



"We have had seven months of a right-wing Labour government in power. It is no secret that the Tory Party is on the way back." Gerry Healy, *The Newsletter*, 12.6.65.

"The demand remains: 'Kick out Wilson!' The alternative to him is not Ted Heath, as Cousins said, but the Socialist Labour League." M. Farley, *The Newsletter*, 14.10.67.

THE CREDIBILITY GAP — THE POLITICS OF THE S.L.L.



PUBLISHER'S INTRODUCTION

The Socialist Labour League, because of its press and the activities of its members, is the best known organisation calling itself Trotskyist in Britain. Indeed, for many people the SLL is Trotskyist. Yet this organisation long ago broke with the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement, and its policies and internal life are a caricature of revolutionary Marxism.

Too often, critics of the SLL (especially some of its ex-members, who have had extremely unpleasant experiences of "democratic centralism" a la Healy) confine their critique of the organisation to enumerating its misdeeds. Whilst this is understandable, it does nothing to further an understanding of where the SLL has gone wrong and the political roots of its mistakes.

This is why the IMG is extremely pleased to publish Cde. TW's study of the SLL and its policies since 1964. TW approaches the SLL sympathetically and premises his approach on the undoubted truth that the majority of the members of that organisation are devoted revolutionaries. He painstakingly analyses the organisation's perspectives and prognostications with a view to discovering how it was that an experienced leadership could make such terrible mistakes.

There are important lessons to be learnt from this study—and not just by members and ex-members of the SLL. Bourgeois ideology exerts a powerful pressure upon all of us. The pragmatic opportunism—in "left" and right forms—of the SLL's leadership is a common phenomenon in revolutionary circles. Those familiar with the American radical movement will be struck by the similarity between some of the SLL's more bizarre positions and those of Progressive Labour, which originated from an ultra-Maoist current.

The IMG offers this pamphlet as a contribution to the discussion necessary for the building of a mass revolutionary socialist party in Britain. Such a party will have to be internationalist, opposed to reformism and Stalinism, and based upon Marxist-Leninist principles—in a word, Trotskyist. The first job to be tackled in building a mass Trotskyist movement is to establish exactly what Trotskyism is and what it is not. This pamphlet concretely shows where the SLL has deviated from Trotskyism—it is up to the readers to join with the IMG, Spartacus League, etc. to demonstrate to the militant students and workers what Trotskyism is.

NOTE

The first draft of this pamphlet was written in December 1969, mainly so that I could sort out for myself my disagreements with the SLL. I then approached the local League organiser for a discussion. This proved rather difficult to arrange, and after one session it was brought to a close by the Oxford University sit-in (23 Feb. to 2 Mar. 1970), which was dismissed by an Oxford SLL member as the action of a "student rabble". The first letter I wrote to Cde. Mair Davies serves as an introduction.

I hope readers will let me know of any comments they may have on the pamphlet. I would also like to think that the SLL will reply to my criticisms of them with reasoned comments.

TW. 24th March 1970

4 Warneford Road,
Oxford OX4 1LT.
5th Jan 1970.

TO: Comrade Mair Davies and the Oxford Branch of the SLL.

Dear Comrades,

I am writing in response to Cd. Mair's invitation to do so made on the last occasion we discussed (20th Nov '69).

Let me begin by making one point: Cd. Mair saw fit, during that conversation, to refer to serious mistakes made by me in the past. I found this surprising for several reasons: firstly, since I believed on the basis both of previous discussions and of letters and documents which I possess, that all concerned understood that those mistakes had been corrected and would not be repeated; secondly, since I had during the subsequent period supported and helped the League in many ways (as my bank statement, for example, would reveal), and this assistance had been accepted without ever any reference to those mistakes. Nevertheless, if anyone imagines that something could be learned, by someone who does not already know it, from a further discussion of them, I would be perfectly willing to go over them in private or in public; in the event of a public discussion, I would suggest that the process - which I found singularly unedifying - of my exclusion from the YS last November on grounds of 'trying to demoralise' people and 'disagreeing with the leadership of the Socialist Labour League' be simultaneously examined.

But I was most surprised because mistakes of over a quarter of my life ago - while indicating whatever one cares to deduce about me - are utterly irrelevant to answering the *scientific* questions which I had tried to raise: Is the analysis made by the SLL of social, economic and political conditions in Britain today correct? Are the policies which it advances to meet those conditions correct? Has it made serious errors in the past? If so, has it understood, corrected and accounted for them?

For my attitude to mistakes, both of individuals and, especially, of revolutionary socialist organisations is that taken by Lenin in *Left-Wing' Communism*:

"A political party's attitude towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest ways of judging how earnest the party is and how it fulfills *in practice* its obligations towards its *class* and the *working people*. Frankly acknowledging a mistake, ascertaining the reasons for it, analysing the conditions that have led up to it, and thrashing out the means of its rectification - that is the hallmark of a serious party; that is how it should perform its duties, and how it should educate and train its *class*, and then the *masses*." (V.I. Lenin, *Selected Works Vol 3*, Moscow, 1967, p368, original emphasis.)

And it is to the scientific questions which were raised when last we talked that I will refer here. You will recall that, apart from unimportant tactical issues, the main questions on which we were in disagreement were those I have mentioned above. In particular, I criticised the Statement of the PC of the SLL, "A Political Challenge" (*Workers Press* 25th Oct. '69) along the following lines:

1. I suggested that it suffered from various literary defects. While the question is hardly vital, you must surely - unless you believe there exists such a thing as the "rate of profit on return from international trading", or that Wilson's purpose in reducing imports is "to cut consumption of the workers" - accept that criticism.

2. I argued that it minimised the important obstacle to the leadership of the masses by the SLL which is presented by the trade union bureaucracy; for example, I disagreed with the assertion that "the NUM executive ... have lost the confidence of miners everywhere", arguing that, if that were true, a greater proportion of miners would have struck than in fact did, and the NUM executive would have found it more difficult to strangle the strike in the way that it did. I still feel that those criticisms were also justified.

3. I criticised the statement for failing to mention nationalisation, or trade union democracy, for containing not a single transitional demand, for discussing the Common Market without advancing the slogan of a United Socialist States of Europe, and in general for asserting (3 times, in fact) that it is necessary to build the alternative socialist leadership without explaining *how* that essential task should be undertaken.

4. I also disagreed with it when it stated that: "The road now opens for the building of the revolutionary working-class party which *every worker* is beginning to recognise is needed" (my emphasis); I confess I still feel that such an assessment is overoptimistic.

You may recall that I had doubts about the Swindon By-election. I have thought about the question further, and I feel obliged to state that I disagree with the correspondent in last November's *Keep Left* who observed "the YS and ... SLL have achieved a great victory in putting up a candidate in the Swindon by-election. This is a blow to the capitalist employers." Indeed, if anything, the comment of *The Newsletter* (14th June '69) on the presidential candidature of Alain Krivine seems to me to be more appropriate: "(Frank Willis) was only able to obtain a fraction over 1 per cent of the votes. On this showing his impact was practically negligible."

I have also studied and thought over the perspectives and the political positions of the SLL in the past and present, in particular to the differences between the League and the SWP. I must state that, so far as the Cuban Revolution, the nature of Soviet society, and the United Front tactic are concerned, the positions expounded by Germain in his pamphlet "Marxism versus Ultraleftism" seem, on the whole, to be sound.

So far as the past mistakes of the SLL are concerned - and this is closely related to the question of the SWP - it seems to me that there were made a number of errors which have not yet been recognised. For example, the last (XIth) Congress of the SLL passed a resolution which explicitly pointed to the relation between the SLL's perspectives and its fight against revisionism, asserting:

"In the whole struggle against revisionism, however, there was involved a defence of Trotskyism in its basic view of the present revolutionary epoch." (*The Newsletter*, 24th June 1969).

It referred to the perspectives of the SLL during and since "the split with the Socialist Workers' Party (USA) in 1963" and explained that:

"These perspectives have been richly confirmed, particularly since our last Congress. The revisionists, on the contrary, are thrown into confusion and split by the resurgence of the international working class. We were proved right in answering the revisionist theories of neo-capitalism... Such correctness in perspective has a great danger" (ibid.)

Just *what* were these perspectives which have been so "richly confirmed"?

Cde. Peter Jeffries explained the SLL's "Economic forecast for 1965":

"The outlook for 1965 must, therefore, be one of severe deflation and rising unemployment... In other words, the winter of 1965-66 must see unemployment rise to at least the million mark, assuming that there is no major break in world trade and that the decline of British capital-

ism does not speed up. Should either of these occur, then the position would be even more serious" (*The Newsletter*, 15th Jan. 1965, P.J.'s emphasis),

and Cde. Healy explained the SLL's political perspective to its congress in the middle of that year:

"We have had seven months of a right-wing Labour government in power," he said. 'It is no secret that the Tory Party is on the way back.'" (*The Newsletter*, 12th June 1965, original emphasis).

The perspectives which were "particularly" confirmed between the Xth and XIth Congresses of the SLL were outlined in the Xth Congress resolution, adopted on 1st - 3rd June, and published in the League's paper soon after:

"We work now in a situation where major political breaks are possible because of the depth of the economic crisis. The experiences of the working class under the Labour government will now provide large numbers of recruits for the League, and there will arise a danger of our cadres being swamped by the influx of politically-untrained and inexperienced members." (*The Newsletter*, 18th June 1968)

In the same issue Cde. Jeffries discussed economic prospects in the light of the latest Annual Report of the Bank of International Settlements:

"One fact stands out from its report: *nobody* believes that the present two-tier system can last. Its continuation would only be "feasible", it comments, if "free" and "official" gold prices remained roughly in line.

"Given a continued rise in gold on the open market the pressures towards a dollar devaluation are inevitable..."

"Devaluation of the franc *is near* and this *alone*, in the present world situation, would be enough to spark off a European financial and economic crisis," (ibid., my emphasis)

and, also in that issue, a report appeared of a speech by "SLL Central Committee member Cyril Smith", in which that comrade explained that

"In Britain we had perhaps 18 months in which to prepare for a struggle similar to that in France (in May-June 1968)" (ibid.)

The confirmation of perspectives such as these is truly dangerous!

It is in the face of that danger that I must answer Cde. Mair's question as to whether I believe the SLL has degenerated. I am afraid that, unfortunately, the SLL seems to me sometimes to fail to fulfil in practice its obligations towards its class and the working people; if such a belief is correct, then undoubtedly it has degenerated.

I am also worried by the way in which the SLL tends to conduct its discussions and polemics. I would like to illustrate that by reference to an article by Cde. Robert Black polemicising against the late Isaac Deutscher. Discussing the latter's pamphlet "On the Chinese Cultural Revolution", Cde. Black wrote:

"Deutscher tries to prove that 'today Mao Tse-tung has, as it were, his own version of the theory of "social fascism" which he has applied to Krushchev and his successors, treating them as sheer accomplices of American imperialism'. Oh dear! How could Mao Tse-tung be so tactless, so sectarian as to utter ... the truth.

"Deutscher obviously resents the denunciation of the Soviet government as accomplices of imperialism. This he equates with Stalin's identification of social democracy with fascism - the ill-starred theory of 'social fascism' that Deutscher is now seeking to foister on Mao.

"Stalin denied the working-class basis to the reformist parties and trade unions... But where do the Chinese leaders make a similar blunder on the class nature of the Soviet Union? ...The only theoretical confusion here appears to belong to Deutscher." (*The Newsletter*, 4th Feb. 1967. I expressed sharp disagreement with this article to Cde. George Myers at the time it appeared.)

Now Cde. Black is Foreign Editor of, and a frequent contributor to, *Workers Press*, and undoubtedly exercises in many other ways also an important influence on the education of members and sympathisers of the YS and the SLL; I therefore find it disturbing that he should apparently be unaware of - and certainly fail to mention - the following documents:

1. the Statement of the NEC of the SLL, "The Sino-Soviet Conflict", adopted on 28th Feb, 1963, in which we read:

"The remarks of the Chinese about 'bourgeois restoration' in Yugoslavia (and thus, presumably in Russia also) are an example of the theoretical dangers inherent in their method ... The Chinese approach to the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia betrays an astonishing ignorance of elementary political economy and Marxist sociology. It is not only specious; it is dangerous and opens the door wide to another form of revisionism - 'state capitalism'". (*Labour Review*, V7/N4 Winter '62/63)

2. An editorial of the Peking *People's Daily* - "On the Phoney Communism of Krushchev and its Lessons for the World" - which *explicitly alleged* the restoration of capitalism in the USSR, and was circulated throughout the world, in appropriate translations, by the Chinese Communists following its publication in 1964.

I could, unfortunately, list a number of other things which already bothered me last November, but the general nature of the points I would make should be clear: *politically*, there is a tendency to believe that the crisis of capitalism is now, this minute, sharper than in fact it is, that things are developing faster than they really are; *organisationally-polemically*, there is a tendency to over-simplify, to miss out vital points, and to fail to recognise (admit) errors.

One thing has occurred since then which also bothers me. For the *Workers Press* is absolutely correct to headline (27th Dec. '69) the fact that "Vietnam is the touchstone" and to say (30th Dec. '69):

"A powerful movement in Britain against the war will give new strength and confidence to many others to speak out and act as these heroic soldiers and Vietnamese have done."

But almost 3,000 Vietnamese workers and peasants have been dying every day in that country for over five years, and it seems to me that the SLL has almost certainly failed to campaign enough on that specific issue: perhaps, "Vietnam was the Touchstone" on the 27th of October 1968.

I would be very pleased to discuss all the points I have made under any circumstances, and would be grateful if you could arrange a discussion. If it were to prove impossible for us *even to talk over* these questions, then I might be forced to conclude that, justifying my worst fears, the SLL had indeed undergone serious degeneration; if that were the case, it would be my duty, whatever the personal consequences, to take suitable steps.

With communist greetings.

Yours fraternally,

Tony Whelan.

P.S. I have just come across another example of methods of polemic which can only, in my opinion, do regrettable and unnecessary harm to the SLL itself. In *Workers Press* of 3rd Jan. '70, under the by-line of Cde. N. Makanda, we read the following immortal lines:

"So much for those who, like Ernest Mandel talk of a 'rise' in capitalism. *They forget trivia like two world wars, which are an essential feature of imperialism, as the epoch of decline of capitalism.*"

(my emphasis)

Mandel *forgets* two world wars? Seriously?

T.W.

Chapter 1: HISTORICAL REMARKS

The Socialist Labour League has its origins in the tendency around Gerry Healy in the old Revolutionary Communist Party. The great merit of this tendency was that it fought the sectarianism of the RCP majority, and called for an orientation towards the mass movement; in particular, entry work within the Labour Party.

We intend in due course to discuss the historical questions of the origins of the SLL and of what is, in our opinion, its continuing degeneration. Here we wish only to emphasise - by reference to what we think are gross errors associated with the break by the SLL from the Labour Party in 1964-65 - the need for revolutionaries to have a sober and realistic estimate of economic perspectives and the relationship of class forces in Britain today (indeed, anywhere anytime!)

The Labour Party established the Young Socialists in 1960 following its third successive electoral defeat at the hands of the Tories in 1959, with the aim of bringing young people into the machine of a rapidly ageing party. Without going into details here, we may say that most of the youth who joined the YS in 1960-64 were radicalised by various complex processes (coming out of CND, etc.), and were of predominantly petty-bourgeois or upper working-class origins. (1) Most of these radicalised youth were, during that period, recruited by the SLL, which intervened in the YS around the youth paper *Keep Left*.

Although *Keep Left* was proscribed by the Labour bureaucrats in May 1962, supporters of *Keep Left* won a majority of the elected seats on the National Committee of the YS at both the Easter 1963 and Easter 1964 Conferences of the organisation. The policy resolutions passed at those Conferences were, on almost every question, Marxist.

In our opinion, the SLL leadership were hypnotised by the increase in the membership of their organisation during 1962-64 (from say 300 to 1,000) and came to believe that the youth who were recruited were proletarians, the precursors of thousands more, who would be radicalised by a further, bigger economic and political crisis in the immediate future. Consequently, when they were faced by further repressive measures by the right wing (in May 1964) they took the decision - which they broke to their membership at the Summer Camp in the last week of July and the first week of August - to take the YS majority out of the Labour Party.

This contrasted sharply with what even the leadership had only recently believed:

"Finally, we take one aspect of the general line of SWP leadership. When the SLL first approached the SWP for a discussion on the disputed questions, Cannon wrote to members of the SWP National Committee that the SLL's wrong position would eventually be most clearly revealed in the consequences of its suicidal domestic policy. The SLL, said Cannon, had embarked on a sectarian binge, and was heading for the formation of an open party outside the Labour Party. The long experience of Cannon in these matters probably led SWP members to expect his predictions to be confirmed. All that happened in this case, in fact, was that Cannon's retreat from a revolutionary outlook was fully exposed (2)"

and, of course, with the whole history of their tendency (though it confirmed

(1) *We counterpose this to the claim - indeed the belief - of the SLL that they recruited proletarian youth radicalised by the unemployment of 1962-63 and the Profumo scandal of mid-'63.*

(2) "Revisionism & the 4th International" by Cliff Slaughter, *Labour Review*, Vol. 7, No. 5, Summer 1963.

Cannon's prediction!). Even as late as April-May 1964 (in an assessment of the March YS Conference) they said:

"At last year's conference, delegates associated with the newspaper (*Young Guard*) supported resolutions calling for autonomy for the YS from Transport House. In this way they presumably hoped that their endless discussions could proceed unhampered by anything so mundane as a political fight against the bureaucrats *within* the Labour Party on the questions of youth employment and bans and proscriptions. The odd thing is that they are now accusing *Keep Left* of attempting to form a breakaway revolutionary Marxist League..."

"The rebellion of the youth and the desire of the working class for a Labour Government have the same root: opposition to the oppression and misery of capitalism. Within the apparent opposition there is complete unity. This unity does not yet exist in consciousness but has to be forged in the course of big class struggles. A conception of the Labour Government carrying out for five years, free from trouble or disturbance, its plans for making capitalism more efficient whilst the working class stands by indifferent, provides neither the programme nor the leadership for those struggles. It does the reverse. It sells out those struggles..." (Original emphasis (3))

The political and economic perspectives of the article we have just quoted seemed - to the SLL leadership - to be confirmed by the success of their summer recruiting drive: on September 27th they were able to mobilise between 3,000 and 4,000 youth for an independent YS demonstration in London. In fact it is probable that the youth recruited then were brought into politics by the general tide of sentiment among the working class (and other sections of society) for a Labour victory at the 1964 general election; a Labour Government was duly elected (though only just).

The SLL leadership was also carried away during 1962-64 by the increase in sales of their weekly paper *The Newsletter* - an increase for which, in our opinion, there were three causes. Firstly, the increase naturally caused by an increase in the number of sellers, consequent upon recruitment. Secondly, the inauguration of "pub sales" (in, so far as we can discover, mid 1962) following a group of people being sent from Leeds to Bradford to dispose of some surplus copies round the pubs, which they did very successfully. (4). And thirdly, the fact that the paper - which at that time carried headlines such as "Labour to Power" - met with a ready reception among the growing number of people anxious for the return of the Labour Government (5).

The initial acts of that government, taken during a severe balance of payments crisis for British capitalism, led to severe disappointment of the hopes of those who voted it to power. On taxes - which it increased, on pensions (which it didn't), on nationalisation - from which it retreated, on the Congo - where it assisted Belgian and US imperialism send in troops to smash the revolutionary struggles then taking place, on Vietnam - where

(3) "Fourth Young Socialists Conference" in *Marxist*, Vol. 2, No. 6

(4) This was extended nationally on the initiative of Cliff Slaughter, who was living in Leeds.

(5) It was the experience of this period, both with *The Newsletter* and with *Keep Left* (which was also very successful) which led to the newspaper-fetishism of the SLL and its international allies, culminating in the *Workers Press* and their many other journals. (See the international greetings to W.P. from the SLL's allies, first two weeks' issues).

it supported US bombing of the north; indeed, on all issues, it revealed in its first few months of office complete subservience to the dictates of international capital.

The SLL during this period continued to grow. However, it failed to correct the mistakes it had already committed on the immediacy of a sharp economic crisis; on the duration of the Labour government (c.f. above) and its inability to grant any reforms or concessions; and on the perspective of a mass radicalisation of the working class and in particular of the youth. These mistakes date from, at the latest, the beginning of 1964.

For example, *The Newsletter* of 21st March 1964 carried extensive reports of the Sixth Congress of the SLL (14th to 16th March). Apart from its assessment of the importance of the SLL: "*Fortunately, they have failed to prevent our organisation from growing stronger and stronger until today it has a decisive influence inside the ranks of the Labour movement (original emphasis)*", which, nearly six years later, we may be forgiven for regarding as an exaggeration, it assessed the prospects of the Labour government as follows (completely in line with the quotes from *Marxist* already given):

"*In such a crisis (as is coming after the 1964 election) it is difficult (!) to speculate how long a Labour government might last (original emphasis)*",

and explained the SLL's attitude to that government:

"The Sixth national congress of the Socialist Labour League warned the working class that the Wilson government will betray it.

"We vote Labour in order to carry on the fight against Wilson under conditions where the practical application of his policies will be exposed to millions of people.

"A vote for Labour will be useless unless it is linked to building the Socialist Labour League as the alternative Marxist leadership."

That last bit certainly put 12 m. Labour voters where they belong! In particular, *The Newsletter* outlined how the SLL would intervene in the crisis situation:

"There must be committees for nationalisation set up in all the main industries which put clear demands on the Labour government."

"All problems of housing, education, transport and social welfare will accumulate under a Labour government, from which the people will anticipate reforms."

"The Labour Party must become the storm-centre of the demands of the working class and everyone of those demands must be linked to the struggle against employers by workers in the factories."

That was the Congress resolution on Britain. Here is Gerry Healy reporting on the role of *The Newsletter*:

"Once the crisis develops inside the Labour government and the trade unions, the readership of *The Newsletter* will quadruple itself, said Gerry Healy when outlining the future of the newspaper to the conference.

"This readership would build up because of the "big vacuum" in thinking produced by the inadequacies of a Labour government.

"The Socialist Labour League would pose an alternative leadership through its newspaper.

"That is why we fight for this paper and fight to extend its sales, because we consider it as the highest point of development of our organisation, he commented."

Apart from enquiring whether that last paragraph meant anything, we are entitled to ask: what became of the committees for nationalisation? Of making the Labour Party the storm-centre of the demands of the working class? And, comrades of the SLL - bearing in mind that, in fact, the circulation of *The Newsletter* merely increased by 50% (from 10,000 to 15,000) before slumping - are the prospects of these very same tactics being carried through successfully with the daily *Workers Press* any better than they were for *The Newsletter* in 1964? (6)

But, to return to the mistakes of the SLL at that period. Cliff Slaughter, criticising the strike-breaking role of Wilson and the trade union bureaucrats, wrote in the 18th April 1964 issue of *The Newsletter*:

"A Labour victory on the basis of defeated strikes, even if it is possible because of the temporary political disarray of the Tory Party, will be a hollow victory.

"The Tories, backed by a strengthened, confident and rich class of big businessmen will return to power and impose a harsh dictatorship."

The anonymous writer in *Marxist* whom we have already quoted (probably also Cde. Slaughter) goes on to say:

"The youth movement represents the opposite side of the parliamentary course in conscious form. In the disciplined and responsible attempt on the part of the majority of delegates at the youth conference to hammer out a socialist policy to meet the problems facing workers in this country there exists the potentiality of a political leadership to fill the vacuum that will be created when the Wilson Government follows the example of every social-democratic government the world has ever known in administering on behalf of the monopolies against the working class. In the struggle to consolidate that leadership we are confident that large sections of workers will break from their reformist leaders."

We leave pupils in the Cliff Slaughter school of dialectics to puzzle out what all that means; note, however, that it does commit itself to something right at the end. In fact, the writer concludes his article by reaffirming the commitment to entrism:

"One last word to the Brighton delegates. Go out and fight to win more and more young workers to the programme you have passed. Use every bit of that experience to defeat the right wing leadership. Above all, refuse to tolerate the expulsion of John Robertson. Organise in every area meetings, petitions, campaigns and resolutions around the expulsion. For the fight against the expulsion is synonymous with the fight for the policies passed at your conference, and with the building of an alternative leadership to the right wing."

Indeed, there can be no doubt that the SLL leadership believed - even after they had decided on the break with the Labour Party - that they would be able to send new cadres into the party almost immediately:

"If the Young Socialists do not fight now, then they will be cut to pieces as they were in 1955.

(6) Incidentally, the *Fraternal Greetings* published in that issue show the SLL's allies in an interesting light. The Hungarians say: "In our opinion the English workers movement is today the key to a world party. I am aware that I am speaking to that party", and the French refer to "The SLL, the most important section in the International Committee". Why does the SLL have to exact such tributes (even supposing the Hungarians did not confuse the SLL with the world party) from its co-thinkers?

"If they fight, in all probability they will be closed down but with their organisation intact advocating a clear socialist policy, they will be able to organise their forces and train hundreds of new leaders for re-entry into the Labour Party in preparation for the coming crisis."

"We believe that in the next period substantial numbers of young members and cadres will join the Socialist Labour League from the Young Socialists.

"These developments have not in any way altered our conception that it necessary to build up a strong movement in the Labour Party to fight the right wing.

"We believe that this movement can only be built under Marxist leadership and at the moment the forces who will do it are mainly in the youth movement.

"By joining the trade unions and working in the Labour Party they will learn, as they learned over the past four years, that their most decisive task is to build a revolutionary party and leadership, which involves, from time to time, working in mass reformist organisations (7)."

This recruiting would be possible because of the effects of the economic crisis, which was assessed as follows:

"The outlook for 1965 must, therefore, be one of severe deflation and rising unemployment..."

"In other words, the winter of 1965-66 must see unemployment rise to at least the million mark, assuming that there is no major break in world trade and that the decline of British capitalism does not speed up. Should either of these occur, then the position would be even more serious. ((8) Original emphasis)."

With this sort of outlook, the SLL was completely unable to understand what was taking place; in particular, they interpreted the initial discontent among workers with the Labour Government, as manifested in the Leyton by-election (9), as follows:

"Social democracy, whose capitalist policies rest upon a conservative layer of the working class, is now breaking up. (10)"

(7) Articles by "Frank Williams", "Trotsky's Advice to Young Socialists" and "The Opportunism of Ernest Germain", in The Newsletter, 26th Sept. '64 and 30th Jan. '65 respectively. In our opinion, "Frank Williams", who leads such a fleeting existence between the pages of The Newsletter, is probably G. Healy in disguise.

(8) "Economic forecast for 1965", by Peter Jeffries, The Newsletter, 16th Jan. 1965. This puts Cde. "Jeffries'" article "Mandel Revises Marx", Workers Press 2nd December 1969, in an interesting light!

(9) That was the occasion on which Patrick Gordon Walker, Wilson's first Foreign Secretary, was defeated in a by-election in a former "safe" Labour seat, which had been made available to him following his failure to be re-elected in 1964 at Smethwick, after an election campaign in which racialism was a prominent issue. Most probably, racialism, the workers' initial discontent with Labour, and their disgust at the treatment of Leyton's former MP, were the three factors involved in Walker's second defeat. After it he resigned as Foreign Secretary.

(10) "Robert Black", "The Meaning of Leyton", The Newsletter, 13th Feb. 1965.

For the economic basis of social democracy was disappearing; for example:

"Fed on government contracts for years, the aircraft workers, who include a big slice of the labour aristocracy, now march against Labour in defence of their jobs (11)."

