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IS Bulletin

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

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This bulletin, concentrating on international matters, is something of an experiment.

The original idea was that there would be an international bulletin three or four times a year. Now that the bulletin is bimonthly this will no doubt need to be modified. In any case the future of the international version must depend on the extent to which it is found useful by our members and, to some degree, by groups outside Britain.

What has our policy in international work been? We have tried to develop links with groups abroad that combine two things: a revolutionary attitude to both capitalism and stalinism and a serious commitment to building a working class organisation. In practice this has amounted to exchanging papers, documents and so on, to a small extent exchanging people (long visits) and to attending conferences.

International conferences were (and are) sponsored by the French 'Lutte Ouvriere' organisation. For a time they were sponsored jointly by LO and IS but after 1971 we withdrew our sponsorship although continuing to send representatives. This was because we considered that the conferences were too wide, not selective enough. Various 'nut groups' which represented absolutely nothing were allowed in and made useful discussion difficult. For example, a split away from the long near-dead American Socialist Party was allowed the same rights at the 1971 conference as IS or LO. This group had all of five members, two of them permanently resident in Paris! LO took the position that it was impossible to exclude any organisation that professed to be revolutionary, anti-stalinist and committed to a working class orientation, provided that it was not affiliated to one of the so-called 'Internationals'. While we accept the basic soundness of LO's criteria for cooperation, we believe it necessary, on practical grounds, to exclude screwball or insignificant groups. A report on the forthcoming LO sponsored conference will appear in a future bulletin.

Basically, we have been trying to work with two sorts of groups. There are those like the German SAG, the Irish SWM and the Danish IS who, broadly speaking, have the same political positions as ourselves. Then there are organisations like the French LO, the Italian AO, the Spanish AC and the USIS who have developed from a Trotskyist or Maoist background at different times and with whom we have various political differences. We hope this bulletin, which includes the report of

an informal conference held earlier this year, will help comrades to get a better picture of some of these groups.

Are we doing enough in the international field? In one sense, obviously not. We are not significantly involved in international working class action. For example we have no serious involvement in attempts to coordinate the struggles of European carworkers on a world scale. But this is something that can come only as we gain positions of leadership and influence in Britain and others do likewise elsewhere. Of course we have to seize every opportunity of developing contacts but action, which is what we are after, depends on us and groups overseas having a real working class base. No amount of international meetings can substitute for that.

However, as we and other groups develop, there will no doubt be an increasing emphasis on international collaboration. We have always rejected, as absurd, the notion that a collection of people from various places who are unable to lead any significant section of the working class in their own countries can, in any serious sense, constitute an 'international leadership'. That remains our position. Just as there can be no real revolutionary party without substantial roots in the working class, so there can be no international organisation worth twopence that is not based on several real parties. That does not mean that we can stand still in our international work. We certainly cannot form an International at this stage but we can and must try to prepare the ground by working for increased practical collaboration and exchange of ideas with the serious groups in a number of countries who share our emphasis on the central role of the working class.

Duncan Hallas
for International
Sub-Committee Sept '73

THE AMERICAN INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS

The Political Background

1. The American working class is itself a 'new' working class. Only in the 1930's were a majority of American workers actually born there, and only then did trade union organisation spread outside the craft unions to semi and unskilled workers. Even today only 20% of the workforce is unionised (as compared with 50% in Britain). In the McCarthy period (late 1940's and early 1950's) trade union militants and socialists were victimised out of virtually every organised industry,

and any shop floor organisation (job shop stewards) that survived came under further attack in the years of economic boom and anti-union laws of the 1950's and 1960's.

2. The student radicalism of the 1960's could not survive on the single issue Anti-War struggle, and its principal organisational form, the Students for a Democratic Society splintered in 1969 into the Weathermen, community politics orientated groups and apathy. Hundreds of scattered city-based grouplets still survive characterised by softness on 'revolutionary' China, distrust of national political organisations, suspicion of work within the trade unions, and more or less serious attempts at community style work within the plants where many or them now work.

3. The Women's Liberation Movement which seemed briefly as if it might be a successor to the Anti-War Movement itself died after two or three years in 1970/71 leaving a small number of scattered grouplets.

4. The most politically advanced workers are usually Black. They make up 50% of the country's car and steel workers and up to 80-90% of the workers in the plants in the most industrial parts of the country, the Mid-West and East. The decline and demoralisation of the independent Black movement since 1970/71 has therefore had a disastrous effect on what is potentially the section of workers most sympathetic to revolutionary ideas and organisation. Cynicism has been accompanied by the emergence of a significant number of Black careerists in the unions and Democratic Party; individual retaliation has generally replaced organised Black caucuses (rank and file groups) in the plants.

5. The rank and file movements which developed in 1966/7 and 1970 around the last set of three-yearly wage contracts in the car industry, in the Teamsters' Union among the Chicano (Mexican-American) farmworkers and the miners did not maintain real momentum. With the exception of a new recognition struggle by the farmworkers and a few, generally isolated strikes over working conditions among some car workers, the 1973 contracts have been sold to the rank and file by the trade union bureaucracy without a fight. This has been despite record inflation in the last year, Government wage controls since 1971 and an increasingly shaky Nixon Administration that is getting deeper and deeper into a major political crisis.

The Founding of I.S. U.S.

The American International Socialists were only formed in 1969. Prior to that most of the 150 members had been linked in Independent Socialist clubs led in a casual fashion by one or two older members whose political activities stretched back to the 1940's and the Workers

Party (the organisation established by Max Schachtman after his split with Cannon and the Socialist Workers' Party in 1940). In the late 1950's some other members had joined the youth section of the very right wing Socialist Party into which the Workers' Party had been dissolved. But the vast majority of members only had experience of student politics gained mainly around the Berkeley Independent Socialist club and its work in 1966/68 around the Peace and Freedom Party, which was an attempt to break out of the narrow bounds of student activity. Political divisions based on regional grounds, however, dogged the I.S. from its founding conference. The East Coast New York comrades had not shared the same kind of 'mass' work as the Berkeley (West Coast) comrades, while the group that joined in Chicago (Mid-West) came out of S.D.S. rather than an I.S. club.

The shared political basis of I.S. in 1969 was fairly broad. If the 1969/70 upturn in working class activity did not lead a number of workers into the organisation, then internal schisms were almost inevitable. Members agreed that the working class was the agency of change and that some form of working class rank and file organisation would be the key to mass activity. They recognised the importance of building a workers' revolutionary party and also shared the analysis that the Stalinist states of East Europe and the Far East had nothing in common with socialism and the emancipation of the working class. The 'purity' of their anti-Stalinism which a majority of their leadership derived from Schachtman actually made them appear on occasions to give more criticism than support to the Vietcong in Vietnam, and earlier, made them appear to abstain on the question of the Middle Eastern Six Days War.

