



Party Building and the Opposition

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In part one of this document we examined how the Opposition misrepresent our perspectives; we showed that the League does not hold to a 'catastrophist' view that capitalism is on the verge of economic and political collapse. We corrected their view that we are downplaying obstacles and only stressing positive developments in the class struggle. And we showed that our fight for a new International in the ESF, the WSF and global forums of resistance is not counterposed to the search for political co-thinkers, but is a critical element of it.

In this, the second part of our reply, we want to respond to the other main charges of the opposition:

'that we have turned our back on the united front in favour of sectarian 'party front'• building

'that we are in the process of abandoning our full programme and transitional demands in favour of 'key slogans'•. The IS has, the opposition claims, 'fetishised'• these slogans, making them into 'panaceas'• ('cure-alls'•), at the expense of a patient struggle for our full programme in the class struggle.

We will see that these charges too lack any basis in reality. Last but not least we will look at the opposition's alternative to the perspectives we have been working with over the past period. We will argue that this would represent a regression for the League, - turning away from recent and ongoing achievements - and would lead to stagnation and decline.

We apologise in advance to the members of other sections that nearly all of this part of the debate relates to issues and differences within the British section. This is not the fault of the IS. It is our view that the opposition's claim to be an international one is most false in the area of the practical results of our perspectives. The claim that our supposed catastrophism has led to voluntarism with serious consequences for our work is not backed by any evidence whatsoever. Not even a quotation or an example from IEC resolutions or section reports to the IEC.

Instead they say:

'We fully accept that many of the examples in this tendency document are 'British-centred' so to speak. We are sure that other sections will have examples of how the wrong perspectives of the International Secretariat have manifested themselves in other countries besides Britain.'•

Many examples British centred? All of them. And the opposition are not it seems 'sure'• enough to even ask the sections if this is true in advance of declaring an international tendency.

To the members of the British section we have to apologise for going over arguments and their political background, which many comrades will already know well. We will however give a balance sheet of the successes and failures of the other sections which will show that sweeping statements such as the one above neither address real problems we face nor locate their causes.

Voluntarism and Building the League

Anyone who wishes to be a revolutionary will be more than a little careful about throwing around the charge of voluntarism, if for no other reason than the fact that it was repeatedly used against Lenin and Bolshevism. Trotsky observed that an extreme concentration of will characterised Leninism. Menshevism on the other hand was

characterised by a yielding to the pressure of the objective circumstances, by an inability to swim against the stream, to play the role of a vanguard even when the masses are in retreat.

Likewise with complaints about keeping an organisation on a 'war footing'. A communist organisation is in an important sense always on a war footing - always ready to do battle against the system and to promote revolutionary methods of struggle in the working class.

Does this mean that the IS has been trying to whip comrades up to ever greater efforts and sacrifices in circumstances which simply do not warrant it or where success is impossible? They say - without any evidence - that we exhort comrades to achieve everything in 'double quick time', that we 'ascribe undue importance to every gathering of the ESF movement as the 'make or break' meeting at which we could take a step towards this International.'

What the comrades seem to be objecting to is not hysterical promises of big breakthroughs or warnings of imminent disaster if we do not - if we had said such things the comrades would surely quote them back to us - but rather the fact that we have argued that real opportunities for advance exist and that we need to develop the tactics and the means of organising so that we can take advantage of them. What the comrades seem to object to is that we see a real potential for growth in the present period.

Over the last year the IS has not sought to keep the organisation on the highest possible level of activity and self-sacrifice, such as would be necessary during a general strike or the height of the 2003 antiwar mobilisations. But neither have we told the organisation to stand down, to demobilise, to go onto on a 'peace footing'. The tasks we have set have been realistic and concomitant with the level of class struggle and possibilities facing the sections in their differing national circumstances.

No one, to our knowledge, criticised the IS 's methods of mobilisation for the Paris ESF of 2003 or the London ESF of 2004 as voluntarist. In 2005 we did not oblige all the European sections to mobilise en masse for the anti-G8 protests in Edinburgh and Gleneagles or advise all the Revo sections to mobilise for a single Revocamp in the Czech republic. Our judgement was that it was best for the sections to concentrate on whatever seemed the best way to build themselves and build Revo. We encouraged (though they did not need much encouraging) the Australian comrades to help the fledgling Revo Indonesia both by visiting Indonesia and by inviting Indonesian comrades to their own schools and to pay a visit to Europe. We encouraged the Austrian comrades (though they too did not need much encouraging) to orient to agitation in the schools around the attacks on education.

Our priorities for the sections have not been, in any single case, exhorting them to achieve, let alone imposing on them, extreme growth targets and demands to organise 'sectarian' campaigns, but to continue to prioritise the youth work, to intervene in workers', students' and youth resistance to war, to fight the attacks on social gains and welfare, to fight privatisation, racism and the far right and so on. The campaigns that of the sections and Revo - anti-Macdonald's pickets in Sweden and Australia, anti-neoliberal education reforms in Austria, defence of Asylum seekers in Britain, the Czechek campaign in Prague - all have been initiated by the sections themselves, not forced on them by a voluntarist IS.

Alongside and as an element of this, we participated in the transnational events and mobilisations - including events like the ESFs in Paris and London and the G8 in Scotland. In addition we sent Kul dip to the WSF in Mumbai and Luke and Dave S to the WSF in Porto Alegre. Sending two or three comrades to the European Preparatory Assemblies (roughly three or four times a year) hardly amounts to a huge expense of energy. We sent a larger team to the EPA in Prague, and one reason for this was to support our Czech section who had shouldered a great deal of the burden of organising the event. On each occasion - at the ESF and the EPAs - our intervention's purpose was to know what the centrist and left reformist leaders are up to, to attack them to their faces, to polemicise with them in our publications. Through this we hope to make contacts and raise our profile as an international tendency.

This approach, not without difficulties and failures of course, is bearing fruit. Our main priority - youth work - is resulting in a real expansion of REVOLUTION in Britain, Germany and Austria, the founding of a REVO group in

Australia and the winning of a REVO group in Indonesia. We have an ongoing initiative, via the ESF, to call an international day of action on neoliberal education reforms. We do not deny that these are only the first shoots of success but nor do we fail to observe that our tactics and our priorities are being validated. And where there is strong growth of REVO groups, as in Vienna and Leeds, there is a real opportunity for the subsequent growth of our section too.

The minority say, however:

Voluntarism has become the majority's chosen method of building our organisation. By voluntarism we mean that we set over-ambitious tasks for ourselves that take no real account of the forces at our disposal, the conditions under which we work, the features of the objective situation that face us. We then exhort comrades to fulfil these tasks and berate each other for not reaching our targets. All problems stem from subjective failings - from the failings of the volunteers, from their lack of will. That is voluntarism and mars our party building at the moment. Moreover, it can lead to attempts to find short cuts, including short-circuiting debate and differences. It can lead to bullying and what Trotsky and Lenin both described as examples of 'bureaucratic rudeness'. We must ensure that none of this finds a place in the LFI. And to prevent it we must root out voluntarism. •

Maybe this alarmist scenario applies to one or two individual comrades whose 'will' is, temporarily we hope, at a low ebb, but we doubt that most comrades in the League will recognise it at all. But where they exist any such individuals are indeed in need of 'exhortation' and advice.

What we will continue to do is what every responsible leadership must do - not only to produce paper resolutions on policy, high grade propaganda, and programmes, but also to oversee their implementation, identify and help overcome obstacles to their application. A leadership that does not perform these elementary tasks has no right to call itself a leadership. If anything, we should be criticised not for doing this too much, but for not doing it enough.

The reason for this lies mainly in the decline in human and financial resources at the centre of the League, i.e. the London based IS. And here the comrades of the opposition are far from innocent bystanders. First several of them refused to stand for the IEC or the IS, citing personal reasons. That is their right and we would in all loyalty say no more about it if these same comrades did not then criticise us for our practical shortcomings and worse, accuse us of abandoning collective leadership and practicing bureaucratic rudeness. Second they have launched an internal struggle the British section and then in the League. That is their right. But it has consequences for members of the IS who are also members of the British section leadership: Joy, Dave S, Jeremy.