The now so familiar analogy with the rise of Hitler in Germany was already drawn:

"Now, in an attempt to get even closer to the monopolies in order to avoid the fate of German social democracy in 1933, Callaghan's incomes policy is linked to a tightening up of immigration laws ... the right wing hope to preserve their power and privilege by tying the working class to the state, thus dispensing with the need for violent fascist regimes. Thus ... the right wing take another step along the road travelled 32 years ago by German social democracy (11)."

The first Conference of the newly-independent YS was held on Feb. 27th/28th 1965. It adopted policy resolutions calling for the recall of a Labour Party Conference (a demand which has since been repeated many, many times - without any impact, still less success!), stressing the danger of the Tories' return, calling for US troops out of Vietnam (*not* "Victory to the NLF", which came later), etc. (See *The Newsletter*, 6th March 1965, and *Keep Left*, March 1965). It also confirmed the commitment to, if not the practice of, entry inside the Labour Party, by adopting a constitution which included, in its section on "Objects":

"(b) To fight throughout the Labour movement for socialist policies decided democratically at Annual Conference, in order to win the support of all workers. To encourage all members of the Young Socialists Movement to be active in their trade union and Labour Party Wards and Constituencies.

"(c) To preserve and strengthen the national organisation of the Young Socialists against the witch-hunting measures of the official leadership of the Labour Party. To demand and fight for the reinstatement of all young socialists expelled from the Labour Party, and the re-opening of all branches closed down by the Labour Party leadership"

and a membership regulation:

"Membership of the Young Socialists is open to all young people who agree with its policy and programme and who wish to fight against the Tories and the employing class for a socialist Britain. All members of the Young Socialists shall be members of their appropriate trade union and where possible of the Labour Party (12)."

The prospect, of course, was one of building a mass YS in the struggles which were coming; this was summed up in a front-page article in the May

(11) *Ibid.*

(12) *We give all these quotations, firstly to prove that the SLL did not know that it was abandoning entry for a whole period in 1964, secondly to show that the SLL was not free from the mistakes of the British left concerning the desirability and possibility of a left-wing opposition to the Wilson government inside the Labour Party. Anyone who cares to write to 186A Clapham High Street for the humorously entitled pamphlet "How to build the YS" will find these references to the Labour Party have disappeared from the YS Constitution. This change took place - with no discussion - at the 1968 YS Morecambe Conference.*

1965 *Keep Left*:

"Build the YS!

"Summer Campaign - 5,000 new members

"by National Committee secretary Dave Ashby

"One thousand new members in five weeks - this must be the new aim of Young Socialist branches throughout the country. Make a big all-out recruitment drive in this first stage of a campaign to build the Young Socialists, starting on June 9.

"In the course of the summer months, we must recruit 5,000 new members into the Young Socialists ... we shall prepare to make a political intervention in the struggles arising from unemployment on a scale never before possible (13)."

The political perspectives, on the basis of which it was thought that such gains might be made, were summed up by Gerry Healy, as reported in "7th National Congress of the SLL" (*The Newsletter*, June 12, 1965):

"We have had seven months of a right-wing Labour government in power, he said. 'It is no secret that the Tory Party is on the way back.'"

All this, of course, was drastically wrong. From their wrong economic analysis it followed for the SLL that the Labour Government was unable to grant any reforms or to manoeuvre at all. From both the numerical gains of the SLL (wrongly understood) and the initial working class hostility to the policies of the Labour Government, it followed for the League that the workers were abandoning the Labour Party and moving to the left ("Social democracy is breaking up") - this despite racialism (which was, however, grossly overestimated as part of the general picture of deepening social crisis).

Thus, when the Labour Government retreated, when workers won an *average* wage increase of 9% during 1965, while the wave of sentiment for Harold Wilson and his happy band mounted throughout the working class, the SLL-YS were meeting a stony reception from the workers. Although they *correctly* pointed to the danger of Wilson's anti-trade union laws (although exaggerating by far the danger of strikers being imprisoned), they were totally unable to recruit, despite enormous efforts on the part of the rank-and-file. Many rankers - and some leaders - resigned. Even full-time workers were displaced. And so, in the following months, tired of knocking their heads against brick walls, hundreds of demoralised youth left the YS and the SLL. Branches were closed down. By the time the Labour Government was re-elected, in March 1966, with a majority of nearly 100, the membership of the SLL was probably cut by half.

This experience has *never* been publicly evaluated by the SLL leadership - *and we challenge them, for the education of their own militants, if nothing else, to publish material on it, or to seriously dispute our account.*

We have recounted these events mainly to illustrate and to emphasise, for revolutionaries, the need for a serious, realistic perspective and corresponding tactics; other lessons are, perhaps, that the leaders of revolutionary organisations should not drive the rank-and-file to carry out impossible tasks (most of all, not with ultra-left policies and apocalyptic predictions!) and that the "record" of the SLL, which they so frequently invoke these days, is not quite as spotless as they claim.

(13) *This campaign resulted in the massive decline of the YS mentioned in the text. It was more of a failure - in terms of the proportion of existing members who resigned - than the Autumn 1968 campaign ("From YS Summer Camp to the Biggest Recruitment Drive Ever!" - front page headline in the Sept. 1968 Keep Left). We predict that "the Young Socialists' drive forward next year to build a mass revolutionary movement" (Workers Press, 16th Dec. '69) will be as big a flop.*

Chapter 2: BRITISH PERSPECTIVES AND TACTICS

If one thing is, we hope, clear from the experience outlined above, it is that it is vitally necessary for revolutionaries to have a precise, accurate analysis of the situation in which they are working; moreover, it ought to be clear that *when they make mistakes, as they will, they should recognise them, discuss them honestly and objectively, and learn from them.* Our aim in this chapter is to present our analysis of the present situation in Britain and a critique of the SLL's, with asides on the international aspects, and to draw some conclusions concerning tactics and politics.

We would have liked to have done so in the following way: first, to quote completely or extensively an analysis of the situation by the SLL, and then to criticise it and use it as a foil to set off our own analysis and proposals. Unfortunately, that is impossible, for several reasons.

The first is that, throughout the enormous volume of material published by the SLL, we can find nothing which we can regard as a serious analysis (1). The second is that what the SLL does publish is couched in a strange jargon: "pabloite" revisionists, "political" everything in sight (all strikes are political, say the SLL) (2), permanent crisis (economic, social, "world", of every other political tendency, etc.), self-contradictory pseudo-dialectics of the worst sort; and all this reduces what they do produce to the level of semi-illiteracy and incomprehensibility.

The third is that the SLL *never* (3) produces *balance-sheets* of past experiences, evaluating successes and drawing lessons from mistakes. Consequently, any one statement of theirs is so a-historical as to be, for a Marxist, virtually useless.

In view of these difficulties, we intend to adopt the following course: we shall summarise developments in Britain in the period 1966 to 1969, giving special attention to 1969, and then go in some detail into the analysis and activities of the SLL, concluding with some remarks about tactics.

(1) *The main attempts at an analysis by the SLL are:*

(a) *the Statement of the PC of the SLL dated 23/12/68 published in The Newsletter of 4th Jan. '69, and the ATUA statement in the same issue;*

(b) *the resolutions and policy statement of its 11th Congress, May 25th-27th, 1969, published in The Newsletter of May 31st, June 21st and June 24th, 1969;*

(c) *the PC Statement "A Political Challenge" dated 24th Oct. '69 and published in Workers Press of 25th Oct. '69 (see Appendix).*

(2) *Two examples of this strange language from The Newsletter of 10th May 1969, discussing the daily paper:*

"For the first time in history Trotskyists will be able to hit back against Stalinism where it politically hurts."

"You have placed great confidence in us. We will do our political best to be worthy of it."

(3) *The only partial exception is a speech of Aileen Jennings printed in the September 1969 Keep Left; unfortunately, this is extremely dishonest. It discusses "lessons" to be learned from the period 1964 to 1969:*

"Although there were rumblings of discontent with the government between the autumn of 1964 and the summer of 1966 the marked change against the right wing began in the winter of 1966."

One would never guess that in 1965 they talked of a Tory comeback! It also contains some more analytical gems:

"We can therefore see that the main vehicle for political development in the working class is determined by their relationship to their unions."

(6) *In other words...?*

Following its election at the end of March 1966 with a stable parliamentary majority, the Wilson government immediately began to implement the policies it had previously outlined to solve the historically accumulated problems of British capitalism.

Those of its policies since then which are important for us here fall into several groups: long-term measures designed to promote the modernisation and rationalisation of British industry; long-term measures designed to shackle the trade union movement to the bourgeois state; short-term steps taken in the face of particular economic difficulties; short-term steps taken to defeat particular struggles by sections of workers; international policies worked out on the basis of complete subservience to international capital.

The foreign policy of the Labour Government will not really concern us until we come to discuss the radicalisation of youth, but we note that, as was only to be expected, it is imperialist to the core: the relation between US loans to Britain and British support for the Vietnam war is obvious.

The three most important acts of the Labour Government in 1966 fall into (in chronological order) the fourth, third and first categories (4). They were: (i) the attempt to impose the incomes policy, passed through Parliament later that year, on the striking seamen in May - an attempt which was only partially successful; (ii) the emergency economic measures taken in July, involving the scrapping of the ill-fated national plan, severe deflation, and the near-resignation of George Brown from the government; (iii) the introduction of Selective Employment Tax in the autumn, which resulted in a limited increase in the cost of living, and, over a period of time, in a fairly substantial movement of labour from service to manufacturing industries.

During 1967, the outstanding events were clearly the dockers' strike and the associated strike wave in the early autumn, and the devaluation of the pound sterling in November, which was largely triggered off by the effects of the dock strike on the balance of payments. That autumn strike wave was quite important, partly because the SLL made important gains among industrial militants during it, but mainly because it was of considerable scope, and because, following Gunter's notorious "Unholy Alliance" speech and the consequent press witch-hunt, it came very close to raising the question of revolutionary politics among significant layers of workers. We should also mention the widespread opposition among students in the spring to the quadrupling of fees for overseas students at British universities.

1968 began with government economy measures - including the reimposition of charges for National Health Service prescriptions - as a belated sequel to devaluation, which was followed by the March gold crisis resulting in the establishment of the two-tier system. The May-June days in France were not followed by any large-scale industrial struggles, but by widespread radicalisation of students. The May one-day strike in the engineering industry was, however, 100% solid, and had it not been for the sell-out by the dominant sections of the Confed bureaucracy, assisted in various ways by the "left", there would have been in the autumn a very large-scale industrial struggle. One could, however, have anticipated that sell-out - while of course fighting against it - because it took place on the basis of a productivity deal, the principle if not the details of which was, as it is now, supported by all sections of the union bureaucracy.

(4) *These categories are, of course, analytical tools: we do not claim that they are separated by fixed, rigid barriers. It is also, of course, true that the policies in the different categories were worked out in relation to one another, and that even the "emergency" measures taken were the result of contingency planning in the light of long-term aims.*

During 1969, questions of a political break with Labour by large sections of workers began to be raised, mainly because of the attempt by the Labour Government to force through laws imposing penalties on certain forms of trade union activity, particularly unofficial strikes. This attempt was defeated, because the resistance of wide layers of workers - exemplified by the May Day strikes of 1/4m., the first political strikes in Britain for 50 years - was transmitted through the trade union bureaucracy and the Parliamentary Labour Party, and Wilson & Castle could obtain agreement to their proposals neither from the TUC nor from large numbers of their own backbenchers. Which is not, of course, to say that the position of either group was principled, or gave any lead to workers facing a serious attack on their basic defensive organisations; the compromise agreement between the TUC and Wilson, by which the union leaders agree to police their ranks on behalf of the employers, will in many ways, though not in all, serve the interests of the latter as well as the proposed legislation.

The Labour Party Conference, following a summer lull broken only by a number of small, if bitter, unofficial strikes (as at Port Talbot), was marked by a number of heated exchanges between the Labour Government leaders and the left bureaucrats Scanlon and Jones, which did little to conceal the refusal of the latter to put up any serious fight against the former. In fact the main struggle was over the Government's intention to maintain the Prices and Incomes Act, which had been rejected previously at the TUC conference, but was not at the L.P. Conference.

Events in Northern Ireland during 1968 and more so during 1969, while very interesting and important to an overall picture, are not directly relevant to our aims here, and we will leave them aside (5). Following the Labour Party Conference, we have witnessed a wave of strikes, paralleling those in the rest of Europe, but far less intense. Although the impact of strike struggles in Britain tends, for a given number of strikes and degree of intensity of the struggle, to be much greater than in France or Italy, the recent British strikes have in no sense brought the country near a pre-revolutionary situation; they have not, in fact, come as near to raising political questions as those of 1967 did.

The general pattern of these strikes is important to note. What has, with minor variations, happened has been: first, the strikers come out unofficially in various centres, posing big demands, and the strike quickly spreads; then, when it is clear that the workers are serious, the trade union "leaders" step in and assert their right to negotiate with the bosses on behalf of the strikers. After a certain amount of negotiating, feeling the hot breath of the strikers on their necks, these same "leaders" and employers agree on a compromise falling somewhere between the demands of the strikers and what the leaders had previously been asking for, and usually having productivity "strings" attached. The deal being completed, the leaders then instruct the strikers to go back to work, and are obeyed by the less militant sections. Finally, having isolated the more militant elements, the leaders bring pressure to bear on them and, eventually, seeing the weakness of their position, they too return. Sometimes, but not always, there is government intervention and/or a press witch-hunt (6).

What this sort of experience indicates is that, while many workers, particularly the lower-paid, are putting *economic* demands far beyond those advanced on their behalf by the leaders, it is still possible for the employers to grant monetary concessions - especially on the basis of productivity deals - which enable the leadership to reassert their control over

(5) A basically sound critique of the SLL's line on this question, and an alternative policy, can be found in Gerry Foley's article "What Strategy for Irish Revolutionists?" in *Intercontinental Press* for Oct. 27th 1969.

(6) The teachers' strike has, of course, followed a different pattern.

the men. While this reassertion of authority is by no means complete, and discontent remains within the unions, there is, except perhaps in the NUM, no sign of an opposition able to mount an organised challenge to the authority of the bureaucracies.

There are a few other aspects of Mr. Wilson's reign which need mentioning. The first is the electoral and organisational disarray of the Labour Party: it has suffered heavy defeats in a whole series of by-elections since 1966, and has been almost completely eliminated from local government. Moreover - a fact whose significance is sometimes underestimated - party membership has declined, the activists who ran the local machines, and are vital in any election, have in great numbers become demoralised and left the party; only about half the constituency parties were represented at the last conference, and party finances are not in good shape. In view of both these factors - the second of which cannot be easily changed by any swing in popular sentiment - it is probable that the Labour Party will be defeated at the next election.

The second change deserving mention is the concentration of industrial and financial capital which has been engineered by the Government, particularly through the Industrial Reorganisation Corporation. 1968 was certainly the year of the most intense merging: the Leyland Motors/BMH, GEC-AEI-EE and National Provincial/Westminster Bank mergers are only the most spectacular examples of what has taken place on a large scale in many sectors of industry.

The third significant development is the rise of racialism, particularly since the April 1968 speech of Enoch Powell. While this is very dangerous and must be combatted by all possible means, the prospects of a large, active racist or fascist movement establishing itself are, in the near future, not very great; because, the necessary basis in social discontent does not exist. In particular, the growing right-wing tendencies in the Tory Party should not be confused with an imminent fascist danger. (The to-a-certain-extent related phenomenon of Welsh and Scottish nationalism, while indicative of discontent among Labour voters and the failure of the CP in those areas, is probably transitory).

The fourth change to mention is the change in the structure of the British trade union movement: extrapolating from present trends, in the early 1970's there are likely to be four large unions with well over a million members, resulting from the amalgamation of small unions with the T&GWU (transport workers), the AEF (engineers), the NUGMWU (general & municipal) and the ETU/PTU (electricians and plumbers), and also a number of expanding "white collar" unions, such as ASTMS (technicians), and of declining unions in declining industries: NUM (miners) and NUR (railwaymen), etc. Of those mentioned, let us note that the T&GWU and AEF are led by left bureaucrats who are responsive to a certain extent to the rank-and-file, as is ASTMS, while the ETU/PTU is led by avowed anti-communists of the worst kind, and the NUGMWU passed unanimously at its last conference resolutions endorsing everything the Labour Government, or its own leaders, had done.

Before recounting the role of the SLL in these events, we should look at the radicalisation of youth, which proceeded largely independently of them, as a response to, mainly, the well-known development of the Vietnam war.

This phenomenon of youth radicalisation outside the framework of the established labour movement has taken place on an international scale in the *second* half of the 1960s; in our opinion, the developments in the Young Socialists in the period 1960-64 were its heralds. If we are right, then it is even more remarkable that the SLL, the main benefactor of the first phase, should disdain, and gain nothing from, the second.

In any case, there is something of a mystery; for in the 9th May 1964 edition of *The Newsletter* we find an editorial, entitled "Whither Youth?" which shows that the SLL leadership understood quite well the situation then:

"Perhaps the most significant feature of the crisis of world imperialism is the hostility of young people to the bureaucratic leaderships of the Communist Parties and the Labour and Social-Democratic organisations"

although they probably overestimated*the significance, or at least the endurance, of what they had already achieved:

"Both in the YCL and the YS there is a growing appreciation of the power of Marxism.

"Every informed member of the labour movement knows that the old bureaucracies have lost the youth and that a considerable number support the Socialist Labour League. Our organisation has every reason to be optimistic."

Since they were also the first tendency to pose in Britain, about April/May 1965, the demand: "Victory to the Vietcong", one would have thought that they would be well-placed to benefit from the widespread support for that demand which was soon to manifest itself. As we have tried to show, however, by mid-1966 the SLL was, in terms of membership, political understanding, ability to manoeuvre, etc., a very different organisation from what it had been fifteen months earlier; nor can its difficulties in that period have failed to have had a deep effect on its organisation and internal regime (7).

Whatever the explanation (8), the SLL walked out of a VSC meeting in August 1966, and has since then, except at Liège (9), refused to partici-

(7) *Particularly the characteristic hyper-activism, which was general by late 1963, but became all the more pronounced when the same tasks had to be fulfilled, the same face presented to the world, by a much reduced membership.*

(8) *The ostensible reason was that they were prevented from criticising Stalinism, but it is very difficult to accept. For example, why did they, on that particular occasion, find it necessary to denounce Stalinism as they did? While one must, undoubtedly, explain, in one's press and at one's own meetings, the danger which it represents to the Vietnamese revolution, there is no principle which states, nor any sound tactical argument to the effect, that one must always, in every meeting, do so. Even the SLL is aware of this sort of situation: on that famous occasion when Gerry Healy spoke in Trafalgar Square from the same platform as Harold Wilson, during the Labour Party's campaign against the Tories' invasion of Suez, he did not renounce the man next to him, even though he was well aware of the perfidious role played, historically, by social-democracy in relation to the liberation struggle of the colonial peoples.*

(9) *This weird episode needs bringing out into the light of day. What happened was that, at the invitation of the Belgian J.G.S., revolutionary socialist youth organisations from most European countries attended a demonstration, in Oct. 1966 in Liège, against NATO and the war in Vietnam. From Britain and France there came the YS and their sister organisation the Révoltes group. Undoubtedly they provided a large proportion of the demonstrators. For some reason best known to themselves, the top leadership chose, as the demonstration was assembling, to produce before their startled followers banners commemorating the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. (It was, of course, about the 10th Anniversary.) These banners were not among those agreed to at a previous meeting with the J.G.S., although all the banners then agreed upon were carried. In addition, the YS contingent were instructed to shout special slogans different from those they "fought for" in*

pate in any such activities, merely sniping from the side-lines at a movement which, with their organisation, press and cadre, they could have led. In September of that year they embarked on the take-over bid for the National Association of Labour Student Organisations which was, after a certain amount of strife, to lead to the dissolution at their hands of that organisation.

While the fight in NALSO was continuing, after the overseas students' fees issue, a fairly large demonstration was held in London on October 22nd 1967 in solidarity with the Vietnamese, on which there was a fair amount of fighting with the police. During the next few months support continued to grow for the Vietnamese revolution, and on March 17th 1968 a very large demonstration was held in London, culminating in much fighting with the police in Grosvenor Square (10). Just previously there took place a YS-SLL demonstration organised through students' unions in Yorkshire Universities over the cut in prospective increases in students' grants which had just been announced by the Government. In our opinion, this SLL initiative was absolutely correct; while the demonstration was unsuccessful, this was because the social democracy and National Union of Students leadership strangled it, the IS also playing an unadmirable, though very minor, role.

Accompanying and following the May-June events in France, there was an enormous wave of radicalisation in British universities and colleges: Hornsey, LSE, Hull, Guildford, Oxford, Birmingham, etc. Here the SLL's role was less than honourable: it generally stood back, shouting advice/abuse at the top of its voice (11). Simultaneously it accentuated its attacks on Che Guevara (12), and on the culture of the radicalised youth. To take a recent example of this astonishing approach, *Keep Left*, September 1969, has an article - by one of the League's best writers, Brian Moore - on the pop concert last summer on the Isle of Wight. Its title: "Prophets of Profit". Now while that article, unlike most such, is well-written, it remains true that such an approach *prevents one from finding any road to the youth*. One can only conclude, after three years of snide attacks, gloating over difficulties of VSC and misrepresenting its policies, of sharp comments on cultural issues which are *in no sense principled*, that for some reason the SLL is content *not* to approach the youth.

(10) For further details, particularly international aspects, of the anti-Vietnam war movement, see *Marxist Youth Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1.

(11) At a later stage it played a better role at LSE, but not at Hull, Oxford, etc.

(12) While having quietly dropped the allegation that Castro murdered him.

Britain; for example, "Victory to the NLF" instead of "Victory to Vietcong"; and also "Forward to the Socialist United States of Europe". The banners about Hungary were, of course, out of place on an anti-imperialist united-front demonstration which included various YCLs (though not intrinsically incorrect). The SLL-OCI leadership alleged that police, with guns, were called by Mandel and/or his co-thinkers; this was presumably related in some way to the series of incidents about that time where, in Britain, CPs called the police to remove YS-SLL comrades from demonstrations.

Exactly what the SLL-OCI leaders imagined they were achieving is unclear; one can only say that, since they placed threats of expulsion on branches which did not meet their quota of demonstrators, it was very important to them that they were able to embark on that cross-channel ship with 496 cadres.

During the summer of 1968, the start of the next University term and the October 27th Vietnam demonstration were major talking points in the British press. There was a witch-hunt, which was not, as Cliff Slaughter in "A Balance Sheet of Revisionism" tries to suggest, part of some subtle plot by the bourgeoisie to divert attention from the SLL, but an attempt not so much to intimidate the youth as to mobilise *conservative* middle-class opinion against the revolutionary left of *every* tendency, and (which Slaughter ought to realise) against the threatened engineering strike (remember the "Unholy Alliance"!). At the same time, despite some mistakes which, in our opinion, it made, the IS group grew very rapidly.

The October 27th demonstration was, of course, an enormous success, though the various struggles in the Universities, particularly at LSE, were less so. It took place, as Slaughter admits in "A Balance Sheet of Revisionism", and "Robert Black" recently slanderously denied, on the basis of calling for Harold Wilson to support the NLF, though, of course, no one imagined that he would, any more than the SLL imagines its latest campaign will prevent Wilson's visit to Washington.

Since then, of course, the youth movement has waned rapidly throughout Europe. The reasons for this are unclear: one can seek them in the turn, by most left organisations, away from defence of the Vietnamese revolution, and in the various peace manoeuvres, but one cannot be sure one has found them; moreover, even if one had it would not give one a magic key to solving the problem of how to reactivate it. (We suspect that the course of the Vietnamese revolution, through new NLF victories, may do so). But the time is appropriate for drawing a genuine, although tentative, balance sheet.

The first, and most important, lesson is that every left-wing organisation, with the exceptions of the CP and the SLL, has experienced a considerable growth of its forces, and these can, if necessary, be turned to work in other fields; thus the participation in the movement is justified. The second lesson is that, although considerable moral support has been given to the Vietnamese, the material impact of the movement has (except in the U.S.) been extremely limited; outside Australia, we know of no cases where it has been possible to organise workers to black goods, carry out sabotage, etc. (13). The third lesson is that the 75,000 to 100,000 who marched fifteen months ago against the war in Vietnam must still be around somewhere, probably with much the same sentiments, and that it ought to be possible, perhaps on a local rather than a national level, to find a road to them. The fourth is - and it must be admitted - that the number of young people of middle and lower proletarian origin involved in the movement has been strictly limited, and a road to them must be found in the future; those who have been mobilised are, all too often, hostile to or suspicious of the workers' movement.

Most probably, in our opinion, one important way in which a road to the proletarian youth *will* be opened will be by contacting them as they are involved in the growing number of industrial struggles and movements which we confidently expect. Let us also not forget the need to link up with working-class women, particularly through the movement for women's equal rights.

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Before going on to discuss how the SLL sees the world today, we should say what they did in the struggles mentioned above. In the 1966 Seamen's strike, they played an entirely honourable role, fighting against sabotage by the CP to extend the strike to the dockers who faced the implementation of the Devlin modernisation scheme. After it, however, the "dialecticians"

(13) *The movement in the U.S. Army also seems promising.*

of the leadership, in their strange world of two-valued logic, felt it necessary to counterpose to the CP's claim that the outcome was a victory, the notion that it was a defeat and a betrayal. In fact, it was far more complicated: substantial concessions were won, but their implementation was partially delayed, and productivity concessions were given by the leadership.

In the 1967 dockers' strike the SLL again played an entirely honourable role; even though in a small minority on the strike committee on Merseyside, they were very influential among the men, leading them to win considerable concessions; this is, undoubtedly, one of the main factors behind the (economic) radicalisation of the working class throughout the Merseyside, who have seen the government defeated in struggle. In most other disputes in which they were involved, their role was essentially correct, though naturally enough they have a tendency to exaggerate it. Possible exceptions are the Barbican, ENV and Roberts-Arundel disputes, where they tended to make carping criticisms, from the side-lines and afterwards.

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It is clear from the first section that the SLL was, during the first half of the 1960s, consistently making gross errors concerning the scope and immediacy of "the economic crisis", and over-optimistically assessing leftward movements and more militant tendencies among the workers. Indeed, as we have tried to show, during 1964-65 it became utterly disoriented, and suffered severe setbacks as a result.

We would be pleased to report that it learned the lesson of those events, and is more cautious and balanced today. Unfortunately, we cannot do so, since with one curious exception it seems to have learned nothing. And thereby hangs a tale!

For a while after the 1966 election, they continued to show the same carefree indifference to "the facts" of economic and political life; they were especially concerned with the danger of unemployment (14). *Keep Left* in particular kept tilting at this windmill: the issue of Sept. 1966 carries a front-page open letter to the TUC, by the Editor, headlined: "Must We Be Unemployed Again"; it also carries a report by Jean Kerrigan of an (independent) YS NC meeting: "The working class has been told to expect a million unemployed this winter - this is a conservative estimate." In January 1967, we are told: "The end of the boom period, following the mass destruction of men and machines in the Second World War, is shown daily in the rising figures of unemployment throughout the capitalist world." In November 1967, we read of "the alarming growth of unemployment which is now beginning to affect large numbers of young people" (15). A

(14) *Healy, of course, joined the Trotskyist movement in the '30s.*

(15) *That issue features, under the headline "Make the Left MP's Fight", a YS NC statement dated 22nd Oct. '67, which reveals an impressionist reaction - of a type we will meet again - to the temporary strike wave then taking place. By way of illustration, compare the following quotation with the extract from the 1968 SLL Conference Resolution quoted in Chapter 4:*

"During the (1968 YS) Conference we shall be seriously discussing the possibility of adopting Parliamentary candidates for the next General Election. Although we disagreed sharply with Wilson in the last General Election we nevertheless supported the election of a Labour government against the Tories, *but the time is rapidly approaching when a reappraisal is necessary.*" (Emphasis added).

