in the Labour Party in wartime will be severely limited, but outside it will be completely impotent.'¹

Like the Marxist Group's foray into independent life, the M.L.L. was intended to provide a rallying point against war. It was a front for the Militant Group itself and at no time achieved an independent existence.² One reason would be the decline in Labour Party activity immediately before the war, just when it was becoming an exclusive preoccupation of the Group;³ another was that the M.L.L. was working in a somewhat competitive market. During the initial months of its life the Socialist Left Federation still existed: later there were the Socialist Anti-War Front and the No-Conscription Fellowship.⁴ All three of these bodies had more appeal to non-Trotskyists who were opposed to prevailing communist policy. But while this might be explained partly by the willingness of Groves and his comrades to blur

- 1 'The Group and the struggle against War', passed by the Political Education Committee, 30 March 1938, (National Committee, 9 April 1938).
- 2 The first national M.L.L. conference claimed 150 members, not a large number though greater than that of the S.L.F. Margaret Johns, editor of Militant, told it that there was a print run of 2,000 monthly, not greatly in excess of its circulation as organ of the Militant Group. The M.L.L. branch structure - six in London, seven in the provinces - resembled that of the Group, (Report of the first National Conference of the Militant Labour League, (1938), H.P., D.J.H. 3/2).
- 3 Constituency membership in 1937-39 was: 447,150; 428,826; 408,844 (L.P.C.R., 1979).
- 4 At its first annual conference the M.L.L. spoke of continued work with the S.L.F. and 'considerable influence' within the S.A.W.F., (see below, and Report of the first National Conference).

their differences with pacifism, the M.L.L. itself did not put a full Trotskyist line. The programme adopted by its first conference contains transitional demands similar to those advanced by the Founding Congress of the Fourth International in September 1938, but there is no reference to the International or Militant's belief in the need for a new party.¹ Without these two statements of principle, however necessary it may have been for tactical reasons to drop them, even the M.L.L. appeared as an anti-war organisation. And yet the M.L.L. argument was expressed in undiluted Leninist terms. The clash between democratic and fascist powers was presented as a distinction between satiated countries and those with colonies.² The real enemy was at home, it argued, but only the working class could overthrow it. That was why a popular front or peace alliance had to be rejected, for it politically disarmed the working class and made it easier for capitalism to go to war.³ Like the Group, the M.L.L. campaigned for a 'Third Labour Government' and its speakers at local meetings demanded a special party conference to change Government foreign policy.⁴ There

1 *ibid.*

2 Manifesto of the Militant Labour League, [1938], (published by 'J.D. Parry', probably a pseudonym).

3 S. Jackson, 'Peace Alliance' - The Road to War (1938). Jackson presented Ernest Bevin and Harry Pollitt as divided only on tactics, the one representing British capitalism, the other the Soviet bureaucracy. His alternative was a Third Labour Government.

4 Manifesto of the Militant Labour League.

was no prospect of this taking place, but Transport House began to watch the League.¹

Outside the two main groups there were in 1938 three other factions who identified themselves with the Fourth International.

(i) Workers International League:

Following the split of 19 December 1937, the Paddington branch of the Militant Group took steps to secure its position. It made efforts to convince other group members to join it, with some success. It maintained its distinctive style of street and public paper sales, while continuing to be active within the Labour League of Youth. It may also have been the first Trotskyist faction in Britain to cover strikes on a regular basis. Most remarkably of all, the group set itself the task of 're-forming of the ranks of revolutionary socialism'. On 1 January 1938 it began publication of Workers International News, the first theoretical journal of the Trotskyist movement in Britain.² Early editions showed an attempt to put right a perceived deficiency in the movement's performance by putting some of Trotsky's prolific output into print.³ After a few months original articles began to appear, though by then WIN's loyalty to publishing Trotsky had laid it open to the type of criticism levelled at the 1933 Red Flag.

What was Paddington's purpose? The controversy over their intention at the December 19 G.M.M. can never be resolved. Very quickly eight members of the Militant Group resolved to

1 A.L. Williams, (Leeds party agent) to J. Middleton, 14 Oct. 1938; H. Atkinson (London District Organiser) to Middleton, 18 Oct. 1938, (Middleton Papers, Labour Party Head Office).

2 Sub-titled 'Theoretical organ of the Workers International League'. The priority this small group gave to theory contradicts the received wisdom about them as primarily an activist group not at home in the realm of ideas.

3 See footnotes on following page.

establish a new body, the Workers' International League. They later saw themselves as having made a conscious break with 1930s experience.¹ Regroupment was an early success as WIL had within its ranks members of three different Militant Group branches, as well as the brief adherence of Hilary Sumner-Boyd.² During 1938 it made considerable efforts to contact provincial branches: had there not been tangible discontent, it would have met with less success. Its energetic youth work built a local base,³ though it did not launch an agitational journal until September.⁴ By the time of the second fusion of Trotskyist groups in July 1938, Workers' International League had thirty members.⁵

3 From previous page.

Beginning with 'G.P.U. Stalks Abroad. Open letter to all working-class organisations', (WIN, 1 Jan.1938, 1-3), the journal published thirteen articles by Trotsky in its first nine issues.

1 [WIL document on the history of Trotskyism], [Autumn?] 1943.

2 The Paddington, North and Central branches. Sumner-Boyd had, like other Marxist League members, been left without an organisation following its October 1937 dissolution. While the majority of former M.L. members regrouped, Boyd seems to have believed Lee's purpose not to be a new group but only the establishment of a journal. He contributed an article, 'Stalin the Assassin', to the 1 January 1938 issue and collaborated on the second. On 6 March, however, he informed the I.S. that his cooperation had ended, (see above).

3 On 15 April, an eight page magazine, The Searchlight was published from the Paddington League of Youth over the name of Gerry Healey (sic). Only Vol. 1, no. 1 has been located.

4 Youth for Socialism, see below.

5 Interview with E. Grant, Jan. 1973.

(ii) The Revolutionary Socialist Party:

In Scotland a faction of the Socialist Labour Party, itself little more than a shell, split away in the early 1930s and evolved towards the Fourth International.¹ Taking first the name International Socialist Labour Party and then the Revolutionary Socialist Party, it published a journal The British Revolutionary Socialist² at slightly irregular intervals. It had an Edinburgh office and most members lived in the city, though others were scattered in Glasgow and Yorkshire.³ Leading members included the Taits, a family with a background in De Leonism, and the pamphleteer Frank Maitland.⁴ The R.S.P. rested on outdoor meetings and had no interest in Labour Party work. Though its concerns had been largely Scottish the R.S.P. approached the I.L.P. in 1937.⁵ When the I.L.P. rebuffed it, it turned towards the Trotskyist movement.

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- 1 The historian of the S.L.P., Raymond Challinor does not trace this postscript to the party, (The Origins of British Bolshevism, 1977).
 - 2 Later the Revolutionary Socialist, (Id monthly). Numbers 10, 11, 12, (July 1934, August 1934 and January 1935), are deposited at the Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick.
 - 3 In 1934 and 1935 the Revolutionary Socialist reported some support in England. The Leeds branch of the Militant Group encountered R.S.P. members in Fitzwilliam, Yorks. in 1937 and found them ultra-left, presumably in their attitude to the Labour Party.
 - 4 Principally W. Tait, the organiser, though A. Tait was also active. Maitland had written for The Plebs ('History - which made Scott unnecessary', vol.26(1934)44-5) and was the author of several pamphlets including Holidays with Pay, (1938), 7p.
 - 5 The R.S.P. applied for affiliation but was rejected by the I.L.P.'s N.A.C. on 10 August 1937 (J. Jupp, op. cit., 244). It had attended congresses of the London Bureau though it had never been an affiliate. I.L.P. rejection came about from fears that the R.S.P. was already under Trotskyist influence.

It wrote to Trotsky and contacted his British followers in London.¹

(iii) The I.L.P. fraction

Those who had not followed C.L.R. James out of the I.L.P. attacked the party leaders' centrism and propagandised for the Fourth International up to the eve of the war. Their activities were based on the Clapham I.L.P. and its bookshop, a Trotskyist centre throughout the decade. There was support from Militant Group members in Liverpool, who had stayed in the I.L.P.² At the 1937 annual conference of the party, Ernie Patterson, with few backers, pressed the case against the Unity Campaign, attacked the Trials and demanded the formation of the Fourth International.³ Only when, with the backing of the London Division, he deleted from the official resolution on resistance to war, qualifications on party support for colonial revolts, did he meet with success.

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- 1 The R.S.L. informed it that a unity conference of British Trotskyists was imminent and this naturally increased R.S.P. interest. Frank Maitland helped bridge the gap between the two with his article 'The Antics of Forward', Fight, (Aug. 1938); (W. Tait and F. Maitland, 'Statement of the R.S.P.', 23 Dec. 1938, in WIL document on history of Trotskyism, [1943], 9).
 - 2 These included Cund, of Kirkdale I.L.P., who had a full time party post.
 - 3 The New Leader, 2 April 1937; R. Bishop, 'The Independent Labour Party in Conference', Inprecorr, vol. 17, no. 16, 10 April 1937, 380-1. Bishop argued that while most organised Trotskyists had pulled out, 'the leadership has taken over Trotskyism as its ideological stock-in-trade'. It may be that Trotsky's thinking did inspire Brockway from time to time, but he had no respect for his movement, dismissing it as 'the merest trifling sects' (The New Leader, 16 April 1937).
 - 4 The New Leader, 2 April 1937.

As one of the I.L.P.'s rare trade union activists, Patterson found space in The New Leader and used it with some skill.¹ He also held a place on the party's London Divisional Council. In 1938 his assault on the popular front, morally strengthened by knowledge of the fate of the P.O.U.M. in Spain, had the backing of Jack Huntz and C.A. Smith, but still fell. In the debate on Labour-I.L.P. relations, he argued strongly for a limited united front but rejection of reaffiliation. Smith again supported him and his plea fell narrowly by forty nine to fifty five.² The following year Patterson reversed his view on affiliation and was part of the majority which carried it. Apart from his activities, Trotskyism had little to show in the I.L.P. after 1936 though attention continued to be paid to the tiny, but lively, Guild of Youth. Future Trotskyists within its ranks included Sydney Bidwell, Sam Bornstein and Ted Fletcher, who that year succeeded the late Bob Smillie as chairman. Trotskyist influence was nevertheless not confined to the efforts of those who remained active within the I.L.P. In Controversy, the journal launched by the party in October 1936 for discussion purposes, Trotsky and British Trotskyists were published, and there were occasional written debates

1 See his fantasy of a Pollitt speech in the House of Commons, 'I dream about Harry Pollitt', The New Leader, 13 Aug. 1937.

2 The New Leader, 22 April 1938.

between them and members of the C.P.G.B.¹ Controversy tended to confirm continued communist suspicion of the I.L.P. as a Trotskyist breeding ground.

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It had been thought at the time of the February 1938 fusion that the conversion of a majority of former Marxist Leaguers of itself constituted a strong argument with which to approach the Militant Group anew. After reflection the R.S.L. Central Committee rejected this course in view of the entrenchment of positions. It was only the growing threat of war which led it to extend a further invitation to unite. Open preparations for war, it argued, compelled revolutionaries to reappraise their tactical line. The R.S.L. suggested that in the event of war, it would be disastrous if Trotskyists were not united. Since the Militant Group's Labour Party presence was not intended to be permanent, just when would it be brought to an end? It argued that gains could not be made of an order which would justify an extended stay. Against the possibilities within the Labour Party had to be set

1 The rareness of such occurrences has been commented upon by J. Saville, in his article 'May Day 1937', loc. cit., 268. Among the articles of interest in Controversy are H. Sara, 'Communist Party History', (Sept. 1937); "Communist", 'Six Questions to Trotskyists', and C.L.R. James, 'Reply to "Communist"', (Feb. 1938); L. Trotsky, 'The Communist Manifesto Ninety Years After', (April and May 1938); S. Hook, 'The U.S.S.R. Frame-Ups', (May 1938); and L. Trotsky and P. Sloan, 'The Soviet Purge', (July 1938). Sara was Controversy's reviewer for Japan's Gamble in China for which he adopted a detached style. When he reviewed Harold Isaacs's The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution, (1938), he was less restrained, (The New Leader, 21 Oct. 1938). The book had an introduction by Trotsky and Sara criticised Isaacs for failing to follow the evolution of his thought.

'the foundation of a party which could act with tremendous effect on the various disjointed groups and individual Trotskyists and neo-Trotskyists who exist in this country in many thousands'. This was somewhat sanguine, and limited in its impact by the admission that a united group would number 200.¹

The postponed first conference of the Fourth International was planned for 1 September 1938. This meant new pressure on countries where the Trotskyist movement was divided to pull together. The I.S. intervened in Britain to condemn the Lee split as being 'on a basis devoid of all political meaning'² (though it called on Militant publicly to clear Lee's name from any calumny).³ All British groups, it declared, had to make self-criticism and prepare for unity. The S.W.P. was deputed to meet all groups standing for the Fourth International and prepare 'an objective statement of the position of the various groupings in order that the next international conference can settle the English question on the basis of precise proportions'.⁴

- 1 C. Sumner, secretary R.S.L., to Militant Group, 22 April 1938, Internal Bulletin, 3, (July 1938), 1-2.
- 2 Resolution of the International Secretariat on the R.L. affair, (Beginning May 1938), H.P., D.J.H. 2B/4/1. The I.S. described the WIL as 'a new, minute, independent, so-called "Trotskyist" group' and declared unity in Britain to be the most crucial task of the hour.
- 3 Jackson, van Gelderen and 'J.S.V.' were charged with the main responsibility for poor handling of the Lee affair. The charge of misappropriating funds was branded 'pure calumny' by the I.S. though it made no comment on other allegations concerning Lee's activities there. The Militant Group declined to publish a statement clearing Lee's name on the grounds that the matter was only of narrow interest and that Lee had not used WIN for the purpose, (Militant Group to the I.S., 19 June 1938, H.P., 2B/4/2.)
- 4 Resolution of the International Secretariat.

The Militant Group had derived great security from its belief that it was applying the Geneva resolution, but it had failed to secure official British Section status and its position was weakened since the I.S. resolution put priority on unity and not tactical agreement. Militant dropped its argument that different tactics meant different organisations, but insisted that the main field of operation had to be the Labour Party. It told the R.S.L. in May 1938 that a fusion was acceptable provided those in the Labour Party did not have to associate themselves openly with the outside body. Within the Labour Party they would continue to put the Trotskyist programme but remain mute on the need for a new party and the Fourth International. The S.L.F. and M.L.L. could be unified on the M.L.L. programme:¹ within the Labour Party they still suggested the main thrust of Trotskyist activity must be to try and wrest the leadership of left wing workers from the communists. Thus, argued the Militant Group, there should be the open organisation, (the M.L.L.), within which there would be a disciplined group of Bolshevik-Leninists steering for a split. No time limit could be set upon the experience. The weakness and division of the Trotskyists had prevented them taking advantage of the first left swing at the time of the Unity Campaign, but a new opportunity approached. Trotskyism would not, it argued, be in a position to offer alternative leadership on the outbreak of war: its aim should therefore be to hold together. There could be no assumption that war itself would be the signal for a split from the Labour Party: that would depend on what had been achieved by then. The existence of an open Fourth International Party, of whose use to it Militant was still unconvinced, was the price for securing unity of all Trotskyists now in the Labour

1 If Groves's 'bureaucratic control' prevented amalgamation, then the R.S.L. members in the S.L.F. must join the M.L.L. This organisation was recognised as the Trotskyist faction, and Militant better known than The Call (see below).

Party. The outside body would have a limited propaganda role: and must avoid masquerading as a party. Conceding its continued existence was the limit of compromises the Militant was prepared to make.¹

Militant had pledged itself to the I.S. work for unity.² In June 1938 it was approached by Harry Wicks, acting secretary of the new R.S.L. urging it further in this direction.³ The plan was to convene a conference and thus implement the I.S. declaration. Invitations would be sent, he reported, not only to the R.S.L. and the Militant Group, but to Don James's dissidents in Liverpool, to the R.S.P., to the WIL and to the Leninist League.⁴ Militant agreed to a conference but demanded the exclusion of WIL and the Leninist League, which its Glasgow members knew. Its counter-proposal was a fusion of itself with the R.S.L.⁵ This offer was turned down and Militant's worries about the Leninist League scorned.⁶

- 1 'From the Militant Group', 27 May 1938, (R.S.L., Internal Bulletin, 3, July 1938).
- 2 Though it expected more from the I.S. on what it considered Lee's factional course, (Militant Group to I.S., 19 June 1938, H.P., 2B/4/2).
- 3 R.S.L., Internal Bulletin, 3, (July 1938), 7.
- 4 A Glasgow-based group, followers of Hugo Oehler who had opposed on principle the French turn and the proposition to enter the American Socialist Party. In October 1935 the Oehlerites had been expelled from the C.L.A. for violation of party discipline by publishing their own journal. They then formed the Revolutionary Workers' League.
- 5 E.S. Jackson to R.S.L., 9 July 1938, *ibid.*, 9.
- 6 C. Sumner to the Militant Group, 14 July 1938, *ibid.*, 11-12. Naturally an open faction like the R.S.L. would be less concerned than one in the Labour Party about a third less than ten strong which opposed Labour Party membership in principle. But within the R.S.L. itself there were also doubts about the catholicity of the invitation to the forthcoming conference, (W. Duncan, Fusion and C.C. Muddle, 14 July 1938, H.P., D.J.H., 13A/3).

Some time in July 1938, J.P. Cannon, a leader of the American Socialist Workers Party,¹ then at a zenith of influence, arrived in Britain as midwife to the merger.² He met each party to the project separately to persuade them to come in. His immediate object was a unified delegation to the imminent Fourth International conference. Only in WIL's case did he meet the membership and not just leading figures³ but he secured the agreement of all except the Leninist League to take part in a conference. He did not, however, dispel WIL's doubts about the possibility of fusing such different factions into one.

The National Conference of Bolshevik-Leninists gathered in the New Morris Hall on 30-31 July 1938, with Sara again the chairman. It had before it papers from the R.S.L., R.S.P. and WIL. It seems that the Militant, which was to dominate the new body, did not submit a document. The R.S.L. argument was familiar: 'the policy of confining our work to that of a fraction within the Labour Party is calculated to sow the most dangerous illusions among the workers'. After the debacle of the Socialist League there was suspicion of left wing movements. Neither the S.L.F. nor the M.L.L. had met with success in 1938. If the I.L.P. reaffiliated, these two would be reduced to insignificance; but if the I.L.P. was in the Labour Party, a dangerous rival to the Fourth International would be removed. Militant had argued that a split would be justified only by the prospect of establishing an alternative leadership. But, countered

- 1 When the C.L.A. left the Socialist Party of America in mid 1937 it took this name.
- 2 It was a sign of the times that Cannon, following the recent murders of Trotskyists, was carrying a gun, (Interview with E. Grant, Jan. 1973).
- 3 The WIL convened a meeting of its full membership, thirty strong and all in London at this point, (Interview with E. Grant). He met only the leaders of the Militant Group (Interview with M. Johns).

the R.S.L., there could be no such outcome without a clear break with the Labour leaders over the war question. The Transitional Programme was now to hand with supporting quotes for such a thesis. It also tilted the argument towards independent rather than entrust activity. Indeed the shift in the approach of the international from support for the Militant to encouragement of unity via the R.S.L. seems to have been decisive.

The limited progress which the Revolutionary Socialist Party had met in Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and elsewhere in Scotland was, like the R.S.L.'s early experiences, empirical proof that independence could work. It claimed to have attracted a larger crowd than the Labour Party or the communists in Edinburgh to its May Day rally. The R.S.P. submission to the conference rested upon a De Leonite interpretation of British history in the twentieth century - 'the long struggle of the workers to break away from the Labour Party'. The R.S.P. had no time for entry work. 'Never must the revolutionary banner be lowered in capitulation to such a party.' A political crisis had arisen which a new party must meet; on the industrial field there was 'a spontaneous movement of the masses of the utmost significance'. An independent party was needed to marry the two. If it could it would catalyse a revolutionary mood before the war; if this proved impossible it would work by every means possible for the defeat of British capitalism, even if by then it was in alliance with Russia.¹

The WIL recognised that all groups united in seeing the epoch as one of imperialist crisis and decay. They differed on 'how

¹ Revolutionary Socialist Party N.E.C., 'The Revolution in Britain', National Bulletin [July] 1938 (sep. pag. 1-7).

to overcome the present exasperating isolation of the revolutionary elements from the broad masses'.¹ The R.S.L., claimed WIL, made ineffective criticism from outside which could yet be damaging. Revolutionaries could not abandon the Labour Party. Politically awakening workers would just pass through it unless there were revolutionaries present around whom they might gather. While Labour at present was weak, it would grow, and its current feeble condition could give revolutionaries extra weight² and influence in the short run on which they might capitalise in the long. Nor did presence in the Labour Party mean submersion, as WIL's own active life had shown. WIL dismissed the M.L.L. and the S.L.F., each less likely to provide revolutionary support than an I.L.P. returned to the Labour Party. Within that party it urged all groups to organise 'full strength at the point of attack'.

No minutes of the conference have been located. The proceedings unfolded under the influence of Cannon's prestige, knowledge of the approach of the Founding Conference and also Lee's bitter phrases.³ The final agreement,⁴ though drawn up by Cannon,

1 Contribution by Workers' International League to the Discussion on the Tasks of Bolshevik-Leninists in Britain, June 1938, H.P., D.J.H. 5/1, 1.

2 At the present moment the right wingers search for a stick with which to beat the Stalinists who threaten to tear the machine from out of their hands. They do not hesitate to publish selected articles by Trotsky in Forward and to quote from the Trotskyites. Only from within the Labour Party is it possible to extract a price from the bureaucracy, forcing it to acknowledge the revolutionary content of Trotskyism instead of merely utilising the anti-Stalinist aspect of its revolutionary programme, (ibid., 4).

3 Lee referred to the pre-conference negotiations as a French bedroom farce; he called the factions Kilkenny cats, tied by their tails, fated to fight for evermore, (Interview with John Goffe, 1974).

4 For full text, see Appendix D.

was more in the nature of a British compromise. It set up one organisation, the Revolutionary Socialist League, to run all activities, funds and property and to engage a full-time secretary. This much was to be expected. But whereas the main emphasis was to be placed on Labour Party work 'in the next period', members fully active outside the party were not required to join.¹ A publishing house was to be established to run a Fourth International journal fused from Fight, Revolutionary Socialist and Workers International News. The Militant would continue to appear as an agitational paper published by the M.L.L. There would also be an internal bulletin for all comrades every two months. While everyone was to sell the Fourth International journal, there was no explicit clause enforcing sales of Militant on those outside the Labour Party, and it is difficult to see how such sales could have been achieved. The agreement allotted five executive places each to the R.S.L. and Militant Groups, to the R.S.P. and WIL went two apiece. After six months a national conference would elect a new executive. During that time the parties pledged themselves to 'liquidate' past conflicts, collaborate harmoniously, and impose Fourth International discipline on disrupters. The final stage of unification was to be ratification of the agreement by the membership of all parties to it and a general aggregate meeting of all members. When each group had elected its members to the unified executive, that executive would elect delegates to the imminent World Congress.

1 It was this clause in particular which was to attract the objections of WIL. Nor was WIL the only critic. In 1941 the Left Fraction (q.v.) opposed the concession of minority rights in an agreement it construed as based on Labour Party work, (Brief Notes on the History of the Left Fraction, 2). The Socialist Workers Group (q.v.) declared that the fusion 'took place under pressure from the international and left unsolved the burning question of the 'Labour Party perspective'', (For the Building of the British Section of the Fourth International, 30 April 1941, H.P., D.J.H. 7/1).

The R.S.L., R.S.P. and Militant signed the Peace and Unity agreement. But the WIL refused, despite repeated appeals from Cannon, to take part, resting on the argument that there could be no true unity until experience forged it.¹ There was support for this view outside its ranks,² but most seem to have genuinely believed that they had conquered the debilitating weakness of the 1930s. The unified Executive Committee elected Harber (Militant), Maitland (R.S.P.), and C.L.R. James (R.S.L.) as its delegates to the coming conference. Summer-Boyd was also to attend as a consultative delegate, and he took one of the sets of minutes. WIL sent with Harber a statement that it stood on the Geneva resolution, that the controversy over the Labour Party had been fudged in the new R.S.L., that individuals were effectively left to work where they wished. WIL argued that as the organisation implementing the Geneva resolution it ought to be the official British Section. Failing that it requested sympathising status and offered collaboration with the R.S.L. in all shared fields.³

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- 1 [WIL document on the history of Trotskyism], 5.
- 2 Two R.S.L. members, Bill Duncan and Hilda Lane were unhappy that fusion could take place without resolving disagreements over the S.L.F. In their view working within a 'centrist' organisation was a very different matter to setting one up, (W. Duncan, Fusion and C.C. Muddle, 14 July 1938, H.P., D.J.H. 13 A/3). Some months later the R.S.P. wrote 'the Unity agreement was more of an organisational than a political document. Unity was achieved without preliminary discussions on the various national and international issues', (Letter and Statement of the R.S.P. (Edinburgh) and reply of Executive Committee, [Jan.? 1939], 7 H.P., D.J.H. 13 A/6.)
- 3 Statement of Workers' International League to the International Congress of the Fourth International, 1938, [August ? 1938] reprinted in [WIL document on the history of Trotskyism], 7-8.

The 'Geneva' conference¹ to found the Fourth International lasted for one day, 3 September 1938. Thirty delegates from eleven countries attended.² With difficulty a majority had been assembled to consummate the swing away from the Comintern begun after the German debacle of 1933 by launching a new international. Unifications in Britain and Greece, facilitated by the approach of the Conference now were quoted as auspicious signs:

These two steps symbolised for the conference the growing integration of our international movement made possibly by our whole past course, which was based not on the concept of superficial, temporary, and deceptive advances but on the concept of the process of revolutionary selection which alone leads to the creation and victory of the tempered revolutionary party.³

In Britain there was no political disagreement, only the tactical clash over the Labour Party. The International had determined upon 'a definite roll-call of our forces' and looked at Britain in that light.⁴ In fact there was no opposition among the British groups to

- 1 Held in reality at the Rosmers' home in the Paris suburbs. Geneva was a subterfuge used for security reasons.
- 2 Shachtman was chairman and the joint secretaries were Sumner, Hic and Gould. The published minutes are Sumner's.
- 3 'Review of the Conference', Documents, 160. Growth in 'England', (though the R.S.P. was surely included), was quoted with that in the U.S.A. as evidence of fruitful activity by the International Secretariat. The figure of 170 members given for England does not appear fanciful.
- 4 It was faced not only with unifications in Britain and Greece but also with the withdrawal of Vereecken and Sneevliet. The Poles constituted a loyal opposition within the conference, (I. Deutscher, The Prophet Outcast, 419-29).

the launching of the Fourth International:¹ WIL in particular identified itself with this cause right from the start. Nonetheless, the Statutes made it clear that there could be but one section of the Fourth International in a given country. Cannon argued that the recent British fusion demanded the recognition of two places on the I.E.C. and James and Harber were elected to fill them. A discussion on Britain followed. Conference resolved to offer Lee a hand of friendship, but if he rejected it to fight him. Clart argued for a conciliatory approach in view of the strength of the R.S.L.'s position.² Nevertheless, WIL was unambiguously condemned. It was held to have been established and maintained for purely personal reasons:

'Under these circumstances it is necessary to warn the comrades associated with the Lee group that they are being led on a path of unprincipled clique politics which can only land them in the mire'.³

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- 1 James argued against delay, refuting Shachtman's argument that the launch had been delayed in 1936 by hope of convincing the centrists, (Documents, 298). He was the chief British participant. Like Harber he was at his second conference. With seven others he interviewed observers from the P.S.O.P. and the P.O.U.M.; he argued that the K.P.D. collapse of 1933 was a conscious policy; he moved an amendment from the R.S.L. Central Committee to the slogan of the right to work in the Transitional Programme, seeking the insertion of Keir Hardie's phrase, 'work or full maintenance'. When Russia was discussed James defended the progressive nature of the Soviet economy against Craipeau but anticipated his own split from the Fourth International by joining Shachtman in resisting a precise characterisation of the Russian bureaucracy.
- 2 Documents, 302. In Harber's record it was James who made this adjustment.
- 3 [Fourth International], On Unification of the British Section, [Sept. 1938], Documents, 270. WIL was accused of not even making a statement though it had sent an appeal with Harber, (see above, 265).

The following day the new executive of the Fourth International met. It was this body which discussed the Lee group in detail. Shachtman, supported by Cannon, argued against sympathetic affiliation for WIL on the grounds that its action showed it moving away from the Fourth. Cannon thought WIL akin to Molinier's organisation,¹ but on a lower plane. Maitland spoke forcefully against WIL,² but James and Harber joined in only to assent to the proposed resolution, which the I.E.C. then went on to pass.³ The International Youth conference passed a guiding resolution on the English Youth Movement, moved by Gould.⁴ It expected the situation in the Labour Party League of Youth to develop in favour of the Trotskyists and proposed concentration there with work in the Y.C.L. and Guild of Youth from within the League of Youth. Achievements

- 1 Raymond Molinier was the leader of the Parti Communiste Internationaliste, one of two warring factions which comprised the French Trotskyist movement. The International Conference of 1936 had expelled Molinier for use of funds to maintain hegemony in the French Section. The Founding Conference declared the ranks of the F.I. open to P.C.I. members but not to Molinier, (Documents, 262-4). Cannon's comparison seems to have been intended to draw a parallel between the personal roles of Molinier and Lee.
- 2 Described as a 'vicious attack' by WIL, [WIL document on the history of Trotskyism], 8.
- 3 This paragraph is based on Harber's minutes of the executive meeting, [R.S.L.], Report Of International Conference [Sept.? 1938], (Warwick M.S.S.). According to the R.S.P. a misunderstanding of the conference arrangements, (which were shrouded in secrecy), led to Willie Tait, Harber and van Gelderen missing the main conference, ('Letter and Statement of the R.S.P.', loc. cit., 6). Tait may be in error for Maitland, but neither this, nor van Gelderen's presence has been confirmed.
- 4 Gould (often known in the International as Anton) was a youth leader of the S.W.P. and was to be youth representative on the resident I.E.C. established in the United States after the outbreak of war.

there in the past year were thought meagre, not only for objective reasons but because of inefficiency. As a remedy, a certain amount of specialisation was proposed: as many as possible should concentrate on youth work and compose a youth section of the R.S.L. Note was also taken of the 'nascent' youth apprentices movement¹ and the R.S.L. youth was thought to have a great responsibility to steer towards it.²

On his journey back to the United States, Shachtman had further discussions with the British including the WIL. There was no tangible result. The first important development after the conference was the loosening of the cadre which had dominated the British movement during the middle of the decade. Sumner-Boyd who had been present at all important developments since 1936 left almost at once for an academic career in Turkey.³ James, reduced in effectiveness by a stomach ulcer, left, perhaps without warning, in early October 1938 to join the S.W.P. in the United States.⁴ Some time during the year Jack Winocour also departed for America.⁵ This had the effect of

1 There had been strikes among apprentices in 1937, in which the C.P.G.B. had intervened.

2 'Resolution on English Youth Movement', D.D. Harber, Report of International Conference, [1938], Warwick M.S.S., 21.

3 He began teaching at Robert College, Istanbul whence, until his death, he made a deep impression on Turkish intellectual life. He wrote the definitive Strolling through Istanbul, collected the works of Turkish artists and 'effectively created the modern Turkish theatre', (The Times, 18 Sept. 1976).

4 The S.W.P.'s black membership was negligible and Cannon, during his visit, invited James to undertake a lecture tour of the States. James informed Starkey Jackson, the new R.S.L. secretary of his impending departure in September. One of his last acts before leaving was the Manifesto of The African Service Bureau, whose call for inter-racial unity against imperialist war was endorsed by the M.L.L.: (Militant (Oct. 1938) ; I. Oxaal, Black Intellectuals Come to Power, (1971), 71).

5 Interview with H. Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979.

weakening the R.S.L. half of the fusion.¹ Those that remained from the R.S.L. side felt that there had to be action to make a reality of the agenda set by the Transitional Programme adopted by the Founding Congress.² But they were confronted by a political environment more hostile than before. There was no widespread movement against the coming war and what the Trotskyists had to say about it was less effective for the impact of the Trials.³

Unity had thus come late and in most unfavourable circumstances for all the optimism of the Transitional Programme. It was also to be shortlived. Unity was achieved because many in Britain genuinely desired it and because differences were felt to be relatively unimportant in the face of approaching war. If the International Secretariat had stood firm on its 1936 Geneva resolution and its statement in December of that year, unity could not possibly have come about. But the I.S. never made the Militant Group, the faction in

- 1 Harber also moved out of London about this time to take work as a C.I.S. agent in Eastbourne. As an asthmatic he would expect also to improve his health in the sea air, (Information from Mr. J. Harber).
- 2 'The strategic task of the next period - a prerevolutionary period of agitation, propaganda, and organisation - consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard' (The Transitional Programme. The death agony of capitalism and the tasks of the Fourth International, reprinted in Documents, 182).
- 3 At least one Trotskyist, Arthur Ballard, became disillusioned with the movement after the third trial and C.L.R. James was unable to persuade him to remain active, (Interview with H. Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979). Ballard appears to have rejoined the I.L.P. shortly after this. He began to write for The New Leader on colonial affairs and opened a regular column, 'In the Empire' late in 1938 which he used on 9 December to review The Black Jacobins. At the 1939 annual conference of the I.L.P. he moved a Hampstead/Hounslow/Wimbledon resolution on subject peoples which was carried with N.A.C. support.

Britain operating its policy, its official British Section. It only conferred this status on the fused R.S.L., which resulted from the Peace and Unity conference of July 1938. This was a hasty affair arranged within an international timetable, not one which suited the natural course of events in Britain. The only group in Britain to perceive this clearly was the Workers' International League which would have no part of it. The next six years were to vindicate its abstention and prove the International's condemnation of it a wild misjudgment.

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

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PART TWO

(1938 - 1944)

1938 - 1941

British Trotskyists, like the general labour movement, were increasingly concerned about war. During the peacetime years up to 1939 they were able to live off the traditional Bolshevik view of imperialist war, though there was already controversy about what this meant in practical terms. No Trotskyists supported the war when it finally broke out: all factions continued to maintain that it was an imperialist war. But a bitter and protracted dispute developed between the R.S.L., and WIL and the Fourth International over the application of the anti-patriotic line.

* * * * *

The general Trotskyist attitude to war was established as early as 1934. War and the Fourth International (1934)¹ declared that a future world conflict would be imperialist and called for opposition to patriotism in all capitalist countries. War was likely to threaten the Soviet Union and there it was the duty of the working class to seek defence. The support of socialist and trade union leaders in every country for their government in the event of war was predicted as a certainty. British Trotskyists vigilantly watched the rising threat of war which they saw as a political issue dwarfing most others. In 1935 it had been enough to reverse the policy of the Marxist Group. From that year also, part of the Trotskyist charge against communism was its willingness to support an alliance of anti-fascist powers, if such a project should be cobbled into reality. When Trotskyists speculated on war, they drew on knowledge of the Great War, the only precedent they had. In 1936 Groves forecast

¹ The full text of this document, which was written by Trotsky, is in Writings (1933-34), 299-329. It appeared as a document of the I.S. of the International Communist League in July 1934.

dilution, the skeletal emergence of strike-breaking machinery and the exclusion of leftists from war industry. He predicted a gradual loss of trade union rights and recommended resistance to conscription, which was likely to be introduced in peacetime. Only thus would democratic countries be able to match their national resources to those of fascist countries.¹

Suspicion of war preparations led Trotskyists to oppose every step in that direction. Their difficulty was that if their response was confined to opposition of this kind they were doomed to impotence. The Marxist Group recognised the problem early on:

'While we must combine planning for protection with anti-war propaganda, and must make every effort to present the outbreak of another world war, we cannot neglect to face the possibility of that war, and meet the problems involved'.²

But that conclusion could be drawn only after a frank recognition that the international situation was deteriorating faster than Trotskyism was gathering strength. There was no widespread disposition to face the implications of this unpalatable truth.³

When E.L. Davis argued within the Militant Group for penetration of A.R.P. organisations⁴ he was rebuked.⁵

1 R. Groves, Arms and the Unions (1936). This pamphlet was published by the Socialist League.

2 Fight (June 1937).

3 One of the Marxist Group recruits to the Labour Party opposed a purely negative attitude towards defence, raising the call for adequate protection, as far as possible under the control of workers' organisations, (R.W., Air Raid Policy, (Sept. 1936), Warwick M.S.S. 15/4/2/15).

4 Quite early on Davis demanded 'real protection' and called on the government to spend as lavishly on defence as on armaments, ('Air Raid Policy', 27 May 1937, Internal Discussion Bulletin, June 1937, H.P., D.J.H. 2a/2, 7-10).

5 By Robinson, Nicholls and, (later), Bone.

Just as Trotskyists assumed that labour and trade union leaders would rally patriotically, they were also sensitive to signs of backsliding within their own movement.¹ This made it difficult to move beyond an abstract anti-war line. But the capitulation of socialist leaders had taken place, among other reasons, because of intense mass pressure. This was hardly a problem for Trotskyists to worry about, and time was to show that chauvinistic hysteria would not, in any case, recur. If Trotskyism was to break out of isolation, it needed something more than a formal programme, however well grounded in Leninist precept. The Transitional Programme of the Fourth International, the second major document of the movement on war, tried to reach beyond pacifism, arguing 'workers must learn the military arts',² but it was also an optimistic document declaring that crisis would shatter all parties and the Fourth International must be available to rally the proletariat.

This strictly general guidance left Trotskyists in Britain and elsewhere in a formal argument. They faced a political environment which was utterly different to that whose precedents provided so much of their inspiration, the prelude to World War One. The political battles of the left about war and rearmament were fought not in 1939 but in the mid 1930s. Key events in shifting the Labour Party from a broadly anti-war position were the trouncing of Lansbury at the 1935

1 Gould, an S.W.P. delegate to the 1938 international conference, was alive to the fact the patriotism was not a danger for the Trotskyist movement, ('Minutes of the Founding Conference of the Fourth International', Documents, 294-6).

2 Military Training by the labour movement, the thesis advanced by the Transitional Programme, had respectable socialist antecedents in the armed wings of the Austrian and German social democrats. The R.S.L. of 1938 had delegates present at the discussion of the document in the first session of the Founding Congress. In 1940, however, the R.S.L. was to argue that a transitional demand for workers' arms did not have timeless application and certainly could not be advanced in a patriotic period where it might be used by imperialists for recruiting purposes.

conference and the critical vote of the P.L.P. in July 1937 to abstain on the Service Department estimates, reversing its earlier position of opposition.¹ British Communist policy had been unqualified as late as 1934² but by a series of national and international changes its main thrust became a drive to make sure Britain was on the right side in a peace front.³ This induced increased political loneliness which tended to reinforce Trotskyists' views.

They rejected any involvement with war preparations. No fine distinctions between attack and defence were allowed to pass, even a zigzag trench.⁴ For all the occasional doubts of individuals, there were no differences here between the factions.⁵ The R.S.L. conducted an internal discussion over A.R.P., which culminated in the executive declaring against it after being advised by Jackson not to stand on passing proletarian moods. 'The workers', he advised, 'are

- 1 C.L. Mowat, Britain Between the Wars 1918-1940 (1955), 632. For the evolution of Labour policy see J.F. Naylor, Labour's International Policy, (1969), 261-92.
- 2 R.F. Andrews's often quoted Labour Monthly article of 1934 which demanded that British and French workers should 'under no circumstances' support an attack by their governments on fascist Germany, even if that country attacked the U.S.S.R., was well known to Trotskyists, (See Workers Fight, Oct. 1938).
- 3 Following Hitler's march into Austria R.P.Dutt reviewed communist policy since 1933 on the danger of war, ('Notes of the Month', Labour Monthly, (April 1938), 195-219).
- 4 'While it may be true that a trench of itself is not an aggressive measure, when it is seen as means to continuing an Imperialist war, then it is obviously as important a part of the Government's war plans as the construction of bombers', (Militant, Oct. 1938). A.R.P. was also condemned, incidentally, as unlikely to work.
- 5 "'Defence" cannot be separated from offence. The gas-mask is the counterpart of the poison-gas bomb, air-raid shelters are the counterpart of the bombers. To tolerate the one is to tolerate the other, and the revolutionary must implacably reject both', ('Voluntary Conscription', WIN, (Dec. 1938), 1-3).

in general backward and lag behind the necessities of history.'¹

A.R.P. was another means of reconciling the civil population to war.

This attitude contrasts strongly with contemporary communist policy.²

Early 1939 saw Trotskyism resigned to being swamped by chauvinism on the outbreak of war.³ But its isolation did not spring from the anticipated patriotic wave. Conscription, an important step towards militarization, was introduced in April 1939 for the first time in peace.⁴ Resentment was qualified, even among the communists.⁵ In the battle against conscription and the National Register only Trotskyism, the still pacifist I.L.P., and Labour mavericks battled it out minus reservations. The R.S.L. however was later to reject the policy it followed at this time, whereby it allowed its members to make conscientious objection at tribunals.⁶ Faced with imminent war,

1 A central committee statement of 27 October 1938 was followed by a brisk discussion on A.R.P. in which Robinson was sharp and intransigent on patriotic concessions and Hampstead declared the committee ultra-left, (R.S.L., Special Internal Discussion Bulletin, (Nov. 1938), H.P., D.J.H. 13a/5, 5-8). At the February 1939 conference of the R.S.L. only five votes were cast against the executive position on A.R.P. Within the Labour Party A.R.P. was something of an immediate issue because it was raised by local government representatives. This meant the R.S.L. needed a policy (interview with J. Archer, Nov. 1973). WIL, also in the Labour Party, took a similar point of view: 'No support for the National Register, no support for A.R.P., no support for capitalist "defence" - these must be our slogans' ('Voluntary Conscription', WIN, (Dec. 1938), 1-3).

2 The communists had been agitating for deep shelters in London since 1936, and with some success, (P. Piratin, Our Flag Stays Red (1978 edit.), 64-7).

3 'It must be remembered that on the outbreak of imperialist war we, as revolutionaries, will at first be politically isolated from the masses who will turn to "National Defence" and class collaboration', (Draft Resolution on the Policy of the R.S.L. on the Outbreak of Imperialist War, 12 Jan. 1939, H.P., D.J.H./391, 4.)

4 Chamberlain announced conscription for twenty and twenty one year olds on 26 April 1939. It was extended on the outbreak of war.

5)
6) See footnotes on following page.

Trotskyists consistently called for Soviet defence. The circumstances leading to the Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939 were criticised, but not the right of the Soviets to conclude such an agreement. But WIL did attack the way communists in Britain presented it.¹

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The Militant Labour League greeted the outbreak of war with a manifesto branding it as imperialist and calling for the overthrow of the British ruling class. At this general level there was no patriotic incursion into any of the Trotskyists' ranks. Where the factions differed was in their expectations of what the first few months would be like. The Socialist Anti-War Front, partly through its activity in the No-Conscription League, had some success in putting itself at the centre of a movement with support from trades councils. Reg Groves used the extra channels open to him as a Labour candidate to maintain a stream of criticism until official party policy changed.² The R.S.L.³ and WIL both expected heavy and

5 From previous page.

'Give us our ideals to serve, give us a policy worth serving, give us the means to fitness, and we will show what latent strength there is in our democracy, and how unitedly we can shoulder our responsibilities to defend it!' (J. Gollan, Youth Will Serve For Freedom, [1938], 11). WIL predicted that communists would support conscription once Chamberlain was out of power.

6 From previous page.

It later regretted its involvement with the Socialist Anti-War Front and, on 11 March 1940, its executive rescinded the decision on conscientious objectors. For the S.A.W.F., see Chapter X.

1 J.R. Strachan, The War Crisis - The Way Out For Workers (1939).

'J.R. Strachan' was a pseudonym, possibly for Ralph Lee and Grant.

2 For Groves and the S.A.W.F. see Chapter X.

3 For some time before the war the R.S.L. had devoted time and space to 'special' (i.e. illegal) work.

immediate suppression, and WIL actually anticipated it by moving a centre into exile.¹ The R.S.L. had a particular fixation with chauvinist hysteria and continued to believe it was rampant in the face of all evidence.² There was opposition to the war, but it tended, like support for it, to be low key, devoid of enthusiasm. Everyone had lived with the likelihood of war for some time, and for political activists there was also the comforting thought that Britain was at least in a war against fascism.³ These two factors, one affecting the majority and the other the minority isolated all revolutionaries, some of whom misread unanimity for enthusiasm.

As for the form of objection to the war, this was a problem in itself. The Call of the S.A.W.F. publicised conscientious objection, but this presented theoretical problems for Trotskyists. Mere refusal to take part was simply pacifism. The R.S.L. expelled S.A.W.F. participants for this very reason. But while their view was that arms could be taken up either to defend workers' organisations or overthrow a capitalist government, this was of little help in the

- 1 In an obscure episode Haston and Healy with seven others moved on the outbreak of war to Ireland, (Interview with J. Haston, July 1973). James Maxton fought a parallel tendency in the I.L.P., (J. McNair, James Maxton : Beloved Rebel (1955), 286-7). R. Barltrop, (The Monument (1975), 101-22), contains an interesting account of how the S.P.G.B. reacted.
- 2 A Mass Observation Survey of 2 September 1939 unearthed 2% of those interviewed who would be glad if there was a war, 34% who preferred anything to war, and 43% who would rather get it over with, (Mass Observation, War Begins at Home (1940), 35). The predominant feeling seems to have been sullen acquiescence. 'The declaration of war brought none of the excitement, none of the 'ebullitions' as the Observer put it, which had marked the August days of 1914: no rounds of cheers, no dancing in the streets yet 'the sense of moral release' was inexpressible'. (A. Marwick, Britain in the Century of Total War, (1968), 257). See also the comparison of public perceptions of the two wars in H. Pelling, Britain and the Second World (1970), 325-6 .
- 3 See footnotes on following page.

concrete circumstances of September 1939. Capitalism still existed: it had not been overthrown. On a basis of non-complicity in an era of growing militarization of life, it would be difficult to distinguish Trotskyism from pacifism. Trotskyism had a rich Marxist legacy to draw on. Liebknecht had argued that the enemy of the workers was in their own country. The Bolshevik slogan for the turning of the imperialist war into a civil war was well known.¹ Revolutionary defeatism was considered the duty of the Fourth International. Even before the war, however, Trotsky was trying to reach beyond these simple principles. He reminded the International,

'An irreconcilable attitude against bourgeois militarism does not at all signify that the proletariat in all cases enters into a struggle against its own national army'.²

3 From Previous Page.

'But for the ordinary men who fought it, was this war much different from the first? If there was perhaps less passionate dedication there was probably a greater feeling of inescapable purpose: war resistance was a negligible factor this time ' (A. Marwick, The Explosion of British Society, 1914-62, (1963), 105). Gallup found a majority behind Chamberlain from October 1938, which grew from the outbreak of war, (H. Pelling, *ibid.*, 38).

1 In 1914 Lenin had described this as 'the only correct proletarian slogan' ('The War and Russian Social Democracy, Collected Works, 21, (Moscow 1964), 32-3). But Lenin was seeking to draw a definitive line between revolutionaries and social patriots which by 1939 was well established.

2 Trotsky argued that the true meaning of revolutionary defeatism was that defeat of one's own imperialist government was a lesser evil than political prostration of the proletariat within national unity. It may have been significant that it was WIL which published this argument, ('Learn to Think', WIN, (Aug. 1938), 4).

Trotskyism expected the C.P.G.B. to support the war. This had been the drift of party policy before 1939. When it was reversed a month after war began, the communists moved to a policy which was radical but not Leninist. The most radical phase of this policy fell between October and the Fall of France.¹ During this time the war was damned as an imperialist conflict by the party, with the main blame falling upon the British and the French.² It did not call for the war to be turned into a civil war, but demanded the replacement of Chamberlain with a new government pledged to begin peace negotiations.³ WIL regarded communist policy at this time as pro-Hitler, and this belief was a motive behind the revulsion of many on the left from the party.⁴ The change in the programme of the C.P.G.B. did not make it more well disposed towards Trotskyism.⁵

- 1 The war was 'not a people's war, but a war in the interests of the big capitalists against the people', The Trade Unions and The War [1939?]. (This was a resolution of the party central committee). For the period 1939-41 see H. Pelling, The British Communist Party, 108-119.
- 2 London district committee (of the C.P.G.B.), Workers Against The War [1939?], 9-10.
- 3 W. Gallacher, The War and the Workers, [1939?], 16.
- 4 Gollancz wrote that the C.P.G.B. had adopted the policy consistently held by the I.L.P., ('Where Are You Going?', in V. Gollancz (ed.) The Betrayal of the Left, (1940), especially 6-7). The Russian invasion of Finland sundered the close observation of communist policy by Tribune, (W. Jones, The Russia Complex, (1977), 50).
- 5 Trotskyism, with pacifism, belonged among those political tendencies 'which confuse and disrupt the growth of working class opposition to the war', (Workers Against The War, [1939?], 7).

But the bourgeoisie was no more inclined to civil war than the proletariat. The first nine months of the conflict, the Phoney War, were notable for relaxation at home, if anything, to the irritation of many in the labour movement.¹ This again conflicted with forecasts. WIL argued that the pliancy of labour leaders rendered a strong state apparatus superfluous and concluded that the National Government had a 'firm hold'.² But elections continued, and offered an opportunity for anti-war candidates of various kinds to oppose it. In this phase of the war, the general absence of discontent was reflected in their low votes.³

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- 1 Rationing, for example, began only after four months of war and then limited to sugar, butter and bacon. Nor had conscription reached beyond the twenty five year olds by April 1940. At that date there were still more than a million unemployed, (H. Pelling, Modern Britain : 1885-1914, (1974), 164).
- 2 'The Ballot Box Test', WIN (March 1940), 6. But WIL also believed that 'sober discussions' about state repression had taken place in ruling circles immediately before the war. It deployed the evidence of army manoeuvres and the text of insurance policies (which excluded civil war from the list of covered hazards) in support, ('Slump', WIN, (June 1938), 8).
- 3 See the results for 1940 By-elections in C. Cook and J. Ramsden, (eds), By-Elections in British Politics (1973), 372.

The Fall of France shifted the balance of communist policy¹ and tilted WIL in a new direction.² If the much heralded patriotic wave had any substance it was during the period from Dunkirk to the start of the Battle of Britain.³ This could only strengthen the convictions of the R.S.L. WIL concluded that this was the time to build on an anti-fascist mood. It still expected government repression⁴ but began to see an opportunity to differentiate between those who would and who would not fight a genuinely anti-fascist war. But the R.S.L. saw in responses to the Fall of France 'a determination to make any sacrifices to help British imperialism to win'.⁵ It

- 1 On 7 July 1940 the People's Convention movement, an initiative of the C.P.G.B., first met in public to open a six-month campaign. D. Childs, 'The British Communist Party and the War, 1939-41', J.C.H. Vol. 12, (1977), 237-53, leans too heavily on D. Hyde, I Believed (1953) to explore communist policy with any thoroughness. R. Black, Stalinists in Britain (1970), 131-59 is a Trotskyist account.
- 2 'B. Farnborough' (Brian Pearce) dates WIL's Military Policy from the Fall of France, ('Marxists in the Second World War', Labour Review, (April-May 1959), 25-8). The R.S.L. believed adoption of such a policy at such a time was proof that it was a defencist concession.
- 3 A government call for the suspension of holidays, an end to absenteeism, and long working hours received wide backing, but only temporarily, (A. Marwick, Britain in the Century of Total War (1968), 295). Pelling concurs but stretches national unity into 1941, (Britain and the Second World War, (1970), 29).
- 4 In June 1940 WIL spoke ambiguously of an imminent threat to workers' rights ('Workers' Fight', WIN (June 1940), 8); in July it thought the bourgeoisie would not 'pounce' but that the main threat would come from 'the Stalinist machine and the Labour bureaucracy', both more politically astute and the latter now in government, ('The Lesson of France', WIN, (July 1940), 12).
- 5 The Electoral Tactics of the Workers' Vanguard (1940), H.P.

continued to assume that the first sign of a move to the left would be war weariness. In the WIL and in the S.W.P., however, thoughts were turning towards a programme on which those participating in the war could stand. It was the beginning of a search for a 'Military Policy' which would advance positive proletarian tactics for winning an anti-fascist war.

The Emergency Conference of the Fourth International, held in New York in May 1940, issued its own manifesto.¹ It did not treat Military Policy in any detail, though it affirmed it as the only programme adequate for the needs of the epoch. Military Policy, it suggested, was an approach, not a principle. The war was merely a theatre in which Trotskyists advanced their views: just as in a factory, they shared the experiences of other workers. Since the proletariat had failed to prevent war, it must now seek to remove the ruling classes from leading positions within it. The R.S.L. received this manifesto with considerable embarrassment, and published it with a partial disclaimer.² WIL's reception was cordial and from 1940 Youth for Socialism carried its own military programme in every issue.³

- 1 'Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution', Documents, 311-50. Although this was a manifesto Trotsky had warned before the war that a binding policy could not be imposed on all sections of the Fourth International because of national differences, ('Learn to Think', WIN, (Aug. 1938), 5).
- 2 See appendix to Imperialist War and the Proletarian World Revolution, in Marxist Discussion Bulletin (Aug. 1940), 2, (H.P., D.J.H. 6/5). The R.S.L. remarked that the section entitled 'workers must learn the military arts' might be opportunistically misconstrued. When consciousness was low, calling for arms for the workers had a reactionary effect. The League wrote to the I.E.C. asking for clarification.
- 3 This included demands for the election of workers' officers, full trade union and political rights for soldiers, etc.

What became known as the American Military Policy (A.M.P.) rested on two principal texts: a speech by J.P. Cannon to the Chicago convention of the S.W.P. in September 1940 and his presentation on behalf of several defendants at a trial for sedition the next year in Minneapolis. At Chicago Cannon called for public money wherewith the trade unions might set up their own military training camps.¹ He argued that the pre-war policy of the Fourth International had been sound but insufficient. Trotskyists had warned against war yet failed to prevent it:

'It is not quite correct to say that the old line was wrong. It was a programme devised for the fight against war in time of peace. Our fight against war under conditions of peace was correct as far as it went. But it was not adequate. It must be extended.'²

As Cannon recalled, Trotskyism was at a disadvantage when it lacked concrete suggestions as to how Hitler might be resisted. It had formerly argued for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and then repulsion of the invaders. Now, he suggested, the two tasks must be telescoped. At the Minneapolis Trial of October 1941, Cannon went out of his way to reject sabotage of a war effort or indeed any hindrance to it. He also opposed draft dodging.³

The R.S.L. was to accuse WIL of lifting Military Policy from its American context, but there was stimulus enough for it in the last writings of Trotsky and even in some of his articles from before the

1 J.P. Cannon, 'Military Policy of the Proletariat', WIN, (Jan. 1941), 4.

2 J.P. Cannon, 'Our Military Policy', WIN, (March 1941), 10.

3 WIL published his evidence as 'Smash Fascism - End War. The case for socialist revolution. An A.B.C. of Trotskyism. The testimony of J.P. Cannon in the U.S. Labour frame-up Trial', WIN, (special volume, 1942), 1-40.

war. Trotsky had been involved in a lengthy discussion with S.W.P. members on attitudes towards war preparation. He advised against draft avoidance¹ and argued for using military training to acquire skills of arms. Military Policy,

..... is revolutionary in its essence and based upon the whole character of our epoch, when all questions will be decided not only by arms of critics but by critiques of arms; second, it is completely free of sectarianism. We do not oppose to events and to the feelings of the masses an abstract affirmation of our sanctity.²

What Trotsky advised was that the Fourth International should counterpose a genuine struggle against fascism to the 'false fight' of the Petains. He also suggested that denunciation of war had not been the totality of the Bolshevik programme. While the Bolsheviks had won a majority between the February and October 1917 revolutions this was achieved chiefly, not by refusal to defend the fatherland, but by the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets!'³ The need for a positive programme in wartime made a deep impression on WIL and from the late summer of 1940 it tried to counter embryonic Vichyism with its Military Policy: elected officers, government-financed trade union-controlled training schools, public ownership of the armaments industry and a class appeal

1 'If he is draftable, let him be drafted. I do not think he should try to avoid the draft - he must go with his generation and participate in its life' ('Some Thoughts on American Problems', WIN, (March 1941), 1).

2 'Another Thought on Conscription', 17 Aug. 1940, Writings (1939-40), 119.

3 'Leon Trotsky's Last Article', WIN, (Feb. 1941), 9. The R.S.L. later attempted, somewhat unconvincingly, to counter this argument. 'This is not to say that the masses can be won to the banner of the Fourth International on the slogans of 'turn the imperialist war into civil war', etc., but slogans which are evasive and ambiguous with regard to the proletarian attitude to the war are a betrayal of Socialist International ' (Attitude of the Proletariat towards Imperialist War, H.P., D.J.H. 6/12, 3).

to German soldiers.¹ Trotskyists had to have a policy to meet every phase of experience of workers. Setbacks to the Allied cause in the spring and summer of 1940 apparently provided ample evidence for the WIL argument that a fight against fascism could not be won under the old ruling classes. Fifth column activities in Europe showed that there were people in influential circles who feared the workers within more than Nazism.²

The R.S.L., with the former Militant Group in complete control by the outbreak of war, drew opposite conclusions. The Fall of France had not led in its perception to war-weariness, only to grumbling, which had not been converted to a struggle against capitalism.³ Coalition government resting on the patriotic mass provided for the present an acceptable substitute for fascism, but this would not prevent rapid deterioration of the political position at home.⁴ Since revolutionaries were inevitably isolated under such circumstances, the R.S.L. was not surprised that some should seek to break out by means of short cuts. These were opportunists however:

- 1 An uncritical account of WIL's opposition to the war is W. Hunter, 'Marxists in the Second World War', Labour Review (Dec. 1958), 139-146. 'B. Farnborough', (Brian Pearce) tried to put right the omission from this article of any treatment of Military Policy, ('Marxists in the Second World War', Labour Review, (April-May 1959), 25-8), but did not cover the dispute between the R.S.L. and WIL. D. Parkin, 'British Trotskyists and the Class Struggle in World War 2', Trotskyism Today, no. 2, (March 1978), 27-30, criticises both Leagues.
- 2 'The Lesson of France', WIN, (July 1940), 12.
- 3 The Electoral Tactics of the Workers' Vanguard, (1940), 1-2.
- 4 'We may therefore assume that apart from external events the internal crisis of British Imperialism will be carried a step further within the next few months by wholesale attacks on the standard of living of the working class and the middle class', ('Thesis on the Crisis of Capitalism and the Tasks of the British Section of the Fourth International', adopted by the Central Committee, 11 Aug. 1940, The Bulletin, issued by the B.S.F.I., [Sept. 1940], H.P., D.J.H. 6/3). The significance of this gloomy perspective for R.S.L. thought was that the distinction between fascism and democracy would be eroded and with it the basis for believing the Second World War to be different from the First.

