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EDITORIALS

THE WRP AT THE RUBICON, BY RB

AN APPEAL FROM POLITICA OBRERA (ARGENTINA)

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EDITORIAL I

During the twelve months of its publication the Bulletin has been directed at the members of the WRP. The group which has produced the Bulletin functioned essentially to provoke a discussion within the ranks of the WRP, to reiterate some basic points from the method and programme of Trotskyism.

We have dealt with some of the problems raised by the degeneration and consequent crisis within the WRP. We began the work of answering the revisions of Marxist theory which have appeared, in relation especially to the problems of rebuilding the Fourth International; the orientation to the working class in Britain, tactically expressed in entry work; the open revision by the WRP of the Transitional Programme; the way to pose a workers' government in Britain, and the WRP revisions of the Marxist method and attitude to 'philosophy'.

Our intervention was part of the struggle to rescue the Trotskyist core of the WRP, in terms of its cadre and through drawing the lessons of its history and gains in the International Committee of the Fourth International, when it was the SLL. The WRP leadership responded with so-called theoretical attacks on the positions of the Bulletin, which revealed the former's deep-going degeneration. In the struggle against the WRP leadership the Bulletin group itself was consolidated.

A new stage was reached in the struggle for Trotskyism in the WRP when 200 comrades were expelled for fighting for a reorientation to the Transitional Programme; the WRP leadership was unable to co-exist with these forces in the same organisation.

We regard ourselves as a faction of the WRP, as an integral part of the Trotskyist movement which was represented by the ICFI until this was bureaucratically split in 1971 by the SLL leadership, without serious discussion. We fight for the organisation of a structured international discussion between the forces around the WRP-ICFI, and the OCRFI, in order to continue the discussions of 1971, which remain to be brought to a conclusion.

The Bulletin Group is now a section of the Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International, on the basis of our work in relation to the WRP, in the working class movement, and agreement with the basic positions of the OCRFI.

Our work in the WRP continues, the struggle for Trotskyism in the WRP is not ended, but in order to struggle fully for the methods, history and lessons of Trotskyism in Britain we have, as a section of the OCRFI, to broaden our intervention in the working class movement.

As a result we are working towards the publication of a Trotskyist theoretical journal, which will correspond to the next stage of our work. This journal, when published, will incorporate the Bulletin and its work.

EDITORIAL II

Since the explosion of May-June 1968 in France, coupled with the Czech events of the same year as two aspects of the European revolution, we have been living in a period of great offensive by the working class. The European working class, through its trade unions and parties, has defended itself against reaction in the West, and threatened the basis of the Stalinist bureaucracy in the East. Against the rocks of the national problem in Cyprus, and the militancy of the students in Athens, the Greek junta foundered. It was unable to maintain its repression of the working class, and was deserted by its American ally. In Greece the workers once more face the treachery of Stalinism, and popular frontism, yet they do so in conditions of offensive.

The bourgeoisie itself is not inactive, all over Europe it attempts to muster forces to confront the working class. Behind the facades of national interest and popular fronts, the bourgeoisie attempts to establish strong states. Nothing is pre-ordained in the class struggle. The working class in Europe has certainly suffered setbacks since 1968. But nowhere can there be said to have occurred a major defeat.

The revolutionary process now under way in Portugal marks the beginning of the European revolution. In a general sense Europe is entering a pre-revolutionary situation, although this is not precisely true in each country. Yet if the national conditions decide the forms and tempo of the class struggle, it is only on a European scale that we can grasp its true direction. And here we insist against the hysterical verbiage in Workers Press that it is the working class, not the bourgeoisie, which is at present on the attack. This is the framework in which to understand the 1974 events in Britain, the fall of Heath from office.

The method of the Transitional Programme must be the basis of our understanding of the present situation in Britain. In its words,

"The economy, the state, the politics of the bourgeoisie and its international relations are completely blighted by a social crisis, characteristic of a pre-revolutionary state of society. The chief obstacle in the path of transforming the pre-revolutionary into a revolutionary state is the opportunist character of proletarian leadership, its petty bourgeois cowardice before the big bourgeoisie and its perfidious connection with it even in its death agony".

Here are posed two crucial elements. First, the underlying crisis of imperialism, affecting 'the economy, the state, the politics of the bourgeoisie and its international relations'. Second, the crisis of leadership in the working class movement. The recent events in Britain must be viewed in this light.

The special forms which the crisis of capitalism has taken in Britain, since the fall of the Heath government in February 1974, are the precise expression of the historical weaknesses of British capital. The structure and techniques of

of production here are generally outmoded by the new requirements of the international market, and outclassed by other nations. During the boom years this fact was obscured by the development of new industries and a recovery of the world market which gave some leeway to British industry. Yet the boom itself, which stabilised the British economy for a period, strengthened the working class and enabled far greater expansion by Britain's competitors. These factors prepared the way for the sharp problems now faced in shipbuilding, aircraft, machine tools and automobiles.

The car industry for example, finds it extremely difficult to adjust to the accelerating rate of change from an expanding to a stagnating, and ultimately declining market. It cannot simply cut back cleanly on production because this measure brings not only a fight to save jobs by car workers but also economic problems for the bosses. Yet at the same time production must be geared to demand, on average. When the contraction in the automobile market hit home, the bosses responded with hard and classic class struggle methods: short time working (Ford), and the threat of withdrawal of investment and factory closure (Chrysler-Rooves). Correspondingly the demands and actions of the car workers have gone onto the defence of jobs and conditions. The problems of British capitalism have imposed themselves on the international investment which is vital for Chrysler-Rooves and Fords. Chrysler US have threatened the withdrawal of all American investment because of the falling rate of profit, and lack of capital for reinvestment, but above all because of the resistance of the unions, at Ryton and elsewhere. In the case of BLMC, it has had to appeal to Benn for funds. The intervention of the state, with the necessary capital to continue production, is now vital for several industries.

The British aircraft industry, which has been contracting in size for some years, under the pressure of the massive US companies, is in a massive crisis, despite the effort to 'rationalise' itself. Even the BAC and ESA monopolies are unable to compete under today's conditions. There is not a single commercial aircraft projected for construction in Britain, except Concorde, which itself has an uncertain future. At the level of technology required in military aircraft the British government finds it necessary to turn to the USA. For the whole aircraft industry in Britain jobs and production depend on large-scale government intervention.

The shipbuilding industry, hanging onto the coat-tails of the North Sea oil boom, building rigs for drilling, finds itself in a situation where it loses money when it builds ships. It tenders too low, and antiquated production methods and inflation remove profit margins. The Japanese and US industries now make British shipbuilding, in simple economic terms, internationally superfluous. The possibility of export is now also dependent on government aid, or on maverick international ventures like the takeover of UCS by Marathon.

In the textile industry of the north west we have seen in recent weeks the threat of immediate closedown of mills. The cheaper imports from colonial countries have even undercut British textiles in the home market.

Even the growth industries of the fifties and sixties, electronics and plastics, now face the problem of a shrinking market, combined with leaping inflation. The price and supply of crucial raw materials, such as vinyl, fluctuates wildly. These industries are linked to the fortunes of basic heavy industry itself, they cannot expect their sector of the market to continue expanding while heavy industry experiences a crisis. Ferrantis has already appealed for money from the state.

In this conjuncture, where industrial capital is constrained where a steady rate of production is itself threatened, the role of finance capital, of banks and finance agencies is central. Yet here also, despite the fact that the City of London remains as a main pivot of the money market, British finance capital is in no real position to assist its industrial brethren. We can expect foreign help to British industry only on the basis of propping up the international capitalist system itself, of which Britain is a key element. This is the meaning of orders to Routes from Iran. Investment on a basis of profit returns in Britain is almost at a standstill.

This is the economic situation faced by the British bourgeoisie today. These conditions, with the offensive spirit of the working class, have produced a crisis in bourgeois leadership. A struggle has commenced inside the Conservative Party to adjust to the new problems and adopt more suitable class struggle tactics and perspectives. But the habits of generations are not overcome so quickly. When Heath assumed leadership of the Conservative Party it was still with the outlook of the post-war expansion. He attempted to change his approach after 1970 to confrontation with the unions, yet he was unable to hold them in check by his methods of brinkmanship and the first steps of developing a strong state. During the period of the Heath government the state was not prepared for the massive strength of the workers in the unions. Yet at this time the clearer elements among the bourgeoisie, including the CBI leaders, began to take stock of the situation. Heath, in adopting the crazy tactic of a nationally organised two days a week lockout, also threw many capitalist concerns in jeopardy. It was proved also, at Saltley depot and over the release of the Pentonville 5, that the unions could match his use of the state. Finally Heath was forced against his will, to relinquish the government. The right wing in the Tory Party, from February 1974, began to press for a change of leadership, and more importantly, a change in the strategy of the bourgeoisie to real hard class struggle measures. Yet, despite the emergence of Thatcher as leader, with Joseph as the power behind the throne, the move to the right in the Tory Party is uneven. Thatcher represents the smaller business interests, the more hysterical middle class elements, rather than big business itself, which has still to be won to the 'new Toryism'. Sir Keith Joseph has sounded the keynotes of the new Conservative programme: no concessions to the unions, allow unemployment to grow, introduce reactionary social legislation. But it is one thing to sound the charge, another to win the battle. Workers Press considers the bourgeoisie strong enough to implement its ideas. We consider otherwise, it is the working class which is on the attack. The changes in the Conservative Party are a regroupment, not a reversal of the defeats of February and October 1974. In 1974 the Conservatives share of the vote was 35%, in 1970 it

was 38%, this is the reason for the Tory Party's crisis of leadership.

We do not consider that the bourgeoisie will simply retreat before the working class, it must counter attack. The police force has been geared up to cope with mass picketing since Saltley, other measures have been taken.