Let us also remark that the same YS NC statement is exceptionally dishonest when it discusses the break with the Labour Party.

demonstration and lobby of Parliament against unemployment were duly organised on Dec. 12th 1967.

Some time during the next year the penny seems to have dropped that all this was not quite right, so that nowadays articles and statements in the SLL press never say the situation "is" such and such, "will" become something else, but rather "may be" and "might be", or "would" and "could" change in a given manner. Moreover, the opinions of bourgeois authorities are cited: "X thinks that", "it is widely feared", etc. Let us say that this *refusal to commit themselves* is a singularly undignified sight. It is, what is more, a thoroughly dishonest trick, since stress is invariably laid on the difficulties of capitalism, on authoritative predictions of disaster; the possible courses of action open to the bourgeoisie, the other authorities' attitudes, the less catastrophic possible courses of development, are neglected or by-passed completely. So that, as we shall see, the only conclusion one can draw is that in fact they believe that what they say "might" happen will happen, but are scared to say so explicitly. A fine "alternative leadership"!

Bearing in mind this new obstacle placed in our path, let us attempt to discover what analysis of the situation has been presented by the SLL during 1969.

Happily, the first issue of *The Newsletter* in 1969, that of January 4th, contains "A warning from the ATUA" which is unusually forthright:

"1969 promises to be one of the most decisive years in the history of the trade union movement. Government legislation, which makes unofficial strikes illegal and virtually destroys the trade unions, is on the way.

"A new world economic crisis is beginning to take root in all the major capitalist countries. As in 1931, the capitalists have only one solution to offer.

"They are considering raising the price of gold, devaluing paper currency and creating a world recession. This will bring with it millions of unemployed, great suffering, with the dangers of a third world nuclear war.

"The Labour government, which is continuously attacking the trade unions, will very likely be forced to resign should a second devaluation of sterling take place. In that event, a Tory government, pledged to all-out war against the working class and the trade unions, seems a likely possibility."

But the P.C. of the SLL is more cautious (emphasis added):

"We have now entered a period which, *whatever its details*, is characterized by an irreversible tendency to economic crisis and breakdown. These developments have already led to an intensification of the class struggle throughout Europe, the logic of which is a struggle for power by the working class ..."

"One serious clash with the trade unions, one major wage-cut or an attack on unemployment benefit, the next devaluation - any one of these or a combination of them *could* bring the fall of the government and the consequent large Conservative majority.

"Heath has announced the anti-trade union content of this next government's policy. Castle's new law is the response and indicates, as does the AEF sell-out, the role of *Labour and trade union leaders* in backing the Tory policy, or even *joining the government* ..."

"The crisis of the capitalist system has reached proportions where the class struggle must enter a new phase, in which the problems of revolution and counter-revolution are posed."

while Peter Jeffries, in discussing "Economic Prosepects for 1969" on 7th Jan. is positively coy:

"Not only is there widespread *expectation* and preparation for a major trade war between the leading capitalist countries. There is also *considerable fear* of immediate convulsions in the world financial system ..."

"*Nobody* anticipates that world trade will expand at anything like this rate (i.e. 7% - TW) in 1969. *Many commentators* are convinced that the rate will be at least halved.

"And with good reason. There is *considerable alarm* about the course which the American economy will take over the next 12 months..."

"A large devaluation of the franc *is expected* in the early part of the year which *would* lead to an inevitable collapse of the pound only a little over a year after the last devaluation..."

"Under Johnson, the preservation of the existing dollar price of gold was an article of faith.

"A dollar devauuation *would* disrupt the entire monetary arrangements. It *would* reprsset a declaration of economic warfare by the Americans against Europe..."

"But many sectors of big business are clearly convinced that these plans (of Wilson) go nowhere near far enough and are preparing for the return of a right-wing Tory government.

"In any case (sic) a major confrontation between the unions and the state or further chaos in the world currency market *would certainly* force out this present government.

"These are some of the great changes which are being prepared by the development of the economic crisis over the next year (emphasis added)."

a well-advised policy which he also follows on the 11th:

"(American tariffs) *could* have a disastrous impact on world trade in the coming year.

"The Americans are responsible for one-sixth of world trade and they provide one of the richest markets for the exports of West Germany, Japan and Britain..."

"The *possibility* is that Nixon *may* opt for import controls as an alternative to an immediate rise in the gold price.

"Such a move *would* allow some time for the new Administration to work out its strategy for the international monetary system now on the edge of collapse.

"But the imposition of higher tariffs *could* in any case precipitate the devaluation of either the French franc or sterling.

"With world trade *expected* to expand only slowly in the coming year, any further tightening of American import policy *could* lead to a series of competitive devaluations by the European capitalists as they fight to gain access to this market.

"In other words, *should* the new American Administration decide to embark on tough import curbs, the result *would* only be similar to an increase in the dollar price of gold.

"It *would* accelerate all those tendencies towards a major trade war between the present capitalist economies which the present economic crisis makes inevitable (emphasis again added)."

There can surely, from this sort of stuff, be little doubt that the SLL *did* anticipate some, probably most, of the things it described as being possible. Particularly since it mentioned *no* other possibilities. Recalling conversations with SLL members, we take that as established.

How, then, should we react to such slipshod work? Well, first of all we can ask the comrades concerned for an explanation of it; meanwhile, we must try to understand it for ourselves. Fortunately, the lead articles in *The Newsletter* of January 7th and 11th provide a useful insight:

"T.U.C. PREPARING TO ACCEPT ANTI-STRIKE LAWS

by our industrial correspondent

"All the indications are that when the TUC General Council meets on Tuesday of this week (January 7) it will decide to accept the Labour government's new proposals for legislation against the trade unions."

"Behind the left talk

"T.U.C. WILL CAPITULATE

by G. Healy

"The decision of the TUC to reject the Labour government's proposal for curbing trade union rights is not worth the paper it was written on. Neither is that of the AEF.

"Trade union leaders, from the right-winger Woodcock to the so-called 'left-winger' Hugh Scanlon, will hide behind protests and resolutions but they will *not* take industrial action to defeat this government - and only such action is now of any use..."

"Right now, as they (Wilson & Co.) are preparing to curb trade unionism by what virtually amounts to an Order in Council, they know full well that a major economic crisis is on the way as soon as Nixon takes over the Presidency of the United States.

"Devaluation

"They know also that such a crisis may well lead to a second devaluation and that it is highly doubtful if a Labour government would survive.

"Under these conditions we could have a Tory government in Britain before very long. This would take over where the Labour government left off and the result could be a spate of the most reactionary legislation against the trade unions, as well as Public Order Acts against the working-class movement.

"*The way would be paved for a Tory Bonapartist government...*"

"The class-collaboration reformist (?) policy of the TUC is the road to dictatorship.

"The entire trade union movement is now in grave danger. It is being tied hand and foot to the capitalist state without a shot (?) being fired.

"This is the road of the German social democratic Weimar Republic. It was the road along which Hitler travelled to power.

"No effort must be spared to rouse the masses to action.

"It is far better to defeat the Wilson government in a political general strike than to allow the Tories to come to power in the wake of the TUC betrayal of a labour movement which they previously paralyzed by protests and 'left' talk.

"The trade unions founded the Labour Party. Now the Labour Party is

out to destroy the trade unions. The time has certainly come to join the Socialist Labour League in order to build the revolutionary party and defend the trade unions." (original emphasis)

We apologise for presenting at such length all these quotations; it is necessary to establish what the SLL leaders say, and presumably think.

Now in our opinion these quotations are all symptomatic of a *crude oversimplification* of reality, following from an abandonment of dialectical thinking. Recall Trotsky's words:

"Dialectical thinking gives to concepts, by means of closer approximations, corrections, concretisation, a richness of content and flexibility; I would even say a succulence which to a certain extent brings them close to living phenomena." ("In Defence of Marxism", p. 65)

Now one could hardly describe the League's prognostications as succulent...

Instead, it seems to us that their thinking is non-dialectical, evolutionary, fails to take into account the real interplay of social forces.

Thus: first, based on the knowledge that the bureaucracy tends to betray, we have the prediction that they will do so in a simple, straightforward way - irrespective of the masses - by capitulating. Then, when they don't, without a word of explanation of the previous mistake, we have the assertion that (because the bureaucracy tends to betray) it already has, its tactical manoeuvres are meaningless. The political consequences for the SLL are frightening. For read again the picture it presents. The trade unions are going to be destroyed (4th Jan.) There will be millions of unemployed, great suffering, possibly a third world war (also 4th Jan.) Moreover, who is going to do anything about it? Not the union leaders (7th Jan.). Still not the union leaders (11th Jan.) A fascist dictatorship is likely (Comp. with Hitler, 11th Jan.) What can prevent it? Only industrial action...a political general strike (11th Jan. again). What else is necessary? What should one do? Build the SLL (again 11th Jan.)

But hang-on there, says any worker who's actually followed it all that far. How big is the SLL? And how do I build it? Not getting any answer, he thinks a bit more, and says: well, things are bad and getting dreadful, and the only thing that can prevent a dictatorship is a political general strike. Moreover, everyone around except the SLL - which is really small - is hell-bent on bringing about this destruction. Can the SLL really stop it? If not - and the chances of a political general strike are small - is it worth my while sticking my neck out? So, if he accepted the League's premises, he probably concludes it isn't, since Hitler's concentration camps are not a pleasant prospect. More likely, he rips the paper up. But in either case, the SLL can hardly have been said to have "spared no effort in rousing the masses". "Cowing the masses" would be a better term.

The economic perspectives show just the same impressionism, and just the same absence of any perspective which can lead workers to hope "the economic crisis" can be overcome, or its effects averted. The argument works very simply:

The price of gold is rising (e.g. *The Newsletter*, 14th Jan: "Gold price reaches a peak"), therefore it will go higher (17th Jan: "US Expert predicts (sic) GOLD PRICE MAY BE TREBLED". One had, of course, already predicted on the 4th some such increase).

There is talk in the press about Nixon changing U.S. policy on gold, therefore he will do so, and "a major economic crisis" will follow immediately.

There is talk in the press about the government falling, splits in the cabinet, etc., therefore a "Tory Bonapartist government" is on the

way (for Healy says nothing about any other possibility).

Now we think that the failing of the SLL, which leads it to make all these unfulfilled prophecies, is impressionism; we don't intend here to go into the question why, foaming at the mouth against the impressionism of others, they make such mistakes... That is their duty to explain, not ours. What will be more valuable will be to examine the consequences politically of these mistakes for the SLL.

Firstly, the SLL leaders are unable to understand what on earth is going on in the world outside their offices; because they have some *normative idea* of "the crisis", which sometimes seems to correspond to 1931 in Britain, at others to 1929 in Germany, they spend their time contemplating the horizon on the hope that harbingers of the happy dawn will sooner or later be seen there. No surprisingly, they thus acquire a tendency to trip over the smallest obstacle. For example, at a time when **there are revolutionary currents** among the youth, but only ferment over economic demands in the unions, they put forward the proposal: a general strike to bring down the Wilson government! Not the slightest notice is taken of it, even by their own followers, who campaign for the more moderate aim of a protest strike against the government's measures, to discourage it. But when an opponent brings it up, they become rather embarrassed...

Secondly, large numbers of youth and trade unionists are repelled by this sterile, dogmatic inability to see what is at the end of one's nose, by the continued never-fulfilled prophecies (since before it was elected!) of the collapse of the Labour government at the hands of the crisis.

Thirdly, many other militants, recruited on the basis of other, more positive aspects of the SLL's activities, either become disorientated too (particularly the YS members), or, after - for reasons into which we will not go - finding it impossible to change even the most elementary errors, leave the organisation.

Fourthly, as the months and years go by, the SLL presents itself to the world - under the banner of Trotskyism! - more and more as a malicious caricature of the worst features (16) of third period Stalinism. This has been analysed by Germain (17), in its early phase; we gave an example, in relation to the trade union legislation, just above.

In view of the importance for the British working class of the campaign against those laws during 1969, it's worth going into it in further detail. The high point of the struggle was undoubtedly the May Day strike of $\frac{1}{2}$ million workers; in the campaign for that strike, and the associated struggles, the SLL and its militants were to the fore. Most probably, the militants would have been able to extend the influence of their organisation considerably, were it not for the influence on them of the more esoteric ideas of their leadership.

These ideas were outlined in two lead articles in *The Newsletter*: "SLL says: Strike Against Anti-Union Laws on May 1st" on March 8th, and "All Out May 1. No Anti-Union Laws! Wilson Must Go!", on April 19th. The second of these is explicitly a statement of the SLL's PC, the first probably is, on internal evidence. They are worth reading!

The first occupies approximately 26 column-inches of the paper, of which $10\frac{1}{2}$ are given over to a denunciation of the CP. Now the role of the

(16) *The third period Stalinists, while raving about "the final crisis of capitalism", also took seriously "the battle for the streets"!*

(17) *"Marxism versus Ultraleftism", Ch. 11. To our knowledge, two members - Cdes. Mike Banda and Cliff Slaughter - of the ruling triumvirate of the SLL are familiar with that analysis.*

CP, in its alliance with "left" bureaucrats in the unions, has been perfidious, and what is required is to build a fighting alliance with the discontented elements of the CP rank and file, through which present struggles may be won, and at the same time, these CP members can be drawn towards revolutionary Marxism.

In the struggle to do this, it is necessary: to combine, on the one hand, propaganda to and effective collaboration with CP militants; on the other, the offer of a United Front in specific campaigns to the CP leadership, so that workers, particularly CP militants, can judge *by their actions* the roles of CP leaders and of revolutionary marxists.

Clearly, then, propaganda directed to CP militants must be very carefully written; in particular, its tone must be such as to receive a hearing among some, at least, of the discontented. And it is here - echoing Thaelmann - that the SLL falls down:

"The Communist Party does not want a real showdown with Wilson. Its leaders are still up to their old bogus game of 'mass pressure'. That is the reason for their unprincipled alliance with Michael Foot, who has covered up all along the line for Wilson. This was also revealed when they forcibly and physically manhandled a young shop steward who is a member of the Socialist Labour League because (?) he dared denounce the reactionary right wing role of the TUC. And who can deny that the TUC's role is reactionary? (As a matter of fact, the millions of workers who still follow it - TW).

"This is a confirmation (?) of Stalinism as it was before, during and after the Second World War, and as it is now, 16 years after Stalin's death." (original emphasis)

Now most of the bits of this that mean anything are, except the physical manhandling of which we know nothing, not fundamentally wrong. But politically and tactically they are almost catastrophic, and the emphasis on Stalinism "as it was, is now, and ever more shall be" *is* wrong: one of the most important aspects of the current crisis of Stalinism is that it is *now possible* to approach CP militants, on a whole range of political and tactical questions, in a way which was not possible, particularly in Britain, before, during or immediately after World War II. Which is not to deny that the CP leaders have continued Stalinism, are still counter-revolutionary, and have abandoned even revolutionary language. But the *way one approaches* militants *still* influenced by these leaders is decisive.

It is also true that to say "Michael Foot has covered up all along the line for Wilson", while trying to express a correct idea, is insufficient in the text of an article *which begins*: "By voting against the government, Labour MP's have revealed the deepest split yet in the Parliamentary Labour Party." (18)

But we won't discuss the role of the "left" MPs further here; the rest of the SLL statement is more important. After the heaps of propagandistic abuse of the CP leadership, we have the following paragraphs:

"Our conflict with the Stalinists is something that can only be settled within the working class movement. We seek no allies whatsoever outside the working class.(19)

(18) *And is printed next to an article containing a list of MPs who voted against Wilson...a list including Michael Foot!*

(19) *This curious remark, which undoubtedly represents a tactical principle of the SLL, should be compared with the following extract from "Left-Wing Communism":*

"..how is the discipline of the proletariat's revolutionary party maintained? How is it tested? How is it reinforced? ... Second, by

"That is why we consider that the struggle against the anti-trade union laws is vital as part of our conflict with the reformist policies of the Communist Party..."

"Rest assured we will support (discontented CP members) in all forms of joint activity against the anti-trade union laws.

"We appeal to them in turn to defend the right of our trade union members to make their opinions heard in meetings and demonstrations during the course of this joint activity.

"We will fight shoulder to shoulder with all those in the working-class movement who fight this major threat against trade unionism, but we will politically differentiate ourselves (sic) from policies which we believe can lead the working class to defeat and disaster.

"The Political Committee of the Socialist Labour League believes that the next stage of the fight against anti-trade union laws should be a one-day strike on Thursday, May 1.

"We will work to make this a success and we are open now, as always, to any suggestions which may come from the Communist Party or others in relation to the possibility of a more suitable date being selected for such a demonstration."

Now that is not too bad! It proposes, quite reasonably and intelligently - though in complete contrast to the previous Stalinophobia - a fighting alliance between SLL and CP militants, a "United Front from below". What is more, almost imperceptibly, it proposes "A United Front From Above" to the CP: "We are open to any suggestion from the CP or others." It was not done well - merely as an aside in an unemphasised paragraph of an article which previously attacked CP leaders who "still retain their essential counter-revolutionary role" (why is one open to their suggestions?) - but the wonder is that it was done at all!

Unfortunately, any friends and well-wishers of the SLL who thought that it might be seriously, even if in a confused way, employing the United Front from above as a tactic to win to revolutionary politics people still following Gollan & Co., were soon to be disappointed (20). Perhaps the previous suggestions were a slip of the pen or a momentary aberration; we do not know. But the next statement, on 19th April, contains no sign of such an approach.

Instead, occupying approximately 23 column-inches, it is divided up as follows: the quotation immediately below, about 5½"; *propaganda*, of an oversimplified sort, against the union leaders, about 8½"; *propaganda* for revolution, about 5"; the programme of the SLL, about 4":

"In order to save the declining value of sterling and improve the competitive power of the bankrupt British capitalist system Wilson, Castle and company have entered into the most sinister conspiracy against the organized (?) working class.

"They want to deprive it of its only (?) means of defence - the trade unions and the right to strike.

(20) But see our discussion of the latest turn in Chapter 5.

its ability to link up, maintain the closest contact, and - if you wish - merge, in certain measure, with the broadest masses of the working people - primarily with the proletariat, but also with the non-proletarian masses of working people." (Original emphasis. V.I. Lenin, "Selected Works", Vol 3, Moscow, 1967, p. 340).

"This is the *only* meaning of Mrs. Castle's White Paper 'In Place of Strife'. It is a declaration of war - *total war* - against the working class and its leadership. (original emphasis)

"Let there be no mistake about it. *No amount of pressure* or petitioning will make Wilson and Castle change their minds.

"The *greatest crime* is committed by those such as the Communist Party and 'left' Labour leaders who delude (?) sections of the working class with the *illusory hope* that Wilson's government can be forced to adopt *different* policies by pressure, or that the TUC, if recalled, will fight Wilson. (emphasis added)

"Those who live on such hopes must surely die in despair."

This is indescribably bad. The Wilson government *was* forced, by *pressure*, to change its policies. The new ones, we freely admit, are more dangerous in some ways, less in others. But they're not the same! Moreover, having in one column described the CP - apparently as a whole - as committing the "greatest crime", the SLL compounded the sin of erecting obstacles on the road to breaking CP militants from their leaders by having, in the next column, an article beginning:

"STALINISTS PLAY DOWN ANTI-UNION STRUGGLE (sic)

"Leading Stalinists who spoke at last Saturday's (April 12) conference of the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions have as little intention of fighting the government's anti-union legislation as the TUC General Council."

We are, as a matter of fact, very near to discovering the basic error in the SLL's strategic analysis, but just continue for a few more lines to investigate their criticisms of the CP. The author of the article just quoted explains the CP proposals, which include a demand that

"The (TUC) general council should (a) re-call the 1968 Trades Union Congress and (b) recommend the calling of a 24-hour national strike."

This he dismisses as follows:

"Everyone (!) knows that the only (?) desire of the TUC is to find some means of compromising with Wilson."

Now his article criticises, correctly, the failure of the CP stewards to call explicitly for a 1-day strike *on May 1st*. But this last quotation is very strange in a paper whose editorial says:

"Of course (?), as a minimum (?) demand we support the re-call conference of the TUC, but it is necessary to say right now that nothing (!) will come of it, because this government is going to continue regardless."

Now this is just incomprehensible. Why do we support, in the editorial, "of course", a demand of which nothing will come? Is this not, as D. Maude says in his accompanying article about the Stalinists, attempting to create illusions in people "everyone" has already seen through? If it were, if everyone *had* seen through them, then it would, of course, not be very successful in recreating those illusions... But since in fact rather few people have seen through the TUC general council, would it not be better to say: (i) that in our opinion the TUC leaders are all too likely to sell out in some way (not necessarily by a simple capitulation); (ii) that a movement of the rank and file must be built, which will fight to prevent the laws being put through, using the 1-day strike and other means; (iii) that, in order to involve in this movement workers who either

have illusions in or see no alternative to the TUC leaders - and also to bring pressure on those leaders - we advance the demand that the TUC Congress be recalled, and propose that, when recalled, it should decide on a 24-hour national strike. That seems to us to be the right approach, and is one of ten different things that issue of *The News-Letter* tries to recommend. But a doctor who wrote on the prescription that of the items he was prescribing, half were no good, would he have a good effect on the patient?

That "everyone", however, was really the key to the SLL's disorientation. Recall the wild revolutionary phraseology of "total war" that the PC Statement began with. Now the legislation - which has been dropped - was fairly similar to the Taft-Hartley laws in the U.S., which have been in force for two decades without crushing the American proletariat beneath their iron heel. In Britain, a step towards reactionary American labour legislation is indicative of the plans of the bourgeoisie to change the relationship of class forces - and must be (and was, successfully) fought. But who can talk seriously of "total war"?

Well, the PC of the SLL can. Here is an extract from the revolutionary propaganda - *which is the SLL's immediate perspective* - in the middle of the statement (emphasis as original):

"Intervention by the DEP, PIB and CIR (Department of Employment & Productivity, Prices & Incomes Board, Commission on Industrial Relations - TW) - and now the proposed Industrial Relations Reform Bill - mean that the political struggle has assumed a revolutionary character.

"We say unequivocally:

"EITHER the dictatorship of Wilson and, after him, a right-wing semi-fascist dictatorship of Tories,

"OR a workers' government based on workers councils and the trade unions with a socialist home and foreign policy.

"That is the choice."

(Why should the dictator Wilson step down for the semi-fascist Tories? It's a strange matter but we won't pursue it...)

Yes, as Germain said they ought to be, on their premises, the SLL are now putting forward the demand: "Workers Councils! SLL To Power!" The Workers Councils we have just seen explicitly, the rest is implicit in their denunciations of everyone else and the programme the PC concludes with:

"*For a gigantic anti-union laws strike on May 1!
(Demonstrate with the YS-SLL on May 4th!)...

"*Out with all anti-trade union legislation!

"*Smash the White Paper!

"*Nationalize the banks and industries without compensation and under workers' control!

"*'Left' MPs oppose Wilson!

"*Join the Socialist Labour League and build the alternative revolutionary leadership!

"*Forward to socialism!"

This is a strange and repulsive mixture. First, as a slogan, "Join our Party" is strange...presumably the purpose of the party is to, among other things, recruit those who agree with it. What is more, presumably

even the most backward worker, has he heard of the SLL, will recognise that one of its purposes in life is to recruit on those terms. Second, if workers councils are the *only* alternative to a dictatorship, as was claimed just previously, is not the SLL encouraging parliamentary illusions by calling on the Left MPs to fight? And third, while saying "Forward to socialism", don't these demands leave a large part of the route unclear? For, while we can demonstrate with the YS-SLL, we can strike on May 1st, we can carry banners with the other demands, we can even, if so inclined, join the YS-SLL. But where do we go from there? In this issue of their paper, the SLL give no answer: since they say "Workers Councils!" "Join Us!" "Forward to Socialism!", they seem to be putting forward the demand, if not absolutely explicitly, "SLL to Power", at the same time as calling on the Left MPs to fight... A curious state of affairs.

But of course, the SLL leaders don't really believe in the demand SLL to power. They know, as well as anyone else, that of the 55m people in Great Britain, at least 54m would not recognise the name of the SLL. And that of those who would, a large proportion, seeing Healy & Co. shouting "us to power" outside Clapham High Street, would carefully cross over and walk by on the other side of the road, perhaps pausing to telephone a doctor. That is why, in April 1969, the League had to disguise the demand, while giving an analysis from which no other demand flowed, and yet making other demands as well.

(As for us, we should, perhaps, explain our attitude to the demand "SLL to power". If the situation were correct for such a demand, we would support it. In the circumstances...)

Of course, this analysis was replaced, at the SLL conference in May, with a call for a recalled Labour Party Conference...yet more pandering to illusions, one might think, in a situation where Workers Councils were so urgently required. But the fact which explains the "revolutionary" phraseology (which in practice confuses the SLL's followers, if no one else) is: The SLL leadership believes, simultaneously, that there is and that there is not a revolutionary situation in Britain.

The second, we deduce from their more sensible slogans: Make the Left MPs Fight! Recalled Labour Party Conference! The first, which explains all the third period (21) language, is quite explicit. Let us therefore investigate this strange discovery, made by the SLL alone, that the situation is pre-revolutionary in Britain.

This is what *The Newsletter* said on May 10th 1969:

"The lessons are clear.

"The attacks by the Labour government on the unions now take place against the background of an economic and financial crisis that *could* explode within the next weeks or months.

"In such a crisis a further sterling devaluation *would* be certain as well as the collapse of an already shaken Labour government.

"*This pre-revolutionary situation* demands, more than ever, the building of the Socialist Labour League if the working class are to avoid (sic) the sort of defeats that were inflicted on them with the collapse of capitalism in the 1930s" (emphasis added. (22))

(21) Remember, Trotsky opposed the demand: KPD to Power which was the content of the irresponsible antics of Thaelmann, Manuilsky, Stalin...Trotsky called for a KPD-SPD United Front from Above to defeat Fascism, because only in that way could a revolutionary upsurge of the German workers be prepared. The SLL, as we shall see, has a different approach.

(22) "New Economic Crisis on the Way (sic)" by Peter Jeffries. In truth, we are sorry to keep picking on this comrade, whom we regard rather as the victim of orders to hew to the Triumvirs' line than as genuinely culpable.

We will try, later on, to discuss the contradiction between the delusions of grandeur expressed in the SLL's theory, and their day to day practice. Meanwhile, we shall content ourselves with further documentation of their "analysis".

For it would be extremely unjust of us to judge the SLL by the writings of even its most distinguished economic analyst. It would be especially unjust to do so when the political perspectives resolution of its XIth Annual Conference, May 25, 26 & 27, 1969, are available in *The Newsletter* (issues of 21st and 24th June, 1969).