'The basic task of revolutionary socialists in such a period is not to seek opportunist "short cuts" to the mass but to explain patiently the reactionary nature of the war.....'¹

The R.S.L. thought some workers might support the slogan 'Labour to Power' for the wrong reason, that it would bring a more efficient prosecution of the war. But it also believed that in the experience of seeking to make the slogan a reality, they would turn against the war itself. Trotskyists themselves, argued the R.S.L., had a guarantee against backsliding in the policy of revolutionary defeatism. The alternative was to end up like the WIL and the Fourth International.² Cannon's Chicago policy was 'in the spirit of Kautsky', a 'petty bourgeois hotch potch'.³ WIL and others had failed to counterpose class features to nationalism, thus giving a left veneer to patriotism. Only in the case of the Soviet Union was it right for workers to assume a patriotic attitude. WIL was quite prepared to confront this argument. It saw positive features in popular willingness to fight fascism. People were willing to defend working class organisations, the true root of democracy.⁴ It was sectarian to condemn defencism from an isolated position: analysis of war propaganda showed that the government sought support by projecting the conflict as a war for democracy against fascism. Far from abolishing workers' parties, the government leaned on their leaders to

1 *ibid.*, 7.

2 By 1941 the R.S.L. had concluded that the F.I. was in the hands of 'defencist' tendencies, brought to the fore by the fear of the proletariat in Britain and America of losing their privileged position.

3 Attitude of the Proletariat Towards Imperialist War, H.P., D.J.H., 6/12, 1.

4 A. Calder, (The People's War, 60) doubts that ideological motivation against Nazism was common. One atypical exception was George Orwell, (W. Steinhoff, The Road to 1984, (1975), 102). Orwell thought socialist renewal the only policy likely to bring Britain victory.

gain social support.¹ After a year of war the conviction that future political developments would favour the workers was a steady feature of WIL thought.

But neither of the two main Trotskyist factions was monolithic in its reaction to war. The R.S.L. had always been under pressure from within against compromises with chauvinism. When R.S.L. leaders dallied with the possibility of deep air raid shelters, the League branch at Leicester, where J.L. Robinson was the dominant influence, sternly reminded them, 'Marxism remains the same in London as in Leicester'. In the view of Leicester, the heart of what was to become the Left Faction, no demands whatsoever on the war should be put. If one favoured a deeper shelter, why not a better gas mask, a more rapid firing machine gun, a faster tank?² If revolutionaries began to make concessions of this kind they might be led inexorably to improving the military efficiency of capitalism: they had to desire their own government's defeat.³ Hitler's victory was preferable for the British workers; Churchill's victory was preferable for the German workers. When the R.S.L. Central Committee resisted Leicester's critique the branch concluded that its 'concessions' to chauvinism must be a tendency and that they should be

1 WIL, Reply to the Political Statement of the Revolutionary Socialist League, (1941), 2.

2 Bolshevism and Defencism, (May 1941), 10

3 'A revolutionary class in an imperial war desires the defeat of its national army in order to utilize the situation of humbling of its masters to overthrow them irrespective of the nature of the enemy', (Brief Notes on the History of the Left Faction, [1960?], 2; interview with J. Goffe, July 1974).

removed from the leadership of the British Section.¹

WIL also had a debate within its ranks where Haston led a minority of the E.C. He was not opposed to Military Policy as such, but argued that WIL had from early 1941 moved away from this policy as expounded by Trotsky and Cannon. WIL had, he asserted, shifted to making its main enemy the foreign enemy, and by reference to an alleged new popular mood.² WIL had argued for the distribution of arms to the workers who might then repel invasion,³ though it insisted its purpose was to separate workers from the bourgeoisie not to bring collaboration about. But Haston, like the Leicester R.S.L. branch, thought Military Policy was being misused in Britain.⁴ The formation of the Home Guard had been quite misunderstood: it was not a concession to the workers' desire for arms but the outcome of a full-blooded capitalist campaign.⁵ Whereas WIL in the past had said that the best workers were against the war, it now said, 'we want to fight Hitler but the bourgeoisie won't let us'.⁶ But when Healy answered Haston on behalf

- 1 Bolshevism and Defencism, 11. Youth Militant was also singled out for criticism by the Leicester branch. While making an international onslaught the Left Faction (as it soon became) had some ideological companions elsewhere, notably Grandizo Munis of the Spanish section, currently in Mexican exile, who protested against Cannon's exposition of the Military Policy at the Minneapolis Trial.
- 2 'J.H.', 'A Step Towards Capitulation', Internal Bulletin, (21 March 1941), 5, H.P., D.J.H. 14a/3.
- 3 'Military Policy or Confusion', Internal Bulletin, (20 March 1941), H.P., D.J.H. 14a/2.
- 4 His argument was that Trotsky's advice to the Americans had been offered in the context of a dynamic and developing labour movement confronted by the prospect of universal militarization: his ideas should not be used as an alternative to an anti-war struggle.
- 5 Shortly after this exchange, Haston protested against the emasculation of an article he had written for Socialist Appeal and suggested that the formation of the Home Guard proved that the bourgeoisie was not in fact fearful of arming the workers ('The Military Policy as applied to the Home Guard', Internal Bulletin, 21 April 1941, 1-7, H.P., D.J.H., 140/4).
- 6 *ibid.*, 20.

of the WIL leaders, he stated what was to be a major theme of its perspectives documents from now on - that all its arguments were directed towards demonstrating the need to take power. And he insisted that WIL based itself on the popular mood which regarded such bodies as the Home Guard as a defence against invasion:

'... the radicalisation of the workers is taking place at the moment not around the question of "democratic rights" as such but around the manner in which the bosses are prosecuting the war'¹

* * * * *

Although Trotskyists were always projected as enemies of the Soviet Union, at least since the Moscow Trials, they had in fact consistently called for Soviet defence. Common ground among all British Trotskyists at this time was that Russia remained a country where capitalism had been overthrown,² but they were not optimistic about its chances of withstanding a fascist assault.³ They were faced with a rapid reversal of communist policy to a call for prosecution of the war to the full.⁴ There was also far greater intensity in

1 G.H., 'The Home Guard - An Approach', Internal Bulletin, (19 May 1941), H.P., D.J.H., 14A/5.

2 The views of Burnham and Shachtman found no echo in Britain at the time of the Russo-Finnish war and the R.S.L. disowned C.L.R. James when he defected to Shachtman's side early in 1940. Nor did Trotskyists reject Soviet manoeuvres between the Great Powers, only the argument that socialist principles should be jettisoned in allied countries.

3 The Trotskyist view was that the U.S.S.R. had been weakened by diplomatic bungling and purges of the Red Army. See A. Scott, 'Stalin's Diplomacy Leads to Defeats', WIN (Dec. 1941), 1-6 and Trotsky's earlier article 'The Decapitation of the Red Army', (5 July 1937), Writings (1937-38), 55-60.

4 "The urgent need now is the fullest mobilisation and active energy of all sections of the people for the fulfilment of the tasks of the common struggle with the Soviet people for the defeat of Hitler. We strive for the united national front of all sections of the people (not only of the left anti-imperialist or pro-Soviet elements, but of all opposed to Hitler and supporting the Pact) to drive forward the maximum effort in the joint war with the Soviet Union for the defeat of Hitler." (R.P. Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', Labour Monthly (Aug. 1941), 356).

communist attacks on Trotskyists whom they accused of being dishonest in their calls for Soviet defence. The WIL argument was that Britain under a Churchill government must still be waging an imperialist war. Acquisition of a Soviet alliance could not, it insisted, alter this fact. The war could only become a just war if the workers of Britain took military and state power into their own hands. Otherwise all the criticisms made of the British government before Hitler invaded Russia retained their validity.¹ WIL did not propose inactivity in support of the Soviets but, like Tait and others in the I.L.P., called for all aid to be sent to Russia under trade union control. It began to see a road to workers' power through a struggle over the handling of the war. Aided by quotations from Lenin it argued for a positive programme whereby the predatory war might be transformed into a just war. It argued that Lenin's main drive in 1917 was not against war but for a workers' government. Its own pre-conference thesis of 1942 was published under the ambitious title Preparing For Power. There it was suggested that military incompetence was a sign that the bourgeois system had outlived itself, and that it was leading workers to question the regime.² This provoked the R.S.L., which still insisted that a revolutionary mood could not possibly arise through a desire for more efficient prosecution of the war: WIL, it charged, was distorting the popular mood:

1 'But the same class is in control. They are still fighting for the same interests - their profits, markets, colonies, etc. And they can fight for no other interests. They are still fighting to keep India under their own subjection and to keep Africa enslaved.' (A. Scott, 'Britain's War Remains Imperialist. It is not altered by the alliance with the Soviet Union', WIN, (Nov. 1941), 7. This article was also published separately as a pamphlet.

2 'Preparing For Power', WIN, (Sept. 1942), 5.

'When social explosions come, as come they will, they will not arise upon the basis of demands by the workers for a more effective prosecution of the war. No class struggles can arise on this issue because it is not a class issue as far as the workers are concerned.'¹

Workers would be taking a class approach when they desired peace. WIL, charged the R.S.L., was concealing its own chauvinism behind revolutionary - sounding slogans which, in the wartime context, had a counter-revolutionary content.² When WIL replied, effectively concluding the discussion, it was at its most unapologetic. It was against all occupations, but not to oppose the occupation of Britain would be to carry literal opposition to patriotism too far. It would be 'inverted chauvinism', supporting a foreign bourgeoisie while opposing one's own. WIL agreed it had talked of an anti-fascist war, but claimed it had always explained that British imperialism could not wage such a war.³ Exposure of social patriotism was not a live issue: revolutionaries now had to aim at workers' power:

'Our position towards war is no longer merely a policy of opposition, but is determined by the epoch in which we live, the epoch of the socialist revolution. That is, as contenders for power. Only thus can we find an approach to the working class.'⁴

1 R.S.L., 'A Criticism of the WIL Pamphlet Preparing For Power' in WIL, Policy and Perspectives of the British Trotskyists, (1943), 2.

2 The example given was workers' control of production to increase production for the war, (R.S.L., loc. cit., 5).

3 'Reply of WIL to the R.S.L. Criticisms of Preparing For Power', in WIL, Policy and Perspectives of the British Trotskyists, (1943), 16.

4 WIL, loc. cit., 17.

Lenin's task, reflected WIL, had been to hold an internationalist faction together in a patriotic time. Support would not come to Trotskyists who merely repeated his arguments. WIL reflected on the drift of Trotsky's last article where he had argued that Fourth International policy did continue that of Lenin, but that 'continuation signifies a development, a deepening and a sharpening'.¹

¹ 'Bonapartism, Fascism and War', [Aug. 1940], Writings (1939-40), 121. WIL published this as 'Leon Trotsky's Last Article' in WIN for February 1941.

X

THE R.S.L. IN UNITY AND DISUNITY(SEPTEMBER 1938 - MARCH 1944).

The Revolutionary Socialist League was a failure. It did not hold together and it proved unable to capitalise on wartime opportunities. The Marxist League cadre drifted away from it to joint activities against military measures with dissidents inside and outside the Labour Party. The R.S.P. refused any kind of Labour Party work, tried independence and later entered the I.L.P. The Militant Labour League was left in control of the R.S.L. with official backing from the International. But from 1940 it stagnated within the Labour Party and fell out with the International over the correct line to be advocated against the war. These two factors added to a third, the contrast presented by the growth of the WIL, gave rise to intense factionalism and the effective separation of the R.S.L. into three parts. It drew together at the end of 1943 but only as a preliminary to dissolution in the much larger WIL to form the Revolutionary Communist Party.

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The new Revolutionary Socialist League was formed on the eve of the war scare associated with the Munich crisis. This was a test which exposed the fragility of the union forged in July 1938 as each faction reacted in its own way. The M.L.L. argued that the crisis underlined the need for it as the only pole of revolutionary Marxism in the Labour Party.¹ In October, sales of Militant reached a peak

¹ Though it maintained there was no contradiction between its own existence and that of the Socialist Anti-War Front, formed in September: 'on the contrary, the strong organisation of the revolutionary left in the Labour Party will be of great assistance to its work', (Militant, Oct. 1938).

figure of 3,000. On 6 November 1938 its conference met.¹ As the public face of the Revolutionary Socialist League, the M.L.L. spent the post-Munich months trying to dig itself in. But until a conference of the R.S.L. was held to establish a firm policy on Labour Party work the energy of the whole organisation could not be concentrated on the M.L.L. What was the reaction of those signatories of the Peace and Unity agreement with a clear preference for 'open' work?

(i) The Revolutionary Socialist Party.

But while Militant continued to appear regularly during these turbulent months all was not well with other commitments made by the fusion. The R.S.P. had surrendered its paper, Revolutionary Socialist, for the promise of a revamped Fight, rechristened Workers Fight, for 'open' sales. To a tiny party whose mode was street meetings and outdoor sales, regular appearance of the outside paper was vital. The paper came out in October 1938, marking C.L.R. James's last connection with the British Trotskyist movement.² It firmly opposed I.L.P. reaffiliation to the Labour Party³ and continued Fight's

1 The M.L.L. conference reported 150 members, adopted a programme of transitional demands proposed by Jackson, claimed 2,000 monthly sales of Militant. It also claimed to be the driving force of the S.A.W.F. in some areas, (Report of the first National Conference of the Militant Labour League, [Nov. 1938?], H.P., D.J.H. 3/2).

2 James was regarded by the R.S.P. as a pledge that open activity would receive sufficient emphasis in the R.S.L. He fulfilled some speaking engagements despite his illness, and the October Workers Fight bears his editorial mark, but he left for the United States shortly after.

3 It was argued that the opposition of most I.L.P. leaders to reaffiliation would evaporate. 'Comrades of the I.L.P., you think some of you that you are revolutionaries. You are not.' Capitulation to the Labour Party, it now predicted, would allow the I.L.P. to be used by Transport House as a counterweight to Stalinism.

tradition as an open Fourth International journal.¹ There was no change in the political line in November. Both these issues appeared late however, and that intended for December failed to come out at all.²

This caused disquiet in the R.S.P. as well as among other devotees of outside work. The R.S.P. leaders had signed the Peace and Unity agreement as individuals and were meant, within a week, to have won the assent of the party as a whole. Failing to manage this, they were allowed time to hold a referendum. This was completed late in October 1938, and indicated unanimous backing for joining the R.S.L. But Maitland and Willie Tait told the R.S.L. central committee the next month that conditions were attached to the union: a guaranteed continuation of open work and an open paper, and the placing of the editorial and business control of Workers Fight in the hands of the R.S.P.! This ultimatum was refused on the grounds that a revolutionary organisation must centrally control all its publications and that the overall tactics of the R.S.L. could be changed only by a national conference.

R.S.P. suspicions of a lack of interest in London in activities outside the Labour Party continued to fester. It formally joined the R.S.L. on 15 December 1938, but presented the League's executive with a lengthy critique.³ The R.S.L. central committee, under fire also from London apostles of the independent life, pleaded that as

1 It carried articles by James and Maitland, advertisements for Militant, the R.S.P. bookshop and even Workers International News. The Founding Conference was reported as were other affairs of the International such as the murder of its administrative secretary, Rudolf Klement.

2 Suspension of publication was blamed on low revenue from sales, although it was claimed that October and November were sold out.

3 R.S.P. charges against the R.S.L. centre were set down in R.S.P. to R.S.L., (29 Dec. 1938), Letter and Statement of the R.S.P. (Edinburgh) and reply of Executive Committee, H.P., D.J.H. 13a/6. See also 'Statement of the R.S.P., 23 Dec. 1938', in WIL document on the history of Trotskyism, 9-11.

well as the perennial dearth of funds the League lacked able and willing organisers for outside work.¹ There had to be, it argued, a period of common experience on the part of all signatories to the Peace and Unity agreement. The R.S.P., however, was making its own experience by outdoor rallies on the Munich issue² and an intervention in the West Perthshire by-election.³ It was never really integrated in the R.S.L.

(ii) The Socialist Anti-War Front.

Meanwhile the centre of the R.S.L. was under pressure from the other independent strand of thought within it. The entire leading cadre of the old Marxist League was involved in September 1938 in launching the Socialist Anti-War Front. A London conference to found the S.A.W.F. brought together members of a wide spectrum of organisations, though none of them lacked Trotskyist participation.⁴

- 1 *ibid.* Chief London critics were Lane and Duncan of the Islington R.S.L. branch. This branch did publish at least four issues of Islington Workers Voice, a duplicated supplement to Militant, early in 1939. See the issue for March 1939 at H.P., D.J.H./3.
- 2 It claimed to have convened the biggest protest meetings in Edinburgh; one of its complaints against the centre was that it had not been kept supplied with literature during this time. It believed that the R.S.L. central committee was mainly preoccupied with preparations to go underground.
- 3 At West Perthshire there was no Labour Party candidate in the by-election, brought about when the Duchess of Atholl resigned her seat in protest against the National Government's foreign policy. She was the author of Searchlight on Spain, (1938), a defence of the Republic, and received popular front support in her unsuccessful bid to be returned. The R.S.P. weighed in with Maitland's pamphlet Searchlight on the Duchess of Atholl, (1938), an analysis of why a Tory should support the Republic.
- 4 Present were members of the I.L.P. London Divisional Council, the R.S.L., the Africa Service Bureau, the M.L.L., the I.L.P. Guild of Youth and the Labour League of Youth.

It elected Hugo Dewar secretary, formed a provisional committee and issued a 'call to action' in view of the Munich crisis.¹ On 1 October a youth section was set up² and the next day a demonstration in Hyde Park was held. At this stage the S.A.W.F. was mainly a London organisation.³ The S.A.W.F. was formed to organise working class opposition to war and to achieve unity among socialists. Its general analysis did not differ from the accepted Trotskyist view and the M.L.L. joined the provisional committee in mid-October. But the truth was that S.A.W.F. appeal was couched in terms sufficiently ambiguous to carry support from the I.L.P. as well. Indeed, it was I.L.P. interest which made the S.A.W.F. as broad as it was.⁴ Later both the M.L.L., and the WIL, which had also participated, were to condemn the S.A.W.F. for pacifism.⁵

- 1 All capitalist conflicts were denounced but the League of Nations, Collective Security and Peace Blocs rejected. The notion of a war for democracy was felt to be undermined since the British, French and Czechs were already 'ruling by decrees without consulting Parliament'. For the text of the Call to Action see Militant, (Oct. 1938).
- 2 Members of various unions attended as well as others from the Woodcraft Folk, the League of Youth, Guild of Youth, WIL, R.S.L. and London S.A.W.F. The Youth S.A.W.F. intervened with difficulty in a Youth Peace conference that autumn dominated by Ted Willis and John Gollan, (The New Leader, 21 Oct. 1938).
- 3 The September 1938 conference of the S.A.W.F. had formed a provisional committee for London as well as district committees all over the capital. In South London Dewar held the secretaryship in addition to the national post.
- 4 Reg. Groves used The New Leader regularly to expound S.A.W.F. views, (see the issue for 30 Sept. 1938). Sydney Bidwell told the I.L.P. that the Front's anti-war call had come 'like a refreshing breeze' through the labour movement, (The New Leader 7 Oct. 1938), though this was of course vitiated by the adulatory reception extended by Maxton and I.L.P. M.P.s to Chamberlain on his return from Munich.
- 5 The R.S.L. admitted its involvement with the S.A.W.F. during the Munich crisis to have been a mistake, but charged the WIL with sharing it, (British Section of the Fourth International, Statement on relations with the Workers International League, 4 Dec. 1939, H.P., D.J.H. 13a/8, 4).

Within the R.S.L. ways began to part, first of all over the S.A.W.F. thesis that a block of socialist parties could prevent war, expounded in its pamphlet War and the Workers (1939). Workers Fight commented that while unity was a progressive step, only a revolutionary party could overthrow capitalism, the cause of war.¹ In November, the Front declared the National Register part of a dress rehearsal for military and police dictatorship. In Resist the Register,² Hugo Dewar argued for non-cooperation, rejecting the government argument that conscription was defensive and voluntary.³ When the Military Training Bill was introduced without strenuous opposition, a new organisation, the No-C onscription League, was launched, which gained important support and in which the S.A.W.F. functioned as a militant working-class wing.⁴ At the Bermondsey convention of the N.-C.L., on 4 June 1939, Groves⁵ moved an S.A.W.F. amendment to the main policy resolution.

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- 1 See its issue for January 1939. That spring the S.A.W.F. did, however, issue a message to Labour's rank and file declaring opposition to imperialist war to be part of the struggle for workers' power.
 - 2 Dated 7 Feb. 1939, n.p. This pamphlet, with its pacifist connotations was later withdrawn by the Front. The Royal Arsenal Cooperative Society was one organisation which struck an encouraging note when it declared the Register 'a threat to the rights and liberties of Cooperators, and part of the general effort of the present Government to destroy peace and democracy'.
 - 3 See also S.A.W.F. general circular of 13 March 1939, Warwick M.S.S., 15/4/1/19.
 - 4 The N.-C.L. was launched in February 1939 and two months later was talking of a youth section. After a year's life the N.-C.L. claimed 6,000 members organised in 100 branches and around a quarter of a million affiliated members, (The New Leader, 23 Feb. 1940).
 - 5 Groves and Wicks were unable to carry electoral opposition to candidates not opposed to conscription, (No Conscription, June 1939).

With support from Wicks he secured a pledge for agitation against the Military Training Act, for trade union assistance to victimised objectors and help for shop stewards resisting industrial conscription.¹

The outbreak of war itself geared up the S.A.W.F. an extra notch. Its manifesto, issued on the day of declaration of war, called on trades councils to make themselves the centres of opposition to encroachment on civil liberties, and condemned Labour and the C.P.G.B. for their willingness to stand with exploiters behind rhetoric about an anti-fascist war. The Front launched its own journal, The Call, in November 1939, and showed signs of gathering round it substantial numbers of dissident Labour candidates² and trades councils. There was some encouragement in the declaration of the Home Counties Labour Parties for socialist peace terms and against the political truce, and The Call claimed resolutions on these matters were 'pouring' into Transport House.³

On 12 November 1939, the N.-C.L. held an all-London convention against war and conscription, where Alex Sloan M.P. moved

- 1 No evidence has been located of Reg. Groves joining the R.S.L., either in its first or second incarnations, though he and Dewar now linked with the other Marxist Leaguers in the Socialist Anti-War Front. For most of the first year of the war Groves was a militant propagandist against the aims of the war, using whatever publication was open to him to advance his views, and being prime mover in founding another, Home Front, (See Appendix B).
- 2 In addition to Reg. Groves, still the Aylesbury candidate, contributors to The Call included Edgar Plaisted (Wimbledon), W. T. Colyer (Chislehurst) and Will Morris (Hampstead) who was also secretary of the N.-C.L. The Call claimed forty Parliamentary candidates had signed a petition for immediate peace.
- 3 Writing in The Call for December 1939, Will Morris claimed for the N.-C.L. the backing of nine trades councils, eighteen D.L.P.s and 300 Women's Cooperative Guilds through their national organisation. In Glasgow an N.-C.L. convention was called by the Glasgow Trades Council. The N.-C.L. also received backing from the I.S.P. and the R.S.P. in 1939, and the following year the British Federation of Cooperative Youth carried an anti-war resolution with one opposed. In November 1939, seventy Divisional Labour Parties, as well as twenty M.P.s backed a call for peace, (A. Calder, The People's War, 67).

and C.A. Smith seconded a resolution opposing the war, urging repeal of the National Service Act, calling for the maintenance of civil liberties and an end to the truce, and demanding an immediate Labour Party conference to formulate Socialist Peace proposals. An S.A.W.F. amendment was carried with support from the N.-C.L. executive.¹

It seems that the S.A.W.F. now carried the hopes of the former Marxist League in much the same way as the earlier S.L.F. had. To Groves, and perhaps now to the others as well, a gathering of anti-war Labour dissidents in a convention 'would mark an end to the division, the fractionisation, the hole-in-the-corner groupings that in the past have ruined all effort to secure a large left-wing movement'.² The Front was militant, anti-capitalist and anti-Stalinist.³ It was also, by the meagre standards of these years, a success. Against this it mattered little that it did not call for a Fourth International whose hour had not struck.⁴ The Front rejected a purely pacifist appeal which it considered would not rally the working class, but it did demand peace on 'socialist principles'.

1 Strongest opposition came from the Peace Pledge Union which, declared the S.A.W.F., 'regarded the whole question of war and peace as an abstract one unconnected with the efforts of the workers to achieve political power', The Call (Dec. 1939).

2 *ibid.*

3 See H. Sara, 'Pollitt and the Party Line', The Call (Nov. 1939). In December The Call condemned Stalin's invasion of Finland while dissociating itself from official Labour opinion.

4 W.T. Colyer, in 'The Three Internationals', The Call (Feb. 1940) scorned the Second and Third Internationals, but kept silent on the Fourth. Colyer shared a communist background with Groves, but had left the C.P.G.B. rather earlier and for quite opposite reasons, since he opposed party control of the National Left-Wing Movement, (L.J. Macintyre, *op. cit.*, 189-90).

This was what divided it from WIL and - after initial hesitation - from the M.L.L. It built up a significant movement against the anticipated demise of civil liberty and the militarisation of life¹ and even occasionally moved out of the realm of propaganda into direct intervention in events.² When confronted by the Call-up, however, it had only negative individual resistance to suggest.³ An attempt was made to transcend this limit,⁴ but the Front was not a political party and when the end of the Phoney War made military resistance irrelevant, it also died. The Front disappeared after April 1940, despite ambitious plans,⁵ and a broadening of its interests to embrace problems of working class life. It had for once provided a genuine movement in which many of Trotskyist origins might work, but the new phase of the war,⁶ together with increased Transport House vigilance against party dissidents, now finished it off.

- 1 This was a perspective which it shared with the WIL and the M.L.L.
- 2 Some trades councils, like that in Romford, carried out campaigns and The Call for April 1940 carried a report from former Ballam Group member Steve Dowdall on agitation in the building trade.
- 3 From November 1939 to April 1940, its entire life, The Call carried statements from S.A.W.F. members making conscientious objection to conscription.
- 4 In March 1940, The Call talked of ending 'the purely negative stage of opposing the war', arguing the need for 'a great forward movement of the workers'.
- 5 The Call last appeared in April 1940 in a more professional format than previously. It claimed to have almost doubled circulation in six months and planned pamphlets by F.A. Ridley and George Padmore. Nearly sixty lecture meetings had been held in the first five months of the war, and the S.A.W.F. looked forward to the conference of the N.-C.L. planned for 9 June 1940.
- 6 For the decline of conscientious objection in wartime, see E.A. Prince, 'Civil Liberty in Great Britain', (University of London Ph.D., 1950), 304. Another contributory factor to loss of support for the S.A.W.F. was the death in January 1940 of Rowland Hill, a steady friend of the Marxist League and its causes across the years and 'an enthusiastic admirer of Trotsky though he was not a Trotskyist in the full sense', (The Call, March 1940).

To Wicks and Sara, executive members of the R.S.L., from the time of the July 1938 fusion, the S.A.W.F. was a way of tapping the kind of revival in the movement anticipated in the Transitional Programme. They expected they might build as they had in the months following their expulsion from the C.P.G.B.¹: the issue and - for them - the geographical location was similar. It also offered a forum for unity with Groves and Dewar, the one in the Labour Party, the other in the I.L.P. Sara and Wicks were similarly divided. But on the pacifist appeal of the S.A.W.F. itself, they parted with the R.S.L. early in 1939.²

* * * * *

The first R.S.L. conference, convened just outside the six month schedule set when the League was formed, did not reveal a healthy state of affairs. The centre was in conflict with three distinct groups: the former Marxist League, dissidents within the first R.S.L., and the R.S.P. The proceedings opened acrimoniously when the expulsion of Lane and Duncan, of Islington, was upheld.³ This led to a walk-out

1 Interview with H. Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979.

2 They were certainly expelled from the R.S.L. by the middle of the year. See 'Conscription', WIN (June 1939), 3. After the Fall of France the S.A.W.F. contacted the R.S.L. The R.S.L. countered with a questionnaire on such matters as the Fourth International and revolutionary defeatism which could hardly do other than keep the two apart. It seems likely that the S.A.W.F. was in any case a broken reed by this time.

3 No document detailing the reason for the original E.C. decision to expel them has been located, but they were in conflict over their belief in outside work. At the conference they charged that the R.S.L. had effectively been dissolved into the M.L.L., and were accused in turn of obstructiveness. Provincial members expressed bewilderment at all this and the E.C. recommendation was upheld, not with full authority, forty three to twenty three. A Hampstead delegate then proposed the withdrawal of dissidents to convene an alternative conference and a walk-out took place, (Report of National Conference of the R.S.L. [Feb? 1939], H.P., D.J.H. 13a/91).

of at least¹ ten members who were to attempt to found a new organisation. Jackson, the R.S.L. secretary, then had to report the aborting of attempts to fuse with the WIL.² Finally it was announced that fusion with the R.S.P. remained unconsummated and new ground rules were laid down for bringing the moment of it near.³ Conference then approved an uncontroversial - if lengthy - constitution⁴ and returned an executive with strong Militant influence.⁵

- 1 [R.S.L.], Interim Report of National Conference, [Feb? 1939], H.P., D.J.H. 13A/9K, gives sixteen.
- 2 The R.S.L. had offered WIL unification on equal terms though it claimed to hold twice the membership. Both sides met with Phelan of the S.W.P. (q.v.) to consider the R.S.L. proposal of equal executive representation. WIL declined as it did not accept the M.L.L. tactic; nor did it respond to a second R.S.L. offer, for a three month discussion to be followed by a binding majority vote at a joint conference. [R.S.L.], Report On Negotiations With the WIL, [Jan. 1942]. Two WIL visitors were denied entry to the 1939 R.S.L. conference. Jackson told the conference that decisive steps had been taken against WIL where it had established relations with R.S.L. contacts.
- 3 Jackson steered conference through the complex relations between the R.S.L. and the R.S.P. by reference to a thick file of documents. Conference first rejected immediate R.S.P. entry sixteen to thirty. It then instructed the executive forty two to one to open negotiations for fusion with the party, admitting the obvious truth that this task remained unaccomplished, (Interim Report).
- 4 This was a full blown constitution, remarkably elaborate for an organisation less than sixty strong.
- 5 Members were Jackson, Weston, Wood, Johns, Harber, van Gelderen, 'B.Sh.', 'D.B.', 'H.S.', (ibid.). Two other members who had been prominent earlier, Bert Matlow and Roma Dewar, had drifted away from the centre of affairs and were reported in October 1941 to be inactive, (C.C. Minutes, 26 Oct. 1941, Har. P.). Matlow's last important contribution to the Trotskyist cause seems to have been his speech to the 1939 Labour Party Conference, though he remained a central committee member until December 1940.

Conference endorsed the executive position on Air Raid Precautions, which rejected a distinction between offence and defence and called for a boycott, but not before dissent had been voiced, an anticipation of the factionalism which shook the whole League in 1942.¹ It went on to affirm the split perspective, an inevitable development which it believed might benefit centrism (the I.L.P.) or the Fourth International. It also still believed in an open centre, the M.L.L.: all outside work was subordinate to that. The major controversy of 1938 was thus resolved in the Militant's favour. Finally conference recognised that it would not gain support before war broke out, that hostilities would delay the swing to the left (though they would also intensify it), and that the organisation would have to act in collective prudence in order to avoid provoking physical obliteration by a stark presentation of policy.²

The M.L.L., focus for the Militant Group before the Peace and Unity conference became, by fission, the hub around which the whole R.S.L. turned. On its behalf Matlow and Wood made speeches to Labour's 1939 conference, the first it had held for a year and a half.³

- 1 There were several positions. Finchley, Islington and Hampstead did not dispute the purpose of A.R.P. or the nature of the impending war, but they demanded transitional demands on defence. J.L. Robinson, always inplacable on this matter, flatly opposed any demands on the state for protection. George Weston proposed a resolution which argued that demands for defence in war were no more reactionary than demands for more money in peace, but even he favoured abstention from A.R.P. work.
- 2 'It would therefore be fatal for us to carry on open propaganda against the war immediately after its outbreak', (Our tasks in relation to the outbreak of Imperialist War, in R.S.L. National Conference 1939, [March? 1939], H.P.).
- 3 It claimed three delegates present altogether, (B.S.F.I., Statement on relations with the Workers International League, 4 Dec. 1939, H.P., 13a/8, 3-4).

Youth Militant reappeared, (after a lapse), in February 1939 as the paper of the youth section of the M.L.L.¹ It reviewed the attempt of earlier years to rally delegates for a socialist policy and advanced a positive and detailed youth programme stimulated by the T.U.C. Youth Charter. It retained the distinctive stamp of appealing for a Third Labour Government and autonomy for the Leagues of Youth. But the L.L.O.Y. was now in decline, debilitated by a repressive party apparatus and peacetime conscription.² The M.L.L. had fifteen delegates at its annual conference³ but there was now no future for youth work.

In November 1939 London executive members of the R.S.L. had advanced a proposal to their central committee that an open Fourth International paper should be published. The provinces' representatives voted them down, thus ensuring continued dependence on a Labour Party presence. J. Middleton and G. Shepherd, secretary and national agent respectively, warned local Labour Parties in January 1940 against pacifist attacks on party policy and candidates. By February early talk in Labour's propaganda of a German revolution had ceased. Harold Laski's pamphlet, Is it an imperialist war? appeared, intended to assuage the more 'ideologically minded'. He argued that the war might be imperialist but distinguished the contracting (Anglo-French) strain from the aggressive (German) kind.⁴ Reg. Groves wrote a

1 Youth Militant appeared in February, April and May 1939 and then unevenly for at least two years. A new series began in December 1939 and continued at least to no. [16?] which appeared in summer 1941.

2 That spring Advance was ousted from control of the L.L.O.Y. by Labour officials. In July, Willis, most of the now unofficial N.A.C. and many of the rank and file joined the Young Communist League. If the Y.C.L. grew it was a temporary spurt before conscription bit into the membership of both Leagues, (J. Ferris, 'The Labour League of Youth, 1924-40', University of Warwick M.A. (1977), 129-32; T. Willis Whatever Happened to Tom Mix? (1970), 185).

3 B.S.F.I. Statement on relations, 3-4.

4 T.D. BurrIDGE, British Labour and Hitler's War, (1976), 41; B. Jones, The Russia Complex, (1977), 50.

forceful reply which was to lead later to conflict with Shepherd and the N.E.C.¹ Van Gelderen tackled the same job in a review for Militant.² At this point early in the year, however, party conference had not pronounced on the war.

Lack of constitutionally decided policy did not protect the M.L.L. from the Labour Party apparatus. In early March 1940 it resolved that the League was 'a communist organisation for the promotion of Leon Trotsky's views and policy',³ and that membership of it was not compatible with party membership. The League protested that no reason had been given for the ban, that it was 'a denial of democracy and political freedom within the workers' organisation', 'a Gestapo-like attempt to crush honest political criticism'.⁴ Jackson anticipated the Fourth International itself in his attempt to put a brave face on the ban. Labour leaders, he suggested, were less secure as awareness of the reactionary nature of the war began to spread:

'It is not accidental that the M.L.L. is banned at the period when British Imperialism plans to extend the war and talk of further sacrifices in blood and money is in the air.'⁵

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- 1 It is an imperialist war, (1940) was written before Labour's conference endorsed participation by its leaders in the Churchill government. He was threatened with discipline by George Shepherd, the National Agent, but the N.E.C. opted in the end to give him the chance to moderate his views, (see Appendix B).
 - 2 See its final issue, that for May 1940.
 - 3 L.P.C.R., (1940), 27.
 - 4 Militant (April 1940). No other paper printed this statement of the M.L.L. executive published over the name of 'M. Stanwick', almost certainly a pseudonym.
 - 5 *ibid.*

Jackson threatened Labour with continued activity after the M.L.L. itself disappeared. On 16 March 1940 the R.S.L. executive had in fact recommended M.L.L. dissolution. Later that month, on 23 March, an R.S.L. conference met followed by a conference of the doomed M.L.L. It was resolved to follow the R.S.L. recommendation, although the leaders were faced with Our Present Tasks, a 'document of the fourteen', whose authors thought the main political developments would, as in 1915-18, take place in the factories, workshops and streets. They flatly denied that there would be a swing to the left within the Labour Party,¹ but the meaning of acquiescence in the ban had to be that retention of Labour Party membership was an overriding R.S.L. objective. The executive and J.L. Robinson's Leicester branch came together to reject the call to launch an openly Fourth International paper, and suspend Militant and the M.L.L. in favour of open work.² On 9 April 1940, M.L.L. branches were urged to agitate about the ban but to stop short of provoking expulsion. They were promised a monthly Militant and the services of a full-time organiser. The promise was fulfilled when Jackson moved from a voluntary to a professional basis on 15 April at a weekly wage of £2 a week.³ Transport House was told that the N.E.C. action threatened to turn it into 'a hardened bureaucracy'; the M.L.L. was informed in its turn that it was committed to policies of which party conference would not approve and that an attempt was being made by it to build an organisation within the party.⁴

1 Leaders of 'the fourteen' were 'F' (A.A. Cooper?), Bone and Emmett, the last two veterans of the League of Youth. They had backing in the Camberwell and East branches of the R.S.L. They attributed their defeat at the Easter conference to the low political level of the provincial members.

2 Leicester Group (of the R.S.L.), A Circle or a Party?, [1941?] n. pag. Har. P. There had been an attempt to sustain fortnightly publication of Militant in October 1939, (A. Penn, op. cit., 115).

3) See footnotes of following page.

4)

The M.L.L. might express surprise that conference decisions could be anticipated in this way,¹ but the Bournemouth conference easily endorsed Labour's entry into coalition as well as the war itself.

M.L.L. speakers there received some support but the emergency motion for Labour joining the government was easily carried.²

The drive against Labour dissidents was the very thing the M.L.L. had always feared and tried to avoid. Expulsions and proscriptions would inhibit it from taking advantage of a swing to the

3 From the previous page.

E.C. Circular, 16 May 1940. Seemingly there had been plans to publish twice monthly before the ban. Providing Jackson's salary, regularly, proved a strain almost at once, and the frequency of circulars declined.

4 From previous page.

M. Stanwick to the N.E.C., Labour Party, 8 April 1940;
G.S. Shepherd to Stanwick, 10 April 1940.

1 M. Stanwick to the N.E.C., Labour Party, 25 April 1940. Stanwick pointed out that other minorities, such as the Peace Pledge Union, had not been suppressed but that the drive was aimed against socialist organisations. He instanced the Russia Today Society and the expulsion of D.N. Pritt M.P. For Pritt's account of his expulsion see From Right to Left (1965), 221 and ff. The M.L.L. had resolutions from Norwood and Eastbourne on the agenda of the May 1940 annual conference.

2 A. McDonald (Edinburgh and District) put a Leninist view of the war and reminded conference that the previous year any intention to join Chamberlain in government had been disclaimed. Joe Pawsey (Norwood) seconded, calling for a British workers' state as the surest route to defeating fascism in Germany. Among supporting speakers was Emrys Hughes (South Ayrshire), (L.P.C.R., (1940), 127-31). Militant seems to have had illusions in the party mood. In April it had written that most of the 200 resolutions tabled were critical of party policy, that there was 'growing uneasiness' if not an actual alternative. 49 out of 50 resolutions on the war, it told its readers, were opposed to the official line.

left in Labour's ranks.¹ The R.S.L. drew the opposite conclusion from the proscriptions and isolation revealed at Bournemouth to that drawn around this time by the WIL. Late in May 1940 even the continuation of Militant itself was thought risky and it was dropped for a proposed theoretical journal.² Rather than pull out, the R.S.L. concluded that Labour's debilitated condition would permit an increase in its influence. In a tidying up operation, whatever M.L.L. members ^{who} were amenable were recruited into the R.S.L., but that organisation kept an even lower public profile.³

This retreat afforded few encouraging signs to any with a sense of proportion. This quality was never prominent among the governing bodies of the Fourth International. In 1940 the International was faced with a double crisis. War made it impossible for Europe to function as any kind of international centre. Worse yet, the

- 1 In May 1940 Militant argued that the proscriptions were part of a joint Labour government campaign against the left. Apart from the examples it gave action was also taken against the C.P.G.B.-dominated Sheffield Trades Council, against Krishna Menon, and League of Youth members were forbidden to sell Youth for Socialism (WIN, May 1940, 5-6).
- 2 'A Labour Party semi-agitational paper no longer has a basis in the absence of a left-wing tendency even such as existed when the paper was first produced', (Resolution Passed by Enlarged E.C., 25 May 1940). Youth Militant, it was resolved, would continue to be published. The theoretical journal did not appear. Instead it was agreed to launch an internal bulletin under the editorial control of Harber.
- 3 To avoid risks the E.C. resolved to hold its own Trotsky Memorial Meeting independently of all others and, later in the year, to take no part in the People's Convention, (Special E.C., 23 Aug. 1940). Jackson remained organiser, now under the aegis of the R.S.L., but van Gelderen's proposal that he seek to avoid military service was not upheld, (E.C. Minutes, 6 July 1940). Jackson himself was uneasy at drift within the League and made a political statement deploring lack of leadership and initiative (E.C. Minutes, 11 Aug. 1940).

Shachtmanite schism of 1939-40¹ had disrupted the International Executive Committee, with four of its seven members supporting Shachtman's new party and his view of Russia.² Among them was C.L.R. James, now working in the S.W.P. under the pseudonym J.R. Johnson. Faced with this crisis an Emergency Conference of the Fourth International was convened on 19-26 May in New York by the United States, Canadian and Mexican Sections.³ Harber, an orthodox I.E.C. member, did not attend, but the British Section did disown James who was its other representative.⁴ When the conference looked at the situation in Britain it came up with a surrealistic resolution,⁵ inspired perhaps from only one source. It declared 'a rapid revolutionary movement' was maturing in Britain, that a broad unorganised Trotskyist sentiment existed, and that the fractions British were in four groups. Only the third point was factually correct, but the International Conference made two inferences: that

- 1 The course of this dispute can be traced through Trotsky's letters to the S.W.P. and to Shachtman and other dissidents published in L. Trotsky, In Defence of Marxism, (1966). See also J.P. Cannon, The Struggle for a Proletarian Party (N.Y. 1972).
- 2 Of the seven I.E.C. members elected at the Founding Conference Shachtman himself, Abern, Mario Pedrosa (of Brazil) and James were defectors, (R.J. Alexander, Trotskyism in Latin America, (Stanford, 1973), 13).
- 3 For the various decisions taken by the conference see Documents, 306-97.
- 4 Between March and early April 1940 the R.S.L. contacted Trotsky or the I.E.C. to declare their support for Trotsky's view, ('Declaration', 19 March 1940; 'Declaration on the Status of the Resident I.E.C.', 2 April 1940, Writings : Supplement (1934-40), 853-4). Conference resolved, 'the authority of Johnson rested upon the mandate given him by the British section. But the British section in its organs and in all communications received, condemns defeatism in the Soviet Union and continues to endorse the entire programme of the Fourth International, including the position of unconditional defence of the U.S.S.R.', Documents, 354.
- 5 Resolution on the Unification of the British Section, (Documents, 359). The four F.I. factions in Britain are identified as the M.L.L., R.W.L. (q.v.), WIL and the Labour League of Youth. The erroneous belief that the League of Youth stood for Trotskyism reveals how ill-informed the International actually was.

the ban on the M.L.L. was motivated by the 'substantial progress' it was making, and that unity might now come about in Britain. Such a call was never likely to be efficacious, even when sweetened with a nudge to the M.L.L. to make what organisational concessions it could.¹

Those who had walked out of the February 1939 conference attempted for a time to maintain that they were the true R.S.L. and entitled to recognition. By October of that year they had to recognise that the International would not transfer its allegiance and changed their name to the Revolutionary Workers' League.² The R.W.L. maintained a tiny independent existence³ publishing a duplicated paper, Workers Fight, which at Christmas changed to a printed format with ambitions of appearing fortnightly.⁴ They published a manifesto⁵ and a pamphlet,⁶ held meetings in London and reported a following in the

- 1 While remaining within its principles and those of the Founding Conference. The proceedings of the Conference were reported in Britain as 'The Emergency Conference of the Fourth International', International Bulletin, (July 1940), H.P., D.J.H. 18/2. On Harber's proposal the R.S.L. attempted in August to set up a European subsection of the Fourth International, but only one meeting was held before contact was lost with other sections, (E.C. Minutes, 11 Aug. 1940). Members were Harber, Johns, van Gelderen, one German, one Czech, and one Polish advisor. Present in London during this period was the I.K.D. (German Trotskyists) in exile. It too declared against Shachtman and reported a new layer of contacts ('Organisational Report of the International Communists of Germany (I.K.D.)', Documents, 369).
- 2 R.W.L., 'For Members Only', 27 Oct. 1939, in WIL document on the History of British Trotskyism. This was a resolution which deplored the I.S. failure to conduct an investigation into Britain.
- 3 As late as May 1940 Workers Fight was telling revolutionaries in the I.L.P. to join the Fourth International.
- 4 Workers Fight, 23 Dec. 1939.
- 5 The manifesto, dated 20 Dec. 1939, stressed the Finnish issue and called on workers to retain organisations independent both of Stalin and Mannerheim.
- 6 Though they did not follow Shachtman in his view that Russia had ceased to be a workers' state, they did publish his important pamphlet Finland and the Fourth International, [1940?].

provinces. But disorganisation led to them losing control of the Pioneer Press outlet which they had held at the time of the walk-out.¹ In summer 1940 a majority entered WIL on a critical basis.² Leading figures like Lane and Duncan remained aloof. In July or August 1941 twelve former R.W.L. members, among them some who had joined the WIL, rejoined the R.S.L.³

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After the Fall of France, the R.S.L. slogan remained 'For a Third Labour Government, with full power'.⁴ Like WIL the R.S.L. thought the experience of struggling round such a slogan would be the best education for the masses.⁵ The masses had to see that a struggle against bourgeois methods meant a struggle against war.⁶ The sign of

- 1 R.W.L. to M. Abern, 7 Dec. [1939], H.P., D.J.H. 6/2b. Abern was also to follow Shachtman in the split from the S.W.P. to set up the Workers' Party, but the R.W.L.'s connections with American dissidents seem coincidental.
- 2 Though a fusion of the WIL and the R.W.L., almost in response to the May 1940 resolution of the Emergency Conference, was announced by WIN in June 1940 and Youth for Socialism incorporated Workers Fight, only twelve R.W.L. members joined WIL, and it seems that half of them left soon after. Those who joined saw the WIL as providing the nucleus for what might become a true British Section of the F.I.
- 3 Six of them, including Rose Carson, were to form the core of the Right Opposition, which was soon to crystallize within the R.S.L. One curious feature of the R.W.L.'s brief existence was the use of the name 'D. Gray', presumably fictitious, on Workers Fight. The same name was also used by Workers International News and Youth for Socialism in 1940-1.
- 4 [R.S.L.], The Electoral Tactics of the Workers' Vanguard, (1940), 1.
- 5 It believed the slogan itself might win it dissidents from within WIL.
- 6 'Thesis on the Crisis of Capitalism and the Tasks of the British Section of the Fourth International' (adopted by R.S.L. central committee, 11 Aug. 1940), Bulletin of the British Section of the Fourth International (Sept. 1940), D.J.H. 6/3, 8.

a revolutionary temper was opposition to war. The 'Third Labour Government' was considered by the R.S.L. an elementary slogan of the kind which would break the mass from illusions,¹ but it had a revolutionary significance only in the right context:

'The demand for the ending of the Party truce may be progressive or reactionary. Progressive if counterposed to the bourgeois task of winning the war, reactionary if advanced as a mean to the better prosecution of the war'.²

Militant appeared for the last time in its pre-war series in May 1940. An enlarged R.S.L. executive resolved on 25 May that there was no basis for a semi-agitational paper and suspended it with the initial intention of launching a theoretical journal. This was never published. The effective immediate replacement for Militant was The Bulletin of the Fourth International which first appeared in June.³

Though commended by the Emergency Conference, the R.S.L.'s prospects were bleak. To general torpor within its chosen theatre of operations it had to add the practical difficulty of sustaining any kind of activity at all in London from mid-1940 on because of the blitz.⁴ At the beginning of winter the London organisation, its heart,

1 R.S.L., 'Statement of the Executive Committee of the British Section of the Fourth International', Marxist Discussion Bulletin, 2, (Aug. 1940), H.P., D.J.H. 6/5, 25.

2 R.S.L., Attitude of the Proletariat Towards Imperialist War, H.P., D.J.H. 6/12, 4.

3 The June 1940 issue drew immediate complaints from the Leicester branch of the R.S.L., in August, that its appearance in the name of the Fourth International amounted to a declaration for open work, was an assertion that Trotskyism 'had an independent role outside of the social democratic movement of the masses', and offered Labour officialdom a chance to take repressive measures, (Leicester Group, A Circle or a Party?).

4 A move of the centre to Glasgow to avoid the blitz was announced to members on 28 October 1940. In December the Central Committee announced it had become impossible to maintain a full national apparatus but early in 1941 returned to London.

was reduced to a very weak state.¹ It believed it could provide no more than 150 sales for a theoretical journal.² This was somewhat academic, since no such journal ever appeared, Militant had lapsed, and its intended replacement, the Bulletin of the B.S.F.I.,³ did not appear on a regular monthly basis.

The suspension of publications landed the E.C. in further trouble on left and right. 'The fourteen' were in defiance of an executive directive of 25 May 1940 towards Labour Party activity. In July they registered vigorous opposition to the suspension of Militant even if it were to be substituted.⁴ The central committee delivered an ultimatum which, on pain of expulsion, demanded that the fourteen produce a definite alternative programme to Labour Party activities they scorned.⁵ Further exchanges led to the expulsion of 'F' on 5 February 1941,⁶ and the decision by the three prime movers among the fourteen to launch a new faction, the Socialist Workers Group, in

1 The London Organisation Report of 3 Nov. 1940, gave eight to twelve members in Croydon, but their Labour Party had collapsed and inter-member contact was poor; East London had two members left; Lambeth had ten but they were starting to be called up; Staines had one left as had Balham; Camberwell had eight; North had five but had not met for two months.

2 *ibid.*

3 Sometimes entitled Marxist Discussion Bulletin. Alison Penn (*op. cit.*, 159) gives the last Bulletin as September 1940, but there are references in R.S.L. papers to one for November.

4 There must be no compromise, (24 July 1940).

5 Dated 11 August 1940.

6 'F' was expelled for opposing the Labour Party concentration at a December 1940 members meeting, and for general inactivity, (F, B, E, For the building of the British Section of the Fourth International, 30 April 1941, H.P., D.J.H. 7/1, 8).

April.¹ It flirted with WIL, now independent itself,² but five members of it applied to return to the R.S.L. on 3 May 1942.

While wrangling with exponents of independence the central committee and the executive found itself in growing conflict with the Leicester R.S.L. branch which, under the uncompromising leadership of J.L. Robinson, also challenged the suspension of Militant and the appearance of The Bulletin. Leicester was further incensed to find, in The Bulletin for November 1940, a call by Starkey Jackson for support to be given to deep air raid shelters, which policy was also followed by Youth Militant for the same month.³ It considered the step a risk to the Labour Party tactic by its open identification of the R.S.L. with the Fourth International, and the other a contravention of 1940 conference decisions.⁴ Leicester pressurised the Centre for the next five months to clarify its position on A.R.P. In the absence of a statement,⁵ Leicester issued a document, Bolshevism or Defencism, which indicted the Centre for capitulation and a long and tedious polemic began.⁶

- 1 They declared that 'the theory of the Labour Party perspective now has no harmony with reality' and that the official section of the Fourth International in Britain no longer existed. They would launch a bulletin, Socialist Fight to achieve a regrouping of Fourth Internationalists and to direct propaganda and activity towards 'the industrio-military field', (ibid., 8-10).
- 2 Fusion was prematurely announced in WIN.
- 3 Leicester threatened to move expulsion of the whole C.C. if such concessions to chauvinism continued. The dispute between Leicester and the centre can be traced from August 1940.
- 4 Central Committee, 15 Dec. 1940.
- 5 The R.S.L. Centre composed a Reply to Leicester and claimed to have despatched it in February 1941. The Leicester branch claimed to have received it on 2 July 1941.
- 6 Bolshevism or Defencism was published by Leicester on 25 May 1941 and marks the effective beginning of the Left Fraction of the R.S.L. For the argument of this and other Faction Documents, see below, The Centre's reply, dated June 1941, was entitled Leicester's House of Straw, and has not been located.

The breeding ground of factionalism was inactivity which was itself the product not only of a false perspective, but also of organisational incompetence.¹ The December 1940 central committee resolved to begin publication of Militant anew in a duplicated format.² This occurred only in March 1941 however. Again, a July 1941 decision to begin printing became operative only in September. This compares poorly with the contemporary publishing record of WIL. In fairness it must be also added that by March 1941 most R.S.L. central committee members and alternates were in the forces.³

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- 1 The December C.C. virtually confessed this by its announcement that wartime conditions made full implementation of the 1939 constitution of the R.S.L. impossible. Early in the New Year this position was confirmed. National Conferences were declared to be impossible and would be replaced by enlarged national committees and London general membership meetings. The central committee would become the highest body in the party, (E.C. Statement, Our Constitution and the War, (Feb. or March 1941), in Leicester Group, A Circle or a Party?).
 - 2 It was duplicated in Glasgow and edited in Norwich, ([Anon], 'Dear Friends', [1943], H.P., D.J.H. 13A/18). The general work of the League was geographically dispersed from August, (E.C. Circular, 1 Aug. 1941).
 - 3 E.C. Circular, 19 March 1941. In December 1940 the central committee had been Harber, Johns, Davis, van Gelderen, Pawsey, Matlow, Jackson, Wood, Archer, 'M.S.', Robinson, 'M.Q.', with Tom Mercer as an alternate. By late 1940 Tony Doncaster, another senior Militant Group member was in the Navy, (A. Newell, (secretary, Aylesbury D.L.P.) to Groves, 2 Dec. 1940). That autumn the R.S.L. had changed its attitude towards conscription sufficiently to dissociate itself from four WIL members in Sheffield who had evaded military service.

The new Militant appeared from Glasgow in September 1941¹ published in the changed political environment arising from Hitler's June invasion of Soviet Russia. It appeared with a strong supplement calling for Soviet defence, though differing from the C.P.G.B. in its belief that an independent factory movement was the key to achieving it. Like other Trotskyists, the R.S.L. considered Russia unlikely to survive in view of 'Russia's complete incapacity to resist the armies of Hitler, which can only be defeated by superior military strength, which thanks to the bureaucracy and its incompetence the Soviet Union does not possess; or by propagandising the proletarian revolution'. But though such forecasts reflect part of the baggage carried from the Founding Conference,² this Militant series was more impressive than its predecessors, not least in its ability to reflect living industrial struggles.³

- 1 Sub-titled 'Organ of the Socialist Left of the Labour Party'. It appeared as from the Pioneer Publishing Association, possibly transferred after the collapse of the R.W.L.'s attempt to run a P.P.A. outlet in December 1939 (see above, 313).
- 2 Signs which contradicted 1938 predictions were consistently misinterpreted. Family allowances? It was no accident they existed in Italy and Germany. A.B.C.A.? A means for administering 'imperialist dope'. Reveille? 'a pornographic-demagogic rag'. The paper showed a steady inability to recognise the potential in any development which fell short of the full revolutionary programme. See the issue for October 1941.
- 3 London took 500 and Glasgow 300 of the September issue. Every other area took dozens or fractions thereof. Only Glasgow sustained high sales, however, reflecting a steady drive into the Lanarkshire coalfield. And it was the Glasgow R.S.L. branch's opposition which prevented a new suspension in 1942 when sales declined elsewhere, ([Anon.], 'Dear Friends', [1943], H.P., D.J.H. 13A/18.) What was noticeable in this Glasgow Militant was its close coverage of trade union affairs. Disputes north and south of the border were closely watched, especially where factory floor feeling clashed with the opinions of union officials or communist stewards.

The R.S.L. convened its national conference on 20/21 September 1941.¹ This gathering revealed growing uncertainty in the R.S.L. about its international standing² and lifted a veil from new factional lines: Conference clearly revealed a Left Fraction, around Robinson, which was intractably wedded to the Labour Party tactic, but vigilant against any concessions to chauvinism;³ a Right which favoured a Military Policy on the war and worked for fusion with the WIL; and a Centre of Harber and the traditional M.L.L. leaders which controlled the apparatus. Conference discussed Military Policy and concluded that it might not be binding on a section of the International. It decided to seek clarification of this point upon receipt of which a special conference would be held.⁴ This gave freedom to the Right to develop its activities. Jackson, the R.S.L. organiser, had been called up⁵ and John Lawrence became organiser responsible for industrial

- 1 Thereby contradicting the intention announced by the Central Committee at its meeting of December 1940.
- 2 The R.S.L. had learned of contacts between the I.S. and WIL and was vulnerable by reason of its internal disputes and its differences with the International over Military Policy. A November 1941 communication from the I.S. reassured the R.S.L. that it was still the official British Section.
- 3 The Left Fraction comprised principally J.L. Robinson and his supporters in Leicester, and the Glasgow backers of Tom Mercer, an alternate member of the Central Committee and Nan Milton, daughter and later biographer of John MacLean.
- 4 It later heard that Military Policy was not binding upon national sections of the Fourth International.
- 5 Jackson became a submariner. On 9 January 1943 the Central Committee was told that he was missing, presumed lost at sea.

affairs.¹ At central committee meetings he and Harber clashed over possible fusion with WIL.² Until the end of the year, it was possible that the R.S.L. would be knocked off its course not only on the war but on the Labour Party tactic too.³

The R.S.L. was vulnerable because the Military Policy it perceived as a concession to chauvinism had been embraced by WIL. From August 1941, under international pressure, the two organisations exchanged documents.⁴ The R.S.L. stood by its 1937 position that WIL had had no political right to exist when it was first formed. WIL claimed British Section status since it and not the R.S.L. adhered to Fourth International policy. It had launched its paper Socialist Appeal as an avowedly Fourth International journal, but the R.S.L.

- 1 E.C. Minutes, 26 Sept. 1941, Har. P. The Left Fraction later claimed that at this time the R.S.L. issued two pamphlets, Class War in the West and Production committees and the Soviet Union, each of which reflected the line of the Right. Neither has been located. Each was withdrawn when the R.S.L. heard from the I.S. that Military Policy was not binding upon it. On 5 January 1942 the R.S.L. recommended that Lawrence be made a professional.
- 2 At the October meeting Harber moved 'that fusion with WIL is not politically necessary' (C.C. Minutes, 26 Oct. 1941). The following month Lawrence demanded immediate fusion, (E.C. Circular, 26 Nov. 1941) but the Central Committee voted against it in November and December, (C.C. Minutes, 7 Dec. 1941).
- 3 The October 1941 central committee heard gloomy reports about the League of Youth and the Labour Party. Youth Militant had control of the League in the Midlands and South Yorkshire and its activists believed in a long entrism perspective, but the organisation as a whole was small. The Labour Party had 'no leftward tendency' and was 'stagnant'. Remarkably, the central committee concluded six to two that little could be done in the Labour Party and that the R.S.L. must go into industry as an organised left. An open challenge was tabled at this meeting to the Labour Party tactic, (Anon., 'Opportunism and the Labour Party Perspective', [late 1941?] Har.P., F6; C.C. Minutes, 26 Oct. 1941; West Riding Faction, Labour League of Youth and Our Perspectives, [1941]).
- 4 R.S.L. to WIL, 5 Aug. 1941, Report on Negotiations with the WIL, [Jan. 1942?]. The R.S.L. sent WIL its documents The Crisis of British Capitalism and Political Statement (to its 1941 conference). WIL returned, somewhat tardily, its Reply to the Political Statement of the R.S.L.

found its documents vague and saw them as confirmation that WIL was a clique. The R.S.L. retained international backing but the door was now noticeably left open to the WIL.¹ On 12 December 1941 the R.S.L. resolved to bring negotiations to an end.