'Industrialisation'

1969-1972 were years of slow growth, predominantly students or ex-students, but including one or two 'indigenous' workers. Recognising the impossibility of building a workers' party without roots in the class the organisation adopted the policy of 'industrialisation'. This means sending members into plants and industries where it is felt they can operate best in establishing rank and file groups and recruiting members. As 40% of all Americans attend college at the age of 18 it is not as unusual to find young workers with some college background as it is here, and so the class barrier is easier jumped. There are problems, since with little shop floor organisation in the plants newcomers, whoever they are, have little job protection and militants are very rapidly pushed to the front of fights which usually end in victimisation. But much good work was done.

The national office was moved to Detroit, the centre of the American motor industry

situated in the most heavily industrial part of the U.S., the Mid-West. Many of the more committed West Coast comrades 'colonised' it, and more recently Chicago and Cleveland as well. On the West Coast (Los Angeles, San Francisco-Berkeley, Seattle) the main emphasis was on Teamster work (especially lorry-driving and loading) in the Mid-West on the motor industry, and in New York on telephone company work. Work among teachers developed in New York after a leading teachers' union militant was recruited, and it also took off in Berkeley.

By 1972 I.S. had a handful of comrades with enough industrial experience to begin to take a few local initiatives, particularly to start rank and file bulletins and newspapers. The quality of these efforts and the ability of the industrialised comrades to draw other workers including Black militants (albeit in small numbers) around them in this work is the most impressive feature of the American I.S.

On the West Coast I.S. has been instrumental in producing Picket Lines (Los Angeles), Fifth Wheel (San Francisco) and Seattle Semi (Seattle) - the last two being Teamster union rank and file papers while the first named is much more general and contains good coverage of the steel industry. These papers are currently very involved in attempts to mobilise the Teamsters' Union rank and file against the gangster poaching activities of the union leaders against the Spanish-American United Farmworkers Union. In Detroit a Chrysler newspaper, the United Justice Train, is produced at the Jefferson assembly plant where sit-in workers forced the first public defeat of Chrysler in decades in July this year, and several single sheet bulletins are produced at other plants (eg. the Mack Safety Watchdog - a Chrysler press shop, Shifting Gears - a General Motors gearbox plant). One I.S. member has just been elected a chief (departmental) shop steward in one of these plants, and in New York two members are job shop stewards in telephones. Also in New York a regular teachers' bulletin is produced and one teachers' union branch is virtually an I.S. 'red base' I.S. members are so active. Not surprisingly these industrialised comrades, now approximately 30 men and women (excluding the teachers) are probably the most politically advanced comrades in the group.

Problems

The decline of the expected rank and file upsurge after 1970 and especially the demoralisation of many Black militants meant that I.S. and its industrialised members remained far more isolated from the working class than had been thought likely. Bad enough as such a development is for any group of revolutionaries its impact was compounded in I.S. by simultaneous internal problems.

In 1969 the recognised national leaders of I.S. refused to become the actual leaders elected at Conference. Largely the result of their involvement in the libertarian student movement and of their reaction against the hard-line Stalinist sects, the leadership really failed to give an active lead. Little if anything was done to clarify the politics of the group and to end the 'umbrella group' aspect that encouraged debate rather than decision-taking and carrying out.

Workers Power, the I.S. paper, has appeared monthly or fortnightly, but was never seen as an organiser for I.S., as a political weapon for the industrialised comrades and as an organising interventionist tool for the non-industrialised members. It did not fill the gap between I.S. members and their worker contacts nor did it unite the membership on a common political line and in a common activity. It remained and remains a magazine which could print different views on the same subject and was never seen as the group's most important outward face. Universally moaned about it was and is rarely sold. Without their own revolutionary paper on the shop floor the danger grew that the industrialised members might substitute the rank and file papers and caucuses for their politics.

Finally, personal problems arose with embarrassment and even jealousy being shown by some non-industrialised or unsuccessful industrialised members towards the successful. All in all by 1972 the group that had grown to some 280-300 members was ripe for a major internal faction fight.

The Faction Fight

In July 1972 a new majority was elected at Convention. Rooted in a regional alliance of New York (McKenzie and Landy) and Chicago (Tabor) it demanded the construction of a programme which it was hoped would increase the organisational seriousness of I.S. and lead to clearer perspectives. Such a programme it argued had to be a 'transitional programme'. The old leadership, realising the danger to the whole orientation of I.S. that could result from the application of the principles of revolutionary impatience, then organised itself into the 'Transformation Caucus'. It stood for systematic work within the trade unions, the building of rank and file organisations out of existing class consciousness, and 'transforming' I.S. into a workers' party.

Positions hardened as the year went by. Landy and Tabor, the new National Secretary and Industrial Organiser respectively, developed the argument that capitalism had stopped expanding (indeed, that 'the trend is downwards') and that there was already a layer of revolutionised workers who could be mobilised merely by the correct political programme. This faction called itself the 'Revolutionary Tendency'.

In April 1973 Landy reported to the National Committee, "At this time an advanced layer 'is in the process of becoming'...Unless the full revolutionary strategy is presented we miss this critical layer." In I.S. propaganda rank and file organisations should be 'presented as vehicles for building a revolutionary leadership, for which we pose our goal of socialism' (emphasis in original). Tabor wrote on I.S. car industry perspectives 'We do not call for a reformist caucus, however, but one based on our program, a caucus that takes as its starting point not the immediately apparent situation in the United Auto Workers and the automobile industry, but an analysis of international capitalism and the tasks before the working class.'

The New York-based group around MacKenzie had argued for the 'transitional programme method' to clarify perspectives and provide some transitional demands in the current situation. When they saw where the Landy-Tabor faction was going, they pulled back, and in April grouped with the Transformation Caucus to form the present majority. They have called themselves the 'Labor Action' tendency.

The Split

In April, then, the Transformation Caucus and Labor Action tendency united to remove Landy and Tabor from office and to elect a new joint national secretariat of Joel Geier (TC) and Dave Finkel (LA). This new majority campaigned around the organisation trying to win over as many as possible of the RT supporters and sympathisers. With very few exceptions the industrialised members gave them full support, but the conditions which had given rise to the RT still operated for students and the absence of any clearly respected leadership in the organisation made it a difficult job.

Meanwhile the faction fight had paralysed the organisation's external work and demoralisation was spreading. If it had gone on much longer then hardly anything would have remained. In June a secret RT document fell into the hands of the majority. In it Landy wrote 'We can see that the present I.S. leadership tendency is doomed to walk along the same path as its forebears and that it will one day liquidate itself into reformism outright.. The issue at stake in the I.S. is boldly, simply, accurately 'his - which side of the class line are you on? ..We pose the question in the I.S. as centrism versus revolutionary Marxism.'