This resolution, "The political perspectives of the SLL", is, in our opinion, typical of the low level of theory in that organisation. It contains the usual dishonest criticisms of "the Pabloites" and "the revisionists". It is *incoherent, self-contradictory*. While it is utterly unable to evaluate what the SLL has done in the past (23), it devotes paragraph after paragraph to a marxist-sounding, but essentially *mechanical*, analysis of the "struggle inside the SLL" and "the development of revolutionary theory". We don't want to deal with its more confused, jargon-ridden sections, because we shall discuss the SLL PC's statement "A Political Challenge" in detail, and one can have too much of a good thing. But we urge our readers to get hold of those issues of *The Newsletter* and see if our comments are not justified. (24)

Here, however, is the resolution's assessment of the current (May '69) situation in Britain:

"Wilson's decision to press ahead for an early decision on this (anti-union) legislation reflects the urgency of the problem facing the ruling class. In this situation the problem of *political* leadership of the working class in a struggle for power (sic) is decisive. "In short, the situation is rapidly becoming pre-revolutionary as a result, firstly, of the inability (?) of the ruling class to continue to ensure its dominance through the old methods (?) and secondly, the combativity of the working class, which enables it to raise demands which are incompatible with continued bourgeois rule. Wages struggles merge directly (??) with the political struggle against the government's anti-union legislation." (original emphasis)

It assesses the prospects of the Labour Government:

"These last months (sic) of the sixth Labour government in Britain

(23) *With the exception of the following:*

"As the decisive struggle approaches, the pressure inside the SLL becomes very great because of the steps taken by the bourgeoisie to put off the crisis. The effect is contradictory in the dialectical (sic) sense: these postponements of crisis allow crucial time for the political preparations of the revolutionary party; but they also place intolerable strain on the idealist, formal conception of automatic or simple development of revolution; and this strain is increased by the demands made on these same idealists by the conscious elements in the SLL leadership in the fight for the daily paper and changed methods of work."

To us, it is clear that "the conscious elements in the SLL leadership" have an "idealist, formal" notion of "the crisis" - which, unfortunately, like the rainbow's end, keeps eluding them in practice.

(24) *Or content themselves with the following specimen:*

"The predominance of the industrial working class in British capitalist society, more marked than anywhere else in the world, places a tremendous political concentration on the reformist bureaucracy in the trade unions and Labour Party."

mark the transition between two great historic stages in the development of the working-class movement..."

"The question of emergency government to meet a sharp deterioration in the economic situation could provide the occasion for such a new government coming to power whether by a snap election in a crisis atmosphere or by some form of coalition government of 'men of good will' following an electoral defeat of the Labour Party."

It explains how it sees the workers' attitude to reformism:

"At the level of politics in the parliamentary sense the working class has become rapidly disillusioned. The desertion of the reformist party has been almost complete."

Evidently the SLL leadership are confusing their dreams with reality. Having given our general analysis above, the main lines of which we think cannot be shaken, we shall not waste space refuting fantasies of workers having "almost completely deserted" reformism, of the imminent collapse of the Labour government. We assert - and the future will see who is right - that the Labour government will last out its term, and that, whether or not it wins the next election, *millions* of workers, including the most conscious, the majority of trades-union members, etc., will vote for it then. We shall turn, noting that the SLL still thinks economic catastrophe is round the corner, to two questions which seem to arise: Why are the SLL leaders living in cloud-cuckoo land? What will be the consequences for their organisation?

The answer to the first question can hardly be sought in any personal qualities of the leadership; we should not replace Marxism with demonology. In fact, it is very difficult to answer it; most probably, the explanation is that their rapid recruitment in 1960-64 was just too much for them. *They could neither understand it nor do anything successfully with those recruited*; moreover, it served as justification for and encouragement of their split with the rest of the Trotskyist movement (see below). Consequently, the Fourth International has been unable, despite its best efforts, to correct the increasingly incorrect course of the Triumvirate and its followers.

We must admit that we don't feel too happy with that explanation; it seems sound, but too many of the details are left out, the ideological aspects of the SLL's evolution are ignored. Accordingly, we will return to the problem elsewhere.

As to the consequences of the SLL's course, one's opinion of that depends on one's assessment of the prospects of self-reform. After what we have outlined above, we must admit we assess them as rather low. Moreover, in the light of the recent SLL PC statement "A Political Challenge", they look lower than ever. So let us look at that statement, bearing in mind that it was published four weeks after they embarked on the practice of their tactic of a daily paper.

We propose to show, in detail, that "A Political Challenge"

1. is utterly unable to correctly analyse the relationship of class forces in Britain in late 1969;
2. is equally (and consequently?) unable to propose any orientation for revolutionary socialists;
3. suffers, at the same time as it makes an ultra-left analysis, from a number of errors which are typical of opportunism.

"A POLITICAL CHALLENGE"

We have had offered to us by SLL members four interpretations of the title of this document: that the strikes (i) represent a political challenge by the working class to the Labour government (ii) are the result of a political challenge by the Labour government to the working class,

(iii) are a political challenge by the working class to the SLL itself; and (iv) that the statement was a political challenge from the SLL to the working class called forth by the strike wave. Unfortunately, the document itself fully justifies this variety of interpretations.

For at first reading, the Statement gives the impression of being illiterate, a collection of assertions, some true, others false, many meaningless, strung together in no particular order; it seems to lack any unity of thought and to fail completely to develop any argument.

Further study confirms this judgement. To take the worst individual example of confusion, one paragraph reads: "Imports will be further reduced to cut consumption of workers and their families." Quite clearly, the writer does not mean what he says - unless the PC of the SLL is acquiring a previously unsuspected sense of the macabre. The idea he is trying to express is: "Imports will be further reduced in order to cut the living standards of workers and their families." Unfortunately, those readers of *Workers Press* who managed to divine this will also - we are entitled to hope - realise that it is untrue; in fact, the real situation is that the living standards of the working people will be further reduced, in order to cut imports in the interests of the financial and banking sector of British capitalism, and for various other reasons in specific industries. More precisely, taking into account both the electoral schemes of the Wilson government and the present militancy of the workers, we can say that some such attempt is probably *on the way* (but not yet here!), particularly if the Tories win the next election.

Having noted this perhaps most glaring error - and remarking that its political content is the replacement of Marxist analysis with ultra-left propaganda - let us try to assess the Statement as a whole. The first question to ask is: towards whom is it directed? (25) Certain paragraphs, particularly in the first and third quarters, suggest that it is general anti-Wilson socialist propaganda. But in late October the world wide circulation of *Workers Press* (including all those sent to the SLL's hapless allies), even the Saturday edition, the most widely sold, was not more than 15,000. So, since the SLL leadership are not stupid, and would not waste their *only* major political statement for months on something with such a marginal effect, that hypothesis must be rejected.

The only other possibility is that the statement is directed at those most sympathetic to *Workers Press* - regular readers, i.e. SLL members, YS activists and TU militants close to the League - and at CP militants, particularly in the miners union, disturbed by the role of the CP leadership (and those it supports) during the recent strikes. In which case, the Statement must be assessed, firstly on scientific grounds (is its analysis right? what road forward does it indicate?) and, secondly but subordinately, on how well it explains its answers to those questions.

"Dialectical" Verbiage

To touch on the second aspect - but gain a good idea of the first! - parts of the statement are simply meaningless. For example, the sentence: "Speed-up and closures...are the only way capitalists can restore their rate of profit on return from international trading." Perhaps Cdes. P. Jeffries and T. Kemp, having respectively exposed how Mandel, prisoner of empiricism, has revised Marx, and the hideous destination towards which he has chosen to travel, will explain to us the "rate of profit on return from international trading."

While they are thus engaged, we hope some other graduate of the Cliff Slaughter school of dialectics will enlighten us about: "Whatever the form taken by the strike struggle...the content of them goes very deep because whole sections of the class are acting independently of their

(25) A general question, perhaps, about almost everything published in *Workers Press*?

leadership in response to the deepest crisis of the system." "Form" of the strike struggle? "Content" of the strike struggle? Are these concepts - no doubt united opposites - exactly clear? Are they clearly explained, even? We think not, and refer doubtful readers to the Appendix. How about content which "goes very deep"? Into what, or down where? No one cares to inform us. But, wherever this content is going, it's doing so in response to the "deepest" crisis of the system. Political, economic, social crisis? - we're not told ("world" crisis we reject). "Deepest" ever, or since the war, or in the last two weeks? The same answer as before. We're afraid that, unless and until one of the materialist dialecticians of the SLL leadership expresses himself on the subject, we must consign some parts of the statement to the bin marked: "Dialectical Verbiage - Out".

On the Trade Unions and the Labour Government

"There was a tendency to feel that the SWP, as it was at that moment in 1946, was capable of being catapulted into the leadership of the revolution if only it could show the workers its ability to lead them in this or that mass action. Thus the party tended to minimise two important obstacles to its leadership of the masses - the Communist Party and the trades union bureaucracy."

Tim Wohlforth (26)

- (1) "All the Labour, trade union and Communist Party leaders conceal from the workers that this (the taking of power from the capitalist class) is what is at stake. The Socialist Labour League, with its daily paper, the Workers Press, devotes all its efforts to the recruitment and training of the forces to achieve this revolutionary task."

This is blatantly wrong. For while it is true historically that what is posed is the taking of power from the capitalist class, and it is true now that a fight against the bourgeois state is posed by government intervention in current industrial disputes, the overthrow of capitalism remains a long-term task, the achievement of which is conditional upon breaking millions (not just a few thousands) of workers from their present bureaucratic trade union and political leaders. Contrary to what the SLL thinks, or says, Britain is not yet in a pre-revolutionary situation; moreover, although the prospects of building a revolutionary organisation are good, there remains the probability of the return of a Tory government at the next election, and the time to launch a revolutionary *party* has not yet come. So, while revolutionaries have the duty to make revolutionary propaganda, they must also have a policy during the intervening period, designed to encourage the mass movement and break it from the bureaucrats. Specifically, within the factories and unions, they must fight to weaken the stranglehold of the bureaucracies, *on a programme of transitional demands*. They must also, of course, participate in every strike and other movement of the class, fighting to strengthen the position of the workers vis-a-vis the employers nationally and within each area or industry.

Consequently revolutionaries must explain to the most conscious workers whom they can influence, the whole range of betrayals of the Labour, CP and union bureaucrats, which are not just "concealing from the workers" something the necessity of which neither the bureaucrats nor (unfortunately) most workers recognise, but also selling out specific strike and redundancy struggles, using their prestige to introduce anti-working class legislation or to foist productivity deals on the workers, imposing a dictatorial regime within the trade unions in collaboration with the bourgeois state, etc.

(26) In his "history" of the SWP, "The Struggle for Marxism in the United States", Part IV. SLL's Fourth International, Vol. 3, No. 2, April 1966, p. 90.

But, amazingly, "A Political Challenge" contains not a single transitional demand. It does not mention the fight for trade union democracy. It does not seriously attempt to explain to workers the treacherous roles of the bureaucracies, to analyse the ways in which this treachery has developed recently.

(2) While it is, to a certain extent, true that "The massive wave of strikes now engulfing British industry is the beginning of a major change in the class struggle in Britain", one must be careful about the quantitative and qualitative aspects thereof. For there are major changes of various kinds - the Russian Revolution and the ascendancy of Hitler - and revolutionary marxists adopt different tactics in the different cases. (Though third-period ultraleftism claimed the latter as a victory also!) Unfortunately, "A Political Challenge" is silent about the nature of the "major change" which "is beginning"; we shall have to try to deduce what the writers envisage.

As we have remarked, the British strike wave of autumn 1969 is not unprecedented, and in some ways that of autumn 1967 came nearer to raising the political issues in the minds of millions of workers. But the recent wave is important, first, because it took place at the same time as the strike waves in Europe, second, because it was rather larger in scope than the 1967 wave, third, because it took place about a year before the next General Election.

But the comparison with France and Italy puts it in proportion. For while there is undoubtedly a pre-revolutionary situation in both these countries (27), there is not in Britain. Social tensions are in no way so sharp. For example, in Italy and France millions of workers are called out on official strike by the bureaucrats, who feel the pressure of the rank and file, and the struggles have gone far beyond economic demands, involving factory occupations, fights with the police, etc. Whereas in Britain the bureaucrats, taken by surprise though they were, have been able, almost completely, to reassert their control.

This, as we said, has taken place for two reasons. Firstly, economic concessions can still be granted, especially on terms involving productivity deals, and secondly, while discontent with the TU leaders exists and must be developed, it is still limited, partial and to a certain extent transitory. At the moment, revolutionaries may hope, in Britain, to combine building an organised movement of opposition inside the unions with recruiting a number of the most advanced militants. They can also, in those cases where they have a base or can effect an intervention, influence favourably the course of the strikes. (But only marginally: keeping one Yorkshire pit out for an extra 24 hours was not a major victory and confirmation of the SLL's line!) To suggest that the as yet limited revolutionary forces can generally have a decisive influence is to abandon a scientific analysis and to invite confusion and disillusionment among the SLL's own militants.

(27) Curiously, the American allies of the SLL do not agree with it that there is a pre-revolutionary situation in Britain. The Bulletin of 1st Dec. '69 has headlines:

"Pre-revolutionary situation

"MASS STRIKES SWEEP ITALY AND FRANCE"

with which we entirely agree. The accompanying article does not mention Britain. Another article in the same issue advances "All U.S. Troops out of Vietnam Now" as a slogan on Vietnam; the 10th Nov. '69 issue does the same on the front page. Moreover, while we are missing on one issue - which may be relevant - the American proletariat does not seem to have heard of the "great victory" at Swindon. The Workers League better watch out!

(28) Wohlforth, loc. cit., p. 41.

- (3) "Whatever the form taken by the strike struggle...the content of them goes very deep because whole sections of the class are acting independently of their leadership in response to the deepest crisis of the system."

We have remarked on this example of the SLL's "dialecticians" at work already, but it repays further examination. For behind the "form" of dialectics we detect a "content" which is anti-dialectical and unscientific, namely the same old stereotyped, mechanical overassessment of the militancy of the workers and the severity of the economic situation which the SLL has been purveying these past six years, and which have so spectacularly prevented it from making the gains it anticipated and might have made.

The real situation is: Some of the workers are beginning to move independently of their leaderships. But they are doing so for *economic* demands which *can* generally be granted. Consequently, while this provides the basis for an oppositional movement within the unions, at least in a number of cases, it does not herald an immediate break of "whole sections of the class" from the bureaucracy (indeed the bureaucrats have reasserted control). Moreover, if the SLL claim that it does, those workers who are beginning to break from the bureaucracy will surely not follow their leadership!

It would seem that the comment of the SLL's ally on the SWP in 1946 should, perhaps, be directed rather at them in 1969.

On Marxist Sociology and Political Perspectives

- (4) "The government's policies and the employers' plans are one and the same thing."

This is absolutely false and will be accepted by no thinking worker. What is true is that, since it came to power, the Labour government has been guided mainly by considerations of modernising British capitalism, even against the resistance of sections of the British capitalist class. But that is not to say (as ultra lefts would) that nothing else has influenced or can influence the policies of the Labour government, which are *identical* with the employers' plans.

To take one issue, central to the struggle in Britain: the Labour government's trade union legislation. This began as a thin sugar coating around laws against the trade unions. But, by virtue of the working class "stopping the Labour government's plans for laws against the unions" - which the SLL said was impossible - and thus "leaving itself with the ability to wage the strike struggle against the employers", the legislation has been reduced to almost an irrelevancy, which even grants a few trivial concessions, and is by no means uniformly welcome to the employers.

Indeed, the Confederation of British Industries is waging a campaign against the government on this very issue, claiming (which is of course hardly true) that the planned legislation is entirely concessions. *The Times* of London, representing important bourgeois interests, dismisses proposals for legislation along the lines formerly intended by Wilson, on the grounds that experience since the proposals were dropped has shown they would anyhow be ineffective; it calls for collaboration at a local level between the TU machine and the employers. The Tories, seeking to return to power on the basis of middle class hostility to the trade unions, announce their intention of legislating against the unions once elected, and even of provoking and defeating strikes. Very probably, should they be returned to power, they will attempt to carry out these plans.

That, in our opinion, is the line-up on the question of anti-union legislation in Britain today. It is, of course, not obligatory to give a detailed analysis (and much more can be said than we have here) in every statement. What is obligatory is not to make blatantly inaccurate assertions of an ultra-left variety.

- (5) "Finance and heavy industry always win out against the manufacturing industrialists in such critical periods, and the manufacturers, like the motor industry, then take advantage of the repressive and right-wing policies imposed on their workers.
"That was the situation before Hitler's rise to power in Germany."

Here again we have the familiar parallel with Germany which the League has been drawing throughout the past five years. The very fact that the analogy has been made for so long makes one suspect that it is arbitrary, since the period 1918-1933 in Germany was characterised by sharp changes in the political situation, not the least of which was the rise of Hitler. We can't give a history of Germany here, but there are a number of significant differences between the situations which we should mention:

- (i) there is no fascist movement comparable in strength to Hitler's even as it was in 1928, and racialism is not so virulent as it was in Germany even in the mid '20s;
- (ii) the economic and social crisis is in no wise so serious as it was in Germany; social tensions are not as sharp as in Germany in 1928-29;
- (iii) nor have they been so sharp in the recent past - there has been no empire overthrown, no insurrection, no foreign occupation, no putsch, no devastating inflation, no mass Communist Party, in Britain in the last fifteen years;
- (iv) there is not yet the discontent among the middle classes with capitalism or with bourgeois democracy which existed in Germany in 1928-29.

All these considerations suggest that the invocation by the SLL of this particular historical analogy is probably unjustified. What is certainly unjustified is the substitution, for an analysis of the real difference of interests between light and heavy (not manufacturing and heavy!) industry, of an empty propaganda point.

On the other hand, the SLL's militants are, to their cost, finding *in practice* that this contradiction (although, of course, limited in comparison to the contradiction between capital as a class and labour as a class) is very real; for example, the restriction of home demand does cause the motor industrialists difficulties which force them to lay off workers, introduce short time, etc. (As well as providing the opportunity for sacking long-hated militants!)

On the Common Market, Youth, Vietnam

"No attempt was made (by the SWP) to reach the radicalised students and intellectuals, some of whom went to the Shachtmanites but the bulk of whom were recruited into the C.P." (Tim Wohlforth (28))

We explain in discussing the Swindon by-election why we consider the line of "A Political Challenge" on EEC opportunist. We would also have hoped that, rather than publish the meaningless, disconnected paragraphs which follow that section, the authors would have mentioned the radicalised youth and/or Vietnam.

But not a word! Yet more evidence that Wohlforth's comments on the SWP, justified or not, are a *devastating critique of his allies in the SLL*. For despite the pretentious "Launching the Young Socialists Student

(28) Wohlforth, *loc. cit.*, p.92.

Societies" (*Keep Left* Oct. '67), or as *Bulletin* would have it, the Young Socialists' "Invasion" of the universities, the SLL has made *negligible* gains from the radicalisation of youth. Moreover, while the C.P. has made no gains, the I.S., whose leaders (like Shactman) do not defend the USSR, have recruited *hundreds* of students.

We have said before that the abstentionist attitude of the SLL towards the youth is incomprehensible; we ourselves certainly don't understand it. It seems likely that the leaders agreed, most atypically for them, to take part in VSC in 1966 because they were *bitterly aware of their failure* to build the "mass revolutionary socialist youth movement" in the previous two years. But why they withdrew we cannot say; the logic of their political position, which since then has included, as well as propaganda against Cuba, black power & student power, also a justification of that split and a denunciation of the youth, has certainly driven them further into isolation. Even locally, for example in Hull, they stood back and let the I.S. take the leadership and make the gains. Wohlforth tries to provide a "theoretical" justification for all this in "Revisionists in Crisis", but it's difficult to accept that he can really believe what he writes, and until the Triumvirate breaks up the matter must remain a mystery.

Once Again, on the Trade Unions and the Labour Government

- (6) "The present wave of strikes is an essential preparation for the struggle against unemployment, because these strikes accelerate the unification of the working class."

Unfortunately, this is not true. Perhaps a million workers (out of at least 20m!) have been directly involved in the strike wave. Moreover, there are important contradictions between the different sections: many teachers, for example, are thinking something like: "If the (nasty, smelly) dustmen can get £20 p.w. why can't we?" That is an example of how the "competition" between different sections of the working class is also accentuated by the present strike wave; the isolation of the different industrial and geographical groups was anyhow one important factor in the trade union leaders bringing the strikes under control. (And how do those who struck feel about those in the same industry who scabbed? 'United' with them?)

Furthermore, despite the superstitious belief of the SLL leadership in the imminence of large-scale unemployment, which is, as we have seen, virtually unshakeable, we can say with reasonable confidence that in Britain unemployment is not going to become severe in the near future, and that, if and when it does, the effects of the 1969 strike wave will have been superceded by subsequent political and economic struggles.

One reason why we believe that unemployment is not imminent is that there is a General Election on the horizon, and if the best Tory prime minister of this century does not follow the example of all his recent predecessors and engineer a pre-election boom we will be very surprised indeed. Other reasons are (a) that, while the tendency of recessions in the advanced capitalist countries to coincide is more marked than during the '60's, the developing American recession will probably be accompanied by continued boom in Germany and Japan, and (b) that, while nothing the Wilson government has done has changed the relative backwardness of British capitalism in the *decisive* sectors, electrical and mechanical

engineering, the current balance of payments surplus is unlikely to be undermined by either that weakness or the pre-election boom for some time.

(7) "...what is the role of the union leaders in these strikes?

It is here, in answering this question, that the SLL's PC really takes leave of this world. First, they make some correct propaganda points to the effect that the union leaders had not been seeking gains as big as those won by strike action, and they make elsewhere propaganda points about the TU bosses selling out. But they "ignore the central lesson of this - the (leadership) was able to get away with it" (Tim Wohlforth). Why the SLL should "minimize" this "important obstacle to its leadership of the masses" we cannot say, but it does.

For example, the miners union:

"The resignation of Ford, Daly and the NUM executive has been demanded all over Yorkshire and Derbyshire, and *they have lost the confidence of miners everywhere*" (emphasis added).

This shook even the present writer. For only *one third* of the miners came out on the unofficial strike (120,000 out of 360,000). And while it is true that the resignation of the leaders, who played a criminal role, has been demanded in Yorkshire and Derbyshire, it has not been demanded in South Wales, Kent, Nottinghamshire, the North East, Scotland... Presumably not even the SLL leadership would maintain that miners who did not take part in the strike lost confidence in the leadership when it sold out.

What we do think is that the role of the NUM leaders must have disturbed many miners, and that there is the opportunity now to build, at least in some coalfields, an opposition to them. This seems to be particularly true in Yorkshire, where the SLL's miners are campaigning for the resignation of Lawrence Daly, the union's general secretary. Now, provided he were replaced with someone who would fight, that would be desirable, and he must certainly be criticised; moreover, the other issues the SLL is taking up in its campaign certainly make us wish them every success. Our only worry is that they will be content to make a few individual gains rather than build an effective opposition movement.

The statement goes on to criticise the role of Scanlon and Jones, especially the latter. They criticise him, absolutely correctly, for signing, along with the right wing, an agreement (dated 19th Oct.) with the CBI which the employers described as 'a breakthrough in employer-union co-operation at national level'. We thoroughly agree with their criticisms, though we don't think they propose any effective way of fighting him.

But then they lose their way completely:

"This attempt (?) at an agreement with the employers follows the failure (which, we repeat, the SLL said would not happen) of the Labour government to impose its legislation and the blastfurnacemen's successful killing at one blow (?) of the TUC's proposal for settling disputes.

"The trade union bureaucracy is only carrying forward logically (?) its reactionary policy of the June special TUC conference."

Again, even we were shaken. For the policy of the special conference was, essentially, what they agreed with Wilson later in June: the TUC's proposals for settling disputes. Yet the SLL leaders apparently believe the bureaucracy was "carrying forward logically" something the blastfurnacemen "killed at one blow"; if that were the case, we would have little to worry about...

Unfortunately, both for the SLL leaders and, more important,

the mass of the British working class, while the unofficial strike of blastfurnacemen was an important, bitterly fought struggle, in the end victorious, it did not "kill at one blow" the proposals of the TUC. On the contrary, the TUC will continue to intervene in other disputes, trying especially to force the workers to call off their strikes before talks begin. And this policy is very much alive! Moreover, the October agreement was a *further development* (or, if you insist, a "carrying forward logically") of this June agreement with Wilson. What the SLL fails to understand about this issue, mainly because it has to pretend the situation is pre-revolutionary, is that while the bureaucrats and bosses don't like losing one contest, their main aim is to shackle the whole of the working class, proceeding cautiously over a couple of years or so. Thus, Feather predicts that the TUC will eliminate 40% of unofficial strikes in 1970. And, although the victory of the blastfurnacemen encourages other sections of workers to have a go (as do the rest of the gains made this autumn), it does not really destroy the TUC's plans. *Nothing prevented* the union bureaucrats from going further, in the middle of a strike wave, last October.

(8) "...surely this experience *settles* the disputed questions of leadership in the unions."

This is contained in an appeal to C.P. militants. As such, it has a certain validity: the C.P.'s militants were, as is well known, in many cases very disturbed by the role in the recent strikes of the bureaucrats whom their leaders support. But, at the same time, it reveals a severe weakness of the SLL: their inability to distinguish between what is settled *for them*, and what is settled in the minds of most workers (or, which is must the same thing, practically).

For the statement appeared once in *Workers Press*, in a Saturday edition. Mercifully, no use of it as a propaganda hand-out has been made. So *how many CP members and supporters read it?* Obviously, we don't know the exact answer. But a few figures are relevant. The C.P.'s membership is rather over 30,000 (not, of course, all activists). The circulation of its paper *Morning Star* is between 50,000 and 60,000. The C.P. probably plays a significant or decisive role in the leadership of 1 or 2m organised workers. While the circulation of *Workers Press* on Saturdays is probably around 15,000, on other days 10,000, the difference coming from "pub sales".

Of course, those figures do not tell the whole story. *Workers Press* sellers attend as many as possible of the strikes which take place. More important, SLL industrial militants can explain the analysis their paper makes to CP members and others, and the criticisms of the union and CP bureaucrats are a regular feature. But, even so, we think the figures reveal the basic relationship of forces: the disputed questions are *not yet settled* in the minds of many CP members; of course, they are *not even raised* in the minds of those millions of workers who still follow the reformist trade union leaders.

On Politics and Economics

It is not worth our while to analyse in detail the prospective development of British politics according to *A Political Challenge*;

we content ourselves, first with pointing out that the authors get themselves involved in contortions when facing the prospect (at that time widely talked of in the press) of the re-election of the Labour government, and second with the following quotation:

"The temporary voting swing back to Labour reflects the great and growing feeling in the working class against the employers.

"But the plans of the employers have actually been implemented by the Labour government and will continue to be so,"

which reveals mainly the strange tendency of the SLL to revert to elementary *propaganda* against Wilson - of course with no measurable effect - in the middle of a supposedly serious *analysis*.

The economics are all too familiar.

(9) "Instead of the predicted 10-15 per cent increase in investment this year, there was only 5 per cent. That means a worse crisis in balance of payments is being *inevitably prepared* because economic growth falls further behind. (?)

"Further and more severe attacks on the working class *would follow*." (emphasis added)

Yet again, we see the unfortunate reluctance of the present-day SLL to commit itself: a worse crisis "is being inevitably prepared" and severe attacks "would" follow. After what we have already quoted, this reluctance is perhaps wise!

* * *

We have tried to show that the answer to our question: is the analysis made in *A Political Challenge* correct? is a resounding NO. We have also, we think, shown that it does not explain what it has to say too well.

The other question we posed was: what orientation did *A Political Challenge* propose? The amazing answer is: NONE. For let us admit that it tells us, three times, that the essential question is to build an independent Marxist leadership. We know that already, and we suspect many readers of *Workers Press* do too; the question of interest, is *how*? And to that we get no answer whatever. The statement contains, as we said, *not a single* transitional demand, *not a single* policy on which militants might fight in any union or industry, not even a suggestion as to how to organise such struggles, and fails to mention the youth.

Instead it informs us that a leadership can be built, of which we were already confident, that the *Workers Press* is the instrument, which on ground of its circulation as well as its politics we rather doubt, and concludes:

"The road now opens for the building of the revolutionary working-class party which every worker is beginning to recognise is needed.

"The Socialist Labour League, recruiting hundreds of new members and building new branches, supported by the Young Socialists and the All Trades Unions Alliance, calls upon all workers to join with it in the task of constructing that party."