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To WIL, now outside all parties, the 'Third Labour Government' slogan was 'completely incorrect and opportunist', a demand associated with the bad experiences of the past. WIL argued for advancing a Fourth International programme for Labour, in power, to implement. The R.S.L., it charged, had become Labour Party members on principle, not qualitatively different from the Marxist Group or the Communist League:

'Like the sectarians who attempt to place the so-called "independence of the organisation" above time and place, the late adherents of the Militant Labour League turn the Labour Party tactic into a panacea'²

1 'The decision of 1938 was not taken by chance, but on the basis of a definite attitude of the Lee group. Since then many things have occurred and our relations are not exempt from development, but that could be done only through a thorough explanation', (I.S. to WIL, 28 Oct. 1941, *ibid.*, 6). Eight months later the I.S. attitude had hardened. It told the R.S.L.:

In our opinion your attitude towards the WIL is utterly false. Without ignoring personal differences inherited from the past, it is necessary to recognise that your false attitude flows directly from a false political appreciation of this group. You see in it a centrist group "moving away from us". This is an opinion which we can by no means share.

(I.S. to R.S.L., 21 June 1942)

2 WIL, Reply to the Political Statement of the Revolutionary Socialist League, (1941), H.P., D.J.H. 5/7, 4.

WIL did not drop its demand for Labour to take power just because it was outside the Labour Party. Throughout the war, and after, its leaders rejected a long term presence in the Labour Party.¹ But to surrender the advantages of independence for 'a problematical future possibility' of fecund Labour Party work was, in its view, futile.

From 1942 it became impossible to disentangle the wrangles within the R.S.L. from that body's relations with WIL and the International Secretariat.² The R.S.L. Centre, supported by the Left, made three charges against WIL: it lacked internal democracy; it had abandoned revolutionary defeatism; it had rejected entrism for party building methods 'basically opposed to those of Bolshevism'.³ The central committee as a whole broadened its sights on 11 January 1942 when it declared the Chicago (Military) Policy of J.P. Cannon to be reactionary. This was not enough for the Left, which in April 1942 launched its own duplicated internal journal, The Leninist. For the Left it was in the end all one: any concessions made to Military Policy must ruin everything. If Military Policy was rejected then

- 1 'This tactic is designated for a period, when, under the impact of events, the leftward moving rank and file of reformist or centrist organisations in a state of flux, can be won in a short time to a programme of revolution. The perspective is not of long years but of one or two, or even of months', (ibid., 4).
- 2 One curious development early in the year was a sharp attack by Jackson on Harber for breaking off fusion negotiations with WIL, (E.S. Jackson, On the Workers International League, 18 Feb. 1942, Har. P.).
- 3 The charges mingle. Thus WIL was accused of building its independent organisation by 'pandering to the chauvinism of the workers' with its slogans of 'Arm the Workers' and 'Nationalise the Arms Industries under workers' control', (D.D. Harber, Our Political Estimation of the WIL, accepted by the R.S.L. central committee, 29 March 1942).

fusion with WIL was out of the question.¹

When, on 21 June 1942, the I.S. wrote to the R.S.L. again advancing the need for Military Policy and urging unity with WIL, Lawrence and thirteen others seized their opportunity. They circulated a statement² among the membership backing the I.S., reserving their right to participate freely in fusion discussions unbound by R.S.L. policy and demanding an emergency conference. It seems that the Right at this point was about to break away and join WIL.³ On 18 July, however, an International representative, J.B. Stuart,⁴ visited London. He met WIL leaders, Margaret Johns and, crucially, some members of the Right, whom he persuaded to stay in the R.S.L. and fight for a majority. The next day the R.S.L. central committee met and suspended the fourteen signatories to the statement of dissociation, including Carson, Lawrence, Lane and Goffe⁵ but the Right, which earlier might have welcomed a rupture, now submitted to being disciplined. On

1 This stricture also applied to other protagonists of 'independence'. It was Robinson who intervened to prevent the speedy admission of five S.W.G. members who had applied to rejoin the R.S.L. on 3 May. The terms he set were softened by Harber however, (Minutes, Emergency C.C., 17 May 1942). Robinson, almost incredibly, suspected Harber of being soft on the WIL. At the June 1942 meeting of the central committee he intervened to prevent the R.S.L. selling WIL publications in public. Connections with 'centrism', he warned, would damage the League's integrity. (J.L. Robinson, 'Answer to the Statement of the E.C.', [March 1943?], in 'Dear Friends, etc.', H.P., D.J.H. 13A/18.)

2 This happened on 14 July, (History of Expulsions of Members of the WIL Faction (Right Wing) accepted by a majority of the C.C., Dec. 1942).

3 WIL Document on the History of British Trotskyism, 13.

4 J.B. Stuart (Sam Gordon) was the administrative secretary of the F.I. appointed by the Emergency Conference in 1940.

5 Resolutions passed by the C.C., 19 July 1942. Their appeal to international opinion was neutralised by Harber, who argued that while the I.S. had a view it had not taken a decision on which the Right might act.

26 July 1942 Stuart met Harber and Lawrence and a compromise plan was agreed to cover the conduct of the Right during negotiations for fusion.¹ This collapsed a few weeks later when it was discovered that Lawrence and others of the Right were involved in an elaborate subterfuge, that their conciliation screened concerted action with WIL.² In October and November nearly all members of the Right were expelled from the R.S.L.

Meanwhile a special conference of the R.S.L. had been held as requested by the Right. The Left was itself growing in alienation from the R.S.L. and from the Fourth International, but it united with the Centre to vote down Military Policy and reluctantly advanced a panel for the central committee. The Left and Right captured three seats each and the Centre held four. Following the conference the League heard from the I.S. which condemned it for severing negotiations with

1 The plan was Harber's. He proposed that a period of discussions be held within the R.S.L. and the WIL and that when exchanges began between the two the Right could remain silent. Harber was reassured by Stuart that the R.S.L.'s status with the Fourth International was safe, but he suspected Stuart's relationship with the Right and was disturbed that he did not meet the Left. He later told the R.S.L.

'The I.S. seeks, in my opinion, to push us into a fusion with the WIL, which they know would automatically give the supporters of the A.M.P. (American Military Policy: M.U.) a majority. Such a tactic is typical of Cannonism.....'
(D.D.H., Report of Conversations with Comrade S. of the I.S., 7 Aug. 1942.)

2 It is generally agreed that from about this time Lawrence began to act as a WIL agent within the R.S.L. branch at Leeds. On at least one occasion he actually received a salary from WIL. Lawrence, Lane and others of the Right were also holding secret faction meetings with Haston and Grant of the WIL from August 1942 onwards. Lawrence's activities on WIL's behalf were revealed at the August central committee of the R.S.L. and Harber's compromise plan was then withdrawn. E.L. Davis interviewed members of the Right involved in the WIL meetings on 5 September 1942. On 3 October they were confronted with the charge of acting as WIL agents and, after a lengthy discussion, expelled. Others who supported their action were expelled in November, (History of Expulsions of Members of the WIL Faction (Right Wing), Dec. 1942; Gradjine, Who Speaks For Bolshevism?, 19 Nov. 1942).

WIL¹ and for the ultra-leftism of Robinson. Following the expulsion of the Right, however, a new central committee was returned, composed of six followers of the Centre and four from the Left.² The Right, also now known as the Trotskyist Opposition, was playing its own game, with international encouragement.³ There was a feeling that simple adherence to WIL would mean that that body had too easily surmounted the 1938 declaration of the International.⁴ From 1942 the idea took root that WIL was anti-internationalist, and that its support for the F.I. programme was only for the record. So the Trotskyist Opposition bobbed about independently in 1943, some of its members uneasy at a policy which had turned them back towards struggling for a majority in the R.S.L.

By 1942 WIL was even more convinced that the place for Trotskyists was in the open,⁵ seizing the opportunity to recruit directly to the Fourth International. It was now visibly beginning to derive benefit from an existence outside parties, unlike the R.S.L. which remained immersed in the Labour Party. It would take a mass influx

- 1 The R.S.L. met the WIL on 25 Oct. 1942, where proposals for a joint discussion bulletin were opposed by Harber. He also blocked the holding of a joint conference before a full exchange had taken place between the groups.
- 2 Gradjine, Who Speaks for Bolshevism?, 19 Nov. 1942.
- 3 For the Trotskyist Opposition, see WIL document on the History of Trotskyism, 16-17.
- 4 'It would be criminal to assume that, because it (WIL) pursues a by and large correct policy today, that is all that is important', (J.B. Stuart to J.L(awrence), 4 Feb. 1943, *ibid.*, 17).
- 5 'The proponents of entry have their eyes glued to the future visage of the Labour Party and not to its present posterior. Using the example of the last war, they argue, correctly enough, that the first big revolutionary wave will revive the Labour Party', (Preparing for Power, special issue WIN, (Sept. 1942), 22).

into the Labour Party to make it change its mind.¹ The R.S.L. always challenged WIL's presentation of conditions for entry. WIL had argued that Labour must be in a state of flux, at a high level of political life, and moving left. The R.S.L. countered that political life in the Labour Party had never been on a high level and that this was not in any case material in determining Trotskyist behaviour. Trotskyism, it insisted, had to prepare the turn to the Labour Party, a task WIL was manifestly failing to carry out.² The R.S.L. suggested that WIL was preparing to argue that workers would skip the Labour Party stage and join it directly.³ Finally, it argued that WIL's false attitude to the Labour Party sprang from its erroneous policy on war. WIL did not recognise present chauvinism, it charged, and it exaggerated class conflict so that it might reject the Labour Party.⁴

- 1 'If as the result of the mass upsurge, hundreds of thousands and millions participate actively in the organisation of the Labour Party, then will come the time to enter, (ibid., 23).
- 2 'A Criticism of the WIL Pamphlet Preparing for Power', in, WIL Discussion Bulletin, Policy and Perspectives of the British Trotskyists (1942), 3. Here the R.S.L. rejected a further WIL argument, that a turn of other parties such as the I.L.P. towards Labour also confirmed the time to enter. The R.S.L. reminded WIL that the I.L.P. had had no interest in the Labour Party in 1936 when Trotsky had proposed joining and that the conditions to which it attached such weight did not apply during WIL's own period in the Labour Party.
- 3 ibid., 4. The R.S.L. central committee assented to this document by a majority on a postal ballot.
- 4 The following year WIL responded to this document arguing that there was a pre-revolutionary situation and that it would not take an anti-war character at all. It dismissed as 'formalistic nonsense' the thesis that all workers must pass through the Labour Party and argued that there would be a differential response to the Labour Party within the working class, (Reply of WIL to the R.S.L. criticism of Preparing for Power, 7 June 1943, 15).

But the already tottering R.S.L. was now lop-sided. Indeed the Centre now had twenty-three members on paper to the Left's thirty six.¹ The Left believed Harber to be a liquidationist who would dissolve the revolutionary party in the centrist WIL. The Centre was deeply suspicious of an organised faction within the League, and one, moreover, which had effective control of its paper from December 1942.² On 9 January 1943 the Lefts were suspended for factionalism. When the charges against them were confirmed they were expelled on 23 January for refusing to divulge the names of their Fraction.³ The Left boasted that it took with it the true industrial base of the British Section of the Fourth International⁴ and the early months of 1943 passed in an ugly wrangle over the status of its paper.⁵

- 1 J.L. Robinson, 'Answer to the Statement', loc. cit. One rare product of R.S.L. thought not devoted to factional conflict at this time was Harber's preamble to a Draft Programme for the "Socialist Left", [June?] 1942, (Har. P.).
- 2 A Glasgow supporter of the Left, Gibbie Russell, was a former Lanarkshire miner who had retained his links with the pits. By 1942 a rank and file movement had developed among the miners in Lanarkshire. See 'Fife Dispute' supplement, Militant (Glasgow), Sept. 1942. But it was debarred from launching a new paper by war-time regulations. Russell persuaded the R.S.L. executive to turn over the Militant to the miners in return for the proviso that all material be first submitted to Margaret Johns and Tom Mercer, both of the Glasgow R.S.L. branch, and that the R.S.L. be allowed a 200 word editorial. The transfer took place on 3 December 1942. Even before this a special supplement had been issued to Militant between normal issues with all articles being written by Russell, Hugh Brannan (a Lanarkshire miner and Left Faction member) and Tom Stephenson, (a Cumberland miner and I.L.P. member who had been a disaffiliationist in 1932).
- 3 P.J.B., E.L.D., M.J., D.D.H., An Answer to the Charges of the "Left", 23 Jan. 1943, (Har. P.).
- 4 See the Left Fraction, 'On the Future of the Scottish Miner Edition of the Militant'. The R.S.L. did not dispute this assertion, ('Dear Friends, etc.', H.P., D.J.H. 13A/18). For Trotskyists in the Scottish pits in wartime see Chapter XI.
- 5 Russell and another member circulated all R.S.L. branches on 18 February 1943 urging joint B.S.F.I. - Lanarkshire miners control of Militant. By May circulation of the paper, now duplicated, had fallen below 300, (Minutes of the C.C. held on 9 May 1943, Har. P.).

On 4 June the Left Fraction appealed to the I.S. against its expulsion and received a reply to the effect that this act was indeed a violation of the R.S.L. constitution.¹

In July 1943 WIL made a new offer on unification. It refused to devote itself to nothing else but proposed a six month discussion at the end of which a fusion conference would vote for one tactic in a majority vote. WIL demanded for itself either recognition as the official British Section or, failing that, sympathetic status - the very request it had made in 1938.² WIL also had grown tired of being lectured by American representatives on splits:

The elements which began the work of the Opposition, even in the majority, were not of the best material. The difficulties of growth and the milieu in which they had to work; the composition of the Opposition itself, the different stages of development through which the organisation passed; the necessity at various stages of making sharp changes if the movement was even to survive; all these factors led necessarily and inevitably to splits.³

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- 1 The I.S. specified that it continued to abhor Left Fraction policies (Brief Notes on the History of the Left Fraction, 2.).
 - 2 WIL offered, tongue in cheek, to treat with the R.S.L. factions separately or together, (Conference Resolution On International Affiliation, H.P., D.J.H. 14B/17).
 - 3 Political Bureau, Internal Bulletin, 11 Sept. 1943, 12. WIL also recalled Trotsky's part in splitting the Belgian Party in 1929 and his role in the C.L. split of 1933. It never conceded that its own existence was due to a personalised split but argued that even if true, this charge could not cancel out its own success while the R.S.L. had failed. WIL took the view that the I.S. had in any case been for years 'completely misinformed' about the real situation in Britain, (WIL, Document on the History of British Trotskyism, 2).

On 7 September 1943, WIL wrote to the I.S. about the mode of unification. On 26 September the I.S. passed a resolution on British Unification which identified acceptance of the F.I. programme principles and statutes as the sole conditions for it. Under the circumstances the door was open to WIL. Yet WIL had within its own ranks a challenge to its behaviour since 1938, a minority which, like the Right Opposition of the R.S.L., accused it of being anti-Internationalist in method.¹ This minority led by Healy, a party to WIL's abstention from the Peace and Unity agreement, now condemned this aloofness in a critical resolution.² It reminded the WIL leaders of the need to observe majorities and warned, presciently, that such majorities had international as well as national boundaries.

The I.S. resolution of 26 September 1943 led the warring R.S.L. factions to prepare unification. The Centre seems to have responded³ most promptly: it regarded the proposed reconstitution conference as the reforming of the old R.S.L. The I.S. required all three parts of the old R.S.L. to be within the reconstitution. Bitterness persisted between Lawrence and Harber, leaders of the 'Right' and 'Centre' to the end,⁴ but a Reconstitution Conference did gather on New Year's Day

1 See G. Healy, 'Our Most Important Task', Internal Bulletin [1943?]; Political Bureau to Healy, 21 Aug. 1943; G. Healy to Political Bureau, 25 Aug. 1943.

2 H.P., Political Statement of the Minority on Unification, Dec. 1943, H.P., 14B/21. See also An Open Letter to All Group Members, 30 Dec. 1943, H.P. 14B/21.

3 Minutes of E.C. of 13 Nov. 1943, Har. P.

4 See D.D.H., H.G., Account of an Interview between S.G. and D.D.H. (Militant Group) and J.L. ("T.O.") on 4 Dec. 1943, H.P., D.J.H. 13A/23; [J.L.?], Letter to the R.S.L. Membership, 18 Dec. 1943, H.P., D.J.H. 13A/24; E.C. of the T.O., Statement to the R.S.L. membership from the E.C. of the T.O. (R.S.L.), 19 Dec. 1943, H.P., D.J.H. 13A/25.

1944 in the presence of Phelan. The Left had hoped to secure from it a unified organisation with which to join WIL in fusion. This was not the proposition however. The Right (thirty four votes) and the Centre (thirty six votes) carried the Standing Orders Committee proposal of a looser arrangement against twenty nine votes for the Left.

The Left joined with the others in giving unanimous support to the I.S. resolution of 26 September reconstituting the British Section, a step it later regretted. But its full vote was cast against the resolution for fusion which was carried with seventy four votes behind it. The Right emerged as the faction most eager for unity, and in the third session of conference called for immediate fusion of R.S.L. and WIL locals.¹ An I.S. representative also attended the second day of WIL's January 1944 central committee² from which the Minority was excluded in view of its contact with an R.S.L. faction. Nor was the Minority allotted a place on the negotiating committee in view of lack of support for its views at the 1943 WIL conference.³

The Fusion Conference met on 11-12 March 1944. There were sixty-nine delegates, fifty two from the WIL and seventeen from the R.S.L.⁴ This reflected a membership split of 260/75 in WIL's favour.⁵

1 Left Fraction, R.S.L. 'Reconstitution' Conference, [Jan.? 1944], Har. P. This is the only record of the conference located.

2 Another recent WIL contact with the American-based I.S. had been through Grant who was in the United States at Christmas 1943, (A. Wald, op. cit., 84).

3 Central Committee Report, [Jan. 1944], H.P., D.J.H. 14B/22.

4 Plus a representative from the International, Terence Phelan (alias Sherry Mangan, 1904-61). Mangan, a C.L.A. member, worked in France as a Time-Life correspondent from 1938 until he was expelled by the Pétain government for his political activities. In 1939 he had been technical secretary of the I.S. In 1944, again in France, he was part of the European Secretariat and was to join the reconstituted I.S. in 1946. After the war he was often known in Trotskyist papers as Patrice O'Daniel.

5 See footnotes of following page.

And the division of the R.S.L. delegates - seven to the Centre, six to the Trotskyist Opposition, and four to the Left Fraction - meant that whatever resistance there was to the WIL, was seriously weakened. The resolutions of the R.S.L. Centre did not represent any programmatic change. It still saw workers' control as a slogan for a revolutionary period. As advanced in the Britain of 1941-3, at a time when the masses were under capitalist influence, it continued to believe that the slogan had 'not so much a purely reformist character as a definitely chauvinist one'. It furthered the illusion that it was justifiable to increase war production. All supporters of Military Policy had taken the incidental factor that the enemy was a fascist country and made it a cardinal principle. Since this was essentially a rehearsal of the old argument, it may have been aimed at justifying the R.S.L.'s wartime stand. When Tearse moved the WIL's industrial policy resolution he was able to carry it with only four votes in opposition. No more successful was the Left Fraction with its motion, A Policy for Industry. The Fraction regarded the Clyde Workers Committee and M.W.F. as paper organisations:¹ the emphasis should have been put on work within the existing organisations, and its aim should have been to achieve one shop stewards movement. 'We certainly will not assist in clarifying our position by attempting to imitate the Stalinists and building our own private concern.' To the Left Fraction it was tactically preferable to court expulsion from the shop stewards'

5 From previous page.

The WIL membership of 260 has been wrongly taken as the membership of the entire R.C.P., (P. Jenkins, Where Trotskyism Got Lost, (1977), 3).

1 These bodies, the product in part of WIL's wartime drive into industry, are discussed in Chapter XI.

movement and then campaign for democracy in the factories. The Fraction implied that the Militant Workers Federation was being used by WIL as a kind of political party. It was no more successful than the R.S.L. Centre had been, and secured only four votes.

Voting on conference resolutions reflected roughly a four to one majority for WIL policies. Indeed, the Fusion Conference generally was a recognition of WIL's wartime achievement. The main WIL leaders were all returned to the new central committee and there was no representation for the WIL minority. For the R.S.L., Harber (now known as Paul Dixon on party documents) and John Goffe were returned as C.C. members.¹ The leading WIL figures were then confirmed in the key positions. Haston became general secretary, Millie Lee organisational secretary, Ted Grant the editor of Socialist Appeal. This paper was confirmed as the agitational organ of Trotskyism though Militant's imprint was to be used in the Labour Party. Workers International News remained the theoretical journal. The decision to adopt the name Revolutionary Communist Party was at once a rebuke to the C.P.G.B. and a reflection of WIL optimism rather than the bleaker outlook of the R.S.L. Stuart's report to the American Trotskyists is perhaps the source of the myths later circulated about the WIL and the R.S.L.² It saw the R.C.P. as a marriage of the 'furious activism' of the one with the 'serious attention to theory' of the other, whose consummation was the fruit of two years' tireless international effort.³

- 1 Goffe had been on the R.S.L. Central Committee and also represented an important provincial area, Glasgow.
- 2 See T. Ali, The Coming British Revolution (1972), where it is revealed that the WIL was smaller than the R.S.L., that they fused after the war, and that WIL's internal life was marked by an intense factional struggle over Labour Party entry.
- 3 J.B. Stuart, 'A Brief Report On England', Fourth International, (June 1944), 168-70. The claim of the Fourth International that it played a centripetal role is set down in P. Frank, The Fourth International (1979), 60.

Stuart detected two dangers as displayed by the Fusion Conference. One was ultra leftism within the Left Fraction, though he urged caution in dealing with it in view of its class composition. The other was 'a deviation of national coloration', apparently discernible in the ex-WIL leadership. He made complaints of references to 'our' eighth army which were almost certainly directed at the views of Grant.

The Fusion Conference was the occasion of the last in a series of communist pamphlets attacking Trotskyism.¹ Elsewhere the launching of the R.C.P. attracted some attention, but it was really the arrests of party leaders during an industrial crisis the following month which brought recognition. Even before this assault of the party helped bind it together, the fusion resolution declared the hatchet buried:

The past clashes on the political questions engendered deep cleavages between the leading personnel and embittered the relations between the members of the organisation. An important task for the leadership of the new organisation is to introduce a real comradeship into the political discussions and life of the party, and to sweep away all the vestiges of the bitter disputes of the past. In the interests of the fusion this Conference therefore dissolves all past organisational conflicts and disputes and closes the discussion on these questions in the British Section.²

1 J.R. Campbell, Trotskyist Saboteurs (1944).

2 Socialist Appeal (April 1944). Party leaders lived up to these sentiments, taking a close interest in how the new branches were holding together and referring to the fusion as the marriage. In Glasgow there was great enthusiasm for the merger on the part of the two locals, each important in its national organisation. They had some common work behind them, (Interview with J. Goffe, M. Johns, July 1974, Nov. 1973).

The Fusion Conference was a watershed. It did not mark the end of factionalism, but it redrew the demarcation lines. WIL leaders felt that Harber and the R.S.L. Centre adhered loyally to the new set up,¹ even though they still differed from the new party's leadership. The Left Fraction, of course, maintained its existence. But the Right or Trotskyist Opposition had some within it who were travelling in the same direction as the Healy group within the WIL, and the fusion brought them together with, in the end, profound results.

* * * * *

The R.S.L. had a melancholy history. All of the WIL's predictions concerning the fragility of the Peace and Unity agreement of 1938 were borne out. The gulf over Labour Party tactics was too wide to be bridged by such a pact. In the end it was experience which resolved this, always the most difficult question for Trotskyists in Britain. WIL grew by rejecting the Labour Party and staying independent of the International.² The R.S.L. decayed and dissolved by staying within the Labour Party. The sacrifices it made for its Labour Party existence became increasingly futile as the anticipated left swing within it was seen to be a mirage. The formation of the R.C.P. was an endorsement of WIL's method and its policies and gave promise of a departure from a bleak Trotskyist tradition in Britain.

1 Interview with R. Tearse, (Nov. 1973).

2 WIL's industrial successes are the theme of Chapter XI.

XI THE GROWTH OF WORKERS INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE AND
ITS INDUSTRIAL AGITATION (1938 - 1944)

Workers International League seemed to have poor prospects at the end of 1938 with all other Fourth Internationalists grouped in one body. Yet it survived, put a regular press on the streets and became the pivot of a limited regroupment. WIL moved from its original interpretation of entry work to a position in 1941 outside all parties. This, with its ability and flair, won it industrial support from 1942 on. It intervened in all major industrial disputes from this time and was more successful than any other party in its attempt to fill the vacuum left by the communists, who had become advocates of increased production. While WIL's achievements and influence were exaggerated, they were tangible, and culminated in a celebrated court case which brought them national publicity.

* * * * *

Debating in 1939 with C.L.R. James, Trotsky attributed the failure of Fourth Internationalists in Britain to lack of ability, inflexibility and the long domination of bourgeois thought. He urged continuation of the policy of critical support for the Labour Party but sought an independent paper which might make needed attacks on I.L.P. leaders.¹ Trotsky took no public position on the formation of

1 Trotsky's wide ranging discussion with James is reproduced as 'On the History of the Left Opposition' and 'Fighting Against the Stream' (April 1939), Writings : (1938-9), 61-2, 63-5. The reference to an independent paper may have been intended for Workers Fight, the open journal of the unified R.S.L., but by this date it would have been more appropriate to Workers International News. This full text was published in S.W.P. (U.S.A.), Internal Bulletin, 20 Dec. 1939, (Writings : (1938-39), 150n.).

Workers International League, though its leaders had written to him. It later claimed that it turned its back on the past, seeking a break with tradition. Certainly it made new recruits to Trotskyism, but it also rallied a number of those who were disenchanted with the other groups. This was a conscious policy proclaimed in the first issue of WIN.¹ It did not retain all of those whom it drew to itself in the first few months of its life,² and others were expelled for 'Molinierism'.³ But it gained members from the R.S.P. and the R.W.L. as well as from non-Trotskyist formations like the I.L.P. Guild of

- 1 WIL wrote to inform Trotsky that it had bought a small printing press, which it used to produce Workers International News. He replied praising this as a revolutionary step, (interview with E. Grant, Jan. 1973). No correspondence between WIL and Trotsky has been located, though Trotsky did remark, in a French connection, that an unprincipled split might lead to post hoc justifications ('Letters to the P.O.I. Central Committee', 19 July 1939, Writings: Supplement (1934-40), 826). Pablo, a post-war secretary of the Fourth International, later claimed that Trotsky had condemned WIL, ('It Is High Time To Find A Solution', [July 1947], R.C.P. Internal Bulletin, n.p., H.P.).
- 2 Hilary Sumner-Boyd withdrew from collaboration with Ralph Lee after the second issue of WIN, (see Chapter VIII). Michael Tippett, to whom the WIN project had appealed, (see 'Statement of M.T., 8 March 1938) now ceased to be involved with Trotskyism. In 1940 he became Director of Music at Morley College, and in June 1943 was sentenced to three months imprisonment as a conscientious objector.
- 3 In 1940 WIL expelled Betty Hamilton who with Pierre Frank (then in London exile) was advancing the syndicalist propositions of Raymond Molinier's P.C.I., (D.F. 'The Lack of Democracy Within the Group and Reasons' and [W.I.L.] 'Reply of the E.C. to Comrade D.F.', 12 Oct. 1940, Internal Bulletin, (n.d.), H.P.). Raymond Molinier was the leader of one faction of the French Trotskyists who contributed to a seven year split in France. His influence was also felt to be at work in the East London branch of the R.S.L., which had produced a critical document What Is Wrong With Our Organisation?, and in Camberwell, where a statement There must be no compromise had been issued, ([R.S.L.], Circular Newsletter, 21 Aug. 1940). The R.S.L. considered WIL as a whole to resemble Molinierism in its aspiration to a mass appeal and desire to expound popular principles. Nor was the accusation new, since it had been levelled by J.P. Cannon in 1938, (see Chapter VIII).

Youth.¹

WIL failed to convene a national conference for the first five years of its life, though meetings of the London membership were held. It grew steadily, first around the original leadership of Ralph Lee and Haston assisted by Grant² but many recruited after the split from Militant gained leading positions.³ Sometime in 1940, Ralph Lee, the dominant influence in WIL at least until 1939, returned to South Africa⁴ and was succeeded as General Secretary by Haston. Illness incapacitated other WIL leaders for a time, but they were able to avoid conscription and thus kept a centre in being.⁵

- 1 WIL recruited twelve R.W.L. members in 1940, but retained only six, (see Chapter IX; Anon., letter to the WIL central committee, [1940?] H.P.). Ralph Lee and Haston visited the Edinburgh branch of the R.S.P. and convinced some of its members. WIL also expelled from its ranks two sympathisers who had moved towards the Leninist League, a Glasgow and Coventry faction which, like Hugo Oehler in the U.S.A., stood for an independent existence and factory work, (D.F., and WIL E.C., op. cit.). The Leninist League, blocked from the Peace and Unity conference, maintained activity at least until the middle of the war. It published material from the Revolutionary Workers League of Chicago, an anti-Trotskyist party.
- 2 E. (Ted) Grant (1914-) had as a young man been one of the first South African Trotskyists to come to Britain. He had been a member of the Marxist and Militant Groups. He was posted to the Pioneer Corps but fractured his skull before joining up and was discharged. Another South African, Ann Keen, joined WIL sometime in 1938 as part of its London organisation, (interview with Ann Finkel (Keen), 30 July 1974). Gerry Healy, though a founder member, was a controversial figure. He resigned in 1938 when not consulted over a decision to print Youth for Socialism (q.v.). While in Ireland he joined the Irish Labour Party in opposition to WIL. He was allowed to rejoin WIL but in 1940 resigned again following criticism of federalising amendments he had proposed to the WIL constitution. Healy's organising abilities were widely recognised, however, and he occupied important positions in the League throughout most of its life.
- 3 Half of its October 1940 executive was comprised of members with less than two years standing. Nor were the editors of WIN or Youth for Socialism foundation members.
- 4 No reason has been ascertained for Lee's departure nor have details of his subsequent career been discovered. Lee is referred to in Haston's 1945 correspondence with South African Trotskyists.
- 5 Grant was able to stay out of the forces because of a skull injury. Haston had a stomach ailment, but also changed identities, for which offence he was arrested. Andrew Scott simply did not respond to call up and worked full time for WIL for some years. When he finally reported and told a truthful story to account for his non appearance

WIL put a consistent press on the streets throughout this time. WIN appeared regularly, and from 1939 WIL members increasingly contributed articles, displacing the emphasis on foreign contributions.¹ In September 1938 WIL launched a monthly agitational paper, Youth for Socialism² to supplement its activities in the Labour League of Youth. Youth for Socialism was a lively newspaper, given to exuberant abuse of communists and their fellow-travellers in the youth movement. It seems unlikely, however, that WIL supplanted the M.L.L. before that body was proscribed in 1940.³ WIL had practically no one working full time, but it was more visible than the R.S.L. because of its policy of putting its press on streets.⁴ Its energetic reaction to the outbreak of war included - as well as the transference of its controlling centre to Ireland - the publication for seven months of a daily handout, Workers Diary.⁵

5 Continued from previous page.

no action was taken against him (Interview with J. Haston, 13 July 1973).

1 WIN still regularly published Trotsky, a task no other faction of the 1930s regularly achieved. WIL claimed that it published every important document of the F.I. to 1941. The R.S.L. challenged that WIN's emphasis on foreign articles left it 'in the realm of the abstract', a charge which would bolster its view that WIL had no reason to exist, (B.S.F.I., Statement on relations with the Workers International League, 4 Dec. 1939, H.P., 13a/18, 3-4).

2 Youth for Socialism bore the imprint of G. Healy from September 1938. In August 1939 Healy's name was replaced by W. Clarke, and in September 1939 by B. French. In June 1940 the name D. Gray appeared and continued until May 1941 when the last issue appeared over the name Harold Atkinson (q.v.).

3 At the 1939 L.L.O.Y. conference WIL had about five delegates to fifteen of the M.L.L. At the party conference held that year in Southport, WIL had no delegates to the M.L.L.'s three, (B.S.F.I., *ibid.*, 4).

4 The R.S.L. argued that this was 'by no means the most important' kind of revolutionary activity and that WIL had an advantage over it by virtue of its freedom from international commitments (*ibid.*, 4).

5 Workers Diary appeared daily from 22 September 1939 to 8 April 1940, (A. Penn, *op. cit.*, 157). Copies have survived in private possession but had not been located at the time of completion of the substantive draft of this thesis.

WIL's belief in the autumn of 1940 was that revolution.. or near-revolution would shake every belligerent country.¹ In anticipation it showed the flexibility for which Trotsky had yearned. The electoral truce between the major parties had cleared the way for minor parties to oppose their candidates at by-elections. Healy may have advocated support for Pollitt in the Silvertown contest of February 1940.² The next month WIL openly supported anti-war candidates as the only outlet for those who wished to support revolutionary socialism.³ Youth for Socialism was shortly put on the list of papers League of Youth members might not sell.⁴ WIL remained within the Labour Party however, though its emphasis on sales always gave it the opportunity to approach those outside. A Labour Party presence was justified by reference to the arguments of Lenin and

- 1 'The economic blockade not only of Europe but of Britain too will become increasingly effective and this will mark the beginning of wholesale social convulsions. Long before the nations can complete their mutual destruction, the political and social structure of every country will be subjected to the severest test, (Britain Holds Out', WIN (Oct. 1940), 7).
- 2 R.S.L., The Electoral Tactics of the Workers Vanguard (1940), 2. Pollitt's 966 votes, while six times larger than the Fascist candidate polled, were swamped by a Labour total fifteen times larger.
- 3 'The Ballot Box Test', WIN, (March 1940), 6-8. WIL advocated critical support for anti-war candidates, preferably the I.L.P. rather than the C.P.G.B., though it regarded their programme as 'a vote for Hitler'.
- 4 It was, presumably, WIL's electoral line which provoked this ban. However, the paper had consistently attacked the Labour officialdom which ran the League of Youth and, notably, Huddleston, the party Youth Officer, although it had tended to lose the character of a youth paper. It had also evinced an undisguised interest in the youth sections of other parties such as the C.P.G.B. and I.L.P.

Trotsky and the early stage of WIL's development.¹ Yet the organisation was watching developments in industry and warned that it would not hesitate to alter tactics if faced with a change in the 'objective situation'.² It was still calling for 'Labour to Power' and would continue to do so even after leaving the party.³ But it flatly rejected the M.L.L. tactic as applied either before or after proscription.⁴

WIL began to move out of the Labour Party in the spring of 1941, though the manner of its going was confused and protracted.⁵

- 1 'We are still in the most elementary stages of preparing the party and consequently it is to the politically conscious and organised workers to whom we must turn our faces' ('Reply of the E.C. to Comrade D.F.', 12 Oct. 1940, Internal Bulletin [1940], H.P., D.J.H. 14A/1, 8).
- 2 In October 1940 WIL had I.L.P. and C.P.G.B. fractions but believed main forces should be concentrated at the main point of attack, viz. the Labour Party. Factory work at this point was treated by WIL with especial scorn: it had not yielded a single recruit. One possibility visualised which might change the 'objective situation' was the emergence of a mass communist opposition, the appearance of which would 'depend entirely on the future orientation of Stalin's foreign policy', (ibid., 8-9). Factory work had been proposed by another WIL member in Anon., 'For A New Course', 26 Oct. 1940, H.P., D.J.H. 5/3.
- 3 'Labour to Power, I.L.P. chairman supports the war', WIN (Aug. 1940), 10-13.
- 4 The R.S.L. reminded Lee and his comrades that they had not objected to the M.L.L. tactic when they had been members of the Militant Group in 1937.
- 5 An undated document of the first half of 1941 put the WIL leaders' views to all locals. It foresaw a Labour Party split, with the Left and I.L.P. joining together, and predicted a harbinger in the shape of a turn to factory committees. But while I.L.P. and C.P.G.B. fractions would be needed, full strength had to be applied at the points of attack: the Labour Party and the unions, (Statement On Policy and Perspectives, [Feb. - June 1941?], H.P.). Yet WIL dated its turn to open work from March 1941 in Preparing For Power, (WIN special issue, Sept. 1942, 20). In June 1941 Youth for Socialism was transformed into the broader Socialist Appeal, which declared it supported the policy of Workers International News (Trotskyist)' and advertised meetings of WIL (Fourth International). In September Workers International News appeared openly as the organ of Workers International League. From January 1942 Socialist Appeal appeared openly as an F.I. paper.

It was complete by September, by which date a major shift in communist policy had occurred which could only reinforce the argument for independence. Negatively, the Labour Party no longer offered the prescribed high level of political life, debilitated as it was by the effects of conscription, air raids and the absence of regular elections. Positively there were the first signs of stirring in industry in this second year of war. To its critics the WIL turn was empiricist, an opportunist adjustment to circumstances. But it is noticeable that WIL continued to call for a Labour Government, which had not been the policy of the first R.S.L. or the Marxist Group after 1936.¹ Plans were made for a WIL conference in 1941, but it seems not to have met. But WIL regarded itself as programmatically the true representative of the Fourth International in Britain and demanded that this be recognised by the conferral of official status.² It actively projected itself as a Trotskyist party and met with a good deal more success in this respect than the more inhibited R.S.L.³

- 1 WIL also stated that it would still issue this call even if Trotskyism had a mass following, drawing on precedent in the form of the Bolshevik slogan 'All Power to the Soviets', (WIL, Reply to the Political Statement of the Revolutionary Socialist League, (1941), H.P., D.J.H. 5/7, 4).
- 2 The July 1941 issue of WIN carried what it claimed was the manifesto of the Fourth International in Britain. This claim, when repeated on letterheads and elsewhere enraged the R.S.L. It was based on its record, its advocacy of the F.I. programme and that of the R.S.L. since 1938. Evidence later advanced included the quality and consistency of the WIL press and the part it had played in establishing an Irish Section, (WIL, For Discussion. To the International Secretariat of the Fourth International, [1941?] and Reply to Lou Cooper. The Bolshevik attitude to unity and splits, H.P., 11 Sept. 1943).
- 3 WIL held Trotsky Memorial meetings in London and Birmingham during August 1940, the month of his death, and demonstrated outside the Russian Embassy. The R.S.L. initially resolved not to combine with other Trotskyists because this would risk its Labour Party presence: in the end it held a meeting in London and Glasgow with I.L.P. speakers as well as its own. Each organisation held a Russian Revolution anniversary meeting on 7 November 1941. According to WIL there were 200 in attendance at its own meeting, (which sent a resolution to Ambassador Maisky calling for the victory of the continued in footnotes on following page.

It was the second wartime change in communist policy which gave Workers International League its chance. Communist policy in 1939-41 was not supported by Trotskyists, who saw it as a popular front campaign in disguise.¹ But while there is doubt about the success of the C.P.G.B. in this phase² it is certain that it sustained a militant opposition to the Government. What was more, the party dominated the national shop stewards movement by strong representation on its National Council.³ The People's Convention itself had impressive backing on paper and the possibility of a broad movement developing must have been one motive behind Morrison's

3 Continued from previous page.

Red Army but opposing Stalin) but only twenty seven at that of the R.S.L. ('D. Gray' to secretary, R.S.L., 31 Dec. 1941, Har. P., F7). The R.S.L. objected to WIL holding its meeting under the auspices of the Fourth International, (R.S.L. to WIL, 7 Oct. 1941, in Report On Negotiations With The WIL, [Jan.? 1942], 4).

1 'The "People's" Convention', WIN, (Dec. 1940), 6.

2 In spring 1940 the communists performed poorly in by-elections and convened a Labour Monthly conference on 25 February, whose representation is difficult to assess. The People's Convention movement from July 1940 did win support, particularly during the following year, though some of its claims may have been exaggerated, (A. Rothstein, 'Harry Pollitt', B.S.S.L.H., (Spring 1977), 20; M. Johnstone, 'Harry Pollitt', B.S.S.L.H. (Autumn 1977), 24-7). The Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, believed that the party itself had not grown, (J. Hinton, 'Killing the People's Convention', B.S.S.L.H., (Autumn 1979), 27).

3 While the party lost support among the intelligentsia, most dramatically displayed in V. Gollancz (ed.), The Betrayal of the Left (1941), it had a militant line for its factory members. In 1940 the party's central committee advised 'if this industrial truce policy were to succeed, then the British workers, the pioneers of trade unionism, are faced with the danger of losing all their safeguards and having virtual slavery thrust upon them' (C.P.G.B., The Trade Unions and the War, (1940), 10). Party influence on the shop stewards movement was revealed at the national conference of 6-7 April 1940 and that of the following year. E. Trory (Imperialist War (1977), 157-65) gives an uncritical account of this phase of communist policy. See also R.T. Buchanan, 'The Shop Steward Movement 1935-47', Journal of the Scottish Labour History Society, (Feb. 1978), 34-55.

decision to suspend publication of The Daily Worker.¹ At this time communists and their followers could see no difference between the Chamberlain and Churchill administrations² and spoke the undiluted language of class war, often to the point of exaggeration.³

Trotskyist attempts to intervene in the People's Convention met with no noticeable success.⁴ But WIL did fear that it would make headway and believed the result would be to isolate the revolutionary

1 Morrison banned The Daily Worker and The Week in January 1941, rather late in the day and clearly alarmed by the People's Convention. The Daily Worker had already been punished for libelling union leaders the previous year, (T.U.C., Union Leaders Vindicated, (1940))

2 Pritt wrote of the government:

Its origins are pretty clear. It is surely the lineal descendant and residuary legatee of the class-government which conducted and "won" the last war, made the treaty of Versailles, intervened in Russia in the name of crushing the new-born and fortunately indestructible socialist country, acquiesced in the rape of Manchuria, Abyssinia, Austria, Albania and Czechoslovakia (Labour Monthly, (Jan. 1941), 16-17.)

3 J.R. Campbell wrote of 'Labour in chains', 'the straight jacket on shop stewards' and 'compulsion in the workshop'. Joint committees were, he declared, an attempt to weaken shop stewards' committees, their appearance, with other developments, marking 'a decisive clearing of the ground for an advance to Fascism'. ('Workers and the British Totalitarians', Labour Monthly, (March 1941), 131-9.)

4 Sydney Bidwell's N.U.R. branch in Southall tabled five amendments only to have them rejected by the Standing Orders Committee, (B. Farnborough, loc. cit., 27). Healy may have been a delegate. The Convention adopted a programme including the raising of living standards, adequate A.R.P., restoration of civil rights, emergency takeover of big business and the banks, self-determination for the colonies, friendship with the U.S.S.R., a people's government representative of the working class and a people's peace based on self-determination of all peoples. For resolutions passed by the Convention see Labour Monthly, (Feb. 1941), 93-5. Motivation of those who supported it is discussed by J. Hinton, loc. cit., 27-32. See also the general discussion by A. Calder, The People's War (1971), 281-4.

vanguard from the mass of workers who still backed Labour.¹ Under the new dispensation of growing independence WIL was rallying some support from dissident Trotskyists,² though it could only hope to operate on the fringes of such a movement as the Convention. But with Hitler's invasion of Russia on 22 June 1941, the entire British political environment altered, especially in the labour movement. Most important was the alteration in communist policy for industry to one which made increased output the top priority.³ The communists had to operate underground in Nazi-occupied Europe. In the United States, the C.P.U.S.A., like the Comintern itself, was to be dissolved. The C.P.G.B. escaped that fate, but at the price of public contortions in policy. It put itself at the head of an opposition movement and used, with some skill, the opportunity provided when Labour shared office with the 'Old Gang' from May 1940. But there was no serious

1 'People's Convention. And Now?' WIN (Feb. 1941), 7.

2 G. Weston, whose relationship with Trotskyism spanned almost a decade and a half, came over with several industrial workers to WIL. Weston was an important figure at De Havillands' Hendon factory. As an independent group WIL attracted Arthur Cooper, who was thought to have as many as twenty young workers around him in the Socialist Workers Group. (R.S.L. E.C. Minutes, 5 Jan. 1942, Har. P.)

3 J. Owen, 'How to Increase War Production', Labour Monthly, (Sept. 1941), 391-5. See also William Rust's case for lifting the ban on The Daily Worker, ('The Daily Worker and the National Front', Labour Monthly, (Aug. 1941), 368). All the demands of the Convention except for friendship with the U.S.S.R., were dropped as immediate objectives. As Pritt observed 'much of the Convention's programme was no longer fully applicable to the situation', (From Right to Left (1965), 285-6). However, his The Fall of the French Republic with its suggestion that the British government, like the French, was moving towards the suppression of liberties, was published in October 1941 though written before Russia entered the war. Hinton comments that the People's Convention, which six days after Hitler's attack had reaffirmed its call for a People's Government and a People's Peace, was by July 1941 looking 'through victory to a People's Peace', (loc. cit., 29n).

groundswell of industrial discontent during the first two years of the war and the communists had therefore been in opposition at a time when objective circumstances were at their most unfavourable.

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There was no great originality in WIL's policy for industry, only in the political conditions in which it was applied. The principal Trotskyist text on the subject was Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay, which Trotsky wrote towards the end of his life. Trotsky argued that under late capitalism, trade union leaders tended to draw towards the state.¹ The closer they approached the state, the less democratic they became. Instability of trade union leaders mirrored that of the capitalist state itself. At its Founding Congress, the Fourth International had adopted a Transitional Programme which argued that even minor and partial demands could not be conceded, that to achieve them required a struggle against the system itself. Trotsky observed that union leaders worked closely with popular front governments in France and Spain and thought that they were in Britain, (especially in foreign policy), 'obedient agents of the Conservative Party'.² If trade unions did not surrender their independence the 'labour aristocrats' at their head would be driven away and the job done by fascists.³ This thesis was developed by the R.S.L. and WIL in the

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- 1 'By transforming the trade unions into organs of the state, fascism invents nothing new; it merely draws to their ultimate conclusion the tendencies inherent in imperialism', (L. Trotsky, Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay, (1966), 6).
- 2 But the Founding Congress sternly opposed 'sectarian attempts to build or preserve small 'revolutionary' unions, as a second edition of the party, (which) signify in actuality the renouncing of the struggle for the leadership of the working class', (The Transitional Programme, Documents, 186).
- 3 *ibid.*, 11. For the positive side of trade union collaboration with government, see A. Marwick, Britain in the Century of Total War, (1968) especially 288.

years before 1940.¹ That year itself brought abundant empirical confirmation with the formation of coalition government and the appointment of Ernest Bevin to the Ministry of Labour.² In his wake, 'the higher trades unionists became ultimately wedded to the present system', and began to feel their fate was bound up with it.³ With electoral opposition removed, pressure increased on those prepared to maintain traditional conflict-based industrial relations for the duration. If it was true that unions tended to fuse with the state, then strikes were strikes against the state. By 1941 all strikes were, technically, illegal,⁴ though this was for a time of little importance in view of the infrequency with which they occurred.⁵ Britain's national resources were conscripted without great difficulty and at an accelerating rate from the summer of that year.⁶

- 1 Of minor unofficial industrial disputes before the war Grant wrote that the bourgeoisie 'issued a warning to the Union bureaucracy that unless they restored control, unless they could keep their men in check, then they would have to resort to other methods', ('Our Tasks in the Coming Revolution', WIN, (Jan. 1944), 10).
- 2 Trotsky had commented that 'labour aristocrats', who were taken on by governments to sell an unpopular policy invariably occupied the posts of Labour and the Interior. Herbert Morrison was appointed Home Secretary when Labour joined the Government.
- 3 Mass Observation, People in Production, (1942), 251.
- 4 In July 1941 Bevin introduced the Conditions of Employment and National Arbitration Order, No. 1305. Order 1305 set up a National Arbitration Tribunal whose awards were enforceable by law. It prohibited strikes and lockouts unless reported to the minister and not referred for settlement within twenty one days. In fact there were 109 prosecutions of workers under the Order in wartime as against two of employers. One of the effects was to deepen the pre-war trend towards official strikes, (E. Wigham, Strikes and the Government, 1893-1974, (1976), 93).
- 5 E. Wigham (op. cit., 74) points out that official national disputes were absent for nearly thirty years after the General Strike. While small unofficial strikes were, as Grant had noted, rising in number during the 1930s, the number of days lost thereby did not rise.
- 6 At 32,000, the number of compulsory orders issued between July 1941 and June 1942 was more than ten times as many as had been issued since war began, (A. Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, Vol. 2, Minister of Labour 1940-1945 (1967), 141). This represented a major revision of views by Bevin who had, earlier, argued that compulsion would cut output, (ibid., 45-6).

WIL flatly opposed compulsory methods in industry,¹ but there was a limited market in the middle of war for such complaints. More common than resentment was a belief that civil measures necessary for effective prosecution of the war ought to be universally and fairly applied.² Yet the desire to win the war did not entail the suspension of class attitudes on the shop floor.³ These persisted and from 1941 could not find a traditional outlet. With the official trade union machinery enmeshed in the Ministry of Labour apparatus, and the communists hostile to interruptions in production from June 1941, opportunity beckoned to the WIL. It had some success in autumn 1941. During a dispute at the Nottingham R.O.F. factory, a consultative committee emerged on which WIL gained influence through a leading steward, Jack Pemberton, and through which it was able to make itself

- 1 'Industrial conscription must be ruthlessly fought because it is a measure directed against the working class as a whole, a measure to lower men's wages by the introduction of cheap labour, to eliminate labour competition which forces up wages, a measure to utilise the badly organised state of women to smash down the standard of present working conditions', Youth for Socialism (April 1941).
- 2 The conscription of women, for example, against which Youth for Socialism had written and which might have been an emotive issue, provoked no outburst, (A. Calder, op. cit., 309).
- 3 The urge to beat the temporary enemy, the Axis, and the urge to beat the traditional enemy (the employer), mingle and muddle. When the situation looks as if we are bound to beat the Axis anyway - an idea the Government have for long inspired - the impulse to have a round with the traditional enemy creeps up. When things look bad, this impulse goes down again. But when things are more than normally bad, it goes down so far it comes out at the bottom. It is a barometer of the urgency of effort in war industry. (Mass Observation, People in Production, (1942), 246.) In fact 1940 was the only year of the war when the number of days lost through strikes fell below one million and the number of men involved in them fell below 300,000, (A. Calder, op. cit., 299).

known elsewhere in the Group.¹ WIL also made progress in the London engineering industry, notably at De Havillands and Napiers in North West London.² Their chance brought some of its members together with Trotskyist veterans and I.L.P.ers, now trying themselves to establish a trade union presence. Trotskyism and the I.L.P. found themselves allies against the C.P.G.B. at local and national events.³ Trotskyism made no early headway among shop stewards at the national level⁴ but it started to make its mark at local shop stewards' conferences.⁵

- 1 When the consultative committee was formed during the dispute, WIL supported its absorption into the A.E.U. machinery, perhaps foreseeing a chance to carry influence into the union. The Dalmuir (Glasgow) Works was the only factory in the R.O.F. Group that WIL controlled. It convinced leading communist stewards like Alex Reoch who were prepared to debate with it. (Interview with R. Tearse, Nov. 1973.) The WIL executive heard on 22 April 1942 of strike action at the Nottingham R.O.F. against compulsory transfers.
- 2 There was a Napiers' steward in the Battersea I.L.P. branch which included Wicks, Dewar, and their supporters. In the factory a fierce battle was fought between supporters of the communists' engineering paper, The New Propeller and followers of the newly launched I.L.P. journal The Shop Steward. The I.L.P. and Trotskyists had some success in 1942 in keeping the credentials of one A.E.U. steward who opposed communist policy. At De Havillands, Bill Hunter, who remained an I.L.P. member till 1945 (when he represented Chiswick at the party's annual conference) was at work. George Weston, the veteran Trotskyist was factory convenor. Directed there were Alf Loughton, a bricklayer and 1930s associate of the Marxist League, and Roy Tearse (q.v.). Gerry Healy worked at the nearby Park Royal works.
- 3 The I.L.P. used this wartime opportunity to make its most serious drive into the factories. Wicks and Dewar joined the party's industrial committee which brought out a small printed journal The Shop Steward, (Interview with H. Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979). In 1942 the I.L.P. appointed Walter Padley to head its industrial drive.
- 4 Trotskyists and others who opposed the C.P.G.B. line made a limited intervention at a production conference convened by the Shop Stewards Council on 19 October 1941, but their main motion was disbarred from discussion, (Militant Nov. 1941).
- 5 In October 1941 fifty De Havilland stewards passed a second front resolution but appended to it calls for trade union officers to accompany the B.E.F. and for a joint Cabinet-aircraft shop stewards conference, (ibid.). This eclectic resolution illustrated the sea-saw balance of power in the factory.

Trotskyism also worked through the I.L.P. in the pits of Scotland and Cumberland, and here it was R.S.L. members rather than those of the WIL who gained the benefit.¹

After June 1941 the C.P.G.B. added its shrill voice to official advice against stoppages. Its view was that winning the war and helping Russia were objectives which overrode other principles.² Increasingly it smeared those who were prepared to support strikes as witting or unwitting friends of Hitler. The party was vulnerable to those like the I.L.P. and the Trotskyists who sought to displace it, though its policy was not the simply class collaborationism that they liked to believe.³ Once the pressure of a threatening war situation

1 In Scotland, Hugh Brannan, a young member of the R.S.L.'s Left Fraction, campaigned against the Essential Work Order. Tom Stephenson, a leading Cumberland miner, who was an I.L.P.er but not a Trotskyist, campaigned with him against Bevin's measures for industry. Their views can be followed in The New Leader, passim. See also P.J. Thwaites, op. cit., 136-7. Trotskyism and the I.L.P. also overlapped in the Welsh mines, through Bob Condon, who wrote for The New Leader and joined the Revolutionary Communist Party at the end of the war.

2 The Communist Party has been in the forefront of the fight to combat these shortcomings, to overcome every obstacle - whether of craft prejudice, trade union sectionalism or conservatism, suspicion of and opposition to necessary changes, such as the widest introduction of women in industry, or a narrow view of the workers' interests, or slackness - which stands in the way of maximum production. The decisive question for the increase of war production is the question of labour productivity, which depends above all on the effort, initiative and cooperation of every worker. (C.P.G.B., An Urgent Memorandum on Production, (1942), 6.)

A local pamphlet called for speed ups and an end to absenteeism at Corby steelworks, as well as an increase in output of at least 15%, (Corby For Victory!, [Corby 1942?]).

3 The C.P.G.B. argued that democracy at work and high output went hand in hand. Unions ought not to cooperate to the extent of handing employers an advantage over the community. Unions had to defend the standards of transferees to make this option an attractive one. A 1942 policy resolution of the party urged greater power to workshop organisations, periodic election of officials, election of district officers by the membership, annual policy conferences of the unions and the withdrawal of the 'Black' Circular (C.P.G.B., Trade Union Policy in the War against Fascism (1942)). The Circular was in fact withdrawn by the T.U.C.'s Southport Congress in 1943.

was lifted, non-political workers were liable to voice what might seem like Trotskyist views.¹ The wartime conjuncture led the C.P.G.B. to mount more attacks on the Trotskyists than ever before, while the imputation of links with Hitler was now more damaging than ever:

'Remember that the Trotskyists are no longer part of the working class movement'.²

It is doubtful if Trotskyists had any great impact on the wartime flow of production; this was not, in any case, their intention. Communist attacks may have been motivated, not by the threat to output, but by unease at possible erosion of their industrial base.

1 WARNING

Many workers, trade unionists and Labour Party members, unthinkingly express views which sound Trotskyist. Don't confuse these honest but muddled opinions with genuine Trotskyism.

The real Trotskyist is a bitter enemy of Stalin, and the other trusted leaders of the Soviet Union. That's his fingerprint, whatever else he may say. And that's how you can spot him. As for the people who are genuinely confused, your job is to explain. Explain. Explain. Get them to read this booklet. If they haven't time, explain what is in it to them. (W. Wainwright, Clear Out Hitler's Agents!, (1942), 15.)

D.Childs, (loc.cit., 248) suggests communist influence was not important in fomenting strikes before 1941 or preventing them later. D.N. Pritt claimed however that 'left to themselves, many workers of no strong political consciousness would have struck from time to time against the innumerable irritations to which they were exposed, but the communists in the factories were able to make clear the importance of keeping up the flow of vital production for war purposes' (From Right to Left, (1965), 307).

- 2 W. Wainwright, op. cit. The pamphlet goes on to advise that the Trotskyist be exposed and turned out, and finally treated 'as you would an open Nazi'.

Though the charges of links with Nazism were absurd, they might yet have stuck. had it not been for spiralling industrial discontent from 1942 onwards. The charge should have been lethal, but WIL replied with gusto, recalling the contortions of communist policy in recent years. It claimed that the C.P.G.B. had rebounded from advocating peace in Hitler's interests to demanding war in Churchill's.¹ As to the charge of hostility to the Soviet Union, it was argued by Trotskyists that the most secure ally for Russia would be a Britain in the hands of the workers.² Nor did Trotskyists of any British faction advocate any kind of sabotage.³

- 1 E. Grant, The Communist Party and the War : Look at their record! (1942). Grant made no concessions to the 1939-41 phase of C.P.G.B. policy, arguing that its call for a negotiated peace with Hitler stultified any possibility of it building a mass movement in the factories.
- 2 All Trotskyist papers referred to the need to defend the U.S.S.R. This was a constant theme and quite unmistakable in all their propaganda. Nor was the slogan in any way dependent on Britain being transformed from a capitalist country into a socialist one.
- 3 Even the Left Fraction, whose views might be said to have led in that direction did not advocate it. J.R. Campbell, in Trotskyist Saboteurs (1943) showed awareness of James Burnham's split from the Fourth International. Yet Trotsky himself, disputing with Burnham, had written that in all countries, regardless of alliances, workers must develop the class struggle, though they might use sabotage to help the U.S.S.R.

If England and France tomorrow menace Leningrad or Moscow, the British and French workers should take the most decisive measures in order to hinder the sending of soldiers and military supplies. If Hitler finds himself constrained by the logic of the situation to send Stalin military supplies, the German workers on the contrary, would have no reason in this concrete case to strikes or sabotage. Nobody, I hope, will propose any other solution, ('Again and once more on the Nature of the U.S.S.R.', in In Defence of Marxism (1966), 36-7).