Clearly these views put the RT outside the bounds of I.S., and the new majority circulated them with a reply and called special branch meetings to discuss the situation. At these meetings a resolution repudiating Land's document was moved, 'in particular the contention that I.S. politics - the politics of revolutionary democratic socialism from below, the fight

to build broad political rank and file opposition movements in the unions, the championing of all struggles of oppressed groups - are adaptationist and counter-revolutionary.'

This resolution was carried in New York, Detroit, Bloomington, Berkeley and Seattle, and was defeated in Chicago and Los Angeles. In July the National Committee met and voted 14 to 0 to expel the RT after the 7 supporters of the RT had walked out.

The Future

I.S. in America has survived .. but at a price. Those lost to what has now become the Revolutionary Socialist League and those lost through demoralisation amounted to more than a third. Probably only about 160 fully committed members remain. Of these some 30 are industrialised members and another 15-20 are teachers.

Problems remain. The leadership is still divided into two tendencies (the TC and LA) which appear to have more basis in the old regional divisions than on any important differences in present perspectives. Elections to their NC and equivalent of our EC (the National Action Committee) this September will still be based on factional lists rather than on the idea of choosing a collective leadership for the whole organisation - unless they can be persuaded differently in the meantime. They still lack a newspaper that is an organiser and could unite them much more than can their present magazine. Concessions are still made to the old debating-club atmosphere, their Internal Bulletin has no noticeable word limit.

Nonetheless the I.S. is also quite clearly the revolutionary organisation in the States with the best chance of winning workers to systematic revolutionary politics. The other national groups range from the insane (National Caucus of Labor Committees) to the sectarian (Spartacist League) and to hard reformist (CP). All are small (the CP USA has 5000) or minute. The only possible challenger to I.S. are the Maoist groupings which are currently undergoing some kind of unity discussions. But while they can agree on their anti-Trotskyism in the main, they are in total disarray when it comes to work in the unions.

It will take I.S. some time to cash in on the work done over the past two years. They will have to prove they can recruit and deep Black workers if they are to get anywhere. They will have to make their organisation 'habitable' for workers. But this is not out of the question and in one or two areas and in one or two industries they are well placed to expand as inflation and speed-up cut deeper into the ropes bound by the trade union bureaucracy around the working class.

ISGB and ISUS

Internationalism does not have to mean only the twin evils of paper resolutions or paper organisations. It can also mean our trying to give more positive assistance to small sympathetic revolutionary organisations around the world. We should think more about getting IS articles or pamphlets overseas (even translating them where necessary), and writing some articles specifically for an international market. The debate on the traditional programme is not only going on in US IS at the present time, it is also a live issue in Denmark and Germany.

IS has considerable shop floor and trade union experience; we have transformed our group into a working class organisation; we used Socialist Worker as an organiser and have built a relatively broad layer of leadership at local and national level. Many of the problems that IS US faces we can say something useful about. And while the time taken to go to the US is the same as to go from London to Glasgow the fare is actually only just under five times as much.

When IS US comrades come to Britain we should make sure that we organise their visits so they see and possibly participate in some of the best and most instructive of our work. If US IS decides to move to a weekly paper orientated on the working class then we should be prepared to train some of their comrades at Corbridge Crescent in preparation for the change, and should send over an SW journalist to Detroit for a few weeks when they actually make the move. We should try and send IS GB speakers, preferably NC members, to tour the States once a year or every six months. One speaker should go in October or November this year to help consolidate their organisation after this year's Convention (NH, CP, DH, ..) We should send IS US copies of all our education notes and materials and notice of our advanced cadre schools with an offer of one or two places. We should look into the possibilities (eg. the insertion of 'American Supplement' into copies sold in the US) of ISG aiding the launching of an IS US theoretical journal. We should request all American members of IS GB who have been here for longer than a year to consider returning to the US to help build the organisation there.

IS can also learn and benefit from IS US. Their size has forced them to establish industrial and political priorities in a much more precise way than we do. Members who work in factories in areas that are not priorities (small number of workers, insignificant union etc.) are given guidance as to where they

should work. The industrialisation of some of the American IS women members coupled with less toleration of male chauvinist attitudes means there are more both women in the leadership of the group than in Britain and that their level of political development and contribution is much higher too. IS US can also assist us in a practical way too. They have 10 Chrysler and 2 General Motors' workers in car plants in Detroit as well as one or two other members working in other international combines. Our rank and file papers can be helped considerably by regularly and rapidly getting bulletins and newspapers put out in American plants. Later, when Workers Power becomes a better paper most IS branches could find it useful to get it regularly as well.

by Joan Smith and Steve Jeffreys

REPORT OF INTERNATIONAL FORUM ORGANISED

BY THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS ON 21 AND 22 MARCH 1973

The forum was held following the 1973 annual Conference of the International Socialists for groups who had been present at the conference as Fraternal Delegates. Groups present were:

International Socialists (G.B.)
Lutte Ouvriere (France)
Avanguardia Operaia (Italy)
S.A.G. (W. Germany)
S.W.M. (Ireland)
I.S. (Denmark)
Socialist Revolution (Greece)

apologies and fraternal messages were received from:

Accion Comunista (Spain)
International Socialists (USA)
"Spark" (USA)

It should be emphasised that the forum was not an International Conference but a discussion without any decision taken.

The discussion was centred around two principal areas:

Comrades from I.S. (Denmark), S.W.M. and S.A.G. asked why there was so little discussion on international questions at the I.S. Conference. In particular the comrade from I.S. (Denmark) asked why the question of China was not discussed and the other comrades raised the question of the E.E.C. in relation to I.S. (G.B.)'s perspectives. I.S. (G.B.) replied that the focus of the conference was on those areas where it was intervening. This meant that the main, international question which was discussed was Ireland - in many factories

Socialist Worker is called 'the IRA paper' because of its anti-imperialist stand. Thus this question is of vital importance in everyday work. In the past I.S. conferences have been too broad and vague. With the growth of the organisation they focus more and more on the practical problems of intervention, especially industrial intervention. A.O. agreed that the conference's focus was correct but criticised the absence of a reference to the international significance of China and Vietnam in the Political Report. Perhaps this was a question on which A.O. and I.S. differed. The comrade noted that the programme referred to both Russia and China as 'state capitalist'. The comrade felt that there was a noticeable improvement on the previous I.S. conference in terms of the class composition of the delegates - there were many workers - and that the discussions on industrial work and on the programme were very informative. He approved of the decision to establish factory branches. On the other hand he argued that the existence of organised factions as opposed to mere oppositional platforms was harmful to serious discussion.

Socialist Revolution also felt that the conference had given a useful picture of the activities and development of I.S. (G.B.) but again criticised the apparent absence of a broad international perspective and also of any reference to other tendencies in Britain.

I.S. (G.B.) accepted that there was little discussion of broad perspectives but these questions had been previously discussed and that articles setting out the position were available. In relation to other tendencies I.S. never encountered them as significant forces in our work. The real rival is the Communist Party. I.S. envisages itself over the next 4 or 5 years struggling to replace the CP as the leadership of the militant minority in the working-class movement.