Enoch Powell is again assuming a position of importance, as a link-man to the enraged petty bourgeoisie and lumpen workers. Yet his time is to come; he is a bridge to the neo-fascist Protestant organisations in the North of Ireland, which will play a large role in the preservation of the British bourgeoisie. Powell will be acceptable to the ruling class in a way impossible for Craig or Paisley. Today's conditions require a Sir Edward Carson. The economic ideas of Powell, essentially the recognition of the laws of market forces as the strongest imperative for capitalism, are acquiring credence again in the Tory apparatus. Yet Heath avowed similar policies, and could not implement them; Thatcher has yet to develop her ideas. She has said, carefully, that there is no place for Powell in a Tory government 'today'. But there is also tomorrow.

The swing to the right in the Conservative Party, is not synonymous with an objective strengthening of the position of the bourgeoisie itself. Ultimately a defeat of the working class is required. The problem at the heart of the crisis of bourgeois leadership is how to break the strength of the trade unions. In the last year individual capitalists have resorted to traditional methods: lockouts, closures and scab labour. But generally the workers have replied successfully to these measures, some struggles have been lost, but the strength of the unions remains intact. No, for the bourgeoisie the task is to return the Conservatives to power, to again link state and legislature against the unions. The signs are that they will try to bring down the Labour government as soon as possible, especially if particular measures of state are unacceptable. The 'strike of capital', threatened against Barn's Industry Bill, may yet take place.

The working class, for its part, faces an intensified attack on jobs, wages and standards. It is mobilising in the unions to defend itself. The elections of 1974 have proven beyond any doubt the solid support for the Labour Party. There is a definite leftward movement in the advanced layers of the working class which we expect, at a certain moment, to emerge in increased membership of the Labour Party. The period we are entering is one in which the defence of jobs on a large scale will be linked in the minds of trade unionists directly to the need for a Labour government. The turn to the Labour Party does not imply a simple acceptance of the limitations of reformism. But the Labour Party remains as the only mass party of the British workers, and it has to be tested in practice for its suitability as a class struggle weapon.

We can see evidence of the leftward move by the working class within the LP itself, and negatively in the moves to resist changes on the part of the right wing. Between the February and October elections, there was a marked increase in the size of the Tribune Group in parliament. The left wing of the PLP is now at

its largest in twenty years. This growth can be attributed to the changes in the consciousness of the working class itself, refracted inside the Labour Party. The period when large numbers of workers enter the LP to fight has not yet commenced, yet a polarization, under the pressure of the class as a whole, has. As a result the Labour rights have formed a hardened tendency, the Manifesto Group, to fight proposals for state control of industry and to block those demands of the unions unacceptable to the employers.

We have no illusions in the Tribunites, they are reformists with all the limitations of reformism. But their increased numbers are based on a turn by the workers; the Tribune programme reflects the fighting mood of the workers, it is not the same programme as that of Jenkins, or even Wilson. Trotskyists must defend the Tribunites against the right wing, and on this basis criticise the weaknesses of left reformism. The move on the part of the working class which today brings increased support to the Tribunites will at a certain point go well beyond them. But we cannot jump to that stage; to simply attack the Tribunites today in blanket fashion is in fact to abstain from the struggle for the leadership of the working class. The Tribune group has grown on the basis of the victories by the miners, the nurses and the Scottish transport drivers. The Tribunitite leaders, especially those in government, have a contradictory link with these movements, which give them strength, but which they attempt to restrain within the limits of reformism. Foot, in granting claims, also warns other workers to remain within the boundaries of the Social Contract, and remains inactive in relation to the impending closure of Ebbw steel works.

The transition of the British working class from illusions in reformism to revolutionary consciousness will not occur in one leap. This transition is today beginning, but it will not run in a straight line. We must support the Tribunites whenever they conflict with the right wing and the ruling class, and at the same time advance our own demands and methods of struggle.

February 1974 saw the thwarting of the plans of the bourgeoisie, through parliamentary decrees and the use of the judicial machine to force the unions into retreat. October 1974 marked the consolidation of the offensive begun by the miners at the end of 1973; the October election was a real defeat for the ruling class and its party. Since Heath had decided to use control of parliament as the lever to attack the unions, it was imperative for the unions to have a majority Labour government. The election victory opened the gates for the many partial and sectional demands which had been held down by the Industrial Relations Act. The level of claims for wages and guarantees we believe to be unprecedented in the past five or six years. Trade Union activity on every level is accelerating. As Wilson has recently pointed out, settlements on the scale of the latest NUM claim are not possible generally. This presages clashes between the unions and the Wilson government, with the unions in by far the stronger position. This process of conflict, between trade unionists and the Wilson government, shielded to some extent by the nature of the LP apparatus, will bring the working class to seek closer control of the LP and accentuate the

split between left and right wings.

The leaders of the major unions, behind the screen of the 'Social Contract', are attempting to hold demands in check, to try and prevent a clash with Wilson. They have to fight hard at every stage against the demands of their own members, yet in the last analysis their places as union bureaucrats depend on winning these demands. As the right wing of the PLP advocates a statutory incomes policy as the way to hold wages down, the union leaders respond by a defence of the social contract. This defence is a desperate attempt to hold back a direct conflict between the Labour government and their unions. As David Bassett, GMWJ secretary wrote,

"Have we learnt nothing from the last ten years? Is there any way in which a policy of right statutory control could avoid creating far more social conflict than it cured? ... A crude reversion to statutory incomes policy would destroy the whole structure of fairness (sic) we have started to build."

These are not simply the remarks of a cool traitor determined to betray his members. The union leaders, and the Labour lefts, are caught in the cleft stick between the interests of the bourgeoisie and the demands of the workers. At every step the officials in the Scottish drivers dispute advanced the social contract as a reason for 'moderation' and return to work. They were forced to fight for the full claim.

The working class itself is far from being uniform in consciousness and militancy. The dockers and textile workers are both engaged in battles against redundancies yet the differences in union traditions are so great that Lancashire textile workers allowed Cyril Smith into a union meeting and carried union jacks, chanting chauvinist slogans. Blind economic militancy is not in itself enough to take workers forward. The Shresbury Two remain in jail and only by a movement with a wide enough base to force the TUC to take the necessary measures to free them, including a General Strike, as was the case with the Pentonville 5, will they be released. But such a movement requires consistent organisation in the unions and Labour Party, and a high consciousness of the political nature of the sentence, by a significant section of workers. As far as we are concerned, stunts like the 'Wigan to London March' and the impending 'Trans Pennine' walk do nothing to gain the release of the Two, discredit the name of Trotskyism and act as a positive diversion from a real struggle in the unions. Not a muscle of Jenkins flinched when the Wigan march reached London.

We see as central to the present conditions of class struggle in Britain the situation in the North of Ireland. Under conditions where 5 Labour MEPs have declared for the right of the Irish nation to self determination, it is imperative to fight for this demand in the LP and unions. The main principled demands of the moment are: Immediate withdrawal of troops, repeal of the Acts of Union. We condemn the slovenly and half-hearted way in which the WRP raises this call, combining it with conceptions, such as the immediate disbanding of the standing army, which negate its meaning, and in effect make Irish independence conditional on the revolution in Britain.

In our analysis of present conditions we reaffirm that the principle obstacle to the development of the fighting ability of the organised workers is 'the opportunist character of proletarian leadership'. Yet this is linked to the struggle to rebuild the Fourth International, and the crisis in those organisations which call themselves Trotskyist. The recent discussion in the WRP, which the leadership cut short before it could reveal their bankruptcy, by expelling many members, was provoked in great part by the conflict between the lunatic maximalism of the WRP and the demands of the working class. The WRP has been unable to directly participate and make gains in the last three years because of its sectarian abstention from the mass movement. Even a casual study of published attendance figures for ATUA conferences, YS meetings, which have stagnated, and the diminishing frequency of extravaganzas, reveals this fact. In its own terms the WRP is a failure. In terms of the real needs of the struggle for a revolutionary leadership of the working class its degeneration from Trotskyism can turn into an obstacle. The departure of many leading worker cadres from the WRP is a direct result of its isolation from the mainstream of the class struggle - the LP and unions.

We advance the entry tactic in the LP, as the method to fight for revolutionary politics in the working class in Britain. This is not an opportunist adaptation to the Tribunitas as certain Workers Press hack writers claim, but the means to participate in the break of a section of the working class from reformism at a certain stage. Our work in the LP is based on a split perspective, but the present stage of events required first the entry of the leading elements of the working class into the LP. We take part in the emergence of a leftward moving current in the LP, which is posited by present events but yet to emerge fully.

We believe the WRP, along with IS and IMG are bound to undergo a certain decomposition process as a result of the pull felt by their best elements towards the struggle in the LP. We expect this decomposition to continue so long as the dialectical relationship between the working class and its organisations is not understood. The crisis of proletarian leadership in Britain at present focuses on elements in the LP To successfully build a base, a cadre, on the issues of the day the EEC, redundancies, Ireland, means having the respect of the workers who vote Labour.

The task of Trotskyists in the next period, and in the coming months we can expect major events, is to root ourselves in the mass movement, the unions and the Labour Party. The pre-revolutionary period in Britain will not be a short episode. It will enable us to build a revolutionary leadership of the working class.

THE W.R.P. AT THE RUBICON

It is now a year since the Bulletin group commenced its activities. It little realised that the tentative analysis made in the Bulletin of the WRP crisis would be confirmed and enriched so dramatically and with such brutal suddenness. We refer of course in the first place to the shameful expulsion of the tendency, some 200 comrades strong, headed by Alan Thornett. The Healy leadership celebrated the first anniversary of the WRP in fitting style. They hurled out of the party, without the least pretence of a discussion, what is most certainly the most advanced group of workers British Trotskyism has won to its banner for many years, accusing its chief spokesman of 'Menshevism' at the precise moment when the Banda-Healy leadership is liquidating the assets of the movement into the swamp of petty-bourgeois radicalism.