We do not believe that this is true. We doubt that the SLL is making the gains it claims, we are sure that "every worker is" not "beginning to recognise" that a revolutionary working-class party is needed. We are convinced that only through a struggle for transitional demands, only through the *actions* of the most advanced workers will the masses of workers be convinced of the need for

revolution or the party. And we regret to say that, along with its opportunist line on the Common Market and its silence on Vietnam, *A Political Challenge* reveals the *complete absence* of any such approach on the part of the SLL.

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We have said that the question must be raised: What do the SLL leaders think they are doing? How to explain the 'unity' of theory and practice as manifested in this particular case? We will try to answer it partially.

We do not think the best elements of the SLL leadership believe that the situation in Britain is prerevolutionary in any accepted sense of the word among Marxists. We may be wrong, and if we are then they sink lower in our estimation, but in our opinion they use this language for two reasons.

The first is that their mis-estimation of the situation in Britain, in particular of their own recruitment, was the real basis on which they established their own international tendency in opposition to the reunited world Trotskyist movement. Thus their American followers attempted to convince the SNP that the SLL was right as follows:

"It is extremely significant that it is the SLL which should assume the leadership in opposing the (SWP) majority's turn to Pabloism. It is precisely the SLL which has emerged over the past several years as the largest Trotskyist group in all of Europe, almost entirely proletarian in composition (sic) with deep roots in the working class of Great Britain. A sectarian group is incapable (!!) of such growth and thus the majority's charges against the SLL do not stand up against the objective reality of the continued growth of the SLL" (29)

No doubt the SWP leaders were sufficiently acquainted with the *growth* and subsequent *decline* of revolutionary tendencies throughout the world not to be convinced: the Left Opposition is a case in point. Unfortunately, some of the youth recruited by them from the Shactmanites were not, hence Tim Wohlforth and the Workers League.

But having carried out this split, the SLL leaders are forced by the logic of their previous actions, to carry on down the lonely road into the wilderness. Moreover, they are forced to proclaim their successes ceaselessly, to give moral if not material succour to their followers, and to proclaim those who do not follow them to be damned. For, deep in their minds, they believe that *they cannot turn back.*

The second reason for the disorientation of the SLL is that, while the leadership *know* that the propaganda effect of all their wild talk is negligible, they also know that its effect on their membership is very great, and that their whole organisation only exists on the basis of *driving the membership at top speed while they last.* (We do not, of course, deny that the leadership drive themselves also) In fact, looked at in this light, the SLL leadership begin to resemble an acrobat on an oil drum which is rolling helter-skelter down a steep slope.

Let us look at that second point more closely in relation to their various fields of work.

(29). *Statement by the Reorganized (& how!) Minority Tendency, SWP, 20th April 1963.*

The Young Socialists

Since 1964, as we have emphasized, the independent Young Socialists have not been a success. A typical branch has one or two activists, and at times nothing more. At other times, either through painstaking door-to-door work or through social activities (dances, etc.), a selection of young people is gathered together. They probably meet in an unattractive church hall or room in a pub, occasionally they have good premises. The level of political discussion is low, conformity being the order of the day. Thus solemn discussions are conducted, not on the need for socialism, how to fight in industry or against the war in Vietnam, but on the absolute correctness of "Making the Left MPs Fight" (we don't want any Kerensky's!), on the counter-revolutionary role of the Vietnam Solidarity movement, on not talking to fascists. Attempts are even made occasionally to discourage people from enjoying Bob Dylan or Stones records: they are the Prophets of Profit.

The only times the Y.S. branches, despite the extreme activism of the League members in them, break out of this sterile round are, when social activities (usually dances or trips) are particularly successful. (All too often, SLL members wear themselves out running social clubs with *no political gains whatever.*) What happens then is that a group (rather than an assortment) of young people begin to conduct organised activity. Unfortunately, after a certain number of "recruitment campaigns", "classes" and "schools", after the latest apocalyptic prophecies have not been fulfilled, they tend to drift away again.

It might be wondered how the YS paper maintains its vaunted high circulation. Now firstly let us say that the claimed circulation has not risen nearly as much as the SLL leaders hoped or predicted: 20,000 - the current claim - was once anticipated for the beginning of 1964. But the circulation is certainly impressive: the main reason is that the YS activists spend an enormous amount of time selling the paper, door-to-door, on High Streets, in shopping centres, etc.

That they do this becomes more difficult to explain when it is realised that virtually nothing is gained, in the medium or the short term (and we predict: not in the very long term) from all this literature selling (partly because the literature sold is these days so unspeakably bad). Now why the leadership insist on it we cannot say, but insist on it they do, and the membership certainly do it. The main reason why they are willing to do so is their devotion to the revolutionary organisation, a subordinate one is that they know the money has to be found to pay for the papers anyhow (with, we admit, some exceptions). For "Keep Left debts" and "Newsletter debts" are familiar terms among the ranks (30), and eventually have to be paid off. We know of areas where these debts are to the value of three months nominal sales, which can be quite a lot of money.

None of this prevents "circulation drives" of the most bureaucratic kind; the usual way these work, so far as we can tell, is that the centre decides that an area's quota shall be increased by say 50 or 100, and the members duly try to sell the extra copies. Very little account seems to be taken of the strength, or indeed of

(30) We rather suspect "Workers Press debts" may have replaced the latter.

anything, in the different areas in determining these increases.

Of course, the top leadership know all these details of the state of the YS, but, having embarked on the present course they cannot alter it significantly without catastrophe. More, they cannot even admit in public that the thing has been a failure: on the contrary, an endless series of successes is claimed (c.f. Swindon). Recently, a turn has taken place and we discuss its political implications later. From the viewpoint of the Y.S., this sudden concentration on Vietnam obviously represents an attempt to reach the youth, who are vitally needed for the running of the daily paper. But even this turn is carried out without any admissions of previous failings, indeed with an ingenuous air of great things past.

The *Workers Press* of 24th Dec. '69 is a typical example.

The front page carries a report of the progress of their petition to stop Wilson's visit to Washington, laying emphasis on the number of members of other groups who have signed it. In the next column we read:

"1970 will be the 'Year of Lenin and Trotsky' for the Young Socialists - a year in which item number one on the agenda is the building of a mass revolutionary youth movement.

"The Young Socialists have pledged themselves to politically commemorate 100 years since the birth of Lenin and 30 years since the death of Trotsky with a programme of expansion for their youth paper *Keep Left* and recruitment never before embarked upon by this youth movement.

"Already YS branches up and down the country are driving full steam ahead for the first great event in 1970, the Weekend Rally of their paper on January 10 and 11.

"Right from the word 'go' (sic) this campaign has got off to a particularly good start.

"Branches are finding an enthusiastic response to the rally with its variety of events."

If this "building of a mass revolutionary youth movement"

stood any chance of becoming a success, we would be all in favour of it. But unfortunately there is little reason to suppose that it will be. Firstly, the YS has cut itself off even physically from the radicalised youth; its members don't do the same things, go to the same places - partly because they spend so much time on the door-step. Secondly, and more importantly, the YS-SLL line, on so many questions, is either so wrong, so sharply presented, (or both), as to make it very unlikely that the youth whom they do recruit will stay around very long. So our hope is that, when they leave the YS, they will be able to find their way to some other form of revolutionary politics.

The All Trades Unions Alliance

This is one of the most difficult aspects of the SLL's work to understand. Their own appraisal in the last Conference resolution was:

"The All Trades Union Alliance was formed in order to organize together all those trade unionists moving towards the political struggle of the Socialist Labour League for revolutionary leadership in the trade unions. *It is not, therefore, simply an alliance of all those who agree on one or more immediate policy questions in industry.* This is what is meant by saying that the Alliance is the political

arm of the League in the trade unions. In this sense the Alliance, like the Young Socialists for the politically developing youth, is a training-ground and preparation for League membership. Thus it is not a trade union in any sense but a rallying of all (?) the advanced political elements in all (?) unions, trained to take their place, as first, and foremost, fighters for a revolutionary leadership in the trade unions." (Emphasis added)
(*The Newsletter* 21st June 1969)

A Political challenge explains that:

"(The Labour government) will not stand back and watch the development of the struggle in Britain and political preparation (this follows a reference to troops in Northern Ireland -T.W.) is necessary against them.

"That is why the All Trades Unions Alliance has such an important role; its aims is to build alternative socialist leadership in the unions."

Unfortunately, neither explains, nor can we find any explanation elsewhere, *how* the ATUA proposes to go about achieving that aim, which makes a critique to a certain extent difficult. But some points can be made. First, it seems to have few branches; its main "activity" seems to be the frequent Conferences. These, however, very rarely get down to any discussion of building a movement, either on a national level or on that of one industry. The last all-industry Conference, on 5th July 1969 (see *The Newsletter* July 12th et seq), consisted of a long speech by Gerry Healy ("Be prepared to Give Leadership"), followed by a series of soliloquies by various militants, and also by the other two Triumvirs - Central Committee members Cdes. Mike Banda and Cliff Slaughter. Most of the soliloquies merely repeated particular points Healy had made, or recounted "successes"; the inevitable resolution pledging to "redouble our efforts" was passed.

The second critical point is that, as the Conference resolution we quoted suggests, the leaders *don't really want* to build a movement. The aim of "organizing together all those trade unionists moving towards the political struggle of the Socialist Labour League for revolutionary leadership in the trade unions" is the "theoretical" basis for the practical measure of *excluding* I.S. militants who *accepted the aims of the ATUA* and were *prepared to collobarate* with the League in building the ATUA. (The aims are given in the ATUA warning we already quoted; they talk about British trade unions, but not the USSR. There is also the usual passage to the effect that membership is open to all who accept the aims.) That is to say, rather than have an oppositional movement of the masses of workers in any particular union, the League wants to recruit a few individuals. There is a theory, evolved recently under the impact of their failure to grow, which "justifies" this: summed up, it is that "Leadership is Decisive". More explicitly, the general idea is that if a few militants, preferably shop stewards, can be recruited in a factory, then they will be able (& prepared) "to give leadership" to the masses. There are two things wrong with this theory: that the issues raised by the activities of shop-stewards are almost entirely day-to-day *trade union* questions, and that the only opportunity provided for changing the politics of the masses are propaganda *speeches* and discussions (which, of course, are

necessary but not sufficient). This theory is related to the almost complete failure of the SLL these days to give any attention to the strategic problem facing British revolutionaries: to break the masses from reformist leaders, Labour and trade union. At times, we have seen, the SLL leadership seems to imagine the task has been completed, but no one will agree with them (except the Maoists), for around 10m workers, including most trade unionists, will vote Labour at the next election.

The third critical point is related to the second: that the policies on which the ATUA campaigns are either specific trade union demands - which, of course, are necessary, but bourgeois - or the most hair-raising ultra-left propaganda (of which we have given examples) produced by the leadership. We suspect that to a certain extent this is recognised; most of the efforts these days (see *A Political Challenge*) seem to be devoted to recruiting C.P. militants, and, if these are discontented with the complete absence of revolutionary propaganda or practice from the C.P.'s activities, there is a strong possibility that they will be attracted rather than repelled by the wild talk of the SLL. Unfortunately, however many C.P. militants one recruits, that will not solve the problem of breaking British social-democracy.

While discussing the trade union work of the SLL, we should perhaps point out that, because this is something which the leadership (in its own inimitable way) takes seriously, there is a complete absence of the hypocrisy and hysteria which characterises some of their other activities.

Thus, while attacking IS, IMG, etc, for taking part in joint activities with the Stalinists over the defence of the Vietnamese Revolution, they are quite happy to sit in strike committees, shop stewards' committees, etc, not only with C.P. members, but also with: Liberals, Tories, right-wing social-democrats, even racists. Of course, they don't hide their differences with these people, and fight for their own viewpoints within such activities. But in the trade unions, they *do not strikebreak if they can't get their own way* (usually). While on Vietnam...

What is more, when they do sit in these committees, they don't attack C.P. members over such issues as the Moscow Trials, the Hungarian Revolution, etc. (c.f. Liege). In fact, we are willing to bet that they don't even mention them. No, they put forward, of course, their own conceptions of how the struggles involved should be waged, and (as over the May Day strike) suggest struggles and courses of action which seem to them called for by the situation. Let's illustrate this point. To judge by a recent issue of *Workers Press*, shop stewards influenced by the SLL within the British Leyland combine committee supported the suggestion that 6d per week be levied, if possible, from all workers within the combine for a combine committee strike fund. We agree, it would be a good idea, provided only that it would not contradict the rules imposed by the union bureaucrats (and that only because those rules could not be successfully defied at present.) Apparently this suggestion was voted down by the C.P. and the right wing, and the C.P. and the right wing were denounced by *Workers Press*. Presumably some similar sentiments were expressed in the combine committee and at report back meetings to stewards committees locally. We are 100% certain that the Moscow Trials, the Hungarian Revolution, the colonial record of social democracy, class collaboration in two world wars, etc, etc, *were not mentioned*. So we can only conclude that all the chatter about Stalinists, & so on, in relation to V.S.C. is just not intended to be taken seriously (except possibly by the YS-SLL membership).

Workers Press

While the level of activity of ATUA members, unlike that of Y.S. members, has typically been what people might bear over a long period during the publication of *The Newsletter*, this has probably changed with the appearance of *Workers Press*. So it is worthwhile investigating what the SLL hopes to achieve with it.

The paper was, of course, launched under completely different circumstances from those envisaged in 1963-64 when it was first decided to try to launch a daily. At that time, it was believed that the circulation of *The Newsletter* would continue to grow, with a minimum of 30,000 before the launching of the daily, and that the League's membership would continue to increase (see all the reports of recruitment at that time). This was linked to the perspective of a short-lived Labour government and mass unemployment, and by 1965 it was confidently anticipated that the paper would be launched in 1967. Unfortunately, the SLL had misjudged the situation, as we have seen, and things have developed along different lines.

One impact of these difficulties has been to change the character of the paper. Even in 1964-65, *The Newsletter* still carried mainly medium length reports and analyses, and the "Industrial Newsletter" on the back page was exceptionally good. These days, *Workers Press* presents a very different picture. Firstly, we have the interminable polemics against other tendencies, which are virtually meaningless anyhow, not to say in bad faith, and cannot conceivably interest any worker who buys a copy in a pub or on a street corner. Secondly, we have very good cinema and theatre critics, some very good stuff on Zionism and the Middle East (significantly, this is usually by a non-member of the League), and a number of very good industrial reports. But thirdly, we have the sloppy, outdated news reports, evidently poor rewrites of agency material, and fourthly (31), we have the unbelievable politics, particularly headlines such as "Leadership is Decisive", "Protests Against our Exclusion Grow", "Tory Press ban David Maude". We find it difficult to believe that the paper is intended to be read by average Labour-voting workers, even though it purports to be.

Moreover, the question still remains: why a *daily*? Except where militants can sell it on the strength of up-to-date industrial news, analysis and suggestions, what possible advantage does it have over a weekly or a twice-weekly? The fact that it is manifestly *not* an agitational paper only emphasizes the question, for the extreme organisational problems show no sign of being alleviated through a growth of circulation leading to sales through normal channels. The present writer can only conclude that the SLL leadership, having decided to have a daily when they had one assessment of the situation, are unable to change course, and remained determined to have a daily come what may.

We doubt, for the reasons outlined, whether they or the revolutionary movement as a whole will gain very much from it in its

(31) *Fifthly, The Newsletter used to carry, and the signs are that Workers Press is going to carry, long unoriginal and frequently confused historical articles on the General Strike, the English Civil War, the degeneration of the Soviet Union, the French Revolution, the rise of Hitler...The British crisis of 1931 is a favourite topic - usually the occasion for arbitrary and mechanical analogies.*

present form. But we reject predictions that it will collapse, because we know the devotion and self-sacrifice of the SLL's members and supporters. So we can only hope that in the future it will play some fruitful role in building the mass revolutionary movement.

* * *

In closing this section with our views on tactics and party building, we shall try to put the matter in a long perspective.

Throughout the 1950s, both the SLL and the "state capitalist" IS - under their names of that period - carried out entry work within the Labour Party. The SLL was able to make much greater gains than the IS from the post-Hungary crisis of the British CP, partly because it had a better analysis of the Soviet Union.

Once the ferment in the CP died down, and particularly after the formation of the "open party", the SLL, in 1959, the League devoted itself again almost entirely to Labour Party work, particularly in the YS. At the same time it was "developing theory" in such a way as to put it at cross purposes with the rest of the world Trotskyist movement, and, encouraged by its successful recruiting, it saw fit to split. Since then, its perspectives have not been fulfilled, and it has undergone political and organisational degeneration.

This has been so marked that it has been unable to benefit from the radicalisation of youth in the late 1960s, which has renewed and invigorated all other political tendencies to the left of the CP. It now finds itself in the position of a *sect*, isolated, by virtue of its language, politics and tactics from large sections of the leftward-moving currents; even in the trade unions, its special field of work, few will be attracted to an organisation which predicts the imminent "virtual destruction" of those same unions.

Meanwhile, the IS has undergone enormous growth, and the Fourth International has been able to re-establish a section in Britain. This growth of revolutionary forces, however, while it is very welcome (particularly the growth of the IS, IMG, and also the relative growth of the SLL since 1960), has taken place under unfavourable conditions: outside the labour movement at a time when demoralisation was spreading through that movement, afflicting particularly the ranks of the Labour Party. So far as the fundamental task of breaking that party's hold on the British working class is concerned, we have still to start seriously on that task, though circumstances are more hopeful after five years of Wilson than they were.

One of the main difficulties, of course, is the sectarianism and factionalism, so irresponsible in the face of the tasks which remain to be achieved, of the British left. So far as the IS is concerned, there are signs of organisational and political difficulties within that organisation, the end result of which is likely to be a marked improvement in IS. But the Socialist Labour League, which along with IS shares most of the revolutionary-minded militants in industry, is a more difficult case: it combines pretensions to Trotskyism with extreme discipline, ultraleftism and sectarianism. So the question must be posed: can it overcome them? *Can the SLL return to Trotskyism?*

The immediate prospects are not good; unless a split develops in the very top ranks of the League. But sooner or later it will become clear, if not to the leadership then to the majority of the membership, that their present course is fatal, and - unless altered - will lead to the destruction of their organisation and cadre. In order to try to hasten that day, revolutionaries must, where the circumstances permit, try to overcome the factionalism, not only but especially, of the SLL.

These problems are likely to be posed much more sharply if - say as a result of a severe election defeat for Wilson - 'entry' work within the Labour party again becomes necessary. For undoubtedly a combination of 'entry' and 'open party' work will be called for, and under those circumstances a measure of co-operation (at the least) between revolutionary tendencies will be vital if redundant and duplicated work - not to mention faction fights - are to be avoided.

With these things in mind, what should revolutionaries do? Three points seem particularly important to recognise.

First, that while the crisis of the C.P. provides the opportunity both to recruit and to form temporary alliances, "destroying Stalinism" in Britain is not the main task; cadres should be educated with that in mind.

Second, that the relationship between the trade unions and the Labour Party is one of the peculiarities of the British working-class movement; it is likely that, on a local level, it will provide a means by which the fight against the Labour bureaucracy may be taken up again directly; and this has implications for the nature and aims of trade union work.

Third, that some cooperation between revolutionary groups may well be necessary - or at least desirable - as the time for building a mass revolutionary party draws near. So criticism of the IS's opportunism (say on Ireland), or the League's sectarianism (say on Vietnam), should be made in a way which will not render such co-operation impossible.

A firm hold on political principles, combined with a lack of organisational exclusiveness: these are the qualities revolutionaries need in Britain today.

Chapter 3: SOME THEORETICAL AND OTHER QUESTIONS

We aim here, not to provide a full account of all the controversies within the revolutionary movement to which we refer, but simply to illustrate the extra-ordinarily light-hearted fashion in which the SLL approaches the history of these controversies, and the theoretical gains made by the Marxist movement during them. We shall also touch on, in more detail than previously, two aspects of the SLL which we have already mentioned: its methods of lying and distorting in the course of polemics, and its insular nationalism.

The United Front

Most people on the left will be aware of the failure of the SLL to participate in the work of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, even to the extent of attacking the October 27th, 1968 demonstration which had been called for by the Vietnamese. It is worth examining their justification for this, which consists of specious arguments to the effect that the V.S.C. is not a United Front.

Thus it is pointed out that the organisations participating in V.S.C. are "small" - though very few in the SLL appreciate the growth undergone these past few years by the groups they attack, particularly the IS. It is pointed out that the United Front Tactic was elaborated by Lenin and Trotsky for mass revolutionary parties, and that these groups are not parties. (1)

That is true; what the SLL fails to grasp is that what was called for, after the degeneration of the Communist International and the founding of the Fourth, was the development (not ossification) of Marxist theory; among other problems, it was necessary to work out tactics for building the revolutionary groups of today into the mass revolutionary parties of tomorrow. The development of the tactic of the United Front of revolutionary groups and tendencies is a case in point, as was the entry tactic.

(1) For example, Cliff Slaughter in his pamphlet "A Balance Sheet of Revisionism", reprinted from The Newsletter of late 1968, on p.6:

"They use for this purpose the Marxist-sounding phrase 'united front', the favourite device of Tate, Jordan and the 'Unified Secretariat' clique.

"This is a crude and deliberate distortion.

"Lenin, Trotsky and the Communist International elaborated the tactic of the united front in the years after 1920, when it was essential for the newly-formed Communist Parties to find a road to those masses of workers still under the influence of the social-democratic parties.

"By putting forward a platform of demands to meet the elementary needs of the masses, from living standards and employment to democratic rights, the Communist Parties would give the class the opportunity to unite, which many workers desired, and at the same time expose the reformist leaders who would either refuse the united front, or stop short of the steps necessary to realize its aims.

"This bears no relation whatsoever to the so-called 'united front of individuals and groups' who are in solidarity with the Vietnamese, as the policy statement of the VSC says, and is the opposite of the unprincipled banding together of small propaganda groups in VSC's National Council."

We'll return to this question later, in the light of the latest turn, not to say zig-zag, of the SLL. But we can't help wondering whether Slaughter considers it is no longer necessary "to find a road to those masses of workers still under the influence of the social-democratic" and Communist Parties. That would explain a lot!

But the dishonesty of such an attack is quite remarkable. For let us admit that the SLL was probably larger in 1964 than it is now, though smaller than the IS is now. It remains for the PC of the SLL - and in particular the chief theoretician Cliff Slaughter, who surely knows the SLL has never been a mass party - to explain their adopting, on 11/12th January 1964, a resolution - subsequently passed by the March 1964 Congress of the SLL - which said:

"Our 'entry' in the Labour Party has reached a new stage. On the basis of the radicalisation of working class youth and the fight against revisionism, for a revolutionary attitude to entrism, we have reached a position where the *united front from within* can be posed at the level of mass campaigns and direct struggle under our leadership against the existing leadership" (original emphasis, 2), and attacked

"revisionist tendencies such as that of Germain, with his perspective of mass leftward moving centrist parties to be infiltrated and even led by Trotskyists (3). This type of entrism has nothing to do with Trotskyism and serves to protect the bureaucracy from the resistance of the working class to imperialism's latest contradictions. In Britain the Pabloites capitulate to the bureaucracy and 'unite' with opportunists and fellow-travellers of all kinds. Instead of leading struggles behind the banner of the Transitional Programme and the United Front, they are content to mobilize pressure for more progressive Labour policies."

What a nightmare world the leaders of the SLL live in! In 1964, the SLL could itself have a united front with the *Labour Party*, and denounce the "Pabloites" for not being "behind the banner of the Transitional Programme and the United Front"; in 1968 no United Fronts are possible and "the Pabloites" are damned for imagining that they are engaging in them.

Historical Questions

(a) The Belgian General Strike of 1960-61.

The Newsletter, in 1961, published an account by Tom Kemp of the Belgian General Strike, in which some violent attacks were made on Ernest Mandel. The burden of these attacks was that he was putting forward certain specific policies rather than "building the alternative leadership"; anyone who cares can check the details in Kemp's pamphlet "Class Struggles in Belgium", in which his articles are reprinted.

In our opinion, this attack is indicative of the initial degeneration of the SLL: it is one of the first signs we can detect in its press of the process which has culminated in its substituting, for policies and tactics designed to build the revolutionary movement, the mere propaganda slogan: "Build the Alternative Leadership." Ever since that time, the SLL has attacked the perfidious Pabloite revisionists for what they did in the Belgian general strike and later.

One example of such attacks is to be found in Cliff Slaughter's articles "Trotskyism versus Revisionism" in *The Newsletter* (4).

(2). *This formula is repeated on p.8 of G. Healy's pamphlet "Problems of the Fourth International".*

(3). *We don't claim that was Germain's perspective! -TW.*

(4). *Issues of 8th, 11th, 15th, 18th, 22nd, 25th Feb, 1st, 4th, 8th March 1969. These articles, billed up to and including 4th March as a series in seven parts, are an attempted reply to E. Germain's pamphlet "Marxism vs. Ultraleftism". Though it must be said that, in order to avoid most of the issues raised by Germain, Cliff Slaughter uses the following formula:*

"Germain prefers to select certain issues, particularly Cuba, Ceylon, and Negro nationalism, with some shorter references to

In the second of these articles Slaughter quotes from an article by Ernest Mandel in the Belgian paper *La Gauche* of 24th Dec 1960:

"In 'La Gauche' we have proposed a clear formula: *A government of the workers supported by the trade unions.*"

He then quotes terms on which Mandel said the Belgian Socialist Party might form a coalition, and cites the verdict of his French cothinker Gerard Bloch: Mandel "substituted an alternative both of the terms of which amounted to vulgar reformism, vulgar parliamentarism."

Now we don't know all the details of the Belgian General Strike; it was a bit before our time, though judging by, in particular, Tom Kemp's pamphlet, Mandel's line was generally correct. But we do know that Slaughter's "critique", symptomatic of a certain infantile disorder, can only disorient those - presumably his followers - whom he is trying to educate.

For Slaughter attacks Mandel's "advocacy in Belgium of a coalition government under pressure of the masses", an attack which seems to reveal more Slaughter's than Mandel's mistakes. May we remind him: since the collapse of the Third International, there have not been mass revolutionary *parties* (5) in the advanced capitalist countries. What there have been are revolutionary organisations, the nuclei of *future* revolutionary parties. As he is discovering, the tactical problems of building these parties, in a workers' movement dominated by reformism and Stalinism, are considerable. And yet, arguing on the level on which he operates, one could denounce the Bolshevik *Party* for putting forward, in 1917, the slogan "Down with the Ten Capitalist Ministers". (6)

(5). In all probability the SLL will soon change its name to Revolutionary Communist Party. That will merely indicate its delusions of grandeur.

(6). If the SLL reply to this pamphlet, they may point out that the Bolsheviks also had the slogan "All Power to the Soviets". We know that. Indeed, the mention of it raises an interesting little episode. The SLL's Fourth International, Vol. 4, No. 3, Nov 1967, carries an interesting series of articles about the Russian Revolution, in which the authors can be seen unconsciously groping in the light (for them, darkness) of the Russian Revolution for a justification of their present-day sectarianism. This is particularly marked in Slaughter's article, and also one by two other leaders of the SLL, Cdes. "Robert Black" and "John Crawford". The latter insist (pp. 103, 104) on the correctness of the withdrawal, by the Bolshevik Party, of the slogan "All Power" after the July days. Now we think the question is open to discussion, but we would have the decency to refer our readers to Trotsky's History, in which he argues that the withdrawal was a mistake.

The episode is made all the more curious when one knows that Cde. "Black" once wrote a review of the History. Like most of the material in that particular issue of F.I., this particular curiosity is probably an ideological reflection of the growth of the SLL's sectarianism, dogmatism and organisational rigidity.