A.O. accepted this but argued that this therefore meant a need for a full discussion of the C.P.'s broad strategy of the parliamentary road and thus a discussion of international questions such as Chile.

S.A.G. raised the question of I.S. (G.B.)'s orientation towards building the Party. What is the view on the question of 'mass party' or 'cadre party'. What was I.S. (G.B.)'s policy on recruitment and education. To what extent has I.S. succeeded in informally building a cadre. There seems to be an unevenness in the organisation. How does this relate to the political clarification around the programme.

I.S. (G.B.) replied that the Trotskyist movement came from outside the working-class. Thus the key element needed to build a cadre is practice rather than just discussion. The question of 'mass party' or 'cadre party' depends on the

situation as one can see from the different views that Lenin took at different times. In Britain today Economism is not a real danger. It is true that there is unevenness in the organisation but it can only be overcome by constant work. Ultimately a real mass party will be one big enough to lead the class - hundreds of thousands in Britain.

S.A.G. said that the question they were concerned with was not the number of members but the quality. They saw Social Democracy as a major problem and raised the question of the united-front tactic as a means of winning over people.

L.O. agreed with I.S. that whether a party is very open or a narrower cadre depends on the period. They were interested to know what sort of workers I.S. was recruiting. Were they older workers with Trade Union experience or young people fresh to the movement. Are workers from sections outside the working-class such as teachers also joining in numbers. Does I.S. have a different attitude towards the latter. How are workers educated inside I.S. L.O. saw a danger that workers without political education and training would become merely the extreme left-wing of the Trade Unions. How does I.S. intend to prevent this happening.

A.O. argued that the question of 'mass party' was a political one. Lenin's conception of a mass party was different from the essentially social-democratic advanced by Togliatti. A mass party itself can be a different size at different periods. Its nature is determined by the political situation and its political strategy. A.O. continued with a report of the development of their work in Italy. Since 1967-8 it had been possible for the first time to build organisations independent of the C.P. in the working class. A.O. started in opposition both to the C.P. and to the widespread spontaneist groups. They were seen as sectarian for their insistence on theoretical clarity and on slow but systematic work in the factories while others grew more rapidly. A.O. succeeded, despite having very few workers and only limited Trade Union experience, in building factory cells in a number of places in N. Italy. Now revolutionaries are a real force. With perhaps 25,000 in the various groups and maybe a million sympathisers. About a third of the militants are in three main groups A.O., Lotta Continua and Manifesto. The rest are in small localised groups.

Both Manifesto and Lotta Continua run daily papers. Manifesto tends to tail the C.P. and is in decline, Lotta Continua has picked up most of the spontaneist student leaders but has lost much of its worker sympathisers. It survives on its student influence and talent for fund-raising. A.O. has about 2,000 activists (same as L.O. but more concentrated geographically). In this situation it is important to find means to united action of all revolutionaries.

A.O. and L.O. have run campaigns against the government, its involvement in police terror against the left and around anti-fascism. The C.P. for the first time lost the initiative. Over 100,000 people in different places were mobilised in demonstrations against the Fascist congress. The success has been limited by the absence of a single organisation and there has been only a limited involvement of workers. Now there is a struggle around the new contracts in engineering and a recent big march had political slogans quite different from those of the C.P. cadres. This was due to the influence of revolutionaries. There is still a lot of work to do, the government, the fascists and the C.P. are all attacking the revolutionaries very strongly. A.O. sees a need to create a programme and a strategy as opposed to merely criticising those of the reformists. Thus a party can be built which is a Subject of History. A party can be built out of unity with other groups and by taking the base from the C.P. A.O.'s position is for unity on a clear position and pressure on the base of the C.P. The key place for this is in the factories.

I.S. (G.B.) commented that at the I.S. conference the debate was not around the question of 'cadre party' or 'mass party' but against a sectarian conception of building (or rather of not building)

I.S. (Denmark) asked what sort of questions were discussed at I.S. (G.B.)'s education schools for trade unionists.

I.S. (G.B.): general theory, working class history and immediate problems.

S.W.M. said that in Ireland there was little tradition of independent working-class politics despite a high level of economic militancy. Politics remain essentially capitalist. Even Connolly had been weak on this and the question of the Party. Both Republican groups are class coalitions. S.W.M. was formed as a result of failures both North and South of independent socialists. It is still difficult to organise in the working-class due to the small size of industry and the dominance of bureaucratic general unions. Rank and file intervention must be very specific and often localised. It is difficult to see how to build this into broader Rank and File organisations from which one can recruit and in which one can gain experience. Perhaps the French experience might be relevant.

I.S. (G.B.) commented that it seemed essential that S.W.M. tried to build in the unions at the same time fighting to smash republican politics and establish a tradition.

A.O. explained that in Italy there are 3 main unions each politically controlled. The largest is the C.P. controlled CGIL. There are C.P. inspired moves for a bureaucratically controlled unification. A.O. cannot organise a national fraction in the unions without a real Party, but they do control C.U.B.'s (Unified Base Committees) with a clear line against the reformists. Militants put forward political motions in the unions. But A.O. need to be able to present a real alternative

strategy, which is difficult: eg. in the coming weekend there would be an engineers conference, the delegates are officials, chosen off union lists. A.O. has only 10 delegates and cannot intervene.

L.O. wished to clarify the differences and similarities with Italy. In France the 3 unions are also controlled by political parties except that F.O. is in decline and the Socialist Party is getting more involved with the CPDT which used to be a Catholic union. There is much less union life in France than in Britain or even in Italy. Only about 100,000 are active at any one time and only 2 million even have a card. The trades unions are effectively only a bureaucratic machine. L.O. produces factory bulletins on local problems plus a general political line. There is great hostility from the union machine. As soon as L.O. start a bulletin it is all-out war. L.O. has to work in secret from both bosses and unions, if necessary comrades have to deny links with L.O. and it is impossible to conduct an open and general fight in the unions. L.O. tries to gather sympathisers around it on the basis of local factory work.

I.S. (G.B.) and A.O. both said that in their countries workers would fight against any attempt to victimise. A.O. added that in Italy they can sell openly and the C.U.B.'s can intervene - could not this happen in France? I.S. (Denmark) asked what would happen to a CGT branch taken over by L.O. and I.S. (G.B.)

whether it would not be possible to build broader organisations to involve non-unionists.