There are several features that make these mass expulsions unique in the history of British and possibly even world Trotskyism. Firstly their scale. Virtually an entire region, the WRP's strongest outside of London, and probably its most proletarian in class composition, has been closed down in the course of carrying through the purge. This in itself establishes beyond doubt that Healy places the sanctity of the party apparatus and the preservation of his own cult of infallibility above that of the interests of the movement as a whole. It was Healy and no-one else who decided that the Thornett opposition and he could not remain in the same organisation, as the documents produced by the expelled comrades eloquently testify. That in itself is an instructive political lesson for those who doubted Bulletin claims that there has evolved at the top of the party a clique crushing genuine discussion and leading the movement towards disaster.

We shall return to the question of the regime. Suffice it to stress here that all the evidence goes to show that the Thornett group did all that it could to avoid a split with the Healy leadership. It was Healy that wanted the split. It is he who is wrecking the party and trampling on the principles of democratic centralism, not the 'liquidator' and 'Menshevik' Alan Thornett.

The second extraordinary aspect of the purge is the brazenness with which the Healy leadership has flouted the party's own constitution. We learn from the 'Second Document on Party Policy and Perspectives' produced by the expelled group that at a meeting of the WRP CC, Healy declared 'I will not have factions in this party. I will expel anyone who forms a faction in this party'. (p.39)

This statement not only betrays an utterly bureaucratic, in essence Stalinist conception of what constitutes a healthy party regime. It reveals Healy's cynical contempt for his own membership, whom he presumably expects to, not only submit to such a hideous tyranny, but actually join with him in hounding the would-be 'factionalists' out of the party. Sad to say, in many cases Healy's low opinion of his hand-picked yes-men on the WRP CC has proved to be justified. At lower

levels of the party, however, more resistance has been encountered, and yet more can be anticipated in the future as members begin to count the cost of the purge and of tolerating such a foul regime.

Finally, and for our purposes, most symptomatic of all, is the manner with which Healy carried through the party purge. In each of its stages, its political genealogy can be traced back, not to the honest methods of the Bolshevik Party during the lifetime of Lenin, where differences were fought out before the entire membership and after the revolution, in front of the entire working class; but to Stalinism. WRP members should ask themselves: is it not both ironic and monstrous that the very bureaucratic weapons forged by Stalin in his struggle to crush the Trotskyist opposition should now be turned against the WRP opposition by Healy?

Let us retrace the stages through which the purge passed. First the opposition was denied the right to put its views freely before the party, as was its right according to the WRP Constitution. And did not Stalin progressively deny the Trotskyist Opposition access to the party press and meetings of party cells as its barbs struck home at every aspect of the Stalinist course? We learn that Comrade Thornett had been promised the facility - and this was nothing more than his right as an organised and recognised minority - to address aggregate membership meetings in each major region of the party. None of these meetings took place. But what did take place were aggregate meetings addressed by CC members who supported the Healy line, and who in several instances at least, slandered Comrade Thornett both politically and personally. What are these if not Stalinist methods of conducting a political struggle within the party?

Also akin to Stalin's repression of the views of the Soviet Opposition was the WRP leadership's selective distribution of the first document produced by Comrade Thornett. While the WRP perspectives document for the Conference was made available to all party members, the document produced by Comrade Thornett was handed over only to 'reliable members', the number sometimes being confined to two copies per branch.

The next step in Healy's plot to drive out the opposition also had an impeccable Stalinist pedigree. A whispering campaign was initiated in London and allowed to spread out to the other regions of the party. Inspired by Healy and his immediate subordinates in the apparatus, the lie was put about that Thornett had gone 'soft' on social democracy, was after a job in the union machine, and that he had nearly deserted the party during the Cowley witch-hunt. These foul slanders, we feel absolutely confident, have no more substance to them than the accusation raised against Trotsky that his views represented a 'petty bourgeois deviation' from Bolshevism and a reversion to his alleged former Menshevism; that in fact the opposition was a 'social democratic' tendency alien to the Bolshevik Party.

Just like Healy, Stalin wasted no time in re-writing the history of the movement, a task begun in 1924 and still in progress under Stalin's successors today. At the outset of the factional struggle in the CPSU, it was suddenly discovered that

Stalin, and not Trotsky, had been responsible for organising the October insurrection, despite Stalin himself having asserted entirely the contrary in a Pravda article on the first anniversary of the Revolution. By stages, the legend was embroidered that Trotsky had not only played no part in the revolution, but in fact, had been from the beginning its sworn enemy. It took Stalin 12 years to complete this progression, which culminated in the first of the three Moscow show trials in August 1936. Healy seems determined to travel the same road in twelve months. In Stalinist parlance, the slogan at Clapham regarding frame-ups, slanders and purges is 'catch up and overtake'. Thus far the plan is right on schedule. In Banda's atrocious internal document 'A Menshevik Unmasked' we read therein not only the most lamentable and lame apologies for all the errors committed by the party leadership over the last year, but an exploratory essay in the re-writing of history that did we not know the identity of its author, we would presume had come from the pen of a graduate of the Stalin school of falsification:

"There is a legend that Oxford is the oldest and most experienced industrial base of the WRP. This is of course a factional distortion. Some of the most important experiences of the party were made in the docks, mining, electrical contracting and engineering industries. This is not to devalue the work in Cowley (sic!) but intended only to put it in its proper(sic!) perspective."

Just like Stalin, Banda and Healy are now, by the logic of their own unprincipled factional methods, being driven to eat their own words - and pamphlets - concerning in tone and content the party's record in industry. How different is the above quotation to the praises sung by Banda and Healy of the comrades at Cowley during and after the witch-hunt of last spring. Then, no words were spared to convince all and sundry that at Oxford was an exemplary group of comrades, whose collective work comprised the high point of the party's intervention in the trade unions.

Now that the 'Menshevik' has been 'unmasked', the former heroes of the Cowley battle have to be cast in a new role, and the importance of their struggle accordingly downgraded, taking fourth or fifth place to other sectors where the party has intervened in the past. But even if we take Banda at his word (hardly a wise thing to do) there remains a great deal of explaining to do. What has happened to the work done on the docks for example? Or in the electrical contracting industry? Leading workers active in these sectors - we need not name them here, since Banda knows them as well as we do - have long since left the party, and have yet to be replaced by others nearly as capable. Is Banda claiming this as a greater achievement than that at Cowley, where an entire layer of advanced workers came to the party and in the course of this, established themselves in - strong positions both within the factory and in the local trade union movement? Naturally, this achievement has to be minimised now, because those involved proved themselves not only to be loyal supporters of the party in their trade union work, but also (and in no way does the one contradict the other) capable of assessing

Healy's policies and methods critically. And there can be no greater crime than this.

Let us recapitulate. The purges, both in the CPSU and the WRP began with the curtailment of the rights of the minority. Stage two, an essential complement to the first, involved the distortion of its views. And in both instances, the opposition found itself characterised demagogically as 'Menshevik', as being conciliatory towards social democracy. This had to be if the claims of the respective leaderships to Bolshevik orthodoxy were to be sustained. (Let us note in passing that the same Banda who hurls the charge of 'Menshevism' against Comrade Thornett succeeded in recruiting, in the course of his barnstorming election campaign in Stoke Newington, 500 new members into the WRP, of whom no more than 20% could then be induced to vote for him. And Banda would lecture us on Menshevism?)

Stage three flows, but is distinct from stage two. It was not enough for Stalin to distort and repress the views of the Opposition. In order to isolate its leaders from the party rank and file, it was necessary to link their names directly with the overt enemies of the USSR. Even before the mass expulsions that preceded the 15th CPSU Congress in December 1927, the Stalin faction was denouncing the Opposition as 'anti-Soviet', and to lend credence to this slander, concocted an amalgam between Trotsky and the counter-revolution by planting an ex-Wrangel officer in one of the cells of the Opposition.

How did Healy operate on this front? We learn, once again from the statement issued on the expulsions by Comrade Thornett and his supporters, that Healy put about the slander that Comrade Thornett was a police agent. Bulletin supporters in the WRP have also confirmed that this lie became common coin amongst certain London branches only days after the expulsions. For example, the fact that at a picket of a London aggregate meeting organised by the expelled opposition Comrade Thornett was spoken to by a policeman, was at once construed as evidence of his collusion with the Special Branch. Those who put this dirty lie into circulation should have been a little more prudent. Little could they have realised that their own 'Leader' would soon be calling the cops to protect the WRP conference from the lobbying of the 'police agent' Thornett.

Thus very much after the manner of Stalin, Healy sought by these gutter methods to drive a class wedge between Thornett and that section of the party membership sympathetic to his views and disturbed by the manner of his expulsion. Accusations that he was an agent of the Special Branch, if not fully believed by the membership, certainly had the effect of diverting attention away from the political issues in dispute between the opposition and Healy. They also gave the leadership a breathing space in which to repair the worst of the damage and to prepare its political counter-offensive. Here too, there can be seen similarities with Stalin's methods in dealing with oppositional tendencies, as Healy well knows, since he himself claims to have been a victim of them.