The opposition in fact seems to see what it regards as the IS's intervention in the British section's 2005 pre-conference discussion as illegitimate, micromanaging the sections, etc. The only issue which was actually and legitimately a question for the IS as an IS was the issue of tactics in the European elections in 2004. In some respects the sharp differences at this time originated the divisions in the British section. But the roles played by the London IS members related to their roles as NC, PC or just ordinary members of the section.

As individuals we did not agree with the decision of the pre-conference NC to dump the five key slogans. We organised a tendency struggle to win this position. Having done so we at once dissolved the tendency; the defeated minority immediately formed one. Thus the WPB NC was elected from majority/minority slates. There was no attempt to under-represent the minority on the NC and two minority representatives were put on the PC. But after this to form the majorities and executive required comrades staying on the PC and NC of the British section. Far from being a desirable option for the IS this went completely against trying to separate the IS from the leadership of the section and devote five London comrades to international work.

Thus the London base of the international leadership is weaker in numbers (three not five, one fulltimer not two) and younger comrades, plus comrades from the Austrian and German sections, have had to step into their shoes. But we have survived, continued our work and we believe that the balance sheet we will present at congress will compare favourably enough with that of the years the current opposition leaders served on the international leadership.

Yet behind the fantastical notion of the IS running around exhorting and berating people for failing to achieve over-ambitious tasks (such as?), the Opposition's real meaning quickly becomes clear. They say:

‘The objective situation, say the majority, is perfect for growth. Zero growth is therefore inexcusable. If we don't grow, it must be the members' fault. The IS should therefore become a body engaged in the micro management of the sections' work so that this work is carried out in the voluntarist spirit of the Sixth Congress resolutions.’•

Where are we supposed to have made the stupid comment that conditions are ‘perfect’? In the Tasks document of the January 2005 IEC, which said:

‘In current conditions, the objective situation provides no excuse for zero or negative growth. Every unit of the League must discover how to find new contacts, how to involve them in discussion groups and joint work with us, how to recruit them to the League.’•

Once again the Opposition ‘improve’ one of our documents to bolster an accusation that otherwise will not stand up for one minute.

Zero growth or shrinkage is objectively understandable in situations where there is no mass movement, or where the size and scale of defeats has disoriented, thrown back and divided the movement. Maybe this was the case after 1989 and for most of the 1990s. But even this was very uneven and was relative not absolute. The French and New Zealand sections grew rapidly, the British steadily shrank, the German and Austrian sections first grew and then declined, the Irish section collapsed. The Swedish section was founded and expanded by fusion with the Marxist Left. The Latin American sections declined, degenerated politically, and then deserted.

Thus even the nineties - which we characterised as a counter-revolutionary phase - are not a picture of objective circumstances which precluded growth. Nor can we discount the subjective factor - mistakes made by the international and national leaderships. But at the same time the minority accept that we are in a period of recovery - even in Britain and even if ‘from a very low base’•. So what's the objective reason today for regarding zero or negative growth as likely?

The comrades hazard a guess -

‘the objective conditions might well be more propitious in gaining an audience but we may find that the nature of the audience is less attracted to our politics than in previous periods - why, because in the consciousness of thousands upon thousands of activists our ideas on class, party, programme and such like appear alien. The preceding period of defeats has had an impact on the outlook of activists that cannot be wished away by IS or IEC exhortations.’•

We may find that. Indeed, in particular milieux we will find that. No one denies that the social counter-revolution in Eastern Europe, and Russia 1990-91 and the restoration of capitalism under Stalinist auspices in China have had profound ideological consequences. Indeed it is easy to see these in the national labour movements, with the rampant neoliberalisation of Social Democracy and the deepened class collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy. All these we have analysed, repeatedly.

But starting in the late nineties we have also found plenty of opportunities to involve ourselves in struggle with new layers of young people who are open to anticapitalist and revolutionary ideas. Now too - in some countries - we are finding sections of the vanguard of the working class, radicalised by the neoliberal attacks, with whom we can work.

Of course we do not expect them to be spontaneous Marxists, to have reached the levels of consciousness common in previous high points of the class struggle (e.g. in the 1920s and 30s or in the 1970s and 80s). But it would be pure snobbery to say that their level is too low compared to these previous periods to be worth a serious orientation to them.

Leaving aside the negative influence in these earlier periods of Stalinism, centrism and left social democracy, to get to those levels required serious work, propaganda and agitation by subjective revolutionaries and militant reformists. It is

identifying and working with such layers - workers, as well as students and school students - that every unit of League needs to do. This task of renewing the revolutionary vanguard and a fighting labour movement is what we concentrating on.

To set ourselves such a task is not 'voluntarism', unreasonable 'exhortation', or demanding a double-quick march. But it does include clear advice to those comrades who say that certain milieux are objectively unfavourable for recruitment, and who reject any other methods than those they have already tried, to orient to the younger, newer activists and militants, both in the workplace and in the schools and colleges.

By the way, it is little short of demagogy to claim that identifying the need for sections or branches that are stagnating to search out other areas in which to grow is somehow 'blaming the members'. The Opposition even go so far as to create an amalgam between two concepts when they accuse the IS of saying 'All problems stem from subjective failings - from the failings of the volunteers, from their lack of will.' Where and when have we said this?

However the comrades surely cannot be saying that stagnation or decline is never the product of subjective failings. Is it not necessary to find out what part subjective failings have played in the problem? What they seem to be saying is 'We are a leadership-in-waiting that will always give the comforting advice, 'it is not your fault', 'objective circumstances are to blame for our failure to grow'. Soothing perhaps, but leadership? Not a bit of it.

To imply that constructive criticism is offensive, that the leadership should not challenge ideas and practices if it thinks they are reinforcing problems rather than overcoming them, would reduce leadership to flattering the membership. And it encourages an over-sensitive, personalist approach.

On the contrary, the Leninist concept of leadership requires of our central bodies that they 'say what is' as they see it. Those charged with responsibility for leading our organisation on the local, national and international scale have an absolute duty to do this.

Then the Opposition says: 'Secondly, political problems can beset an organisation and, despite objective conditions, it can shrink. That is one reason why the LRCI shrank. We lost one of our biggest sections (the French) in between 2000 and 2003 for political reasons.'

That is absolutely true. The French section was lost for political reasons, not the absence of fruitful conditions in the French class struggle after the great upheaval of 1995. What were these differences? Years of resistance by comrades in the French section to building Revolution as a broad autonomous organisation as laid out in guidelines agreed by IEC after IEC since 1996. It was in part because the majority of the section instead placed a great priority on seeking 'regroupment' with the splits from LO and the LCR that they finally - when they proved unable to do so on a principled basis, as a section of the League - 'regrouped' themselves into the LO faction and the LCR.

The IS tried to correct these subjective errors; probably too late and not decisively enough. But the case of the French section, like the case of the problems which led to the near collapse of the Australian section in 2000, did not arise from the IS over-intervening in them, trying to micro-manage them, or subjecting them to bureaucratic rudeness. Quite the opposite: more, earlier and more consistent intervention might even have prevented these collapses. So too might greater frankness, less diplomacy.

The Opposition gives a prime example of the flattering method of leadership:

'Thirdly, in terms of 'discovering' new methods of trying to attract people let's get away from alchemy and towards establishing good practice. In our view the sections are generally good at organising ways of engaging contacts. They are generally open to experimenting with new methods of organising. They have risen, for example, to the challenge of building youth groups, supporting comrades engaged in that work and trying to learn from it. Yet, none of this creativity is yielding results on the scale that the IS expects.'

It is far from clear what 'scale' the IS is supposed to have expected or what 'alchemy' the comrades are referring to.

Perhaps to the guidelines for youth work we have adopted over the years. It is however far from clear that the comrades understand them. Indeed their one attempt to touch on our number one perspectival priority and its clear success in building the League is slighting to the point of scarcely concealed contempt:

?The very looseness of Revo?s politics - its independence, its prioritisation of activism over ideological struggle, its openness to a range of wrong and muddled ideas being published in its pages - means that it can grow through ad hoc front campaigns that draw in the casual activist and hold them to Revo mainly through a continuation of activism (?) We have no quarrel with this method of building Revo (although it is not and should never be allowed to become the only way of building the youth group).?•

Looseness of REVO?s politics? What nonsense - REVO is based on a clear revolutionary programme. Perhaps the comrades would like to point out the wrong and muddled ideas contained in Revolution?s pages - and please do not quote letters or articles replied to by other Revo members. Of course there will be some. Even a fighting propaganda group can make mistakes and even write ?muddled and wrong?• articles in its papers and journals. We would expect any serious publication attempting to have a dialogue with its readers to allow them to express wrong and muddled ideas.