L.O. replied that after a year or so their comrades became known as L.O. but it was important to establish a reputation as trade unionists first - then it became difficult to victimise even if they sold the paper in the factory, which is illegal. But they have had examples of comrades who were quickly spotted and sacked. At Angouleme there was even a case of a comrade who had led a strike and was a CGT factory delegate. The CGT regional union removed his credentials (as a delegate he was protected) and he was instantly sacked by the boss the day before the annual holidays. Also L.O. did once experiment with open factory work (admittedly before 1968) and all their people were sacked within 2 or 3 weeks. The Maoists sent lots of people into the factories and most of them have now been sacked. Thus it is important to start very discreetly. Of course there are by now hundreds of workers known as L.O. activists particularly those who were around in '68. L.O. aims to intervene politically and wondered whether the bureaucrats might not be more tolerant in Britain and Italy because the revolutionaries don't really challenge them. L.O. puts its main effort into the CGT because it is the most significant union. They have some local base in the CPDT and FO but only when they get one in the CGT will this show real strength. It was an important victory recently when

one of their election candidates, a Peugeot carworker who had been expelled in succession from the CGT and the CFTD was re-admitted to the CGT.

Discussion continued around the question of the problems and possibilities of building broader rank and file base committees. In the course of the discussion L.O. said that their experience was that these types of organisation in France had a very ephemeral existence even after 1968 and that those that survived were actually political groups under another name. L.O. could do the same with their bulletins which group people around their clear political line.

Where they control union sections they try to run them through mass meetings of members and mass meetings in the factory elections it was difficult to get more than a hard core except in times of struggle when they could also often get people to L.O. meetings as well. Did the rank and file groups in Britain or the base groups in Italy really group more than the sympathisers of political groups. Perhaps it was the lack of a tradition of shop-floor democracy in France.

I.S. (G.B.) said they had limited experience. A number of the rank and file papers involved people well outside I.S., including even C.P. members and sympathisers. But although British unions were bureaucratized I.S.'s experience had little relevance to France although A.O.'s might have.

I.S. (Denmark) said that Danish unions had a very high proportion of full-time officials.

S.W.M. said the same was true of Ireland where the shop-stewards were weak despite considerable militancy.

A.O. explained that the C.U.B.'s had a political core but were quite broad. It was only possible to keep them going and to link them up because of this political orientation. They will only be able to create a real national link-up when there is a political need for it but they have managed to create some regional and sectional link-ups.

The first day of the forum ended with this discussion continuing.

The second day was opened by a letter of apology from Accion Comunista and greetings from the American groups unable to attend. L.O. explained the basic principles of their activity. They broke with the 4th International on the question of a serious orientation to the working class. This is their absolute priority. L.O. tries to work in the CGT which is the biggest union with the most conscious workers in it and the one where they directly confront the C.P. In France one will not be able to build a revolutionary party without breaking the hold of the C.P. on the working class especially in the factories. Thus L.O. insist that their students, teachers etc. do work

orientated to the working class. They do not ask them to abandon their studies etc. but, for example, to try to make contact with young workers in hostels, youth centres, etc. L.O. do contact work with teachers, students, etc. but undertake no organisational efforts outside a working class milieu. Some people have said that L.O. missed the boat in not organising among students in 1968 but in fact they have grown proportionately as much as any other group, recruited as many students but more workers. Now L.O. think they may be strong enough to do work in other areas. Thus they are intervening in the high-school struggle around call-up, especially in the technical schools among apprentices. But L.O. are demanding the total abolition of call-up which is a relevant slogan for young workers rather than simply the call for deferralment which is purely a student issue. Thus they raise working class demands wherever they may intervene. They believe it is necessary to restate basic Marxist ideas in the working class where they have been distorted by Stalinism. Their second principle is that they have high standards for entry to the organisation - more so for students than workers. Until they are no longer a small organisation in a difficult situation they have to fight the pressures of the milieu outside. A much bigger organisation could afford to be more lax. Thirdly L.O. have a clear line towards other groups of which there are many. The maximum of organisational independence combined with the maximum of united action, particularly as workers tend to hold against revolutionaries the fact of their division. The election campaign with the Ligue Communiste was a limited success in this sense.

I.S. (G.B.) explained more about Rank and File papers - they reach an audience about twice the size of Socialist Worker (which of course is sold in industries where I.S. have no rank and file paper as well as those where it does). I.S. also commented that L.O.'s work was largely propaganda except that at a very fragmented level in the factories - was it not possible to link the two. I.S. also asked L.O. what their perspective was for the C.P. - a split, attrition, the gradual growth of L.O. exposing the C.P. and what does L.O. think about the problem of reviving the theoretical heritage of Marxism for the modern world?

S.A.G. asked L.O. about their view on rank and file work, the rights of political factions etc. in the unions. Did L.O. only demand rights for political factions? Socialist Revolution asked about L.O.'s perspective towards the rest of the revolutionary left.

L.O. replied that factional work whether political or not is banned in French unions. Any rank and file paper would lead to expulsion. Political freedom is thus crucial. If L.O. had the strength to effectively fight this they would seize the opportunity for wider union activity. But they are suspicious of groups which, in France, claim to do so but in fact only

build groups of their own political sympathisers. The fight that L.O. wages for free choice by workers in the union lists for factory elections is part of the struggle for union democracy etc. L.O. is organised solely in factory cells, trying to gather sympathisers around the factory bulletin. L.O. does not expect to wear away the C.P. one-by-one. The C.P. is built on a contradiction - it recruits the most militant workers yet pursues visibly class-collaborationist policies. This explains its hatred for revolutionaries. One day this must explode. Yet L.O. also think that they will not win C.P. militants until L.O. have shown real strength. Thus they must carry out systematic work vis-a-vis the C.P. As far as other groups are concerned only the pressure of events will create unity. Just after May 1968 there was such pressure now, despite examples like the demonstrations after the murder of Overney, there is very little. Despite L.O.'s desire for unity of action they meet very few people with whom to unite in the sort of work they do in the factories. L.O. think that the question of Marxist analysis of the problem of re-introducing very basic socialist ideas such as internationalism into the working class movement. L.O. started with a dozen 15 or so years ago now, including sympathisers, they have about 3,000. If any group has a recipe for more effective growth they would sincerely like to know about it.

A.O. commented that it was not a question of recipes but of revolutionaries creating their own opportunities. They also added that people in Italy did not understand the relationship between the C.U.B.'s and A.O. and said the C.U.B.'s were just a front for A.O. In fact the C.U.B.'s organise another 6,000 to 7,000 workers on top of the A.O. comrades themselves.

I.S. (G.B.) asked if, given the fact that 90% of workers aren't in unions in France, it was not possible to find ways of working outside the unions.

L.O. replied that the most militant elements were usually in the unions and that although mistrust of the political leaderships of the unions kept others from joining they still looked to the unions for a lead. Thus work in the unions was vital.

Apart from a report from Greece which was too long and detailed for summary and which we hope will be published in another form, the reports on activity had largely been covered in the discussion. The following additional points were made.