'united fronts' and to the nature of Soviet society. Each is, of course, a vital question, but they have meaning only in the whole development of world revolutionary strategy and tactics; they can be understood by Marxists only in direct relation to the revolution in the advanced countries."

We note also that virtually none of Slaughter's reply is original; he serves up mainly a stale diet of either reprints or paraphrases of previous "exposures" of Germain/Mandel.

(b) The 1953 Split in the Fourth International

One of the issues used by the leadership of the SLL to convince its rank-and-file of the hideous nature of the "so-called 'United Secretariat of the Fourth International'" and of the American SWP is the treatment of the majority of the French section by M. Pablo and the SWP during the 1953 split.

Thus Tim Wohlforth, an American sympathiser of the SLL, gives in *The Newsletter* of 22nd July 1969 a long account of the split, accusing the SWP of supporting Pablo's allegedly bureaucratic measures against the French majority, etc. Now in due course the sections and sympathisers of the Fourth International will have to go over again the experience of that split, and see what can be learned from it. What we want to do now is not to comment on it, but to indicate the perfidy by which the SLL leadership keeps its members, most of whom joined during the 1960's and have no independent knowledge of the split, in a political ghetto.

For Wohlforth's account of the split is, shall we say, incomplete. While the SWP is denounced at great length, the actions of the European Trotskyists, who were on the scene and could be expected to know much better than the SWP what was going on in the French section, are unmentioned. With good reason! For the facts of the matter are that many European Trotskyist leaders, including the damnable Ernest Mandel, opposed Pablo's suspension of the leadership of the PCI, but the SLL supported it, voted for it, and a prominent leader of the SLL even spoke at the PCI's congress *against* the majority. (7)

(c) "Pabloite Revisionism"

Tim Wohlforth, in a series in *The Newsletter* in July 1969 which we have already mentioned (8), argues (July 15th) as follows:

"The very first paragraphs of the resolution (9) ('The New Rise of the World Revolution' adopted by the 9th Congress of the Fourth International) establish the central theoretical outlook which has marked Pabloite resolutions since the Third Congress. This makes clear that while Pablo, the man, left the United Secretariat several years ago, Pabloism as a revisionist method remains at the very heart of the world outlook of the United Secretariat and its supporters."

that is his justification for calling the Fourth International "Pabloite" throughout his articles.

Let's refer him to Tom Kemp's introduction to the SLL's 1963 edition of "Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain" by Felix Morrow. On p.xi thereof can be found the following:

(7). *To be fair, G. Healy mentions this, very briefly, on p.6 of "Problems of the F.I.". But that was mid-1966 - a long time ago in terms of the rate of turnover of membership of the SLL.*

(8). *This amusing series entitled "Revisionists in Crisis" can be found in the issues of July 12th, 15th, 19th, 22nd, and 26th 1969, and also in Wohlforth's paper Bulletin for July 28th and August 25th 1969.*

(9). *While finding space to deliver himself of such profundities as: "First of all we must understand that we exist in a world dominated by capitalism. Capitalism is a world system which covers almost the entire face of the globe, having an impact, as we shall see, even within those countries which have established workers states",*

Wohlforth does not see fit to give his readers the paragraphs concerned.

" (H. Thomas) produces the following curious piece of reasoning: 'Although not Trotskyist in the sense of being strict followers of Trotsky (they were not affiliated to the Fourth International), these men could justifiably be regarded as such since they were Marxist opponents of Stalin who shared Trotsky's general views: permanent revolution abroad, working class collectives at home.' The POUM leaders did not regard themselves as Trotskyists, nor did the Trotskyists outside Spain regard them as such, therefore... therefore, Thomas accepts the Stalinist characterization of them as Trotskyists."

Now, Comrade Wohlforth, you are aware that "Pablo, the man, left the United Secretariat several years ago"; that is to say, that neither do the F.I. leaders regard themselves as Pabloites, nor do the "Pabloites" (including Pablo). Don't you think that your argument also, is rather "curious"?

France in 1969

Needless to say, the role of the Fourth International in the May-June days in France, and in the French Presidential elections of 1969, is looked down on from the heights of Clapham High Street. For example, Tom Kemp, in *The Newsletter* of June 7th, 1969, says:

"Alain Krivine was a leader of the now-banned Jeunesses Communistes Revolutionnaires, an advocate of 'student power', who took a part in the happenings in the Sorbonne in May-June 1968.

"His political antecedents are no secret. He is an offspring of the revisionist split from (sic) the Fourth International, a protege of the Pablo, Frank, and Mandel group (a "curious" list, Comrade Kemp) who, under the name of Trotskyism, abandoned its programme.

"For all its revolutionary phraseology, this current can be regarded as a petty-bourgeois centrist trend.

"Its main support comes from sectoons of the students and a kind of beatnik fringe. It has never carried out serious and sustained work in the working-class in France.

"Its policy has been characterized by a complete lack of consistency and principle.

"Krivine's candidature can thus only contribute to further confusion and division." (10)

Or an anonymous writer in the same paper on June 14th:

"For all his six hours of radio and TV propoganda Krivine was only able to obtain a fraction over 1 per cent of the votes. On this showing, his impact was practically negligible.

"With a surer class instinct the striking workers of May-June, 1968 preferred Duclos." (11)

(10). *Despite Kemp - who favours a united working class candidate - being forced to admit: "What (the bourgeoisie) feared most of all was the appearance of a single working class candidate supported by all the working class organizations. The heaviest burden of responsibility obviously lies on the shoulders of the leaders of the Communist Party and the Socialist Party", about half his article is devoted to an attack on the Krivine candidature.*

(11). *This comment illustrates the sheer irresponsibility with which the SLL puts malicious factionalism above theory and scientific analysis; in the same issue of The Newsletter Tom Kemp correctly writes:*

"...it is clear that the Communist Party is not able to pull in all the working-class votes...Duclos fell short of the maximum percentage which the party has obtained in general elections....

"In other words, many of those who took part in the May-June, 1968, strike, or who would have followed a decisive lead from the left, have not broken electorally from the bourgeois parties."

(our emphasis - T.W.)

Tim Wohlforth, in *The Newsletter* of July 19th, explained what the Ligue Communiste should have done:

"Thus they ignored the central task posed after the resignation of de Gaulle - the development of a strategy aimed at breaking the Communist Party rank and file from its Stalinist leadership. This required first a 'no' in the referendum, as the workers understood it (?), then a call to vote for Duclos, posing to the Communist Party a socialist programme as an alternative to Gaullism and capitalism. This would have begun the process of exposing the Communist Party before the mass of French workers who still look to this party for leadership in their struggles against the capitalists."

From these quotations and the rest of the accounts published in *The Newsletter*, one may be forgiven - as the SLL's militants must, in many cases, be forgiven - for thinking that the SLL's French 'cothinkers' of the OTF actually did all that. Not so! They called on the workers to vote for "any workers' candidate", and thoughtfully specified that Duclos (of the French CP) and Defferre (of the Socialist Party) were workers' candidates, but that Krivine, and Rocard of the PSU, were "petty-bourgeois". For which, however, they came in for heavy attack from their "comrades" in the leadership of the SLL, who agreed with Wohlforth.

Rebuilding the Fourth International

We don't wish to go here into the more sordid details of the "International" work of the SLL, but the world-wide fight against Pabloite revisionism has featured in their press during 1969, as prominently as ever, and it will be worth our while to puncture one or two claims, and to indicate the "theoretical" level, and some other qualities, of the individuals concerned.

Workers Press has just carried a report that a Conference of the "International Committee of the Fourth International" will take place in February 1970: we should note, therefore, that of the eight sections of the original International Committee, six participated in the Reunification of the Fourth International (in and after 1963), only the Healy and Lambert groups refusing (see, e.g. Germain's pamphlet). and that the SLL's appropriation of the label is a fraud. However, since they consider themselves justified in it, we must, as serious students willing to learn, try to follow the reasoning they adopt.

Looking, therefore, at one of the few publications in which they have offered the world anything approaching a serious evaluation of the state of Trotskyism today - G. Healy's pamphlet - we find (p.32) that they consider "the present international committee...constitutes the *sole organised successor to the Trotskyist movement.*" At first sight, this strikes one as incredible: in 1963, when they refused to reunify, they had negligible support outside of two West European countries, namely Britain and France. But a further study of the documents available produces a clue: while we intend to go into details elsewhere, the evolution of the "critique" of the Fourth International by the I.C. follows a certain pattern - at each stage the F.I. is attacked for not doing *what the SLL imagines itself to be doing successfully in Britain.* (12) (As in the case of the United Front above)

(12). Reading the SLL's documents of the early 1960's - which, we sometimes suspect, Banda-Healy-Slaughter find little time to do - we are struck by the fact that, larded though they are with denunciations of "impressionism" and pragmatism, they usually indicate that the SLL believed that what it was, at that moment, doing in Britain, which was working, was the only thing Trotskyists might do at any point in space

This is, of course, the inevitable consequence of the domination of the fraudulently self-styled "International" Committee by Cdes. Banda, Healy and Slaughter; it does, however, make one wonder who exactly *these people in other countries who support them, nay, prostrate themselves before them*, may be. To shed some light on this question, and also on the SLL, let's consider Cliff Slaughter's reply to Germain's pamphlet.

We have seen how Slaughter evades a real discussion (though he's quite prepared to claim to want, or at least to have wanted one): the questions raised by Germain "can be understood by Marxists only in direct (?) relation to the revolution in the advanced (sic) countries". It's hardly worthwhile dismissing this parochialism: in fact, revolutionary Marxists working for the overthrow of capitalism in the advanced countries will only succeed if they understand those questions, rather than the reverse as Slaughter seems to think. But what were the questions raised by Germain, and so imperiously dismissed by Slaughter?

According to the latter himself, they were "Cuba, Ceylon and Negro nationalism, ... 'united fronts' and the nature of Soviet society". As a matter of fact they were more precise: 1. the *class nature* of the Cuban state; 2. The alleged responsibility of the Fourth International for the LSSP entering a bourgeois coalition; 3. The SLL's refusal to support black nationalism in the USA; 4. United Fronts in Ceylon and in Britain; 5. The role of foreign trade in the economic and social development of the USSR.

Now Slaughter says *nothing* about the class nature of the Cuban state - while his position on that question, which occupies about $\frac{1}{4}$ of Germain's pamphlet, remains a mystery, he contents himself with references to the undoubtedly incorrect positions of Fidel Castro on May-June 1968, and the invasion of Czechoslovakia. This is most extraordinary, since the SLL, correctly, regards the Ulbricht regime, which did not support the French General Strike of May-June 1968, and whose troops invaded Czechoslovakia, as a workers' state but refuses to commit itself - see Germain's pamphlet pp.46 to 49 - on the class nature of Cuba. One can hardly believe that his reply is written in good faith.

The same comment applies to his cavalier treatment of questions 2, 3, 4: he must know, for example, that *The Newsletter's* obituary comment on Malcolm X was directly the opposite to what he writes now, or it had written before (13). His ideas may have "developed", but he should at least know of their development, and in a serious polemical article he ought, one would have thought, to account for it.

But we have a certain respect for Slaughter which we don't have for some of his cothinkers, so it was with great pleasure that we noticed he maintained total silence on the subject of Soviet foreign trade. For, while he is co-editor of the journal - *Fourth International* - in which one of the worst expositions of the SLL's position on the

(13). We hope to treat of this rather shabby episode on another occasion.

or time. (See especially F.I. Vol 1, No 1, Cliff Slaughter's article; reprinted in Vol 6 No 2). The Fourth International is, essentially, identified with its self-styled British section.

question was perpetrated (14), the main "development of theory" had been done by the SLL's allies, leaders respectively of the "Hungarian Section" and the "American Cothinkers" of the International Committee, Comrades Michel Varga and Tim Wohlforth. And we were led by Slaughter's silence to hope that, at least behind the scenes, he had tipped them off to the fact that their position was untenable; perhaps, even, he might have remonstrated with them that their polemics against Ernest Mandel and the rest of the Trotskyist movement should be less ludicrous in future.

Unfortunately, our hopes that, if only in this small way, the top leadership of the SLL were pushing through a measure of self-reform proved unjustified. Tim Wohlforth's articles "Revisionists in Crisis", pushed the same old line. Since Wohlforth, in particular, is a fairly prominent ally of the SLL - that is to say, we have heard of Americans who have heard of Wohlforth - and since the SLL sells his pamphlets and publishes his articles, let's look at some of them and see what we shall see.

As we said, "Revisionists in Crisis" repeats the line - exploded once-for-all, we had hoped, by Germain - on Soviet foreign trade:

"Precisely, at this point (God knows what point -T.W.), where the workers' states reach a level of economic development which requires of them greater integration into the world market if the economies are to move forward, the world market is marked by the fiercest international competition since the 1920s. The ruling bureaucracies are forced to discipline their own working class in a futile attempt to raise the level of productivity to a point where competition is possible, thus intensifying the conflict between the working class and these bureaucracies."

Exactly what this means is unclear; apparently Wohlforth imagines that Soviet enterprises, or perhaps the whole Soviet economy, "compete" with imperialist concerns in the same way that General Electric of Britain competes with General Electric of America. One interesting aspect of the quote is that it is far closer to the position of 'state capitalist' revisionism - which the SLL professes to reject - than to that of Trotskyism (15). We don't really pretend to understand what all the mutually contradictory articles produced by Wohlforth, Varga & Co. mean, but we do demand of the SLL, since those are the people with whom they are collaborating in the "Rebuilding" (16) of the Fourth International, that they explain, in the light of Germain's critique, what their own position is. (17,18)

(14). "Marxist Political Economy and the 'Socialist World'" by Michel Varga, Fourth International Vol 3 No 1, Jan 1966. See also Germain's pamphlet, and other references given there.

(15). Compare with M. Kidron's formulations in "Maginot Marxism: Mandel's Economics", in International Socialism No 36, April/May 1969. Kidron, of course, is a "state capitalist" leader of IS. See also Mandel's critique of Kidron in "The Inconsistencies of State Capitalism".

(16). An interesting point: the SLL describes itself as the British Section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, while their French cothinkers constitute a section of the International Committee For the Reconstruction of the F.I. So the SLL blithely reproduces OTF or ex-OCI material under the banner: French Section of the I.C. (For the Reconstruction) of the F.I., demonstrating how easily, with two brackets, one may become all things to all men.

(17). After all, Varga, at least, corrected very promptly his "errors" at the 1966 Conference of the I.C.

(18). Workers Press of 25th Oct '69 leads us to suspect the SLL agrees

But we have not finished with Wohlforth's "Revisionists in Crisis"; readers are invited to submit answers to the question: Did Wohlforth support Dubcek in August 1968 on the basis of the following quotation:

"Our (i.e. Wohlforth's) position was one of opposition to the Soviet intervention, but refusal to give any political support whatsoever to the Dubcek section of the Stalinist bureaucracy in Czechoslovakia. Instead we relied on the independent struggle of the working class of Czechoslovakia and called for the creation of a section of the Fourth International to take this struggle forward to the political revolution. We gave critical support to Dubcek only insofar as he resisted the Soviet invasion."

Of course, this is, as many interested Americans know, only an extreme example of Wohlforth's agility in changing his position - though to do so in three consecutive sentences is unusual even for him. But his strange acrobatics in 1958-62 on the Algerian and Cuban Revolutions, on the desirability and possibility of reunification of the International, etc., are an enlightening precedent, and some at least have, we believe, been discussed publicly by the Spartacist League (Robertson group) in the USA (19). We don't say: people are not permitted to change their positions. We just ask, in vain, for them to account for the changes...

Other aspects of this international work have been taken up by Germain and also by Hansen; we content ourselves with one further point. In his reply to Germain, Slaughter devotes a large amount of space to "proving" that the Fourth International is on the point of uniting, in Britain and France, with the "anti-communist" IS and ex-Voix Ouvriere. He was wrong of course...and there's one experience, which he ought to have recollected *and* mentioned, which ought to have enabled him to understand some things about unity. For he somehow contrives to omit the fact that unity negotiations between his French cothinkers and VO went so far that the latter attended his April 1966 International Conference - only to withdraw in horror.

Arrogance, Lies, Nationalism

The SLL has been attacked many times for an article published in *The Newsletter* in December 1964, written by one P. Desai, which criticised Congolese revolutionaries for taking white hostages and shedding innocent blood. In our opinion, that abominable article was not representative of the SLL's line on the question - Bill Hunter, for example, wrote an excellent denunciation of it, which was published in *The Newsletter*. Moreover, P. Desai was soon to leave the League (mid-'65), and the probable explanation of its being printed is that Mike Banda, the paper's editor, just failed to read it thoroughly.

But there can be no doubt that even the writing of such an article,

(19). Alternatively, see "Unprincipled Combinationism - Past and Present" by Tom Kerry, S.I.P. Discussion Bulletin, Vol 24 No 15, May 1963.

with Wohlforth. The case of the Soviet Union is probably another example of the way in which some "development of theory" is carried out by some "theoretician" - in this case Varga - and is then uncritically accepted by the rest of the international leadership, and consequently by their followers, as part of the body of given truth which is not to be criticised or questioned. This sort of approach is evident in the SLL's Fourth International and in their miserable student journal *Marxist*, which few of them defend. Both of these - *Marxist* in every issue - appeal for discussion and polemic. But very little takes place...The most outrageous case of the "body of truth" approach is the habitual lying of the SLL-OCI about the attitude of the F.I. to the Hungarian revolution. How many 'critics' have read the F.I.'s documents?

by a regular correspondent of *The Newsletter*, was indicative of something wrong with the SLL. In our opinion, two of the trends in the League's thought which it both exemplified and followed from were their arrogance and their insular nationalism - which are, of course, related. The first is indicated by the way the SLL haughtily dishes out instructions to revolutionaries all over the world, frequently (as in that case) bad instructions; the second by its negative, abstentionist attitude to the colonial revolution - it sees its first task as criticism, its second as campaigning (often only in a formal, propaganda way) for solidarity. Both of these trends have been frequently noted, especially the League's arrogance. But it will nevertheless pay us to look at them further.

We have already noted the tributes the SLL exacted - characterised by both arrogance and nationalism - from its allies in 1964. That same year, the SLL's theoretical journal *Fourth International* (Vol 1 No 1, Spring 1964) explained that "(from late 1963) the International Committee of the Fourth International was called upon to assume the leadership of all those Marxists throughout the world who are fighting to build revolutionary parties". Discussing its fitness to carry out this task, it remarked that *Fourth International* - edited by Cliff Slaughter and Tom Kemp - had "an editorial board which includes the most advanced international thinkers in the Marxist movement today".

Let us repeat our previous question: why does the SLL give itself such airs, and exact such tributes from its allies? Moreover, why do the latter put up with it? While awaiting a reply, let's investigate the problem ourselves.

As we have said, the SLL leadership was hypnotized by its recruitment in 1960-64. They believed that this had taken place "on the basis of the radicalisation of working class youth", which was hardly true. During a four-week campaign in 1963 over the Profumo affair they had recruited 250 members on top of their previous recruitment targets. They had won the majority on the YS NC.

Drinking deep of this heady wine, and unrestrained either by the S.W.P. - long their closest allies in the world Trotskyist movement - or by the Fourth International (they broke with both of them in 1963, when the Reunification of the Fourth International took place), they developed the belief that their proportionately large, but absolutely small, numerical gains, had occurred because of the serious crisis of British capitalism, *which was worse than that of any other advanced capitalist country.*

Thus the resolution of the Nov 28th 1964 Conference of the SLL has a long section explaining that "Britain constitutes 'the weakest link in the chain' at the latest stage of development of capitalism". (20) This invocation of Lenin's analogy about the Russian Revolution can have only one meaning! And indeed it did mean to the SLL leadership precisely that they were going forward to the overthrow of British capitalism.

So the same conference adopted an unpublished resolution which concluded: "We shall, therefore, work for a fusion between the Young Socialists and the Socialist Labour League which will enable us to change the name of the League to that of a Party and to maintain the Young Socialists as that of its youth section."

We ourselves have heard Gerry Healy say - in 1967, not recently - that "Britain Will Be Next!"

The main effect of this nationalism has been to reinforce their

(20). *The Newsletter*, Dec. 5th 1964. *The Manifesto of that Conference*, in the same issue, was fairly good - unfortunately the SLL didn't follow its own advice: "All workers, young and old, must start this fight now inside the factories, trade unions and local Labour parties."

sectarianism, in relation to the solidarity movements with the colonial revolution in particular. Another effect has been to render them totally incapable of understanding the dialectics of world revolution today; the interaction of struggles in different countries or of different sections of the oppressed masses, the interrelation of the world economy and its national sections, all these are completely misunderstood by the SLL (21).

In particular, they have failed completely to understand the tempo of developments in Britain. Which brings us to the next point: lies and distortions. For what do they do? They distort their critics' arguments and call those who draw attention to past mistakes by all manner of uncomplimentary names. All this is familiar to most non-members of the SLL; we suggest that members should study Ernest Germain's pamphlet "Marxism versus Ultraleftism" and Cliff Slaughter's above-mentioned reply.

What the critics have failed to remark so clearly is the way in which the SLL lie about their own activities: usually to proclaim as a success what was an abject failure. Whether the top leadership really believe in all these successes we cannot say. All we can do is call attention to their press, and other activities, and form our own judgement.

To give one example - and it is really sufficient - consider the following quotations, all from Aileen Jennings, editor of *Keep Left*:

"What we did in 1966 we will improve upon. The circulation of our paper topped the 14,000 mark with the launching of a 12-page paper; let us make that figure 20,000 in 1967." ("(1967)AGM - Keep Left starts 1967 with huge success - 800 unanimous to boost sales to 20,000" in the Feb. 1967 edition)

"We call upon everyone to support this campaign and to build up the circulation to 25,000 a month in the next year." ("Good news from the Editor at the (1968) AGM - Paper gains support in 1967" in the Feb. 1968 edition)

"...we were able to announce (at the 1969 AGM) that our circulation is only a few hundred short of the 20,000 target we set ourselves at the 1968 Annual General Meeting." ("1969 - a year of revolutionary decision". *Keep Left* Feb. 1969)

(21). To give one example, on the first point. Tim Wohlforth's articles "Revisionists in Crisis" attempt to clear this one up. Thus part 2 says (our emphasis):

"This global conflict is then broken up (by the Pabloites) into sectors, thus obliterating the essential unifying forces of capitalist relations on the one hand and the working class as an international class on the other. At the same time the material foundations of the class struggle rooted in the crisis of world capitalism are either ignored altogether or seen as only one among many factors affecting the imperialist sector of the schema" (July 15th 1969. Does that second sentence mean anything?),

while part 2 continued says (original emphasis):

"The only uniting force between international sectors or these sectors of struggle within a country is the revolutionary party and its programme." (July 19th 1969)

Even published in two parts, an article containing such formulations makes an inestimable contribution to the development of Marxist theory!

Chapter 4: THE SWINDON BY-ELECTION

We have already pointed out that the SLL's verdict on the Krivine candidature in the French Presidential elections of 1969: "Krivine was only able to obtain a fraction over 1 per cent of the votes. On this showing, his impact was practically negligible", would apply equally to their running Frank Willis as a candidate in the By-election in Swindon on October 30th 1969; thus it might seem hardly worth anyone's time to discuss the question further.

Such, an opinion, would, in our view, be profoundly mistaken. For two important questions are raised: (a). Why on earth did they do such a thing? (b). What lessons have they learned from the experience? We shall try to show that the answer to the first question is that they utterly misunderstood the situation in which they are working, and to the second: nothing. In the course of doing so, we shall try to discuss parliamentary tactics for revolutionaries at present, and the impact of the Swindon defeat on the SLL.

The first thing which strikes a revolutionary about the comparative figures for Swindon in the General Election of 1966 and the recent by-election (1) is that the number of votes cast for left opponents of the Labour government increased by about 100 (i.e. $\frac{1}{3}$ th), but that in the second case they were split between the C.P. and the YS-SLL, the latter receiving slightly less than half of them. What this suggests, particularly in the light of the Liberal candidature, is that the working class is not yet, in any significant numbers, prepared to break, even in a by-election, to the left from the Labour Party. *There is no reason to suppose that the YS-SLL candidature made more workers vote Labour than would otherwise have done so; it is conceivable, but in the light of what happened at the other by-elections of the same date, very unlikely.*

Apparently then, the only aim the YS-SLL could have had which they in any sense could claim to have achieved would have been to win support from the C.P. That is, of course, something which should be done; but we think they had greater aims. And we think we can prove it.

(1).

1966 General Election			1969 By-Election		
	No. of Votes	Vote as %age of Votes Cast		No. of Votes	Vote as %age of Votes Cast
Noel-Baker (Lab)	25,966	61.3	Ward (Con)	16,843	41.7
Reece (Con)	15,523	36.7	Stoddart (Lab)	16,365	40.6
Gradwell I. (C.P.)	838	2.0	Layton (Lib)	6,193	15.3
	-----	-----	Gradwell, J. (CP)	518	1.3
Total	42,327	100.0	Willis (YS)	446	1.1
				-----	-----
Lab. majority of 10,443				40,365	100.0

73.5% of electorate of 57,582 voted.

Swing from Lab. to Con. of 12.8%

69.8% of electorate of 57,851
voted. Tory majority of 478.

The first bits of evidence are personal knowledge or reliable informants; we hope our readers will accept them. (i) In late 1967 we were present at a public meeting in which Cliff Slaughter explained that the YS-SLL would be running candidates in future elections, and that they would not get the negligible crank vote which any candidate who had stood in the past would have got. (ii) As late as *two weeks* before the by-election, they were telling canvassers brought in from London that they would get 5,000 votes (this was related to us, between then and the election, by a sympathiser of theirs who had helped). (iii) When *The Times* of London, about a week before the election, predicted, in a rather snide comment, that Willis would get fewer votes than the C.P. did in 1966, most of their members and sympathisers we know were furious at the way their candidature was being run down, predicting surprises for *The Times*.

But there is more evidence than that. For example *A Political Challenge* says that "The road now opens for the building of the revolutionary working-class party which *every worker* is beginning to recognise is needed" (our emphasis). It was published in *Workers Press* five days before the election. While "beginning" is a careful (if meaningless) qualification, one ought to get more than 1.1% of the votes if it were true!

Moreover, there is the strange question of their election manifesto. One would have thought they would publish it in their paper, since they were running a candidate for the first time, and it might be of interest to their sympathisers and supporters elsewhere. But they didn't, a fact which made some of us wonder exactly what policy they were running on. And, sure enough, it has to be seen to be believed.

We mean that literally. For the whole point of an election manifesto is that the slogans and bold print are read by far more people than read the text. (2) So the typography is all-important.

Thus, on the back, we find displayed, in large bold type, the platform:

"* Keep the Tories Out!

"* Hands off the unions!

"* Sack the Wilson leadership and bring in socialist policies!

"* No entry into the Common Market!"

which, if anyone else put it forward, would be denounced by the SLL on the grounds:

1. that it does not mention revolution;
2. that it does not mention the need for an alternative Marxist leadership, a revolutionary party;
3. that it does not pose the demand for a United Socialist States of Europe.

Indeed their canvasser-sympathiser whom we mentioned became decidedly less sympathetic after Swindon for precisely these reasons. But the text is more complicated: it reads more like an article by "Frank Williams" than "A Message from Frank Willis". Thus its main line, boldly printed, is equally opportunist, but the socialist united states of Europe, and the revolutionary party, etc., are *mentioned*, tacked on at the ends of sentences, "in the small print" so to speak. And although the need for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of workers councils (so urgent last spring) are strangely omitted, there are at the same time some third-period style sectariana

(2). *The ratio might be lower in the case of a new party such as the Young Socialists, but that does not change our argument materially. We should also say that the SLL XIth Conference Policy statement (for which see The Newsletter 31st May '69) may have been distributed in Swindon before the election campaign began; on the spot investigation is not decisive on the point.*

to add spice to the meal.