Revo?s method, the League?s method with Revo, is to put active campaigning (propaganda sales, contingents on demos, pickets) in the forefront of its work, to hold regular (weekly) meetings which have a component of introductory Marxist education and analysis of contemporary events from a revolutionary standpoint. In this context the autonomy, the self-governing character of Revo is a crucial training ground for young people to make their own decisions and, yes, occasionally to make their own mistakes.

But in essence what the comrades are suggesting here is that the League?s ?adults?• have nothing to learn from the youth work, that it is insulting and patronising to experienced cadres to suggest that they can do so. Sorry comrades, but age alone, just like youth alone, has limited and one sided virtues. Both can learn from one another. In the past five years or more the younger cadres have had more experience in agitation and campaigning. The very complaints of the opposition that there is a very low level of class struggle and no immediate perspective of that changing ought to lead them to think: ?Maybe we could learn something from Revolution, especially since recruits have come overwhelmingly from this area of work.?•

The IS and the WPB majority have not asked the older comrades and trade unionists (far from all of whom are in the opposition) to slavishly copy Revo. Rather they have suggested that political campaigning - around the new workers? party, in defence of asylum seekers, for example, can supplement work in each member?s own trade union and workplace and help find contacts and potential members in other unions and other workplaces. Is this alchemy? Or is the opposition defending comforting routinism and practices which bring hardly any recruits?

The IS is very well aware of sections taking good initiatives. Some of the work plainly is yielding results - and in some areas in excess of expectations. We never imagined we would go from a few young members to a mass youth movement in a few years and have never predicted it or tried to berate people for failing to achieve it. Rather we had to persuade comrades who said it was impossible to build youth organisation to take up the task. When they did they had quite respectable results?? in Sweden, Czechia, Australia. No other area of work brought anything like them. And the work in Germany, Austria and Britain has brought quite striking results.

It is also true, however, that in some areas we have been less successful than others. Phrases about everyone being ?generally good at organising ways of engaging contacts?• are frankly platitudes. Where sections or branches are not proving successful at this, the task is to understand why and help them to find other ways, other methods. Is this alchemy?

Of course, if the conditions in a given city or indeed country are less favourable - maybe we have few young comrades capable of doing youth work or no trade unionists - we need to take account of it. But we must also examine the methods that are being used and make an honest assessment of them to maximise our prospects of success. We will find in the work of each section both good and bad habits and we must seek to generalise the lessons for the benefit of the

whole organisation. No one should feel threatened by this; still less should anyone seek to stir up mistrust of the leadership's motives when it undertakes this difficult work.

Has our work been a failure?

The platform of the opposition not only shows the signs of being written by more than one hand - that is nearly inevitable in any collectivity - but it also shows evidence of being written from more than one perspective. For example, as well as trying to put everything wrong in the League down to the catastrophist perspectives of 2003, it remarks:

“Since 1997 the party building perspectives of the LRCI/LFI have failed miserably.”

The comrades have probably shifted the starting point for their tale of our failures so that they can include some real and spectacular failures: the collapse of the French section and the decimation of the Australian section, plus the fiasco with the Ukrainian “section”. The problem with trying to bring these failures into the picture is that they were not suffered under the supposedly voluntarist perspective of 2003, or the leadership elected at the sixth congress, but with a different perspective - when youth work was being done by only one or two sections. If it was our perspectives which failed miserably it would be the very perspective the opposition recommend today: “the search for co-thinkers” amongst “leftward moving centrists”.

They tell us that:

“In place of a fixation with the WSF/ESF as the international in waiting we will revive our tradition of seeking co-thinkers amongst international political tendencies by engaging with those we identify as the most leftward moving centrists and by allocating resources to a political dialogue with such forces. Engaging and winning supporters from these tendencies is vital if we are to break out from our current tiny base of six grouplets in six countries.”

In fact as the comrades of the opposition well know we expended an enormous amount of time and energy in discussions with one leftward moving centrist organisation in particular, the PTS, in 1995-1997 and again in 2001-02. In the earlier period we sent comrades Keith H, Dave E and Dave S for visits to Argentina. We welcomed two PTS comrades into WP in London, we organised two speaking tours for PTS comrades in Europe, etc. At the highpoint of the Argentine revolutionary situation in 2002, we sent comrade Michael there twice, the second time for three months. But both times we hit the obstacle of their centrism on the question of the necessity for a workers party in Argentina, and could not reach agreement. On both occasions they terminated the discussion.

If you want to find a failure then this was it - as was the French section's discussions with the LO faction. The Ukrainians too appeared to be leftward moving centrists. They turned out to be CWI fraudsters, not spotted by any of the members of our international leadership - neither those now in the opposition nor those in the majority.

In fact the worst problems, losses and failures of our work occurred between the fourth and the sixth congresses. Overall losses between 2000 and 2003 - without counting the fictional Ukrainians - would have been 16. Thus it could not have been due to the 2003 catastrophist perspectives, to post 2004 voluntarist party building methods of the new IS or its “rude and bureaucratic” leadership.

Nor, let us state this clearly, was it due to our orientation towards the PTS. When a real and significant centrist organisation responds to our propaganda and programme we must bend every effort to engage with them - even if there is no guarantee of success. The real issue is how we carry out such discussions and whether we delude ourselves that this method is the only way forward. The League as whole did not do this vis-a-vis the PTS.

The losses to the league in the 1999-2001 period were not due to our false party building perspectives, nor even to our economic perspectives which did indeed envisage a major cyclical crash (opposition comrades should re-read Trotskyist International No 25 where articles written by people who now castigate our catastrophism would make their hair stand on end today).

So why did the League suffer serious losses in the period around 1999-2001. We can state with no fear of contradiction that it was due to serious crises in three sections. The French section (where 16 members were lost), the Australian section which suffered a post-September 11 2000 crisis (four members lost) and the Swedish section which suffered a post-Gothenburg 2001 crisis and then decided to reduce others to supporter status (nine members lost).

These losses were indeed political. They also related to national and international perspectives. Many of the comrades lost were with greater or lesser degrees of openness resistant to the youth work, to work in the anticapitalist movement. Some proved unable to take the heat of the anticapitalist mobilisations of 2000-01. In Sweden two or three of the older AM comrades collapsed politically under the pressure of the post-Gothenburg witch hunt against 'violence' and denounced it publicly. The loss of such elements is a natural phenomenon of political life and example of 'a party strengthening itself by purging.'

In fact the only remotely similar post-sixth congress crisis was in the Austrian section where four or five comrades were lost over a period of a year (2003-04). Here no one can say that the IS was precipitate in siding with an activist wing. Quite the opposite: we tried every compromise to keep the more passive propagandist comrades in, even when their contribution to the section had dropped to nearly nil. It proved to be a serious error. So whilst the figures seem to show the section has not grown (11 in 2003, 11 today) there has been a major turnover in the membership.

Those who have met the new comrades will confirm that this marks no degeneration of the section's educational or theoretical level and certainly not its practical effectiveness. Quite the opposite, it is clearly a regeneration. The striking successes with building a Revo group of around fifty members, able to regularly mount contingents on demos of 100, are living proof of this. The training of new young comrades in Marxism, their recruitment to the League, confirms in practice the fruitfulness of our international perspectives.

The way that the IS responded to the crisis in the Austrian section shows rather that the international leadership errs on the side of inclusiveness and conciliation, not on that of bureaucratic rudeness or exclusion. In none of the above crises were members driven out. Often they left only after extremely provocative and undisciplined behaviour or after an outright capitulation to centrism. And no one argued otherwise at the time.

Since the Sixth Congress the League has actually grown - not sufficiently certainly. For that reason we shall indeed continue to 'exhort' our sections to do so and try to provide them with advice as to how this might be achieved. Where there are differences over perspectives and tactics we will listen carefully to all sides and to all members of a leadership. However most, if not all, sections envisage further growth over the months ahead.

Have sectarian campaigns replaced the united front work?

The opposition claims that the international leadership has not rested content with voluntarist exhortation to grow - it has promoted the launching of voluntarist campaigns, and even outright sectarian initiatives, thus replacing use of the united front within the labour movement.