S.W.M. has 18 months existence. It fights the submergence of the left in the national struggle. They have 45 members but sell 4,500 papers monthly. They meet few other tendencies in the working class. They have only one comrade in the North of Ireland and some regular sales there. To recruit Protestant workers they will have to show an effective struggle against the southern government and the Catholic church.

S.A.G. still have problems from their student origins. They work round factories

and in unions. They demand a high degree of agreement for entry. There is some revival of activity in the German working class. There is still strong Maoist influence in the revolutionary movement. I.S. (Denmark) emerged from splits in the left socialists. Although they are only 25 strong and have no roots in the working class they are the only group in Denmark with a serious orientation towards the working class. Many workers regard the Social Democrats as scabs. Maoism is strong but hopelessly split on the revolutionary left and even among middle class liberals. They think there are big possibilities of building something in the Danish working class.

LIGUE COMMUNISTE

In the period following the banning of the Ligue Communiste (Communist League - French section of the 'Mandel' 'Fourth International') two myths were spread by the Ligue and by some British organisations. The first was that the demonstration which served as the excuse for the banning had been a vital, indeed exemplary piece of anti-Fascist activity. The second was that the banning of the Ligue heralded a new wave of French, if not world wide, repression. Without in any way detracting from the unconditional solidarity which all revolutionaries rightly expressed then and continue to express, it is important to demolish these two myths (as our comrades in Lutte Ouvriere did at the time).

The demonstration which provoked the banning was called by the Ligue in common with a number of other revolutionary groups (mainly Maoist) in order, they claimed, to prevent the neo-Fascist 'Ordre Nouveau' group from holding a meeting. Now 'Ordre Nouveau' is clearly Fascist. It holds meetings protected by a helmeted, jackbooted and partially armed (with iron bars) set of stewards. But it does not have even the limited public impact of our own National Front. Until very recently it had hardly even attempted to cash in on racialism. Its membership is overwhelmingly drawn from the traditional French upper-class right, and in particular from the traditionally upper-class and rightist sections of the student world (eg. the Paris law faculty). Students and recent graduates make up most of its membership, a (bad) recent Ligue pamphlet describes O.N. as 'a mainly student grouplet', which is probably no bigger than any one of the main leftist groups and smaller than the biggest of them. In the last elections it formed the activist core of a rightist coalition called the 'National Front' which did rather badly, often polling less than the revol-

ationaries, and whose few 'successes' (4 or 5% here or there) were achieved by locally-known independent rightists rather than O.N. Its main activities have been spectacular 'armed' attacks on occupied university buildings or on high schools with a left reputation. It has made no intervention in industry and next to none in any working-class or even lower-middle-class area. The meeting the Ligue was trying to 'prevent' was one of its very rare public appearances, a once a year indoor rally. It has held these in several recent years despite leftist demo's but has never attracted more than a few hundred people, drawn from the quite large but socially irrelevant traditional extreme right. By contrast L.O. regularly gets 1,200 in the same hall and a C.P. rally would get 10,000 at least.

For anyone outside the student milieu this was a non-event. The demonstration to some extent reveals the extent to which the Ligue and the other groups involved are stuck in the rather 'infantile leftist' confrontations to which the atomised French student movement has sunk.

But beyond this it was obvious from the outset that a demonstration would lead to a major confrontation not with O.N. but with the police. This too, has been a feature of each of the O.N. meetings in the last few years. The French police do not tolerate large leftist counter-demonstrations, particularly in the left-bank university area where the meeting was taking place. The effect of the Ligue's decision to demonstrate was, inevitably, to transform a relatively unimportant event into a major confrontation between the police and the revolutionaries.

This was precisely what happened. But in addition the Ligue made one further mistake in adopting an almost military approach to the demonstration. Thus when the authorities, as now seems clear, deliberately created a confrontation in which police were injured etc. (it is quite clear that the police held back forces so as to allow the 'battle' to reach major proportions before a major intervention), the Ligue walked into the provocation.

Now for the second myth. The Ligue recognises that there was a police provocation (although at the same time it still defends its decision and behaviour). It draws the conclusion that the government was determined to ban the Ligue and that this is the herald of major repression. To say this is simply to ignore the general politics of the French authorities. It does not take a major wave of repression, nor, as the Ligue has also argued, a major shift to the left creating a threat to French capital (!) to make the French authorities ban a revolutionary group. They have several times banned and jailed people since 1968, almost all of them from the more lunatic fringes of the Maoist movement. Now of course it is true that this reflects the greater activity of the

revolutionary left since May '68, its greater public impact and a more serious attitude by the authorities... It does not constitute a new wave of repression. The French authorities are only too happy to have an excuse to ban any revolutionary group and the Ligue walked into the trap that was set. That no repressive wave is on its way is shown by the fact that the revolutionary left has continued to function more or less normally, indeed 'Rouge' the Ligue paper, has continued to appear, protected by the legal technicality of separate ownership, a detail which would have presented no problem to a seriously repressive government. Equally the relative caution with which the authorities approached the LIP work-in - they let it continue for over two months before intervening at a carefully chosen time when most French workers were on holiday - shows a marginally less repressive attitude than usual where a strongly-backed working-class issue was concerned.

Thus the events of last June in no way show a new turn. On the contrary they are an example of the 'normality' of repression in capitalist democracy, and of the problems of capital increase and as workers' resistance the impact of revolutionaries increase too. But there is no dramatic shift. It is in the context of this 'normality', this 'democracy' that we advance the banning of the Ligue.

by Richard Kirkwood

REPORT ON THE 1973 IRISH CONFERENCE

Held Saturday July 7th at North London Polytechnic. 29 branches sent over 60 delegates. The main two documents discussed and passed were as follows:

1. IS work on the Irish issue.
2. Jimmy Grealy. Perspectives (see next issue)

A resolution submitted by the Left Faction calling for a new national initiative to create a 'real movement', the AIL having proved inadequate, and the calling of a TU delegate conference around the slogans:

1. withdraw the troops
2. self determination for the Irish people

was lost 20 for, 26 against.

IS WORK ON THE IRISH ISSUE

The continuation of the war waged by the British army in Northern Ireland means that it is imperative for socialists in this country to make continual propaganda within the working class and trade union movement here about the role of the army. (This is to a very large extent a distinct task from that of arguing the limits of republicanism within the Irish community, selling the Worker and so on).

It is now absolutely clear that the Anti-Internment League in no way provides a means of carrying through this work. It does not address itself to British workers and has very little influence among Irish workers. For us any united front is only meaningful if it enables us to put across particular ideas (in this case opposition to British troops in Ireland) to a larger audience than IS itself can. Perhaps this was true at one stage in the development of the AIL; it is no longer true. Therefore as a group we should stop wasting our time with the AIL and begin organising much more effective work against the presence of the troops on our own. That does not preclude the formation of limited united fronts on the Irish issue, or even now in certain localities. But we only do so when united activity brings us into contact with a far greater number of people than would otherwise be the case. That means the united fronts must be with organisations capable of mobilising numbers (in some areas some republicans), not with minute political groups like the IMG.