WIL by 1942 was a small but solid organisation. It had established a definite national framework, more independent of London than any of its predecessors.¹ It now found itself the target of attacks in Tory papers which played their part in making WIL's lively paper, Socialist Appeal well known. This paper established itself in 1942 as the main Trotskyist vehicle,² helped chiefly by being the badge of WIL's energetic intervention in industry which was now being organised by the Tyneside engineer Roy Tearse.³ Industrial developments during the year made WIL more and more optimistic. The communist drive for Joint Production Committees would fail.⁴ Opportunities within the factories were 'unlimited' as frustrations with traditional trade union machinery would lead to new factory, regional and national committees.⁵ It was the confinement of strikes to localities which, with communist influence, had prevented 'a

- 1 Lawrence told the R.S.L. at the start of 1942 that WIL had sixty London members, twenty three Glasgow members, (E.C. Minutes, 5 Jan. 1942, Har. P.). A WIL levy circular of 1942 gives eighteen branches: Kilburn, Shepherds Bush, Southall, East End, South, Edmonton, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Motherwell, Nottingham, Birmingham, Coventry Liverpool and Birkenhead, Burnley, Wolverhampton, Leeds, Northampton and Slough.
- 2 Lawrence informed the R.S.L. that sales were 10,000 monthly. This may be high, but Haston had convinced the paper controllers that WIN and Youth for Socialism had vast pre-war circulations and until 1943 they were not constrained by paper shortages, (Interview with J. Haston, 13 July 1973).
- 3 Roy Tearse (1919-) had, as a young I.L.P. member in Newcastle, organised peace meetings in the first year of the war. As a skilled engineer he moved to De Havillands in 1941 to test aero engines. Before he left the factory he rose to the presidency of Edgware 3, a new branch of the A.E.U. He had met R.S.L. members while in the Tyneside I.L.P., but it was the active WIL which he joined, while still a party member, in London, (Interview with R. Tearse, 28 Nov. 1973).
- 4 Joint Production Committees began when Jack Tanner, now A.E.U. president, persuaded a reluctant Engineering Employers Federation that they would be the best collaborative device to raise industrial output. The engineers' example spread to shipyards and engineering, (A. Bullock, op. cit., 945).
- 5 Preparing for Power, WIN (September 1942), 24.

general strike on the Clydeside, at least (sic.) among the ship-building workers'.¹

Something of a breakthrough was provided for WIL in early 1942 when it convened a meeting, over forty strong, of members and sympathisers involved in industrial work. The WIL executive was informed of interventions at R.O.F. factories in Enfield and Nottingham,² among miners in the North-East³ and Liverpool dockers.⁴ WIL played no part in the Betteshanger dispute, where Kent miners successfully defied the law.⁵ But it did approach striking Yorkshire miners in the summer of 1942. There was widespread discontent

- 1 *ibid.*, 24. T. Dan Smith, not yet a Trotskyist, gave full coverage in The New Leader to a successful Tyneside shipyard strike in early 1942 where the men had stayed out in defiance of a personal appeal by Harry Pollitt for a return to work.
- 2 See the broadsheet Socialist Appeal policy for the R.O.F.s, (16 June 1942), designed for an Enfield meeting on workers' control of production, (H.P., D.J.H. 14e/14).
- 3 The Industrial Organiser [Tearse?] found that a pro-communist mood among miners coexisted with 'hostility to the Stalinist strike-breaking'. WIL was well received in several pits and it was reported that a Socialist Appeal committee had replaced the lodge committee at Blackhall. ([WIL] E.C. Report, 22 April 1942, H.P., D.J.H. 14B/11/1.)
- 4 Recruitment of dockers had allowed the launch of a Dockers Bulletin ([WIL] C.C., 20 June 1942, H.P.).
- 5 Betteshanger was a strong confirmation for WIL's perspectives of increased industrial militancy and power, 'the first really important victory to be won by the workers since the outbreak of war', (Socialist Appeal, (Aug. 1942)). See also A. Bullock, *op. cit.*, 267-8. This important strike, whose consequences revealed the shift of power towards Labour is not mentioned by R.P. Arnot in his standard The Miners in Crisis and War (1961).

among them¹ and when WIL members were noticed at the pits they were denounced by Yorkshire Miners Association leaders and the national press.² WIL produced a typically ebullient reply which promised a £5 reward for those who could find truth in the accusations against them!³ It also felt justified in taking the more serious step of establishing an industrial committee, which in 1942 began to publish a periodical Industrial News.⁴

- 1 The mines were dilapidated even in 1939 and Labour would not propose nationalisation under the terms of the moratorium on controversial issues. Younger men had been conscripted into the forces and in early 1941 there was a 'sharp fall' in total production and output per man and wages were comparatively low. There had been therefore an inadequate response to Bevin's call for former miners to return to the pits, so he applied the Essential Work Order to the industry in May 1941. He registered all who had worked in the pits at any time and it was now that the committee was established which would propose the Bevin Boys scheme. Nevertheless, 160,000 Yorkshire miners struck in May and June 1942.
- 2 'Propaganda in the Coalfields' (Morning Post, 15 July 1942) included an interview with Haston and Grant. Joseph Hall, Y.M.A. president had charged that young men were being paid £10 a week to tramp the Yorkshire coalfields with Socialist Appeal. See also the Daily Express and the Daily Telegraph for the same date.
- 3 Socialist Appeal : an open letter to the Yorkshire Miners' Association, 18 July 1942, H.P., D.J.H. 14E/20. See also What Socialist Appeal said. The Minister of Home Security questioned in the House of Commons, (April 1942, H.P., D.J.H. 14e/13), an earlier WIL broadsheet. A second open letter appeared in Socialist Appeal for January 1943.
- 4 See Industrial News, [3?], Aug. 1942, (H.P., D.J.H. 14F/1). This publication may have replaced another entitled Workshop News, (A. Penn, op. cit., 61).

There were even minor exchanges in the House of Commons that summer about the impact of WIL literature in industry,¹ but they revealed great confidence among ministers that the Trotskyists could do little harm.²

* * * * *

By late 1942 WIL had concluded that an alternative organising centre for trade unionists in struggle was needed. It approached the I.L.P. and the Anarchists with a view to arranging united action on the industrial field.³ Similar desires had been voiced for some time by the I.L.P. itself⁴ and WIL and the I.L.P. already had joint activities underway.⁵ In February 1943 a Militant Miners Group was established to link up workers in the pits,⁶ and that

- 1 When questioned in the House by a Tory M.P., Morrison showed great scepticism about Joseph Hall's claims; he also reminded William Gallacher M.P., another questioner, that 'this organisation is only pursuing the same political policy as he and his own political friends did before the Soviet Union was attacked', (H.C. Debs Vol. 381, Cols. 1330-1, 16 July 1942).
- 2 Morrison resisted further calls for suppression and disputed the more exotic claims for WIL size and influence. He also went so far as to taunt Gallacher with the suggestion that the C.P.G.B. had inspired some of the alarmist stories in the Conservative press, (H.C. Debs, Vol. 381, Cols. 1493, 1515-16, 21 July 1942).
- 3 G. Healy, 'Industrial Militants Need a Programme', Socialist Appeal (Jan. 1943).
- 4 The New Leader passim. Padley had offered its pages to industrial workers seeking to coordinate their struggles, and a number of rank and file workers had taken the opportunity to call for a new organisation to do the job undertaken by the National Council of Shop Stewards to June 1941.
- 5 Hunter, Don McGregor and Tearse had shared an I.L.P. platform in Tooting, and Grant had debated with Padley on apparently equal terms elsewhere.
- 6 The Glasgow Militant gave way in February 1943 to Militant Scottish Miner, also from Glasgow, and sustained monthly publication until December. In January 1944 it was succeeded by the irregular publication The Militant Miner. Militant Scottish Miner with The New Leader was used by Hugh Brannan of the Lanarkshire coalfield to campaign for reform. Brannan stood for the presidency of the Lanarkshire miners in 1943 against an upholder of the wartime industrial truce. His poll of 7,792 was only 1,400 below that of his opponent.

same month in London a committee for Co-ordination of Militant Trade Union Activity was formed by members of a variety of unions.¹ Meetings with I.L.P. and Trotskyist speakers were set on foot and I.L.P. interest in trade union work grew.² In Scotland the name Clyde Workers Committee was appropriated by a new body on 15 May 1943, which was led by expelled communists, some of whom had been recruited to WIL.³ They were also motivated by the need to coordinate industrial militants and they convened a meeting in Glasgow on 5/6 June 1943 to which all bodies with similar aims were invited.

There was a danger that a new coordinating body might remain suspended in mid-air: there had so far been few spontaneous attempts to by-pass established industrial organisations, and the protagonists here were all politically motivated. Yet a definite vacuum existed,

- 1 Members of the A.E.U., T.G.W.U., E.T.U., N.S.P., N.U.R., A.S.W., A.U.B.T.W., A.E.S.D., and others attended and Don McGregor of Wood Green I.L.P. was made secretary (The New Leader, 20 Feb. 1943).
- 2 On 21 February militant trade unionists heard Tearse, McGregor, Bidwell, Jock Milligan (a Trotskyist builder) and Healy speak in London. The New Leader was giving a regular and growing space to industrial policy and the I.L.P.'s 1943 conference voted to oppose industrial collaboration, build a militant shop stewards movement and strive for industrial unionism; it stopped short of making Padley's position full-time, however, (The New Leader, 1 May 1943).
- 3 They were led by Bob McCrory and Alex Reoch. The committee drew up a seven point programme on which to campaign and resolved to try to embrace all industries in its work. McCrory, Reoch and ten others broke with the C.P.G.B. about this time, and nine of them joined WIL. Reoch was a shipyard worker recruited through paper sales, in which the Glasgow local of WIL excelled. McCrory and the others were expelled from the C.P.G.B. for association with the R.O.F. consultative committee in defiance of party instructions. WIL claimed that Glasgow area communist shop stewards were equally split between Stalinists and Trotskyists. (Interview with A. Finkel (Keen), July 1974; 'A Letter from England', Fourth International, (N.Y.), June 1943, 190.)

and the meeting of June 5/6 decided to establish a National Confederation of Workers Committees on a programme which endorsed the aims of the Clyde Workers Committee.¹ This left it with vague intentions which possibly reflected the polyglot composition of the meeting. WIL, represented there by Jack Haston, was unhappy that perspectives had not been clarified and anxious that this should be put right soon.² But the I.L.P. had its own definite programme, drawn up by its Industrial Committee,³ although it could in industry sound

1 The statement of the N.C.W.C. read:

Realising the necessity of a National Organisation in defence of the workers' interests, this delegate conference representing organised workers from London, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Barrow, the Midlands, Yorkshire and Glasgow, declares that we basically agree with the understated seven points of the "Clyde Workers Committee".

1. Co-ordination of all militant T.U. activity.
2. Annulment of all anti Working Class legislation.
3. Every shop a closed shop.
4. Workers control of transfers.
5. (a) Higher standard of life for all workers.
(b) Better standard of wages and allowances for all workers in the Armed Forces.
6. Confederation of all Workers Committees (Nat.)
7. Workers' control of Industry.

We call on all workers to rally to the fight.
(Socialist Appeal, Mid-June 1943.)

2 Haston's concern centred on the belief of the I.L.P. industrial committee that coordination should be confined to engineering and allied trades. This, he declared, would repeat 'all the worst blunders that were committed by the industrial movement at the end of the last war', (Socialist Appeal (Mid-June 1943)). The WIL leaders were very aware of the 1914-18 precedent. Their keynote document, Preparing for Power, had borrowed that title from J.T. Murphy's account of the movement and engineering stewards in the First War. WIL declared 'the conquest of power is the axis of our propaganda'; Murphy had written 'it is significant that in all these discussions the central question of the CONQUEST OF POLITICAL POWER by the working class was entirely overlooked' (Preparing for Power (1972), 159).

3 '1. Maintain Trade Union practices.
2. Restore right of works assembly and literature distribution.
3. Shop Stewards control of deferments, transfers and dismissals.
4. Equal pay for the job.
5. Independent T.U.'s and Shop Stewards - NOT whips for the bosses.
6. For Workers Control of Production.'
(I.L.P. Industrial Committee, Renew the Wage Demand, (1942), 1.)

very much like the Trotskyists themselves at times.¹ WIL's own industrial policy was far more detailed, based on trade union control of the circumstances produced by war, for example by shop steward control of transfers of labour,² but it put chief importance on the search by workers for a broader form of organisation which could coordinate struggles.³ In early November 1943 the Coordinating Committee took the name of the Militant Workers Federation. Before that Roy Tearse was appointed as its organiser. A more definite programme was outlined and local presences developed.⁴ In the internal contest within the M.W.F., WIL achieved an ascendancy over the I.L.P.⁵ From WIL's point of view the Federation was, of course, a source of contacts which it milked with some success. The M.W.F.'s best chance was to displace the National Council of Shop Stewards as

- 1 "But", you may say, "we don't want pious sentiments; we want planes and guns and production for Russia now!" Reflect a moment. Are you getting this from capitalism? How is capitalism running its war? You may think you can use capitalism but capitalism is using you, and I say that the only true friend of the Soviet Union is the International Working Class (J. McNair, Make Britain Socialist Now (1942), 12-13.) The I.L.P. also denounced communists as 'strike-breakers', (T. Taylor, Defend Socialism from the Communists (1942), 3). In 1942, the WIL, perhaps swayed by its own perspectives, was recording that the I.L.P. was 'beginning to penetrate the fringes of the trade union movement' (P. Thwaites, 'The Independent Labour Party, 1938-50', 134).
- 2 See Appendix E.
- 3 'A New Stage in History', (draft resolution of WIL central committee to 1943 conference), WIN, (Sept. 1943), 8.
- 4 Trade union independence, union democracy, 100% trade unionism, workers' control, and the confiscation of war profits were in the programme, (The New Leader, 6 Nov. 1943). The London Group was more definite still raising such demands as soldiers representation on Trades Councils, (P. Thwaites, op. cit., 137).
- 5 Socialist Appeal, in its industrial coverage, refers occasionally to Anarchist influences, and WIL would occasionally debate with Anarchists, but their importance seems to have been slight.

a focus for militant discontent. It was not a body of conscious revolutionaries however: many of its supporters were unpolitical factory activists looking for support outside their locality.

Despite this, two seductive assumptions - that peace would bring a slump, and that the M.W.F. would benefit from rising militancy - were commonly made.¹

The timing of the M.W.F. could not be faulted. Industry was more troubled from autumn 1943 to D-Day than it had been for many years. At Vickers' Barrow shipyard, discontent had been festering since 1942 over a pay award, and in September 1943 a strike by 9000 workers shut down the entire yard for eighteen days. Government guidelines may have inhibited a settlement, and state intervention remained a possibility throughout the dispute. Bevin rumbled from the platform but did not act.² The Barrow district committee of the A.E.U. was affiliated to the Militant Workers Federation, but the union's leaders, and notably Tanner, were staunch upholders of Bevin's no strike policy. When the district committee, after initial hesitations, endorsed the strike and tried to organise support, it was suspended by head office.³ In the yard there were communist members

- 1 Within the R.S.L., the Left Fraction strongly disputed that the M.W.F. could become a mass force and maintained its view after the R.C.P. was formed in March 1944. The Trotskyists, it argued, should work within the national shop stewards movement until expelled. Only then would a separate movement be justified, 'A Policy for Industry', (submitted to the 1944 Fusion Conference, March 1944, H.P., D.J.H. 14C/m).
- 2 For this he was criticised in The Times and elsewhere. His key speech at Farnworth on 2 October 1943, where he spoke of the 'anti-war people' without specifying that he intended Trotskyists, is discussed by A. Bullock, op. cit., 269. Nevertheless he took the Barrow dispute and troubles on the Clydeside Shipyards and Rolls-Royce (Glasgow) seriously enough to have them investigated by M.I.5. His informants told him communists and Trotskyists only found an echo where grievances already existed, (E. Wigham, op. cit., 92).
- 3 Tanner sent officials to the district committee early in the strike to plead for opposition to it. They were rebuffed and three weeks later the suspension took place.

of the union, two of whom were members of the strike committee. For their opposition they were expelled and The Daily Worker ran strong criticism of the strike committee.¹ Socialist Appeal and The New Leader gave strong support to the dispute however, and the M.W.F. spread news of it, developed contacts and raised cash.² Most tangibly the strike committee worked with Tearnse and he spent most of the dispute in Barrow. It is little wonder that The Daily Worker correspondent saw Barrow as 'the cockpit of Trotskyist agitation'.³

1 These communists, (according to Socialist Appeal) distributed leaflets in opposition to the strike. Jack Owen, The Daily Worker's correspondent, was hostile to the strike throughout. He suggested that the strikers could have campaigned for an inquiry as an alternative to industrial action. When they stayed out after a tribunal had called for such an inquiry, he blamed the strike committee, (The Daily Worker, 27, 29 Sept., and 1 Oct. 1943.). The Times pondered all this with some bewilderment:

.... but it has to be recorded to the credit of the strike committee that it has endeavoured to keep all politics out of the dispute and make it purely industrial. Only yesterday it expelled two members from the strike committee for alleged political activities. At the same time there has been a somewhat Gilbertian situation in the town. Communist meetings have been held and communist literature circulated in an endeavour to persuade the strikers to return to work. (The Times, 30 Sept. 1943.)

Common Wealth also had a member in the yard. Acland and Loverseed, leaders of C.W., visited the yard and offered sympathy but argued for restraint. (A. Calder, 'The Common Wealth Party, 1942-5', University of Sussex Ph.D. thesis, 2, (1969), 24).

- 2 The M.W.F. and WIL were well received because the strikers were glad of any support in the face of such an imposing array of enemies. One strike leader claimed that Socialist Appeal alone had put their case, (Socialist Appeal, Oct. 1943). In fact The New Leader also explained the dispute sympathetically and savaged the communists with some gusto. It had the advantage over Socialist Appeal of being weekly: see the articles by Padley in the issues for 25 September and 2 October 1943, the second of which contains a strong attack on the C.P.G.B.
- 3 The C.P.G.B. was embarrassed by the role it felt compelled to play in industry and irritated that it received no gratitude from Bevin. On 27 September 1943, J.R. Campbell charged WIL with seeking a national anti-war engineering strike (The Daily Worker, 27 Sept. 1943) and the accusation was extended to embrace the I.L.P. also when the A.E.U. Huddersfield district committee resigned in solidarity with the suspension of its Barrow counterpart. When Bevin coupled his denunciation of the Trotskyists with gibes against the C.P.G.B., in a speech delivered at Farnworth, The Daily Worker for 4 October
- Continued with footnotes on following page.

The strikers showed great determination and defied a tribunal to achieve a substantial victory.

Barrow had been a great success for WIL, though it recognised that its commitment to the strikers' cause, rather than its political programme, had won it support. There were strong grounds for optimistic generalisation: only later did it become clear that the Barrow strike had been the only successful major dispute of the war. But WIL at the time wrote of 'a sharp discontent and radicalisation transforming the outlook of the British working class'.¹ The movement had passed beyond local disputes and was steering towards national developments of an increasingly political character, it charged. Yet optimism was tempered with caution: disgruntlement had not yet hardened into a struggle to change the leadership; the M.W.F. might be engulfed by strike before it solidified.² Yet WIL and the M.W.F. had basked in

3 Continued from previous page.

lamented his inability to distinguish between the friends and foes of fascism. After the strike was concluded, William Rust, the paper's editor, was sufficiently stung by further attacks from Bevin to address the Minister in an open letter. 'The handling of the Barrow strike has not been an easy job for The Daily Worker', he wrote, 'I have had many headaches over it'. Communist loyalty to the truce was remarkable. It was, apparently, without blemish in industry and ruptured electorally only once, when the party supported the successful candidature of the independent socialist Charlie White against an effete pro-Government candidate in West Derbyshire in 1944.

1 In its immediate aftermath Haston noted the solidarity of women with the Barrow strikers, their friendly relations with the local police and mayor and a sympathetic feeling among soldiers and sailors on leave. But he warned that 'there is a growing awareness that if the workers do not gain concessions for themselves now, when they have the employers where they want them, they will not be able to gain concessions after the war'. (Socialist Appeal, Oct. 1943).

2 'Tasks of the Industrial Militants' (a resolution adopted by the 1943 conference of WIL), WIN, (Oct. - Nov. 1943), 6-9. WIL could take some satisfaction from the confirmation of its forecast that factory committees would be built by militants forced to by-pass the quasi-official shop stewards structure.

national publicity and with increasing confidence approached leading convenors and stewards. Tearse moved to Glasgow at the end of 1943 and met a friendly response from militants on the Clyde.¹ WIL with some I.L.P. members was beginning to assemble a fraction in the building trade that was to gain great influence after the war,² and there were hopeful signs of inter-factional coordination by Trotskyists in engineering.³

WIL itself had every reason to look back on 1943 with considerable satisfaction. It had established a national identity and gained vital experience. In March of that year Socialist Appeal had started to publish a mid-monthly supplement - in effect it became a fortnightly paper. Its income was enough to sustain a high level of publicity:⁴ Socialist Appeal leaflets supplemented its interventions in all major disputes.⁵ It had eclipsed the R.S.L. and was moving

- 1 Tearse was now a WIL professional and still M.W.F. national secretary. A number of convenors, who were not Trotskyists, were prepared to sell Socialist Appeal, raise money and even ask advice of WIL. (Interview with R. Tearse, Nov. 1973). Yet WIL made no really large gains in membership despite attention it paid to Albion Motor Works, Singers, John Browns and other Clydeside factories, (H. McShane and J. Smith, op. cit., 236).
- 2 The M.W.F. line was to oppose Payment By Results in building and civil engineering, (J. Milligan, Payment by Results, [1943], H.P., D.J.H. 10/1).
- 3 South London A.E.U. members who were in the S.W.G., WIL and dissidents in the R.S.L. met to concert action on 14 March [1943].
- 4 Income for 1943 was £2654, a sum which included Millie Lee's income of £350 and £781 from sales of Socialist Appeal (The Trotskyist Movement in Great Britain, Cabinet Paper W.P. (44), 202, 13 April 1944).
- 5 See Cortonwood Supplement, (Jan. 1943) and Barrow Workers fight for living wage (Sept. 1943), H.P., D.J.H. 14E/21 and 23. The circulation of WIL's publications in 1943 were 8-10,000 for Socialist Appeal and 2,000 for WIN.

towards a fusion of British Trotskyists which it would dominate. WIL considered it of some significance that its enemies saw it as the chief representative of Trotskyism: this seemed to apply right and left.¹ This achievement had been made possible by a unique wartime political conjuncture of which it was only one beneficiary. Its cheerful willingness to break the tacit industrial truce was a parallel with the disruption of the electoral truce by the I.L.P. and Common Wealth.²

1 The Economic League drew similar parallels between the German Workers' Challenge radio station and articles in Socialist Appeal. It saw Trotskyism as undermining faith in the government by suggesting there was an Anglo-American conspiracy against the Soviets, (Notes and Comments, 9 July 1943). This conflicted with the communist view that Trotskyism sought to undermine Russia, and yet J. Mahon (Hitler's Agents Exposed, 1943) wrote 'so Hitler needs something more than a radio station. This is where the Trotskyists take up the work'. Mahon charged that Trotskyism and the radio station had identical views on the war and both called for a general strike. In fact Socialist Appeal did not once call for a general strike throughout the war. But WIL thought Mahon's pamphlet the first attempt by the C.P.G.B. to deal with the programme of Trotskyism, ('A Letter from England', Fourth International, (June 1943), 190), though that did not stop him dubbing Trotskyism 'a special detachment of fascism', alleging that they were consciously playing Hitler's game and asking 'sooner or later we shall have to deal with them: why not now?'. Mahon also achieved a remarkable exegesis of Socialist Appeal:

'There are somewhere about 22,000 words in each issue. In November one sentence of 24 words might be construed into a criticism of Hitler. The remaining 21,976 words were attacks on Hitler's enemies', (op. cit., 16).

2 Electoral contests were the *raison d'être* of Common Wealth: when the truce ended, it died. Its story is thoroughly told in A. Calder, 'The Common Wealth Party, 1942-1945', 2 Vols. (University of Sussex Ph.D. thesis, 1967). The remarkable sequence of wartime results is discussed in P. Addison, 'By-Elections of the Second World War', in C. Cook and J. Ramsden, op. cit., 165-90. It is remarkable that D.L. Prynne in 'Common Wealth - a British Third Party of the 1940s', (J.C.H., Vol. 7, no. 1-2, (1972)), apparently had not read Calder.

Of course, C.W. supported the war - a fact differently interpreted by Trotskyism and communism.¹ The I.L.P.'s platform was a pacifist one but it came close during the war to winning seats in England for the last time in its life. WIL, the smallest of the three and the least known, also recognised the opportunity and gained support, not necessarily for its programme, but for its cheerful willingness to break the consensus. WIL recognised the possibilities early on, and its success in 1943 and 1944 arose from confidently following its own forecasts of industrial unrest and a social shift towards radicalism.² It forecast the turn of dissident parties to the Labour Party³ and that

- 1 The C.P.G.B. construed the rise of Common Wealth as a crack in national unity and the appearance of a potential fascist ally. It was forced to withdraw a hostile pamphlet, R.P. Arnot's What Is Common Wealth? (1943), which stated this thesis. WIL drew encouragement from the adoption of a common ownership platform by J.B. Priestley, (who was a precursor of C.W.), and Sir Richard Acland, (WIL, Reply to the Political Statement, 2). The flavour of C.W.'s appeal, which had something in common with that of the Militant Socialist International in the less favourable environment of the 1930s can be derived from Acland's belief early in the war that 'only under common ownership can we abolish class distinction, unemployment, inequality and strife. Only under common ownership can we free ourselves from the system which positively encourages every man to seek his own personal advantage here on this earth.' (Unser Kampf, (1940), 94).
- 2 This was the substance of WIL's rejection of the R.S.L. argument. In 1942 it forecast 'more and more the workers will tend to break the bonds with which the Labour leaders have tied them to the fortunes of capital and advance on the road to independent action', (Preparing for Power, (Sept. 1942), 22-3). The next summer it noted 'within the ranks of the armed forces, among wide strata of the middle classes, a growing clash, a growing ferment and a process of radicalisation has been taking place', (Reply of WIL to the R.S.L. criticism of Preparing for Power, 7 June 1943, H.P., D.J.H. 14B/15, 15).
- 3 WIL supported C.P.G.B. affiliation to the Labour Party on the grounds that the communists were not revolutionary and therefore not entitled to a separate existence, (Amendment to Stalinist Resolutions Proposing Affiliations To The Labour Party, [1943?], H.P., D.J.H. 4/13, 2). It preferred that the I.L.P. should also join and believed this would sift both Labour and the I.L.P. between reformists and revolutionaries.

that party would be the main beneficiary of social discontent.¹ From its position outside the Labour Party WIL maintained a fraction within, in anticipation of a re-entry it never entirely ruled out.²

* * * * *

WIL reached a pinnacle of industrial influence and national publicity in 1944. Its opportunity arose because this was the worst year for strikes since 1932.³ The months before D-Day saw simultaneous movements in engineering and the coalfields, Britain's first wartime experience of such a conjuncture.⁴ There was a link between the two in the form of Bevin's programme for boosting manpower in the pits. But when Trotskyists became involved in the resisting this there seemed to be plenty of grounds for conspiracy theory.

- 1 Although independent, WIL always advanced the slogans, 'End the Truce' and 'Labour to Power', ('A New Stage in History', WIN Sept. 1943, 7). But it believed the moment of Labour coming to power would be the moment of 'its period of decline, of splitting and breaking up', (E. Grant, 'Our Tasks in the Coming Revolution', WIN, (Jan. 1944), 11).
- 2 WIL noted 36 divisions calling for a break in the coalition on the 1943 Labour Party Conference agenda. It claimed that there were two which put its own position, ('A Letter from England', Fourth International, (New York), June 1943, 190). Although WIL sent no one into Common Wealth, there were ex-Trotskyists within its ranks, (A. Calder, 'The Common Wealth Party', Vol. 1, 193 and Vol. 2, 150-1).
- 3 2,194 strikes took place during 1944, (E. Wigham, op. cit., 92).
- 4 The coalfields were generally quiet during the 1914-18 war, though massive unrest occurred in the first years of peace. But in January - March 1944 850,000 days were lost in South Wales, and elsewhere, in strikes against a tribunal award. In March and April more than one million days were lost in strikes over the home coal allowance. Coal mining was responsible for more than two-thirds of the 3,714,000 days lost in the year, (ibid., 92). In these circumstances the inverse ratio noted by Mass Observation, between military crisis and industrial unrest broke down. R.P. Arnot, The Miners in Crisis and War, (1951) traces the accumulation of discontent in the pits but not the effect of dissident political opinion.

Measures to ensure voluntary topping up of the mines workforce proved insufficient,¹ and when the ballot scheme was introduced² it encountered more resistance than any other measure of industrial conscription. The 'Bevin Boys' were young but their names entered the ballot only when they reached national service age. One in ten was selected by ballot to work in the pits and no less than 40% of them appealed.³ There was political encouragement for those who sought to resist,⁴ but the decisive factor in making this a national issue was the decision of engineering apprentices on the Tyne to organise collective resistance. A Tyneside Apprentices Guild founded in the second week of December 1943 gathered 15,000 members despite official union discouragement. Its purpose was to fight the ballot scheme as applied to shipyard apprentices.⁵

Local WIL leaders were in contact with the apprentices from an early stage and established a rapport with the more political among them.⁶ But the apprentices were able themselves to organise and spread

- 1 Bevin had registered all ex-miners, but only a quarter of them, (about 100,000) were fit and willing to return to the mines.
- 2 A Ministry committee advanced the idea of the ballot scheme in 1942 and Bevin introduced it in December 1943.
- 3 Five hundred Bevin Boys were actually imprisoned for refusing to do pit work, (A. Bullock, op. cit., 260).
- 4 As early as 29 May 1943 Tom Stephenson of the Cumberland area of the M.F.G.B. had asked New Leader readers if the coercion of young surface miners underground should be permitted, and on 31 July - 1 August the National Administrative Council of the I.L.P. opposed conscription of sixteen year olds to the mines.
- 5 Anti-Labour Laws Victims Defence Campaign Circular, 5 May 1944, (Warwick M.S.S.).
- 6 In January 1944 Bill Davy, a lapsed Y.C.L. member and leader of the apprentices, visited London with another apprentice. There he met Haston and Tearse.

an impressive strike movement. They were very far from being the Trotskyist tools of popular legend, though in a friendless world they had to find allies where they could. They were willing to listen to advice but did not always to take it, particularly when it was cautious.¹ The strike itself was caused by discontent at the apprentices' inability to prevent conscription to the pits entering the shipyards.² March, the first month of the strike, was relatively quiet in publicity, though it was the month when the Trotskyists with splendid timing fused to form the Revolutionary Communist Party! April was different as Tory papers vied with The Daily Worker in a hunt for the 'hidden hand' of Trotskyism behind the apprentices movement.³ It was

- 1 Their January 1944 statement 'We refuse to carry the burden imposed on the industry by the lust for profit and inefficiency of the coal owners. Since they are directly responsible for the coal crisis, it is against them that compulsion must be directed' may have been influenced by the Trotskyists. And yet the Guild officials resolved on 7 February 1944, having heard Tearse's advice, to break off relations with the M.W.F. (J.B. Stuart, 'A Brief Report on England', Fourth International, (June 1944), 170). The Trotskyists were to be accused of fomenting a strike but Tearse's advice had been to explore first all legal channels, enter the unions, and send a deputation to London.
- 2 In February 1944 an apprentice was actually conscripted. On 10-11 February a deputation of apprentices from six centres visited Bevin in London but he refused to see them. They then gave three weeks notice of a strike to begin on 7 March and in the absence of any word from Whitehall came out a week early on 28 February 1944. There were 6,000 strikers on the Tyne, 5,000 on the Clyde and 1,000 in Huddersfield.
- 3 The Daily Worker reported on 4 April 1944 that a Tyneside apprentice had 'exposed the Trotskyists', that Davy, Tearse and Haston had met and that wild rumours about the ballot were circulating in Newcastle. The next day the paper added to its plea for an end to the strike, a call for miners, currently on strike against the Porter award, also to return to work. After the apprentices called their strike off The Daily Worker for 10 April ran J.R. Campbell's pamphlet These Trotskyist Saboteurs as an article. Frustration boiled over when the B.B.C. reported R.P.C. activities without explaining the difference between the parties. All of this was a kind of tribute, (R. Black, Stalinism in Britain, (1970), 171).

the Labour Left and the I.L.P. who scorned the idea that Trotskyists could lead the apprentices by the nose.¹ Government concern at the unrest among miners led the Lord President's Committee of the War Cabinet to discuss subversive influences on 5 April 1944 and what powers of prosecution were available to stem them. Memoranda drawn up following this meeting show the Home Secretary and Minister for Home Security was sceptical.² Gwilym Lloyd George, the Minister of Fuel and Power was more alarmist. He had noted the attacks made by Socialist Appeal and Militant Scottish Miner on trade union leaders.³ The T.U.C. gave public expression to its concern the day the Lord President's Committee met.⁴ A second meeting of the Committee concluded that some legislative action should be taken.⁵

- 1 For the reactions of M.P.s, see below. The New Leader was sympathetic to the apprentices and on 8 April ridiculed the notion that 'one or two "mystery men" could impose their will upon 26,000 intelligent young workers'.
- 2 'There is little evidence before me to show that their activities have resulted in the starting of a strike or contributed to any material extent in prolonging a strike.' (Memorandum by the Home Secretary, Use of Regulation 18B against fomenters of strikes, 12 April 1944, Cabinet Papers, CAB71/16, LP (44) 67, 1.)
- 3 'My task would, I think, be made easier by the imposition of a check on inflammatory propaganda, which, although it may not cause strikes, engenders feeling hostile to the Government, the coal-owners and the trade union leaders alike, and encourages the prolongation of strikes once they have begun.' (Memorandum by the Minister of Fuel and Power, Distribution of Subversive Propaganda in the Coalfields, 13 April 1944, Cabinet Papers, CAB71/16, LP (44) 68, 2)
- 4 Ebby Edwards, T.U.C. Chairman, and Sir Walter Citrine, T.U.C. Secretary, issued a statement about 'persons and organisations who have been active in fomenting disturbances', (The Times, 6 April 1944).
- 5 The Lord President's Committee met to discuss subversion for a second time on 14 April 1944. For its conclusion, see CAB71/15. The Legislation Committee approved a draft regulation, to be published as 1A(a), on 17 April 1944.

Meanwhile the Government decided to charge four R.C.P. leaders with conspiracy and acts in furtherance of a strike in contravention of existing legislation: the Trades Disputes Act (1927).¹ This was a step of gross political insensitivity,² which added spice to the reaction. By an extraordinary conjuncture the I.L.P. annual conference was meeting in Newcastle, the storm centre, on the weekend of the arrests. James Maxton M.P. supported by John McGovern M.P., proposed an emergency motion to the conference denouncing the prosecutions as a frame up, a diversion from incompetent control of the mines and a product of communist influence,³

- 1 On 5 April 1944, the Harrow Road premises of the R.C.P. were raided by the Special Branch, who took away copies of the Socialist Appeal's latest issue. Simultaneously, there was a raid on the home of Ann Keen and Heaton Lee in Newcastle and documents relating to the strike were confiscated. There were other raids in Nottingham and Glasgow, (The Times, 6 April 1944). On the next day Heaton Lee and Ann Keen were arrested. They appeared on a conspiracy charge on 8 April and were remanded until 26 April (The Times 10 April). In the early hours of 11 April Roy Tearse was arrested in Glasgow and charged with the same offence (The Times 12 April). Haston had been sent by the party central committee to organise affairs in the North-East. He had travelled on from there to Edinburgh but, on learning that the police were also seeking him, he gave himself up (Interviews with J. Haston, E. Grant, July, Jan. 1973). These dates were contradicted by A.L.L.V.D.C., op. cit.
- 2 The Trades Disputes Act was regarded by the labour movement as Tory revenge for the General Strike. The Labour Party was pledged to repeal it. Lee, Keen, Tearse and Haston were the first people to be charged under its provisions and a mighty propaganda lever was thereby handed to the R.C.P. It is remarkable that Sir Alan Bullock did not comment in his biography of Bevin on the paradox of a Labour Minister of Labour being the only one in whose term of office there was a prosecution under this Act, yet wrote that Bevin sought repeal of the Act, (op. cit., 244).
- 3 In his peroration, Maxton declared:

I say this to Ernest Bevin and to the Prime Minister. If they really believe that the I.L.P. and the Trotskyists are associating together in a plot to stir up industrial trouble, don't let them go after the boys. I am the Parliamentary leader of the I.L.P. Let them haul me into the Courts and, if I get there before any judge who is fair-minded, the verdict will be "not guilty".

(The New Leader, 15 April 1944)

and conference unanimously condemned the arrests and in camera hearings of Newcastle Crown Court. The I.L.P. reaction was an important factor in spreading protest against the prosecutions, while the R.C.P. noted that an act aimed against the trade union movement was being used against Trotskyism.

'This attack is a complete vindication of our whole perspective. It is a positive demonstration that we are in the van of the Labour movement; that the next period is ours.'¹

After nearly five years of war, the sort of state action pre-war Trotskyism had foreseen came about. The R.C.P. took the arrests as a signal to canvass vigorously for support.² When the War Cabinet came to discuss the industrial influence of Trotskyism it was surprisingly well-informed.³ Advice given to the Cabinet leant against

1 R.C.P. Circular, Following the Arrests, 12 April 1944, n.p. H.P.

2 This had been the intention behind the despatch of Haston to the North. There seems to have been no dissent from the party leaders' decision to meet the challenge head-on, though E.L. Davis ceased his activities around this time.

3 The War Cabinet met on 19 April 1944 and took note of a four page memorandum by Morrison, concise and largely accurate, with which an appendix, giving personal details of seven R.C.P. leaders, was printed. Morrison coolly analysed the situation which had permitted increasing R.C.P. activity and influence and concluded:

These advantages are temporary and, unless the Trotskyists can exploit them much more rapidly than at present, it seems unlikely that they will ever rise to a greater position than that of sparring partners to the communists, who would very much like to see the Trotskyists and their small paper suppressed.

(Memorandum by the Home Secretary, The Trotskyist Movement in Great Britain, 13 April 1944, Cabinet Papers, CAB66/49, folios 7-9A, W.P. (44) 202, 4.) See Appendix H.

attributing great importance to Trotskyism,¹ but on 17 April Bevin outflanked his earlier critics by introducing in the House of Commons an addition to the Defence Regulations, Order in Council 1A(a).

1A(a) gave the government powers, additional to those it already possessed, to act on disputes in essential industries by imposing a fine of £500 or a prison sentence of up to five years. Bevin had taken new powers without exhausting the old,² and he had done it by extra-Parliamentary consultation rather than by vote.³ He had travelled some way in the decade since his proud declaration to the Labour conference:

'I do not like emergency powers, even when they are operated by my friends'.⁴

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- 1 Morrison knew that WIL sent speakers to locations of industrial strife, 'but hitherto their influence has been almost negligible'. He argued against the use of 18B since it would be difficult to employ it against Trotskyists without also clobbering local strike leaders not opposed to the war. If a miner were to be the subject of an action under 18B, he argued, a widespread strike might result. Morrison was not complacent but felt the great majority of people had no desire to hinder prosecution of the war, (Use of Regulation 18B against fomenters of strikes, 3).
 - 2 In addition to the Trades Disputes Act there was available Order 1305, (introduced by Bevin in 1941), which banned strikes and lock-outs and bound parties to disputes to accept the rulings of arbitration courts.
 - 3 It emerged in the Commons debate of 28 April 1944 that Bevin had secured the prior approval of 1A(a) of the General Council of the T.U.C. as well as that of employers' representatives. Will Lawther, the M.F.G.B. president had insisted in a speech that the Trotskyists be taken seriously and called for 1A(a), (Tribune, 14 April 1944).
 - 4 This was a riposte to the legalistic revolutionary proposals of the Socialist League, (L.P.C.R. 1933, 161).

The strong government line in April may have been a compound of anxiety to placate loyal T.U.C. leaders who felt threatened,¹ pre-D-Day nerves, and sensitivity to the situation in the pits, currently wracked with discontent.² Bevin's own case for the arrests was that he was faced with acts in furtherance of strikes, i.e. political acts.³ The R.C.P. struggled to evaluate what his measures meant: there might be no more, there might be further arrests, or there might be outright suppression.⁴ Whatever happened maximum open activity must be maintained, its members were told.⁵ This was the only sensible conclusion open to the Trotskyist movement, now offered the opportunity to escape from years of obscurity and isolation:

'Far from going underground the capitalist class have put us on the map, and we must seize this favourable opportunity to conduct the widest possible forms of propaganda and recruiting'.⁶

- 1 Psychologically Bevin himself would have to be numbered among them. Some in the press had attributed his bitterness at Farnworth to injured pride at a loss of influence with the unions, (A. Bullock, op. cit., 269-70).
- 2 M. Foot, (Aneurin Bevan, 1, (1966), 386-8), traces Bevin's public statements of concern against the mining background.
- 3 Strikers had been arrested on a number of occasions earlier in the war, and nearly 2,000 of them had been convicted on various charges. The April arrests were unique, however, in covering those not on strike but assisting one.
- 4 These three possibilities were discussed at a central committee of 16/17 April 1944.
- 5 The Central Committee took a number of decisions: to prepare a second line leadership, to appoint a special committee of three to review problems on a day by day basis, and to conduct the forthcoming trial politically, despite the risk of heavier sentences. They had a lawyer, Ajit Roy, (an Indian Trotskyist), available, but they resolved to hire a barrister for the trial 'and check his background for Stalinist sympathies', (C.C. Report, 19 April 1944, H.P., D.J.H. 15A/21, 1).
- 6 *ibid.*, 2.

On 24 April 1944, a provisional defence committee was formed in London¹ with a remit to provide legal aid for those arrested and others who might be, to support them and their dependants, and to pick out the class character of the measures. Two days later the committee was strengthened with the addition of a number of M.P.s and others who had been associated with Trotskyism.² After it gained further adherents the defence committee renamed itself the Anti-Labour Laws Victims Defence Committee,³ and held its inaugural meeting on 9 May with Reg. Groves in the chair. An enthusiastic campaign was pushed into all corners of the country, usually by means of public meetings where prominent politicians were balanced with an R.C.P. member:

On the Defence Committee, the British Trotskyists, for the first time, have a platform together with the established left reformist and centrist leaders of the Labour Movement. This fact has the effect of positively integrating Trotskyism as part of the Labour Movement in the eyes of the advanced workers.⁴

- 1 Initial members of the committee were Brockway, G. Pittock-Buss, Padley, Bob Turner, M. Kavanagh of the Freedom Association, Grant, and McGregor. V. Sastry of the Federation of Indian Associations was made provisional secretary.
- 2 Sydney Silverman, Rhys Davies, McGovern, R. Blake and Sorenson were M.P.s who joined. Maxton was made chairman and W.G. Cove M.P. treasurer. John McNair, Dick Beech, Arthur Ballard and D. Ballantine were added as well. At a meeting in the House of Commons, only George Harney M.P. declined to join his fellow members on the committee, (A.L.L.V.D.C., Circular, 5 May 1944, Warwick M.S.S). John McNair mistakes the dates of Maxton's interest and that of the I.L.P. as 1943, (James Maxton, the beloved rebel, (1955), 324).
- 3 Early in May 1944, the most obvious gap in personnel was put right by the adherence of Aneurin Bevan. [A.L.L.V.D.C.] The Facts of the Case [June? 1944] reports that two more M.P.s, Alex Sloan and S.O. Davies, also joined.
- 4 [R.C.P.] Political Bureau, Political Letter, 24 May 1944, 1. The R.C.P. discovered however that while I.L.P. M.P.s were wholeheartedly committed to the campaign, the more orthodox Labour M.P.s were more uneasy at association with Trotskyists. The R.C.P. believed that whereas Maxton always addressed a meeting if he could Aneurin Bevan, for example, was less determined. All local groups of the
Continued with footnotes on following page.

The R.C.P. spoke of a 'limited united front', though invitations by Sastry to the Labour and Communist Parties to join the Committee were unsurprisingly rejected. No communists took part, and all Labour M.P.s acted in a personal capacity. As for the trade unions, a limited success was scored through support gained from local branches¹ though there was strong national opposition to 1A(a).² Given a new opportunity the R.C.P. reorientated itself to speak to a larger audience and called on its members to adopt a more positive attitude towards the Labour left.³ Yet however flexible the R.C.P. might be, there could never be a bridge between its aims in the campaign and those of M.P.s. They could not be expected to justify the party's political beliefs and were motivated either by a desire to defend the accused or to fight the attack on trade union rights.

4 Continued from previous page.

A.L.L.V.D.C. were established on R.C.P. initiative, ([R.C.P.] Political Bureau, Perspective of the Party Work on the A.L.L.V.D.C., (Sept. 1944), 1).

1 Resolutions against the arrests were passed by Southall N.U.R., Trades Council and G.M.W.U.,; from Paddington N.U.R.; Newcastle Trades Council; Slough E.T.U. and Trades Council; Edmonton Trades Council; Camberwell National Society of Painters; Newark A.S.L.E.F.; A.E.U. branches in Mitcham, Thornton Heath and the Glasgow district committee, [A.L.L.V.D.C.], The Facts of the Case, early June? 1944. This list indicates that it required a Trotskyist presence to mount a trade union campaign in a locality.

2 See below.

3 [Some workers] 'are openly hostile to the right wing of the Labour and Trade Union movement. But to destroy their illusions in the "lefts" it is not sufficient that we denounce Bevan as we have done in the past. It is necessary to be explanatory; to go through their experiences with them, calling on Bevan to match his words and gestures with deeds' (Political Letter issued by the Political Bureau, (24 May 1944), H.P.; D.J.H. 12/3).

The Order came before the House of Commons on 28 April. Bevan moved a prayer that it be annulled and thus initiated the only occasion when the House debated the impact of Trotskyism.¹ Bevan ridiculed the suggestion that miners were brought out on strike by Trotskyists² and accused Bevin of whipping up a scare in order to achieve easy passage of the Order. He defended the rights of the House and railed against imprisonment without trial.³ Kirkwood, Bevan's seconder, followed him in scorn for the idea that Trotskyists could cause stoppages, and defended strikes as safety valves of society.⁴ No supporters of the government took the floor and John McGovern and Sir Richard Acland had the chance to follow the main argument of the critics.⁵ D.N. Pritt also spoke, and in the course of

- 1 There had been minor exchanges about WIL, inter alia, on 16 and 21 July 1942, at the time of earlier miners' strikes, (see above).
- 2 'Are we seriously asked to believe that these solid Yorkshire miners came out on strike because of a number of evilly-disposed Trotskyists?' (H.C. Debs, Vol. 399, Col. 1065, 28 April 1944).
- 3 Holding the Trotskyists without trial and hearing their case in camera was, he charged, 'disgraceful, and shows the extent to which public morale had degenerated under the leadership we have at the present time'. (H.C. Debs, Vol. 399, Col. 1068, 28 April 1944). Perhaps the strongest outcry over Bevan's biting speech was stimulated by his attacks on what he claimed was an unrepresentative T.U.C. For this and the debate, see M. Foot, op. cit., 390-402.
- 4 Kirkwood focussed on Bevin's refusal to meet the apprentices and told that when he had been warned there would be a strike Bevin had retorted, 'we are ready for them'. 'The Minister of Labour', Kirkwood declared, 'is a man who has lost his soul', (H.C. Debs, Vol. 399, Col. 1076, 28 April 1944).
- 5 McGovern followed the R.C.P. argument that repression would establish it, not because of its policy but because of the heroism of some of its members, (ibid., Cols. 1086-92). Acland, amused by the way Pritt and Bevin played up the importance of Trotskyism, told the House the party had 500 members, total weekly expenses of £10 and a fortnightly press circulation of 5,000. 'This', he taunted, 'is the size of the organisation which, it is suggested, can bring 130,000 miners out on strike', (ibid. 1092).

a remarkable contribution argued that Bevin should not have brought in a new Order when he already had adequate statutory powers.¹

Neil MacLean put perhaps the most pertinent question to the Minister: if there were so many instigators of unrest, why had the House heard only of four arrests and not hundreds?² But logic and oratorical skills were impotent against a well-drilled government majority, and the annulment fell with only twenty three votes behind it.³ Outside parliament as well as inside there was a disposition to ridicule the government's action by the labour movement⁴ though not by the communists.⁵ Supporters of the Order justified it by the claim that

1 Is it really suggested that the whole machinery of the law is powerless? The whole law as it stands at present is not strong enough to deal with this Trotskyist instigation, say the Government. As I have said, I do not minimise this Trotskyist instigation; I think it is serious, and I think it has grown up partly because of the persistent refusal of the Home Secretary to do anything about it. The Home Secretary has two fiddles to play: Mr. E. Bevin: The hon. and learned member wants 18B?

Mr. Pritt: Not only 18B but also 2D.

The Government, instead of supplying paper for Socialist Appeal, should stop the paper itself.

(H.C. Debs, Vol. 399, Col. 1107, 28 April 1944.)

Bevin told Pritt that he had considered introducing Order 1A(a) earlier in the war for use against the C.P.G.B., but had been forestalled when it ceased to believe that the war was imperialist. 'The Trotskyists', he ruminated, 'were the "wee frees" who did not accept that'. Pritt, in his autobiography, made no reference to the case.

2 *ibid.*, Cols. 1138-9.

3 All I.L.P. and C.W. members voted for the annulment. The noes totalled 314, which suggests that a bare majority of M.P.s were present to vote on this prime parliamentary occasion.

4 See P.L.E.B., 'A Socialist's War Diary', The Plebs, (May 1944), 65; R.S.W. Pollard, 'Strikes and 1AA', The Plebs (Aug. 1944), 98; D.G. MacRae, 'Organised Labour in War Time', Fabian Quarterly, (Jan. 1945), 74.

5 The Daily Worker line on 1A(a) evolved during April 1944 and by 27 April it was reporting widespread opposition. Unlike other labour movement papers, however, it supported government action under existing powers:

'For example, the Socialist Appeal could have been closed down under Regulation 2D and all matter published by the Trotskyists could have been stopped under Regulation 2C. There is also Regulation 18B, under which a number of

the Minister's present powers made it impossible for him to act against deliberate provocation.¹ The R.C.P. leaders understood this attack and adjusted to meet it.² The four R.C.P. members were detained in Newcastle from the time of their arrest in early April until the hearing at Newcastle on 18-22 May,³ when they were given bail. The court heard solicitors for the prosecution and the defence and also testimony from Bill Davy and other apprentices. Dr. Charlesworth, for the prosecution, disclaimed any intention to try the accused for their political opinions but still quoted from the apprentices' literature,⁴ yet his account of Trotskyist assistance seemed to concede

5 Continued from previous page.

Fascists, blood-brothers of the Trotskyists, are still held in detention.'

('Government already has power to deal with Trotskyists', The Daily Worker, 13 April 1944.)

WIL had protested against suppression of The Daily Worker: see Lift the Daily Worker ban, [1941?], H.P., D.J.H. 14E/6. Socialist Appeal was at last beginning to suffer paper difficulties. In 1943 it appeared for a time on narrower sheets than hitherto. The Cabinet in its 1944 discussion noted the paper's lack of difficulty with newsprint supply, (The Trotskyist Movement in Great Britain, 2).

- 1 The Times, 19 April 1944.
- 2 To the R.C.P. it seemed clear that 1A(a) was intended to prevent those activities which were the raison d'etre of the M.W.F.: the coordination of policy, action and finance, and the exchange of information. Carrying on as before would be 'the worst sort of adventurism'. The central committee therefore switched the direction of the M.W.F. to activity through the trade union machinery and presented the change to the membership as a retreat in good order, (Political Letter issued by the Political Bureau, (24 May 1944), 4, H.P., D.J.H. 12/3).
- 3 They had been remanded again on 28 April, the day of the Commons debate. The proceedings were held in camera, a fact referred to in the debate by Bevan.
- 4 Charlesworth presented to the Court three pamphlets, Appeal from the Tyneside Apprentices to the whole Organised Working Class, Apprentices fight the Pit Compulsion Ballot, and Appeal from the Tyneside Apprentices to the Miners. He argued that the apprentices' advocacy of resistance to the ballot and mines nationalisation was introduced from outside and suggested the leaflets were composed by Lee with Davy's assistance at Lee's Newcastle house, (Socialist Appeal, June 1944).

part of the defence's case.¹ Rutledge, for the defence, stuck closely to his brief and the witnesses - with one exception - backed him in blaming Bevin for the strike.² This was a dress-rehearsal for the trial itself, held at Newcastle Crown Court on 13 June before Judge Cassels.³ The R.C.P. defendants had to face two charges under the Trades Disputes Act and had engaged Derek Curtis-Bennett K.C. to appear on their behalf.⁴ Davy was again put in the box as were other apprentices, and their evidence was to force acquittal on the conspiracy charge.⁵ The defendants used their chance to the full to

1 After he had explained the sub-committees established to run the strike, Charlesworth continued,

'Without them to develop such a scheme, it is very doubtful if the movement among the apprentices would have remained more than a budding movement, or that any strike at all would have occurred, or if it had occurred, would have assumed even such proportions as it did assume.'
(Socialist Appeal, June 1944.)

2 Davy testified that he had only met Lee and Keen late in December 1943, and declared 'there would have been a strike if I had never met any of the accused'. The apprentices had already concluded that nationalisation of the mines would render conscription unnecessary, the provenance of which political idea was an important feature of the prosecution case. The exception was the Blyth apprentice Donnachie, the informant of The Daily Worker. Yet while Donnachie's evidence differed from that of the other seven apprentices called to the box, he was not opposed to a strike against the scheme, but to making mines nationalisation the issue on which they would come out, (ibid.).

3 There is no transcript of this trial, although shorthand writers attended. Socialist Appeal reported verbatim many speeches and exchanges and gave a generally full coverage. The Times published brief reports on each day's proceedings with few quotations. This account rests on the two papers' reports. Socialist Appeal claimed that the capitalist press was deliberately playing the trial down in its issue for June 1944.

4 Curtis-Bennett was to prove unsatisfactory through his failure to cooperate with the party aim of treating the trial politically. The party also concluded that he did not even put forward the legal arguments as well as the defendants themselves might have done, (Statement to Members from the Political Bureau, (22 June 1944) H.P., D.J.H 12/4, 1). He was not dismissed because it was felt that this would cause 'a sensation throughout the country'.

5 See footnotes on following page.

explain their general interest in working class problems, not just in strikes. Heaton Lee argued that a conspiracy was impossible.

Roy Tearse explained that the M.W.F. had a policy of coordinating struggles. Lee added that Davy had not been a Trotskyist at the time of the strike, only becoming convinced later. Haston's advice to the apprentices, as told to the Court, was skilful but at times ingenuous.¹ The defence case concluded with the appearance of Tom Trewartha, chairman of the Barrow Strike Committee, who corroborated Tearse's presentation of M.W.F. activity,² and the summoning of Ernest Bevin himself, who testified about the application of the ballot scheme to

5 From previous page.

Paley Scott, the prosecuting counsel, warned the jury before Davy went into the witness box that he was a reluctant witness. Davy was emphatic as to the role of the accused:

'Our object was to prevent apprentices being conscripted for the mines at any price. That was our view without the intervention of the four accused. None of the defendants ever addressed any public meeting advocating a strike. None of the four even advocated a strike privately.' (Socialist Appeal, July 1944)

In April, Morrison had written of the R.C.P., 'the party's slogan is not "Strike!", but "Break the coalition : Labour to power"', (The Trotskyist Movement in Great Britain, 3).

- 1 Haston told that he had advised against lobbying M.P.s until the apprentices realised how ineffective it would be. Once they saw through such activities they should undertake them for propaganda gains. Haston also told the Court that he had urged the apprentices to declare that they would observe the ballot if the mines were nationalised, but his advice was rejected in both cases, (Socialist Appeal, July 1944).
- 2 Trewartha appeared for the defence by unanimous decision of his district committee of the A.E.U., (Interview with R. Tearse, Nov. 1973). Trewartha compared Tearse's role on the Tyne with that he had played at Barrow, an important parallel, for the prosecution had projected him as the apprentices' eminence grise. Socialist Appeal commented on the improbability of this since Tearse, at twenty-five years of age, was only three years older than some of the apprentices. Trewartha, it transpired, had been approached by the police some weeks earlier, to testify for the prosecution, (ibid.).

the apprentices.¹ Judge Cassels summed up for more than three hours and, in a passage which was to draw the attention of the Court of Criminal Appeal, virtually directed the jury to bring in a guilty verdict on the charge that the accused had acted in furtherance of an illegal strike.² This they did, but acquitted all four on the various conspiracy charges.³ Cassels sentenced Lee and Tearse to twelve months apiece, Haston to six and directed that Ann Keen be released at once.⁴ Inconsistencies were to be picked out by the Court of Appeal and must be traceable in part to this being a unique prosecution

- 1 Bevin denied that his conversation with Kirkwood had ever taken place: he had not known the apprentices were waiting on him but would not, in any case, have received them. He claimed his job was to meet with official bodies only, whereas the T.A.G. was unofficial. While he had once given exemption from the scheme to the Tyneside lads, changing circumstances of war meant that he had to withdraw it. Millie Lee reported he was 'shaking like a leaf' while in the box, (Socialist Appeal, July 1944). His appearance there was a singular omission from Lord Bullock's biography.
- 2 'It is not necessary that the act in furtherance of an illegal strike should be during the actual time of the strike; it may be an act which could reasonably be regarded, upon the evidence, as an act in preparation for the strike and that the strike was an illegal one, (The Times Law Reports, Vol. 171, 11 Nov. 1944, 288-9).
- 3 Socialist Appeal for July 1944 damned the jury as middle class types with not one worker among them.
- 4 There was little evidence against Keen, amounting chiefly to the charge that she had typed out a letter and pamphlet under Lee's and Davy's direction. She was sentenced to thirteen days, which she had of course already served. Though Haston received a shorter sentence, he had not of course been active on Tyneside. Ebullient to the end, Haston told the judge he hoped to serve his class as well as he (the judge) had served his, (Socialist Appeal, July 1944).

under the 1927 Act.¹ Cassels' interpretation of the 'in furtherance' formula had established a precedent which might have wide application.² Under the circumstances it is remarkable that the National Council of Civil Liberties took no serious interest in the case.³

Wide potential application of the 'in furtherance' provision of the 1927 Act, under Cassels' precedent, boosted the A.L.L.V.D.C.'s activities. Old Trotskyists rallied round⁴ and meetings were held around the country to demand the release of the incarcerated

1 The word illegal effectively meant political under the Act, and the apprentices' action qualified by being aimed at coal industry nationalisation.

2 This may have been an extra thrust behind eventual removal. Yet it is surely misleading to project the 1946 repeal by Labour as a linear development and to shake out the contradictions in Bevin's role:

As things turned out the unions had to wait for another fifteen years by which time not only did they have a Labour Government with a majority large enough to make easy the fulfillment of the party's programme, but they had as its most powerful member a man who had been at the centre of the General Strike, Ernest Bevin.

(D.F. MacDonald, The State and the Trade Unions (1960), 109-110.)

3 H. Pelling, (Britain and the Second World War (1970), 316) alleges that the Council simply did not take up the case of those of whose politics it disapproved. The R.C.P. was convinced the N.C.C.L. was under communist influence. Ewart A. Prince, 'Civil Liberty in Great Britain', (University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1950) makes no mention of the case. The Anarchists were another non-communist group to experience N.C.C.L. indifference, (G. Woodcock, The Crystal Spirit, (1970), 20-3). After the appeal R.C.P. members were urged to keep local committees in being and work for 'a real Labour Defence organisation'.