The Opposition says: 'Instead of looking at the more difficult tasks of how we place ourselves at the centre of broader movements, of how we can expand our positions of influence in mass organisations, of how we can put ourselves in a position to conduct an open struggle with the reformists (or influential left centrists) the leadership advances front campaigns run by ourselves.'

The only concrete example they give of this is supposed to be around the WPB produced leaflet 'You are being lied to about asylum seekers':

'The clearest example of this in Britain was the proposal to set up a campaign called 'Asylum Lies'. This was proposed by an IS member as a campaign, directed at mobilising people with us to undertake mass leafleting of working class estates, football grounds, town centres, workplaces etc. Out of this work we would create a new campaign run by us. It would have our politics because we would write the leaflet on which it was to be based. We would therefore create a new periphery for ourselves from this front initiative. The only thing was, it would not

mention WPB. It would be created in the name of an organisation - Your Are Being Lied To - which has no existence, no address separate from us, no existence separate from us. Indeed the campaign was not conceived of as, primarily, an objective necessity for the class. It was motivated at the NC explicitly as 'a proposal for integrated campaigning initiative' which would help integrate 'the work of the WP branches and Revo'. At the time this idea was put forward the principal task for revolutionaries was to fight to stop the movement, Unite Against Fascism (UAF), from becoming - under the day-to-day leadership of the rightward moving SWP - a popular frontist, liberal campaign. The UAF, which had been endorsed by the TUC, unions etc was preaching a pacifist liberal approach that would do nothing to stop the rise of the BNP in the forthcoming Euro elections. But it was mobilising sizeable numbers in several key areas and our task was to intersect with it to pose the revolutionary alternative - a task that we successfully undertook, in Manchester, for example, by leading the UAF forces into a direct and well publicised confrontation with Le Pen. The task was not to focus on setting up our own tiny front to serve the needs of our own small numbers of members and supporters in Revo and WPB through an Asylum Lies Campaign. This was especially so because in virtually every town there were well staffed campaigns and organisations doing far more work on the asylum issue than we could ever dream of undertaking. This was sectarianism in action.?

This is a gross misrepresentation of the facts. The leaflet was suggested and produced (by the present writer) not as a member of the IS but as a member of WPB. Its purpose was to reply to the horrific witch-hunting of asylum seekers by the tabloid press. The WP PC and NC agreed to this. In draft form it was actually proposed to two 'united front' bodies - the Campaign to Defend Asylum Seekers and Unite Against Fascism at a joint meeting, where they were discussing the issue of asylum -, under the influence of the opportunist SWP, they rejected the leaflet.

As it had more impact than any CDAS and UAF material, and as, unlike CDAS and UAF, it actually answered the anti-refugee lies by putting the blame squarely on the capitalists and the government for real cuts in social provision, we produced it anyway. That is to say, when the bodies to which we put our united front proposal refused to act with us, we went ahead ourselves. By what rule of the united front or revolutionary politics are we forbidden to do this? In fact it is an essential part of the united front policy that, when reformists or centrists refuse to unite in action, the communists will, if they have the strength, endeavour to carry out the work themselves.

Why did we not put our name on it? Why did we set up an e-mail address for it? Precisely so that trade unions, trade union branches, trades councils and individuals who wanted to use it without having to endorse Workers Power could do so. And indeed they did so in large numbers. We did not hide from anybody that it was we who produced it. We used it ourselves as campaigning material in the pre-election period and then in our pro-asylum seekers work. But we specifically did not set up a campaign.

Thus it did not, and could not have, obstructed - or been an alternative to - a real united front in the labour movement. In fact no such 'real' labour movement united front on this issue yet exists. CDAS remains essentially a 'united front of a special type' tied to the SWP's apron strings, despite many nominal and a few active union affiliations and two or three functioning local groups. In fact it is 'parked' by the SWP for most of the time. UAF may be a more mass body but its activity is highly intermittent and it is grossly popular frontist and pacifist. But wherever local or national actions or mobilisations are called by it WPB participates in them. Perhaps such a broad united front may arise out of the forces WPB has mounted for a conference, initiated by the Sukula family defence campaign. If so, again it will be a result of our initiative.

So did WPB set up a separate campaign of our own counterposed to the labour movement's united fronts? It did not. It did propose that branches of our organisation should hand out the leaflet, try to draw people - and organisations - around us in handing it out in working class areas. That is not sectarianism - that is a normal initiative. If anything it should have been carried out more widely. The leaflet has in fact aided our asylum seeker defence work and raised our standing in this field not lowered it. We are not ashamed of this work. Quite the contrary.

Since this is the only example of our 'sectarian campaigns,' counterposed to the united front of the labour movement, it is a pretty cracked pillar to bear the entire weight of the opposition's case for our sectarianism.

The opposition platform however, says: 'in place of sectarian front building we need to take our place as the revolutionary wing of the broader campaigns set up by the labour movement. The idea that we have to start out by attacking these campaigns because of their popular frontist character and set up rivals to them is nonsense.'

This is a dangerous mixture of different arguments leading to an opportunist conclusion. Of course we want to take our place as the revolutionary wing of mass campaigns. Nor have we ever suggested the idea of 'setting up rivals' - i.e. small isolated campaigns - where real united front campaigns exist and fight. But neither will we renounce taking initiatives where the reformists and centrists oppose necessary steps in the struggle. It is a vital component of revolutionary tactics never to renounce our independence of action. Drifting along in moribund campaigns just because they are part of the labour movement is not anti-sectarian: it is anti-Bolshevik.

But what of the opposition platform's warning that we must not 'start out' by attacking the popular frontist character of 'these campaigns'? Presumably what is being referred to here is UAF or perhaps even Respect? Where a reformist/centrist initiative involves an alliance with the bourgeoisie - or holds back from effective struggle because it wants to keep a place free for the liberals or the religious leaders at the table - then of course we 'attack' this fact. And not only that - we demand the working class forces break with the bourgeois forces and take the path of struggle and confrontation. And - if they will not - we most certainly must agitate for action anyway, even if that does mean the creation of other, alternative, effective coordinations of action - or 'rival campaigns' to use the loaded language of the official leaders, who will always try to blame those who seek action for any disunity arising from their own cowardice.

So what are we to make of the opposition's criticism of Asylum Lies?

They recognise that it was a very good, well written, leaflet. Their objection seems to be to the idea that we wanted to hand it out - with non-party activists and other groups - even without the support of other campaigns like CDAS and UAF if necessary. And they object to us 'starting out' attacking the popular frontist character of the latter. This starts to look like an opportunist reluctance to apply a critical element of united front policy - challenging the cross-class nature of the popular frontist campaigns throughout their existence (including at the outset), and refusing to allow our hands to be tied when our allies object to necessary steps in the struggle.

In short, at a time when centrism is moving to hobble and limit resistance through such unprincipled alliances, the opposition seems to be showing reluctance to adopt clear tactics aimed at breaking their hold.

Key slogans replace transitional demands?

First one major point. Neither the IS nor the IEC ever tried to impose a list of key slogans on all the sections of the League. The place where this issue arose was and remains the British section. Even here it is a matter not of the IS's intervention but of a number of WPB leaders and members - some of whom were IS members - opposing a change in a position which was nearly unanimously agreed by the WPB leadership and membership at the beginning of 2004. This 'line' has not been exported to other sections let alone imposed on them.

At the December 2004 and January 2005 NCs of WPB it became clear that the majority of the NC, led by Stuart and Mark, wanted to remove three of the key agitational slogans which the 2004 conference had adopted.

The demands the comrades specifically wanted to withdraw were:

- 'a new mass workers' party
- 'social forums in every city
- 'the rank and file movement in the trade unions.

It was set out most clearly in paragraph 89 of the NC's draft British Perspectives, where it says:

'the key slogans of the previous period, in particular formation of a mass workers' party based on the trade unions and socialist organisations, building rank and file organisations in the unions to dissolve the bureaucracy, and building social forums in every city and borough, are no longer immediate or operable slogans to guide our tactics.'

The reason WPB had raised the call for a new workers' party in the previous period was straightforward enough.

During Blair's second term of office, his privatisation and neoliberal policies, an unprecedentedly unpopular war, and the emergence of a mass anti-war movement, drawing in trade unionists, the Muslim community and youth, meant that large numbers of working people - normally Labour voters - developed deep a hostility to Blair. Having failed to stop the war on the streets and in parliament many of them looked for an electoral expression of their hostility to Labour. Some, the less class conscious, voted for the Liberal Democrats. Others voted for Respect or abstained.