Have we exhausted our analogy? By no means. In fact we have reached the stage where we observe Healy not only emulating but excelling his mentor Stalin in bureaucratic repression. Of Stalin it could be said that while, like Healy, he expelled all the Opposition on the eve of the Party Congress (not one of its leaders attended the 15th Congress as a delegate) he permitted, as a cynical gesture in the direction of party 'democracy', a mock debate and roll call vote on the respective platforms of the Majority and Minority. He had no fear of the outcome, since the delegates had been hand-picked by the apparatus of which he was the protector. In the case of the WRP conference, not only were representatives of the opposition prevented from attending by expulsion: Healy did not even risk going through the motions of permitting delegates to discuss and pronounce on the relative merits of the two rival platforms presented to the branches over the previous month. Indeed, with the expulsion of Comrade Thornett, the opposition document was recalled from the branches by the centre, and the 'discussion' declared to be at an end. Healy felt so unsure of himself politically that he did not dare tolerate even a token presence of an oppositionist at the conference. Such is the measure of his political bankruptcy.

Our parallel does not end even with the expulsion of the Opposition, or the establishment of 'monolithic' party unity and the triumph of the infallible 'leader' at his stage-managed congress. The class struggle, being an independent process and possessing an objective nature, pays scant heed to the desires of even the most messianic party despot. The actual course of events, the observation of which both Stalinism and Healyism is able to impair, but not totally prevent, puts certain very real pressures on the leadership. In the case of Stalin, the course of the class struggle in both Europe and Asia had cruelly exposed to the most advanced elements of the Bolshevik Party and the Comintern the disastrous nature of his rightist line, the policy of a bloc with the Nepman and Kulak at home, and in the International, with the TUC lefts in Britain and in China, their counterparts in the Kuomintang.

On all three counts, the Opposition had both predicted the consequences and struggled against the opportunist line of Stalin-Bukharin, characterised by Trotsky as one of relying on 'rotten ropes' to protect the USSR. As the ropes broke one by one - the TUC lefts betrayal of the General Strike, Chiang Kai-Shek's massacre of the Shanghai workers in April 1927, and finally, the grain strike blackmail of the Kulaks in the winter of 1927-1928 - Stalin and his closest supporters felt immense pressure on them from all quarters to make a sharp, improvised turn to the Left. In the very wake of the expulsions, Stalin revealed for the first time the real state of Soviet agriculture, which was passing under the sway of the richest rural elements. In the Comintern, at the same time, a sharper line was advanced against Social democracy, especially in Britain and France. The 'great turn' had begun, soon to culminate in the lunatic adventurism of the third period, with its theory that social democracy had turned into 'social fascism'.

The very ideas that had been denounced as 'petty bourgeois' and 'Menshevik' for the duration of the struggle against the Opposition were now stolen by Stalin and perverted and twisted almost out of all recognition as they were forced into the anti-Marxist mould of 'socialism in one country'. The leftist course pursued

during the 'third period' came no closer to authentic Leninism than did the rightist course followed by Stalin over the previous three years, even though the left turn arose partly as a result of healthy class pressure upon the leadership, and also as an improved attempt to defend the state sector of the Soviet economy from bourgeois and petty bourgeois subversion.

Healy the Plagiarizer

It has become almost a truism to say that while Stalin developed no original ideas of his own (not even the theory of socialism in one country), he was a master at plagiarising the ideas of others, especially those he had first purged from the party. The experience of the recent WRP purge suggests that here too, Healy is no sluggard. Those who read Bulletin No. 1, published at the end of January 1974, might recall that it focused on what remains the most salient feature of the WRP's departure from Trotskyism: namely, its sectarianism. This expressed itself in a variety of ways. The leaders of the Labour Party and the trade unions were characterised as 'corporatists' and were repeatedly accused of not merely facilitating the establishment of the 'corporate' state by their reformist treachery (a charge with which we heartily concur) but actually desiring the creation of a regime that would (unless the Stalinists were right on the question of social fascism) involve their own liquidation. Bulletin No. 1 also pointed out with careful textual references, how the WRP had been retreating from the struggle to expose the reformist leaders by failing to address demands to them that would draw the mass movement into collisions with the bureaucratic apparatus.

The WRP chose to abandon this policy just at the point in time when the Miners, supported by the Railmen, were forcing their leaders into conflict with the Tories, a struggle which raised at once the question of government, of a workers' government that would implement the demands for which the advanced layers of the class were already struggling (repeal of all Tory legislation, payment of outstanding wage claims etc.) For the method of the Transitional Programme was substituted a journalistic sensationalist, petty-bourgeois panic-mongering, infatuation with a pending military coup masterminded by the Tory squirarchy and, (as one infamous issue of WP informed its readers), endorsed by the leaders of the NUM.

Bulletin No. 2 (March 1974) analysed the implications of the WRP's sectarian-opportunist election policy and activity (repeated on a more ludicrous scale in October) and another aspect of its departure from Trotskyism - the substitution of the Maximum programme (the nationalisation of the entire economy 'without compensation and under workers' control') for the Transitional Programme. We especially highlighted the WRP's abuse of the slogan of workers' control, which in Healy's order of things, follows, and does not prepare, the expropriation of the bourgeoisie. What subsequent Bulletins have done is to round-out and correct the analysis attempted in these first two issues of the journal.

While we cannot claim to have re-oriented the WRP leadership on these questions, the appearance of the Bulletin did have a noticeable effect on Workers Press. Some

of the radical excesses of Bull, Johns and Mitchell were curbed a little, and the paper began to talk in a half-witted way about minimum programmes (going so far as to support that of the Labour Party, something the Bulletin has never done).

But the cloven hoof of the Healy-fostered radicalism continued to protude at moments of sharp political turns, when a clear head and a grasp of Marxist essentials was called for, and not infatuation with leftist rhetoric. Thus the fascist-led 'Ulster Workers' Strike' found the WP editorial board split down the middle, with the radicals backing the UWC. After all, weren't they striking against the Labour Government?, One can almost hear Mitchell saying. For five days, WP was silent on this most sinister development, as bewildered members rang up the paper asking what the party line was. The formulation finally to emerge from Clapham was that the fascist-led strike showed the 'great strength' of the working class in N. Ireland. And by the same token, so did the Powelite marches of 1968 show the great strength of the London dockers, or the recent anti-IRA marches in Birmingham, that of the City's car workers. This is the price the party is paying for tolerating Healy's deliberate cultivation of the petty bourgeois radicals from the acting and journalistic professions. They are the medium through which he imposes his own sectarian conceptions on the movement, a course which is leading it to ruin.

Many of the Bulletin's barbs struck home. We established a foothold in the party, Healy paid us the compliment of fingering in WP the authors of Bulletin No. 1 for the benefit of the police, the Labour bureaucracy and our employers. Inside the party, he slandered us as paid agents of the CIA, working from the London office of Cord Meyer. All this is routine stuff for Healy. It is the only method he knows of dealing with political opposition, and we can see where he learnt it.

But we had no illusions about the threat that our tendency posed to the Healy leadership which felt no great pressure to change its line to undercut our criticisms. Such a manoeuvre would only be undertaken if Healy found himself seriously threatened from within. And this is precisely what took place. The emergence of the Thornett opposition, both in its composition and aims, a healthy tendency fighting its way back to Trotskyism, forced the WRP leadership into a corner. Until the appearance of the first opposition document, maximalism reigned supreme in the press of the WRP. Its high (or rather low) point was reached with the WRP election manifesto, a sectarian monstrosity that amidst an orgy of leftist rhetoric (disband the standing army) omitted to call for the repeal of the Tory Immigration Act. Then, as if by magic and after years of total neglect and oblivion, the Transitional Programme burst forth on every page of Workers Press. Copies were either dusted down by or handed out to the WP staff, and lengthy extracts from it worked into not only lead articles but even secondary news items. WP even toyed around for a few heady days with the previously heretical notion that workers' control could and should be established by the workers themselves in struggle against their employers, and that workers' management was the order of the day after the employer had been expropriated. References to sliding scales abounded. It was even conceded that contrary to

previous WRP claims, the bulk of the workers still remain to be convinced of the need for large-scale nationalisations, and that the way to do this was through the method of fighting for transitional demands (i.e. workers inspection) and not maximum ones ('nationalisation without compensation and under workers' control of the banks, industry and land').

What we are confronted with in this latest centrist zig-zag of the Healy leadership is a clear case of opportunist adaptation, of plagiarism no less blatant than Stalin's filching operation of 1926. How come that the WP features day after day the very extracts from the Transitional Programme selected by Comrade Thornett in his first document to highlight the sectarianism of the party leadership, and its misuse of the slogan of workers' control?

Whither the WRP?

What are the motives behind this manoeuvre? What might be its effects on the party membership and those workers to whom the WRP addresses itself. It is in this area that the greatest clarity and caution is called for. We must draw on all the experiences of our movement in grappling with such political methods. We must see what is similar, and what is different between the experiences of the Stalin group and the crisis of the Healy leadership today. Stalin enjoyed some basic advantages over the Trotskyists which Healy does not possess and never will. While Stalin and his clique wielded state power by virtue of their control over the party apparatus, Healy's domination of the latter finds (thankfully) no such support in the organs of the state, even though he has proved himself not averse to seeking their aid in dealing with the expelled opposition. Healy might behave in his own flat as if he holds state power, and his retinue helps to sustain this delusion. But delusion it is. And it must always be remembered when making such analogies, which are valid within certain clearly defined limits, that Stalin headed a caste of bureaucratic usurpers that came to power as a result of the defeat of the revolution in the advanced capitalist states. The basis of Stalin's bonapartist rule was therefore the consequence of the isolation of the Russian Revolution. Healy's rise to dominance in the WRP cannot be explained in this way. The forces behind the degeneration of the WRP clearly are linked to the failure of the British Trotskyist movement to fully assimilate Trotsky's analysis of Stalinism, principally its abandonment of proletarian internationalism with the enthronement of the theory of 'socialism in one country'. But the social, economic and political conditions which nurtured the present Healy leadership must also be explained within the context of those who permitted Healy to rise to his present position of despot. The WRP is the product of a whole process, national and international, and it is along these lines that the analysis of its present crisis will most fruitfully proceed.