4 Sara made himself available as speaker (H. Pratt, (acting secretary, A.L.L.V.D.C.) to Sara; H. Sara to Pratt, 17 June 1944, (Warwick M.S.S.)). Groves chaired meetings in Birmingham and South-West London.

three.¹ An important trade union campaign built up over 1A(a) and a powerful challenge was posed to T.U.C. endorsement.² The 1927 Act was a symbol and it had been used against the R.C.P. Order 1A(a) was an unspecific threat. Yet 1A(a) was never used and even the apprentices were not charged.³ The decision to act against the Trotskyists was certainly not motivated by wild government misjudgment

- 1 Ann Keen was much in demand as the only one of the accused at liberty. She and Millie Lee were offered space from which to run the campaign at the I.L.P. head office, when the R.C.P. centre at Harrow Road was menaced by flying bombs (interview with Ann Finkel (Keen), July 1974). At a 6 August 1944 meeting, chaired by Dick Beech, Ernest Silverman, one of the speakers, told of how he had warned Haston that an appeal might double his sentence and that Haston had replied this did not matter if trade union rights were asserted, (The New Leader, 12 Aug. 1944).
- 2 N.U.D.A.W. at its annual conference demanded the withdrawal of 1A(a) after hearing its acting general secretary Alfred Burrows ridicule the idea that the Trotskyists might be responsible for the apprentices' movement. The Scottish T.U.C. and S.W.M.F. added their condemnation of 1A(a). In the autumn, the Trades Union Congress accepted an invitation to approve of 1A(a) and the conduct of the General Council at the time of its introduction by 3,686,000 to 2,802,000. One surprising convert to opposition, in view of his wartime record, was A.E.U. president Jack Tanner.
- 3 At the May hearing, Bill Davy had told of three consecutive days interrogation he had undergone at Wallsend Police Station. It was suggested to him at the time that he could go to prison, but nothing came of it.

of R.C.P. strength.¹ Among the communists there was considerably more concern.² Lee, Tearse and Haston remained in Durham Jail for two and a half months. On 24 August 1944 Judge Wrottesley of the Court of Criminal Appeal ruled that their acts could not have been in furtherance of a strike since they had preceded it.³ They were set at liberty but had been removed from activity for a crucial phase of the war. Cassels' controversial ruling still stood however.⁴

* * * * *

1 Morrison knew the exact London membership, (though he exaggerated the national figure). He could make a shrewd evaluation of the R.S.L., 'stultified by internal strife' and devastatingly predicted that the R.C.P. under present leadership was unlikely to submit to dictatorship from the Fourth International. He had seen the 1943 accounts of WIL, and could make a subtle comparison of the communists and the Trotskyists. The strongest probability is that there was an informant within WIL who, by providing documents and knowledgeable opinions, gave Morrison the data from which to draw his perspicacious conclusion:

'These advantages are temporary and, unless the Trotskyists can exploit them much more rapidly than at present, it seems unlikely that they will ever rise to a greater position than that of sparring partners to the communists, who would very much like to see the Trotskyists and their small paper suppressed.' (The Trotskyist Movement in Great Britain, 1.) This memorandum is produced in full as Appendix H.

- 2 In the wake of the trial, the C.P.G.B. brought out the last of its wartime attacks on the Trotskyists, J.R. Campbell's Trotskyist Saboteurs (1944). Campbell's pamphlet was full of knockabout stuff: all Grant knew of the British working class movement might have been picked up 'on back veldt'; Haston's contribution to the workers' cause in Edinburgh might be written on the back of a 1d stamp; Roy Tearse was a third rate inefficient shop steward. Yet there was some nervousness in Campbell's deployment of a quote from 'a working woman' who had heard the R.C.P. defence: 'what kind of communists are these? They are even against Stalin'. Campbell's plea for publicity to bring the Trotskyists into the light of day did not compel conviction. At the end of the war, the C.P.G.B. called for removal of the 1927 Act and 1A(a) from the statute book, (Britain for the People, [1945], 17).
- 3 Key guidance for the Appeal Court came from a House of Lords ruling that a strike could only be furthered during its course, Conway v. Wade, 1909. Cassels had ignored this in a three hour summing up. But this ruling was inconsistent with acquittal of the four on the conspiracy charge so Wrottesley upheld the Appeal. (The Weekly Notes, 14 Oct. 1944, 200; The Law Times, 11 Nov. 1944, 287-9). The Daily Worker, which had not closely followed the trial did not report the successful Appeal.
- 4 A.L.L.V.D.C., A Victory for Labour! (1944).

The International was euphoric about R.C.P. success during the apprentices' dispute.¹ The R.C.P. itself was more balanced yet optimistic between the Trial and the Appeal.² After the Appeal there was a period of victory rallies.³ But the Defence Committee had been the party's main field of work for some months⁴ and with the successful Appeal this phase of activity came to an end. The M.W.F., which had since the arrests operated with restraint, did not take off, and in the end the anticipated wave of industrial unrest failed to materialise. The arrests and the introduction of 1A(a) played their part in straining relations both within the Labour Party and the T.U.C. however. They contributed to bringing nearer that moment when there would be a rupture in the wartime coalition: that fact in itself meant a change, as Morrison foresaw, in the circumstances which had

- 1 J.B. Stuart's belief that the Welsh miners had 'seen through Bevan and the communists' was quite mad, ('A Brief Report on England', Fourth International, June 1944, 168).
- 2 The fact that they were found not guilty on the conspiracy and incitement charges is a victory for us, particularly in the light of the vicious press campaign directly or indirectly accusing the comrades of instigating and inciting the Tyne Apprentices and other strikes. It completely vindicates our contention that we do not incite or conspire to bring workers out on strike as the capitalist press and the Labour and Stalinist leaders were charging, but that the workers come out on strike only when they have a genuine and legitimate grievance. (Statement to Members from the Political Bureau, 22 June 1944, 1).
- 3 A large rally was held in Glasgow with some communist stewards on the platform, (interview with R. Tearse, Nov. 1973). The R.C.P. could also consider its decision to rely as much as possible on legal and open activity vindicated.
- 4 Socialist Appeal claimed that soldiers abroad were following the case and quoted a headline from an Eighth Army paper, 'Right to Strike is one of the freedoms we are fighting for'.

allowed the Trotskyists to gain ground. In 1943, before the trial, Grant claimed that WIL had ceased to be 'an entirely insignificant sect' because of its role in industry. WIL and the R.C.P. played their hand to the full,¹ but their opportunities were limited and ended with the war. As for the Trades Disputes Act and Order 1A(a), the one was repealed by the Attlee government in 1946 without ever being used again as a basis for prosecution, and the other was never used at all and lapsed, of necessity, when the war ended.²

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- 1 'But the remarkable feature of industrial relations in the Second World War, as compared with twenty five years earlier, is the relatively small proportion of trouble due to strikes, and the almost entire absence of political motivation in the strikes that did take place', (H. Pelling, Britain and the Second World War, (1970), 250).
- 2 'Our Party was the instrument through which the ruling class suffered a defeat on this issue. For the first time the limits within which legal work can be conducted have been fixed by the precedent of this trial' (R.C.P. Political Bureau, Perspective of the Party Work On The A.L.L.V.D.C., [July 1944?], H.P., D.J.H. 15B/5, 1).

PART THREE

(1944 - 1949)

XII THE R.C.P. AND THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL(1944 - 1947)

At the end of the war the structure of international Trotskyism was rebuilt. As in the 1930s, its chief presence was in Europe, where the British were the only Trotskyists who had maintained unbroken legal activity throughout the war. In 1944-7 it was the British who proved the most flexible Trotskyist interpreters of post-war political and economic phenomena in Europe, many of which had not been anticipated in the seminal Transitional Programme of 1938. However, international leadership remained in the hands of thinkers unable to break with pre-war ideological categories, and against whom neither the R.C.P. nor other critics were able to assemble a majority. This was the case before and after the return of the World Trotskyist Centre to Paris. For its part, the R.C.P. during these three years failed to compile a rounded alternative analysis to the official viewpoint of the Fourth International.

* * * * *

War destroyed the fragile structure of European Trotskyism. Some national sections were underground or in exile even before 1939. The outbreak of hostilities led to transference of the international centre to the United States. By 1940 the only Trotskyists in Europe operating legally were, to their initial surprise, the British. This is not to argue that activity did not take place in Occupied Europe. The fissiparous French, working at first under exceptionally difficult conditions,¹ maintained publication of journals² and were prime movers

1 When the Germans occupied France Trotsky's books, unlike Stalin's were banned. (G. Nollau, International Communism and World Revolution, (1961), 199-200.)

2 From August 1940 the French published seventy three issues of La Verité: nineteen duplicated and fifty four printed.

in convening the international gatherings of August 1943 and February 1944. Across Europe, there were other groups working in clandestinity but until these gatherings met they were isolated.¹ The August 1943 meeting brought representatives from five countries to Paris and established a provisional European Secretariat.² That of February 1944, again in Paris, had a similarly broad base and elected an executive as well as a secretariat.³ This was the European structure of Trotskyism at D-Day, which was to bring in its train renewed legality. The I.E.C. elected at the Emergency World Conference of May 1940 barely functioned during the war. It was isolated from the heart of the world movement, which was Europe, and suffered from being dominated by the Socialist Workers Party although, technically, that body could not take part.⁴ Its only functioning limb was an

- 1 They were also, 'for the most part changed from top to bottom, and their leaderships almost wholly replenished by youthful elements', (P. Frank, op. cit., 62).
- 2 French, Belgian, Greek, Spanish and German delegates attended in the hope of organising a conference of European sections. Following this meeting two duplicated issues of Quatrieme Internationale were published and the journal appeared in printed format from January 1944., (R.J. Alexander, Trotskyism in Latin America (Stanford, U.S.A., 1973), 13.).
- 3 Delegates from five countries attended, including representatives of three French sections, two Spanish factions and a Greek emigre living in Paris.
- 4 The Voorhuis Act (1940) forbade labour organisations in the United States to affiliate to an international. The S.W.P. formally withdrew from the F.I. and appeared henceforth as the 'New Zealand' section in internal documents.

International Secretariat divided within itself¹ and regarded, by the R.C.P. at least, as an outpost of the S.W.P.² WIL and the R.S.L. had both been in contact with the International Secretariat through correspondence and occasional visits.³ After the R.C.P. was launched there was a sharp clash with the I.S. over recognition for the new Manifesto Group in Italy which was broadly, but not precisely, identified with the current Trotskyist programme.⁴ The R.C.P., with

1 The I.S. was reorganised on several occasions between 1943 and 1946. From March 1944 its effective members were E.R. Frank and Daniel Logan, an S.W.P. member and political ally of Felix Morrow. Frank was a supporter of Cannon's leadership of the S.W.P., of which regime Logan, like Morrow, was increasingly a critic. Three years later Natalia Trotsky, George Munis and Benjamin Peret deplored the wartime record:

The I.S. and the I.E.C., which had been designated at the emergency conference of 1940 had only a vegetative political existence and led an almost non-existent organic activity during the whole war, the functioning of these bodies having been paralysed by personal and political struggles in the atmosphere of the American section.

(The Fourth International in Danger, 27 June 1947, 7, H.P., D.J.H. 12/79)

- 2 R.C.P. leaders also saw their own Minority as a fraction of the S.W.P. in Britain, (C.C. Minutes, 1 Sept. 1945). There was a parallel political development by van Gelderen, a supporter of the economic view of the British majority and Felix Morrow: see van Gelderen's letter of 22, 23 March 1945 to the R.C.P. and his 15 March 1945 letter to the S.W.P. complaining of the 'third periodism' of an article in Fourth International. For the emergence within the R.C.P. of a Minority convinced of the need to enter the Labour Party, see Chapter XIII.
- 3 WIL was in touch with the I.S. throughout the war and of course had been visited by J.B. Stuart, Lou Cooper and others of the S.W.P. Grant visited the S.W.P. in December 1943, (A.M. Wald, James T. Farrell : the revolutionary socialist years, (New York, 1978), photo facing p. 84).
- 4 The Manifesto Group applied for affiliation to the F.I. after being contacted by van Gelderen, among others. On 2 January 1944 the I.S. rejected the Group on the grounds that it disagreed with Trotsky's tentative position on Russia and stood for the F.I., (implying such a body did not yet exist). In 'Trotskyism and the European Revolution', (Militant, N.Y., 13 May 1944) the I.S. sharply criticised the Group and, in the view of one Italian leader, invited other sections to break off relations with it.

other sections, argued for friendliness as well as firmness with emergent European sections.¹ I.S. handling of the Italians fuelled general discontent with it.² The R.C.P. called for the transference of the World Centre back to Europe while harbouring some misgivings about what the sections on the Continent represented.³ It also voiced disquiet about the involvement of the I.S. in party affairs via the backing it provided for the British Minority.⁴ In the last months of 1945 the I.S. seems to have disintegrated from within⁵ and

- 1 The R.C.P. wrote that the Group represented 'the first concrete signs of an internationalist Trotskyist tendency in Italy'. (To the I.S. from the R.C.P., 20 May 1944; see also From the I.S. to the R.C.P., 20 May 1944, H.P.). The Spanish Trotskyists, currently in Mexican exile projected the I.S. as an S.W.P. front and reminded it that the Russian question was not closed. Correspondence between the I.S. and the Spaniards, as well as the Italians' letters of adherence are in For the Information of the Members, (May 1945), H.P., D.J.H. 12/23.
- 2 The exclusion of the Italians had occasioned a clash between Frank, who favoured it, and Logan. The Spaniards thought I.S. intransigence likely to lead to the Italians lining up with Shachtman and called for a World Congress to be convened before any further exclusions took place.
- 3 The R.C.P. political bureau called for a European Bureau, with a decisive vote to the British in view of the Europeans' lack of basis, to be established in London. The party's central committee endorsed this call on 11 November 1944 with Betty Hamilton and David James abstaining. News of the European conference must have been known at least as early as the April-May 1944 issue of Quatrieme Internationale. The R.C.P. call met with no success.
- 4 The R.C.P. claimed that the I.S. did not always deal with its leaders but maintained contact with 'selected members in the Party', and also complained of the circulation in the International Bulletin of a misleading account of the Fusion Conference. In autumn 1945 the R.C.P. central committee resolved, after an angry discussion, to raise the whole matter of informal contacts at the highest level, (C.C. Minutes, 1 Sept. 1945).
- 5 Following a row over the disposal of funds Logan wrote to the I.E.C. and E.E.C. calling for the latter to assume the duties of an international centre. He remarked that the R.C.P., 'is not represented on either committee although it is one of our strongest sections', (D. Logan, To the I.E.C. and the E.E.C., 20 Oct. 1945, Internal Bulletin, 1945?, H.P.).

and lost much standing outside.¹ The body elected by the 1946 conference of the Fourth International - the first representative gathering since 1946 - was quite different in personnel.

The European Executive Committee became a more solid body during 1945,² though it did not have to defend its ideas at an international conference until the following year. Like the S.W.P. it nurtured expectations of extreme and immediate crisis: there would be a 'relatively rapid' movement to workers' power or a turn to fascism, a January 1945 resolution of the E.E.C. declared.³ Even the slightest demand would, in its view, put a strain on the regimes of Europe. R.C.P. distaste for the American-based I.S. did not imply any great confidence in the leaders of European Trotskyism. Pierre Frank, who had passed much of the war in Britain, was one of those who did not enjoy good relations with the British, but was a leading member of the Executive Committee. In 1945 he clashed with the R.C.P. several times

1 Munis backed Logan's proposal, (G. Munis, To the I.E.C. and the E.E.C., 9 Nov. 1945, *ibid.*). The R.C.P. political bureau informed its Central Committee in December 1945 that a 'grave situation' existed in the I.S. and the committee resolved to support the proposed transfer:

'Europe today is the centre of political life, and ... the E.E.C. is the most representative body in the International.'

(P.B. report to R.C.P. C.C., 1/2 Dec. 1945; J. Haston to Logan, 10 Dec. 1945, H.P.)

2 It held four plenums during 1945. By the end of the year representation had built up to eight sections and the European Secretariat was in touch with Italians, Irish and Danes.

3 'An "interim" era of a relatively prolonged duration up to the decisive triumph, either of the socialist revolution or once again that of fascism is proving to be impossible.'
(Fourth International, N.Y., June 1945, 172.)

over French and European matters, and was one of those who argued that pre-war statements of the Fourth International had a timeless value.¹ The R.C.P. felt that he and others avoided specifics in the guiding resolutions they produced and relied too greatly on attitudes struck in a different era. When the European Secretariat produced its key resolution in anticipation of the imminent conference of the International, the R.C.P. central committee determined in February 1946 to seek a lengthy series of changes.² Their drift was that stabilisation and not crisis was the immediate character of affairs in Europe³ and that democracy would be maintained;⁴ that there should be self-criticism of earlier Trotskyist statements on European diplomatic threats⁵ and that there should be an unequivocal call for the withdrawal of the Red Army as well as other occupying forces.⁶ The Central

- 1 In challenging an assessment of the political character of the French government by Grant, Frank countered by arguing that Bolshevik-Leninists had since 6 February 1934 declared the French regime to be 'bonapartist' in character, (P. Frank, 'Father Loriquet', History of P.C.I. and P.O.I. 1940-44, Internal Bulletin, 1 Dec. 1945, H.P.).
- 2 Harold Atkinson's criticism that the E.S. resolution was defective in generalisation and economic analysis was upheld with only James abstaining, (Special C.C. 9/10 Feb. 1946, H.P.).
- 3 Tearnse proposed the inclusion of a passage on partial stabilisation, while Haston argued stabilisation was already taking place, albeit within a general framework of decline. James added that the chief factor for stabilisation was U.S. loans. Haston's view was adopted with Healy and Goffe abstaining, (ibid.).
- 4 It was Lawrence who abstained support for an amendment claiming that the U.S.A. was compelled to rely, in Europe, on bourgeois-democratic methods.
- 5 Harber's rejection of any possibility that the U.S.S.R. might collapse this way was resoundingly carried.
- 6 There was some Minority confusion over this matter. Lawrence moved the need for a clear position on the Red Army. In the division, Goffe voted against but Healy voted with the Majority to help carry Lawrence's proposal eleven to one, (ibid., 5).

Committee also put itself on record that the European Secretariat had no revolutionary perspectives for China and underestimated that country's ability to win national independence. When the Minority moved a resolution condemning Morrow it was voted down nine to two.

The Founding Congress of the Fourth International had given certain international responsibilities to the British. C.L.R. James had a strong interest in colonial questions and had secured agreement that his country should devise a colonial programme and an international colonial bureau.¹ Nothing seems to have come of this and James was, in any case, removed from the I.E.C. within two years. But Workers International League took a special interest in the fate of other sections, notably the Indians² and the Irish.³ Both WIL and R.S.L. members in the armed forces used the opportunity to make contact in foreign lands.⁴ In 1944, before D-Day, the most impressive Trotskyist organisation in Europe was surely the R.C.P. although it could obviously take no part in the elementary rebuilding taking place on the mainland. The R.C.P., like the WIL before it, had played a role in holding together the semblance of an international network and it was, of course, at a peak of influence in its own country. Its absence from the deliberations of the Trotskyists on the mainland contributed to their incomprehension of changes which followed the Allied invasion of Europe. The political thought of the R.C.P. and the Europeans never converged.

1 Documents, 302.

2 Discussion documents on India prepared by WIL and the Bolsheviki-Leninists of India were published in WIN in 1942 and 1943. Ajit Roy, a lawyer from Bombay, was a member of WIL's central committee.

3 The Irish section was established by WIL early in the war at the time of the attempt to set up an alternative centre in exile.

4 Most assiduous in this respect was van Gelderen who contacted Trotskyists in Italy.

While war continued in Europe, Trotskyist thinking stayed close to the forecasts of the Transitional Programme. The Italian Revolution was interpreted by the British and the infant European Secretariat as the harbinger of great events. WIL predicted instability and the impossibility of a democratic era following the war.¹ The Europeans went further and anticipated a rapid collapse of Stalin's regime either as the result of world revolution or military intervention by the west.² The S.W.P., to increasing disquiet within its own ranks, predicted more or less immediate revolution.³ As the months passed however, it emerged that there was a different emphasis in these predictions of crisis. The British anticipated progress for the workers' movement while the Europeans and the S.W.P. emphasised

- 1 'A victory for British and American imperialism cannot herald a new blossoming of bourgeois democracy on the Continent of Europe', (E. Grant, 'Italian Revolution - and the tasks of the British Workers', WIN, Aug. 1943, 3). Grant argued that there would however be no army - except the Americans at first - which would be prepared to suppress revolutionary movements. The WIL Central Committee told its 1943 conference of its belief that the social basis for reaction had evaporated, but that Trotskyist weakness would allow social democracy and Stalinism to be the first beneficiaries of a shift to the left, ('A New Stage in History and the Tasks of the Working Class', WIN (Sept. 1943), 4).
- 2 'The Transformation of the Imperialist War into Civil War', Fourth International, (March 1945), 82. Here it was claimed that the Fourth International constituted 'the essential base of the European Revolution'. The other key factors weighed by the Europeans were the advance of the Red Army, and the prospect of revolution in Germany.
- 3 The S.W.P. scorned 'shallow observers and would-be Marxists (who) had predicted a new organic era of capitalist stabilisation and development, and a new flowering of bourgeois democracy', ('The Eleventh Convention of the American Trotskyist Movement', Fourth International, (N.Y.) Dec. 1944, 358). By this was meant the views of Felix Morrow and others who had from October 1943 challenged, cautiously at first, the party's simple-minded application of the Transitional Programme to post-war developments in Europe.

the power of the state and the military and forecast repression.¹

The R.C.P. grew restive at the failure of the I.S. to provide theses which would guide the European Trotskyists as Nazi hegemony crumbled. At the time of the Normandy invasion it advanced its own view of the likely course of events.² When the next few months brought forth no guidance from the United States, it went further and took up a position on the national question.³ This entailed criticism of liberation movements, a perspective of democracy in Europe and reaffirmation of resistance to the ideas of the I.K.D., a German emigre group resident in London.⁴ Both the R.C.P.'s D-Day view and its thesis

- 1 Thus the S.W.P. resolved fifty one to five at its November 1944 convention, against Morrowite opposition, that the 'allied imperialists do not desire the revival of European economy to a competitive level', that post-war socialist or communist governments would be 'unstable, shortlived and transitional in character', ('Revolutionary Perspectives', *ibid.*, 367-9). Morrow's argument was that transitional slogans could not be abandoned, that fascism may have planted illusions in bourgeois democracy, that the rival imperialisms at war in Europe were not equally predatory. (Peter Jenkins gives a useful summary of Morrow's developing views in Where Trotskyism Got Lost (1977). See also the criticisms made by D. Logan, Morrow's ally, (Fourth International (N.Y.) Feb. 1945, 63) of a draft resolution before the S.W.P. national committee. Logan and Morrow argued that ultra-left formulations must be corrected if the theses drawn up in America were to be of any value to European Trotskyists).
- 2 This was a political bureau resolution, 'Second Front and the Tasks of the Working Class', (Socialist Appeal, June 1944).
- 3 Resolution on the National Question in Europe, 11 Nov. 1944, H.P., D.J.H. 12/10a. The resolution was later published in WIN, (July - Aug. 1945), 6-7.
- 4 Walter Held, an I.K.D. leader killed by the Nazis in 1941, first sketched out their ideas in Europe under the Iron Heel (Sept. 1940). 'The National Question - Three Theses' (WIN, April 1943, 9-11) advanced the view that fascism in Europe was a new social epoch and that the Fourth International would not struggle for a Socialist United States of Europe, but for democratic liberties. WIL published the theses with firm criticism.

on the national question were criticised by minorities within.¹ By the end of 1944 the R.C.P. position was that there should be independent workers' formations within the resistance, that they could not be absorbed since history had not been rolled back to the point where only democratic tasks lay ahead. The basic slogans of the Transitional Programme were, the party held, still valid, but there was also a place for 'transitional democratic slogans' to arouse the masses.² The proletariat would not aim at bourgeois democracy in post-war Europe but bourgeois democracy was what it would get, at least for a time. The R.C.P. predicted counter-revolution in a democratic form,³ but like other European sections⁴ was militantly opposed to making a democratic orientation the main emphasis of Fourth International

- 1 Arthur Cooper opposed any apparent concession to the view that genuine liberation was taking place: the French masses, he believed, were unwitting tools of American imperialism, ('Opposition Minority Position at the Central Committee, July 1944', H.P., D.J.H. 12/7, 2c, 2). Cooper abstained when the Political Bureau's resolution came before the Central Committee in November. But the Central Committee decision was criticised also from the right, by 'W.G.', who thought it analysed national oppression insufficiently deeply, (Internal Bulletin, (Jan. [1945]), H.P., D.J.H. 8B/8).
- 2 Resolution on the National Question in Europe, (WIN, July-Aug. 1945, 6-7).
- 3 It was this belief which separated it from Morrow who did not see democracy in Europe as a cloak for counter-revolution. Compare E. Grant, 'The Character of the European Revolution', WIN (Oct. 1945), 8-17 with Morrow's formulations in 'The First Phase of the Coming European Revolution', Fourth International (N.Y., Dec. 1944), 369-77.
- 4 1944 had brought renewed activity by the I.K.D. The European sections rejected its views as 'the conception of those for whom at night all cats are grey' and imbued with a popular front spirit, ('Against a Revisionist Tendency', Internal Bulletin, (July 1944)).

propaganda.¹

But while there was fairly general agreement that fascism had not levelled all differences, there were distinct emphases in the British and European presentations. The R.C.P. was convinced that the bourgeoisie would lean on 'Stalino-reformist agents' and that this would constitute not a democratic revolution but a preventitive democratic counter-revolution.² A swing to the left was impending:³ popular indignation at Nazism would bubble over, it thought, into a struggle for economic and social rights. There was little basis on which reaction might develop, but since the proletariat did not yet support revolutionary parties it could not realise its full strength. A period of ideological confusion must follow with 'Kerensky' or popular front governments pushed to the fore. That was why the tactical orientation of the Trotskyist forces was of vital importance in the period opening up.⁴

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- 1 Assistance given by WIL and the R.C.P. to the German emigres of the I.K.D. and other former German communists who moved to Trotskyism following the dissolution of the Comintern did not imply political support. Peter Nicholls, one R.C.P. member, did back the I.K.D., ('On the National Question in Europe', Internal Bulletin, (1945), H.P.). The official view, however, was that of Grant, that the I.K.D. had 'succumbed to the pressure of the petit-bourgeois reaction'. The European sections appealed to the I.S. to take a stand on the I.K.D. but stopped short of calling for expulsion, ('Against a Revisionist Tendency', loc. cit., 5).
 - 2 E. Grant, 'The Character of the European Revolution', WIN, (Oct. 1945), 8-17. In a draft of the resolution on the national question discussed above, it had been written 'the fact that the revolution which is approaching in Europe can only be the proletarian revolution does not exclude the possibility that the Allied European bourgeoisie in their struggle against the revolution may not adopt the methods of bourgeois democracy' ('National Question', (n.d.), H.P. D.J.H. 12/10, 5).
 - 3 There was widespread expectation in the F.I. that the collapse of Nazism would precipitate revolution in Germany. But Germany was also thought likely to be the only exception to strong communist influence within post-war European labour movements.
 - 4 [R.C.P.], European Revolution and the British Working Class, n.d., H.P., D.J.H. 12/18. A March 1945 central committee meeting demanded that the I.S. issue documents on a number of world developments on which it had not pronounced, (Minutes of the C.C., 17 March 1945, 3, H.P.).

As in the West, so in the East. Trotsky had predicted that Stalinist Russia could not survive the war.¹ Not only did this prove false but the Soviet borders effectively expanded to embrace half of Europe, courtesy of the Red Army. WIL, whose perspectives were to dominate the R.C.P., had shared this perspective.² The R.C.P. attempted to explain Soviet survival and military success with conditional formulae. The Red Army crushed Nazism but also delayed workers' revolution. Its troops were, however, open to fraternal appeals. The fate of the Soviet bureaucracy remained undecided. One workers' victory in an important European country would, it believed, 'sound the death knell of the Soviet bureaucracy'. Even before that there might be internal conflicts in Russia and it was on these, rather than military intervention, that imperialism relied. The R.C.P. believed therefore that the position of the Soviets was strong, that they were a beneficiary from the shift in the relationship of European social forces in favour of the working class.³ Soviet power was, for the moment, unchallengeable and the Allies would be 'forced to tolerate a deal with it'.

* * * * *

1 See below.

2 The WIL central committee resolved, in the middle of the war, that:

'The fate of the Soviet Union rests directly on the fate of the new wave of revolutions. Further defeats and a new epoch of reaction would inevitably usher in the bourgeois counter-revolution in Russia.' (WIN, Sept. 1943, 4.)

3 See the 1945 conference resolution, 'The Changed Relationship of Forces in Europe and the Role of the Fourth International' (WIN, Sept. 1945, 1-14). When this resolution was proposed by Grant at the R.C.P. central committee, there were three abstentions: by Cooper who was in general opposition, by Deane who had differences over the assessment of Russia, and by Betty Hamilton who had had insufficient time to study it. Deane and Lawrence failed to obtain a separate vote on the passage dealing with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (Minutes of the C.C., 17 March 1945).

A dozen national sections attended the international conference of April 1946, convened in Paris.¹ The conference had before it the key resolution, 'The New Imperialist Peace and the Building of the Parties of the Fourth International', discussed by the R.C.P. central committee two months earlier.² It declared the 'last possibilities of a relatively stable equilibrium' in the economy destroyed. A third world war loomed, it argued, given unprecedentedly united bourgeois opposition to the U.S.S.R., which only the intervention of workers' revolution could now save. There was no self-criticism in the resolution,³ nor any serious explanation of why given the alleged character of the epoch the F.I. was so small.⁴ The nearest attempt was the argument that defeatism and failure to grasp the phase politics were passing through inhibited growth.⁵ Faced with this, and mindful of the central committee discussion, R.C.P. delegates

- 1 The conference was in the nature of a holding operation, convened by the International Secretariat and the European Secretariat, to draw together the world's Trotskyists after the war and cast those who had deviated into outer darkness. A full World Congress was not to gather for another two years, although it had been intended to meet earlier. Though sometimes referred to as an international pre-conference, this gathering did all the things a meeting of full status would have done. It was also taken seriously by the police, who raided it and arrested many delegates.
- 2 The resolution was published in WIN for November-December 1946.
- 3 The text declared that there had been no mistake in early assessments by the F.I. of the character of the epoch, only in guessing the tempo of events. 'Only the superficial and cowardly petty-bourgeois mind' could think otherwise.
- 4 Potential was believed to be greater than before the war, with Trotskyists in countries like England and South Africa, where the communists were not strong, having the best chance of all.
- 5 See WIN, (Nov. - Dec. 1946), 306-7.

concentrated on projecting three theses: that relative recovery within general decline was taking place; that recognition of counter-revolution within a democratic form should govern tactics of the sections; that Soviet defence, backing for the revolution in Europe against Stalinism, and a clear call for the withdrawal of all occupying armies were essential.¹ They drew up a resolution expressing these reservations and abstained in the vote which approved the main resolution.² They stood out for tolerance of minorities within the F.I. with whom they did not necessarily agree and were themselves the most persistent critics of the International's leaders.³ A crucial election for the International Executive, that was in the end to split the R.C.P., returned the British delegates Grant and Haston, but there was no British member of the new I.S.⁴ A fairly sharp division set in

- 1 There were no official minutes of the 1946 conference though Goffe was appointed to take a transcription. The text of this resolution is taken from the report of the international conference given in Report of the National Council Meeting held on 6 April 1946. The abstentions were criticised by Healy who argued that the return of stability was a myth.
- 2 The resolution, while critical, was intended also to demarcate the R.C.P. from the I.K.D. The R.C.P. had moved an amendment to a European Secretariat resolution on the I.K.D., which would have allowed that body to stay within the Fourth International.
- 3 The Morrowite minority of the S.W.P., and the P.C.I. minority, voted against a separate resolution criticising the 1944 European conference theses as 'mistakes in the evaluation of tempo' and therefore not fundamental, but the R.C.P. again abstained. British delegates were however disturbed at the amalgamation in many speeches delivered by international leaders, of their own views with those of Morrow, the P.C.I. minority and the I.K.D.
- 4 The new I.E.C. had two British, two French, one German, one South African and the secretary of the F.I. (Conference of the Fourth International, April 1946, H.P., D.J.H. 11/22, 3.) Later in 1946, Grant withdrew 'for technical reasons' to be replaced by Deane. In January 1947 it was asked that Deane himself be withdrawn because it was felt his industrial experience was needed during the road hauliers strike in Britain, (R.C.P. to I.E.C., 11 Jan. 1947). National sections were expected to provide top level members for the I.E.C., and to finance their presence in Paris. In October 1947, when the I.E.C. divided the R.C.P., Deane was finally withdrawn because the party could no longer maintain him in Paris.

within this I.E.C. from its first meeting of June 1946 onwards. The World Congress did not meet until June 1948, by which time the pattern of the post-war Fourth International was set.

The political differences separating the R.C.P. from the new I.S. and I.E.C. and which dominated their relations over the eighteen months separating the international conference from the British split, may be conveniently grouped into three: the stage reached by the European economy, the strength or weakness of Western European governments, and the ability of the Soviets to survive. The 1946 R.C.P. conference adjusted the party's economic outlook for Europe to embrace an indefinite period of stability ahead.¹ There was no meeting of minds with the International which, the R.C.P. believed, saw it as sharing Morrow's views on this subject.² The party argued that generalised statements about crisis were of little practical value in the short term, disputed that Europe was suffering a classic crisis of overproduction and denied that there would be a spontaneous collapse.³ In late 1946 the R.C.P. developed the thesis of economic revival: first (in a curiously Keynesian passage) capitalism would not allow Eastern Europe to outstrip the West; second, since the crisis had been one of under not over production, a cyclical upswing must follow.⁴ If

1 J.B. Stuart, the I.S. delegate to the conference, claimed that the R.C.P. foresaw three or four years of stability in Europe. This Haston denied in his addendum to J.B. Stuart 'Report on R.C.P. National Conference, 1946', Internal Bulletin, [1946].

2 A claim made by Grant, who later withdrew.

3 'No matter how devastating the slump, if the workers fail, capitalism will always find a way out of its economic impasse at the cost of the toilers and the preparation of new contradictions.'
(R.C.P. amendment to The New Imperialist Peace, WIN, (Nov. - Dec. 1946), 324.)

4 The R.C.P. suggested at this point that pre-war output might be surpassed, except in Germany where division and occupation would prevent it.

the F.I. refused to acknowledge the facts it would be discredited. Nor, in the R.C.P. view, was an upswing necessarily to be feared by revolutionaries. It boosted confidence and combativity within the working class.¹

One of the countries on which the R.C.P./I.S. dispute tended to focus was France, the world centre of Trotskyist operations after April 1946. Grant and Frank had clashed in 1945 over the constitutional referendum held in the autumn of that year.² Frank could abide no attempts to undermine the pre-war characterization of the French government as a bonapartist regime and continued to believe in 1946 that the changes which had occurred had not altered its fundamental character.³ Frank's general view was that there were no

- 1 The party wrote of 'the harnessing and knitting together of the masses in industry' which might prepare new struggles, (ibid., 326).
- 2 See Grant's article in Socialist Appeal for mid-November 1945 and, for the referendum, D. Thomson, Democracy in France since 1970, (1969), 232-3. 96.4% of votes effectively rejected the Third Republic for a constituent assembly. The P.C.I. had called in La Verite for a yes vote. The R.C.P. backed it, arguing that this was not recognition of a specific bourgeois constitution, but of a living conflict between bourgeois and workers' parties. Since no form of workers' rule presented itself it was, argued the R.C.P., permissible to favour a democratic republic. ('Statement of the Political Bureau on the French Referendum', On The French Referendum, (May 1946), 7-8, D.J.H. 15B/54b.) Pierre Frank had favoured a boycott and though defeated on the P.C.I. central committee, received the backing of the I.S., which branded the call in La Verite a 'typical opportunist deviation of the P.C.I.' See P. Frank, 'Father Loriquet', (a soubriquet for Grant), (1 Dec. 1945), Internal Bulletin.
- 3 Frank allowed that post-war bonapartism leaned towards the workers, but insisted that it still possessed 'an apparent strength':
 'In the October 21 elections the end of the democratic regime was incontestably demonstrated by the inglorious foundering of the principal formation of the Third Republic, the Radical Party'.
 (P. Frank, 'Democracy or Bonapartism in Europe?', WIN, (June-July 1946), 215.)

democratic regimes in Europe. Grant countered that Frank's identification of political and economic developments was crude.¹ Repressive apparatus was retained by all regimes and its existence, therefore, proved nothing. In 1940, the I.S. had identified Petain and de Gaulle, but the analogy had been palpably false for some time.² Reaction might occur, but there was no mass support for it and one did not throw in the towel before the bout.³

The 1946 R.C.P. conference upheld the view expounded by Grant, that what were being manifested in Europe were 'unstable bourgeois democratic regimes' where capitalism was obliged by the strength of the workers' parties to rule through them and not by decree.⁴ But the economic and political perspectives of the leading bodies of the Fourth International were effectively one. In 1946 and 1947 the I.S. insisted that in France there was a ceiling on production which it would be impossible to exceed.⁵ It denied that the failure of

- 1 'It is a vulgarisation of Marxism - vulgar materialism of the worst sort - to argue that the superstructure of a society is determined immediately by the development of its economy', (E. Grant, 'Democracy or Bonapartism in Europe? (A Reply to Pierre Frank)', WIN, Aug. 1946, 241-56).
- 2 Grant allowed that WIL had shared this belief at the time, but claimed that it had been known to be erroneous from 1943.
- 3 'De Gaulle may yet be a French Franco, but one does not declare the enemy victorious before the decisive battle has begun.' (ibid., 252).
- 4 'Resolution of the R.C.P. conference on the Nature of the Regimes in Europe', WIN, (Sept. - Oct. 1946), 269-70.
- 5 The R.C.P. claimed this idea had been advanced at the October 1946 plenum, (Political Bureau, 'The Real Situation in Britain - A Reply to the I.S.', Internal Bulletin, March 1947, 18). O'Daniel challenged this, and made the counter-claim that 'Jerome' of the I.S. had suggested that France on her own would take twenty years to renew her capital equipment, (P. O'Daniel, 'A Note on Discussion Methods', 22 April 1947, Internal Bulletin, (12 July 1947), 3-6). Yet later in the same document O'Daniel wrote:

'It is, in fact, quite conceivable that French production will never, again, in twenty three or any other number of years, break through the level of 100 per cent of comparatively stagnant 1938.' (ibid., 6)

revolution to follow hard on the heels of war meant that stabilisation was taking place¹ and its confidence was not dented by the arrival of U.S. loans. The March 1947 plenum of the I.E.C. complacently reviewed earlier documents and the unwillingness of F.I. leaders to acknowledge their past errors angered the British.² That autumn the guiding resolution for the coming World Congress affirmed the theses of 1946. Capitalism was 'incapable of restoring the world market and a balanced development of world trade'. 'Increased disequilibrium' would extend the period, (largely imaginary) of convulsions and crises.³

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1 O'Daniel quoted gloomy forecasts by Ramadier and Lippmann and contrasted them to:

impressionistic conclusions drawn from the greater appearance of "normalcy" in 1947 Paris over the grim winter of 1944-45 (or) a sectarian schematism whereby, if the imperialist war were not immediately followed by the successful German revolution, the conclusion must automatically be: stabilisation of the European bourgeoisie.

(P.O'Daniel, 'The Limits of French Economic Revival', Fourth International, (N.Y.), (Oct. 1947), 252.)

This same document gives sectoral ceilings on output from 1938.

- 2 Germain (Ernest Mandel), a Belgian economist and member of the I.S., insisted that a revival had always been foreseen but that the secretariat differed from the R.C.P. by not expecting stabilisation to follow it. Even 1938 production, he argued, would only represent a stagnant plateau. (Mandel's views were quoted in full (from I.E.C. minutes) by O'Daniel, (Mangan) in 'A Note on Discussion Methods', 12 July 1947, H.P., D.J.H. 15a/36.) For the R.C.P. reply to all this see the fierce polemic, J. Haston, In Reply to the Discussion Method of Comrade O'Daniel, (July 1947), H.P., D.J.H. 36.
- 3 Taken from the draft resolution, 'World Situation and the Tasks of the Fourth International', Fourth International, (N.Y.), (Nov. - Dec. 1947), 274-81.

Perhaps the most difficult phenomenon for post-war Trotskyism to comprehend was that of Russia and Eastern Europe. It was a monster with three heads. What attitude should be adopted to the advance of the Red Army? What were the implications of post-war Soviet survival? What was the social character of the new states of Eastern Europe? Healy, the R.C.P. Minority leader, had in February 1946 supported the call for Red Army withdrawal from occupied territories;¹ two months later he reversed this position.² R.C.P. leaders suspected the International of equivocation on this issue and a clear call for withdrawal was made only in June 1946.³

But responding to the Red Army was only a minor feature of a larger problem. Writing in 1936 Trotsky had declared that failing socialist revolution elsewhere in Europe, Stalin's regime must be deposed in a war.⁴ Alongside this prediction rested Trotsky's description of the Soviets as a transitional regime, where planning and the state monopoly of foreign trade had survived but the country was in the grip of a bureaucratic apparatus. On this analysis rested the willingness of most Trotskyists to call for Soviet defence during the war. Soviet survival ought to have called for a full appraisal by the Trotskyists. There were in fact three reactions to it: the supporters of Shachtman continued to believe that capitalism had been restored in Russia; a few sections, and most notably the R.C.P., belatedly undertook

1 See above. p 391

2 At an R.C.P. national council of 6 April 1946 Healy criticised his vote at the Central Committee of 9/10 February and urged that a distinction must be made between the Red Army and imperialist armies, (Report of the National Council Meeting held on 6 April 1946, 6).

3 This occurred at the first meeting of the new I.E.C.

4 'If the war should remain only a war, the defeat of the Soviet Union would be inevitable. In a technical, economic and military sense, imperialism is incomparably more strong. If it is not paralysed by revolution in the West, imperialism will sweep away the regime which issued from the October revolution.' (L. Trotsky, The Revolution Betrayed, (1967), 227).

a lengthy examination of economic and political processes there; the majority, led by the I.S. and supported by the British minority, took refuge from reality by trying to stay as near as they could to Trotsky's predictions.

The views of Shachtman et. al. had provoked a major crisis in the International and especially in the Socialist Workers Party. After the 1940 defection of the I.E.C. to Shachtman's Workers Party, most Trotskyists remained firm behind Trotsky's holding formula. By 1946 however, there was a small state capitalist group in the R.C.P.,¹ and that same year Morrow and Jeffries were led by their frustration in the S.W.P. to join Shachtman's party. The British believed that the law of value still prevailed in Russia, and that once the country's output had saturated the home market it would start to suffer crises of overproduction.² At the 1946 R.C.P. conference the Majority and Minority put up a joint spokesman to answer the only Shachtmanite among the delegates. But while Shachtman's position was consistent,

1 Among its members were Ann Keen, the business manager of Socialist Appeal, Bob Armstrong (who had moved from Belfast to London), Ann Walker, Rose Carson and David James. Their emergence reflected, in part, contact with the exiled I.K.D. They seem to have made no strenuous effort to capture the R.C.P. though they may have been urged to do so by Shachtman, who visited them occasionally from 1947. They argued that a new war would be one of plunder on both sides and suffered none of the Minority's agonies over the role of the Red Army since they did not stand for Soviet Defence. Henry Sara, a non-aligned Labour Party member by the end of the war, was approached in 1945 by Albert Gates of the Workers Party to act as its British correspondent.

2 B. Armstrong and M. Merrigan, 'In Defence of "Revisionism"', (4 Sept. 1946), Internal Bulletin, (20 Dec. 1946), 6-15.

the R.C.P. was fluid, aware that it could not rest content on pre-war formulae.' In July 1946 the Central Committee declared that theory must now be measured against social conditions in Russia.¹ After hesitation the party affirmed that capitalism had not been restored there but began to talk of the country heading towards capitalism. The 1946 party conference somewhat uneasily asserted that in Russia the capitalist state existed without a capitalist class, but continued to see a positive side in state planning.² The R.C.P. also insisted that Russia had emerged from the war stronger not weaker, a view the I.S. felt quite unable to accept.³

The R.C.P. minority projected Russia as caught in an economic impasse:⁴ faced with a capitalist world and under bureaucratic management it would not fulfil the terms of its own five year plan. But the Minority also rested largely on the pre-war analysis.⁵ To the I.S. Russia was economically weakened by the destruction of its Western industrial regions and faced the prospect of war since 'the imperialists have posed the settling of accounts with the U.S.S.R. as their most pressing task'.⁶

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- 1 C.C. Resolution on the Nature of the Soviet Union, [July? 1946], H.P., D.J.H. 12/58. This was substantially the resolution upheld at the annual conference of the party a few weeks later.
 - 2 This opinion was advanced in a self-critical resolution which also called for an international discussion on the character of the Eastern European states, ('Resolution of the R.C.P. Conference on the Soviet Union', WIN, Sept. - Oct. 1946, 267-8.)
 - 3 'Proposed Amendments to the Foregoing Text', WIN, Nov. - Dec. 1946, 316.
 - 4 See H. Finch, In Defence of the Soviet Union, (17 Aug. 1946), H.P., D.J.H. 11/24.
 - 5 Finch drew a distinction between 'proletarian nationalisation' and 'bourgeois nationalisation' and thus made it impossible for himself to explain events in Eastern Europe. A French Trotskyist who agreed with the R.C.P. that Soviet collapse was unlikely, argued similar categories of 'statification'. (B. Thomas, 'Remarks on the Discussion on Russia in the British Party', (19 Aug. 1946), Internal Bulletin, 11-17, H.P., D.J.H. 11/26).
 - 6 The New Imperialist Peace (April 1946), H.P., D.J.H. 11/22.

But it was the 'glacis' of Eastern European states which provided the greatest conundrum. It was all very well to repeat, as Finch had, the arguments of The Revolution Betrayed, but were the nationalisations in Eastern Europe bourgeois or proletarian? If bourgeois, where was the capitalist class which benefited? And did this permit Marxists to call for them to be defended as they called for Soviet nationalisation to be defended? If these were 'proletarian' nationalisations how was it that a degenerate bureaucracy in Russia had, through invasion, destroyed capitalism? Could capitalism be overthrown other than through the agency of the Fourth International, which considered itself the only party of world revolution? The leaders of the Fourth International retreated from these insistent questions behind a wall of repetitious slogans and arid dogma. The R.C.P. conceded that the East European states were 'new and amazingly complicated social phenomena',¹ but did not regard this as an excuse for evasiveness. It called on the I.S. to initiate a discussion throughout the International on the new regimes and began a discussion in Britain. Meanwhile, the R.C.P. position was that public ownership (statification) had to be defended,² and at least one Minority writer conceded the principle.³ But when the I.S. attempted to meet the challenge it equivocated. The nationalisation in the East was quantitatively, but not qualitatively different from that in the West,

1 C.C. Resolution on the Nature of the Soviet Union, [July? 1946].

2 The example the R.C.P. gave was of Czechoslovakia, where it would also be necessary to support the breaking up of large estates, (C.C. Resolution, [July? 1946], 21).

3 H. Finch, op. cit., 12.

it suggested.¹ Capitalism still ruled in these states: the Soviet bureaucracy could not achieve the revolution. Its aim was assimilation into the U.S.S.R.² The only possible resolution of the dilemma - declaring the 'glacis' to be deformed from the outset - was not faced. But the more ideologically vulnerable the I.S. became the more strictly it dealt with those who differed from it. The R.C.P. found itself in the always unsatisfactory position of defending the place within the Fourth International of those with whom it disagreed,³ particularly as it was in 1946 and 1947 perhaps the most trenchant critic of those ideas in whose name discipline was being imposed.⁴ The R.C.P. did not,

1 Germain argued that public ownership in Eastern Europe did not affect property relations:

The objects are the same: compensation is to be anticipated; the nationalised enterprises continue to be managed like capitalist enterprises, with administrators nominated by the state as the board of directors (and the Shareholders being sure of drawing each year the same dividend, that is to say never making any losses!); workers' control exists only here and there.

(Germain, 'On the Question of the Countries Occupied By The Red Army', an extract from theses he wrote for the I.S. under the title The U.S.S.R. on the Morrow of the War, 1946?, H.P., D.J.H. 15B/68, 3.)

2 *ibid.*, 9.

3 At the I.E.C. of June 1946 a resolution on the projected unity in the United States of the S.W.P. and W.P., which backed Cannon's distaste for it, was passed against the votes of the British delegates and a French Minority. A resolution condemning the P.C.I. stance on the French referendum was opposed by the R.C.P. and the French Majority. A general resolution on entry into social-democratic parties at the same I.E.C. revealed the R.C.P. to be in ominous isolation.

4 The R.C.P.'s rivals as chief critic were Morrow and Jeffries of the S.W.P. When they were expelled from the S.W.P. the British condemned the expulsion but also attacked their subsequent decision to defy an I.E.C. ruling and join the Workers Party. This attitude was struck on van Gelderen's proposal which was upheld by twelve votes against those of Goffe and Healy (Report of C.C. Meeting held on 16/17 Feb. 1947, H.P., D.J.H. 15B/76).

however, back the sharp challenge of 1947 to the proposed constitutional arrangements for the World Congress intended for the following year.¹

The R.C.P. cannot survive an examination of its theoretical record in 1944-47 without facing criticism. It failed to be bold enough in casting ideological baggage overboard. But this would have required a very radical critique and perhaps a willingness to break with the Fourth International. The leaders of that body were intellectually ill-equipped² to deal with a post-war political and economic environment so much at variance with their expectations. To consummate a full and radical inquiry in their company was scarcely possible, but breaking with them would have been a large step the R.C.P. was not ready to take.

- 1 This was posed by Shachtmanites within the Fourth International: N. Trotsky, G. Munis, B. Peret, The Fourth International in Danger, (27 June 1947), H.P., D.J.H. 12/79. The R.C.P. delegates were part of the majority which rejected this view at the September 1947 International Executive Committee.
- 2 Trotsky's perspective was regarded by them as 'a literal prediction of the actual course of events', (P. Jenkins, Where Trotskyism Got Lost, (1977), 1). The alternative argument is that Trotskyists were ideologically ill-equipped and this is the line taken by K. Coates with the argument that Trotsky's catastrophist prognosis caused the 'prolonged atrophy' of the Fourth International, ('Socialists and the Labour Party', R. Miliband and J. Saville (eds.), Socialist Register 1973, 162).

The Revolutionary Communist Party was born chiefly out of WIL's wartime success. It was launched on a wave of optimism that was confounded by the disintegration of the coalition and the political consequences of Labour's election victory in 1945. The R.C.P. resisted Labour's centripetal attraction longer than other parties which had flourished in the war. It remained in independence, intervening wherever it could in industrial disputes. By 1947 it was faced with a period of economic growth which would make further progress difficult; that same year the International Executive split it in two to facilitate the passage of an entrust Minority into the Labour Party.

* * * * *

The R.C.P. expected big things to occur at the end of the war. In the early 1940s WIL had predicted that fascism would follow a British victory.¹ It was certain that peace, as in 1919, would bring with it an economic catastrophe. 'A terrible crisis of unemployment' was inevitable.² So, every gain the workers could make in wartime against this day would be a bonus.³ The general belief of the R.C.P.

1 'Victory for British imperialism would not lead to an overthrow of fascism (even in Germany) but to the establishment ultimately of fascism in Britain as well', (WIL, Military Policy - or Confusion?, 20 March 1941, H.P., D.J.H. 5a, 8). 'The inevitable tendency of British Capitalism after the war will be toward not any high-minded war against disease, poverty, want or anything of the sort, but towards fascism. Nothing else is open to them if they are to live', (A. Scott, 'Anglo American Relations', WIN, (Jan. 1943), 5).

2 Socialist Appeal, (Mid.-Sept. 1943).

3 R.C.P. leaders even cautioned their members against expecting favourable wartime conditions to carry on, ('Statement of the Political Bureau on Redundancy', Internal Bulletin, 14 Dec. 1944, H.P.).

was that militancy would increase in response to economic decline and an employers' offensive. There was a question mark over how far the M.W.F. would play a pivotal role,¹ and how far the national shop stewards movement would come to lead it. Socialist Appeal advanced propaganda for a strong trade union movement and warned against breakaways.² Unions must be 'fighting organs of the working class', the front line of resistance as Britain moved from being a creditor to a debtor nation and the impetus of arms production died.³ Maintaining union organisation would, argued the party, be a priority. There was a tremor of redundancies late in 1944 which the party thought was the beginning of a slump. It precipitated internal controversy over what slogans were appropriate to the phase the economy was passing through. In October 1944 Socialist Appeal called for 'no one to be sacked until work is found'.⁴ This view was taken up by a minority in the party which had first crystallized around a belief that it should join the I.L.P. The party leaders however preferred a policy of non-trade unionists being first to lose their

- 1 At the Fusion Conference the Left Fraction argued unsuccessfully against using the M.W.F. Trotskyists should, it argued, work within the shop stewards movement until expelled. Only then would a separate movement be justified, ('A Policy for Industry', [March?] 1944, H.P., D.J.H. 14c/8m). In November 1944 however the R.C.P. affirmed its industrial perspectives. At the conference its main fear had been that events would overtake the M.W.F. before it was ready. One central committee member, 'A.R.' (Reilly?) moved an amendment to a resolution before the November central committee doubting the future importance of the Federation, (Central Committee Report Issued By The General Secretary [of its 10/11 November 1944 meeting], H.P., D.J.H. 12/8).
- 2 The next year it warned the dockers that breakaways 'would play into the hands of the Donovans and Deakins', (Socialist Appeal, Nov. 1945).
- 3 Socialist Appeal (mid-July 1944).
- 4 In an article by Bob Allen. Vic. Simms developed an industrial programme a few weeks later when he suggested that transfers should be controlled by shop stewards' committees, and that there should be a forty hour week and a guaranteed minimum, not dole, for those without work, (Socialist Appeal, Nov. 1944).

jobs in a period of mass redundancy.¹ A sharp discussion was closed by the R.C.P. central committee at its first meeting after the 1945 annual conference.² Even then there was a strong belief that unemployment of three million was inevitable. The M.W.F. declared its intention to transcend functioning as a coordinating unit and become 'a mighty delegates movement embracing factory committees across the land'.³ Economic revival was to blight the expectations expressed in a conference resolution:

'The problem of reducing costs and wages to "competitive" levels will immediately present itself for urgent solution to the ruling class. In addition, the problem will involve dislocations of industry, mass "redundancy" and transfers of labour.'⁴

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- 1 The Minority argued that a 'nons first' policy reinforced a division between trade unionists and others when the working class as a whole was faced with a political fight, (F. Emmett and G. Healy, 'The Party's Policy on Redundancy', [1944?], Internal Bulletin, H.P., D.J.H. 11/66). If sackings were inevitable that did not force the party to participate in putting people on the streets, (F. Emmett and G. Healy, 'The Transitional Programme and Redundancy', Internal Bulletin, Feb. 1945, H.P., D.J.H. 15/B/20). The Majority case was that some redundancy was inevitable and that 'nons first' was not a solution but a tactical response to them. In a period of retreats vital positions had to be held. The closed shop gave power over hiring which could also be extended to firing, ('Statement of the Political Bureau on Redundancy', Internal Bulletin, H.P., 14 Dec., 1944). The Majority also insisted that there was no contradiction between a perspective of trade union advance and minimal demands for trade union defence, (H. Atkinson, 'The Discussion on Redundancy. Defence of Marxism against Infantile Leftism', Internal Bulletin, April 1945).
 - 2 'Redundancy, the beginning of mass unemployment, has reared its head on an ever increasing scale. Employers celebrated VE Day by sacking thousands of workers', (The Aims and Objects of the Militant Workers' Federation, [1945], H.P., D.J.H. 4/46).
 - 3 The discussion on 'Nons' and redundancy was a major internal preoccupation of the R.C.P. between the annual conference of 1944 and 1945. See the bound volume of Internal Bulletins in the Haston Papers: I.B.'s 1945 Nons and redundancy.
 - 4 The Perspectives in Britain, 6 June 1945, H.P., D.J.H 12/26b, 3.

The year between the Fusion and 1945 conferences saw no major industrial unrest to follow the movements in engineering and the pits of the first half of 1944. This left the M.W.F. in a vacuum. But expectation of industrial developments was the strongest argument for keeping the R.C.P. out of the Labour Party, and the 1945 conference appointed a National Industrial Committee of Tearse and nine others. The dockers' strikes, when they began in the autumn of 1945, seemed to the party to be the start of the much-heralded industrial wave.¹ They occurred almost every year until the end of the decade, with that of autumn 1945 the most serious - and therefore the most misleading - from which to extrapolate to other industries.² The docks strikes came not only at the right time, but also in a form which suited the R.C.P.: unofficial committees rapidly flowered and looked for support.³ This was felt to be the result of the trend marked by the party in wartime: when leaders fused with the state, as they did in peace under Labour, every dispute threw up a new industrial leadership.⁴ The party was

1 See Socialist Appeal (Mid-Oct. 1945). But the paper part explained the strikes as 'the aftermath of the strain and privation suffered by the workers'.

2 1,100,000 working days were lost in a six week stoppage that spread from Birkenhead to all major ports. Large strikes on the docks now became the rule rather than the exception.

3 'Wherever a strike occurred in a port in the post-war period the ephemeral or semi-permanent unofficial port-workers' committee which organised it would despatch envoys to other ports to appeal for support. The envoys became accomplished in the art of strike spreading and rarely failed to secure an extension of the strike', (V.L. Allen, Trade Union Leadership, (1957), 198).

A link between R.C.P. industrial and political independence was forged in October 1945 when C. (Mazo) Martinson, a party docker, stood for the Mersey Ward Bootle in a council election and polled 148 votes, just over 10% of those polled, (Socialist Appeal, Nov. 1944). But Martinson was the occasion of an attack by the Liverpool strike committee on the R.C.P. when he was accused of representing himself as a delegate from his native city at a London dockers' meeting. For the text of the telegram of complaint sent from the Liverpool committee, see The Times, 12 Oct. 1945.

4 See footnotes of following page.

disturbed to find a lack of sympathy for the dockers¹ among the other groups of workers and was in two minds as to what the strike meant.² It also found itself the subject of denunciation which recalled its experiences of April 1944 on the part of elected dockers' leaders³ as well as union officials.⁴ The 1945 conference revealed a twenty per

4 From previous page.

Dockers had fiercely criticised the leaders of the T.G.W.U. and the party concluded that 'the labour and trade union bureaucrats' had been exposed in the eyes of the vanguard (WIN, Nov. 1945, 36-8). The dockers, it thought, were 'on the road to building a leadership conscious of its tasks': a permanent rank and file movement to struggle from within against the leadership was needed (Socialist Appeal, Nov. 1945). The R.C.P. also believed there had been resignations from C.P.G.B. members among the dockers during the Daily Worker's original coolness towards their cause.