At present most of our branches take the Irish seriously and have shown they are prepared (as with Bloody Sunday commemoration or the Belfast 10 demonstration) to mobilise over it. This must continue. Every branch should ensure that the Irish issue is discussed in depth periodically in both the branch and factory discussion groups. If members are to be able to argue with contacts, at work, at union branches, effectively they need to have some knowledge of the main elements involved in the Irish issue (ie. an outline of what British imperialism has done to Ireland, Orange-ism, republicanism - the James Walker pamphlet provides a good background to this).

The major failure of the AIL was its inability even to begin to raise the question of the troops in the Labour movement. IS branches and union fractions should endeavour to do so. We suggest that in the major localities, public meetings should be held aimed at putting across the case against the British troops to trade unionists. A possible format would be to have two or three (fairly brief) speakers - one giving a brief outline of the situation in Ireland, one (a local trade unionist) linking the actions of the Tory government in Ireland to its various repressive measures here (eg. the picketing conspiracy trials, reference to the writings of Kitson), possibly an Irish speaker who has been in the army recently (we have a couple of members who were in Aden).

To back up these meetings, IS should produce a short popular pamphlet on the troops, aimed (not as James Walker was) at contacts who are confused over the issue rather than at existing IS members.

Irish sub-committee is already producing the draft of a leaflet for IS branches to use for more general agitation (eg. when the British army stages big recruiting campaigns - we should aim to exploit every such occasion for putting across propaganda about the role of the army). Branches should themselves reproduce the leaflet (suitably amended) as particular occasions for using it arise.

Our members in union branches, at conferences, etc. should regard the Irish issue as one in which they should intervene in so far as it is possible. Union fractions should give thought later in the year to the possibility of getting resolutions on the troops through for next year's union conferences.

Finally, the question also arises as to what work is possible in relation to the members of the army itself. There are some indications of discontent among the British Forces in Ireland (sometimes expressed in breakdowns of discipline in the sense of 'going wild' against the Catholics, sometimes restricted to moans about wanting to get out). IS is small organisation, with only limited roots in the working class generally - it would be absurd to think that we could develop some sort of organisation in the army at the present stage. However, insofar as we are able to produce propaganda material on some of the troops. IS members in garrison towns etc. should take whatever opportunities present themselves of arguing the case on Ireland (perhaps selling pamphlets etc. in pubs where troops drink, if this is possible, etc.) being careful, however, not to open themselves up to prosecution by breaking the laws on sedition (ie. in arguments put the line on the role of the British troops, do not get drawn into urging desertion, mutiny, etc).

There is the possibility that locally or nationally, a campaign may be begun by people not in IS around opposition to recruitment to the British army (eg. the South Shields trades council). We should encourage the development of overt opposition to the role of the troops, particularly in the trade union movement. Certainly, very good propaganda can be made by linking the question of lads being forced into the army to the question of high local unemployment. However, we should not fall into the illusion that pacifistic propaganda (eg. calling on people individually not to join the army) can disarm the bourgeois state.

AVANGUARDIA OPERAIA

A New Step in the Formation of the National Organisation.

The latest conference of the revolutionary group 'Collectivo Lenin of Turin' made a firm commitment to speed up its unification with AO. This process is likely to involve also a number of southern revolutionary groups.

Background

Most of the Italian left groups have emerged out of a mass student movement. Those that exist today are those who have survived the confrontation with the real world of the mass strikes of 68-69.

The revolutionary left in its totality is much larger than in this country, it is mostly spontaneist or maoist, and is very fragmented. A whole number of little groups exist, which are based in only one town or region. AO itself started only in Milan. It is not uncommon for any one with any political knowledge at all to automatically form his own group.

A number of rank and file action committees exist in factories up and down the country (they are called CUBs). AO is very active in them and has taken serious steps to link them up into a national organisation. AO is the political leadership of the movement of the CUBs.

The growth of AO has not only been through the recruitment of individual members through its mass work, but by amalgamating with a score of grouplets. AO has operated for some time with the stated objective of becoming a National Organisation through a process of unifications. In particular it has had close links with a number of groups similar to itself both theoretically and in working methods. All these groups together are defined by AO as the 'narrow Leninist area'. This process is seen by them as the first step towards the formation of the revolutionary party.

The process of unification has been undertaken, in my opinion most correctly. There have been a number of meetings between their national leaderships and joint activity in the mass movement. When we attended AO's last conference, there were a number of delegates with speaking rights from these other groups. Thus both them and all the delegates of AO could debate and verify points of unity and difference. When I attended the Collectivo conference there were a number of AO comrades present on the same basis. They were thus able to argue there for unity.

A statement was put out by both groups jointly:

The present political situation is characterised by three main factors:

- a) there is a continuing economic crisis, social tension and instability of the political structures,
- b) there is the development of increasing contradictions between the masses and reformism, and also in the political positions and organisation of the Communist Party,
- c) there is a growth in the maturity and consciousness of the masses.

There are therefore increasing opportunities for the activity of the revolutionary left within the masses.

For the revolutionary organisations the main task now, is to define a minimum working programme for activity in the mass movement. This must be connected to the development of the strategy and tactics of the moment and result in a strengthening, both theoretical and organisational. It is in this context that we have to admit the inadequacy of the revolutionary organisations in the relation to the tasks. This situation again places to the head of the agenda the urgency of the political and organisational growth of the revolutionary left.

Within the revolutionary forces the Leninist groups are the only ones capable of meeting the challenge, since they are the only ones which have been able to develop a correct line of mass intervention.

At the same time there are still ideological and organisational problems which hinder the full development and success of the Leninist positions. These groups developed out of the mass struggles of '68-'69 through the beginning of a process of self-criticism of a fundamentally ultra-left movement. They have since undergone a considerable improvement due to the increasing role which the working class vanguards play in their ranks. There are however still residues of ultra-leftism which are a serious obstacle. It weakens the Leninists in their struggle against the revisionists and opportunist who are the main impediment within the workers' movement.

The Leninist forces are not only weak for ideological reasons. Their fragmentation makes it impossible to maximise the capacity of intervention, and this in turn allows for spontaneist and opportunist organisations to intervene. It is therefore absolutely necessary to overcome these organisational limitations, and to stimulate a more systematic and precise development of the political positions.

In this last year our organisations have increased their role and impact in the localities where we are present. For the first time we have influenced some national political events. In this context, the role played in the formation of the CUBs inside the factories is probably the most important. From the analysis of the political situation

and from the political level reached by our organisations, emerges the necessity to enter more decisively the struggle for the construction of a national communist organisation. The first objective must be the unification of the Leninist area. Today this 'area' is that complex of forces which shares not only the Leninist principles and a series of strategic and tactical positions, but above all the concept of building the organisation in the mass movement. In practice this relates to the political importance which is ascribed to the CUBs. All these forces need to be involved in the political struggle for the unity of all Leninists. This should not preclude, however, initiatives towards those forces with which there are now fundamental differences on those questions. On the contrary the perspective must be for this first unification to act as a catalyst both within the revolutionary left and above all the rank and file militants of the reformist and revisionist organisations.