In the course of 2003-04 the postal workers (CWU), the firefighters (FBU) and railworkers (RMT) came into sharp conflict with the government and union members started challenging the unions' support for the Labour Party. The FBU withdrew from the Labour Party and the RMT was expelled. Many of the CWU rank and file also wanted this, but their recently elected left leader Billy Hayes was a Labour Loyalist and blocked the way to this. In addition the new left general secretary of the unaffiliated civil service union, the PCS, gave his personal endorsement to Respect, as did a number of RMT and FBU branches. In Scotland, the RMT region as a whole affiliated to the Scottish Socialist Party, and the 4,000 strong CWU Edinburgh No.2 branch voted for, but were bureaucratically blocked from affiliation.

The Respect Unity Coalition was founded as an SWP initiative - after George Galloway MP the main leader of the anti-war movement was expelled from the Labour Party. In Scotland the SSP with about 3000 members and six members of the Scottish Parliament began to attract support from the left unions. In the bigger unions a series of 'left leaders' had been elected who were strong on anti-Blair rhetoric during the war and in various disputes with the Labour government, but led their unions back to uncritical support after an agreement (the Warwick agreement) which was supposed to assure a 'radical third term' for Blair. In fact this radicalism was a radically anti-working class series of neoliberal reforms.

For all these reasons, despite the continued low overall level of industrial action (not least because of the continued existence of the anti-union laws), the level of political ferment within the labour movement was and remains intense. Only an economistic and blinkeredly trade union assessment could think otherwise. Some in the opposition hold to this view, their fetish, by constantly comparing strike figures and union membership with the levels of the 1970s and 1980s. Thus they fail to see what is new in the situation - the experience of the longest-lived Labour government ever, which has adopted extremely nakedly pro-capitalist and pro-imperialist policies, and has thrown the mass of its supporters into episodic opposition to it, and the vanguard of the labour movement into search for a political alternative.

In short, exactly what we argued was the very purpose of electing a Labour government in 1997 and 2001 was now taking place. The vanguard of the working class was becoming deeply disillusioned with Labour and looking for an alternative. This created the opportunity to rally the most advanced workers to the formation of a new party. Therefore we called on the unions to break with Labour and form a new party, together with the rebellious youth and the left groups. The call arose from a real contradiction - the prior support of the unions for Labour, and Labour's attack on the unions and the working class: in a nutshell, the contradiction of a bourgeois workers party, as it unfolds in a prolonged period of Labour government.

Of course we were never so foolish as to imagine that the whole of the working class had broken with Labour - let alone broken with reformism! But it was clear that, unlike in the period 1979-97, far more than a few thousand members of left groups now wanted an alternative. Who? Those erstwhile Labour supporters who marched in their hundreds of thousands against the war. The 200,000 Labour members - half the membership - who tore up their party cards. The members of the FBU who had had to strike against a Labour government. RMT members finding themselves outside the Labour Party for refusing to bow the knee to Blair. The huge numbers of former Labour voters who deserted the party in the 2004 council and European elections and who were to do so even more signally in the 2005 general election. Of course a party based on thousands of these people would not be a party 'of the whole class', immediately supplanting the Labour Party's entire working class base. It would be a party of the most advanced workers - a party of the vanguard.

The call for a new workers' party is an appeal to the rank and file as well as a demand on the leaders to break with Labour. The programme that we call for it to adopt is one that consistently expresses the interests of the working class - a revolutionary programme. The difference between the two slogans 'For a new workers party' and 'for a

revolutionary party?• is absolutely not that we think the new party should avoid a revolutionary policy for fear of scaring off reformists or the bureaucracy (which is the method of the Fourth International and the IST in the German Linkspartei and in a slightly different form in Respect.) Rather, the difference for us is that we are calling on mass organisations to break with Labour and campaign for the formation of a new party, one that we will, from the outset, fight to become a revolutionary one - with a transitional programme and Leninist structure.

That is the way we have argued this in the RMT - an exemplary application of the workers? party slogan. Our comrade Pat fought at local and national level for the RMT to call a conference to discuss the foundation of a new working class alternative to New Labour. The result is the RMT-called conference to discuss the crisis of working class political representation. We never relied on Bob Crow to support the call for a new party nor did we boycott our own policies to convince Crow to found a party with us. We used the method of the united front to raise the need for a new party in a creative and principled way that related to real developments.

So far, we have not only been raising propaganda for the idea of a new workers? party. We have been agitating for it. We use these terms a lot, but it's often worth reminding ourselves what they mean.

For revolutionary Marxists, agitation means a small number of ideas for a large number of people. It does not mean solely immediate and achievable aims, let alone only those issues that workers are already conscious of. In speeches at meetings, in interventions against Respect, in leaflets and on the front page of our paper, in resolutions, we have been pushing the idea of a new workers? party to as broad a layer of people as we can. This is agitation.

It's important, however, to be clear what the distinction between agitation and propaganda doesn't mean. The Russian social-democrats had occasion to tackle this issue many times from 1895-6 onwards; it was important also in 1905. It doesn't mean that agitation calls on people to do things while propaganda is just about big ideas. Why? Because then we could only ever agitate for things that can be brought to immediate fruition - and our propaganda would not call for action and taking concrete steps. And this is a dangerous division in any group's politics.

In reality it is sometimes necessary to agitate for things that can't immediately be carried out, or, as Lenin put it, which do not 'promise palpable results?•. Things for which there is, in the opposition's words 'no resonance?•. In fact, on this issue, it is palpably true that there is a resonance for such an idea - i.e. that the working class needs a new party. Respect would not exist if there was no resonance for building a new party to the left of Labour.

Bob Crow of the RMT would not have broken from the party and agreed to the calling of a conference to discuss alternatives if there were no resonance in the ranks of the railworkers. Of course it is true that what sort of new party - revolutionary, reformist, centrist, populist or a popular frontist - or a pick and mix policy of support for different parties by the unions is not a spontaneous given. These 'solutions?• to the question raised by tens if not hundreds of thousands of activists are being fought for by political organisations.

But in any case, without bold and clear agitation for a step which is both possible and necessary, how will we even know what resonance there is for it? In fact the opposition comrades are asking not just for resonance but for the call to emerge from the masses themselves. That is the view expressed by that part of the opposition who, from time to time, support the workers party call or who support it 'in the left unions like the RMT and the FBU?• (as if the left unions alone could have their own new workers party). Other comrades within the opposition really regard this whole situation as a diversion.

They believe that, because millions of working class electors have not broken with Labour, because Gordon Brown has carried out some social reforms (working mother's tax credits and so on), because the labour aristocracy is happy with New Labour, because it remains, despite it all, a bourgeois workers party (true), we must keep to our old tactics of critical electoral support and calling for a struggle within the Labour Party. This quite simply ignores the fact that the role of the working class vanguard is to lead, including to lead a split from Labour. This is not a contradiction to our tactics of critical support but the logical and dialectical culmination of it. To say otherwise would be like saying birth is a break from pregnancy. Indeed, those who wish to continue critical electoral support or entry 'beyond term?• will end

up with the death not the birth of a new party. This is not vanguardism - giving a lead - but tailism: waiting to be led by the masses.

This was not the method WPB used in the great struggles of the 1980s. Then too we had certain key slogans - an all out general strike, organised picket defence squads, a miners' rank and file movement, a working class women's movement led by the miners' wives, etc. Few if any of these had much initial resonance. Take for example WPB's call in the miners' strike for picket defence squads as the embryo of a workers' militia. Some miners started to see the need for this new form of organisation under the clubs of the police and the impact of our agitation - most did not.

Likewise the call for a rank and file movement had little or no resonance for at least half the strike. But in the last two months it did and we even managed to initiate a small rank and file grouping. We were right to agitate for these things, because they were necessary to win the dispute. Some of these slogans took hold of serious numbers of miners, most did not. In fact they were a large part of the reason the miners lost.

The same applies today to our slogan of solidarity with the Iraqi resistance. Does it have resonance? Only with a very small vanguard. But (a) it is necessary to say it, because we will be proved right later, and (b) because it helps us locate the most intransigent revolutionaries and anti-imperialists, just as we recruited a small number of advanced miner militants during the Great Strike.