- 1 In 1945 and subsequently, the Emergency Powers Act and troops were used during docks strikes without rousing any great indignation. The R.C.P.'s special alarm was due to discovery of hostility among those miners with whom it was in contact.
- 2 R.C.P.ers in Liverpool thought that the docks strike meant the new era had actually arrived: it criticised the London organisation for the way it had intervened (Liverpool District Committee, 'The R.C.P. and the Dockers' Struggle', 22 Nov. 1945, H.P., D.J.H. 12/41. See also J. Deane, 'Reply to the Liverpool Document on the Docks Strike', H.P., D.J.H. 12/41). V.L. Allen found the strike 'an excellent example of the inscrutability of dockers' behaviour' since the rank and file Dockers Charter stated aims already essentially present in union claims to the employers (op. cit., 195). The 1947 national docks scheme provided a fall-back wage and thus offered a step away from casualised labour. This seems to have had the effect of tilting the occasion of docks disputes away from pay issues (E. Wigham, op. cit., 103).
- 3 The National Docks Group Committee drew attention to the activity of 'unofficial elements' in the T.G.W.U. and declared:

There is definite evidence that the present stoppage has been seized upon by people connected with certain political organisations who had ready-prepared machinery at their disposal for encouraging and maintaining strike action. We think our members should know this and discard these people and make up our minds to use the constitutional machinery at their disposal.

(The Times, 13 Oct. 1944)
- 4 Arthur Deakin, who was about to succeed Bevin as General Secretary of the T.G.W.U., elaborated Trotskyist preparations for the strike, instancing the hiring of loud-speakers, vans and halls.

cent increase in membership,¹ which was sizeable but not in accord with the expectations of the previous year. Yet this conference also marked the last moment at which the Majority and Minority, as well as the leaders of the International, were unanimously optimistic about R.C.P. prospects.²

But 1945-6 revealed that the dockers' strikes, while they were to continue until 1950, were the end rather than the beginning of large-scale industrial action. The 1946 R.C.P. conference was told that the National Industrial Committee had been unable to meet regularly due to lack of finance.³ It seems improbable that this would have happened had there been more industrial unrest. The nearest thing to an exception was the movement which developed among building workers between 1945 and 1947. In 1945 the R.C.P. had two builders among its members; a year later builders were 'the most mature and strongest industrial faction in the party', among their number the chairmen of the Glasgow and London campaign committees.⁴ Trotskyists - not all of them R.C.P. members - were in the van of rank and file

- 1 At this second annual conference, held on 4/5/6 August 1945, there were thirty six delegates. Representation was on the basis of one delegate for ten members, with small branches combining to elect their delegates. It was believed that membership was around 300, with the increase largely comprised of those formerly in the C.P.G.B. or in no party, though gains were still being made from the I.L.P. (Socialist Appeal, (Mid-Aug. 1945).
- 2 R.C.P. leaders spoke at this time of 'by-passing the Popular Front stage' and of a critical mood on which Trotskyism might build. Socialist Appeal sales, at 12,000 were said to be restrained only by paper controls and not by the market.
- 3 Party Organiser, (Sept. 1946), 8.
- 4 ibid., 8.

agitation which convened impressive London demonstrations.¹ Yet by 1947, with the original aim of the agitation unfulfilled,² there were strong internal pressures for dissolution of the Builders Campaign Committee which the party had established.³ Other disputes in which the R.C.P. involved itself in the post-war years were those of the London Transport workers,⁴ Glasgow binmen,⁵ and at the Savoy Hotel.⁶

- 1 Up to 1946, the Glasgow Building Workers Campaign Committee published a small duplicated sheet, The Builders Bulletin. In 1946 the party launched a supplement, The Builders Appeal, which sustained a circulation of 700 in its seven issues between the 1946 and 1947 party conferences, ('Organisational Report of the R.C.P.', R.C.P. Conference Documents (1947), 4). The London and Glasgow committees made a strong intervention at the large building workers' demonstration in Hyde Park on 31 August 1946. On the platform were Jock Milligan, a party member, and Alf Loughton, a comrade of the group of Wicks and Dewar in the I.L.P. The Trotskyist platform was 3/- an hour for craftsmen and 2/9 for labourers; a guaranteed 40 hours at the 44 hour rate; two weeks paid holiday and pay for bank holidays; a national building workers' ballot for one union; all building by direct labour; opposition to P.B.R. or the attuning of wages to production; and the nationalisation of the building industry and land without compensation, (Mass Meeting Broadsheet, H.P., D.J.H. 11/2).
- 2 Brothers! Stand Firm For 3/- Per Hour, [1947], H.P., D.J.H. 11/3.
- 3 R.B. 'Appraisal of Struggle in the Past Period', (5 Jan. 1947), H.P., D.J.H. 12/74.
- 4 In the London Transport Strike the party considered it had made a strong intervention, which received press coverage. It produced a Socialist Appeal Transport Strike Bulletin : Unity is strength, [Jan. 1947], H.P., D.J.H. E/16.
- 5 The party had 'excellent relations' with the strike committee of the Glasgow binmen, for whom they provided typing and duplicating assistance. In return the committee reproduced a Socialist Appeal article as a strike leaflet, ('Organisational Report of the R.C.P.', R.C.P. Conference Documents, (1947), 4).
- 6 The Savoy Hotel staff sought recognition for their union, the G.M.W.U. The R.C.P. had a member, Marion Lunt, working there and its coverage of the dispute led to a libel action against Socialist Appeal. On 14 April 1948, the Master in Chambers found against the paper.

In 1945 the party had set itself the target of 1,000 members by its next conference, but it failed even to maintain membership. In 1946 the party was, however, reported to be 'overwhelmingly proletarian in composition'.¹ But this could not disguise the collapse of expectations. Not only had there been fewer disputes, but where these had occurred party influence tended to outstrip recruitment. Part of the reason was that a group of workers which was engaged in a strike, while it threw up rank and file committees, did not turn to the M.W.F. This was true of the dockers' and builders' movements, and the M.W.F. was by autumn 1946, reduced to keeping in touch with those engineers, formerly its backbone, now dispersed throughout industry.² By 1947 the M.W.F. had only a nominal existence.³ As for the party, it retained a strong cadre of industrial militants, but the high percentage of engineers among them indicates how far this rested upon the wartime successes of WIL.⁴ Strikes had been more localised and shorter than expected. Employers, thought the party, were on the defensive and prepared to grant concessions. What was more, strikes had involved not the heavy battalions but 'backward and formerly inert sections of the workers'.⁵ There was not a general disposition on the

1 75% of those eligible to join were in trade unions, 220 out of about 270. But 10% of the party's members were housewives and it had sixty members in the forces, (Membership Report, 1946).

2 Party Organiser, (Sept. 1946), 9.

3 R. Tearse, 'Reply to R.B.', (5 Jan. 1947), H.P., D.J.H. 12/74.

4 In 1947, on the eve of the split, the party reported eight convenors, fifty seven branch officials or committee members, nine district committee members, three area committee members and thirty six shop stewards. There were sixty trades council delegates serving on thirty five trades councils. In each case there was a strong presence of A.E.U. members, ('Organisational Report of the R.C.P.', loc. cit., 4).

5 This was not accurate. While the number of strikes in 1950 at 1,339, was just over half that in 1945 and the number of working days less than half, the number of strikes in coal mining was large, (E. Wigham, op. cit., 102).

part of the working class to support embattled groups.¹ On the eve of the split at the 1947 conference, the R.C.P. claimed to have intervened in every important industrial dispute in the year, but its expectation of large scale clashes failed to materialise.² For Trotskyism to survive at all in industry by 1947 required great flexibility. Even then success was not guaranteed. The R.C.P. was capable of manoeuvring with skill: it put a favourable construction on the vigilance committees which emerged during the Fuel Crisis,³ and detected the new wine in the old bottle of Joint Production Committees demand by the A.E.U.⁴ But there was, unmistakeably, a ceiling to industrial unrest which no amount of drive could transcend.

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As the British Section of the Fourth International, the R.C.P. was the official representative of Trotskyism in the country. It ran a campaign at the time of the Nuremburg Trials of Nazi War Criminals intended to explode the allegations of links with Trotsky

- 1 The government's ability to break the London Transport strike without causing an outcry was the subject of a dispute between the International Secretariat and the R.C.P. (Pablo, 'A Turn Towards the Labour Party Masses is Becoming ever more Urgent', Jan. 1947 postscript, H.P., D.J.H. 12/75; C. van Gelderen, 'Why I Now Oppose Entry', Internal Bulletin, March 1947, H.P., 1).
- 2 There were 10,000 stoppages in January 1945 - autumn 1950, nearly all of them illegal, but not a single striker was ever prosecuted under Order 1305 although it was in force throughout, (E. Wigham, op. cit., 104).
- 3 Vigilance Committees appeared in 1947 as a check on employers who squandered fuel. The R.C.P. held that they reflected high class consciousness, 'Soviet forms of organisation based on the factories' and called on its members to participate, (Emergency Resolution on the Fuel Crisis, [1947?], H.P.).
- 4 See also P. Sedgwick, 'The Fight for Workers' Control', International Socialism, no.3, (1960), 22; R.C.P. Conference Documents, 1947, H.P.

made in Moscow between 1936 and 1938.¹ A good deal of the energy and unity of purpose so lacking at that time in Britain was in evidence² but no tangible reward resulted. Haston's view that Stalinism was now, unlike the 1930s on the defensive, may have been sanguine³ but the R.C.P. did manage to assemble a useful paper committee behind its objectives.⁴ The need to attend to affairs within the C.P.G.B. was a secondary argument deployed by R.C.P. leaders for continued independence, but no great impact on the communists was achieved during these immediate post-war years.⁵ More scope was provided by the National Council of Labour Colleges which had provided a non-Stalinist platform for WIL in wartime.⁶ After the war the attention paid to the N.C.L.C. by the

- 1 Haston requested of Attlee that the British Prosecutor probe the alleged Nazi-Sedov link and that the R.C.P. be allowed a watching brief and the right to question some of the accused. He also wrote to Shawcross, and directly demanded that Vyshinsky, the Soviet prosecutor who had also prosecuted in Moscow, prove Trotsky's connection with the Nazis, (J. Haston to Attlee, 23 Dec. 1945; to Shawcross and to the Russian prosecutor, 4 Jan. 1946, H.P., D.J.H. 15A/21). A copy of the Vyshinsky letter went to the Daily Worker.
- 2 A model resolution was drawn up for labour movement meetings, (H.P., D.J.H. 15B/53), 50,000 leaflets distributed, a pamphlet written, (but not published), and much space given over in Socialist Appeal, (Report for Three Months, Feb. - April 1946).
- 3 Unlike the R.C.P., the Socialist Workers Party was reluctant to act and the main thrust of a half-hearted campaign in America was provided by the Workers Party with whom Al. Goldman, Trotsky's attorney, and Natalya Trotsky had links. Haston told J.P. Cannon on 1 June 1946 that an offensive campaign by the R.C.P. had 'completely silenced the British Stalinists'. For Haston's correspondence with the S.W.P. and other Americans see H.P., D.J.H. 15A/21.
- 4 The most prominent name on the list of intellectuals who lent their name was H.G. Wells, who had withheld his support at the time of the Moscow Trials.
- 5 The party issued the broadsheets Back to Lenin (Nov. 1945), An Open Letter to all Communist Party members (Feb. 1947), Cominform is not a workers international (Oct. 1947), and Open letter to members of the Communist Party and Y.C.L. (Nov. 1947), (H.P., D.J.H. 15E/1, 17, 19, 21).
- 6 In 1942 WIL ran N.C.L.C. classes in Shepherd's Bush and Coventry and moved its speakers onto the programme elsewhere. Trotskyist infiltration of the N.C.L.C. was denounced by the communists, (W. Wainwright, Clear Out Hitler's Agents! (1942), 15).

R.C.P. and Trotskyists outside its ranks increased.¹

The key R.C.P. branches carrying the frenetic activity of the party in these years were often less than a dozen strong. The Tyneside branch had thirteen members at the time of the 1944 crisis and was not significantly larger later.² The Southall branch, which enjoyed good relations with the I.L.P. and numbered among its members a leading railway militant, Sydney Bidwell, had about nine members.³ Liverpool in 1946 had three locals and its own district committee.⁴ Yet nearby Manchester had no branch until that year. When the new branch was established in the city it grew to one of the largest in the party, with a strong industrial base. But, as a microcosm of the

- 1 Sara had become Southern London Area Organiser for the N.C.L.C. and lectured against Vansittartism in January 1944. He and Maitland contributed to The Plebs in 1944 and 1945. Some N.C.L.C. officials including J.P.M. Millar and George Phippen may have looked to Trotskyists to offset communist influence. Phippen certainly created a congenial political environment in Southall, where the Trotskyists were strong, ('George Phippen', in J. Bellamy and J. Saville, (eds.), Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. 5, (1979), 179-81). After he broke with Trotskyism, Haston obtained a full-time position with the N.C.L.C.
- 2 In 1946 Tyneside suffered a major crisis with the resignation of Minority supporters T. Dan Smith, Jack Jones and George Benn. Tearse led a Central Commission investigation into the way the branch, under the leadership of Dave Binah, was run. His report proved yet another occasion of Majority/Minority disagreement, (H.P., D.J.H. 15B/82, July 1947).
- 3 Interview with S. Bidwell, (Jan. 1973). Southall was one of the branches which undertook fraternisation with German Prisoners of War, a key feature in the R.C.P.'s international programme. Bill Clemitson, another party member, was arrested in 1946 for distributing literature to German prisoners at a P.O.W. camp.
- 4 The party Control Commission had to investigate a case in Liverpool as well, (Statement of the Control Commission on the Liverpool case and related correspondence, July 1947, D.J.H. 15B/82).

party as a whole it fell apart by 1948 through factionalism and the impression created by Labour's progress.¹ It was clear at the 1946 conference that the R.C.P. was marking time. Membership, at 360-70 had fallen.² The party had retained a national framework, and in London membership and sales of Socialist Appeal were rising.³ At a peak the party had twelve professionals,⁴ but after the 1946 conference the apparatus started to be pruned under pressure of the need to economise.⁵ Mid-monthly supplements to Socialist Appeal began to appear irregularly and WIN, which had almost always been published monthly, became bi-monthly. The May 1947 issue of this journal appeared two months late and duplicated. There were further symptoms of decline as 1947 wore on.

The Tyneside arrests of April 1944, coming less than a month after the Fusion Conference, helped to bind the party together and confirm a sense of destiny. But though the old factionalism between the R.S.L. and WIL was conscientiously set aside new internal differences were present from the outset. An 'entrism faction' was formed at once⁶ with the aim of steering the R.C.P. into the Labour Party. It was a mixture of different Trotskyist experiences which at

1 Publishing correspondence (New York), 2, special supplement, (27 Nov. 1954).

2 Membership losses were 112 between August 1945 and September 1946. ('Against the Politics of Stagnation', Internal Bulletin, 1947 Conference Number, 1).

3 36 voting members at the 1946 conference represented 29 branches: ten in London, thirteen in the provinces, four in Scotland and two in Wales. Membership in London, the centre of the factional struggle had risen by 30% and paper sales by 70%.

4 There were twelve full-time and one part-time worker in November 1944.

5 See below.

6 Interview with J. Goffe (July 1974).

first gathered only a small following.¹ For a time some of its followers proposed that greater emphasis should be placed on fraction work within the I.L.P.² Party leaders still judged that anticipated revolutionary upheavals would bring a great accession of strength to the I.L.P. but pleaded that their forces for work within it were few.³ The R.C.P. attitude towards reaffiliation of the I.L.P. to the Labour Party was identical with the view taken by the WIL during the earlier discussions of 1938-9. I.L.P. separation from the Labour Party, in the R.C.P. view, was sectarian: revolutionaries in the I.L.P. ought to support reaffiliation whatever the terms the Labour Party might demand.⁴ Reaffiliation would break the I.L.P. between revolutionaries and others and be the quickest way to remove a false revolutionary alternative.

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- 1 The core of the Minority was Healy, already estranged from the old WIL leadership which now dominated the Political Bureau of the R.C.P.; Goffe, variously of the Centre or the Right (Trotskyist) Opposition of the R.S.L.; and (later) Lawrence, himself leader of the Right. They had the support of Sherry Mangan, a Time/Life journalist based first in London and later in Paris. Mangan, who functioned in Europe under the names 'Phelan' or 'Patrick O'Daniel' was a member of the S.W.P. and later of the International Secretariat. Other followers of the entrust faction were Fred Emmett, an A.E.U. member who taught crafts in Stockwell, Sam Goldberg, Ben Elsbury and Hilda Pratt, (Interview with J. Goffe; A. Richardson, op. cit.). X
- 2 D. Finch and B. Shaw, 'Our Perspectives in the I.L.P.', 9 Aug. 1944, H.P., D.J.H. 15A/3. Finch and Shaw rejected entry into the I.L.P. but they believed fraction work there was of greatest importance after industrial work. They charged that I.L.P. work was being downgraded, notably by the taking out of Bill Hunter, its convenor, to supervise trade union activities. Paradoxically they also forecast the rapid disappearance of the I.L.P.
- 3 But the I.L.P. remains an important obstacle in the path of the Fourth International. Events will not resolve themselves as simply as the comrades imagine. Far from the I.L.P. disappearing at the "first breath of revolution", even the beginning of mass radicalisation will see an enormous increase and influence in the membership for this organisation. (Political Bureau, Perspectives in the I.L.P., [1944?], H.P., D.J.H. 15A/3).
- 4 However, even if the terms are harsh, they would in any case be accepted by the I.L.P. leadership. The I.L.P. leaders are preparing to repeat on a new historical scale the experience of 1920-23. The lefts should analyse carefully this experience. But from the point of view of building the left wing, they should support the re-entry, however onerous the terms. The revolutionary wing will enter the Labour Party with a different aim than the leadership. (Political Bureau, The I.L.P. Fraction and Affiliation to the Labour Party, [late 1944?], H.P., D.J.H. 15B/17).

This was not the view of Wicks, Dewar and the others who had persisted with the I.L.P. in wartime: Trotskyism, now as in 1938-9, split two ways. Reaffiliation was carried by the I.L.P. but to general surprise the Labour Party rebuffed it.¹ Simultaneously with its discussions with the Labour Party however, the I.L.P. leadership acted against the R.C.P. supporters within its North-East region and elsewhere.² Interest in the I.L.P. within the R.C.P. was maintained at least until June 1945.³ It seems possible that the I.S. entertained hopes of a united Trotskyist faction in the I.L.P.⁴ This never materialised and the Wicks-Dewar faction persisted with the I.L.P. during its rapid

- 1 R.C.P. members in the I.L.P. continued, as in 1944, to back reaffiliation. See also P. Thwaites, op. cit., 38.
- 2 T. Dan Smith, North-East divisional representative on the I.L.P. National Administrative Council, was expelled in May 1945 along with two other members of the R.C.P. fraction. Herbie Bell, another Trotskyist, resigned in sympathy with them. In London Betty Russell was also expelled. The open adherence of the North-Eastern faction was reported in Socialist Appeal for June 1945. See also P. Thwaites, op. cit., 139-40.
- 3 Grant argued that the I.L.P. was in no position to make conditions about the Labour Party breaking the coalition. If it decided to reaffiliate then continued coalition was irrelevant, ('The I.L.P. at the Crossroads', WIN, April 1945, 5). J.B. Stuart, (the political name of Sam Gordon, who had become administrative secretary of the I.E.C. when it underwent its 1940 reorganisation), sought a way to reconcile 'the good sides' of the two parties. An approach by the R.C.P. to the I.L.P. would dispel illusions:

'That is why the next task of the R.C.P. is a main orientation to the I.L.P. That is why fusion with the Left Wing in the I.L.P. is the main tactic in the immediate period.'

(J.B. Stuart, 'The R.C.P. and the I.L.P. Left Wing', Internal Bulletin, June 1945, 1)
- 4 The R.C.P. was criticised for making reaffiliation the benchmark of its approach to the I.L.P. (ibid.). Some kind of contact between Dewar and the I.S. existed until at least 1946: Dewar told the I.L.P.'s 1946 conference that he had discussed with it the R.C.P. view of the I.L.P. and the Nuremburg Trial. After R.C.P. complaints, the I.S. denied that any official contact had taken place. (Political Bureau to the I.S., 9 May 1946; I.S. to the Political Bureau, 20 May 1946, H.P.)

peacetime decline.¹ R.C.P. attention to the I.L.P. fell away sharply after the 1945 election,² though the Minority who expounded the need for Labour Party entry continued for a time to be interested in the I.L.P. as part of their tactical proposition.

* * * * *

During 1944 pressures mounted within the Labour Party against the coalition which culminated in a December call for a break.³ Yet the Churchill government survived until after V.E. Day, so when a by-election was declared in Neath in January 1945 the electoral truce still prevailed. The R.C.P. resolved to challenge it as the I.L.P. and Common Wealth had been doing for some years.^{3A} The party ran a vigorous and well-received campaign. Jock Haston, its candidate, addressed large meetings in the town and was given a sympathetic hearing at the pithead.⁴ Six full time organisers were moved in, under

- 1 In 1946 Wicks and Dewar combined with pacifists in the I.L.P. to defeat reaffiliation at the party's annual conference. When a by-election was called for 25 June at Battersea North, the London divisional I.L.P., with little encouragement from national level, put Dewar up as candidate. Dewar polled only 1.5% of the vote. This was a traumatic blow for the London I.L.P., (Interview with H. Wicks Nov. 1979). After this Dewar mainly devoted himself to writing. He wrote Assassins at Large (1951) and Communist Politics in Britain (1976) as well as a pamphlet at the time of the Hungarian crisis of 1957 and various articles. Wicks continued as an antagonist of the C.P.G.B. on the Battersea and London trades councils.
- 2 The last R.C.P. polemic with the I.L.P. was published in early 1946 when Hunter argued that it was at a dead end and called on all revolutionaries to rally to Trotskyism, (W. Hunter, 'The I.L.P. and the Revolutionary Party', WIN, Feb. - March 1946, 141-5n). In April 1946 the R.C.P. recorded that it still had severe differences with the I.L.P. left.
- 3 Reg. Groves was part of the Victory for Socialism movement which helped to crystallize discontent. He was co-organiser of the conference of anti-coalition local parties and trades councils organised in Birmingham on 9/10 September 1944.
- 3A See Socialist Appeal for January 1945.
- 4 The R.C.P. held seventy meetings up to polling day, ranging from impromptu pithead gatherings to open air rallies in Neath with audiences between 300 and 500 and finally to two indoor forums at Gwyn Hall with 750 and 1500 in attendance, the last for an eve-of-poll debate with the C.P.G.B., (J. Lawrence, Report on the Neath Campaign, 13 June 1945, H.P., D.J.H. 15A/21,3).

the direction of John Lawrence and Heaton Lee and paper sales were high.¹ The R.C.P. had a memorable clash with the local communists, who were supporting the Labour candidate, N.C.L.C. organiser D.J. Williams.² But the decision of the nationalists to stand a candidate blurred the issue and, more significantly, polling day was delayed and fell a week after the end of the war in Europe.³ Haston came a poor third⁴ though the R.C.P. considered the success of its intervention should be measured more broadly than by votes alone.⁵

- 1 Thirty other party members took their holidays in Neath though this was in part an admission of local weakness. 7,500 special election issues of Socialist Appeal were sold and 2,000 of each fortnightly issue of the campaign. 30,000 leaflets were distributed, (J. Lawrence, *ibid.*).
- 2 Williams, the author of Capitalist Combination in the Coal Industry (1924), had once had some sympathy for Trotsky, if not Trotskyism.
- 3 Voting was on 15 May 1945, eight days before Labour actually pulled out of the coalition.
- 4 Haston polled 1,781 votes against more than 6,000 for the Nationalist and 30,847 for Williams. On a turnout of 58% Haston amassed 4.6% of the poll. Work on the Neath by-election by Mr. B.J. Ripley and Mr. J. McHugh of Manchester Polytechnic is currently, (Sept. 1980), in progress.
- 5 From no members in Neath before the election, the R.C.P. built a branch of six in the town and one of ten nearby. Sales of Socialist Appeal were reported, rather soon, to have 'stabilised' at 1,000, (J. Lawrence, Report on the Neath Campaign, 3).

1,781 votes, even for revolutionary socialism, were a douche for the more ambitious spirits.¹ A year earlier the R.C.P. had planned to put up many candidates in the forthcoming general election.² It now found that sympathy for its policies would not easily be transformed into votes. When the coalition broke the R.C.P. could only welcome it: as soon as Neath was out of the way it campaigned on a policy of 'Labour to Power':³ a few weeks after fighting him, party members campaigned for D.J. Williams in the General Election. In 1944 it had no expectation of a Labour landslide,⁴ though as the months passed Socialist Appeal sounded confident. The massive Labour victory declared on 26 July 1945 effectively spelled ruin for all parties which had benefited from the electoral truce.⁵ Even before that discussion had

- 1 John Lawrence in his report noted that a Save the Deposit campaign had not been a success and advised caution in future ventures. R.C.P. canvassers also encountered many Neath people who sympathised with them but were determined to vote Labour, (Interview with E. Grant, Jan. 1973).
- 2 'Where possible we will put our own candidates as against those of the Labour Party, as well as of other parties', (Electoral Policy, adopted by the Central Committee, July 1944, 3, H.P., D.J.H. 12/6).
- 3 The R.C.P. also called, in an unreal passage, for a united front of working class parties, including Common Wealth. Its argument was the old entrust one of sharing the experience of putting Labour in Power, (Labour to Power in the General Election, statement of the R.C.P. Political Bureau, printed in Socialist Appeal for June 1945).
- 4 See Electoral Policy. At this point, before the coalition was broken, the party speculated on writing 'End the Coalition' across the ballot paper or even urging abstention, except where there was an I.L.P. candidate to vote for. It also considered the possibility of a snap jingo election which would lead to a short-lived Tory government.
- 5 There is a discussion of the common fate of Common Wealth, the I.L.P. and the R.C.P. in D.L. Prynne, 'Common Wealth - A British 'Third Party' of the 1940s', J.C.H., Vol. 7, no. 1-2, (1972), 178-9. Prynne's suggestion of common work between the three parties seems fanciful however. See also A. Calder, 'The Common Wealth Party, 1942-45', Vol. 1, 186-95, 315-17 and P. Thwaites, op. cit., 185. C.A. Smith was a physical link between the I.L.P.'s reaffiliation discussions of 1938-9 and the crisis within Common Wealth, of which he was now a leader, provoked by the approach of the 1945 General Election.

boiled up within the R.C.P. about possible entry into the Labour Party. The Entrist Faction, (or Minority as it was commonly known), argued that the 'open tactic' could be justified only by the special circumstances of the war. It had plenty of evidence to argue from with the collapse of third parties and the recovery of Labour Party membership.¹ Healy called for entry into the Labour Party in June 1945.² R.C.P. leaders resisted the entrism proposal. Not only a rupture of the coalition, but a definite swing to the radical left through the Labour Party would, in their view, have to be in evidence. It seemed that whereas there was a popular radical mood, the Labour Party was moving rightward. The R.C.P., they insisted, must expect for the immediate future to recruit from the vanguard of the working class, and these people had 'by-passed the Labour Party stage'.³ They had some proof for their case in the stagnation of the party's Labour Party fraction.⁴ Finally they argued powerfully that the sacrifice of

- 1 From 1943 there was a rise in the total individual membership of the party. 1945 membership was practically double that of the previous year, (L.P.C.R.). The C.P.G.B., which could not be bracketed with with the anti-truce parties, also felt Labour's gravitational pull, and had sought affiliation as early as 1943 even though its membership total was booming.
- 2 'On Our Tasks and Perspectives', Internal Bulletin, (30 June 1945). The Glasgow branch had found there was a response for attacks on Churchill from a soapbox but less interest in meetings organised under the auspices of the R.C.P., (Interview with J. Goffe, July 1974). J. Walters, ('Some Notes on British Trotskyist History', Marxist Studies, 2, 3, 1962-3, 45), dates the dispute over entry from the 1945 election, but Healy's contribution preceded the declaration of results.
- 3 "'Entry" and the Revolutionary Party', Political Bureau reply to the discussion, 1945 Conference Discussion, (20 July 1945). The R.C.P. leaders argued that the emergence of a 'healthy' centrist current would compel the attention of all revolutionaries, but whatever the value of entrism in the past, this moment had not arrived.
- 4 In the eighteen months to July 1945 the R.C.P.'s Labour Party members had failed to make even one recruit, (*ibid.*, 31).

independence could be made only in exchange for concrete gains.¹ The 1945 R.C.P. conference upheld their views.² Later that year the R.C.P. put up two of its own candidates in municipal elections.³

The party was not completely preoccupied with factional disputes over entry into the Labour Party, but its preoccupation with this debate tended to grow.⁴ There was an unsuccessful attempt to close the discussion following the rejection by the 1945 Congress of the views of Healy and Goffe,⁵ which itself was an endorsement of the

- 1 This argument was in 1945 more powerful than it had been a decade earlier in view of the fame of Socialist Appeal relative to that of pre-war Trotskyist journals. Trotsky had even in 1936 considered the retention of an independent press while urging entry into the Labour Party.
- 2 Just after the conference, in September 1945, the Left Fraction, a reluctant partner to the 1944 fusion was expelled for indiscipline. It had refused to surrender control of Militant Miner but its other infraction was refusal to pull out two Labour Party members for open work. An appeal by the Fraction to the I.S. received no reply, (Left Fraction, Brief Notes on the History of the Left Fraction, 1960, 3). It continued within the Labour Party, publishing a duplicated paper Voice of Labour, (A. Richardson, Some Notes for a Bibliography of British Trotskyism, [1979], 20). See also 1945 R.C.P. Conference resolution on the Left Fraction, 4 Aug. 1945, W.D., T.M., J.L.R., Open letter to the membership [5 Aug. 1945?], and Left Fraction, A reply to the letter of the Secretary of the R.C.P. to members of the Left Fraction, H.P., D.J.H. 15B/30b, 31, 34a.
- 3 C. Martinson stood in the Mersey Ward of Bootle, (see above), and H. Bell, formerly an I.L.P. official, stood in the Buddle Ward of Wallsend on a Revolutionary Communist Ticket.
- 4 The internal documents of the party contained many contributions on the subject but this can be misleading. Party members had the right to have documents reproduced within twenty one days, (interview with J. Haston, July 1973); and the Minority levelled criticisms a good deal more often than the Majority answered them.
- 5 The Minority protested against closure, and it was recognised that circumstances, notably the arrival of Labour in government, were changing. The discussion was therefore extended to the end of 1945. This would only have barred formal contributions to the Internal Bulletin and could not of itself reverse deeply held convictions; in 1946 even this restriction proved ineffective.

view taken in March 1944.¹ Former protagonists of entry - major figures from the defunct R.S.L. - did not, for the most part, pursue the idea.² Harber, still a member of the Central Committee, insisted now that no principles were involved and that the short term and long term perspectives should not be telescoped.³ In view of the history of the discussion, this view was significant. The Minority however had behind it an International Secretariat which was strongly convinced that entry was vital,⁴ and the discussion continued without interruption into 1946. Party leaders pointed to inconsistent Minority views,⁵ but built

1 The Labour Party question has been the subject of discussion within the British Trotskyist movement for more than ten years. That is a long time even to discuss so important a tactical question as entry into the Labour Party. The subject was one of the principal questions in dispute between the R.S.L. and the WIL prior to the Fusion Conference of 1944. That conference decided the issue. (M. Lee, 'On the Limitation of the Discussion on "Entry" , [Dec. 1945/Jan. 1946?], H.P., D.J.H. 15B/45, 2).

2 Leigh Davis ceased activity in 1944, (see above). Margaret Johns had become inactive while living in Glasgow in the middle of the war. After the war she was persuaded to rejoin the party and was for a time a member of its Thames Valley branch, (Interview with M. Johns, Nov. 1973). Van Gelderen, another former R.S.L. leader, opposed entry after initial hesitation.

3 Harber shared with Lee, Grant and Haston the insistence that entry demanded a centrist current, participation in which, (on a short term basis), would make surrender of an established open press worthwhile. Faced by Minority interest in the I.L.P., Harber wrote pseudonymously:

'.... granting (as they know I do) the assumption that we shall eventually have to enter the Labour Party, how can we in the meantime best build up our forces for entry ...'

(P. Dixon, The 1945 Congress of the R.C.P. - A Reply to Comrades Goffe and Healy, 23 Nov. 1945, H.P., D.J.H. 15B/40, 9.)

4 See below.

5 They charged it with advocating liquidation of the I.L.P. as the priority task, then preparation for entry and then total entry, (C.C. Majority, Reply to the Minority Statement, 9 Feb. 1946, H.P., D.J.H. 15B/48, 2).

up the strength of the party fraction within the Labour Party.¹ Minority writers now projected their argument more sharply.² They called for complete entry into the Labour Party, which they presented as 'mass work'. Their thesis was powerfully backed by the International. At its 1946 conference the International determined on an independent presence for its sections in Continental Europe,³ but this was not intended to apply to Britain.⁴ It became difficult to distinguish the arguments of the Minority from those of the International since the Minority defended not only its view of entry but its economic analysis too. There was little originality in the case of the Minority which derived from Trotsky what it did not take from its comrades abroad.⁵ Its economic belief, like that of the

- 1 Militant a duplicated paper around which the faction was intended to operate was made into a printed publication in mid-1946, a bold step for the R.C.P. which was beginning to experience difficulties in the production of Socialist Appeal. R.C.P. leaders charged that the Minority had failed to contribute any articles to Militant up to February 1946, (ibid.). No copies of this Militant have been located, but see A. Penn, op. cit., 163 for an issue with an Edinburgh imprint. She also discovered a publication Workers Weekly issued from the same city in the party's name on 9 December 1944.
- 2 The establishment of a definite Minority dedicated to winning the R.C.P. for total entry was declared in Minority Statement to the Central Committee of 9/10 Feb. 1946, H.P., D.J.H. 15B/48, 1.
- 3 'In a general way, the road for the construction of our parties, particularly in Continental Europe, leads at present through the combination of our independent work, guaranteed by our organisational and political autonomy, with patient, systematic and sustained fraction work in reformist, centrist and Stalinist organisations' ('The New Imperialist Peace', (I.S. document of the April 1946 pre-conference of the Fourth International), WIN, (Nov. - Dec. 1946), 307). The R.C.P. attempted to amend this resolution, arguing that entry could not be rejected a priori for Europe 'in the coming period', (WIN, Nov. - Dec. 1946, 328).
- 4 At the first plenum of the new International Executive Committee in June 1946, the main resolution on entry was carried with only the British opposed. They put a counter resolution which fell with five votes in support, including that of the French majority and the Spanish delegate.
- 5 See footnotes of following page.

International, was that a severe crisis was imminent. It was this aspect of its thought that was rejected by Harber and also by van Gelderen, who initially supported entrism on his return to Britain that year.¹ The R.C.P. leaders, now forced to recognise that they were a 'Majority', and therefore a faction, in their own party, agreed that if economic disaster did loom the case for entry would be 'immeasurably strengthened'.² Nevertheless, it seems unlikely that the Minority could have held on and become a permanent feature of the R.C.P. if that party as a whole had not been stagnating. But the organisational report to the 1946 R.C.P. conference indicated that it

5 From previous page.

This is exemplified by Minority warnings about communist penetration:

'If we fail to rally our forces to wage this struggle, (that within the Labour Party), we are merely handing over the leadership in the next immediate period to the Stalinists, who are undoubtedly our strongest opponents'.

(Finch, Goffe, Healy, Lawrence, 'The Turn to Mass Work', R.C.P. Internal Bulletin, 17 July 1946, H.P., D.J.H. 15B/59, 9.)

- 1 Van Gelderen backed entry on individual grounds. He believed that contemporary industrial movements would later be reflected in the Labour Party and that an authoritative presence there had to be established in anticipation. The actual moment of entry, he suggested, could only be determined empirically and he implied a longer period within the Labour Party than the R.C.P. leaders, with their short term concept of entry, had envisaged, (C. van Gelderen, 'Towards Entry - A Contribution towards the pre-conference discussion', R.C.P. Internal Bulletin, [August? 1946], H.P., 10).
- 2 W. Hunter, 'British Perspectives - The Economics of the Discussion', R.C.P. Internal Bulletin, [August? 1946], H.P. Hunter disputed that any sort of capitalist offensive was taking place and charged that the Minority depicted 'a harassed and desperate ruling class with no room for manoeuvres, no room for retreats or compromises'.

was at best marking time. When the Majority explained this by reference to economic conditions, which were not such as to create a radical mood, the Minority saw that explanation as fatalism and renewed its case for entry in order to break free of isolation.¹ Nevertheless, the R.C.P. conference, in August, reaffirmed a principal emphasis on open work.²

The R.C.P. leaders had not ceased to believe in the approach of a crisis, but they considered its arrival would be delayed.³ The results of war, they argued, had been disastrous, but were screened by the fusion of finance capital with the state and American loans. The party clung to a long term perspective of decline but had to diagnose accurately the immediate conjuncture: it now began to recognise that it had previously telescoped not only its political but also its

- 1 The R.C.P.'s Labour Party members had grown in number from forty four to sixty six during the year between conferences, a 50% increase which compared very favourably with the overall position, (Labour Party Fraction Report [Sept.? 1946], H.P., D.J.H. 15B/63). However it emerged the following year that this fraction itself supported a majority of the R.C.P. staying out, and that a number of them preferred to sell Socialist Appeal rather than Militant. The Thames Valley branch of the R.C.P., a thriving Labour Party branch sold more copies of the open paper. Monthly sales of Militant were reported in September 1946 to be 118. In late 1946 the party was speaking of 'increased attention' to the Labour Party though it had the Labour League of Youth chiefly in mind, ('Editorial Notes', WIN, Sept. - Oct. 1946, 261).
- 2 J.B. Stuart, 'Report on R.C.P. National Conference, 1946', Internal Bulletin, 1946, H.P. Stuart, a supporter of the Minority, judged the class composition of the two sides to be similar, thus pre-empting an accusation it would level against the leading bodies the following year.
- 3 'Because mass unemployment will only begin towards the end of Labour's term in office it is quite likely that not only will the Labour Government see through its term of office, but that we may see a second Labour Government.'
('Perspectives and Orientation of the R.C.P.', R.C.P. Conference Documents (1946), H.P., 7.)

economic perspective,¹ and insisted that small unofficial industrial disputes offered it the best chance for growth in membership. But while the R.C.P. adjusted to a world quite different from expectation, the Paris-based International now intervened to challenge its interpretation of the whole British environment. It found the R.C.P. distinction between long-term crisis and immediate revival 'rather schematic', predicted a crisis of overproduction and declared that if a revival occurred it would be unstable.² But the I.S. also believed it detected incipient mass radicalisation, 'a deep movement of opposition to the reactionary policy of the Labour Government', and put its full weight behind entry as the mean whereby the R.C.P. might capitalise upon it.³

In responding the R.C.P. was inhibited by the forecasts of the Transitional Programme. It had to cover its flank against accusations of belief in a capitalist future,⁴ but it felt able to

1 'The inevitable crisis, however, will not be immediate. It will be delayed for a time. The orientation and strategy of the Revolutionary Communist Party is firmly based on the long-term perspective of crisis and decline but its eyes are also wide open to the immediate conjunctural upswing

('Editorial Notes', WIN, Sept. - Oct. 1946, 260.)

2 I.S., A Turn Towards the Labour Party Masses Is Becoming Ever More Urgent, (Jan. 1947), H.P., D.J.H. 12/75. In March 1947 the I.E.C. discussed and approved this letter to the R.C.P. by a narrow majority of seven to five, (one Italian, one Spanish, one French Majority, two British).

3 The I.S. quoted Labour Party success in local polls and by-elections and the resolutions being sent into Transport House in opposition to Bevin's foreign policy, but did not face the contradiction between electoral support and its belief that the government's policy was reactionary, (ibid., 5-6). The opposition within the Labour Party to government policy with its emphasis on a critique of foreign policy is discussed by D. Rubinstein, 'Socialism and the Labour Party : The Labour Left and Domestic Policy, 1945-1950', in D.E. Martin and D. Rubinstein, (eds.), Ideology and the Labour Movement (1979), 227-57.

4 'Every capitalist boom in the imperialist epoch is without perspective of achieving real stability', ('The Real Situation in Britain - A Reply to the I.S.', Internal Bulletin, (March 1947), H.P.).

insist that Britain's economic difficulties were attributable to under-production. There was, it insisted, an upswing: trade was growing, unemployment was low, consumption was at a peacetime peak.¹ It would last 'not longer than a few years at most' since antiquated British capitalism would prove unable to take advantage of its opportunities, but while it did there would be no polarisation of class forces. The I.S. might insist that there was a 'furious offensive' against living standards but 'there is, in fact, more purchasing power in the pockets of the workers and the capitalists alike than ever before'.² It is noticeable that both sides felt the need to underpin political prognosis with evidence of economic recovery or decline.

From a clash in economic prognosis, the British and the I.S. built an extension of their different views on tactics. The International saw the rapid expansion of Labour Party membership and insisted that this indicated the direction of the masses. Entry would not immediately bring gains: first there would be a period of shared political experiences during which the R.C.P., in the Labour Party, would advance and gain support for the Transitional Programme of 1938. Outside the Labour Party the R.C.P. was isolated. Resisting the sweep of the masses towards the Labour Party was placing its future in jeopardy.³ 'The fate of the party as a whole is at stake.'⁴ The

1 The R.C.P.'s detailed account of the revival is in loc. cit., 19-23.

2 'The British people were far from starving', writes David Marquand, 'although a casual newspaper reader might have been forgiven for doubting the fact', ('Sir Stafford Cripps', in M. Sissons and P. French (eds.), Age of Austerity, 1945-1951, (1964), 186).

3 'Under these conditions, it is obviously bound to be much more difficult to recruit members from the Labour Party directly to the revolutionary party, than to organise them inside for Trotskyism.' (I.S., A Turn Towards the Labour Party Masses, 8.)

4 *ibid.*, 12.

R.C.P. leaders, argued the International, were far too deeply embedded in their own interpretation of what Trotsky had said about entrism before the war.¹ It advised them to fix their sights upon a different objective:

'the present situation sets new objects for entry: the setting into motion of the entire awakened British working class along the path of revolutionary action, this time within the framework of the Labour Party itself.'²

The R.C.P. reply to this was sharp in tone³ and broad in content. Having challenged the economic outlook of international leaders the party turned to their Labour Party views and concluded 'innovations on entry reveal pressure of reformism'. The R.C.P. would adhere to independence. It was not it believed, cut off from the Labour Party in view of that party's loose structure. Nor did it follow that all political activity on the part of workers was expressed through the party. Acknowledgment of proletarian loyalty to

- 1 The R.C.P. Political Bureau referred often to the need for entry to be preceded by the emergence of a centrist current within social democracy, moving towards the left and in a period of high political life. They also insisted that entry could be for the short-term only. While they could quote Trotsky in this respect they were on less firm ground with their conditions for entry. The I.S. argued that 'entry of revolutionary organisations has taken place, at different periods that vary greatly in political character and for different purposes', and gave the example of groups seeking protection against terror and groups seeking their first recruits, (ibid., 9).
- 2 The Real Situation in Britain, 11.
- 3 'It was with no pleasure that we read your letter addressed to the Central Committee of the R.C.P. but with growing apprehension.' Following this opening sentence the R.C.P. declared the I.S. orientation, polemical method and conclusions 'patently false' and informed it, 'we concluded a study of your letter with considerable alarm', (The Real Situation in Britain, 1).

the Labour Party did not suffice as a complete tactical guide.¹ Labour's revival itself was felt to be only superficially impressive, a fact not readily appreciated from Paris.² The R.C.P. firmly believed that radicalisation in Britain would first inevitably create a centrist current, that no tactical dexterity would avoid this, and that it would in any case occur through a deterioration in economic circumstances.³ When this materialised there would be stirrings not over foreign policy but over bread and butter issues. Before then any Trotskyist current within the Labour Party, once it gathered strength, would be suppressed by the official apparatus.⁴ The Minority in Britain which supported the I.S. view was 'a tendency moving to the right and reflecting the pressure of reformism in the R.C.P.'. The Minority, charged party leaders, sought a short cut to reverse the huge disparity, between the R.C.P. and the Labour Party. But no long-term entry tactic could in fact resolve Trotskyism's British problem. A

- 1 'In that event, the Communist Party should never have been formed in Britain nor should the Trotskyist Party. The Trotskyists should have entered the L.P. and remained there until the masses had completed their experience', (ibid., 30). The example of the dockers was proffered: they were Labour supporters but had not sought to use the Labour Party during their recent strike. The R.C.P. however had found it possible to approach the dockers openly as a representative of the Fourth International.
- 2 Thus the R.C.P. argued that while paper membership of the Labour Party had risen, activity in many localities had declined as soon as the General Election was over. In traditional areas there had been scarcely any revival. The League of Youth now barely existed and Labour Party publications showed a swing to the right.
- 3 'The setting into motion of the entire awakened working class will not be achieved by a few hundred (or even a few thousand Trotskyists) no matter how determined, or how well we plan, or how much we might work or wish to achieve this aim - albeit propped up by the inspired directions of the I.S.'
(ibid., 41)
- 4 This point is specifically applied in the text to the Labour Party faction paper Militant.

propaganda presence would have to be retained until the workers were no longer prepared to extend to Labour the benefit of the doubt. There was a hint in the document of doubt about whether the traditional split perspective still held¹ but the R.C.P. rested mainly on a balance sheet of entrism derived from the WIL.²

In 1947 the Internal Bulletin of the R.C.P. reflected the Majority case more fully than before. Van Gelderen now reversed his view of the previous year and even outdistanced longstanding protagonists of independence.³ The Minority in the R.C.P.⁴ were unable to break new ground⁵ but the debilitating effect of this internal

- 1 The very fact that the Labour Party is in power with such a huge majority, and that the local organisations are not nearly as active as they were even before the outbreak of the war, is one of the factors that makes us hesitant to conclude that the workers will pour into the Labour Party in active masses as a result of the next wave of radicalisation. (ibid., 50)
- 2 This entailed two conclusions: that Trotskyism could grow when there was healthy life and internal struggle in the reformist or centrist organisation it had entered; that when the movement was quiet Trotskyism stagnated, especially if struggles found an outlet outside the Labour Party, (ibid., 40).
- 3 Van Gelderen was editor of Militant and representative of the Labour Party fraction's steering committee on the Political Bureau. He announced that his years abroad had left him out of touch and that British workers currently looked to unions and factory organisations as 'organs of struggle'. Going into the Labour Party, he suggested, 'means that for a long time ahead, we transform ourselves into a propaganda group for the sake of winning over the comparatively rare workers who do attend local L.P. meetings - and these by no means the most advanced', ('Why I Now Oppose Entry', Internal Bulletin, (March 1947), 2),
- 4 Van Gelderen had observed that the R.C.P. members in the Labour Party were succumbing in some cases 'to the reformist and petty-bourgeois atmosphere and opportunist tendencies are creeping in their articles and activities', (ibid., 2). J. King, a Labour Party fraction leader recruited during the A.L.L.V.D.C. campaign of 1944, delineated the case for placing the major emphasis on independence, from Labour Party structure.
- 5 C.C. Minority, 'Some Comments on the P.B. reply to the I.S. letter', Internal Bulletin, (April 1947), H.P., D.J.H. 11/29.

conflict began to be evident in the views of those who were not protagonists.¹ Majority thinking was not hidebound. Both Hunter and Grant acknowledged that politics since 1945 had followed an unforeseen path. Hunter recognised that Labour was implementing its programme. This, he believed was because it corresponded to capitalism's contemporary needs - a coincidence which explained the lack of resistance from capitalism to nationalisation.² Grant, later in the year, contrasted the Opposition to its home policy suffered by the 1929-31 Labour government to that on foreign policy experienced by Attlee.³ Hunter predicted that nationalisation would not reach beyond iron and steel;⁴ Grant foresaw a passive experience of Labour in Power, that there would be 'relatively stable economic and political

- 1 See A. Walker, 'The Task of the Party in the Present Period', Internal Bulletin, (April 1947), sep. pag., 1-3, H.P., D.J.H. 11/29. Walker was a follower of Shachtman. Bob Condon, a Welsh miner Trotskyist, went even further than Shachtman by arguing that technocracy and not capitalism would be the next historic stage after capitalism, ('The New Order', Internal Bulletin, (March 1947), H.P., D.J.H. 11/17).
- 2 'Today the Labour Government nationalises industries which form the basis of capitalist economy, and it is undeniable that there has so far been no fundamental opposition from its bourgeoisie', (B. Hunter, 'The Nationalisation of British Industry', WIN, May 1947, 1).
- 3 'Two Years of Labour in Power', WIN, (Oct. 1947), 1-11. D. Rubinstein discusses the role of the Labour Left, urging the government faster along the same road rather than along a different one in 'Socialism and the Labour Party', loc. cit., 236.
- 4 Hunter's argument was that the Labour Government was acting as the most conscious section of the ruling class thus far, so that state interventions could not be interpreted in a progressive light. Nevertheless, he suggested, workers did interpret them that way, ('The Nationalisation of British Industry', loc. cit., 4-6).

relations', and that there would be no mass revolt until the next slump. Even before this, R.C.P. leaders were preparing their members for political lull and little progress in building the party.¹

* * * * *

With the 1947 party conference approaching all contributions to the debate were winched up.² The R.C.P. was in opposition to the policies of the leaders of World Trotskyism on virtually all points where they had developed their own views rather than having relied on Trotsky's pre-war writings.³ The gulf was reflected within the British party, where the Minority defended all views of the International Secretariat and was establishing a discrete existence.⁴ There was no

- 1 ... we anticipated a development of events at a far more rapid tempo than has taken place. On this basis we overestimated the possibilities of growth. This error must be corrected, or it can have serious consequences for the Party by causing a sense of frustration among the cadres in face of a slower tempo of events. The Party must be prepared to face a period, not of rapid and spectacular gains but of slow growth and entrenchment in the propaganda field and in the trade unions and in the industrial arena, ('Editorial Notes', WIN, (Sept. - Oct. 1946), 261).
- 2 Patrick O'Daniel (Sherry Mangan) invited the British to moderate their polemical tone in his pompous 'A Note on Discussion Methods', (Internal Bulletin, 12 July 1947, H.P., D.J.H. 11/34). Haston wrote a devastating reply, with a witty appendage, 'In Reply to the Discussion Method of Comrade O'Daniel', (Internal Bulletin, [July 1947?], H.P., D.J.H. 11/36).
- 3 See Chapter XII.
- 4 On 14-15 June 1947, the Minority held its own conference and formally constituted itself as the 'Entrist Faction'. An International representative attended. Haston complained of poor attendance by Minority members at aggregates and public meetings, and also of a lack of interest in Militant. 'The atmosphere of a split already exists', he complained, (J. Haston to I.S. 15 July 1947, For Information, H.P., D.J.H. 12/82, 6). He also charged that the Minority, despite its interest in the Labour Party would take no responsibility for the operation of the fraction within it. Van Gelderen, he charged, had 'on several occasions' written the entire Militant himself, (Internal Bulletin, July 1947). To a charge of being opposed to the decision to print Militant, Healy replied that he and Goffe felt the fraction's narrow base did not justify it and that low Majority interest in Labour Party work inhibited the development of it in any case. In the pre-conference period Minority contributions started to be styled, 'E.C. Entrist Faction'. For separate Minority interventions in industry, see R. Tearse and T. Reilly, The Adrema Strike - The Real Issues, (Sept. 1947), D.J.H. 12/90, 4.

doubt that the R.C.P. was failing to progress,¹ let alone fulfil the heady expectations of 1944. Both protagonists had explanations to hand: the Majority in factionalism; the Minority in refusal to enter the Labour Party.² Interventions by Pablo, the International Secretary, from 1947 assumed a threatening tone, calling on an authority their author lacked in Britain.³ In the July Internal Bulletin, Haston published in full his correspondence with the I.S., a step which served to reveal the distance between the sides. Pablo's contribution effectively threatened that if the R.C.P. did not take the right decision the International Secretariat would split the party,⁴ and countered the British leaders' presentation of requirements for entry with some of his own which read as if composed a posteriori. His formulation compounded the differences over entrism and economic analysis.⁵

1 Between September 1946 and July 1947, the party had a net loss of forty two members, (E.C. Entrist Faction, 'Against the Politics of Stagnation', Internal Bulletin, (1947 Conference Number), 1, H.P., D.J.H. 11/32, 1).

2 *ibid.*

3 Pablo (Michel Raptis), 'It is High Time to Find a Solution', Internal Bulletin, [July 1947], H.P.

4 'Let the next Conference of our British comrades solve the problem in this direction and let each of the two tendencies in our British movement make its own experience', (*ibid.*, 12).

5 Pablo's conditions were:

a) The existence of a party based on the working class enjoying the confidence of its overwhelming majority and which allows within its ranks a legal or semi-legal revolutionary tendency.

b) The economic and political conditions of the country, which far from foreseeing a capitalist stabilisation, determine an equilibrium more and more unstable of the bourgeoisie, which will accentuate the opposition of the masses to the reformist leadership of the Labour Party and will drive them to seek a more revolutionary situation. (*ibid.*, 11.)

The Minority was faced with its own failure to convince the party membership: seemingly it was confined in perpetuity to 20% of conference delegates.¹ This was the context in which, like the International, it threatened to split the British party.² Now as in 1933 there was a constitutional case for arguing that democratic centralism had world not national parameters, but the prestige and achievement of the R.C.P. was far above that of the Communist League, whereas the standing of international bodies was much reduced. Undaunted, the Minority now began to drive the argument back in time, explaining the clash by reference to long standing differences between the former WIL and international leaders,³ and even to the social composition of the R.C.P. leadership.⁴ Had the charges carried conviction it would still have been necessary to explain why these

- 1 In 1946 and 1947 it could muster only seven delegates for total immediate entry against twenty eight for the Majority. It did, however, question the accuracy of representation at R.C.P. conferences, claiming the split among active members was 149:73. This complaint, first made after the annual conference of 1947, lacked moral force.
- 2 we shall suggest to the I.E.C. that it allows temporarily a division of the British section into an open and an entrust group. Such a division would take place within the Fourth International and there would therefore be no return to the pre-1944 division of forces in which one group was inside the F.I. and the other (the WIL) was outside, (E.C. Entrist Faction, Open Letter to the Political Bureau. The crisis in the Revolutionary Communist Party, Internal Bulletin, (Speical 1947 Conference Number), H.P., D.J.H. 15A/39 1-2).
- 3 Healy, the Minority leader had been a founder-member of WIL, but in this presentation to the 1947 conference, his Entrist Faction looked back on wartime activities which had been 'valuable' but fostered illusions that independent activity 'could, of itself, build the revolutionary party', (ibid., 4).
- 4 The suggestion was that two thirds of the Majority representatives on the Political Bureau and the Central Committee were 'either petty-bourgeois or intellectuals with no experience of work in the mass movement', (ibid., 7). This assertion conflicted with the observations of Stuart the previous year, as shown on p.432_n. above. It was not uncommon in the Fourth International to level this kind of charge, but in the 1939-40 separation of the S.W.P., considered a model guide to conduct during factional disputes, Trotsky, a participant, had been careful to avoid it before Shachtman et. al. took a definite splitting course.

middle class types had behind them an essentially proletarian party.¹ The industrial perspective these leaders held out to the 1947 annual conference was 'a continued process of considerable ebb and flow'. They warned especially of the penetration of factories by the C.P.G.B., but hoped that the similarity of communist and Labour ideas would discredit the former.² Best prospects for the party were still felt to be in industry and in the C.P.G.B.³ There was no doubt, however, that the party was now in decline.⁴

The conference itself, meeting on the August Bank Holiday of 1947, broke no new ground on the Labour Party question. How could it when one part of, if not the whole, British Trotskyist movement had been arguing over entry for a decade and a half? The arguments were wearily rehearsed: the outcome predictable. What made the 1947 conference different from those of previous years was the clear warning

- 1 In 1947, 79% of the R.C.P. membership, excluding forces members, was in unions. The rest were divided equally between those ineligible to join and housewives. 35.3% were in basic industrial unions; 18.9% in industrial service, transport or general unions; 25.2% in white collar or professional unions. Blue collar membership predominated in the provinces; white collar in London, ('Organisational Report of the R.C.P.', R.C.P. Conference Documents, 1947, H.P., 1-2).
- 2 R.C.P. Conference Documents, 6.
- 3 The R.C.P. still expected a mass communist movement to emerge. It noted that the C.P.G.B. was giving publicity to Labour Party members leaving to join it and regarded this as a hint that the danger of a large Stalinist faction within the Labour Party was less than it seemed from Paris, (The Real Situation in Britain, 34).
- 4 The bulk of the membership, at 332, had been held, perhaps by the lowering of expectations. But they now supported only eight professionals. The failure of WIN to appear for five months after May 1947 may be attributable to the intense factional conflict: there were abundant internal documents during this time.

that it would not be allowed the last word.¹ In view of the political composition of the I.E.C. this could mean only one thing. The stand of the Minority and the I.S. indicated that they would not recognise a national majority vote.² This might be justified by the belief that the I.S. urgently needed to see its convictions converted into reality: yet it was denying that very right to the R.C.P. Majority.³ It was left effectively with the alternative of walking out of the Fourth International or acquiescing in a split. As it was led by founder members of WIL, it had to suffer more than its share of splitting

- 1 The I.S. brought to conference a resolution which stated,
 'This Conference accepts the decision of the next I.E.C.
 on the British Question.'

Against Minority and International protests, the R.C.P. leaders' view that this should not be put to the vote was upheld. Both the International Secretariat and the Minority had accused Haston and Grant of canvassing a possible split from the International. No documentary proof of this has been located. That same month Haston claimed that he had appealed to the I.S. in June to throw its weight against a split and that the Minority had been asked to acquiesce in the decision of the 1947 conference, (Majority Central Committee, To the International Executive Committee, 19 Aug. 1947, H.P., D.J.H. 15B/86).

- 2 This also conflicted with Trotsky's advice to J.P. Cannon during the S.W.P. debate of 1939-40, where the American had been advised while in a minority to work patiently for a majority, (In Defence of Marxism, (1966) *passim*).
- 3 'The tactic of the Majority bases itself on the orientation of the independent party, but an integral part of that orientation is the operation of a faction inside the Labour Party', (To the International Executive Committee, 5). This document also made the claim that about half of the Labour Party faction supported the Majority view. If the R.C.P. was separated, these members were likely to fall under the sway of the Minority.

accusations though these reached the point of provoking many others.¹ But to the I.S., whatever the feelings of the British, the R.C.P. was now a living reproach. The I.S. would retie the historical knot. 'False prestige' of the R.C.P. leaders was coming before anything else, declared Pablo. It was a relic of the old WIL contempt for the International, he added. Clearly, it still rankled that the wrong horse had been backed in 1938.²

1 The Minority proposed, on the eve of the 1947 annual conference, to re-open discussion about WIL's abstention from the Peace and Unity conference of July 1938. This had been closed at the 1944 Fusion Conference. The move was clearly intended to subvert the key ex-WIL figures who led the R.C.P. But they countered most effectively with a protest from the R.C.P. central committee against singling out one only of the many splits which pockmarked the history of the Fourth International. This protest, circulated at the annual conference derived its force from being issued over the names of all central committee members who had not been in WIL in 1938, a surprising fifteen out of twenty. Grant, Haston, Healy, Heaton Lee and Millie Lee had been in WIL in 1938. The signatories to the protest, (with their 1938 organisation in brackets), were:

K. Westwood	(R.S.L.)	F. Ward	(R.S.L.)
D. James	(")	S. Bidwell	(")
D.D. Harber	(")	B. Hunter	(I.L.P.)
C. van Gelderen	(")	H. Atkinson	(")
J. Deane	(")	T. Reilly	(")
R. Tearse	(None)	(Co-opted members)	
J. Dowd	(")	A. Roy	(R.S.L.)
D. Binah	(")	A. Rosen	(")

The remarkable spectrum of support for this declaration confirmed how conscientiously the R.S.L. leaders had put ancient quarrels behind them in 1944, (R.C.P. to the I.E.C. : An Appeal, 19 Aug. 1947, H.P., D.J.H. 15B/87).