Secondly, Stalin was able to exploit and pervert the prestige of the Russian Revolution in his campaign against the Opposition. Again the Healy leadership can lay no claim to having participated in such a history-shaping event. His claim to prepresent 'the party' simply cannot be sustained. En route to total power in the WRP, Healy has broken not a few political spines of the movement's pioneers, and driven others into the political wilderness, from which several are

now returning. When the real history of our movement is written, Healy will find a place in it without denigration, though not the one he now claims is his.

Healy also finds himself at a serious disadvantage on a third count. Stalin scored his great victories over the Opposition at a time when the working class was reeling from a series of crushing defeats, from Britain in 1926, through China in 1927 to Germany in 1933 and Spain and France in 1936-1939. The slogans of 'defend the party' and 'defend the USSR' were readily transformed by millions into the uncritical support of the Stalinist line. There seemed no other alternative in a period of black reaction.

How different today. If we wish to give one simple answer to the question 'Why the expulsion of Thornett?' we would say 'Portugal'. For the rise of the revolutionary wave in Portugal epitomises the process of proletarian radicalisation at work in every European country, and which is even burrowing mole-like under the foundations of the Stalinist apparatus in E. Europe and the USSR. In Britain the proletarian offensive expressed itself through the miners' struggle, which in ^{its} turn, led to the fall of Heath and the return to power of Wilson. Each stage in this process left the WRP leadership floundering in its own verbiage of imminent coups and biggest-ever sell outs, of coalitions and Trojan Horses. The advanced workers brushed the sectarians and defeatists aside, and went about the business of placing their own leaders in the government.

This head-on collision between the class and the self-styled vanguard could not but have its impact on the thinking of the most serious worker-militants in the party. The result of this thinking we can read today in the two documents produced by the Thornett tendency, documents which show that the origin of their opposition to the Healy line lay in the real movement of the classes, and not any office in New Scotland Yard.

The limits of Healy's room for manoeuvre are therefore established by these objective factors. Having said this, then we must return to our first two questions. The emergence of the Thornett opposition must have been a severe blow to the Healy leadership. Being worker-based, and led by long-seasoned comrades, it embarrassed Healy all the more since it could not be easily characterised after the usual manner as 'middle class'. That designation, as Healy well knows, suits admirably his own most vociferous supporters.

It calls for the greatest tactical ingenuity to depict as a triumph for the party's proletarian forces the spectacle of a wealthy actress and a globe-trotting journalist hounding out of the WRP its strongest concentration of industrial workers. Hence the need for a turn, hence the sudden embracing of many of the slogans put forward by those expelled, hence the flurry of activity around issues where the 'proletarian' credentials of the WRP can be re-established. The Wigan March, the ATUA Car workers (sic!) and Miners' conferences, are examples of this attempted turn. A series of meetings have been undertaken in the devastated Western Region, with Oxford obviously the long term target for re-colonisation. These we think,

are the motives behind the manoeuvres with the Programme, manoeuvres which so long as they do not involve a complete re-casting of the WRP's present orientation towards the mass movement, and especially the Labour Party, will only serve to debase still further the slogans recently advanced in the press of the party. For it is not, as the first Opposition document so correctly points out, a matter of slogans as such, but the method of the Transitional Programme that lies behind them and the movement of the class to which they give expression. Here, nothing has changed so far as the WRP is concerned.

This is nowhere better demonstrated than in the Healy leadership's approach to the question of the nature of the Labour Party, and flowing from this, what tactics Marxists should adopt towards it. This problem has been with us since the very origins of the Communist movement, and it is therefore impossible to do justice in such an article as this to the complex arguments and tendencies that have evolved over the last half century and more on this question. But it nevertheless is of paramount importance to re-establish, in view of the recent sectarian lurch of the WRP on the Labour party issue, to recapitulate what Lenin and Trotsky wrote on the British workers' movement, and indeed, to exhume a controversy in the WRP's forerunner, the SLL, where Healy found himself attacking the position which he advances today with such zeal.

The Labour Party Question

The problem is best approached by looking critically at the WRP's most recent exposition of what it claims to be the communist position of the Labour Party. In WP of January 5th, Jack Gale (who cut his first Trotskyist teeth as an entrant in the Leeds Labour Party) wrote what passed for a reply to Mary Archer, who had written a private letter to Gale criticising formulations he had used at a WRP meeting on the nature of the Labour Party. Ironically, Gale and Mary Archer fought on the same side against the ultra-lefts in the faction fight of 1960, in the course of which Brian Behan developed the line that the Labour Party was not a workers' party, and that the SLL should proclaim the 'open party', (one projected name for this forerunner of the WRP was 'Revolutionary Workers' Party).

Before examining Gale's revision of the Marxist position on the Labour Party, it must be noted that he departs, or permits Healy to depart, from the traditions of communist polemic. Mary Archer's was a private letter to Gale. Gale is perfectly justified, as a WRP member, in showing it to the WRP leadership, and the party is quite within its rights to publish a reply. But in doing so, it should permit the readers of the WP not to speak of the 99.9% of the WRP's members who have not read the letter in question, to avail themselves of its contents. All the WP allows to appear from Mary Archer's letter is one isolated excerpt. Can it be that Gale and Healy are afraid that by publishing the whole of the letter, their own untenable position on the Labour Party will be exposed?

This is more than likely the case. Gale makes much of the fact that Mary Archer selects a quotation from Lenin on the Labour Party dating from 1908. Gale asks 'Why did she not choose to quote Lenin on the Labour Party in 1920?'

Gale is understandably anxious to invoke Lenin's authority in his bid to prove that the Labour Party is, in no sense, a workers' party. We can appreciate this concern, since following in the footsteps of Palme Dutt, John Strachey and company, the Healy leadership has been denouncing for the last two and a half years the leaders of the Labour Party (most of all the Lefts) as 'corporatists'. Clearly a 'corporatist' (fascist) party cannot be in any sense a workers party, and certainly not a party one should do entry work in.

Let us look at the quotation preferred by Gale, and, let us look at it in the spirit of its author, critically: it comes from a speech made to the Second Congress of the Comintern, on 6th August 1920, the subject being 'on affiliation to the British Labour Party'. The excerpt selected by Gale runs:

"Whether or not a party is really a political party of the workers does not depend solely (NB) upon a membership of workers, but also (NB) upon the men that lead it, and the content of its actions and its political tactics. Only this latter determines whether we really have before us a political party of the proletariat. Regarded from this, the only correct point of view, the Labour Party is a thoroughly bourgeois party, because, although made up of workers, it is led by reactionaries, and the worst kind of reactionaries at that, who act quite in the spirit of the bourgeoisie."

That, for Gale, settles the matter of the class nature of the Labour Party. But it did not for Lenin, nor the Comintern, nor Trotsky, nor indeed Healy. Lenin made this speech - a polemical one directed against a British delegate - on 6th August 1920. On 4th July of the same year, in preparation for the Comintern Congress, he drafted the 'Theses on Comintern's Fundamental Tasks', a section of which he devoted to the vexed question of the British movement. Lenin's Theses, while coming out clearly and firmly for total organisational as well as programmatic and political separation from the Second International, made a single exception in the case of Britain, where he argued for the embryonic Communist Party to fight on specific terms for affiliation to the Labour Party:

"... the second congress of the Third International should declare in favour of Communist groups and organisations, or groups and organisations sympathising with communism, joining the Labour Party in Great Britain, despite its membership in the Second International. As long as this party ensures its affiliated organisations their present freedom of criticism and freedom to carry on work of propaganda, agitation and organisation in favour of the dictatorship of the proletariat and Soviet government, and as long as this party preserves the character of a federation of all trade union organisations of the working class, it is imperative for communists to do everything and to make certain compromises in order to be able to exercise their influence on the broadest masses of the

workers, to expose their opportunist leaders from a higher tribune, that is in fuller view of the masses, and to hasten the transfer of political power from the direct representatives of the bourgeoisie to the "labour lieutenants of the capitalist class" so that the masses may be more quickly weaned away from their last illusions on this score."

(Vol. 31, P.199)

We should note two things. Firstly, that Lenin saw in the British Labour Party features which set it aside from all other parties of the Second International, namely that it permitted freedom of tendencies, and secondly, that it was a 'federation of all of the trade unions of the working class'. Now if we treat everything Lenin said and wrote as holy writ (a distinctly non-Marxist approach) then we would be hard put, in the light of Lenin's considered opinion on the trade union basis and nature of the Labour Party, to explain his remark in the already quoted polemic against the British delegate to the Second Congress, where he says the following:

"... I should like to mention a slight inaccuracy on the part of Comrade McLaine, which cannot be agreed to. He called the Labour Party the political organisation of the trade union movement, and later repeated the statement when he said that the Labour Party is 'the political expression of the workers organised in trade unions'. I have met the same view several times in the paper of the British Socialist Party (and we shall see it recurring - within the author's opinion, some justification, in the publications of the Socialist Labour League, forerunner of the WRP). It is erroneous, and is partly the cause of the opposition, fully justified in some measure, coming from the British revolutionary workers ... Of course most of the Labour Party's members are working men ..."

(Vol 31, P.257)

The quotation then continues with the extract cited by Gale.