So are there obstacles to the realisation of the new workers party slogan? Yes, obviously. First the leaders of the 'big four' unions remain strongly pro-Labour putting all their hopes on Gordon Brown, when he becomes party leader, throwing them a few concessions. They will do all they can to block the road to a new workers' party. But our agitation for a new workers party helps us expose Labour and point out these leaders' treachery, and enables us to relate to the militant minority in their unions.

Secondly there is the Labour left, who, as Blair tries to drive through his neoliberal reforms, will achieve parliamentary prominence in leading revolts. They will argue that this proves the possibility of reforming Labour.

Thirdly there is Respect and the SWP who are leading a section of 'new party' supporters up the blind ally of populism. This will not be able to break whole unions or sections of unions from Labour and open them up to a debate about strategy. Respect will strain every nerve to prevent a potential rival coming into existence and knows that a broader party based more solidly on militant workers and trade unionists will not agree to many of the horrible concessions that have been made to the petit-bourgeois and clerical leaders of the Muslim community.

Fourthly there is Bob Crow's pick-and-mix attitude to political representation, i.e. I will vote for those parties which support the RMT's policies - a position which led him personally to vote for his local Lib Dem candidate in the last elections (a party which, by the way, calls for a ban on strikes in public services). He has advocated RMT support for the Scottish Socialist Party, Welsh Nationalists, Labour lefts as well. The background to this is an eclectic mix of syndicalism (my party is the RMT) and Stalinist popular frontism of the CPB variety. Add to this his bureaucratic stranglehold on the RMT and it should be clear what an obstacle he can present.

It is true too that there is a strong current of antipartyism among the antiwar and anticapitalist youth. This is shown in the near total absence of youth amongst all the above trends. But agitating for a new workers' party helps us to challenge this and cut against it.

For all these reasons the slogan is not only 'immediate' and 'operable', but necessary. Propaganda for a revolutionary party is very important but it must complement our agitation, not replace it.

The opposition are divided as to whether it is principled or operable at all. So they concentrate on suggesting that in any case the WPB majority have used it in an unprincipled way.

In fact in the current political context in Britain the call for a workers' party is in danger of being used in an opportunist way. In the absence of any genuine attempts by workers to build such an initiative it becomes an abstract

call that suggests that such a party will solve the political problems that these militants face. The danger is that workers are now being presented with a half way house as a strategy to break workers from Labour.?

Note the slide into the passive voice-?the workers party is in danger of being used?? By whom? Are we using it in an opportunist way? ?The danger is that workers are being presented with a halfway house?• Are we presenting it as a halfway house? If so tell us exactly when and where.

Getting a little bolder the comrades try to provide one piece of evidence.

?This danger was revealed in the totally inadequate programme advanced as the basis of such a party in the June 2004 issue of Workers Power. That programme tacks on the call for revolution at the end purely as a means of concealing the threadbare transitional content of the rest of that it.?

Hmm. June 2004. Rather old evidence but at least a move away from innuendo. We will have to quote at length from the article, though leaving out most of the immediate demands and the elements of commentary, so that comrades can judge for themselves.

?Working class policies for a new Workers? Party

As an independent working class organisation, Workers Power campaigns for the following policies against capitalism and war. We fight for the urgent formation of a new mass Workers? Party as an alternative to Blair?s New Labour. We propose that a new party should adopt these policies as part of its Manifesto.

? Against Blair?s War - Against Imperialism

? Workers Power demands the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all British troops from Iraq and overseas.

? Abolish secret diplomacy - publish secret treaties and deals

? Nationalise the arms industries under working class control, with no compensation

? Abolish the sinister spies, liars and assassins of MI5 and MI6

? Not a penny, not a person for the defence of this system. Self-defence should be carried out by the working people themselves under their own democratic control

Against Privatisation - for Workers? Control

We believe that publicly owned services and enterprises should be run not like the old bureaucratic nationalised industries but under the control of the working class, of the employees and consumers themselves. This workers? control would be completely different from the old capitalist style nationalisation, because working people could then coordinate in a plan to produce for public need, not private greed. What?s more, unlike Old Labour?s nationalisations, we wouldn?t spend years generously paying off the former owners with millions in compensation payments. We wouldn?t give the former owners a penny, because they?ve compensated themselves quite enough out of the public pocket over the years.

For socialist planning

Why stop at renationalising the privatised utilities when billions upon billions pass through the banks, finance houses, insurance companies and building societies every day - billions produced by working people but monopolised by a tiny class of super-rich financiers?

We would take all of these private financial corporations into state hands and merge them into a single bank, to account for the values available to us and to help plan and direct investment and development.

In that way we could start to create a democratically planned economy - one in which the majority of the people participated in making decisions about what should be produced, where and by whom, allocating resources rationally according to a democratic plan. That?s called socialism.

Tax the rich

Socialists also argue that the books of companies and rich individuals should be opened to public inspection to prevent

tax evasion, and that their property should be confiscated if they try to defraud the public. That would bring in billions more each year to help eradicate poverty.

Pensions

The giant pension funds should be owned by the public and guaranteed by the state - administered by the workers ourselves and corporations taxed to provide the shortfall.

The Minimum Wage

The introduction of the minimum wage is one of New Labour's few achievements. It is currently below the European Decency Threshold though - it should therefore be raised from Gordon Brown's miserly level to £8 an hour immediately. Young workers should not be exempted from its full protection. This is a disgraceful piece of discrimination that allows super-exploitation of young workers by unscrupulous bosses. Any companies that pay less than the minimum wage should be nationalised and their bosses forced to pay punitive damages.

Education, Health and Housing

Improvements in services, new schools and hospitals, new affordable homes and infrastructure schemes should be funded from central taxation. How? By taxing the billionaires and the super-rich and by confiscating the mega profits of the City and the big private corporations. That way we will see the fruits of all our work in sustained improvements in education, public health and socially owned housing instead of the market-madness we see today - tuition fees, trusts, internal markets, soaring house prices.

Immigrant workers and refugees

We say abolish all the terrible restrictions on the right to asylum, abolish all immigration controls, restore immigrants' social rights and give them full civil rights, including the right to vote.

The European Union

Instead we should elect a democratic Constituent Assembly across the whole of Europe, that can fight for a Socialist United States of Europe in which the working class of the whole continent would have the power, not bureaucrats in Brussels or the mandarins of Westminster.

Threadbare transitional content. Does the comrade who wrote this jibe understand what a transitional demand is?

Trotsky makes it clear that the transitional demands exist to address a particular problem. One we too address. He says:

The strategic task of the next period ?? a pre-revolutionary period of agitation, propaganda and organization ?? consists in overcoming the contradiction between the maturity of the objective revolutionary conditions and the immaturity of the proletariat and its vanguard. (, ,) It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between present demand and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat? (Transitional Programme)

Look at the Transitional Programme and then look at the one some opposition comrades have even called reformist. Our short action programme could hardly be more densely interwoven with them.

As for tacking on the call for revolution - well here is what it says

However, even if all 650 MPs were elected on this programme they would face sabotage and repression by the capitalists and their state. Lasting change cannot be carried through parliament but through action on the streets. That is why, especially during an election campaign, we warn working class people that only a revolution can ultimately solve the miseries caused by capitalism.

In a page long article which repeatedly raises expropriation, planning, socialism this hardly seems so terrible. And, as

for the charge that we are making the workers party a stage, one which gets in the way of arguing for a revolutionary programme, we will quote the article from the same European election supplement. It concludes:

Let's use this election campaign to go to workplaces, estates, shopping centres and put the case for building a new workers party. Except this time, we want a party that really fights for the workers and not one that goes cap in hand to the bosses for the next 100 years. We need a party that will use direct action to overthrow capitalism because we don't want any more unjust wars, any more racism, any more cuts and privatisation. Instead we want a world owned and run democratically by working people - we want socialism. •

Again this is not the longest or the only article we have written. In fact there are many such articles. Not one of them have the comrades been able to hold up as failing to raise our view that such a party must have a revolutionary programme if it is to really serve the interests of the working class. So the charge that we have used the workers' party tactic to obscure the revolutionary party or that we have dropped transitional demands because of our key slogans, particularly the workers party tactic, turns out to be another ghost story to frighten children.