2 Pablo charged that the R.C.P. leaders sought to gather round themselves all the malcontents within the international and, undeterred by the central committee declaration, quoted the Resolution of the Founding Congress of the International on the Lee Group. He also charged the R.C.P. with preparing a split while accusing others of doing the same, (Reply to Comrade Haston : certain reflections are now necessary, (Aug. 1947), H.P., D.J.H. 15B/88).

Despite accusations of considering a split, the R.C.P. leaders did not break discipline. All they could do in the face of certain defeat was protest at the use of an organisational club to resolve a political dispute. Haston was unable to head off a resolution at the September 1947 plenum of the I.E.C. for separating the British party, and had to acquiesce in the least odious of the alternatives before him.¹ A special conference of the R.C.P. was convened on 11 October for the purpose of implementing the I.E.C. decision in favour of entry into the Labour Party by the Minority. A Majority declaration urged, for the record, reconsideration of the I.E.C. decision.² While this was upheld, the conference had then to distribute R.C.P. property between the factions. Most of it fell to the Majority, though the Minority had on 1 October acquired Militant.³ From 1 November there were again two Trotskyist organisations in Britain.

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- 1 Initially, the I.E.C. declared itself eight to five 'in favour of the entry of the Minority of the R.C.P. into the Labour Party'. Supporting the two British delegates in opposition were one Indian, one French Majority and one Indo-Chinese. Haston had avoided a harder resolution than this but now sought the best deal he could get. With 'Jerome' and 'Robert' he made a Special Commission which produced a compromise resolution. Under its terms both factions received official recognition and would separately pursue their courses under the guidance of the I.S. which would convene monthly meetings. The I.E.C. upheld this resolution eleven to one with one abstention, (Resolutions and motions of the Fourth Plenum of the I.E.C., (Sept. 1947), H.P., D.J.H. 15B/90).
 - 2 Declaration of the majority for the special conference, (11 Oct. 1947), H.P., D.J.H. 15B/93b.
 - 3 Central Committee resolution to go before the Special Conference, (Oct. 1947), H.P., D.J.H. 15B/93a. Militant was allowed by the Minority to die, though the 1947 annual conference had been told that it had a print run of 1,000 of which 450 were sold. More than a year later, in December 1948, it launched a new paper, Socialist Outlook.

The R.C.P. was split by the International Secretariat at the very moment when hardening communist policy created the possibility of growing industrial unrest, usually seen as an argument for independence.¹ It has been argued that the communist turn away from the Labour Party left a vacuum which the Minority filled with Socialist Outlook.² But the Minority/I.S. argument had been that entry was needed to pre-empt Stalinist penetration. The Minority was accused by the Majority of entering the Labour Party with no perspective.³ The official historian of the Fourth International frankly allows that the tactic was consciously intended to be different from the raiding parties of the 1930s.⁴ The I.S. action can be understood only within the broad context of general R.C.P. criticisms of it. By splitting the R.C.P. the I.S. emasculated a firm and powerful critic whose arguments it had failed to shake. No great compensation materialised in the shape of

- 1 In Bevanism : Labour's High Tide, (1979), M. Jenkins places the end of conditional C.P.G.B. support for the Labour government at October 1947, the very month of the R.C.P. split. Jenkins follows Pelling in attributing the docks strikes of 1948 and 1949 to communist attempts to disrupt European recovery, (op. cit., 15). D.N. Pritt, in The Labour Government, 1945-51, (1963), dated strong developments on the left from 1948.
- 2 M. Jenkins, op. cit., 91. Jenkins wrongly presents the 1947 and 1949 entries of the R.C.P. into the Labour Party as one and makes no comment on the presence of Trotskyists in the Labour Party from 1945, (op. cit., 58n, 92-3).
- 3 Declaration of the majority, H.P.
- 4 P. Frank, The Fourth International, (1979), 85. Frank unconvincingly motivates I.S. advice by Labour's 'close links' with the unions and the emergence of Bevanism. But the 'close links' were not new and were in any case an argument for permanent entry. Bevanism moreover should only accurately be dated from the 1950s. For the contemporary left, see M. Jenkins, op. cit.; D. Rubinstein, loc. cit.

rapid progress by the Minority.¹ In 1933 Trotsky and the entire leadership of the International Left Opposition urged the tiny and unknown Communist League into the I.L.P. as a matter of urgency. Yet they discouraged a split and condemned the Minority, (whom they supported politically), for carrying one out.² Matters stood quite differently in 1947. Although it had largely stood still since 1945, the R.C.P. was well known to active militants in Britain and had a reputation won by WIL's wartime industrial interventions. Its leadership had proved its ability over a period of time and could point to almost a decade of well organised Trotskyist activity in Britain. Who of the International Secretariat could make a comparable claim? Under the circumstances it might be considered remarkable that the I.S. was able to secure its objective. This can be explained only by the distaste of the R.C.P. for walking out of the Fourth International despite the low esteem in which it held that body's leaders, and the existence within the British party of a Minority faction which acted as an uncritical outpost of the I.S. and, increasingly, embroiled the whole party in an internal war. Finally it must be said that none of this could have come to pass if the R.C.P. had been forging ahead in the years after 1945.³ As it was, unforeseen economic expansion and the

1 The subsequent history of the Minority falls outside the scope of this thesis. Some of their activity can be followed in M. Jenkins, op. cit., D. Rubinstein, loc. cit., and L.P.C.R., 1947-9.

2 See above, p. 91.

3 This thesis, which was acknowledged by the Majority itself was challenged by the state capitalists within the R.C.P. ranks, who argued that it should be an exception to the general decline of all parties outside the Labour Party. They urged the maintenance of independence and the advancement of a practical alternative to the programme of the Labour government, (B. Evans and R. Carson, 'Must the R.C.P. Collapse?', Internal Bulletin, (Aug. 1947), H.P., D.J.H. 11/38).

radical programme of the Labour government in its first two years confounded all forecasts. No tactical adjustments could set right objective conditions which were quite unfavourable to progress for Trotskyism in Britain.

(THE R.C.P. 1947 - 1949)

The R.C.P. continued in being after the October 1947 split though the apparatus of the party was gradually reduced. 1948 was a year of stagnation: party leaders concentrated on theoretical explanation of dynamic world and national political changes, but there was declining activity by the membership. The difficulty of maintaining progress and disillusionment with ideologically bankrupt international leaders led to most R.C.P. leaders advocating entry into the Labour Party early in 1949. After a short fierce battle, a majority of the party supported them and the R.C.P. was dissolved.

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The majority retained the name and most of the apparatus of the R.C.P. But from this point the party press began to run down¹ and it seems that there was a decline in membership and in the activity of those who remained during the fifteen months to the opening of the final debate in January 1949.² Internal life, so frenetic in 1947, also subsided.³ 1948 was the first year the WIL/R.C.P. had failed to convene its annual conference since 1941. Polemics began to be directed, not against internal critics but against the I.S. and the Cominform.

- 1 The October 1947 issue was the only Workers International News between May 1947 and June 1948, though it appeared two monthly thereafter. 800 copies of the last (Jan. - Feb. 1949) were published. Socialist Appeal already a monthly was hit by the decision to break the long standing arrangement with the printers C.A. Brock, who, it had been discovered, were undertaking work for Mosley. No issues of Party Organiser post-dating the split have been located.
- 2 The Haston papers provide little evidence of activity in 1948 though most members now expected a political recession and were prepared for it. Some of the moneyed backers of the party were however starting to lose interest, (Interview with E. Grant, Jan. 1973). In 1948 some professionals began to be removed from the employment roll.
- 3 See footnotes on following page.

The strongest plank in the platform of explanation offered by the R.C.P. for the post-war political lull was the non-appearance of slump. It was this which would expose Labour's reformism.¹ R.C.P. leaders had rejected any suggestion that a slump was already taking place. They did not doubt, however, that it would soon be upon them. Signs abounded in the re-emergence of Mosley, an electoral swing to the right² and the words of Labour leaders.³ But continued British insistence that the lull would be ended for fundamentally economic reasons still left it divided from the I.S., which continued to believe European politics was occurring within 'unstable equilibrium', that 1938 output levels in the nations of the Continent were exceeded 'only

3 From previous page.

The internal dispute over entry and economic perspectives ceased with the split. 1948 was a vital year in the development of Trotskyist ideas in Britain and important documents were written, but the Internal Bulletin in its usual form virtually ceased to appear. These documents were the work of a handful of leading party members. In February 1949 it was alleged that the Political Bureau had failed to issue a single directive for the previous twelve months, (Bill Cleminson, Criticism of the entry statement of J.H., H.A., R.T., V.C., Feb? 1949, H.P., D.J.H. 15B/101).

D.D. Harber, a supporter of the leadership, ceased activity circa. 1948. He continued to combine W.E.A. work with his C.I.S. job in Eastbourne. In later years his main creative work was in ornithology, though he kept his Marxist views and gift for languages.

- 1 E. Grant, 'Two Years of Labour in Power', loc. cit., 11.
- 2 E. Grant, in The Menace of Fascism (1948), repeated the wartime argument about the irrelevance of Fascism to British capitalists as long as they could achieve their ends by other means. The reappearance of Mosley and rising Tory votes at by-elections were linked by him to Labour 'tinkering' with capitalism. Disaffection in a boom threatened dire things for the slump.
- 3 Grant argued that 'the exhaustion of the sellers' market looms in sight' and that in the speeches of Cripps were to be perceived, 'the symptoms of decline, of impending economic slump, of over-production', (ibid., 51).

in exceptional cases'.¹ The absurd 'ceilings' argument was applied in detail to Britain by the I.S. economist Mandel, who warned the R.C.P.:

'.... it is necessary to abandon right now any juggling with a boom that has not existed and that British capitalism will never experience again.'²

By 1947 key sectors of industry had been taken into public ownership in all the buffer states of Eastern Europe. In 1948, a domestic crisis over acceptance of Marshall Aid precipitated a full communist takeover in Czechoslovakia. That year also witnessed the Tito-Stalin split, the first serious and open rift between communist governments. The next year a generation of communist struggle in China was crowned with success when the Red Army, long in control of the countryside, finally entered the country's cities. These events created an unprecedented, albeit largely unrecognised, ideological crisis within the Fourth International, whose leaders had already proved unable to comprehend the survival of Soviet Russia after the war.

To the R.C.P. there was a need for enquiry into the worldwide enhanced role of the state in the economy. Some R.C.P. leaders³ had begun to consider that Trotsky's analysis of Russia might be outmoded

- 1 The I.S. also discerned evidence of a rightward swing of the petty-bourgeoisie in election results, but perceived an imminent clash between the two wings of the Labour Party, ('World Situation and the Tasks of the Fourth International', Fourth International (N.Y., Nov. - Dec. 1947), 275).
- 2 E. Mandel, 'From the A.B.C. to Current Reading : Boom, Revival or Crisis?', Internal Bulletin, (Sept. 1947), H.P., D.J.H. 11/40, 9. Mandel focussed especially on the shortages of manpower and of coal, both of which rendered the transformation of the economic revival into a boom 'impossible', and on the refusal of 'an enormous mass of capital ... to converge towards industry'. Mandel's paper was circulated to party members with a reply by Cliff.
- 3 Notably Haston and Grant, (Interviews, 1973).

and that a form of 'state capitalism' flourished there. Some of these speculations found expression within a document of autumn 1947 which implied that 'state capitalism' was a form of society which might emerge from contemporary economy.¹ It was after this debate was opened that Tony Cliff, an Israeli exile,² drew an emphatic conclusion from the hypothesis and applied it to Russia.³ A year after raising the matter the R.C.P. leaders had concluded that the theory was not coherent: if the state took over all the means of production, they reasoned, capitalism had ceased to exist. Their analysis rested mainly on the introduction of planning where industry was mainly in the hands of the state, a step which allowed crises to be transcended and the contradiction between production and the market gradually ironed out. In the capitalist countries, statification (nationalisation) could proceed only up to a certain point. The use of state ownership was a device of capitalism to mitigate the effects of its decline. It would not peacefully evolve into its opposite.⁴ The

- 1 Capitalist Statification. This internal document has not been located.
- 2 Cliff (Yigal Gluckstein) had come to England in 1946 and contributed occasional articles to Workers International News and Internal Bulletin.
- 3 The Nature of Stalinism in Russia, trans. C. Dallas, (June 1948), H.P., D.J.H. 15A/43. A harbinger of this critique was Cliff's article 'What is Happening in Stalinist Russia?', (Socialist Appeal, Feb. 1947).
- 4 The analysis can be followed in 'The Tendency Towards Statification - A Necessary Correction', WIN., (Nov. - Dec. 1948), 8-18. The decision to make the correction arose from a Central Committee meeting of September 4/5 1948.

more negative features of Soviet rule were given greater emphasis in a contemporary contribution from Hunter.¹ In 1949, with the R.C.P. already doomed, the crystallized views of Cliff on Russian economy and society received weighty refutation from Grant.²

Before the political shocks that 1948 brought to Eastern Europe, the I.S. saw the buffer states 'retaining their basic capitalist structure' and moving towards western influence.³ The 1948 World Congress, meeting in the month of the Prague coup, endorsed this view, seeing in these states,

'.... an attempt to exploit the resources of the "buffer zone" and to ensure its strategic control, while at the same time maintaining capitalist production relations and a bourgeois state structure in its traditional form.'⁴

Removal of capitalism from Eastern Europe was envisaged by the I.S. only within the context of structural assimilation into the U.S.S.R. Underlying its reasoning was the assumption that national

1 Hunter contrasted the reality of state power in Russia, with Engels' prediction that it would wither away, and argued that bourgeois rights there were strengthening, not weakening, as expected by Marx, ('Is Russia Moving to Communism?', WIN, Jan. - Feb. 1949, 8-23).

2 T. Cliff, Marxism and the theory of bureaucratic collectivism, [1949?], H.P., D.J.H. 15B/109; E. Grant, The Marxist Theory of the state as applied to the Stalinist states: reply to Cliff (Aug. 1949), D.J.H./15B/109. This debate on the state extends beyond the R.C.P. to take in a faction fight within 'the Club' (the former Entrist Minority led by Healy), and the formation of a discrete state capitalist group. It is not therefore dealt with here. See D. Hallas (ed.) The Fourth International : Stalinism and the Origins of the International Socialists, (1971).

3 In a resolution which speaks of their 'need to trade with the West and imports of American capital and industrial products' and suggests that their population is moving in favour of socialist parties. ('World Situation and the Tasks of the Fourth International', Fourth International, (Nov. - Dec. 1947), 275). Six months later the I.S. called on Trotskyists in Eastern Europe to enter Social Democratic parties, ('The U.S.S.R. and Stalinism', Fourth International, (June 1948), 110-28).

4 *ibid.*, 118.

social change could occur only through a mass uprising, following the Russian model of 1917. The corollary was that only two social alternatives lay before Eastern European states: capitalism or a healthy socialist system. The I.S. was forced to believe this, for the alternative was that some agency other than the Fourth International could achieve social change.¹ By 1949 its views were at such variance with reality that some stalwart supporters began to crack.²

Impatience grew in Britain. The R.C.P. argued that the existence of the bourgeoisie in the buffer states was more apparent than real, but kept in insubstantial being for reasons of realpolitik.³ The new society, Hunter reasoned in an important article, emerged that much more easily because of the existence of a model degenerated workers' state in Russia.⁴

- 1 Unaccountably, T. Ali in The Coming British Revolution (1971), attributes this folly not to the I.S., but to its British critics. But the R.C.P. stood opposed to the fantastic call in the 1948 World Congress theses for the expropriation of the big bourgeoisie of Eastern Europe who had been expropriated long before, ('The U.S.S.R. and Stalinism', loc. cit., 121).
- 2 The argument that structural assimilation into the U.S.S.R. was not in prospect and that the East European states were sociologically similar to Russia, was rehearsed by E.R. Frank, (Memorandum on Resolution on "The Evolution of the Buffer Countries", (31 March 1949), H.P., D.J.H. 15B/103). The Evolution of the Buffer Countries was an I.E.C. resolution of March 1949 which still did not clarify the social character of these countries.
- 3 Hunter argued that the Czech communists kept a National Block in being when it was not needed:
 'the coalition with the shadow of the bourgeoisie was intended to placate western imperialism in line with the alliances then existing, and to facilitate western economic aid.'
 (B. Hunter, 'Stalinism in Czechoslovakia', WIN, June 1948.)

4 *ibid.*

But the I.S. now accomplished an astonishing volte-face. When the split between Russian and Yugoslav communists broke into the open in June 1948, the I.S. responded with a naive open letter to the Central Committee of the Yugoslav party which betrayed great illusions about what was taking place, and principally the belief that Tito and his colleagues were repudiating the past.¹ The I.S. made no criticisms of Tito and urged him further along 'the road of the socialist revolution and its programme'. The R.C.P. was unimpressed however.² It also supported Tito against Stalin but interpreted the split as a struggle for independence by one section of Soviet bureaucracy. The Titoites were Stalinist still, claimed the R.C.P., and they shared with the Russians some responsibility for the crimes of the past. But the I.S. had landed itself in a hopeless ideological muddle,³ and the

- 1 'Now you are in a position to understand, in the light of the infamous campaign of which you are the victims, the real meaning of the Moscow Trials and of the whole Stalinist struggle against Trotskyism', ('Open Letter to Yugoslav C.P.', WIN, Aug. 1948, 16). A further letter developed this friendly theme and offered Tito the assistance of the Fourth International.
- 2 'We cannot lend credence, by silence on aspects of Y.C.P. policy and regime, to any impression that Tito or the leaders of the C.P.Y. (sic) are Trotskyist' (Letter on Yugoslavia sent to the I.E.C. by the R.C.P. (Britain), (Oct. 1948), H.P., D.J.H. 15B/100). The letter, toned down from earlier drafts, called on the I.E.C. to repudiate the open letters. I.H. Birchall, Workers Against the Monolith (1974) reports the later rejection by the Cliff Group of the official F.I. line but omits any reference to the R.C.P. leaders' contemporary rebuttal.
- 3 In June 1948, the month of the split, the World Congress had declared all the East European states to be capitalist. Now it was supporting a 'capitalist' country (Yugoslavia) against a 'workers' state' (Russia). There was, as Haston the R.C.P. signatory pointed out, no call for the overthrow of Yugoslav capitalism in the open letters.

British paid no attention to its views in the literature they put out for public consumption.¹

1949 brought final success for the Chinese communists which compounded the bewilderment of the I.S. It reacted in the same myopic way as it had to the new Eastern European states, which is to say that it pretended, in effect, that a revolution had not taken place.² To the R.C.P., this brought final disillusionment. David James took the views of the I.S. itself to their logical conclusion that the Fourth International was irrelevant.³ Nor was he satisfied with the R.C.P. attempt to handle the apparent contradictions in Trotskyist theory, thrown up by Yugoslavia and China by backing a deformed workers' state.

- 1 See the pamphlet, E. Grant and J. Haston, The Tito-Stalin Split, (1948). The official Trotskyist reaction was no passing fancy. Two years later, in its official American journal, Gerard Bloch wrote that 'the Yugoslav revolution can very well become the springboard from which the Fourth International will launch out to win over the masses', ('The Test of Yugoslavia', Fourth International, (July - Aug. 1950), 121). For an interesting first-hand account of the course of events before and during the Tito-Stalin quarrel see F. Claudin, The Communist Movement, (1975), 486-548. The enthusiasm of the Fourth International leaders for Tito found a mirror image in James Klugmann's From Trotsky to Tito (1951) which constructed a farrago of links between the two movements.
- 2 In April 1948, before the Nationalists were routed, a Chinese Trotskyist dismissed Mao's programme as 'an embellishment of bourgeois power' and predicted he would use the national bourgeoisie as an ally against imperialism, (H. Yueh, 'Mao Tse-tung's "Revolution"', Fourth International (N.Y. Dec. 1949), 328-32). Later it was suggested that 'the Stalinist programme itself is dedicated to the protection and preservation of capitalist property relations', (C.L. Liu, 'China : An Aborted Revolution', Fourth International, (N.Y. Jan. - Feb. 1950), 3-7).
- 3 'Objectively, it is Tito (and Gomulka and tomorrow perhaps Mao Tse-tung) who express the programme of Trotskyism, unconsciously, in a distorted form. The Fourth International has been by-passed.' (Some Remarks on the Question of Stalinism, (Feb. 1949), H.P., D.J.H. 15B/102, 10).

Stalinism, he concluded, was the only real alternative to capitalism. Grant's refutation of this rested on the variety of political forms available either to proletarian or to bourgeois rule, and the argument that like economic forms did not preclude conflicts between states. R.C.P. support for Tito was dictated not by the form of Yugoslav society but by the right of nations to self-determination, which had been threatened by Stalin. As for China, Mao might prove 'a new and more formidable Tito' but this did not mean that his revolution would not also be deformed from the start.¹ Support for this argument came also from Hunter, who noted in his analysis the close economic similarity of Russia to all the buffer states, yet echoed Grant's warning of future Maoist opposition.²

* * * * *

The ideological incapacity of the I.S. as well as the general lack of progress by the Fourth International was the background to the disintegration of the R.C.P. which took place in 1949. Grant and others had cobbled together a strong alternative analysis to that of the I.S., but they had not provided a definite programme to guide the activity of Fourth Internationalists in the present. Internationally and nationally the thrust of their argument was that no initiatives

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- 1 Grant predicted bonapartist rule in China. The working class had not played a leading role there and the bourgeoisie would only be allowed a fragile existence while Mao played for time, (In Reply to David James, (1949), H.P., D.J.H. 15B/102, 15).
- 2 W. Hunter, The I.S. and Eastern Europe, (May 1949), H.P., D.J.H. 12/106, 3. Grant had welcomed the passage of power to the Chinese communists with the remarkable prediction that 'it is quite likely that Stalin will have a new Tito on his hands. Mao will have a powerful base in China with its 450-500 million population, and its potential resources, and the undoubted mass support that his regime will possess in the early stages', (Socialist Appeal, Jan. 1949).

were available, that matters were in the hands of objective economic and political forces. The malaise might have been offset by R.C.P. progress but this did not take place. In Britain Labour was, apparently, carrying out its programme. The extension of Soviet rule in Eastern Europe made it improbable that any great numbers would defect from the C.P.G.B. After a period of confusion induced by the Tito-Stalin split, the C.P.G.B. rallied to Russia. Party membership fell, but Trotskyism did not benefit thereby.

The crisis of Trotskyist leadership may have been long gathering.¹ It broke into the open in January 1949 when Haston, Tearse, Atkinson and Vic Charles, a majority of the Political Bureau, called for entry into the Labour Party.² They had not revised their views on how things stood within the Labour Party, but recognised that the industrial field had been, contrary to expectations, 'exceptionally quiescent', and that communists were now more confident than before and thus more difficult to move. Haston et. al. made no claim that the 'conditions' for entry existed in the Britain of 1949. They suggested instead that the problem be approached from a new angle: that it would be impossible to build a third party except from a recognition that workers had first to complete their experiences of social democracy and

1 Haston had been surprised at the leniency of his treatment in Durham Jail in 1944. Three years later he had argued against extending support to a miners' strike, (Interview with J. Haston, July 1973). It is believed that he had attempted to resign several times before 1949, but been dissuaded by other party leaders who also suppressed the news, (Interview with S. Bornstein and S. Levy, 30 Nov. 1973).

2 J. Haston et. al., Statement on the perspective of the R.C.P. (Jan. 1949), H.P., D.J.H. 15B/101. The discussion was officially opened on 9 January and it was then agreed that it would last fourteen weeks. In fact written contributions continued to arrive until the special R.C.P. conference in mid-June 1949.

communism. Without enthusiasm,¹ they proposed a long period of Labour Party work.² Since it was an expression of a mood the proposal, if it was to be defeated, had to be instantly suppressed. But other party leaders were not sufficiently resolute or willing to take such rapid steps. Grant and two other Political Bureau members consciously avoided the issue by declining to engage in a struggle over entrism. In their view the die was already cast³ and unity took precedence over a sterile discussion within the party.⁴ They put great value on the agreement by all that there was a need to maintain a theoretical journal and a tight organisation. This was to turn out to be self-deception. The debate ceased to be confined to R.C.P. leaders as the party received a missive from the I.S. and polemics from members who sought to retain an independent party. The I.S. letter was animated

- 1 (The Labour Party), 'despite the limitations which it will impose on revolutionary agitation is the only field from which a mass Trotskyist tendency can arise in the period ahead', (ibid.).
- 2 'Several years' were specified, another departure from previous beliefs. The authors rejected another earlier view by talking of going in to organise the left wing. Their detailed proposal was for a period of preparation for entry, an open approach to the Labour Party for terms, and coordination with the former Minority once they were inside.
- 3 'The overwhelming majority of the leadership and trained cadres, and a substantial section of the rank and file' were in favour of dissolving the R.C.P., they claimed, (T. Grant, J. Deane, G. Hanson, Letter to the Members, [Jan.? 1949], H.P., D.J.H. 15B/101).
- 4 Grant et. al. argued that if a principle had been at stake then there would have to be a struggle regardless of the consequences. But since Trotskyism was barred from growth for the present whatever it did, a debate would be futile.

by an unforgiving spirit.¹ Haston et al. had not adopted the entrism proposals of the I.S. two years late; they had devised their own. Nor had they revised their economic perspectives. They were proposing to enter the Labour Party without any definite end in view.² The I.S. called for delay and regretted that no votes had been taken in the discussions held so far by the R.C.P. This document had the predictable effect of solidifying the British leaders. None of them shared the views of the I.S. on the economy or in the controversies over Russia and Eastern Europe. The I.S. had so little standing with the R.C.P. that its demand to be involved in the debate had negligible impact. A rapid reply from the Political Bureau rejected the liquidationist charge and all I.S. proposals for conduct of the debate.³ It also pointed out the R.C.P. leaders were now repudiating the very concept of entrism the International itself had criticised two years

1 'This document is the expression of liquidationist tendencies', (Open letter from the I.S. to all members of the R.C.P., (8 Feb. 1949), H.P., D.J.H. 15B/101, 1).

2 There is great danger because the policy of the comrades depends on nothing. Nothing is to be done because reformism is transforming the working class, nothing is to be done because Stalinism is achieving victories for the working class. They have not much hope to build the Trotskyist organisation, they have no hope in the development of the Fourth International. The proposal of entry looks like the act of a desperate man drowning himself in deep water, (ibid.).

3 To the I.S. from the Political Bureau of the R.C.P., (21 Feb. 1949), H.P., D.J.H. 15B/101. The authors declared their hope, on entering the Labour Party, to fuse with the old Minority.

before.¹ The I.S. could derive no comfort at all from other contributions to the debate.² Most significantly there was a rank and file revolt which centred on restating original R.C.P. views against a leadership which it believed to be demoralised. These members, centred on the London district committee, had first looked to Grant to resist the drift into the Labour Party. When disappointed, they took up cudgels themselves. They agreed with the I.S. only in their belief that Haston et. al. were aiming at destruction of the party. In every other respect they opposed it. Entry could be efficacious only under conditions of economic recession which were absent. R.C.P. leaders were privately in despair at the ability of the party to maintain itself and this was driving them on.³ The Open Party Faction had only a limited impact though it made considerable effort.⁴ Late in the

- 1 Although the Political Bureau now believed there would be no great gains inside or outside the Labour Party, they did also concede that they had to attempt to influence processes at work within it. It may have been this concession to the I.S. which caused Grant to abstain over its statement, (ibid.).
- 2 B. Cleminson, Criticisms of the entry statement of J.H., H.A., R.T., V.C., [Jan./Feb. 1949?], H.P., D.J.H. 15B/101. Cleminson believed that criticism of the Labour Government was growing but was not expressed through the Labour Party. He asserted that the R.C.P. had never been more than a propaganda group and that if the ability to agitate successfully was the criterion of open work, Trotskyists should never have left the Labour Party. He branded the Haston document as a screen for inactivity and remoteness on the part of the leadership, and proposed a purge of those who suggested, 'let's drown ourselves in the most stagnant pool in British politics - The Labour Party'.
- 3 Open Party Faction, Some Comments on the I.S. Letter and the P.B. Reply, (March 1949), H.P., D.J.H. 15B/101.
- 4 Sam Levy, author of Some Comments, and Alf Snobel, another faction leader, visited several party branches but failed to convince them of the need to hold the traditional line. They themselves lacked the aura of front rank leaders, and their perspective of more of the same did not inspire confidence, (Interview with S. Bornstein and S. Levy, Nov. 1973).

debate its leaders did attempt to broaden the issues. They rejected the classical conditions of entry, formerly much beloved.¹ They came close to suggesting that successful Trotskyist activity within the Labour Party was impossible.² Lack of activity there would, they predicted, lead to an over emphasis on theory and to factionalism.³

When the Political Bureau next addressed the party it was in more radical mood. It repudiated its own policy of independence since 1945,⁴ conceded the charge of fatalism levelled in the past by the I.S.⁵ and predicted that the beneficiaries of a mass movement would be no independent force but Bevan and other left wing Labour leaders. The R.C.P., it now believed, would never be able to step in and take

- 1 Once again - the real situation in Britain; document of the Open Party Faction, (May 1949), H.P., D.J.H. 15B/101, 12.
- 2 The Faction claimed that those R.C.P. members still in the Labour Party wished to be withdrawn, and that the former Minority was placing increasing emphasis on the support of left parliamentarians through its paper the Socialist Outlook, (ibid., 15).
- 3 They charged the R.C.P. leadership with neglecting the ideological education of members. This seems harsh in view of the output of Grant and Hunter from 1947 onwards, and yet Grant is the subject of particularly scathing remarks in the text of the Faction's May document.
- 4 Maintenance of an open party had been wrong, 'ever since the Labour Party was elected and began to carry out its programme', (Political Bureau, Statement on Entry, (March 1949), H.P., D.J.H. 15B/101).
- 5 The Political Bureau acknowledged that together with the Open Party Faction it had been guilty of waiting for events to come its way in an 'ivory tower'.

control of an established current: it would have to earn support.¹ Appearing monolithic before the members, and having allowed a lengthy discussion, the Political Bureau's victory was assured. The Open Party Faction had failed to gain ground and other alternatives did not attract support.² There was no split before the special R.C.P. Congress of 4-6 June, which gave most of its agenda over to the problem of entry.³ At the Congress the biggest faction, with around 50% of the thirty delegates was that behind Grant which meant a vote to enter the Labour Party was certain. The supporters of Haston and of the Open Party Faction registered about equal strength.⁴ Speeches by Levy and

- 1 Specific points of activity would be persuading disillusioned militants not to despair of the Labour Party, and the N.C.L.C., (considered a form of Labour Party work). The danger of degenerating into left opportunism was rejected: 'the mere existence of an open party and seclusion from real trends in no answer to incipient ideological capitulation', (ibid.).
- 2 One of these was advanced by Frank Ward, a central committee member, who favoured entry for most of the R.C.P. with a small group outside to publish a new theoretical journal and undertake industrial work, (British Perspectives and the International, [May? 1949], H.P., D.J.H. 15B/107). The F.I. leaders were predictably as horrified by the views of Ward on the Fourth International as they were by those of James, and considered the party had failed to convincingly refute either, (I.S., To The Conference of the R.C.P., 2 June 1949, H.P., D.J.H. 12/108). Another R.C.P. leader, Tommy Reilly, drew even further conclusions from the failure of the Fourth International and joined the C.P.G.B., (See Central Committee, R.C.P., To the I.S., 25 June 1949, H.P., D.J.H. 12/108).
- 3 There was however a discussion on attitudes to the Fourth International which revealed that Ward alone advocated the slogan 'For the Fourth' which Trotsky had rejected before the Founding Congress.
- 4 No minutes of this Congress have been located. These figures are based on an interview with S. Bornstein and S. Levy, (Nov. 1973). The Congress met in the presence of an I.S. delegate and Goldberg from the old Minority.

Snobel gained them no ground and the decision to dissolve was taken.¹

Haston was appointed to head a Committee of Dissolution.

The last issue of Socialist Appeal was published in July 1949. It ran a declaration of dissolution:

'The perspective for Socialists must therefore be to join the ranks of the politically conscious workers inside the Labour Party and try to orientate its policy along truly socialist lines.'²

It was openly stated that dissolution was forced on the R.C.P. by a 1946 decision of Labour Party conference on affiliations. It claimed to take this step in order to help Labour fashion an anti-capitalist programme in the face of the coming world slump. In the end the R.C.P. had succumbed to the same hostile environment which had induced the collapse of the I.L.P. and Common Wealth. Ideologically and organisationally it was tougher (though much smaller) than either, and so its fate was delayed. To its credit it tried honestly to explain post-war developments in the economy and politics at home and abroad. Its efforts shine when compared with those of its international leadership.³ But events were so different to expectations that the party itself was shattered by the reorientation expected of it. The argument between the I.S., the Majority and the Minority had been over when, not whether the slump would appear. By 1949 only the

1 In fact some Faction supporters were lost during the debate, (Interview with S. Bornstein and S. Levy, Nov. 1973).

2 'Declaration on the dissolution of the Revolutionary Communist Party and the entry of its members into the Labour Party', Socialist Appeal, (special number), (July 1949).

3 The R.C.P. leaders rapped I.S. knuckles one final time on the eve of dissolution when they attributed some of the democratisation to I.S. failure to distinguish the Fourth International from Stalinism, (Central Committee, R.C.P., To the I.S., 25 June 1949, H.P., D.J.H. 12/108).

Majority had faced up to the probability of some years of expansion which its determinist Marxism suggested meant also a political lull. This greater clarity brought nearer its demise and an end to the struggle against history.¹

1 The subsequent fate of the R.C.P. is outside the scope of this thesis. The Open Party Faction had predicted that the I.S. would give control of the newly fused Trotskyist presence in the Labour Party to the Minority, now known as the Club. The idea of a fusion had been supported from the outset by Haston et al. Two different economic perspectives were at war within the Club and that of the I.S. and Healy prevailed following a number of expulsions. Within a short time the state capitalist group of Cliff departed. Others ceased activity. Haston formally left the Trotskyist movement on 10 June 1950, leaving behind him a remarkable memoir in which he repudiated the activity of a lifetime, (H.P., D.J.H. 15B/111). At least one former R.C.P. leader, Deane, was expelled from the Club for refusing to break relations with Haston, (E.C. Statement on the conduct of J.D., 24 May 1950, H.P., D.J.H. 15B/110). Shortly, most R.C.P. leaders had either ceased activity or, like Grant and Cliff, were seeking to build anew outside the Club. The real meaning of the original proposal of Haston et al. - physical exhaustion arising from a long struggle against adverse circumstances as well as arrival at an ideological impasse - was now apparent, (Interview with S. Bornstein and S. Levy, Nov. 1979; J. Walters, 'Some Notes on British Trotskyist History', Marxist Studies, Vol. 2, no. 3, 1962-3, 45-8).

CONCLUSION

As assessment of the achievement of British Trotskyists to 1949 may be undertaken by reference to their own objectives. The general strategic aim of Trotskyism in Britain as in other countries was the creation of a mass revolutionary party which could seize power. It would, however, be facile to conclude that their failure to approach this aim even remotely, and after two decades of endeavour, meant that their efforts were cancelled out. Several subordinate goals - rarely drawn up by the Trotskyists themselves - could be listed. They sought to establish a youth influence, to rebut Stalinist propaganda, to secure trade union support and rally the labour movement against war. At different times in the two decades they achieved some success under each of these headings. And yet it is quite clear that there was never a possibility at any time between the 1920s and the threshold of the 1950s that Trotskyism might emerge as a significant current even within the labour movement.

The first opportunity for Trotskyism in Britain occurred in the 1920s. The case however is negatively proved. No significant support for the platform of the Left Opposition was aroused within the C.P.G.B. at any time in the decade, yet at this very time leading communists in almost all metropolitan countries defected to Trotsky. The small size and inadequate grasp of theory of the C.P.G.B. must figure largely in explanations of this contrast, but there was no great understanding outside the party either of the full meaning of the debates in Russia and the Comintern. As a result Trotsky's defenders displayed no inclination to create a political movement, seeing in the disputes of the 1920s a confirmation of their belief that Marxism - with which they identified themselves - was not monolithic but

heterogeneous. Trotsky himself was in any case still a recognised communist for most of this decade and his critique was advanced from within the Comintern. Of itself, this constructed a barrier to influence outside the C.P.G.B., even among those who had resigned from it early in the 1920s. The communist context of Where is Britain Going? reinforced this distance and the book could have become a principal text of the party. Instead Trotsky's position rapidly collapsed in the Comintern after 1926, the British party was hustled by Moscow to his left, and he had no support, only interest outside it.

When a group of British communists did commit itself to Trotsky it was under most unfavourable circumstances. 1931 and 1932 were not years of crisis for the C.P.G.B. in the sense that sharp political differences were widely articulated. Party leaders handled Trotskyism, whose arrival they had long anticipated, and the desertion of Murphy, with little noticeable difficulty. Nevertheless, a fear of Trotskyism was implanted in their political outlook and it continued to haunt them whether its substance waxed or waned. As for the Trotskyists they were hampered by being born into a labour movement entering a decade of impotence following its industrial defeat of 1926 and political defeat in 1931. It was unlikely that a brand new political movement could establish itself at such a juncture; there were, moreover, established competitors in the market. A firmer echo among those whom they could reach might have been received by a shrewder emphasis on the more popular aspects of the programme of the International Left Opposition. Advocacy of the United Front in Germany - though its application was more problematic in Britain - could have been a strong suit. But tactical questions and the selection of programmatic emphases could only have a secondary effect. The real problem for the Balham Group and then the Communist League was survival.

Here the infusion of I.L.P. members, and the powerful personal influence of Trotsky, had a critical effect in tilting part of the new organisation towards the I.L.P. Though the manner of achieving this must be put down as a setback, I.L.P. entry made possible the first important swathe of recruits to Trotskyism in Britain. When all just criticism is made of its sojourn in the I.L.P., it has to be allowed that the very continued existence of the movement to the middle of the decade must rank as an achievement.

It was in 1936-8, at the time of the Moscow Trials, that an opportunity might have presented itself, yet did not. British Trotskyists needed to have established a bridgehead before 1936 if they were to discredit the Moscow Trials, whose verdict was a mortal threat to their continued presence in the labour movement. Most crucially they needed a following among the intelligentsia where the critics of the Trials were almost entirely to be found. Lacking this before 1936 they were unlikely to gain it later. It is true that scepticism about the conduct of participants in the Trials, as well as about their verdicts, was extensive. But scepticism is not the stuff of which political movements are made. There was in any case an issue of overriding concern to the Left, and that was the creation of a common crusade against fascism and war. Late in 1936 and in 1937 the Unity Campaign conjured up this mirage, and it was enough to still the doubts of, or at least to silence, many of those made queasy by the grotesque and medieval spectacle of the Old Bolsheviks being arraigned for treachery. The Trotskyists must be criticised for their failure to suspend their feuds in the face of such an assault as the Trials represented, but this cannot be brought forward as the major reason for the shallow impact of the Defence Committee. It remained largely unknown, the main debates about the Trials conducted without its

participation. And when scepticism about the Trials grew, as it did steadily to 1938, the effect within the intelligentsia was not to generate an enquiry into putative deviations from a communist ideal - this was not their lineage in any case - it was rather to inculcate what had always been there, a deep mistrust of communism per se.

On the Trotskyist analysis, failure to achieve socialist revolution meant inevitable war, as inter-imperialist conflict was openly renewed. Trotskyists did play an important part in the anti-war movements of the last year of peace, but there was by 1939 no prospect of mass resistance to war, just as there was to be no repetition of the patriotic fervour of 1914. Trotskyists had launched the Fourth International in 1938 as a desperate throw to rally those they could influence and dramatise what they saw as the treachery of the L.S.I. and the Comintern. But how could a small, seriously divided and sometimes abstract movement in Britain galvanise a revolutionary opposition to war? When it came the principal opponents of war were the traditional ones - the uncomplicated pacifists of the I.L.P. That moment effectively marked the dissolution of whatever had been accomplished by Trotskyists in the 1920s. Yet the war brought revival in a novel way. When the C.P.G.B. followed Labour into the belief that the effective prosecution of the war overrode other objectives, a vacuum was created in industrial relations which matched the electoral truce which had prevailed from the outbreak of war. Trotskyism's single foray into parliamentary electioneering was not a great success but WIL, more than any other organisation, proved able to capitalise on the opportunity provided in industry. It was able to do this because it embodied a rupture with the British Trotskyist tradition in so far as the 1930s had seen one established. Above all it relegated tactics to their proper subordinate sphere, reacted flexibly

to shifting opportunities and aspired to build by recruitment outside the present ranks of Trotskyism. But it was the wartime conjuncture and not the political programme of WIL (and later the R.C.P.) which gained it support. There had not been a fundamental shift away from established labour organisations. 1945 indeed was to reveal that they were stronger than ever. Labour and the unions had acted as if war was not the continuation of politics by other means and when peace came they reverted to type. The R.C.P., which in 1944 had taken the name Party as a pledge to the future, speedily found that the premiss of its existence had been removed.

Thus in post-war Britain there was a narrowing base from which to conduct 'independent' revolutionary activity and, after a timelag, this ledge had to be shared with the C.P.G.B. when the first breezes of the Cold War began to blow. The case for an open party had been an anticipation of industrial conflict and political disaffection brought on by economic collapse. None of these three expectations materialised and the R.C.P.'s hopes vanished with them. This is the fundamental reason why the party collapsed, yet what must be allowed is that its leaders made strenuous efforts to comprehend the meaning of the post-war world. They were hampered in this by their international leaders who simply failed to undertake the same intellectual struggle. The pre-war interventions of the Fourth International in Britain were for the most part salutary; from 1938 onwards the International intervened almost always to harmful effect, its blundering culminating in the crude split of 1947. The ultimate organisational sanction was applied when I.S. political prestige in Britain was lower than ever before. High weighting must be allowed to its behaviour in any assessment of the reasons for R.C.P. decline.

Thus Trotskyism remained on the periphery at four potential

moments of growth in the 1920s and 1930s. The belief that factional existence had been transcended at the end of the war was a mirage. The nearest it came to a breakthrough was in 1942-4. Yet this partial success was achieved only during the war and it has to be said that even then the reputation of WIL outstripped its ability to recruit. Was there something in the Trotskyist movement itself which inhibited its ability to grow? The accusation of sectarianism was that most commonly levelled. This finds substance in the relations between the groups themselves, estranged by essentially secondary matters for most of the 1930s. Indictable also was a frequent inability to recognise positive steps when they were taken by leading figures in the labour movement. But much of the steam behind the sectarian charge was generated by communists, who in the 1930s and 1940s frequently levelled it against any who sought by reference to Marxist precept to criticise them from the ample space to their left. In many cases Trotskyists - and even those who were not Trotskyists - were expounding arguments similar to those advanced by the Comintern itself in earlier years. But since there was no lack of ill-will towards them from communism, should the Trotskyists not have sublimated internal disputes in order to rise above a factional existence? These civil broils took their origin from a pre-existing isolation however. The whole Left in Britain felt the frustration in the mid-1930s of trying to shift the apparently immovable Right-wing control of Labour and the T.U.C. Trotskyism faced not only this problem, but the equally intractable one of a C.P.G.B. which after 1934 grew steadily. Moreover communist growth meant wider diffusion of anti-Trotskyism of a peculiarly virulent strain. It was the communists who charged that Trotskyists were agents of fascism and allies of Franco and they did not relent: the language of Labour Monthly in the early 1930s and that of From Trotsky to Tito (1951)

is much the same and spans the period discussed by this thesis. It certainly took its toll. Factionalism and sectarianism rarely destroy a dynamic movement but they can flourish in a stagnant one. This must stand in partial explanation of Trotskyist behaviour in the 1930s. Reference must also be made to the persistence of entrism as an occasion of dispute throughout the period under consideration. It split the Communist League in 1933. It shivered the Marxist Group in 1936. It kept all factions apart in 1937. Failure to resolve it was at the heart of the double failure of the Revolutionary Socialist League in 1938-9 and again in 1941-2. It was apparently resolved in 1944 but returned in a different guise and with renewed vigour to paralyse partially the R.C.P. and contribute to its destruction. It was the occasion of the 1947 split and the 1949 dissolution. Effectively Trotskyism's own relationship with other parties remained permanently on the agenda to be sublimated only when one organisation, WIL, pursued successfully an independent policy while maintaining fractions in other parties. That entrism should continue to be so important is a dismal commentary on twenty years of struggle and it is ironic that the most successful organisation of all before 1949 built independently.

Entrism was a penalty for numerical weakness. But Trotskyism in Britain had another vulnerable spot for most of the period under consideration here. This was a general inability inherited, it is arguable, from the anti-theoretical environment into which the C.P.G.B. was born, to deal with matters of theory. The discussion on tactics in the British Trotskyist movement was prolonged and, occasionally rich. But the movement's late appearance precluded it from contributing to the debates of the 1920s between the Opposition (in its various incarnations) and the Russian Party apparatus. In the 1930s there were further disputes within the International Opposition -

over rejection of the Comintern, the nature of Russia and launching the Fourth International. The British played no part in these debates. In the same decade there was no major theoretical contribution by a British Trotskyist. The best achievement, World Revolution, was written by a negro temporarily in Britain. It was moreover a work of history, not theory, and seemed to Trotsky to be 'Anglo-Saxon' in its empiricism. Only in the 1940s was there a change, first with the dispute over Military Policy which educated WIL but sterilized the R.S.L., then with interesting R.C.P. discussions over industrial slogans and programme, and finally with the contributions of Hunter and above all Grant to the attempt to comprehend post-war economic and political developments within a Trotskyist framework. The major theoretical writing from Trotskyism in Britain came at the very end of the period covered by this thesis, but by its appearance indicates an inner vitality in the movement and contradicts the general view of WIL and the R.C.P. as empirics not overburdened with care about ideas.

Yet the story is not one of unrelieved gloom. Despite the attentions of the C.P.G.B., Trotskyism did not become extinct. An alternative activist Marxism was kept in being in the 1930s and proved attractive to industrial militants in the 1940s. Whenever the C.P.G.B. undertook political fraction work in the 1930s it faced sniping from the Left. Trotskyism may not have grown to the point where it might have competed on equal terms, but it dented the communist claim to all Marxist authority. Members of the I.L.P. in 1934-6 or of the League of Youth in 1937-9 could be in no doubt that there was a choice of Marxisms on offer. The survival of an alternative tradition is not attributable only to the Trotskyists: there were many on the Left who derived, at least in part, their inspiration from Marx. Indeed

Trotskyism aspired to encompass the destruction of all other parties and groups confusing the choice between itself and reformism. Trotskyism was unique however in seeking to sustain a revolutionary Marxist movement, one which sought to rehabilitate not repudiate Lenin. In the years 1942-4 this endeavour reached its climax and before a growing audience though it derived its force from the extraordinary deviations of communist policy. But even after the war, when Trotskyism was in decline, the existence of a Left critique of communism was known to militants.

The defensive argument that they kept a tradition in being may not be one which would have appealed to Trotskyists. More popular would be the other unequivocal credit - the industrial activities of WIL and the R.C.P. They undoubtedly played an important ancillary part in the dispute at Barrow in 1943, in the Tyneside apprentices' case and in the Docks strike of 1945. In a number of less publicised cases, they helped to sustain militant trade unionism when it naturally revived after 1942. WIL achieved a far greater impact on industry than, for example, the I.L.P. which had many advantages over it. And both it and the R.C.P. had within their ranks a strong cadre of shop stewards and industrial militants, the fruits of resourceful factory interventions. It would therefore be wrong to place a zero against the British Trotskyists before 1949 for in two important respects their absence might seriously have disarmed the Left when it most needed those who would courageously swim against the stream.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX AA NOTE ON BRITISH TROTSKYISTS AND SPAIN

The Spanish Civil War dramatized the menace of Fascism for the Left in Britain. The Trotskyists had a distinctive critique, and their comrades were being brutally repressed in Spain. The communists had to engage in a limited polemic on their left. It might have been possible to avoid it had the Trotskyists been their only critics, (except perhaps in the League of Youth where the centre of gravity of the debate was further left than elsewhere). As it was there was some disquiet in the Labour Party about the communists' role in the war, though loyalty to the Republic generally overrode it. The I.L.P., however, was militantly critical and its opposition to the Spanish communists deepened after the Barcelona rising of May 1937 and the suppression of its sister party, the P.O.U.M.¹ The communists branded all their left critics as Trotskyists, though they eschewed a polemic with the Trotskyists themselves.² Within the party there were differences over Spain,³ though the Trotskyists only gained from them

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- 1 Within the I.L.P. Trotskyists and others at annual conferences urged the inconsistency of I.L.P.-C.P.G.B. cooperation in the Unity Campaign, while the communists were suppressing the P.O.U.M. in Barcelona, (The New Leader, 2 April 1937 and 22 April 1938).
 - 2 J.R. Campbell, Spain's "Left" Critics (1937), 16p. The P.O.U.M. was not a Trotskyist party any more than the I.L.P. itself. But there were Trotskyists in the P.O.U.M. Two of them, Mary Low and Juan Brea published Red Spanish Notebook (with an introduction by C.L.R. James) in 1937.
 - 3 Discussion for 13 April 1937 did carry an article by Hugh Slater which argued that Daily Herald reports of fighting behind the lines might be untrue, but otherwise there was no public controversy between communists over Spain. Yet Wally Tapsell and others did bring back criticisms from the Brigades (H. McShane and J. Smith, Harry McShane, No Mean Fighter (1975), 223; F. Copeman, Reason in Revolt (1948), 119; H. Dewar, Assassins at Large (1951), 70.). Emile Burns did feel it necessary to defend Stalin's early policy of neutrality, (Discussion, Nov. 1936). See also R. Black, Stalinism in Britain (1970), 113-4.

in a very minor way.¹

In Spain the verdict of the Moscow Trials was steadily applied to critics of the communist line, and that was a matter not only for Trotskyists. Yet the response of the I.L.P., the party most at risk, was muffled for most of 1937 by its longing for a united front at home.

All Trotskyists closely followed developments in Spain, especially after the events of May 1937 in Barcelona. To Militant the gains of the July 1936 revolution were steadily filched later in the year and in early 1937. Continual provocation by the Government led, in its view, to the Barcelona rising. Yet this insurrection would, it believed, have succeeded but for the vacillation of the P.O.U.M. and the anarchists. With its failure 'the Government felt more secure and the tempo of the counter-revolution increased'. The keynote criticism of the P.O.U.M. was probably the extract from a Trotsky article with which Youth Militant led in June 1937

The New Leader publicised the rolling back of the revolution from 1937.² The death of Bob Smillie and the murder of Andres Nin drew particular attention. But, the I.L.P. apart, it was only the Trotskyists who thoroughly covered the revolution within the Civil War in Spain. What was more, Trotskyism denounced the I.L.P. for its willingness to unite with a communist movement which was executing revolutionaries in Spain:

1 Bob Armstrong and four other communists who had served in Spain joined WIL in 1939.

2 See The New Leader, passim, and also Brockway's pamphlet, The Truth About Barcelona (1937). Fight polemicised against this pamphlet in July 1937.

'Let Brockway and Maxton take this to heart. Their participation in the famous "unity" campaign helped the Stalinist murder gang to get away with this crime (the murder of Nin - M.U.).'¹

Trotskyism opposed the strategic thrust of the republicans and communists towards a democratic Spain. As Militant observed, Spain had been a democracy since 1931, but the advantages were not obvious.² A socialist programme could not await the end of the war: indeed the destruction of the revolution would prolong war and lead in the end to some sort of fascism. Militant therefore supported the P.O.U.M. and Anarchist belief that the war was indivisible. It differed in its insistence that workers and peasants power, mediated through Soviets, was the indispensable tool for translating belief into reality. Yet Trotskyists drew encouragement from the regroupment of revolutionary socialists through the Socialist Party and the Friends of Durrutti: a new party might be born out of this. Of all the Trotskyist papers

1 Militant (Sept. 1937).

2 The advent of the Azana Government in Spain was hailed as a decisive defeat for Fascism, a victory for the working class. But the agrarian problem could not be solved, for this would have meant an attack upon the banks and the church. No political rights were given to the oppressed people of Morocco, with the result that they became a ready prey to Fascist demagogy. All the old instruments of repression - the army, the police - were maintained and were used by the reaction in the rising of July. We have seen the result in a civil war which has decimated Spain for over a year. (Militant, Oct. 1937.)

'It is for a third taste of a liberal bourgeois government that the leaders of the liberals, the socialists and the Stalinists say the workers are fighting and dying. A slight knowledge of the history of Spain since the Republic shows how monstrous is the slogan "For Democracy" in Spain.'
(Fight, April 1937.)

Fight most regularly carried the documents of the Spanish 'Bolshevik-Leninists' who were fighting for such a regroupment.

Looking back over two years of the Spanish conflict, Fight¹ reflected that a People's Front government was unable to prevent civil war breaking out and incapable of waging it either. 'Almost from the very beginning, the Spanish Government did not obtain a single lasting victory.' Fight did not minimise the inferior arms supplies of the Republic, but it insisted that moral superiority could bring victory against a better equipped enemy. But the People's Front government had, in its view, destroyed morale by reintroducing Assault Guards into key military positions and deepening the divisions between officers and men through salary differentials.

1 S. Frost, 'Two Years of Civil War in Spain', (Aug. 1938).

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX BREG. GROVES AND THE AYLESBURY DIVISIONAL LABOUR PARTY,1937 - 1945.

From 1936 the Communist Party and most of the Labour left moved by stages towards a popular front of all organisations and individuals opposed to fascism and war. This was a reversal of an earlier view held by the Labour left: their principal policy had been for a Labour government, with a majority to implement the full socialist programme. Alliances with those outside the working class movement were rejected in the earlier 1930s since they would involve watering the party's programme down.¹ The C.P.G.B. had moved from its sectarian policy of the united front from below to advocacy of a united front without this qualification by 1934. The Seventh Congress of the Comintern, in July-August 1935, confirmed a change which had already occurred. In 1936 the communists of France and Spain were the most enthusiastic protagonists of popular front governments. These represented an alliance of working class parties with those outside the labour movement who, it was suggested, had a common interest with them.

In Britain this argument took the form of the thesis that the widest possible unity was required to defeat a National Government which was soft on Hitler.² Specifically it was denied that Labour could hope

1 When Lloyd George complained to the National Trade Union Club in 1935 about doctrinaires in the labour movement who opposed a liberal alliance, Harold Laski rebuked him and argued for a firm Labour commitment to a socialist programme. He warned that in such an alliance 'you give up all that you have been fighting for to secure the victory of unity', ('The Siren Voice of Mr. Lloyd George', Forward, 24 Aug. 1935).

2 'The workers are asked to let the present authority slip past', (J.R. Campbell, 'Next Steps for a United Front', Labour Monthly, (April 1937), 222).

to build a majority for its programme by the time the next general election was due in 1940.¹ This argument was the motor force behind the Unity Campaign of the Socialist League, C.P.G.B. and I.L.P., which was launched with great optimism in January 1937, but had collapsed by the middle of the year. The right wing of the Labour Party, led by those most likely to hold the leading ministerial positions if it was elected with a majority, people who had not made the running when the Socialist League's influence was at its peak in 1932-4, now presented themselves as the guardians of Labour's socialist integrity.² They rejected alliances and pacts, especially with the communists, and called for maximum effort to be placed behind putting Labour in with a majority for implementation of Labour's Immediate Programme.³ In the early 1930s the Left, (and principally the Socialist League) had urged that Labour should not take power except with a majority and should then carry out the most radical socialist measures to win popular support. This was in response to the MacDonald betrayal of 1931. But by 1937 many of the same people, before and after the May 1937 dissolution of the Socialist

- 1 G.D.H. Cole doubted Labour's ability even to equal its 1929 result. The extra 2,800 votes needed to get there would not be won on a socialist programme, he argued. Indeed, no government of the Left would be achieved 'if we merely wait for the Labour Party to win a majority in Parliament by continuing its present methods of appeal'. Labour, he concluded, was 'not even in sight of an independent majority', (The People's Front, (1937), 275).
- 2 Attlee did not reject an alliance in the face of an imminent world crisis, (and indeed was to make one in 1940) but to the proposition that Labour should drop its nationalisation policy to gain Liberal support and a majority he replied, 'I am convinced that it would be fatal for the Labour Party to form a Popular Front on any such terms', The Labour Party in Perspective, (1937), 130.
- 3 The communists in Bethnal Green, near Herbert Morrison's base, had called for an anti-fascist alliance with the Liberals. Morrison rejected it, arguing that the C.P.G.B. favoured unity to its right but not to its left. 'Would Mr. Pollitt appear on a platform with Socialist Working-Class Trotsky? He would not', he declared and demanded:

'Who says the communists are on the left? This Labour Party is more of a Left Party than the Communist Party'.

(L.P.C.R., (1937), 161-4.)

League, had lost faith in Labour winning a majority and were prepared for an alliance across parties. The Right wing, including some who had served with MacDonald and even sought to follow him,¹ now had to hand the plausible argument of socialist fundamentalism with which to stem growing communist influence on the Labour Party. The convenient guise of single minded crusaders for the socialist commonwealth well suited their intention to remain in unchallenged control of the labour movement.²

Trotskyists in Britain had always favoured a united front of working class organisations.³ They derived their inspiration from Trotsky's speech to the E.C.C.I. on the subject in 1922.⁴ The United Front was a tactic for those countries where the working class was split in its allegiances. It was a limited agreement, openly concluded between

- 1 Attlee and Morrison had been junior ministers in 1929-31. Morrison entertained hopes of joining the National Government in August 1931 but was dissuaded by MacDonald who had told him not to ruin his career, (B. Donaghue and G.W.Jones, Herbert Morrison, portrait of a politician (1973), 162-70).
- 2 C.F. Brand, The British Labour Party (1965).
- 3 'To reach the wide masses of workers organised under the banner of reformism the Communist Party needs to apply correctly the tactic of the united front. It is only by the wise and determined use of the united front policy that the Party can break down its isolation and win a foothold in the trade unions and factories.'
(The Red Flag, June 1933)
- 4 'On The United Front. (Material for a report on the question of French communism)', The First Five Years of the Communist International, Vol. 2, (1953), 91-109.

mass organisations. They retained their own separate programmes, and the right to criticise each other.¹ In 1932, when organised Trotskyism first emerged in public in Britain, its advocacy of the united front was criticised by the C.P.G.B. as a betrayal. By 1937, when Trotskyists of all factions opposed what they regarded as a bogus front of the Unity Campaign in the name of a genuine united front, they were attacked by the C.P.G.B. as splitters, disrupters and people with the same ends as the National Government.