On two occasions, the leadership of the Comintern had cause to address itself to the problem of the class nature of the Labour Party. It did so in a way that makes it yet more difficult for Gale to sustain his sectarian line on that organisation. In December 1921, the Comintern Executive circulated to all its sections a directive on the application of the united front tactics formulated at the recent third congress of the CI. Section 10 dealt with the specific application of the tactics in Britain:

"In England the reformist Labour Party has rejected communist party affiliation although other workers' organisations are accepted. Under the influence of the growing desire among the workers for the united front, the London workers' organisations recently passed a resolution in favour of the affiliation of

the CPGB to the Labour Party. England is of course in this respect an exception because as a result of the peculiar circumstances the English Labour Party is a kind of general workers' association for the entire country. It is the task of the English communists to begin a vigorous campaign for their acceptance by the Labour Party'. (emphasis added)

Little more than a year later, in March 1922, the Executive Committee of the Comintern met to discuss the so-called 'English Question', and formulated a resolution on the problem guiding the CPGB in its work, especially towards the Labour Party. Point 7 of this resolution contained the following definition of the Labour Party, one that Lenin, had he followed to the letter his polemic against McLaine two years earlier, would have been bound at least to modify:

"The Labour Party is the political organisation of the trade unions. It includes various political tendencies within the workers' movement, such as those represented by the ILP, the Fabians, the Guild Socialists etc. etc. But the defensive struggle of the working class against the increasing oppression of the bourgeoisie requires that the Labour Party should include within its ranks all the political aspirations of the workers' movement. The Labour Party cannot claim that it unites the working class in the political field if it does not also include the Communist Party ..."

(emphasis added)

In this instance, the Labour Party is characterised as a trade union party, imperfectly expressing the aspirations of the working class by virtue of its exclusion of the CP. It is nowhere in this very important resolution characterised as a bourgeois party after the manner of the August 6th 1920 speech by Lenin, nor anywhere else in Lenin's work that we have been able to find.

Gale's purpose is clear. He wants to pluck an isolated citation from Lenin to boost his own sectarian line on the Labour Party. He chooses to ignore all those statements on the question by Lenin, Trotsky, the Lenninist Comintern and his own organisation which round out, and in the author's opinion, correct the one-sided analysis of the Labour Party quoted by Gale.

Let us move on a little to 1925, the year when Trotsky wrote his short book, 'Where is Britain Going?' Gale and Healy, given their recent conversion to the Behan conception of the Labour Party, will be hard put to it to explain how Trotsky came to write the following:

"The proletariat has forced the trade unions to create an independent party. But the matter will not rest there ... A great deal less time will be necessary to turn the Labour Party into a revolutionary party than was needed for its creation."

(Ibid, p.35, 1960 edition)

Gale deduces from an article written by Lenin during the world war (The Collapse of the Second International) that in Britain it was from then on the task of Marxists to 'destroy' the Labour Party. Yet a decade later, Trotsky, in a quotation studiously ignored by Gale, is saying that it is the task of Communists to 'turn the Labour Party into a revolutionary party'. Was there a contradiction between Lenin and Trotsky on this question? We think not, though there existed obvious differences in the manner of their presentation of the problem. Trotsky did not say that the task of the communists in Germany was to transform the SPD into a revolutionary party, nor any other section of the Second International save the British. Gale fails to grapple with this side of the matter - the special nature of the British Labour Party, and the consequent flexibility and even uniqueness of approach towards it by the Comintern. Trotsky did not of course argue that the Labour Party would automatically evolve into a revolutionary party (a development which is of course, contrary to the claims of the Grant group, totally excluded today and has been since at the latest, the defeat of the 1926 general strike). He saw as one of the decisive factors the role of the young British CP:

"In order to take power, the proletariat must necessarily have at their head a revolutionary party. In order to make the trade unions fit for their future role, they must be freed of conservative officials, of superstitious blockheads ... A reformist, opportunistic Liberal-Labour party can only enfeeble the trade unions, thus paralysing the activity of the masses. A revolutionary Labour Party, based on the trade unions, will together with them become a mighty instrument for their restoration to health and their uplift ... Of course, for the period if a certain comparatively long period Communism will develop comparatively slowly, but after that an inevitable change will take place: The Communist Party will take that (leading) place in relation to the Labour Party which at present is occupied by the ILP." (Ibid, pp.122-127)

Nowhere in this work does Trotsky pose the question of 'destroying' the Labour Party. Neither, despite the great sharpness of his formulations did Lenin in any of his writings on the subject. Only Gale employs this formulation, revising as he does so the entire heritage of Marxist teaching and experience in relation to the British Labour Party.

Gale also informs us with evident delight that 'nowhere in this report (the 1908 article referred to Mary Archer) does Lenin call the Labour Party a workers' party'. And then Gale adds: 'Always precise, he refers to it as the political representation of the trade unions'. But in 1920 Lenin himself rejected this formulation, in the very speech seized on by Gale to establish the thoroughly bourgeois nature of the Labour Party!

Because he is grinding Healy's sectarian axe, and not attempting an honest and balanced evaluation of what is a very complex problem Gale lands himself in yet another contradiction. He asserts that in 1908, Lenin refused to term the Labour Party a workers' party. Yet in his already quoted war-time article, Gale cites Lenin where he says:

"In reality, the opportunists' formal membership in workers' parties by no means disproves their objectively being a political detachment of the bourgeoisie, conductors of its influence, and its agents in the Labour movement'. (emphasis added)

In other words, these parties to which Lenin is referring - the parties of the second international - are workers' parties with a bourgeois, opportunist leadership. To stress either feature at the expense of the other is to make a concession either to opportunism or sectarianism. By his highly selective use of quotations, Gale makes Lenin appear as an ultra-left, as we shall also see when we turn to the WRP's distortion of Lenin on election strategy and tactics.

There is a final quotation of which we cannot resist reminding Gale. He must know, since his own organisation has only recently republished it in the last of the three-volume collection of Trotsky's writings on Britain. It occurs in the article 'Once Again the ILP':

"The war crisis does not alter the fact that the Labour Party is a workers' party, which the governmental party is not. Nor does it alter the fact that the Labour party leadership cannot fulfill their promises, that they will betray the confidence which the masses place in them." (emphasis added)

So Trotsky held the Labour Party to be a workers' party. And like Lenin he grasped the contradiction between its worker base and trade union origins, and its treacherous, opportunist, bourgeois leadership. Gale will have none of it:

"Mrs. Archer and the opportunists of 1974 want to stress that the Labour Party is a 'workers party' (Gale finds the suggestion so ridiculous that he has to put the term in quotation marks) in order to establish a link between the Wilsons, Healys, Jenkins, Foots and the working class. Aren't they leaders of a workers' party?"

The notion is just too preposterous for Gale. Yet it is true. That is precisely why Trotsky insisted that the crisis of humanity is the crisis of leadership. Gale capitulates to Wilson, Healy and Foot by implying that they are no longer a danger to the working class, since they are supported only by the bourgeoisie.

Unfortunately for the day dreamers of the WRP, there is a link between the Labour leaders and the working class. It is one that six decades of imperialist crisis and war, reformist betrayal and the persistent work of Marxists have as yet been unable to sever, or even seriously weaken. Or does Gale believe, as the 1969

SIL conference resolution so blithely put it, that no section of workers would 'ever again' look to Labour for leadership? Is Gale arguing that Trotskyists no longer have as their task the breaking of the workers from their reformist leaders? He writes as if this had already happened, spontaneously. Perhaps Gale still does support the resolution for which he voted in 1969, and which was brutally refuted by the vote of 12 million workers for Labour a year later. For he declares today:

"But the labour bureaucracy does not draw its strength and political outlook from the working class. It draws it from its alliance with the bourgeoisie".

Such word play is highly dangerous. For the fact is, and only blind sectarianism refuse to admit it - that the working class in considerable numbers does find its own illusions and prejudices reflected in the reformist ideology of its leaders. To argue otherwise today implies that the working class is quite spontaneously evolving its own socialist consciousness, and doing so without greatly disturbing the domination of the bureaucracy, or without lending its support in significant numbers to the 'revolutionary alternative', the WEP.

Does saying that Labour is a workers party, (as Trotsky did in 1935) necessarily involve or imply an opportunist outlook? Does saying that the Labour leaders derive support (however critical) from the workers, and to a certain degree, reflect their reformist illusions, place one in the camp of anti-Marxism? Gale obviously thinks so. Let him then expose, in his inimitable style the 'opportunist author of the following lines:

"The contemptible, mercenary, and servile bureaucrats of the trade unions and the Labour Party express all that is humiliating, serf-like and feudal in the British working class."

Let Gale make hay with that one, and when he is finished, we might tell him who wrote it.

Then he could try his hand at this:

"Morrison, Clynes, etc., represent certain prejudices of the workers".

Another case of an opportunist wanting to 'establish a link' between the working class and the Labour leaders? As every Marxist knows, there is no such link. The Labour bureaucracy owes its position only to the support of the bourgeoisie. The reformists are exposed, and have been for decades, the crisis of leadership has been resolved; has it?

Do we not have here, decked out in the language of what passes in the WRP for Trotskyism, the third period Stalinist theory that the reformist parties (in Britain, the Labour Party) had ceased to be in any sense workers' parties? Palme Dutt, pioneer of the third period in the CPGB argued that Lenin's analysis of the Labour Party no longer applied after 1928, that the party had become a straightforward 'third capitalist party', and the task of communists was to smash it. After 1929, and up to 1934, the Labour Party was dubbed social fascist,

much as the WRP today uses the term 'corporatist'.

It was also argued, in a style that has again become fashionable amongst sectarians, that the Labour Party was fast losing its hold on the workers, that its only support derived from the ruling class, and that therefore, all that had to be done to win the workers to communism was confront the 'social fascists' as the 'new leadership' of the working class. All this sounds familiar, as indeed it is. Gale is simply attempting to smooth the rough edges of what is essentially a policy derived from the third period, and from the 'Left Communism' of a decade earlier.