Agitating for social forums

Another WPB slogan the comrades attack is the call for 'social forums in every city and London borough.' • WPB first adopted this - again nearly unanimously in the winter of 2002-03. We adapted this during the February-March crisis around the beginning of the war into a call for people's assemblies. The name, as we always said, was not at all important beyond trying to relate to recent developments in Britain and the continent: the Italian social forums that sprang up after the Genoa G8 repression and the people's assemblies called in 2003 by the Stop the war coalition. We made it clear that the substance of these for us was to be councils of action which linked up militant trade unionists with anticapitalist and anti-war activists.

In raising this demand, we were proposing a democratic fighting bodies in which these links can be made from below, weakening the hold of the reformist bureaucracy. It did not for one minute suggest that we refused to make calls on the latter to act, to mobilise against the war, against cuts, privatisation, the pension scam, etc. We maintained this position in 2004 because we knew the ESF was coming to London. We had no illusions that trade union leaders, the bureaucratic Livingstoneites in the GLA, their centrist hangers-on feared that local social forums - even in the limited form of local mobilising committees - could develop this dynamic. That is why they did all they could to block them coming into existence.

Why call these proposed structures social forums? Because, for a time at least, it was associated with the mass confrontation in Genoa in 2001 and the big antiwar and anti-Berlusconi mobilisations, because this was abundantly clear in Florence in November 2002. Social forums developed in many parts of Europe and indeed around the world - the name identifies bodies coordinating struggle with the global movement. We want to develop and link local and city wide initiatives in Britain with the movement and with the European process that is coordinating action via the Assembly of Social Movements.

From the beginning, we made it clear that the social forums that are wanted were democratic coordinations of struggle, not tiny groupings of petit-bourgeois anarchists and cranks. Quite early on, the now WPB majority recognised that such social forums as existed were often 'reduced to feeble talking shops by the antics of the 'Horizontal' and petit-bourgeois windbags.' • (initial draft of WPB perspectives, January 2004, WPB IB319 p49). But given the impending ESF in London and after that the G8 mobilisation we thought it was right to continue to call for them and for a UK social forum.

The reason they did not come into existence except in a few isolated cases was the opposition of the reformists, the sabotage of the centrists and, in a different way, the anarchists and Horizontals. The rise to dominance of the reformist wing of the anticapitalist movement and their centrist hangers on, the retreat into tiny reactionary utopias of the anarchist wing has made this slogan unrealisable. Does this mean we should never have raised it? In our view no. Does this mean that we held onto it too long? Quite possibly. But as long as the possibility existed in Britain, around the

ESF, which mobilised 25,000 people and the G8 which mobilised probably around 15,000 anticapitalists (as distinct from Make Poverty History's 200,000), it was not necessary to withdraw the slogan.

The Opposition mock the idea that we said, as part of the struggle to mobilise the maximum forces for London in October 2004, that an ESF like Florence could transform the British labour movement, blowing away the dust and cobwebs, and encouraging younger rank and file militants to get involved, and take the initiative away from conservative and demoralised elements in the unions.

Did they really imagine we intended this as a prediction of what would happen, irrespective of what the forces involved in it did? Did they think we thought it would come to pass spontaneously? Or that we ourselves could bring it about? Of course we didn't. It was an expression of the optimum potential the event held - an essential element of any revolutionary perspective. It was part of motivating people to make it happen. If this is voluntarism then all revolutionary agitation is voluntarism.

Did we ignore the sabotage of the SWP, the GLA, the anarchists? No, we attended all the planning meetings and fought them all the way. We warned repeatedly of what would happen if their bureaucratic practices and failure to mobilise locally continued. That was why the ESF did not produce any serious transformation in the Labour movement.

In a polemic with Dave E in the July before the ESF, Jeremy made this approach clear.

?The ESF has the potential to be historic - if it helps cohere and raise the horizons of the British movements and orient them outwards, make them more internationalist. And it is just this optimal development we are working to bring about. Can it fail? Can the SWP, the horizontals, the trade union and GLA bureaucrats make it fail? Absolutely! But the masses of youth and trade unionists attending can make it a success, with our help! But this is true of any struggle, any event. This is not an objectivist schema: it is a revolutionary perspective. It requires our hard work, mass participation and enthusiasm to be realised, i.e. the subjective.?' (August 2004, WP IB 316)

Thus we did all we could at both an international, national and local level to prevent this strangulation happening. Should we not have done so? Should we have used revolutionary foresight to proclaim it all a waste of time and space from the outset? What a supine yielding to centrism that would have been: in the proper sense of the term, a truly sectarian policy. In no sense did this conflict with or deflect from other bigger or better struggles. Building for the ESF could indeed have interacted with them, help us to contact militants in unions where we had no members, draw in more youth contacts for Revo, etc. To a limited extent it even did so, strengthening Revo, giving us a high profile over the Stop the War/SWP capitulation to the union leaders on Iraq, etc.

Rank and file movement

This is both the least developed argument in the opposition document and the one slogan opposition members least object to in practice. In 2004 and 2005, moreover, events in the unions - both positive and negative - have conspired to prove its relevance.

In the FBU the election of Matt Wrack against ?awkward squad?' member Andy Gilchrist revealed a network of militants angered by the latter's sell-out to New Labour in their dispute. In Amicus, despite a good response to the sacking of Rolls Royce convenor Jerry Hicks, the bureaucracy sabotaged the resistance. In the Gate Gourmet strike the militant workers and the solidarity of other Heathrow workers were betrayed by the TGWU officials, including centre-left leader Tony Woodley. Most recently the selling short of the pensions struggle by left PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka showed the same problem.

All these disputes showed that there is a layer of rank and file militants ready for action but that the ?left?' leaders elected over the past few years are totally inadequate if not treacherous and that this aspect of the crisis of leadership can only be addressed by organising the rank and file in each union and workplace and indeed cross the whole union movement. That we take this up precisely at the time that the SWP is lionising the old Stalinist ideas of broad lefts, subordinate to left bureaucrats, makes it even more vital.

Members of the Opposition often object that there is nothing wrong with these three slogans in and of themselves, but that they shouldn't be 'elevated' to the status of 'key slogans.' As we have seen, our use of these slogans has in no way caused us to downplay or avoid the use of transitional demands - nor has it caused us to evade a clear expression of the need for a revolutionary programme and party.

In fact, it is an essential element of the revolutionary tradition for communists to advance a revolutionary programme at the same time as agitating for a set of slogans addressing specific situations in the class struggle. We did it ourselves in the British miners' strike, when alongside our full revolutionary programme - as expressed in the pamphlet *The Road to Working Class Power* - we also agitated for key slogans: the general strike, picket defence squads, councils of action, a rank and file movement and a working class women's movement. Many of these too were united front calls - and many addressed the crisis of working class leadership. In different conditions today, we are using the same method.

Have our perspectives failed?

The belittlement of the League's achievements are to be found at every point of the Opposition platform. In fact we have been seeing over the past few years a genuine renewal of our ranks. Since 2000 our sections have successfully built functioning Revolution groups in Britain, Sweden, Germany, Austria, Australia and the Czech Republic. The German Revolution group now has 30 members, a serious step forward from having nothing a few years ago.

The Austrian group has in the last year seen a dramatic growth at the head of protests against neoliberalism in education, with a contingent of 200 people on a demonstration of 2,000 just a few weeks ago. Revolution has also established a group of student activists in Indonesia, and over the next year we hope discussions with its leadership will eventually lead to us founding our first section in a semi-colonial country for over ten years. In Britain our youth work has led to us founding new branches of Workers Power in Leicester, Leeds and Newcastle.

In making our turn to youth work, we did not naively believe that tomorrow we would found a mass youth international, but that we could sow the seeds of it. This has entered an important new stage, with the calls we have raised crucially at the WSF and ESF, but also at youth conferences in Germany, the Basque country and in discussion with youth groups from Latin America and Turkey.

What of the Opposition's accusation that Revolution has grown through 'ad hoc front campaigns'? We have always sought to build a Trotskyist youth group with good clear political meetings on revolutionary politics coupled with exciting activism and campaigning work. Revolution has itself adopted a transitional programme, *The Road to Revolution*, that it is fighting for, alongside the L5I, in the global workers and social movements.

This year, at its international delegate conference, it established a political international leadership for the first time. The organisation is a credit to our work and perspectives over the last eight years and the envy of much of the left.