We'll illustrate the opportunism by two examples: leadership and the Common Market. Now *Workers Press* of 29th Oct told us, in 1½" headlines, that "Leadership is decisive" (headline news!). The statement *A Political Challenge* says: "Most essential is a socialist policy and leadership to direct this strength" (it's not clear which strength, probably that of the working class -TW), and also (original emphasis): "*The essential question is to build an independent leadership*", and yet again: "The essential question is to build political leadership in the working class movement". (This bizarre repetition is inexplicable. Do they think they can win the working class in its millions by iterating *this one point?*) We quoted previously an SLL PC statement having as a slogan: "Join the SLL and build the alternative revolutionary leadership!" While the election manifesto just mentions it in passing...

The treatment of the Common Market is just as bad, by the standards of the SLL or indeed any revolutionary. Thus "in small print" we are told that there is an alternative: "Fight for socialist policies in Britain and support the struggles of the European workers against their bosses - for a socialist united states of Europe!" (*How to do these things is not explained*). But this comes after *displayed* paragraphs, in *bold* type, red and black respectively:

"The Common Market would inflict massive price increases on every worker's family. Products like butter and beef will go up to three and even four times the present level",

and

"Vote against the Common Market! Vote for Frank Willis!"

One may be forgiven for thinking that they might have been in danger of getting support from those workers who opposed the EEC for the most backward, muddled reasons; fortunately, that danger did not materialise.

Moreover, *A Political Challenge*, five days before the election, and the "Interview" with Frank Willis in the same day's paper, had a similar line: "drastically reduced living standards would result from entry into EEC". But it did not explain to workers that drastically reduced living standards, or at least attempts at a drastic reduction, are on the way whether or not Britain joins. Nor did they even mention the question of a United Socialist States of Europe.

These strange phenomena, which are of course entirely unrelated to the fact that in Sept-Oct 1969 large sections of British voters, according to all the opinion polls, were opposed to entry, become even stranger when contrasted with the criticisms levelled by the SLL at the CP during the first attempt at entry in 1962-63. For then they attacked the CP's opportunist concentration on the cut in living standards if Britain entered, predicted a cut if it didn't enter, and put forward the policy of a United Socialist States of Europe (3).

Now if the line on the Common Market of *A Political Challenge*, and the main, emphasized, line of Willis' manifesto, were opportunist, even non-socialist, the "analytic" section of the manifesto is even worse. They explain:

"We are absolutely opposed to entering the Common Market! The employers want to be in the Common Market in order to be free to transfer their investments to cheap labour areas and sack the well-organised, highly paid trade unionists of the main British industries."

(3). Tom Kemp had an article in *Workers Press* of 19th Dec '69, attacking the current opportunism of the CP along much the same lines as in the early '60's. This heralded a shift in emphasis on the League's part so great as to amount to a change in line: *Workers Press* of 1st Jan '70 headlined the Case for a Socialist United States of Europe.

Scientifically, this is of course nonsense: it ignores monopolisation on a European scale, the need for large units to meet American competition, etc., etc... And politically, it is all too reminiscent - to say the least - of an appeal to the insular nationalism of many British workers.

Other questions get the same sort of treatment; details would be superfluous. We content ourselves with pointing out that while they refer to the CP being "tied to the Stalinists in the Kremlin", who "brutally suppressed the Czech workers", *there is no mention* of defence of the USSR or support for the Chinese Revolution!

None of this prevented them from asserting in *Workers Press* on election day that "The Young Socialists' campaign...has not been caught up in vote-catching gimmickry through the television (4), inter-party debates and the churches."

The same article contained an interesting formula: "*Whatever the size of the poll, the Young Socialists will not be leaving Swindon*" (our emphasis), repeating the strange line adopted by Frank Willis in the interview we mentioned (5): "The big issue here is not the size of the vote. Working-class victory depends on the building of an alternative force based on principles, and this is the appeal of the Young Socialists... (who) have set an entirely new example in political campaigning in Britain".

Indeed they had: an example of confusion and disorientation!

Firstly, one would have thought that the size of the vote indicated the degree of success in the "building of an alternative force". At least it would provide a measure of the number of those prepared to follow the "independent Marxist Leadership"...

Secondly, their youth paper *Keep Left* had, all through the summer, boosted their Swindon campaign (in contrast to *The Newsletter*). In June:

"The seriousness with which the Young Socialists are tackling the political campaign in Swindon for the by-election was aptly illustrated on June 7 when 250 marched through the town and canvassed for support." (6)

In July/August:

"Over the last months, Young Socialists from all over the country have put in a great deal of campaigning work: canvassing from door to door, visiting the constituency's voters in their homes and explaining our policies."

In September (7) they dropped it for the daily, but in October Frank Willis got a front-page spread:

(4). Curiously, an SLL member told us of watching Frank Willis in a television discussion. We don't know whether any such discussion took place, since we don't watch TV. But, if it did, he was strangely proud of "vote-catching gimmickry"...

(5). It seems that, in the week preceding that interview, those stubborn things, the facts of the situation, crept up behind the SLL leaders and hit them over the head.

(6). The article went on to explain that not all the 250 demonstrators went on to canvass. Since the YS held an election demonstration in July 1968 in Swindon, which also had 250 participants, some of us were already doubtful about their prospects last June.

(7). The September 1969 issue of *Keep Left* is an excellent illustration of organisational fetishism. It has eight pages; two of these are devoted to the YS Summer Camp. On the right hand, we have an article: "An historic YS camp." On the left hand, we have, under the heading "Young Socialists learn about the role of leadership", no less than 11 (out of a total of 12) letters about the camp, describing it as 'a tremendous success', 'the best I have ever been to', etc. So many successes, they had better not let them go to their heads!

"Throughout the last six months we have been campaigning in the town from door to door with our election programme. We have met with an enthusiastic response because the YS stands for the only policies which answer the issues now facing the working class."

So we critics were entitled to expect, from comrades distinguished by their "seriousness" in "tackling the political campaign in Swindon", who were setting an "entirely new example in political campaigning in Britain", a serious assessment of the experience in the November *Keep Left*, published after the fiasco.

Unfortunately, it cannot be said that we got it.

Instead, we had some of the most complacent, hypocritical, dishonest piffle it has ever been our misfortune to read. Thus, under a front-page headline: "SWINDON We fought to keep the Tories out!", Aileen Jennings explains that "For the first time ever the Young Socialists stood their own candidate in a parliamentary election in the Swindon by-election. Our candidate Frank Willis...polled 446 votes following a year's campaign in the town." (Since it began in July '68, about a vote a day!)

They somehow fail to mention that the Tories *won* (8), indeed they don't give anyone else's vote. They claim that "the YS shunned vote-catching gimmickry" and that "Young Socialists learnt a lot from what was one of the biggest and best-organised campaigns we have ever had... the YS was able to canvass the town three times (9)." Demonstrating that in fact they had failed to learn the basic lesson - not to run candidates by themselves under those circumstances - the editorial went on: "All this was extremely valuable experience. We shall stand again in Swindon in the general election and in other places as well."

(8). *It does say: "...no political campaign was conducted by (the Local Labour Party) to keep the Tories out, in fact they opened the door for the Tories to win the seat." We can't regard that formula as enough, firstly, because, the working class youth at whom Keep Left is aimed would almost certainly not be conscious of the Tories' victory at Swindon, and secondly because that was the conclusion drawn by Healy from all five by-elections, four of which were won by Labour. A letter on page 3 does say outright that the Tories won. Incidentally, the editorial also presents us with more jargon: since the LLP must have waged a campaign to keep the Tories out, we can only conclude that Keep Left could not award the label 'political' - a favourite label, of course - to it. But that seems strange... the Labour Party is, whatever else one says about it, a political party.*

(9). *This theme is repeated in the letters column, which these days bears analysis as an awful warning of how a good paper can degenerate. There are four letters, three about Swindon. A "Swindon Canvasser" writes:*

"We canvassed each house three times, carried out a door to door battle for support and raised the most important issues facing the working class - the Common Market, rising prices, wage freezing and unemployment. We warned of a return of the Tories...(We) had the most enthusiastic canvassers. Without vote-catching con-tricks our campaign was a struggle for socialist principles," &c.

Sarah Hannigan of Clapham YS writes:

"Up to the time of the election, the YS completed three full canvasses of the whole of the Swindon area in a mass drive to bring the YS policies home to every worker and housewife in the town. As we talked to people on their doorsteps, we could begin (?) to see very clearly the problems that are affecting workers all over the country today," &c.

And to complete the hat-trick, B. Gill of Hounslow YS writes:

"Young Socialists have been round Swindon at least three times to discuss with the working class about fighting the employers and their system," &c.

One is entitled to ask: can't these people do anything but repeat the same thing over and over?

We must say that the editorial - outrageous though it is - is, indefinably, less arrogant in tone than a lot of their material, e.g. extracts above. We believe, that, in fact, their election experience at Swindon came as a pretty sharp blow. For the orientation towards independent candidates was adopted a long time ago (10), and a justification of it can be found in *The Newsletter* of 18th June 1968. A section of the 1968 Congress Resolution of the SLL is published there; it contains the following extracts on candidates:

"We shall stand candidates in the next parliamentary elections in certain constituencies, not at all because we are for any 'parliamentary roads' but, on the contrary, because we take every opportunity exposing and defeating the existing 'parliamentary' leaderships of the working class.

"We will, of course, not win electoral victories at this stage, and the most important gain will be to build up a body of experience in this field. Where we have no candidate we will urge support for the Labour candidate and oppose any turn away from the Labour movement by 'independent', 'tenants' and similar candidates encouraged by 'state capitalists' and other opportunists who always fall into sectarianism when the real struggle for an alternative is posed."

As a matter of fact that is not too bad. It is quite correct in principle for revolutionary socialists to use elections for propaganda work, even if they have no hope of winning (and the practical experience, is, of course, useful). But, when it is necessary to bring in "Young Socialists from all over the country" to run the Swindon campaign, particularly from "all different parts of London" (B. Gill), one wonders whether, given the strength and resources of the YS-SLL, it is really worth the effort, or is likely to be at the general election. Not that we share their Krivine assessment, that their "impact (in Swindon) was practically negligible". Their comments on Krivine were merely dishonest, inspired by factionalism; as the Ligue Communists did in France, the SLL has managed to establish in Swindon, through its activities including the by-election campaign, a solid, though small, base in the factories, etc. (11)

What we do think is that, in this talk of establishing a base among workers discontented with Labour and /or CP, the role of electoral work is at present minimal. If it were possible to establish a united front of various revolutionary groups - IS, IMG, SLL, perhaps Maoists - on an agreed program of specific transitional demands, and to mount, in one or two suitably selected areas, a serious, large-scale campaign, which set itself the limited objectives of gaining experience, of propaganda work and a certain amount of recruiting, then an electoral tactic on those lines might be justified (one could only say it *was* in a specific case).

Unfortunately, the prospects of such a campaign are negligible. One reason is the sectarianism of the SLL - just as they have recently refused, in the aftermath of the recent racist outbursts in Leeds, to engage in joint anti-racist activity with the IS and the local CP, so their comments on the IS "tenants" candidature strongly suggest that they would refuse any united front electoral work. Now we don't know very much about that IS work, and, apart from not being partisans of IS, we are anyhow

(10). Between 1964 and 1966 they discussed seriously the possibility of putting up a candidate in the Bosworth constituency, where the MP is the extreme right-wing Labourite, and partisan of a Lib-Lab pact, Woodrow Wyatt. For various reasons, mainly their failure to establish a YS branch there, the project did not get off the ground.

(11). It is a curious fact, the significance of which we don't understand, that the main areas where, during the 1960's, the SLL has been able to win over significant sections of adult CP militants, are isolated industrial centres: Swindon, Oxford, etc...

inclined to doubt its value. But the SLL's "criticisms" are merely another example of organisational fetishism: when they, *the revolutionary party*, engage in electoral work that is "the building of an alternative force based on principles", you see, but when IS run tenant candidates, probably with more support, as part of a genuine tenants movement, it is "sectarianism"...

Another reason is that the Maoists, at least, have an insane anti-parliamentary policy. Which question raises a very interesting episode, which cannot be too widely known. Oxford, of course, is one of the few centres where the SLL has a good base among the factories (consisting of some first-class militants). It is also a stronghold of the Maoists of the Peking-recognized CPB(ML)(Birch) tendency. The Oxford branch of the CPB(ML) publish, irregularly, a one-page broadsheet called *Oxford Worker*, for which they claim a circulation of about 1,000 (which, if true, is at least 5 times the Oxford circulation of *Workers Press*).

Here are some extracts from *Oxford Worker* No 3:

"Ever since they were expelled from the Labour Party, the Young Socialists (Socialist Labour League) have been gazing enviously at the seats of power occupied by the capitalists' front men - Wilson, Heath & Co. - at Westminster. This is why they lag so far behind British workers in seeing through the hypocrisy of Parliamentary politics.

"So in the Swindon by-election the Young Socialists politely asked the ruling class if they could join in their game, and put up their own candidate to "pose the fight for principles first" (as they claim). These principles amounted to an attempt to 'teach' the workers of Swindon about the Labour Party's betrayal of the working class.

"Even in Swindon, which had an unusually high poll, the number of voters' abstaining exceeded the number voting for any of the candidates. The real result of all the recent by-elections was a mass vote against Parliamentary politics. Workers obviously know a good deal more about class struggle than do the power-seekers of the Socialist Labour League..."

"The performance staged at Swindon in conjunction with the revisionist Communist Party of Great Britain and the other bosses' parties exposed the League's 'left' socialist phrasemongering as a cover for the most unprincipled opportunism."

As we said, some at least of the Maoists have an insane attitude to, among other things, parliament. We don't want to discuss that here: the important point is that this claptrap has had a pretty wide circulation in one of the League's most important centres. And, unless we are mistaken, the SLL has made *no reply*. In fact, *Oxford Worker* is just an extreme example of what has happened nationally, yet the *only* SLL statement on the Swindon by-election, apart from the November *Keep Left*, is an article "Labour Keeps Door Open For Tories" by G. Healy in *Workers Press* of 1st Nov. It is hardly worth reproducing it all here, but some quotes are called for (original emphasis throughout):

"Wilson has prepared the ground to hand over to the Tories.

"This is the political reality, no matter how unpalatable it may seem to those who continue to think in the old opportunist way.

"It was above all, the lesson from the Swindon result..."

"(The 'left' MP Mikardo) avoided the increase in unemployment which has been engendered by the government to placate big business..."

"The Young Socialists fought what was in our opinion one of the best organised political campaigns in what for them has been a history of well-planned campaigns.

"They were truly magnificent in their discipline and political seriousness..."

"It was absolutely correct for the Young Socialists to pose the fight for principles first in the by-election - this is a million times more important than vote-catching..."

"Hatred of the Tories is not enough - socialist policy is much more decisive (sic. Q. of what?) - that is surely the main bitter lesson from the five years of Wilson's rule..."

"In 1966 Francis Noel Baker had a 10,443 majority. It was Wilson's betrayal which transformed this into a Tory victory.

"The Liberals with Layton, who did not stand a candidate in 1966, received 6,193 votes (no doubt many were Labour in 1966).

"The Communist Party which received 838 votes in 1966 saw its vote fall to 518.

"The Young Socialists, who participated for the first time, received 446 votes.

"It is absolutely clear from these figures that Labour lost because of its treacherous policies, which strengthened the Tories and the Liberals." (12)

These extracts sum up the disorientation of the SLL. First, let us remark that the quoted extract is *all* - believe it or not - that is said about the CP. Second, let us note that, having driven so many people so hard in the campaign, it is impossible for the SLL leadership to *admit the hypothesis* that it might have been a mistake. Every one - we would have thought - would see that "it is absolutely clear from these figures" that the electoral significance of the YS's "absolutely correct fight for principles first" was probably negligible, and would ask *why*, after five years of Wilson's rule, that was so.

But not the SLL. They are unable to recognize that, although the Labour government has tried to solve the problems of British capitalism at the expense of the working class, its real success has been limited, mainly because of the strength, despite all its faults, of the organised trade union movement. Thus, while monopolisation and rationalisation have been carried through, the main damage - and it is very great - done by Wilson is the spread of demoralisation and confusion through the ranks of the Labour movement; the parliamentary and union 'left', by their abject capitulation to him, have contributed to this. But Wilson has *not*, despite the reiteration by the League since 1965 of predictions and accusations, increased unemployment to any very serious level.(13) In particular unemployment in Swindon is negligible, and can have had no effect on the election.

Moreover, as Healy himself admits, despite his campaign for socialist principles, votes have gone mainly to the Liberals, with the Tories benefitting from Labour abstentions. Now some of the votes cast for Layton may have been Liberal votes which were cast for Labour in 1966; but since the Liberals have not stood in Swindon for a long time, that is unlikely. And the conclusion one surely draws, from the fact of such a movement of votes - more so in the presence of a revolutionary socialist candidate than without - is that the British working class is *not*, yet, moving in a revolutionary direction or even, in its masses accessible to revolutionary socialist propaganda: the situation is neither pre-revolutionary nor rapidly developing into a pre-revolutionary situation, and, rather than it being "*absolutely correct*", it is most probably incorrect and a waste of time to engage in such candidatures.

Of course, we have not yet taken into account, in our discussion of the by-election, the effect of the ultra-left element in Healy's

(12). Readers of previous notes will spot in the Great Leader's words the inspiration for some of the rubbish we have quoted from Keep Left.

(13). With the exception, of course, of certain areas, such as Northern Ireland. Moreover bourgeois figures - although they must be treated with great caution - suggest that the specific impact of sackings and unemployment has been changed by certain measures of the Labour Government, e.g. the introduction of Redundancy Payments and less

propaganda. It is very difficult to do so; let us content ourselves with pointing out that it is extremely unlikely that British workers, with their long social-democratic history, will respond to propaganda presenting the Labour Party (and the Liberal Party) as the same as the Tories (e.g. on the Common Market issue). Moreover, such assertions are inaccurate and a-historical: if it were pointed out (and Healy used to do this!) that the Wilson government is different from the Tories in that it is doing, exploiting the confidence of the workers, a job that the Tories could not (in 1961 to 1963) do, that would, in our opinion, find a much better response among discontented Labour voters.

Finally, let us pose another question: why *Swindon*? There have, after all, been plenty of by-elections since 1966, so some account is surely necessary of why the YS-SLL waited three years to be "absolutely correct" in "posing the fight for principles first". None will be forthcoming, we suspect, but if we look at it reasonably, we can see that the answer gives yet more evidence for the belief that they expected a high vote.

For Frank Willis is, after all, one of their best militants. He has a good record, is popular in the trade union movement, and has been involved in a number of important struggles in the area. No doubt the SLL leadership also has or had in mind standing candidates in places such as, perhaps, Birkenhead. But that aspect of the Swindon candidature - and we are fairly confident we have the right answer to the mystery - only emphasizes the SLL's confusion: *they are unable to distinguish between the willingness of workers to follow a good militant in trade union struggles, knowing his politics, and support for those politics and "principles" themselves.*

So let's sum up our assessment of the Swindon by-election. First and foremost, the utter inability of the SLL to honestly discuss the experience is damning. (14) Secondly, their incongruous combination of ultra-leftist and opportunist propaganda has, by all the signs, failed to attract the support they anticipated and one would have liked them to have got. (For while 446 is not bad, it completely undermines their assessment of the situation.) Thirdly, if they continue with tactics of electoral adventures in isolation while attacking others for doing much the same thing, they are wasting their time and everyone else's.

(14). *A propos of this point: the pretentious bombast in their press after Swindon probably did not reflect accurately the counsels prevailing in the ruling circles of the SLL; we suspect the top leadership, as time passes, will find some excuse not to keep the promises then made. Although it may be a self-non-fulfilling prophecy, we predict: the SLL will not "stand again in Swindon in the general election and in other places as well".*

miserly unemployment benefit.

Chapter 5: CONCLUSIONS

We shall attempt here to draw a few lessons, pose a few more questions, and make some suggestions.

The Top Leadership of the SLL

First we address ourselves to the top leadership of the SLL - "the conscious elements among the leadership" to use their own curious phraseology - especially to Comrades Mike Banda, Gerry Healy and Cliff Slaughter. As we have said, we will be very interested in their response to this pamphlet and the questions which it poses. Here are a few more things for which they might like to account.

First, from the June 18th, 1968 edition of *The Newsletter*, which is, we think, our very favourite issue.

1. The following quotation from a report of a meeting of students at L.S.E. the previous Thursday requires comment:

"From the floor, Socialist Labour League Central Committee member Cyril Smith took issue with many of the things that had been said.

"The all-important question, he said, was how could the working class take the state power and establish socialism?

"The Communist Party opposed revolution, and they would not simply disappear from the scene. To defeat 40 years of Stalinist history and lead the working class to power required a party - science, philosophy and economics.

"In Britain we had perhaps 18 months in which to prepare for a struggle similar to that in France.

"Those who talked about struggling along pragmatically were missing out the central question - the building of this revolutionary party, which was the only way we could really draw on the experience of France."

2. The perspectives resolution published in that issue says:

"The Newsletter will be the means by which the League rallies and organizes the supporters and extends its influence. In every area we must have Readers' Leagues which will help us to extend the circulation and finances of *The Newsletter*, at the same time making it possible for the paper to be enriched by taking up every development in the working class as it arises."

The Newsletter had, moreover, been campaigning for some months for Readers' Leagues when it carried the advertisement which appeared in that issue.

Whatever became of *The Newsletter* Readers' Leagues?

3. That issue carries a report of a demonstration organised by the SLL in London on 16th June against the repressions in France. To use the words of the SLL's announcer, "another organisation" - unspecified (but in fact IMG) - took part in the demonstration. Neither the organisation's name nor even its existence is mentioned in the report. Specifically: a deputation of *four* was sent by the demonstration to the French Embassy; it included a representative of the other "organisation". *The Newsletter's* report lists only two YS members and Gerry Healy.

4. There appears in that issue an article "Gold price moves up as world money leaders meet", which contains the following paragraphs:

"One fact stands out from its (BIS's) report: nobody believes that the present two-tier system can last. Its continuation would only be 'feasible', it comments, if 'free' and 'official' gold prices remained roughly in line.

"Given a continued rise in gold on the open market the pressures towards a dollar devaluation are inevitable."

"Devaluation of the franc is near and this alone, in the present world situation, would be enough to spark off a European financial and economic crisis."

Curiously enough, this article is by Cde. Peter Jeffries.

May we suggest that those *really* responsible for all this nonsense account for it?

Turning reluctantly from that special issue of *The Newsletter*, let's go back in time. The date: 24th Oct. 1964. The place: probably Leeds. The scene: Cliff Slaughter is reading over an article, "Behan Crosses the Line", in that day's issue of *The Newsletter*. He wrote it himself: it's a book review, of "With Breast Expanded", by one Brian Behan, ex-Chairman of the SLL and ex-many other things as well. The article is one of the finest things Slaughter has written. But, we wonder, as his eyes pass over the following lines, does any doubt, any flicker of hesitation, about his present course cross his mind?

"There is little wonder that Behan does not say what his political programme (of January 1960) was. With the help of a few clippings from the 'Financial Times', he confidently predicted a serious economic depression by the autumn of 1960, a depression in which the workers would turn away from the Labour Party and seek a revolutionary alternative.

"We must, therefore, set ourselves up as an independent open revolutionary party to appeal to these disillusioned workers, he maintained.

"The (Socialist Labour) League rejected this sectarian nonsense at its conference in 1960. In the aftermath, Behan formed his 'Workers' Party', which has not been heard of since."

We cannot answer our question, of course.

But, *what does Cliff Slaughter think NOW about HIS break from the Labour Party?*

*

Now we must admit that we have little confidence in the ability of the comrades of the top leadership of the SLL to overcome their sectarianism, their habitual lying and distortions, and return to Trotskyism. Some of the reasons may be evident from what we have said before.

So it may be better for us, while calling on these comrades to mend their ways, to address those who will, in our opinion, most probably have to impose - in very difficult circumstances - a change of line on them, the rank-and-file and the sympathisers of the Socialist Labour League.

The Rank and File of the SLL

We believe that among those of these comrades who read this pamphlet the reaction will be roughly as follows. While they cannot help but be disturbed by at least some of the points we have raised, they will try to suppress those doubts. In particular, they will not raise them internally, either in branches or in documents. There are reasons for this; the main ones are, on the one hand, their party patriotism, on the other, the difficulty of raising anything within the SLL (1).

Nevertheless, we urge them to raise whatever has struck them most forcibly in our criticism. Discuss it with other comrades, rather than simply muse on it. Particularly those comrades who have joined the SLL since 1964 should try to raise the issues we have mentioned about the break from the Labour Party. In such a discussion, the issues of *The News-*

(1). *We have little desire to go into the topic, which is hardly fit for public discussion, of the SLL's internal regime - though we will do so if challenged - so we refer only to Hansen's pamphlet.*

letter for that period are vital reading; comrades should endeavour to obtain those issues we have quoted, if only to check, as they should, that we have quoted accurately and honestly.

At the same time as raising these questions, they should loyally carry out the work of the SLL. Much of this, we have tried to show, is pointless, or even marginally damaging to the interests of the working class, but they cannot expect a hearing within the organisation unless they fulfil their obligations to it. Moreover, the SLL has assembled in Britain a cadre of some of the best militants, who have been loyal and have stayed with the organisation. It has also assembled enormous material resources: the press, etc. *It would be a tragedy and a catastrophe for the working class internationally if this cadre were to become demoralised and apolitical, if these resources were not to be used for the interests of the workers movement.* Comrades of the SLL must not let that happen! They must impose - and we fear it will be an imposition - on their leaders a return to Trotskyism. These cadres and resources must not be wasted, must be used for building a Revolutionary Communist Party in Britain in the future!

Other Revolutionaries

Comrades of other revolutionary tendencies - particularly members of IS and partisans of the Fourth International - should also, in our opinion, play their part in forcing the SLL leadership to abandon its sterile sectarianism. Their role will be difficult: they will have to tolerate the most vicious unprincipled attacks in *Workers Press* and elsewhere. But they should not let this deter them.

First, they should reply to slanders in a calm, measured, reasonable way. At the same time, they should carefully note the nuggets of valid criticism occasionally to be found midst the dross.

Secondly, they should, whenever the SLL does something correct, impose on them the United Front from below. This applies, for example, to the Vietnam campaign they have just launched, and to a certain amount of their trade union work (even if the ATUA is "the trade union arm of the SLL" it is not entirely worthless).

*

In this connection - before discussing their turn on Vietnam - we should use the opportunity provided by their associated turn on the United Front to say the few more words on that topic which we promised earlier.

The second point Cliff Slaughter makes in his pamphlet on VSC about the United Front concerns freedom of criticism of other participants:

"At the VSC meeting...in August 1966, the chairman Ralph Schoenmann... prevented the secretary of the SLL (Gerry Healy) from speaking because he attacked Stalinism and warned of the need to fight against it.

"According to Schoenmann this violated the 'united front'.

"Now it should be said that Lenin and Trotsky always insisted that participation in a united front did not on any account signify the absolution of the political responsibility to criticize the other participants."

He then gives a quotation from Trotsky ("First Five Years of the Comintern", Vol. 2, p. 96.) to the effect that criticism is obligatory; his quotation is quite correct. He then goes on:

"And in any case, the Communist Party at this time opposed VSC as adventuristic and extreme!"