Lenin vs. Gale on Elections

The 'Left Communist' aspect comes through in Gale's rather lame apology for the construction of sectarianism and opportunism which served the WRP as an election policy.

This is how he perverts Lenin to protect the WRP from Mary Archer's criticisms:

"Thus he (Lenin) wrote - not having had the advantage of Mrs. Archer's advice about what 'other parties claiming to represent the working class' should do: 'We should put up our candidates in a very few but absolutely safe constituencies (a precept not followed in the Swindon bye-election of 1969, when the vote for the Young Socialists' candidate Frank Willis was greater than the Tory majority over Labour!) ... We would take part in the election campaign, distribute leaflets agitating for communism, and in all constituencies where we have no candidates, we would urge the electors to vote for the Labour candidate against the bourgeois candidate.' This is exactly (emphasis in original) what the WRP has done."

To, Comrade Gale, it is not, and you know it. For you have quite deliberately (unless your copy of Left Wing Communism has pages missing or lines obscured) omitted an entire section of the quotation where Lenin outlines what he thinks should be the election policy of the British Communists.

The relevant passage from Lenin in 'Left Wing Communism' runs:

"The (British) Communists should propose the following 'compromise' election agreement to the Hendersons and Snowdens: let us jointly fight against the alliance between Lloyd George and the Conservatives; let us share parliamentary seats in proportion to the number of workers' votes polled for the Labour Party and for the Communist (not in elections, but in a special ballot) and let us retain complete freedom of agitation, propaganda and political activity ... If the Hendersons and the Snowdens accept a bloc on these terms, we shall be the gainers, because the number of parliamentary seats is of no importance to us (remember Healy's 500 MP's?) we are not out for seats. We shall yield on this point ... We shall be the gainers, because we shall carry out our

agitation among the masses at a time when Lloyd George has 'incensed' them, and we shall not only be helping the Labour Party to establish its government sooner, but shall also be helping the masses sooner to understand the communist propaganda that we shall carry on against the Hendersons, without any reticence or omission.

"If the Hendersons and the Snowdens reject a bloc with us on these terms, we shall gain still more, for we shall at once have shown the masses ... that the Hendersons prefer their close relations with the capitalists to the unity of all the workers ... If the Hendersons and the Snowdens reject a bloc with the communists, the latter will immediately gain by winning the sympathy of the masses and discrediting the Hendersons and Snowdens: if, as a result, we do lose a few parliamentary seats, it is a matter of no significance."

We have only now, after two pages of closely argued text, reached the point where Gale feels it safe to begin his quotation from Lenin, which begins, 'We would put up our candidates ...'

Gale has ignored entirely the stages through which Lenin saw communist election policy in Britain passing. First it was necessary to unify on a principled basis, all the groups adhering to communism and the Third International. The next step in Lenin's opinion, should have been to propose to the Labour leaders a bloc in the elections against the two capitalist parties, the Tories and Liberals. This bloc could, so far as the Communist Party was concerned, only be concluded on the terms outlined by Lenin - complete freedom of agitation and criticism.

Then, and only then, after the CP had demonstrated to the workers that it sincerely sought the unity of the working class against capitalism, did Lenin raise the possibility of the CP running its own candidates, against Labour; in the event of the Labour leaders turning down the CP proposal for an election bloc against the Liberals and Tories. This is evident from even a cursory reading of the section in question. For does not Lenin write, just before the paragraph quoted by Gale, 'If the Hendersons and Snowdens reject a bloc ...'? When Lenin then goes on to propose putting up candidates 'in a very few but absolutely safe constituencies', he is discussing the step that flows from the rejection of the bloc proposal to the Labour leaders.

Lenin's initial plan was to have the seats divided between the two parties on the basis of their respective support in the class. Both parties would then call on all workers to vote for the selected workers' candidate in every seat, whether he be a Labour candidate or communist. Thus in no case would the workers' vote have been split between the Labour and Communist Parties. This was the essence of Lenin's bloc proposal. The second eventuality, the only one considered by Gale (and for a very good reason) involved the CP running against Labour, in safe seats. In this instance, the workers' vote would be split, but the preparatory

steps advised by Lenin (the bloc proposal to the Labour leaders) would have demonstrated in advance that it was not the CP, but the Labour leaders, who were responsible for this division of the workers' vote.

Gale quite shamelessly vulgarises Lenin's highly sophisticated conception of communist election tactics and strategy, and reduce^s it to running in safe seats! Why does Gale do this? He has, we can be sure, read the whole of 'Left Wing Communism'. He knows what Lenin wrote on this question. The relevant passages were literally staring him in the face as he scanned the pages looking for an isolated paragraph that could turn Lenin into a posthumous support of the WRP's sectarian, 'Left Communist' election policy.

The answer is quite simple. Had the WRP, as Gale claims, done 'exactly' as Lenin recommended in 'Left Wing Communism', then it would first have approached the Labour leaders, and proposed a bloc with them against the Tories and the Liberals, both in the February and October elections of last year. Gale knows it did not do this, neither on the terms outlined by Lenin nor any others. Perhaps Healy feared the outcome of a ballot of workers determining which party they preferred to vote for in the general election. We just don't know the reason, because the matter was never discussed in the party at any time. The WRP announced its candidates, and that was that. Healy in fact began his election strategy where Lenin's entered its final option - the point where the party runs its own candidates against Labour AFTER the Labour leaders have turned down the proposal of a workers' bloc.

Gale, the old entrivist and opponent of Behan, has now, under Healy's tuition, evolved into Gale the ultra-left, Gale the perverter of Lenin.

But things were not always thus in the movement that now bears the pretentious title of 'Workers Revolutionary Party'.

The SLL on Entry

As we have already pointed out, Gale was trained as an entrivist in the Leeds Labour Party. Why should he then be so coy about this essential tactical weapon in the armoury of Trotskyism? This is what he says about entry:

"Of course this (i.e. Lenin's alleged position on running candidates against Labour) does not mean that Trotskyists should never, under any circumstances and conditions, work inside the Labour Party. They have done so."

Why so reticent Comrade Gale? Would it not have assisted the newer recruits to the movement to have informed them precisely when Trotskyists worked as 'entrivists' in the Labour Party? Here are some dates that might prove helpful. From 1936 through to 1944, one or other of the various Trotskyist groups was carrying out entry work in the Labour Party.

In 1944, with the founding of the Revolutionary Communist Party, there was a turn away from entry work, although it continued on a small scale. The Haston-Grant leadership was responsible for this sectarian orientation, and flowed basically from their insular attitude towards the International. In 1947, with the support of Pablo, Healy assumed the leadership of those forces that had been working for entry over the previous period, when Healy had been with the Haston-Grant sectarians. In 1949 the RCP was wound up. Haston the anti-entrists soon defected to the right wing of the bureaucracy, where he remains to this day. The Healy tendency became the majority, and entered onto a phase of faction work in the Labour Party that ended only in the Summer of 1964 when he took the SLL's supporters out of the Labour Party youth section to establish the 'independent' IS.

Healy's abandonment of entry work was later emulated by the Pabloites who formed the IMG, and the state capitalists of the IS. Healy, Ali and Cliff all declared the Labour Party to be 'dead', and abandoned the corpse to the Militant group of 'deep entrists' led by Ted Grant. This opportunist tendency has now reaping the harvest that could and should have been the SLL's had it not been dominated by a leadership that surrendered to Healy's impressionistic methods and organic opportunism. The latter expresses itself through attempts to reach the workers by short-cuts, sometimes by bids to by-pass the traditional organisations of the class (the current phase of which the WRP is the embodiment) or at others by opportunist relations with left social democrats and centrists, as occurred in the hey-day of the Bevanite movement and later, CND.

When we come to make a balance sheet of entry work in the Labour Party, it will be noted that of the 40 years or so that Trotskyism has existed as an organised political tendency in this country, at least 26 were years of either full or partial entry into the Labour Party, and another two into the ILP.

Up to 1964, in many ways a watershed in the evolution of the movement that is now the WRP, of the movement's 30 years, all but four had been spent in the Labour Party. Surely, Comrade Gale, this calls for a little explaining? We should ask him: is there any connection between the emergence to total power of the Healy-Banda bloc, in the early 1960's and the subsequent sectarian line of the leadership on the Labour Party?

The answer lies partly in the archives of our movement, especially as they help to throw light on how the leadership of our movement evaluated the class nature of the Labour Party at a time when it was carrying on serious entry work within it, and when any concessions to sectarianism on this question would have been suicidal.

But even more remarkable than the respective periods spent inside and out of the Labour Party are the concrete political conditions under which these two different tactics of open and entry work were carried out. Entry, it will presumably be agreed, is a tactic that can be expected to bear its ripest fruits when the reformist leadership, left as well as right, is put on the spot after being placed

in the government by the upward thrust of the workers' struggle against capitalism. Now the workers expect promises to be translated into deeds, election programmes, however modest, into legislation. It is at this precise point in the evolution of the crisis of the reformist apparatus, where it finds itself trapped in the vice between the demands of the workers who place it in the government, and the insistence of the capitalist class that it stands firm against these same demands, that the Trotskyists are best placed to win the advanced workers, and to expose the reformists to thousands and even millions more.

That means being in force in the Labour Party, while at the same time, maintaining and developing an open, full, expression of Trotskyism through the publication of a theoretical journal which campaigns amongst the most advanced elements of the working class and intellectuals for the re-building of the Fourth International. The dialectical inter-dependence of these two fields of work cannot be stressed too much or too often. The former without the latter must lead to opportunist adaptation to the bureaucracy through its left elements; whilst simply to publish at this stage, a 'Trotskyist' organ without seeking to penetrate the Labour Party, is to lapse into propagandistic sectarianism, of which we have more than enough samples in Britain already.