In this period to work towards the unification of the Leninist forces means to treat as a priority the unity of AO and the Collective Lenin of Turin. Between these two organisations there has been the development of a political debate and a meaningful unity in the work amongst the masses. This allows us to pose concretely our unity objective. While we start from a common realisation of the inadequacies of the development of the political debate, the two organisations have decided to open a new phase of closer collaboration in action. It will allow a greater political and ideological integration so that what is today an objective can relatively quickly become a reality. Both organisations agree on the need to involve in the debate about the problems of this unification the CUBs and all the rank and file organisations in which we operate.

ORGANIZZAZIONE COMUNISTA
AVANGUARDIA OPERATA
COLLECTIVO LENIN

For IS the process of unification of these forces of the Italian left is extremely important. We are developing close links with AO, and are engaged in similar activities. The emergence in Europe of groups of a similar size to ourselves increases the possibility of international work and collaboration. The pooling of our experiences has proved most useful in the past. Its fruitfulness should improve now that the objective of building revolutionary parties in Europe is firmly on the agenda.

Andreas Nagliati

Comrades are referred to the December '72 IB for further news of AO

A DOCUMENT OF THE GERMAN SOCIALIST WORKERS GROUP (SAG)

This is a Shortened version

Social Democracy in Germany

The SPD has been in existence for a century and was already well established in 1904, by which time there were 700 fulltime trade union officials, with 329 editorial staff and other specialists working for the Party Press. By 1913, the Party had 110 Reichstag members, 231 regional deputies, 11000 local representatives, 320 magistrates and local board members. Altogether there were an estimated 100,000 social democratic representatives and administrative bodies. Union officials accounted for 11.6% of the SPD's membership of the Reichstag in 1893 and 32.7% in 1914.

Reformism in Germany began as a trend inside this originally revolutionary marxist party with a revisionist tendency around Vollmar and Bernstein. They had revised marxism so that they no longer thought it necessary to overthrow the system.

The SPD was the political leadership of the German Labour movement, with a fifty year tradition behind it, and the revolutionary left, such as the Spartacus groups, was very weak.

The revolutionary cadres stayed in the SPD (and later the USPD) Independent Social Democratic Party (1961 on), in 1920 this split, the majority forming the Communist Party (KPD). because as Rosa Luxemburg put it in January 1916; "Flight remains flight; for us it is a betrayal of the masses who are floundering and suffocating in the stranglehold of Scheidemann and Legien, who have given in and put themselves at the mercy of the bourgeoisie. One can "withdraw" from small sects and conventicles. It is nothing but childish fantasy to want to liberate the whole mass of the proletariat from this heaviest and most dangerous yoke of the bourgeoisie by simply "withdrawing" and going on ahead of them along the road with a brave example. The disintegration of German social democracy is a historical process of the largest dimension, a showdown between the working class and the bourgeoisie, and one does not dodge to one side on this battlefield in disgust, in order to breathe purer air in the corner under the bush."

The SPD and the Communist Party

Thus, when the centrist mass Party - the USPD - emerged and broke from the SPD (as a result of massive expulsions) the revolutionaries remained within it in spite of its confinement to a bourgeois pacifist

programme. At that time the Spartacus group had only 2000 members and it was another three years before the KPD, founded in 1919, succeeded in 1920 in splitting the revolutionary base of the USPD from its centrist reformist leadership. In so doing the KPD vastly increased its influence on the German working class, with a membership of a few thousand at the founding conference compared with 300,000 a year later after the split in the USPD. (the vast majority came from the USPD. Ed.)

Nevertheless, the SPD still remained in control of the bulk of the organised Labour movement, with 1.2 million members in 1920 and 1 million right up to 1931.

After the War

In 1933 the fascists destroyed the German workers movement. It did not revive until 1945. After 1945 the SPD started out again in the same vein as before, with the Heidelberg Programme adopted in 1925, where it was declared that the "contrast between exploiters and exploited ... was becoming ever harsher". The Party aimed to conquer "political power" for the working class, and while in practice opportunistic and bourgeois, it still managed to persuade the workers by its radical symbols, words and songs that it was an organisation of the proletariat.

Its membership in 1947 had already reached nearly 875,000 members again in the three Western Zones and West Berlin. However, with the first great defeats (currency reform 1948, the prohibition of nationalisation of the key industries and the removal of other rights by the military governments) the membership had dropped to 300,000 by 1954.

This decline did not coincide with a growth of organisations to the left of the SPD. On the contrary the KPD's membership also dropped dramatically, with a loss of two thirds of its membership in a seven-year period, while the SPD lost one third. This meant almost 450,000 workers had turned their backs on the political organisations.

The prewar policies of the KPD and the anti-labour stalinist post-war policies in Eastern Europe and East Germany effectively deterred any left-wing split from the SPD.

The real defeats for the SPD were the elections of 1953 and 1957. The CDU/CSU vote soared from 31% in 1949 to 45% in 1953 to 50% in 1957, while the SPD vote stagnated at around 30%. The most important social reforms were introduced by the CDU/CSU government, while the trade unions had great success with their wages policy and other demands such as shorter working hours.

This led the SPD leadership to a radical change of image, embodied in the programme adopted at the Godesberg Conference in 1959, when the apparently anti-capitalist demands

of the previous period were dropped, nationalisation of the key industries, economic planning, critique of rearmament etc. - and the 'free market' economy, defence and capitalism in general accepted.

The conference was closely followed by the acceptance of NATO and nuclear weapons and the necessity for emergency laws, and also by the expulsion of a small number of relatively harmless left wingers around the SDP, as the leadership could not brook any interference by the more or less active rank and file.

Since 1968 a new 'left' has been growing, which is more or less identical with the Young Socialists. This opposition has come from the least promising and most half-hearted remnants of the anti-authoritarian student movement, who did not join the SDS, but saw the revolt as a springboard to further their own careers inside the SPD and are pretty ineffective as an opposition. They have no proletarian base and in fact there is no sign of any new left proletarian trend within the Party.

Of the 750,000 Party members an estimated 5 to 10% take part in Party gatherings and other activities, mainly Party and trade union officials and the new middle class. The SPD is no longer a reformist Party in the strict sense of the word, but it does still control almost the entire West German Labour movement, including works councils, shop stewards' committees and the union bureaucracy. The initial task of revolutionaries in Western Germany must be to rid the advanced sections of the working class from the traditional belief that the SPD represents their class interests against capitalism and its parties.

Translated by Mary Phillips