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On 24 April 1937 the mid-Bucks. D.L.P.² selected Reg. Groves as its prospective parliamentary candidate.³ By chance the Conservative member for the constituency resigned two months later, making a by-election certain. There was delay in moving the writ and polling day was only fixed for 19 May 1938. By this time the Aylesbury by-election and the presence of Groves, a Trotskyist, as the Labour candidate, had assumed considerable importance. The principal reason for this was enhanced fear of war following the Anschluss of March 1938

- 1 'In the blind panic that followed the German catastrophe, the C.I. swept over to offering terms to the reformists which cannot be justified under any conditions. The offer to suspend criticism is in direct opposition to the united front policy laid down by Lenin in 1921.'
(The Red Flag, June 1933.)
- 2 Mid-Bucks. had been the base of leading Socialist Leaguer E.F. Wise who represented it at party conference. After his death his widow was nominated for the League national committee and also sent as delegate to party conference, (Socialist League, Second Annual Conference, Final Agenda [1935]; L.P.C.R.).
- 3 Groves' political motives for taking up the position remain obscure. His selection occurred on the eve of the dissolution of the S.L. and some months after the Marxist League had failed to prevent it participating in the Unity Campaign. There is no evidence that it was a considered move by the League and Groves's handwritten notes of the time strongly convey his disenchantment with factional warfare, (Warwick M.S.S. 172/LP.A). He was also seeking in Aylesbury a closer contact with a genuine radical rural tradition, something not to be found in London, (Interview with R. Groves, April 1980).

whereby Austria was annexed to Germany, and the call for a 'united peace alliance' by Walter Elliott the editor of Reynold's News on 19 March which revived the flagging forces of the popular front. Pressure mounted for the standing of the single candidate most likely to win at by-elections against National Government candidates.¹

In Mid-Bucks., where the Liberals had always held second place to the Conservatives, a Progressive Alliance Group was formed with the object of obtaining the strongest possible anti-government protest in the form of votes for the Liberal candidate, T. Atholl Robertson. Its founding resolution, which was signed by prominent local Labour members, including Christopher Addison, called on Groves to stand down.² The South Bucks. Unity Committee made the same demand.³ To the positive desire for an alliance was added distaste for Groves as a Trotskyist. Groves himself had the chance to reach beyond propaganda and demonstrate in practice the fallacy of popular

1 Labour had lost in a straight fight against Conservatives at Ipswich on 16 February 1938 and against National Liberal at Lichfield on 5 May. Between these two there had been only a tiny Liberal vote at West Fulham on 6 April. (C.Cook and J. Ramsden, (eds.), By-elections in British Politics, (1973), 371)

2 'The greatest service he could render to the cause of democracy and peace would be to withdraw from the contest and lend his support to the candidate who has incomparably the better chance of defeating the representative of the National Government.' (From a handbill, Progressive Alliance in Action, n.d.)

3 Members of the Labour and Liberal parties sat on this committee, which covered a neighbouring constituency.

front thinking.¹ He encountered opposition within the leading bodies of the constituency.² George Shepherd, Labour's national agent, also initially sought his withdrawal and a candidate more congenial to Transport House. Support on the executive for Groves's candidature fell, but he continued to have a majority behind him.³

Groves resisted these rumblings and began the campaign. By 6 May he had held thirty meetings and other functions.⁴ Liberal papers played down the campaign.⁵ The Daily Herald loyally supported him.⁶

- 1 W.G. Hanton, a former Communist Leaguer, arrived unbid in Aylesbury for the campaign. Groves was not pleased to see him, portraying him as dour and dogmatic in his private notes. No other Trotskyists are recorded as having visited Aylesbury. Fight, the journal of the R.S.L., of which most of Groves's former comrades from Marxist League days were members, reviewed his study of Chartism, But We Shall Rise Again, in May but did not mention his candidature.
- 2 Groves suspected at least one E.C. member of being a covert communist. At one meeting, Kneeshaw, an opponent of his candidature protested 'how will Attlee feel on the same platform as Reg. Groves?' Another delegate enquired 'how will Reg. Groves feel on the same platform as Attlee?'.
- 3 On 23 April the E.C. backed him twenty one to eight. A week later, in Shepherd's presence, it stayed behind him but this time by fifteen to ten, (News Chronicle, 9 May 1938).
- 4 The Star, 6 May 1938.
- 5 On 7 May The Star described Groves's campaign as 'hopeless' and called for a fourth condemnation of the government (following Ipswich, Fulham and Lichfield) behind a united opposition candidate. That same day the News Chronicle also recalled these earlier by-elections and advised, 'the lesson of Lichfield ought not to be lost on Aylesbury'.
- 6 The Herald drew special comfort from the large audiences Groves was drawing to his meetings, (A.J. McWhinnie, 'Why Labour Will Fight Mid-Bucks.', Daily Herald, 9 May 1938).

The Daily Worker followed the Peace Alliance argument but went further in its vituperation of Groves.¹ The first leaflet of local communists, while it called for unity, did not attack Groves and the Aylesbury party. When the Daily Herald made a pointed comparison between the Liberal Party platform and Labour's Immediate Programme the C.P.G.B. pressed a different argument.

'It would, of course, be splendid if Labour had a chance of winning the seat, although even then it would need a candidate who would strengthen Labour's fight against reaction instead of a Trotskyist, the effect of whose policy would be the break up of the Labour movement from within.'²

- 1 Pollitt wrote, 'Aylesbury has become the testing ground of the struggle between the forces of reaction, backed by the Cliveden set and the Trotskyists'. He appealed to local Labour parties to protest against 'this cynical attempt to hand over a seat to Chamberlain and his Fascist friends', (Daily Worker, 9 May 1938). The next day the paper reported a call for withdrawal from the Taunton Left Book Club which stated 'peace and democracy anxiously await a decision', (viz. a withdrawal).
- 2 The Daily Worker, 11 May 1938. The article concluded that Labour support for a Liberal who called for arms for Spain, defence of democratic liberties and the economic and social advance of the people would be a big step on the path to socialism. Another facet of communist interest, that Trotskyist progress would inhibit increasing C.P.G.B. penetration of the Labour Party did not surface here, but see R.P. Dutt, The Truth about Trotskyism quoted in B. Pearce, 'The British Stalinists and the Moscow Trials', in M. Woodhouse and B. Pearce (eds.) Essays on the History of Communism in Britain (1975), 227; and the argument of J.R. Campbell that instead of waiting for the next Labour government trade unionists should unite around a policy of paying the political levy and giving themselves equal rights in the party, ('Next Steps for a United Front', Labour Monthly, (April 1937), 217). The implication was that communists, like Arther Horner, who were disbarred from Labour Party conference, would be able to attend.

The more prestigious Manchester Guardian wondered on 12 May 1938 'how small an increase in the Labour vote here will be held to have justified the decision' (to stand) and predicted that not only was a rise unlikely but that it was more probable Groves would lose his deposit. An important event on that same day was the announcement by the Council of Action for Peace and Reconstruction that both Liberal and Labour candidates had answered its questions satisfactorily and that it would therefore play no part in the election.¹ This surprising eventuality was commented on by other Trotskyists after polling day.²

From mid-May Groves mounted a strong offensive against Robertson. He challenged the Liberal to substantiate his claims of Labour support.³ The Daily Worker, his bitterest enemy among the press, grew more abusive,⁴ but he had strong support from Labour papers.⁵ One

1 Two of the questions asked, (and to which the Council expected a positive response) concerned support for action by the League of Nations. Groves's success was therefore puzzling (The Daily Worker, 14 May 1938). In his manifesto Groves declared, 'a successful League of Nations is not possible until the people are able to express and enforce effectively their will to peace'.

2 See below. A full appreciation of the campaign cannot be achieved without reading the close and often verbatim reports of speeches in the local press, The Bucks Herald, The Bucks Advertiser, and The Bucks Examiner. For comments on the campaign see H. Dewar, Communist Politics in Britain, (1976), 126, 153.

3 In reply to Robertson's claims of Labour Party backing, the Divisional Labour Party stated that all but four of its members were working loyally for Groves, (The Manchester Guardian, 14 May 1938).

4 It insisted that only the defeat of Chamberlain mattered, accused Groves of 'sailing under the false colours of a Labour candidate' and of being 'a Trotskyist agent to carry out the same disruptive policy in Mid-Bucks.', (as in France, Spain, China and the U.S.S.R.), (The Daily Worker, 13 May 1938). This article was circulated in Aylesbury as a communist leaflet.

5 The Daily Record and Mail for 13 May must have raised eyebrows with its declaration that Groves had 'no more connection with Trotsky than Mr. Attlee or Mr. Herbert Morrison' but it was on strong ground in recalling earlier communist hostility to orthodox capitalist parties and Liberal hostility to socialism, which threatened a repeat of the 1929-31 experience.

of the remarkable features of the campaign was the appearance on Groves's platform of Harold Laski, Ellen Wilkinson and even D.N. Pritt, all of whom favoured a popular front. Even Reynolds News respected the decision of the local party. It was a reward for standing firm.¹ New branches of the Labour Party were established in the division, the Attlee meeting was held, and support came from the I.L.P.² On the eve of poll his backers and opponents clashed in their expectations.³

Aylesbury voted on 19 May 1938. The Tory candidate won with more than twice the vote of Robertson, who came second. Each had lost around 3,000 votes over their parties' polls in 1935. Groves was the first Labour candidate in Aylesbury not to lose his deposit and had raised his vote by 3,560.⁴ He was also the only candidate to raise his

1 Despite its misgivings Reynolds reports were accurate and fair. On 15 May it wrote:

'Mr. Reg. Groves, the Labour candidate, is putting up a splendid fight.

He is appealing to the electors on a clear-cut Socialist platform, and declares that there can be nothing in common between Labour and Liberal policy.'

Pritt's behaviour could occasionally be quixotic. He had declined a Transport House suggestion to stand against Fenner Brockway at a Norwich by-election, (F. Brockway, Towards Tomorrow, (1977), 115).

2 On 16 May Groves received a letter from Fenner Brockway pledging N.A.C. support and declaring, 'we need an alliance to oppose the National Government. But it must be an alliance, not of workers and capitalists, but of workers and workers', (The New Leader, 13 May 1938).

3 The Daily Herald, which had reported the establishment of new town branches of the party in the area predicted 'a greatly increased Labour vote' on 16 May. Two days later the Manchester Guardian forecast he would come third and complained,

'He is preaching the entire Socialist doctrine, and that, in a short campaign, is more likely to confuse possible recruits than to convert them'.

4 The result, with 1935 votes in brackets, was:

Sir Stanley Reed	(Con.)	21,695	(24,728)
T. Atholl Robertson	(Lib.)	10,751	(13,622)
Reginald Groves	(Lab.)	7,666	(4,106)

share of the poll, which he did in spite of a reduced turnout.¹ The swing against the Tories was greater than the average of all pre-Munich by-election results. It also surpassed the anti-Tory swing of the Munich by-elections at Oxford and Bridgwater.²

Groves was jubilant. 'We have delivered the death-blow to Liberalism in this division.'³ The Daily Herald echoed his delight on 21 May.⁴ The New Statesman and Nation was surprised⁵ though the News Chronicle affected not to be.⁶ The Daily Worker was bitterest of all.⁷ Groves argued that Labour was being built in Aylesbury against Liberalism as well as against Toryism: a pact, he suggested, would have led to loss of support. He thought backing for the popular front came from 'among the middle-class element; the university socialist; the "week-enders" who had never done a day's work for the local party, and

- 1 The turnout fell from 70.2% to 63.1% between 1935 and 1938. Groves raised his share from 11% to 19.1% but the Tory's share fell by 3.3% and the Liberal's by 4.8%, (C. Cook and J. Ramsden, op. cit., 371).
- 2 The swing against the Tories is put, by different measures, at 5.8%, 10.1%, 5.3%, (ibid., 371). The peak anti-government swing at the time of Munich was 4.1%, (I. McLean, 'Oxford and Bridgwater', C. Cook and J. Ramsden, op. cit., 140-64).
- 3 The Manchester Guardian, 21 May 1938.
- 4 'Congratulations, Mr. Groves and good-bye, Popular Front'.
- 5 It favoured local electoral pacts and complained that all of Labour's counter arguments were aimed against national alliances. See its issues for 14 May and 11 June 1938.
- 6 It believed Groves had attacked the Liberals more strongly than he had the Conservatives and concluded a victory for the latter was 'inevitable in the circumstances'.
- 7 It complained of 'the money that was poured out' against a Peace Alliance and spoke darkly of cheers in 'certain rooms' at Transport House, (The Daily Worker, 21 May 1938).

the social elite of the Left Book Club'.¹ Frederic Warburg, ('Magnificent Work') congratulated him,² as did J.P.M. Millar who announced he had 'no faith whatever in the Popular Front'.³ The New Leader was equally enthusiastic.⁴ But pressure for an alliance against the government did not relent. Later in the year a reluctant Patrick Gordon Walker stood down as Labour candidate in favour of a progressive candidate, A.D. Lindsay, who still failed to win Oxford on 27 October. United support did however permit Vernon Bartlett to win Bridgwater from the National Government candidate on 17 November.

The Trotskyist movement had an ambivalent attitude towards the Aylesbury result. WIL thought it showed a revolutionary approach by the Labour Party would meet with success and that the campaign was part of the experience through which 'the broad masses became aware of the treachery' of the labour bureaucracy. It believed however that a truly Marxist programme would never have received the approval of the 'reactionary' Councils of Action.⁵ The R.S.L. congratulated him on

1 'How We Fought the Liberal-Communist Alliance', Forward, 28 May 1938. The claims he made for socialist policy in this article were ruefully disputed by his agent who thought some of them attributable to organisation, ([agent] to Groves, 27 June 1938, Warwick M.S.S.).

2 F. Warburg to Groves, 31 May 1938.

3 J.P.M. Millar to Groves, 7 June 1938.

4 Wilfred Wigham, who had acted as Groves's driver for the duration thought Groves had thrust the Labour Party back to socialism and put the case for turning out the whole ruling class:

'Thanks to the Liberal-Communist challenge, he has been backed even by moderate Labour elements'.

(The New Leader, 20 May 1938.)

5 'The Lesson of Aylesbury', WIN, (June 1938), 5.

doubling the vote and taking a progressive stand against the popular front, but firmly declared that the Fourth International could not tolerate within its ranks anyone who, like Groves, could give the Council of Action replies indistinguishable from those offered by the Liberal Candidate.¹

* * * * *

After the election Groves continued as a strong proponent of Labour independence and hammer of the communists. He publicly branded an attempt to send Communist Party members into local parties within his constituency as aimed at subverting his candidature.² In the first year of war Groves, while retaining his Aylesbury base sustained militant propaganda against the aims of the war. These activities brought him close to expulsion when Labour leaders moved against party dissidents in 1940. In September 1939, Groves told readers of Labour News that there was more to war than military conflict alone. Later that month he declared:

'The workers are losing the war: the British workers and the workers of all countries'.³

A major interest of Groves was the escape of ruling circles from wartime sacrifices. This was a major theme of Home Front⁴ a monthly journal on civilian life in wartime in the establishment of which he was a prime mover. Home Front published his pamphlet It Is An Imperialist War in which he replied to Harold Laski and, in the view of

1 Fight (June 1938). However Stuart Purkis, who had left the Communist League in 1934 but had supported the Trotsky Defence Committee, examined Groves's submissions to the Council, (Fight, he claimed, had not), and declared them sound, (Fight, Aug. 1938).

2 Forward (20 Nov. 1938).

3 The Big Offensive on the Home Front, 27 Sept. 1939, (apparently a newsletter circulated in Aylesbury).

4 Sub-titled, 'The Month-by-Month Inside Story of the War in Industry and Civil Life'.

the N.E.C., challenged party policy. Home Front continued as a propaganda vehicle until political truce was endorsed by party conference in May 1940. When the British Expeditionary Force returned home Groves used the journal to address Attlee in an open letter. In this he called on Labour leaders entering the government to lift the suppression of conscientious objectors and left wing socialists and follow party conference demands for far-reaching changes in the structure of society. 'A Britain owned and ordered by its workers', was, he urged, 'the only victory worth winning'.¹

Groves carefully recorded his acceptance of conference's endorsement of Labour's entry into the government, but officialdom pounced on him nonetheless. George Shepherd, who had visited Aylesbury in 1938 informed him that It Is An Imperialist War was a disguised attack on party policy, and was not pacified by Groves's explanation that it had been written before party conference approved the war and was therefore a legitimate exercise.² Shepherd and other officials apparently recommended his exclusion from the Labour Party to the N.E.C., but the Committee delayed a decision to allow him time to clarify his views. It hoped he would decide 'that Labour Party policy is for this country that which is best suited'.³

1 'An Open Letter To Major Attlee', Home Front, (June 1940), 1, 13.

2 G. Shepherd to Groves, (26 Sept. 1940); R. Groves to Shepherd, (30 Sept. 1940).

3 G. Shepherd to Groves, (29 Sept. 1940). To the Organising Secretary of the Aylesbury Division Shepherd explained that the N.E.C. recognised that Groves's views had modified and that it wanted to give him a chance to modify party policy, (G. Shepherd to A. Newell, 29 Nov. 1940).

Aylesbury sent Groves as its delegate to party conference throughout the war except for 1945 itself. His only intervention in debate during these years was in 1943 when he moved an amendment to George Dallas's platform motion on post-war relief in Europe. The Aylesbury motion called for relief not to be used as a weapon against socialist or democratic governments. To this argument Groves added an anti-Vanittartite gloss, which formed the principal passage of his speech.¹

During the war Groves wrote for a variety of journals, often on aspects of labour history.² He also became part of the documentary movement led by John Grierson. A principal script of his was Men of Rochdale, a film about Co-operative pioneers which used original techniques.³ He became almost a weekly contributor to The New Leader, even providing a weekly film column in 1940. In the later years of the war he wrote another weekly feature, 'Time to Kill', which reflected on issues not of immediate concern.

Groves survived some murmurings against him among union branches affiliated to the Aylesbury division.⁴ He received several offers of a new constituency, including one from Slough, a set² he might hope to win.⁵ He resisted temptation, aware that local communists were

1 L.P.C.R. (1943), 177.

2 See for example 'The Plug Plot 1942' and 'Tommy Hepburn's Union', (London Post Dec. 1944 and May 1945).

3 H. Sara to A. Gates (of the Workers Party, U.S.A.), 2 Feb. 1945, Warwick M.S.S.

4 Mrs. Gates (Acting agent of Aylesbury D.L.P.) to Groves, 23 Oct. 1944, and Groves to Mrs. Gates, 19 Oct. 1944.

5 F.S.G. Room (of Slough Labour Party) to Groves, 22 Oct. 1944. Room had been a communist contemporary of Groves and also remembered The Call. He told Groves he wanted a socialist in Slough, not 'a good boy from Transport House'. On 26 October Groves wrote telling Room he had decided to stay in Aylesbury. He was not, he assured Room, 'a carpetbagger'.

eager for his departure from Aylesbury. The divisional executive may have known that he could have gone elsewhere, and thought him 'most loyal'.

In the general election he seems to have fought a conventional campaign. Labour was in a radical mood, and he was certainly not the only candidate with a Marxist background. His election address was marked by attacks of equal vehemence on the Liberals and the Tories. His promise was to fight 'in our war against poverty, unemployment, slums and oppression'. The Liberal presence had been broken in 1938 and he secured second place with a respectable vote. After 1945 he stood three times more in parliamentary contests. He came second each time at Eastbourne (1950), Saffron Walden (1951) and Ilford North (1955), always in safe Tory seats.

APPENDIX C

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NOTES

1. The first issue of Workers International News appeared on 18 December 1937 with contents broadly similar to that of 1 January 1938.
 2. This guide to articles was compiled from the Workers International News file at the Brynmor Jones Library, University of Hull. This may explain some of the discrepancies in serial numbers, notably the absence of an issue for April 1941 and an issue numbered Vol. 5, No. 5 (1942).
 3. Numbering is erratic but is given in the list as printed.
 4. In early issues there are many anonymous articles. It seems likely that the chief contributor of these was Ralph Lee assisted by Ted Grant and Jock Haston.
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APPENDIX D

APPENDIX DPEACE AND UNITY AGREEMENT, 1938.

The undersigned propose and recommend the following:

1. All groups are to be united immediately into a single organisation with a single Executive Committee which supervises, directs and co-ordinates all work and activity of all members in all fields.
 2. The name of the organisation is to be the Revolutionary Socialist League.
 3. A central premises is to be engaged at once. All funds, property and equipment of the various groups are to become unconditionally the property of the united organisation.
 4. The administrative work of the united organisation is to be placed in charge of a secretary devoting full time to the organisation.
 5. The main emphasis in the next period is to be placed on work within the Labour Party. All eligible for trade union membership are obliged to join and conduct active work therein. At the same time, general propaganda for the Fourth International and its program is to be conducted by every suitable means (press, propaganda, meetings, etc.). Members at present devoting their full activity to propaganda work outside the Labour Party are not required to join it.
 6. Press:(a) The "Fight" is to be combined with the "Workers' International News" and the "Revolutionary Socialist" (Edinburgh) and published monthly as a political magazine with a new name which seeks to combine as far as possible the features of each. The primary purpose of this magazine will be to train cadres by dealing with national and international questions from the standpoint of the Fourth International without ambiguity. In order to facilitate the distribution and the sale of this magazine by all members of the
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united organisation (including those working under certain legalistic restraints in the Labour Party), it shall be published, like the "New International" in America, under the formal auspices of a publishing association.

(b) The "Militant" shall continue to be published as a monthly agitation paper under the formal auspices of the Militant Labour League. (The question of the Militant Labour League and its perspectives is to be dealt with in a special memorandum.)

(c) One of the papers is to be published on the first of the month; the other on the 15th, so that the comrades will always have a fresh paper for distribution and will, in effect, have a semi-monthly paper.

(d) To aid further in training cadres, strengthening the Bolshevik ideology of the membership and welding it more firmly to the Fourth International, a regular internal bulletin is to be published (about every two months). This bulletin will regularly bring before the membership the discussion of the most important questions of the international movement.

7. The Executive Committee of the united organisation is to consist of five members each from the present R.S.L. and Militant Groups plus two each from the Revolutionary Socialist Party (Edinburgh) and the Workers International League. Each group is to select its own representatives. This Executive Committee is to serve as the leadership of the organisation for six months. At the end of that time a National Conference is to be held, where the experience will be reviewed and a new executive committee elected. Any contemplated change of tactical line shall be finally adopted only after consultation with the Fourth International.

8. The Executive Committee of the united organisation is to

consider the question of forming a special youth section our recommendation being in favour of this.

9. Six Months Peace Agreement: Recognising the necessity of safeguarding and nursing the unity achieved after such prolonged and harmful division of forces, and of fairly testing out the possibilities to expand and develop our influence as a united organisation on a program herein laid down, the signers of this document mutually pledge themselves before the membership and before the Fourth International:

(a) To consider all past conflicts liquidated by the adoption of this agreement.

(b) To work together in harmonious collaboration, laying aside like principled Bolsheviks all personal animosities and antagonisms, and refraining from factionalism, and especially from any kind of factional organisation, during the six months period allotted to the new Executive Committee.

(c) To combine all constructive forces against any individual or group violating this agreement, to impose the discipline of the Fourth International upon any such violations, and, if necessary, to expel them from their ranks.

10. Upon the signing of this unity and peace agreement by the leading committees of the various groups, it is to be submitted to the respective memberships of each group for ratification and for the election of the group's representatives to the United Executive Committee. Immediately after such ratification a general aggregate meeting of all members of all groups shall be called to signalise the formal achievement of unity and the opening of a new stage in the development of the united British Section of the Fourth International.

This entire process is to be completed within one week. The delegation of the International Secretariat is to participate in all above scheduled meetings.

11. The United Executive Committee is to elect the delegates of the United organisation of the World Congress of the Fourth International.

Signed:

Executive of the R.S.L.

Executive of the Militant Group.

Delegation of the R.S.P.

Executive of the W.I.L.

APPENDIX E

APPENDIX EINDUSTRIAL PROGRAMME OF WORKERS INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE

From G. Healy 'Industrial Militants need a Programme', Socialist Appeal, (June 1942).

- "1. Withdrawal of Trade Union representatives from Capitalist state posts. Complete and unconditional independence of the trade unions in relation to the capitalist states.
2. Democratization of the unions and the replacement of the top bureaucracy with militants from the ranks.
3. 100 per cent trade organisation in every factory.
4. A factory committee for every plant.
5. Union organisation to be based on industry instead of craft.
6. Area and National Workers Councils to be formed from Trades Councils and factory committees.

MOBILISATION OF ASSETS FOR MINIMUM DEMANDS

1. Workers Control of Industry to end profiteering, mismanagement and chaos.
 2. Confiscation of all war profits - all company books to be open to trade union inspection.
 3. Nationalisation without compensation of arms industry, mines, railways and banks.
 4. Sliding scale of wages to meet the increased cost of living with a guaranteed minimum.
 5. Equal pay for equal work, no penalisation of women and youth in industry.
 6. Repeal of all anti-working class legislation.
 7. Equal distribution of food, clothes, etc. under control of price-fixing committees to be set up from representatives of distributive
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employees, co-operatives, housewives and small shopkeepers.

WORKERS TO CONTROL TRANSFER OF LABOUR

1. No transfer of labour from Government factories to private enterprise.
 2. No transfer of labour to be carried out at financial loss to the workers.
 3. Transfers to be under the control of shop stewards and factory committees to avoid victimization.
 4. Trade Union control of hotel accommodation to house transferred workers.
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APPENDIX F

APPENDIX FTROTSKYISM AND THE I.L.P.

In the I.L.P. Trotskyism's presence in 1938 was at a low ebb, virtually reduced to Patterson and others working from the Clapham I.L.P. bookshop. In the Guild of Youth there were some young members of WIL and they achieved a symbolic coup on 26 November 1938 when the London Guild declared for the formation of the Fourth International.¹ At the national conference of the Guild, however, the Fourth International was passed over for the London Bureau and the R.S.L. was condemned for failing to support an anti-war front the Bureau had summoned.² At the Party conference of 1939 reaffiliation was the key issue and now, as at the end of the war, Trotskyism split both ways. Harry Wicks and Hugo Dewar had moved to the I.L.P. as the most likely source, in their view, of labour movement revival. With their supporters they openly entered the I.L.P. and formed its Battersea and Wimbledon branches.³ At conference they allied with C.A. Smith and Fred Jowett against reaffiliation.⁴ Patterson, a long standing opponent

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- 1 The decision had only an abstract meaning since the Guild also rejected cooperation with Youth for Socialism, at that time largely based on the League of Youth, (The New Leader, 2 Dec. 1938; Youth for Socialism, Nov. 1938).
 - 2 The conference also rejected a Stepney resolution advancing the Trotskyist view of Russia and passed one from Barking putting the I.L.P. view, (The New Leader, 24 Feb. 1939).
 - 3 Wicks and Dewar negotiated their entry with Brockway who welcomed them because they brought support, (Interview with H. Wicks).
 - 4 For this debate see P. Thwaites, 'The Independent Labour Party, 1938-1950', (University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1976), 83; F. Brockway, Inside the Left, (1942); The New Leader, (14 April 1939). In the winter of 1940-41, C.A. Smith shocked the I.L.P. by coming out in favour of the war and national defence.

of rejoining Labour had now reversed his view.¹ From its Labour Party position, Workers International League' also supported reaffiliation.² The desire of the National Council was upheld and negotiations opened which might have been successful had not war intervened. Patterson attempted to take dissident I.L.P.ers into the Labour Party and received support from the London Divisional Council. The attempt was crushed by I.L.P. head office.³

War gave the I.L.P. a chance to return to the great simplicities.⁴ The 1930s had revealed a lack of clarity as to what the party stood for, but it was definitely against war. This gave it a greater firmness of purpose between 1939 and 1945 than it had had for some years and even the fleeting promise of not being confined to electoral representation in Scotland. It also gathered to it other dissidents stifled by the electoral truce between the two main parties. Before June 1941 the C.P.G.B. was better placed to tap this potential. After that date the I.L.P., the new Common Wealth Party, and even WIL derived growth from defiance of the consensus.

1 Patterson was on the losing side in his attempts to subject the parliamentary group to the party following its behaviour during the Munich crisis, in his effort to strengthen the I.L.P.'s immediate policy on war and in his opposition, during the debate on the National Register, to any connection with A.R.P., (The New Leader, 14 April 1939).

2 Perhaps with Patterson in mind WIL wrote,

'The militant members, who have vainly been striving to transform the I.L.P. into a revolutionary organisation, now completely disillusioned, are attempting to organise themselves with a view to entering the Labour Party apart from the I.L.P..'

('What Next for the I.L.P.?', WIN, (June 1939), 3.)

3 The N.A.C. suspended Patterson for anti-party conduct but the London Divisional Council declined by one vote to operate the suspension. Thereupon the N.A.C. suspended the Council, convened a special conference of London branches, and put to it the motion that the I.L.P. could be made 'an effective revolutionary instrument' and should be strengthened. Resolutions for and against Patterson were ruled out of order on the grounds that he had a right of appeal, whereupon nine branches withdrew in protest. But twenty stayed to pass the resolution and it seems that both groups of delegates opted for staying in the I.L.P., (The New Leader, 21 July 1939).

4 See footnotes of following page.

In January 1940 The New Leader felt confident enough to treat the Trotskyists with disdain, listing five separate organisations of theirs which opposed the war.¹ But while Patterson had left the I.L.P., Wicks and Dewar had come in. By 1942 two more Trotskyist groups had entered the party. The first group was the R.S.P., which had never really surrendered its independence at the time of the Peace and Unity agreement or later. In 1940 a split was evident within this tiny party. Maitland and the Taites were attracted by the idea of conscientious objection, but a number of their Edinburgh members had drifted towards the perspectives of the WIL, which had sent Lee and Haston up to address the branch.² Maitland and the Taites expelled the pro-WIL faction.³ In December 1941 they announced their decision to enter the I.L.P., then 'challenging the capitalist warmongers in the Central Edinburgh By-Election'. The I.L.P., they had concluded, was the only nationally organised socialist party in Britain,⁴ and they set up a new branch of it in the city.

4 From previous page.

I.L.P. M.P.s opposed the Military Training Act, the Emergency Powers Act, the National Services (Armed Forces) Act, the Control of Employment Act, and the Declaration of War itself, (The I.L.P. in War and Peace).

1 J. Jupp, op. cit., 237.

2 Interview with E. Grant, (Jan. 1973).

3 They adhered to the WIL, but because of local conditions peculiar to Edinburgh were allowed to continue with open work; (WIL, 'Reply of the E.C. to Comrade D.F.', 12 Oct. 1940, Internal Bulletin, (n.d.), H.P., 9).

4 [R.S.P.], Vote For A Socialist Britain, [Dec. 1941], H.P., D.J.H. 8/1. In June 1942 WIL attempted unsuccessfully to recruit the rump of the R.S.P. When it failed it concluded W. Tait and others would line up with the 'right wing including Padley and Wicks against the WIL members in the I.L.P.' (C.C., 20 June 1942, H.P., D.J.H. 14B/19).

When the I.L.P. launched its Socialist Britain Now! campaign in late 1941 it rallied support from many with histories in the Trotskyist movement. Reg. Groves greeted it with the declaration that it would bring 'hope to the world'.¹ He and two comrades from S.A.W.F. days, W.T. Colyer and Will Morris, now wrote regularly for The New Leader. In February 1942 Dick Beech, an early British contact of the Opposition, applied to join the I.L.P. as the only party which had not shelved socialism for the duration.² Groves threw himself into the campaign in the spring of that year.³

The premiss of the Socialist Britain Now! campaign was that the I.L.P. would be the prime instrument of socialist transformation. This view was diametrically opposed to that of WIL, which believed that the I.L.P. should join the Labour Party in order to strengthen its left.⁴ Three Trotskyist factions were in evidence at the I.L.P. annual conference⁵ of 1942. There W. Tait urged the sending of arms to Russia

1 The New Leader, (10 Jan. 1942).

2 He did not become a prominent member though The New Leader did publish some of his fiction in 1944.

3 He spoke at a number of campaign meetings and in March 1942 seconded Brockway's main resolution at a Socialist Britain Now! conference in the I.L.P. Midland division, (Maitland-Sara Papers, M.S.S. 172/LPA/5).

4 See WIL's open letter to the 1942 I.L.P. conference, (Socialist Appeal, April 1942). It had been sufficiently sensitive to I.L.P. affairs to publish Trotsky's 'The I.L.P. and the Fourth International', in WIN for December 1941. The C.P.G.B. was equally scornful of the proposition that the I.L.P. would rapidly become the instrument of socialist change. See the treatment of an analysis by John McGovern M.P. in J.R. Campbell, Socialism Through Victory, (1942), 10-11.

5 Groves also maintained relations with the I.L.P. but on an individual basis. From summer 1943, while still Labour candidate for Aylesbury he contributed a free-ranging column 'Time to Kill' to The New Leader. The R.S.L. executive broke its inflexibility on the Labour Party tactic on 16 March 1942 to allow that members might enter the I.L.P. where short term gains could be made. Nothing came of this, preventing the I.L.P.'s internal life becoming yet more complex.

under worker' control and found a seconder in W.G. Hanton, the Communist League veteran.¹ Maitland moved a resolution on industrial unionism.² WIL ran a baleful eye of the performance of Dewar and Wicks, who they thought had antagonised delegates with points of order and not forced the Russian issue.³ For itself, it took great encouragement from the passage by chance, of its 'Labour to Power' policy, and the strong contact established with the Newcastle and Cardiff branches.⁴

Interest in Trotsky, never absent from the I.L.P., increased in 1942 with polemical articles sustained subsequently by WIL.⁵ Wicks and Dewar, with support from Maitland, took over the open forum Free Expression, and by 1943 had turned it into a Trotskyist vehicle.⁶

- 1 J.R. Campbell, Socialism Through Victory (1942), 6.
- 2 S. Bornstein, interview with F. Maitland, (Aug. 1976), kindly lent to author.
- 3 Their activity was 'distinguished only by its complete stupidity and political ineptitude', (E.C. Report, 22 April 1942, H.P., D.J.H. 14B/11/1; National Organiser's Report, n.d., 2). The WIL National Organiser and Healy had attended the conference as observers.
- 4 Conference had passed by an overwhelming majority a Cardiff-Tooting composite putting the Socialist Appeal programme. This 'most amazing fluke' gave WIL a legal platform for its activities, (E.C. Report, 22 April 1942, H.P., D.J.H. 14B/11/1).
- 5 Marc Loris of the S.W.P., who was closely in touch with WIL, contributed a critique 'The I.L.P. : Words and Reality' of the Socialist Britain Now! campaign to Left (formerly Controversy) for October 1942. Walter Padley of the I.L.P. replied in December and Loris wrote again on the party the next year, ('The British I.L.P.', Fourth International, Feb. 1943, 63). See also WIN, passim.
- 6 Wicks promised a limited attempt at changing Free Expression into 'a Marxist theoretical journal' in October 1942, and that month it proclaimed itself 'a Revolutionary Socialist monthly'. (H. Wicks to Sara, 1 Oct. 1942, Warwick M.S.S. 15/3/1/66). From November it was a regular Trotskyist journal, publishing articles by Trotsky himself, former oppositionists and Hugo and Margaret Dewar. Free Expression articles were forceful, but weakened when they had to give practical advice.

Ironically it was WIL which effectively was operating the policy Wicks and Dewar had advocated for the Communist League a decade earlier: an independent Trotskyist organisation with an I.L.P. fraction. Its more effective I.L.P. work helped it to make recruits from Wicks and Dewar as well as directly from the I.L.P.¹

One thrust of WIL propaganda against the I.L.P. was to ridicule its leaders as poseurs with a taste for ultra-left adventures. Such, it believed, was the Socialist Britain Now! campaign which collapsed between the annual conferences of 1942 and 1943. WIL argued that if it were a revolutionary party reaffiliation to Labour would be a disaster, for I.L.P. leaders did not make principled criticisms of Labour leaders; precisely because it was not revolutionary I.L.P. reaffiliation would be a progressive step which would sort out not only its own members but those of the Labour Left as well.² By the time of the 1943 conference WIL was confident. The I.L.P. now had within it a sizeable group of genuine Marxists 'for the first time since the C.L.R. James walk-out and debacle'.³

1 They were to win the support of Bill Hunter, a Tynesider who had formerly belonged to the Peace Pledge Union, and Betty Russell of the Tooting branch of the I.L.P. These WIL gains may have been facilitated by joint I.L.P.-Trotskyist fractions, (Interview with H. Wicks, 30 Nov. 1979). Against such gains WIL had to offset its problems with Healy, who in February 1943 told its Political Bureau that he was resigning to join the I.L.P. The Bureau recalled seven previous resignations that had been hushed up and this was no more permanent, (Statement of the P.B. On the Expulsion of G. Healy at the Central Committee Meeting of February 7th 1943, 15 Feb. 1943, H.P., D.J.H. 4 (15)).

2 E. Grant, 'The I.L.P. in Transition', WIN (May 1943), 2.

3 'A Letter from England', Fourth International (June 1943), 190. The most effective work of all was being done in the North-East. Roy Tearse, from that I.L.P. division was from 1942 organising WIL industrial work from London. Following the arrival of Heaton Lee and Ann Keen in Walker in 1943, a consolidated I.L.P. fraction included T. Dan Smith, Ken Skethaway, Dave Binah and Jack and Daisy Rawlings. This led in turn to an acquaintance with Bill Davy of the Y.C.L. who was to lead the engineering apprentices' movement of 1943-4, (Interview with A. Finkel (Keen), 30 July 1974). As to the size of the factions, P. Thwaites (op. cit., 36) gives twelve for the WIL on entry into the I.L.P. and H. Wicks recalls twenty around Free Expression, (Interview, 30 Nov. 1979).

At this conference WIL influence contributed to the success of Ted Fletcher in defeating an N.A.C. proposal for an alliance with Common Wealth, though a discussion on the Fourth International was not allowed. There was still a clash of policy between the Trotskyists. A Wallsend-Tooting amendment was tabled to the N.A.C. resolution on 'Political Truce and Labour Unity' but its call for 'Labour to Power' was voted down. After this Wicks, the Battersea delegate, opposed the resolution itself on the grounds that it implied reaffiliation!¹ Nor was this the only clash.² In their journals the WIL and the Wicks-Dewar factions argued out the future of the I.L.P. from opposite corners.³ Yet despite their programmatic differences both emphasised the importance of agitation in the factories: there was a close similarity between their approach and that of the I.L.P. when at last it took up industrial work.⁴ These similar approaches helped at least one of the I.L.P.'s impressive wartime performances at by-elections.⁵

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- 1 Hugo Dewar believed that the basis of reformism had been eaten away by the war. 'The disappearance of this (Labour) party from the British political scene is inevitable', he concluded, ('The End of the Labour Party', Free Expression, (June 1943), n.p.). For the clash between the Trotskyists see P. Thwaites, op. cit., 155.
 - 2 In the India debate Wicks backed an N.A.C. resolution while Betty Russell (Tooting) unsuccessfully moved a series of amendments disputing that Congress could be an instrument of workers' and peasants' struggles. There was, however, only one speaker, Wicks, who called for class unity as the best way to help Russia.
 - 3 Free Expression was open to opposed views. The anonymous author of 'Socialists and the Labour Party', in its December 1943 issue argued the WIL case that the Fourth International which the journal called for would not begin from mere denunciation of Labour Party crimes. The opposite view was advanced by Maitland in 'The Meaning of Smith', Left, (March 1943), 66-70. Maitland wrote another article, 'The Political Struggle for Italy' for Left for October 1943.
 - 4 See Chapter XI.
 - 5 At a by-election in Acton in December 1943, Walter Padley, the party Industrial Organiser, fought an area where the I.L.P. and Trotskyism had factory support. He polled a respectable 28% of the votes.

January 1944 saw Trotskyist influence in the North-East reach a peak at the I.L.P. Divisional conference. There a resolution was accepted calling for discussions with 'the Fourth International and other groups who recognise the urgent necessity for the working class to be led by a Workers International based upon Marxism and embracing the Bolshevik form of organisation'. Conference also amended an official motion on 'War and the World Struggle' to include the Trotskyist demand for a united socialist states of Europe.¹ The division defeated a call for Labour Party affiliation, yet it also rejected an electoral alliance with Common Wealth. That same weekend saw the London and Southern Counties division turn down a Tooting resolution on the Common Wealth alliance and refuse permission to approach other revolutionary organisations including the Fourth International.

National I.L.P. conference coincided in time and place with the arrests of Trotskyists for acting in furtherance of the Tyneside apprentices dispute. No party rallied more powerfully to the aid of the infant R.C.P. than the I.L.P., not least at a parliamentary level.² This is remarkable since 1944 may justly be singled out as the year when, arguably, Trotskyist influence on the I.L.P. exceeded even that of 1935-6. Dave Binah, an R.C.P. member and Sunderland delegate urged on the 1944 conference the policy of Labour to Power. His call for the I.L.P. to help break the coalition and participate in exposing reformists was countered by Maitland who claimed Brockway and the Glasgow councillor Tom Taylor were trying to lead the I.L.P. back by the nose into the Labour Party. It was being asked to mask new treachery. This time the

1 There was some ambiguity in this since there were I.L.P.ers who backed this demand.

2 The generous response of Maxton and the I.L.P. conference to the victimization of Jock Haston and the other arrested Trotskyists and the contribution of I.L.P. M.P.s to the debate on Order 1A(a) are discussed in Chapter XI.

R.C.P. was on the winning side: an N.A.C. resolution for socialist unity and the establishment of joint left groups fell by forty three to sixty one.¹ Two separate Trotskyist streams in the I.L.P. continued to flow their distinct ways. The R.C.P.'s fraction work culminated in expulsions the following year.² Dewar³ and Maitland⁴ remained within the I.L.P., firmly committed to the thesis that it might become the agent of revolutionary transformation. In the case of Dewar at least this was to mean commitment to a sinking ship.⁵

1 The New Leader, 7 April 1945.

2 See Chapter XIII.

3 See Dewar's defence of an I.L.P. separate from the Labour Party, 'What Will the Labour Party Live For?', Left (Dec. 1944), 271-3.

4 Maitland wrote four articles for Left in 1945 including his brief polemic against Walter Padley, 'Lord Keynes and Walter Padley', (Jan. 1945, 306).

5 The post-war decline of the I.L.P. and the disastrous Battersea by-election are discussed in Chapter XIII.

APPENDIX G

APPENDIX G
PROGRAMME OF THE
REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST PARTY

An end to the coalition with the Bosses. Labour and Trade Union Leaders must break with the Capitalist Government and wage a campaign for power on the following programme:-

Industrial and Economic Policy.

1. Nationalisation of the land, mines, banks, transport and all big industry without compensation, as the prerequisite for a planned economy and the only means of ensuring full employment with adequate standards of living for the workers, and the operation of the means of production under control of workers' committees.
2. Confiscation of all war profits, all company books to be open for trade union inspection, control of production through workers' committees to end the chaos and mismanagement.
3. Distribution of food, clothes and other consumers' commodities under the control of committees of workers elected from the Co-ops, distributive trades, factories, housewives' committees, and small shopkeepers, and allocation of housing under the control of tenants' committees.
4. A rising scale of wages to meet the increased cost of living with a guaranteed minimum; the rate for the job; and industrial rates for all members of the armed forces.

Democratic Demands.

5. Repeal of the Essential Works Order, the Emergency Powers Act and all other anti-working class and strike-breaking legislation.
 6. Full electoral and democratic rights for all persons from the age of 18 years. Full democratic and political rights for the men and
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women in uniform.

7. Immediate freedom and unconditional independence for India, Ireland and all the colonies of Britain; immediate withdrawal of British armed forces from these countries; full economic and military assistance to the Indian and colonial peoples to maintain their independence against all imperialist attack.

Military Policy.

8. Clear out the reactionary, pro-Fascist, and anti-Labour officer caste in the armed forces and Home Guard; election of officers by the ranks.

9. Establishment of military schools by the Trade Unions at the expense of the State for the training of worker-officers; arming of the workers under the control of workers' committees elected in the factories, unions and in the streets for the defence of the democratic rights of the workers from reactionary attacks by the enemies of the working class at home and abroad.

International Policy.

10. Against race hatred and discrimination of all forms (Vansittartism, Anti-Semitism, and the Colour Bar); for the fraternisation and co-operation of workers and soldiers of all countries.

11. Unconditional defence of the Soviet Union against all imperialist Powers; despatch of arms, food and essential materials to the Soviet Union under the control of the Trade Unions and factory committees.

12. A Socialist appeal to the workers of Germany, Europe, Japan and the rest of the world, on the basis of this programme in Britain, to join the Socialist struggle against Nazism, Fascism and all forms of capitalist oppression and for a Socialist United States of Europe and a Federation of Asiatic Soviet Socialist Republics.

APPENDIX H

APPENDIX H

13th April, 1944

WAR CABINET.THE TROTSKYIST MOVEMENT IN GREAT BRITAINMEMORANDUM BY THE HOME SECRETARY.Doctrine.

TROTSKYISM is a body of doctrine based on the teachings of Marx, as elaborated by Lenin and interpreted and applied to the conditions of the inter-war period by Trotsky. The cleavage from official Communism, or Stalinism, originated in the opposition between Trotsky's doctrinaire views and Stalin's realism. Trotsky denounced the supplanting of the "continuing world revolution" by Stalin's plan to establish Socialism in the Soviet Union as a prerequisite. He opposed the replacement of democratic discussion of party policy by the personal dictatorship of Stalin, the weakening of the influence of the Soviets (Councils) in the face of a rising bureaucracy, and the revival of economically and socially privileged classes. The Trotskyists do not regard the form of society which now exists in Russia as socialism - they believe that true socialism can be achieved only by more or less simultaneous revolution over the greater part of the globe; and they are bitterly hostile to the Stalinist regime because it has not only "betrayed the revolution" in Russia itself, but by using the national Communist parties as the instruments of its "reactionary" policy abroad has retarded the development of the working class towards world revolution.

The ultimate aim of the Trotskyist is the establishment by means of uprisings all over the world of Workers' Governments which will introduce common ownership and workers' control of the means of

production. They believe that world revolution will once more become possible as a result of the war. Their immediate policy in the present "pre-revolutionary period of agitation, propaganda and organisation" is to prepare for this revolutionary moment by fostering a militant spirit among the working class and establishing themselves as its leaders. This they seek to do, according to the directions of the late M. Trotsky, by campaigning alongside the workers on the issues which most closely concern them, such as wages, employment and social conditions.

The Trotskyists, while hostile to "fascism" regard the war as a struggle between rival Imperialisms, a struggle which is being used by the capitalist class as an excuse more effectively to exploit and oppress the workers. The U.S.S.R., although degenerate, is still a workers' State and must be helped in its resistance to fascism; but the Trotskyist believes that capitalist Governments cannot by their nature effectively oppose fascism, and that he can therefore only help the U.S.S.R. if he first overthrows his own Government.

Organisation.

The Trotskyist movement has existed in Britain since 1929, the year of Trotsky's expulsion from the U.S.S.R. The movement originally consisted of several small groups, from which there emerged in 1937 the Revolutionary Socialist League (the official British Section of the Fourth International) and the Workers' International League. The Revolutionary Socialist League was stultified by internal strife and the Workers' International League outdistanced it in members and activity. The two parties have for some time been urged by the International Secretariat to unite, and on the 12th March, 1944, they at length did so. The new body has (to the annoyance of the Communist Party of Great Britain) taken the name "Revolutionary Communist Party" and has succeeded the Revolutionary Socialist League as the British Section of

the Fourth International. It is too early to say what the relations of the party with the International will be, but the International is loosely organised and is not likely to have the will or the means to do more than advise the party on broad issues; nor is the party under its present leadership likely to submit to any attempt at dictation.

The leadership remains in the hands of the former leaders of the Workers' International League, James Haston, Mrs. Mildred Lee, Edward Grant, Roy Tearse and Harold Atkinson (see Appendix A). This group is in effective control of the organisation, which is strongly centralised. District Committees exist in London, Scotland, Tyneside, Merseyside, Yorkshire and the Midlands, but do not act without close consultation with Headquarters. No figures of the total membership are available, but in London, where the movement is strongest there are 152 members, of whom thirty-two are in the forces. Outside London the party has about twenty branches. A branch rarely has more than twenty members and sometimes has less than ten, and the total number of members in the forces is unlikely to be more than a hundred. On this basis the total membership is probably well below a thousand.* Membership, however, is confined to those who have served six months' probation and proved themselves active workers, and sympathisers are probably more numerous than official members. Even allowing for people who are prepared to work for the movement from outside, the number of active Trotskyists in the country is very small. The party is strongest, outside London, on Clydeside, and weakest in the Midlands and South Wales. It hardly exists outside the larger industrial areas.

The Trotskyists, like the Stalinists, attempt to increase their influence by penetrating other organisations. Attempts to penetrate Trade Unions have met with little success, but some progress has been

* The newspapers report that Haston said the membership was 1,500, and that on the same day Mildred Lee said it was 2,000.

made in the I.L.P., which the Trotskyists regard as the party commanding the largest following of militant workers. This progress is most marked on Tyneside, where the divisional representative on the I.L.P. National Committee is also a member of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party.

In the Autumn of 1943 the Militant Workers' Federation was formed to co-ordinate the activity of militant groups which had arisen spontaneously among dissident Communists and members of the I.L.P. and the W.I.L. The Federation is directed by the Revolutionary Communist Party; its secretary is Roy Tearse, who claims that it now has nine regional Committees. The most important of these are the Clyde Workers' Committee and the London Militant Workers' Committee. There is a committee at Sheffield and possibly also at Huddersfield, Barrow and Rugby; and there are small groups of sympathisers on Tyneside, Merseyside and in Nottingham, which Tearse may count as committees. The Federation is not much more than a paper organisation, but it is useful to the Trotskyists as a source of contacts and as an instrument of their industrial policy, particularly among engineering workers.

The Revolutionary Communist Party has three papers, Socialist Appeal, a fortnightly publication of which 8,000 to 10,000 copies are printed, Workers' International News, a theoretical organ of which 2,000 copies are printed at irregular intervals, and The Militant Miner, a small local sheet which has been taken over from an independent group in Lanarkshire on its fusion with the Workers' International League. The Ministry of Supply refused last October to continue to supply the Workers' International League with newsprint pending the production of satisfactory evidence of their pre-war consumption. This has not been forthcoming, and the party has been forced to reduce both the size and the circulation of Socialist Appeal.

Finance.

There are no indications that Trotskyist organisations receive money from abroad. The members are expected to contribute liberally and are apparently prepared to do so. Haston is reported in the Daily Telegraph of the 10th April, 1944, as saying: "Most of our members pay 5s. a week when they can, and those who can afford it pay a 25 per cent. levy on their wages."

The Movement's income for 1943 was £2,654. Sales of Socialist Appeal brought in £781, and it is believed that Mildred Lee contributed most of her private income of £350. There were a few substantial subscriptions, including sums of £30-£50, believed to have come from a Cumberland mill-owner, but the greater part of the total was received from branches and anonymous individuals in amounts varying from a few shillings to £5.

Policy and Methods.

While the British Trotskyists follow the line of the sect in regarding the war as a struggle between rival Imperialisms, their policy is not directly aimed either at stopping the war or at procuring the defeat of their country. They point out that the suffering the war brings is the fruit of the greed and cruelty of the capitalist "boss"; but they do not agitate for peace, and their programme (see Appendix G) includes a pledge of full support for the Soviet Union. Their propaganda appears to be intended rather to stir up class feeling among the workers than to have any direct effect on the war.

The main object of Trotskyist policy is to stimulate and focus discontent and to obtain the leadership of the group of militants thus formed. The party seeks not only to take the place vacated by the Communist Party as the leader of the normally discontented elements, but to attract to itself the larger body of workers who, while not yet ready to take up a militantly anti-Government attitude, are suspicious of their

employers, doubtful of the sincerity of the Government's promises of post-war reform, and tiring of the industrial truce and the leaders who seek to enforce it. The party's appeal to these groups is somewhat similar to that of the Communist Party before June 1941. There are the same bitter attacks on the callous, profiteering "boss," on "anti-working-class legislation," on the sacrifices demanded of the workers, and on the "imperialist war." On the latter subject the Trotskyists are, however, less persistent and less defeatist than were the Communists.

To carry out this policy they campaign on issues and in areas where there is already strong feeling among the workers. Although the party is always ready to exploit grievances in any factory or mine where it has contacts, it is too small and scattered to be able to start trouble on any considerable scale by itself, and it can make more progress by clinging to the fringes of a big strike than by leading a small one. It secures a wider field for its propaganda, a field already well prepared by the mere existence of a grievance strong enough to cause a strike; and in the bitter aftermath of a big dispute it may hope to start a new branch of the party or a committee of the Militant Workers' Federation. The party's technique is accordingly to fasten on an area where a strike is threatening or has broken out; one of the leaders, or the local group if there is one, makes contacts among the strikers and sells literature; the cause and course of the strike is reported in Socialist Appeal; and, whatever the outcome, the moral drawn is that only by militant activity under new leadership can the workers secure their rights. But the effect is small.

Socialist Appeal devotes a good deal of its space, though by no means all, to discussing strikes and industrial grievances. It attempts to discredit the Government, the employers and the trade-union leaders; but, while it undoubtedly fans discontent and encourages

strikers, it seldom explicitly incites to strike and it makes no attempt to foment sympathetic strikes. The party's slogan is not "Strike!" but "Break the Coalition. Labour to power." It desires the establishment of a Labour Government because it believes that any post-war Government must fail to fulfil the workers' expectations, and that the failure of a Labour Government will produce a disillusion strong enough to throw the working class into the arms of the extremists.

Influence on Industry.

The influence of the Trotskyists in industry is still slight. In connection with the recent strike of engineering apprentices, there is evidence that Roy Tearse and Heaton Lee, the party's organiser on Tyneside, advised and directed the boys' leaders and that on the Clyde the apprentices were working in conjunction with the Clyde Workers' Committee. At Barrow in September 1943 Trotskyists had some part in directing the strike committee during the early days of the strike, but the cause of the strike was a strongly felt industrial grievance and not Trotskyist agitation. Trotskyists also took some part in the strikes at the Rolls Royce aircraft works, Glasgow, in August 1941 and July 1943, in a strike at the Barnbow Royal Ordnance Factory in June 1943 and in the Yorkshire Transport strike in May 1943, but their activity has consisted in advising and encouraging the strike leaders rather than in provoking the strikes.

Trotskyist influence in mining is considerably less than in engineering. There is no evidence that Trotskyists have ever started mining strikes or exercised any appreciable influence on their course. They are drawn to the coalfields by a desire to make converts and they are rarely in touch with strike leaders. In South Wales the Workers' International League had at the time of this recent strike two contacts, each of a fortnight's standing, and no organisation. The intervention of the leaders was confined to two visits by Haston, one on the

10th March, four days after the strike had begun, the other on the 18th March, two days after the majority of men, including those in the area Haston visited, had returned to work. The mid-March issue of Socialist Appeal, the smallest that has yet appeared, was devoted entirely to the strike but was not out until it was almost over.

In Yorkshire the Trotskyists have only two groups, at Leeds and Sheffield. Each has about twenty members, most of whom have no connection with mining. During the recent strike small-scale propaganda has been carried on in her spare time by a local leader (Betty Hamilton) with a handful of assistants. Five hundred copies of Socialist Appeal have been sent to the area and pamphlets have been distributed. No national leader has covered the strike, but Edward Grant, editor of Socialist Appeal, who is suffering from a break-down, interrupted a rest cure to address one meeting and do some canvassing. It was attended by fifty people, few of whom showed any enthusiasm. Victory Gavzey - aged 19 - the only other person of Trotskyist sympathies who is known to have addressed meetings, moved a resolution at one of them that the men should return to work and then ask for an increase in pay. The Trotskyists were certainly not responsible for starting the strike, and there is no evidence that they have been responsible for prolonging it. Considering their limited strength in the area and the small scale of their activity, their influence on the situation must have been very small.

The only Trotskyist mining group of any significance is that organised in Lanarkshire by Hugh Brannan, secretary of the national miners' group of the I.L.P. and a Trade Unionist of standing. The group is, however, very small and its influence is limited.

The Trotskyists are attracting workers whose discontent and desire to hit out at the employer and the Government can find no other outlet. They have achieved a small and localised but recognisable

influence; and they are confident that the appeal of their militant programme will become stronger as the strain and friction inseparable from prolonged industrial effort increases. They have a closely knit core of energetic leaders and a membership which makes up in enthusiasm what it lacks in numbers. They are helped by the absence of competition, except from the I.L.P., which they hope to use as a conscious or unconscious ally, the lack of normal political and trade-union activity, and the sense of frustration which is alleged to be produced by the absence of marked progress towards either victory in the field or reconstruction at home. These advantages are temporary and, unless the Trotskyist can exploit them much more rapidly than at present, it seems unlikely that they will ever rise to a greater position than that of sparring partners to the Communists, who would very much like to see the Trotskyists and their small paper suppressed.

Home Office, Whitehall,

H.M.

13th April, 1944.

APPENDIX A.OFFICIALS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST PARTY.

James Ritchie Haston, National organiser, aged 32, describes himself variously as an aero engineer, a builder and a journalist. He has been an active Trotskyist since 1936, and from August 1941 until the amalgamation was employed as National organiser of the Workers' International League. He is in grade 4. Several attempts by the Ministry of Labour to place him in other employment have failed.

Mildred Lee, Secretary, aged 31, is a South African and a milliner's buyer by trade. She came here in 1938 with her husband, the founder of the Workers' International League, and she remained as the League's Secretary when her husband returned to South Africa. She devotes most of an income of about £350 a year received from South Africa to the cause.

Edward Grant, Editor of Socialist Appeal, aged 30, is also South African and has been connected with the Workers' International League since its inception. He was posted to the Pioneer Corps but fractured his skull before joining up and was discharged. It has proved impossible, owing to the effects of his injury, to find him alternative employment.

Roy Tearse, Industrial organiser, is 25. He served for four years in the Royal Navy and was discharged in 1937 on medical grounds. He suffers from the effects of infantile paralysis. From 1941 to 1943 he was employed as an aero engine tester at De Havillands, Edgware, but was again discharged on medical grounds and has been certified by the medical referee unfit for regular employment. He was for two years a secret member of the Workers' International League under an assumed name while acting openly as an energetic member of the I.L.P. but has

lately resigned from the latter and avowed his Trotskyist allegiance. He is secretary of the Militant Workers' Federation.

Harold Atkinson, Chairman and Treasurer, aged 31, has been associated with Trotskyism since 1938. He is employed as a draughtsman by Messrs. Griffin & Tatlock. He devotes most of his spare time to the business side of the organisation but does not often appear in public.

Heaton Lee and Ann Keen, who have been associated with Tearse in the Tyneside apprentice strike, are trusted and experienced Trotskyists; both are believed to be members of the Central Committee. Lee was born in South Africa on the 19th January, 1916, and came to England in 1937 already a convinced Trotskyist. He is a civil engineer by profession and since 1938 has been employed by Messrs. Wimpey on works in London, Glasgow and Tyneside. He is reported to have met Mrs. Keen in the course of his voyage to England. She became converted to Trotskyism and has lived with Lee and collaborated in his Trotskyist activities ever since. While they were in Glasgow Lee acted as Workers' International League district organiser and Keen as literature secretary; when they moved to Newcastle they continued to work in these capacities. On account of his work Lee appears little in public, and confines himself to organisation, making and developing contacts, and lecturing on political subjects under the auspices of the National Council of Labour Colleges. Mrs. Keen regularly sells Socialist Appeal and other literature in the streets. (Heaton Lee is not believed to be any relation of Mrs. Mildred Lee's husband.)

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