Now in our opinion we have already disposed, in Chapters 2 and 3, of most of this nonsense: the necessity for criticism *does not imply* that one makes the same speech, like a gramophone record, on every occasion. There remains Slaughter's point that the CP was not in the 'united front'.

Let's try to explain it to him, in words of not more than three syllables.

Comrade Slaughter, there are two types of 'United Front': 'From Above' and 'From Below'. VSC was a 'united front from above' of certain

groups and tendencies, which did not include the CP. But it was a 'united front from below' *with many CP members*. And that was good, for three reasons: 1) Because we wanted to build a mass movement against the war in Vietnam, and therefore wanted as many CP rankers as possible. 2) Because the joint work with CP members gave us the chance to discuss with them and win them from the CP and Moscow line (rather than just to shout abuse about it). 3) Because both building a movement and affecting their rankers pressured the CP leaders to also join the united front from above.

Now we have the assurance of *Workers Press* (see below) that the first reason is OK. No doubt we both agree the second is OK. Why was the third OK? For two reasons. 1) Because the CP joining the united front from above would, provided *we* were careful, help to build the mass movement (which was, and is, good). 2) Because a change in the line of the CP leadership would provide a further item to use against them with their rankers.

So why was what Comrade Healy did wrong?

Because, it drove the CP rankers, still having confidence in their leaders to some extent, *out* of the mass movement.

Because, it thereby deprived us of the chance to criticise their leaders in the course of joint activity.

Because, it gave the CP leaders an effective excuse to use - whether or not it was a good excuse is not the point - with their ranks, for not joining the united front from above (and their joining was good, provided we were careful).

That is why it was totally wrong for Cde. Healy to do what he did.

That is why he should have had the sense to observe the united front.

Of course, that does not imply he should not have made his criticisms of Stalinism, elsewhere, in his own meetings, in his own press, even within the VSC under certain circumstances if he had stayed with it.

Having, we hope, 'clarified' - to use one of his favourite words - Cde. Slaughter on that particular question, let us look at his latest turn on the united front, or, more generally, on the question of cooperating with the CP.

One of his more profound pronouncements on the subject was an article in *Workers Press* of 28th Oct 1969, entitled "Groveling Before Stalinism" (which is itself, we are elsewhere informed, "Prostrate Before Wilson"), criticising Bob Purdie of IMG for an article in the Oct '69 *International*. Slaughter's article is well worth quoting:

"(Purdie) says in passing that the Communist Parties have not 'as yet' broken from the Stalinist theoretical heritage, thus implying (??) that they are on the road to doing so.

"Indeed he says later that:

'...the (Communist) Party as a whole could be moved towards co-operating with the Trotskyists and other tendencies in work of immediate value to the British workers or the world revolution.'

"Here is the crux of the matter! Purdie will say: 'Co-operation on particular issues does not contradict the view that they are tied theoretically to Stalinism'.

"But what is this 'theory'? Can it be that without abandoning the Stalinist 'theoretical heritage' the Stalinists will carry out actions 'of immediate value to the British workers or the world revolution'?

"Here the worst kind of double talk is used to express counter-revolutionary revisionism."

So we can evaluate Slaughter's 'theory' in the light of this quotation, dealing with what, on his own admission, 'is the crux of the matter'. As we have explained, it *is* possible to collaborate with CP members, or the CP, in actions "of immediate value to the British workers or the world revolution". What is more, we had thought that Cde. Slaughter understood this.

For example, Tim Wohlforth, writing in the magazine *Fourth International* of which Cliff Slaughter is an editor, endorsed Trotsky's 1940 suggestion that the SWP offer the CPUSA an electoral united front. In a more recent struggle, the SLL sought, without concealing differences, to co-operate with the CP during the red-baiting in the ETU, in order to defend the whole

left, which was in the interests of the British workers. Another example - Cde. Slaughter informs us somewhere or other that Ho Chi Minh, the leaders of the Vietnam Workers Party and of the NLF, are all Stalinists - yet the SLL advanced the slogan: Victory to the NLF! Which would seem to be as near to co-operation as they could have got in the circumstances.

Worse yet, on 9th May 1965 *The Newsletter* headlined the slogan: Arm the Vietcong! Arms for the Stalinists! If just to talk of co-operating with them is "double talk used to express counter-revolutionary revisionism", what is it to suggest putting guns in the hands of "the Stalinists"? Assuredly (2) they will use them to mow down the revolutionary workers and peasants of Vietnam....

Now let us say, we don't understand Cde. Slaughter's 'reasoning' on this point. We admit it. Does he believe it is impossible *ever* to co-operate with Stalinists on anything? If so, he is revising the position of Trotsky... and of Wohlforth and the SLL itself. So he should state his position explicitly, and explain why such co-operation is no longer possible. We had supported his demands and proposals on Vietnam and the ETU in the past, and still think that was correct. Were we, in fact, dupes of Slaughter's "counter-revolutionary double-talk"?

If, at the end of October, we had regretfully reached that conclusion, we would have had some surprises coming to us. For on the front page of *Workers Press* of 16th Dec. 1969 we find the text of a letter (dated 10th Dec. '69), sent by the YS to the YCL and reproduced under the headlines:

"Stop Wilson's Visit to Washington

"LET'S UNITE

"YS propose united action to YCL"

So we would have had to do another mental somersault. For most people would regard "LET'S UNITE" as...a proposal for co-operation - "united action"- in the interests of the world revolution. And we would have had to conclude either, that this was counter-revolutionary double-talk from the SLL, or that things had changed rather drastically during the previous six weeks.

Now the YCL rejected (3) the proposal, in our opinion incorrectly. But, by refusing to debate Trotskyism with the YCL, by ultra-left attacks on the CP ("Stalin Lives! in today's CPGB", etc, etc), the YS-SLL have, *without any doubt*, provided the YCL leaders with a perfect excuse to present to their members. On the other hand, suppose the YCL had accepted the invitation to unite: Cliff Slaughter would have been rather embarrassed. For he would have had to explain, not just counter-revolutionary "double-talk", but also, presumably, counter-revolutionary actions, collaboration with the enemy who "must be destroyed".

Of course, we don't accept one word of this nonsense Slaughter has been coming out with. We wait with interest to see what his next articles will have to say.

We should also mention that the latest issues of *Workers Press* we have seen begin a campaign, undoubtedly urgent, against the TUC General Council's proposals to attack union democracy. On their past record, we doubt

(2). *It is, of course, true that the Vietminh leaders in 1945/6 did use arms for that purpose. The Editor of The Newsletter knew that in 1965. Is there, in 1970, some reason which did not exist in 1965 for supposing that the NLF leaders will repeat that? If so, when did the new evidence appear?*

(3). *The correspondence between the YS and the YCL was reproduced in Workers Press of 3rd Jan 1970. Unfortunately, it seemed to us that the YCL won on points. Although Sheila Torrance took a whole page to reply to the YCL, she somehow managed to avoid answering the following challenge by their secretary:*

"We find it a little difficult to comprehend your call for 'unity'. Gerry Healy said in February 1969: 'When we talk of unity with an opponent organization it is to get rid of that organization, we are in arms against you...'

"Therefore we are not sure if you are still connected with Healy's Socialist Labour League or whether he had retracted that statement or if there has been a complete reversal of policy."

whether the SLL will use correct tactics in this campaign, and we can't help wondering where their PC was on the 24th October, but the campaign is in principle correct, and we clearly, ~~explicitly~~ state that we wish it success.

And now let's examine the latest, unbelievable turn on Vietnam which we have already referred to.

The Latest Turn on Vietnam

This began quite quietly and peacefully some months ago when, in news reports, *Workers Press* (18th, 21st, 25th Oct '69) endorsed the October 15th anti-war demonstrations in the US. But this was a bit strange coming from the SLL, and Les Evans pointed it out in an excellent piece in *Intercontinental Press* ("An Ultraleftist Endorses the Anti-War Movement", 17th Nov 1969).

Tim Wohlforth, the American epigone of Banda-Healy-Slaughter, wrote a reply in *Bulletin* (1st Dec '69). He takes Evans to task for alleging that the SLL-WL had endorsed the anti-war movement. They hadn't; what they had done was to take "a turn towards more direct involvement in the mass demonstrations". He doesn't really square this up with an article by the *Bulletin's* present editor, back in the 14th July issue, which stated "This (don't ask us -TW) is why the Workers League opposes the present anti-war movement, its pacifist slogans and its endless demonstrations". But he does really get down to belaboring Evans, who "is forced to carry out a subterfuge... (to take) quotes from Lenin's *writings of 1902*. This is a complete hoax - one, by the way, used by the Communist Party to justify its popular front policies". (Emphasis added)

And why is it a complete hoax? Among other reasons, because "the quotes come from an early period in Lenin's development", and "Lenin did not come to a full understanding of the permanent revolution ... until April 1917 and thus his *early writings* express some confusion precisely on this question of democratic demands". (Emphasis added)

That's Tim Wohlforth's verdict on the "early writings" of Lenin which Evans quoted. Which early writings? Well, Wohlforth doesn't tell his readers. In fact Evans quoted from "What is to be done?", which we thought was a *sine qua non* for the SLL.

This unacknowledged repudiation of one of the Marxist classics was only a foretaste of even stranger things to come.

For the next stage was when, after months of quiescence on Vietnam, the SLL launched (in *Workers Press* of 25th Nov '69) a petition and demonstration against Wilson's proposed visit to Washington; a one day strike was later added to the list of proposals. This campaign was, of course, correct in principle, and we were pleased to see *International* and *Socialist Worker* support it, and that the IMG and IS participated. But if the initial announcements were surprising, we were to be astonished not long after.

For, after all the lies, slanders and attacks on the VSC, we read - in *Workers Press* of 23rd Dec '69 - the following words, under the headline "US SOLDIERS SHAME 'LEFT' MPs" and the by-line of Michael Banda:

"Defying the juggernaut of US imperialism and the threats and sanctions of the hated military-police dictatorship of Thieu and Ky, 500 people, including many US servicemen, are planning to celebrate Xmas in a unique, but appropriate, way by staging a 'Peace Happening' in the John F. Kennedy Square in Saigon on Christmas Eve."

"Although the objectives of this movement remain purely pacifist and

It seems tragic that the YCL should be able to score such points - for no suggestion was made by the IS that the quotation was inaccurate - off a revolutionary organisation.

Postscript: in the next round (31st Jan '70), no adequate answer is produced either.

do not go beyond calling on both sides (sic) (Banda's not ours - TW) to stop fighting permanently at Tet - the Vietnamese New Year beginning on February 5 - the fact remains that US soldiers on active service will be demonstrating against the hated war under the noses of the US military high command."

We were amazed. The SLL endorsing a *pacifist* demonstration? A 'Peace Happening'? Of 500 people? What about the demonstration of 75,000 in London demanding victory to the NLF? Had the SLL suddenly discovered - for we agree with their comments - that a *developing movement*, even if the ideas of the participants are confused, may be supported if its content is anti-imperialist? No explanation was offered ... that day.

But we were not alone in our amazement. The unfortunate members of the SLL seem to have been a little surprised. At least, that is the most likely explanation for the strange sight of the issue of 24th Dec. carrying an Editorial endorsing the Editor's main article in the preceding issue:

"Just Another Protest?"

.....

"Yesterday's Workers Press led on its front page with an article by editor Michael Banda on the 'peace' demonstration - which will be supported by American GIs - planned to take place tomorrow in Saigon. 'The growth of pacifistic moods in the army', the article stressed, 'as Lenin pointed out in the First World War, is only the first step towards a more belligerent attitude to the commanding staff of the army and its own ruling class.'"

"On the surface, the presence of a dozen American soldiers on a peace demonstration in Saigon may seem a small thing.

"But, taken in line with the recent 'moratorium' marches in the US itself, their decision reflects profound changes in the American working class's attitude to the war."

Now we regard this as a somewhat undignified position for the SLL to have got itself into. Of course, this demonstration is in Saigon, the other was in London. But we hope, comrades of the SLL, that you can come up with some sort of explanation.

For in the next issue of your paper, comrades - that of 27th Dec '69 - the editorial is: "Vietnam is the Touchstone".

We agree! Comrades of the SLL, you are right!

But, comrades, fifteen months ago in London there took place a demonstration for the victory of the NLF. It had been called for by the Vietnamese. It was witch-hunted by the police and by the press. Yet 75,000 marched.

Where were the comrades of the SLL on the 27th of October 1968?

So we can only regard the *Workers Press*, when it says on 30th Dec '69:

"A powerful movement in Britain against the war will give new strength and confidence to many others to speak out and act as these heroic soldiers and Vietnamese have done",

as one of the most hypocritical, revolting spectacles we have ever seen!

As for the article's conclusion:

"Much now depends on our campaign to stop Wilson's visit to Washington", it is beneath contempt.

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We have tried to criticise, as severely as they merit, various aspects of the theory and activity of the SLL. We think we have raised a number of questions which should be answered.

So we should, before summing up, mention the main merit of the SLL.

In our opinion, this is that it saw, *far more clearly than any other tendency*, the turn in the strategy of the employers to attacking the working class, with the collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy, by means of pro productivity deals. Where the SLL is probably strongest in the factories - at BLMH, Cowley, Oxford - none have gone through. Moreover, all other tendencies, and many militants, have been warned by the SLL's campaign (4).

(4). *The SLL does not have a serious way of fighting productivity deals*

But we must draw to a close. So let us sum up our critique of the SLL:

1. To judge from their press, they do not know what is going on;
2. The demands which they pose are total demands, which are not going to be accepted by the masses, and which obstruct the building of a movement through which the consciousness of the masses could move forward;
3. Their press and spokesmen lie about the Fourth International, about their own history, and about other revolutionaries;
4. They drag Marxist theory through the mud in the name of developing it;
5. They stand back from the mass movement, while purveying ultra-left nonsense in their press;
6. They have, by their own criteria, scabbed on the Vietnamese revolution;
7. Consequently, they are a disgrace to the name of Trotskyism.

Trotsky, however, disowned antics like theirs in advance. For if we change 'rostrum' to 'newspaper-kiosk' and - since 1963 - 'International Secretariat' to 'United Secretariat', does not the following description sum up the Socialist Labour League?

"The sectarian looks upon the life of society as a great school, with himself as a teacher there. In his opinion, the working class should put aside its less important matters, and assemble in solid rank round his rostrum: then the task would be solved.

"Though he swear by Marxism in every sentence, the sectarian is a direct negation of dialectical materialism, which takes experience as its starting point and always returns to it. A sectarian does not understand the dialectical interaction between a finished programme and a living (that is to say, imperfect and unfinished) mass struggle. The sectarian's method of thinking is that of a rationalist, a formalist and an enlightener. During a certain stage of development rationalism is progressive, being directed critically against blind beliefs and superstitions (the eighteenth century!) But rationalism (abstract propagandism) becomes a reactionary factor the moment it is directed against the dialectic. Sectarianism is hostile to dialectics (not in word words but in action) in the sense that it turns its back upon the actual development of the working class.

"The sectarian lives in a sphere of ready-made formulae. As a rule, life passes him by without noticing him; but now and then he receives in passing such a fillip as makes him turn 180 degrees around his axis, and often makes him continue on his straight path, but.....in the opposite direction! Discord with reality engenders in the sectarian the need constantly to render his formulae more precise. This goes under the name of 'discussion'. To a Marxist, discussion is an important but a *functional* instrument in the class struggle. To the sectarian it is a goal in itself. However, the more he discusses, all the more do the actual tasks escape him. He is like a man who satisfies his thirst with salt water: the more he drinks, the thirstier he becomes. Hence the constant irritability of the sectarian. Who slipped him the salt? Assuredly, the 'capitulators' of the International Secretariat! The sectarian sees an enemy in everyone who attempts to explain to him that an active participation in the workers' movement demands a constant study of objective conditions, and not haughty bulldozing from the sectarian rostrum. For analysis of reality the sectarian substitutes intrigue, gossip and hysteria."

We cannot say more.

(BLMH Oxford is an exception, which unfortunately may be coming to an end). But, partly stimulated by the League's concentration on the issue, the IS seems to have worked out a good approach.

APPENDIX: "A POLITICAL CHALLENGE"

What follows is the complete, unexpurgated statement by the Political Committee of the SLL entitled "A Political Challenge" which appeared in *Workers Press* No. 21, Saturday October 25, 1969.

"Behind the strike wave

A POLITICAL CHALLENGE

A Statement by the Political Committee of the SLL.

The massive wave of strikes now engulfing British industry is the beginning of a major change in the class struggle in Britain.

At the same time it is necessary to stress that these strike struggles are only the first skirmishes in a conflict which can be resolved only by the taking of power from the capitalist class.

All the Labour, trade union and Communist Party leaders conceal from the workers that this is what is at stake.

The Socialist Labour League, with its daily paper, the *Workers' Press*, devotes all its efforts to the recruitment and training of the forces to achieve this revolutionary task.

Miners, motor car workers, dustmen, steel-workers, engineers, dockers, women workers in many industries, have all been thrown into struggle within days of each other.

These struggles take the form of wage demands, unprecedentedly high ones, because millions of workers and their wives are feeling, two years after devaluation, they can no longer live on the standards at which they are being kept.

It is no longer a question of separate and consecutive struggles, but of the world crisis bringing together the fight for living standards of all sections of the working class.

*

These effects of the world crisis - the threat of further unemployment, price rises, curtailment of investment, entry into the Common Market, speed-up and rationalization by the big monopolies helped by state finance - now begin to weld together the working class as a fighting force.

The Labour government's attack on the trade unions and the Tory Party's plans to go even further in these attacks, are both reflections of the world economic crisis and at the same time accelerators of the process of facing the working class up to the political character of its struggle.

Whatever the form taken by the strike struggle - against unemployment in the car industry and in GEC-EE, for parity with the best-paid motor industry areas, for the eight-hour day in mining, for equal pay for women, for substantial pay increases for the dustmen - the content of them goes very deep because whole sections of the class are acting independently of their leadership in response to the deepest crisis of the system.

It is in such a situation that the dustmen's strike for £5 a week increase has had such a big effect, from the mining industry to the teaching profession.

The strength of the organized workers in these strikes can and will force certain concessions from the employers and the government which supports them.

*

But the government and the employers will continue to press forward, in whatever ways they can find, with exactly the type of policy which has produced higher prices, cuts in public spending, reduction of

credit and deflationary policies; all of these will continue.

Jenkins and Wilson have accepted the dictates of the international bankers and monopolists: they have promised the International Monetary Fund a payments surplus of £300 million annually for the next ten years.

The slight progress which they have begun to make is a result of cut-backs in credit, higher prices and fewer jobs, which have caused the present strikes.

The resulting decline in investment will soon destroy any temporary gains in the balance of payments, and worse attacks will follow.

The Tories and the right-wing Labour leaders can only go on by provoking the severest clashes.

In the service of these same bankers and monopolists they must attack the unions, to weaken the working class.

Imports will be further reduced to cut consumption of the workers and their families.

The so-called 'shift of resources into export industries' is again to cut the amount for consumption on the home market.

Wages must be kept down. Speed-up and closures - so-called rationalization - are the only way capitalists can restore their rate of profit on return from international trading. And so disputes over redundancy, short-time working and Measured-Day Work will grow.

The government's policies and the employers' plans are one and the same thing.

*

By stopping the Labour government's plans for laws against the unions, the working class has left itself with the ability to wage the strike struggle against the employers.

Jenkins has made it clear that the credit squeeze, the cuts in consumption and the whole 'deflation' package will continue.

This is why the bankers are so enthusiastic about Wilson's government, even if the motor manufacturers are fearful of the effects of the credit restrictions on their sales.

Finance and heavy industry always win out against the manufacturing industrialists in such critical periods, and the manufacturers, like the motor industry, then take advantage of the repressive and right-wing policies imposed on their workers.

That was the situation before Hitler's rise to power in Germany.

The capitalists know very well that the present strength of the working class is the one great barrier they must overcome.

They hope that entry into the European Common Market will give them both the economic market and the political strength to expand industrially and at the same time a reinforced political strength to control the working class.

Already the Common Market authorities predict, for example, 200,000 increase in unemployed in coalmining and 400,000 in textiles in the immediate future.

Without a shadow of doubt, speed-up, closures 'rationalisation' and drastically reduced living standards would result from entry into EEC.

*

That is the purpose of 'entry' and it is the reason for unanimity on the question between the Tory, Labour and Liberal parties.

The Communist Party is now modifying its opposition to the Common Market because it knows Stalinism in Russia and Eastern Europe is working for new types of collaboration with the West European capitalists, in order to 'stabilize' the position in Europe, i.e. to keep down the Czech, Polish, Hungarian, Rumanian, Bulgarian and

Soviet working classes.

Leadership can only come from a Marxist party which is independent of all plans of the capitalist class and the Stalinist bureaucracy, just as the working class must fight against them in order to survive.

*

That is the lesson for the working class of the whole of Europe as well as Britain.

When the working class in any country enters struggles which raise the question of power, one of the most important factors for the outcome is the *international* relationship of forces in the class struggle.

Here a complete change has taken place since the 1920s and 1930s.

The workers of every European country are thrown into great strike struggles by the effects of the same crisis which is producing the strikes in Britain.

This strength of the working class, reaching its high points in France and Czechoslovakia in 1968 and in Italy and Germany this year, is both an indication of the depth of the struggles in Britain and a major factor for their success.

The Labour government has shown in Northern Ireland that it will use troops to defend a reactionary Tory government and the employers who stand behind it.

They will not stand back and watch the development of the struggle in Britain and political preparation is necessary against them.

That is why the All Trades Unions Alliance has such an important role; its aim is to build alternative socialist leadership in the unions.

The monopolies in Britain have been helped by the state to prepare attacks on the working class.

*

British-Leyland announces a £70 million investment programme at the Cowley plant, and immediately before short-time and redundancy.

£90 million is being invested in containerization in the Merseyside docks alone.

GEC-EE received gifts from the Labour government of £31 million to proceed with their merger and the thousands of sackings which follow.

Now Benn is in charge of the nationalized industries as well as being the government's liaison officer with the monopolies.

The unions, the carworkers, the dockers and the GEC-EE workers are involved in a political struggle against the overall plans of the state, the banks and the monopolies to impose the burden of the crisis on the working class.

Alongside them in the political fight are the miners and all the lower-paid workers battling against the incomes policy.

The emphasis is on exports and the government aids to investment all make the state a direct factor in the wages and productivity struggle in all these industries.

The struggle against unemployment can therefore only be won in a fight against the state, which is the instrument of big business.

The present wave of strikes is an essential preparation for the struggle against unemployment, because these strikes accelerate the unification of the working class.

Most essential is a socialist policy and leadership to direct this strength.

As the Tory Party prepares new attacks, protection for non-unionists and new laws against the unions, what is the role of the union leaders in these strikes?

*

Whilst union leaders were negotiating for a 15s. increase, the dustmen won, by unofficial action, £2 10s.

In the mines, Sir Sidney Ford announced himself 'surprised' by the NGB's granting the full wage claim of 27s. 6d., but the men stayed out on strike and the strike spread.

The resignation of Ford, Daly and the NUM executive has been demanded all over Yorkshire and Derbyshire, and they have lost the confidence of miners everywhere.

The strikes in motors found Scanlon and Jones, after all their 'left' talk, paralyzed.

Jones actually sat with Feather, Hayday and others in a joint committee with the Confederation of British Industries and signed a report announcing an 'agenda for action' to resolve the problems of 'industrial relations'.

This, described by the employers as 'a break-through in employer-union co-operation at national level', was done on the weekend of October 18 and 19, when the miners strike was at its height, the motor industry was over-run by disputes, and low-paid workers in bakeries and other industries were preparing new strikes.

This attempt at an agreement with the employers follows the failure of the Labour government to impose its legislation and the blastfurnace-men's successful killing at one blow of the TUC's proposals for settling disputes.

The trade union bureaucracy is only carrying forward logically its reactionary policy of the June special TUC conference.

Their answer to government intervention in the unions is not to fight the government, but...to get closer to the employers!

From the union leaders, right and left, the workers can expect only that they will go more surely into the camp of the employers as the struggle builds up. So it was in 1926, so it is today.

We appeal especially to all members and supporters of the Communist Party in the trade unions.

*

The presence of Jones' signature on the agreement with the CBI, the lining up of Daly with the right wing of the NUM, following as they do the wage-cutting agreements of McGarvey, the desertion of Paynter, and the record of Scanlon from the engineers' deal in 1968, through the fight on the Ford penalty clauses and the fight against anti-trade union legislation - surely this experience settles the disputed questions of leadership in the unions.

The line of 'left unity' with so-called 'progressive' union bureaucrats has helped these same 'lefts' to carry out their betrayals.

The essential question is to build an independent Marxist leadership.

In 1964, the working class elected a Labour government. In 1966, the majority of that government was greatly increased.

But Wilson and the government have ruthlessly carried out the plans of the bankers and monopolists and betrayed the working class.

Since the seamen's strike of 1966 and especially the dockers' strike of October 1967, the working class has turned away from the Labour Party towards the economic struggle.

The Tories and the employers hoped that this would lead to their return to office in control of a disillusioned working class.

But this 'economic' struggle already has major political effects.

It threatens the Tories with defeat, because it brings the working class forward in independent political action.

Great caution is necessary at this point. The temporary voting swing back to Labour reflects the great and growing feeling in the

working class against the employers.

But the plans of the employers have actually been implemented by the Labour government and will continue to be so.

The recent improvement in balance of payments figures has been achieved only by major restrictions on investment.

*

Instead of the predicted 10-15 per cent increase in investment this year, there was only 5 per cent.

That means a worse crisis in balance of payments is being inevitably prepared because economic growth falls behind.

Further and more severe attacks on the working class would follow.

The essential question is to build political leadership in the working-class movement.

In and around strike struggles, a new revolutionary political leadership can be built from all the most advanced workers through the Young Socialists, the All Trades Unions Alliance and the Socialist Labour League.

The Workers Press is the instrument of building this alternative leadership.

The British working class will not stay at a purely economic level in its strikes. It already raises the question of the leadership of the unions, the political character of that leadership and its relations with the employers and with the Labour government.

It seeks ways of hitting at the Tories politically as well as the employers economically.

*

The working class is strong, buoyant and resolute.

In such a situation, the expansion of the circulation of the Workers Press, its close relation to the struggle of the working class, and the building of an alternative socialist leadership - all of these can and will be accomplished.

The road now opens for the building of the revolutionary working-class party which every worker is beginning to recognise is needed.

The Socialist Labour League, recruiting hundreds of new members and building new branches, supported by the Young Socialists and the All Trades Unions Alliance, calls upon all workers to join with it in the task of constructing that party.

Friday, October 24, 1969."

All emphasis in original.

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REFERENCES

The address of the Fourth International in Britain is: IMG, 182 Pentonville Road, London N.1. The address of the SLL is: 186A Clapham High Street, London S.W.4.

From the former can be obtained the magazines *International* and *Marxist Youth Journal*, and the press service *Intercontinental Press*. From the latter can be obtained the daily organ *Workers Press* and the youth paper *Keep Left*.

The following pamphlets are relevant to the dispute:

F.I.

- E. Germain: "Marxism versus Ultraleftism".
- J. Hansen: "Healy 'Reconstructs' the Fourth International".
- E. Mandel: "The Inconsistencies of State Capitalism".
- R. Purdie: "A Marxist Debates the SLL".
- USFI: "Approaching a decisive turning point in Great Britain".

S.L.L.

- G. Healy: "Ceylon: the Great Betrayal".
- : "Problems of the Fourth International".
- T. Kemp: "Class Struggles in Belgium".
- C. Slaughter: "A Balance Sheet of Revisionism".

Pierre Frank's book "La Quatrieme Internationale" (Paris, Maspero, 1969), which, it is to be hoped, will be published in English as soon as possible, contains much valuable background material.

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