The platform of the opposition asserts that:

'In youth work, much of the work Revo carries out is excellent but it does need to begin a discussion about how it can reach beyond the radicalised middle class youth and start recruiting working class youth on a much broader scale.'

It is simply untrue that Revolution specifically orients to 'radicalised middle class youth.' It orients to radical youth, in the schools, on the streets, in the mass movements against war, and so on. As a consequence many of the youth in Revolution are working class both by class origin (which is the least important issue) and by present employment, i.e. they have very low paid and insecure jobs, like most young people. Most of those at college will become workers when they leave, similar to much of our existing membership. We would be happy to have a discussion with the opposition members as to how to 'recruit working class youth on a far broader scale' but we are sure that it would require the use of campaigning initiatives and agitation on a broader scale: the sort of activity that gets called 'voluntarism' by the opposition.

As for the need for the League to recruit blue collar or manual workers, it is very true that we have far too few car and

component workers, rail workers, post and telecommunications workers, etc. We want to win over more. We will put this at the centre of our pre-congress discussion. But what does the platform suggest?

?This requires the patient expansion of our work inside the mass organisations of the workers? movement. Given how pitiful, internationally, our implantation in the workers? movement over the next period this work must be a priority equal to our youth work.?•

It is interesting that the opposition members of the IEC have so far shown little or no interest in doing anything to improve our international trade union work, despite what they call our ?pitiful implantation.?• Nor do they suggest anything in their platform. Certainly patient work by our existing union members in their own unions or workplaces is important and must continue. But no-one suggests that this is going to lead to many more recruits at present.

To recruit more workers we have to vigorously intervene into the strikes and struggles of public and private sector workers and make contact with the militants leading them. And we will find them too in the big political movements, especially those trying to create new working class parties. We can and we should direct our young members and those in Revo to look for jobs in industry and in the blue collar public sector, as well as white collar jobs where good union work can be done. We can and we should get our young comrades working alongside workers in struggle, as we did with the fire-fighters, the Gate Gourmet workers.

The platform also claims our perspectives and our ?voluntarism? have led to a decline in our theoretical and propaganda output. But is Revo? s emphasis on activism at the expense of propaganda and training new Marxist cadres? No. Revo holds regular Marxist discussion meetings and schools. The sections draw them into our schools and events where they become Marxists. Young comrades recruited via Revo are writing for our papers and our theoretical journals.

What is more, far from reducing our output of theory and propaganda we have, since the last congress, produced two issues of our new theoretical journal Fifth International, a serious journal-sized pamphlet on the anticapitalist movement and another issue of the journal will soon go to the printers. We have already produced more serious propaganda and theory than we did between the 5th and 6th congresses

This year alone, our newswire has carried reports and critical political analysis on: the emergence of new social and workers? movements in China, the revolutions and counter revolutions that have taken place in Central Asia, the victory of the French workers in the referendum on the constitution, the revolutionary upheavals in Bolivia, the fight to build a working class party in Germany, the uprising of French youth, etc.

We are implementing a programme of re-organisation and rationalisation of the L5I web presence. We are organising a series of cadre and youth schools in the sections.

Nor have we turned our backs on Latin America, South East Asia and Africa for the sake of Europe and the ESF. Kuldip and the Indonesian comrades went to the WSF in Mumbai. Luke and Dave S went to Porto Alegre in January and went not just to WSF mass rallies but to the P-Sol and Conlutas conferences, and met and discussed with the Socialismo Revolucionario group. The IS fully supported Dave E ?s trip to Caracas and Bolivia.

We also supported Swedish and Australian comrades? visits to Indonesia and the Indonesian comrade?s visits to Austria and Germany, and to Australia. After the G8 we have tried to engage Trevor Ngwane and his group in discussions. We have contacts in the USA who are interested in the League. In what way is all this a turning away from the search for co-thinkers in the world beyond Europe? We have related to comrades who have or will be able to visit various other countries (Chris to Guatemala, Matthias to Brazil, Din, Mark B and the Indonesian comrades to the WTO this December, Simon to Lebanon, comrades to the WSF-Americas in January).

We agree that work outside of Europe must become a central element in the tasks we adopt at the seventh congress. We must aim to orient to the social and above all the working class movements there. Here, in the hotbed of resistance to globalisation, we will aim to rally workers and youth to our political programme and perspective.

Re-establishing a collective leadership?

The IS believes the opposition's criticisms are a total misrepresentation of the congress perspectives and what the IS and the IEC have done to implement them. The most reprehensible charge is the suggestion that we are opposed to collective leadership, that we have therefore somehow excluded the present members of the opposition. Reprehensible because leaders of the opposition refused to serve on the IEC and on the IS, despite repeated requests to do so. They gave entirely personal reasons for not serving on these bodies - until the formation of the opposition.

Having hardly developed any criticisms until June 2005, they now say they will put forward a totally alternative perspective at the January IEC. If it is not adopted, they say they will form a faction to struggle for the leadership of the League at the seventh congress. They have not yet even seen our draft perspectives. How do they know that what is needed is a global alternative?

The IS never had any desire whatsoever to monopolise the leadership of the League or make it monolithic. Indeed at every IEC we have urged the members of the minority to serve on the IS or attend the IEC meetings. We have never denied that their failure or refusal to do so weakens the IS.

But we do not think an opposition whose leaders have failed to play any serious role in a collective leadership for the last three years?? through no fault of that leadership?? is qualified to lecture us about the need to 'restore'• collective leadership. Moreover, if they flesh out their very sketchy suggestions for a perspective, in the routinist and passive propagandist direction they are taking at the moment this would in our view seriously damage and undermine the sections' work and the possibilities for expansion of the League as an international tendency.

Instead we urge the opposition?? at least for the next three months, i.e. until the final IEC before congress ?? to suspend their 'tendency struggle'•, abandon their course towards a factional confrontation and instead collaborate with us in drafting and amending the documents of the congress. If the comrades do indeed come up with a radically counterposed perspective then of course tendencies or factions may be justifiable.

Conclusion

The opposition says that over the past two and a half years the IS has imposed 'voluntarist'• and 'sectarian'• methods of building the League, in which we emphasised 'party fronts'• instead of united front work aimed at the mass reformist labour movement. We have shown that this is not true, in the British section or anywhere else. All we have done is to advocate conducting our own campaigns (including agitation and propaganda), where the reformists and centrists reject united action to address to a burning need.

They claim we have retreated from arguing for our full programme in favour of agitation for 'key slogans'• (the new workers' party, social forums, rank and file movement, etc) which they say also means retreating from the struggle for a revolutionary party and the use of transitional demands. We have demonstrated that this too is untrue. We have nevertheless insisted that where the crisis of leadership is clearly causing debates and breaks within the workers' and anticapitalist vanguard (i.e. in Germany and Britain), we have to propose solutions?? a new workers' party, a rank and file movement, democratic coordinations of struggle, as well as a focused revolutionary action programme.

They object that the IS has emphasised agitation within the anticapitalist movement for the formation of a Fifth International instead of 'propaganda aimed at a small vanguard of already conscious 'socialist'• militants'•, aimed at seeking agreement with leftward moving centrists. We have shown that the one does not contradict the other. Nor have they been able to point to any leftward moving centrists outside of the anticapitalist milieu which we should have been orienting to.

The IS is supposed to have been 'micromanaging'• the sections and exhausting them with exhortations to pursue unrealistic and unrealisable goals. Again they have not been able to point to one example outside of the British section and, even there, their examples do not bear a moment's scrutiny. It is the duty of the IS to advise and help the sections that have suffered setbacks or are unable to grow. Rather than be criticised for doing this too much, we feel we can be

criticised for not doing it enough.

In short, the opposition's critique of the IS's course of action over the last three years is unfounded. Certainly we can be criticised, but not for over-exhortation, micromanagement, imposition of slogans.

Nor are our tactics related to catastrophist economic perspectives. Again if Keith or Bill want to criticise our 2003 perspectives, our globalisation theory or even Lenin and Trotsky's theory of imperialism that is their right. But let them not claim that the very positions they held only a year ago are catastrophist and the source of a voluntarist practice.

We hope, therefore, that the signatories to the opposition platform will now ask themselves whether such a tendency - let alone a faction - is really needed in the League. Rather we hope that the current members of the tendency members will participate as individuals in drawing up the new perspectives in a common endeavour with the members of the minority.

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