Entry, we submit, will prove most rewarding in a period of upturn on the class struggle, when the reformists have been placed in power, and provided the Trotskyists remember why they have entered the Labour Party in the first place - neither on a 'raid' nor to transform it, a la Grant, into a revolutionary party; but to detach from it the vanguard of the class, and to construct on the basis of a profound dislocation of the apparatus, a section of the Fourth International in this country. As we shall demonstrate, this was the perspective of the British Trotskyist movement up until the early 1960's, when, with the onset of the election of the Wilson government in October 1964, Healy suddenly abandoned it. This was a truly historic reverse for the movement, not only in this country but internationally. The pre-war entry experiences had all been made with Labour in opposition, and in the war, with a Labour minority in the coalition. In neither situation was it really possible to test out before the whole class the inability of the reformist to match up to their own promises. That required Labour being put into power with a clear majority and a clear mandate for action. In 1945, the working class gave Labour both. But what were the Trotskyists of that time doing? Under the leadership of Haston, they had set up, in 1944, the Revolutionary Communist Party, jettisoning all but a token entry work and had presented themselves to the working class as the 'alternative leadership'.

The working class therefore passed through the vital experience of its first majority Labour government with the forces of Trotskyists almost entirely in voluntary exile from the party through which this experience was being made. Incredible, but true. Entry work only really got under way after the election of the Tories in November 1951, by which time the Bevanite movement had emerged as the pace-maker on the left, and in which the Trotskyists correctly chose to work as a tendency. But the lesson has to be learnt - the Bevanites did not only articulate the moods of workers frustrated with Labour's failure because of Bevan's personal stature, but also because the Trotskyists had wasted valuable years in the RCP wilderness when they should have been consolidating their base

in the Labour Party for just such a development.

Entry work was carried out right through the 13 years of Labour Opposition, when all manner of lefts and fakers could win a following, reasonably certain in the knowledge that the day was far off when pledges would have to be honoured. Such periods are difficult ones for the Trotskyists, as they are not in politics to make false promises, but build revolutionary leadership, which involves quite often telling workers unpalatable truths. Trotskyists come into their own when the reformists are placed in the hot seats of government.

The moment of truth for Wilson - and ironically for Healy - arrived in October 1964, when after three successive and increasingly larger defeats, Labour won the general election. Now a decade and a half of entry work, and all the accumulated experiences of the pre-war entry work, not only in Britain but internationally, should have been drawn together in order to settle accounts with the lefts who had now entered Wilson's cabinet or silenced their former criticisms of Labour policy.

But what was Healy doing? Healy was marching his forces out of the Labour Party into the desert in 'independent youth movements' and 'independent leaderships', independent only in the sense that they lived and withered independently of the real life struggles of the working class. Never since 1964, the year when the Wilson leadership embarked on its decade of domination in the Labour Party, a decade in which it occupied office for more than six years, has the Healy leadership seriously turned back towards entry in the Labour Party, though verbal gestures were made in that direction from time to time. And all that ended with the 'transformation' from the SLL into the WRP. Quantity had indeed turned into quality, though in this instance, Hegel's famous law was operating regressively. 15 years of work had been thrown away by an impatient leadership hell bent on taking a short-cut to power. Healy's short cut has in fact led the movement into the cul-de-sac of sectarianism. It can faintly hear the rumblings of the class struggle in the high streets, and hopes that 'the crisis' will direct all the traffic into Healy's blind alley.

Back to the Archives

Despite minor concessions to centrism (which do not immediately concern us here) one of the best expositions of the case for entry into the Labour Party was made in draft resolution 'Towards a Revolutionary Party in Britain', which dates from 1957, and was produced by a leadership in which Healy and Gale were already prominent. Its every line is a devastating refutation of the sectarian conceptions that led to the 'transformation' of the SLL into a 'revolutionary party' in November 1973:

"The overriding crisis of our period is the crisis of leadership. Specifically in Britain, that boils down to the problem of winning the mass of the working class from a social democratic to a revolutionary leadership. The problem in the next stage is that of winning a sufficient layer of the working class to form the basis of a revolutionary party whose strength and influence provides the real and necessary

foundation for it to enter decisively into the political life of Britain and an alternative to social democracy. Such an alternative does not simply arise by the formal posing of an alternative organisation. A revolutionary leadership is something more than an office, full time workers or even a paper. It is an organisation able to participate in and draw support from the working-class at every stage and level of struggle - an organisation that can move masses, whose members have positions of influence and leadership in decisive sectors of the mass movement.' (p.10)

Having demolished 'WRPism', which fails to match up to a single one of these pre-requisites enumerated, we suspect, by Healy himself, the case is then made for a long-term perspective of entry into the Labour Party out of which would come the forces necessary for the formation of an independent revolutionary party:

'Such an organisation will be built, but it will be built by the advanced guard of today sharing with the working class its main political experiences, expanding, and winning positions of leadership in the struggle against social democracy on the central battle-ground - inside the Labour Party ... Whether the Marxist movement emerges from the Labour Party as part of a broad centrist movement ((here Bevanism was very much in mind)) and rapidly extends and deepens its influence in the new ((centrist)) organisation, or whether developments of the Labour Party crisis will give conditions for the emergence of a fully formed revolutionary party immediately from the Labour Party, will become clearer in the future. We repeat what is certain: that in the tumultuous period of struggle in Britain the central political experiences of the working class will be geared to developments in the Labour Party". (Ibid, pp.12-15)

So in 1957, the perspective was an entrism one, with objective developments posing the possibility of a genuine revolutionary party emerging out of a profound split in the Labour Party. We think this is basically a correct perspective, and one that had the movement adhered firmly to it, it would now be placed in a position to carry through should the opportunity arise.

Healy jettisoned this perspective, mesmerised by transient, and as it proved, largely illusory success in attracting to the SLL mainly random individuals on the periphery of the workers' movement or even not linked to it at all. Big rallies and 'big' names convinced Healy that the 'revolutionary party' would arise, not out of a crisis and split within the traditional political party of the workers, but by confronting it with an apparatus from the outside; and at that, at a time when the workers were not breaking from Labour, but placing it in the government. The WRP was not born out of the crisis of British reformism, but rather itself represented the acute crisis of British and indeed world Trotskyism. The WRP experiment will

come to grief in an even more dismal fashion than its forerunner, the RCP. And we predict there will be more than one anti-centrist who will aspire to the mantle of the renegade Haston.

Similar ideas to that of the already cited document are to be found in the 'British Perspectives' resolution for the 1957 conference of the movement, known then as 'the group' :

"The workers' struggles will not by-pass the Labour Party, there are no other parties which it would wish to support. But the workers will come into the Labour Party expecting action and will look to the Bevanites to provide the leadership ... A flexible tactical approach to this emerging centrist current is essential (no denouncing the Bevanites as 'corporatists') if we are to ultimately assume our rightful place as leaders of the British working class. We rejected sectarianism in the struggle for entry and in carrying through that phase it was essential that the revolutionaries combine the greatest flexibility in Labour Party work with correctness of programme, not scorning to appear in the company of right-wing reformists for the purpose of getting close to the rank and file. In the same way our tactical approach to Bevanism must be based on the necessity to swim in the leftward stream".

Imagine what Workers Press would say if the Bulletin employed such a phrase to describe our tactics towards the Tribune Group, or workers supporting Benn! Or if we said, as does this resolution, that we 'are not concerned at this stage to have a polemical battle with centrism and we make known our political differences only when necessary and in the most friendly manner'. These formulations, we think, depart from the Leninist tradition in its dealings with centrism. But we endorse the statement that 'out of the centrist ferment will emerge the Revolutionary Party of the British working class'.

If Healy was right on that count, then the WRP should never have been founded. Neither should he have abandoned the Labour Party in 1964, when it was 11 years further away from such a centrist ferment than it is now.

In 1958, the document 'The New Period : Our Prospects and Tasks' continued in this tradition, stressing that 'the central political experiences of the working class will be geared to developments in the Labour Party.' The point was made that 'the fight for revolutionary demands, the building of revolutionary leadership is impossible without roots in this mass party of the British working class.' Please note Comrade Gale: 'party of the British working class.'!

Sectarian illusions about 'independence' just began to creep in around the time of the formation of the SLL in the Spring of 1959. The movement's position on the

Labour Party however remained orthodox, as is evidenced by a circular to SLL members of that year entitled 'After the General Election', a document which includes the following remarkable passage:

"In the first two years of the ((communist)) party's existence they ((its leaders)) failed to seek footholds within the Labour Party. In that sense they by-passed the Labour Party. Had it not been for their political experience which Lenin clearly understood, as can be seen from his booklet 'Left Wing Communism' they would have moved towards the Labour Party and assisted in completing the task they had begun in industry by strengthening the left-wing forces in that organisation. The SLL will guide these workers towards the struggle inside the Labour Party and avoid the mistake of our predecessors of the early 1920's."

Today the WRP attempts to draw workers out of the Labour Party into its own closed circle of activity, futile where it is not destructive. So much for the lessons of history!

The SLL's position on the Labour Party and entry at the time of its foundation is set out in the book 'The Battle for Socialism' by Peter Fryer. This book was not just the work of Fryer, as its author pointed out in a brief introductory note - "I express my thanks to the comrades who have helped me writing this book by either reading all or part of it and suggesting improvements, as Michael Banda, Brian Behan, Gerry Healy, William Hunter, Patricia McGowan ... and Brian Pearce have done ..." (Ibid, p.v) With this in mind let us review the book's position on the class nature of the Labour Party, and the role of Marxists within it. On page 84, the Labour Party is described as 'a working class party with leaders who have abandoned socialist aims and policies ...', while on page 151 we read that 'the treachery of the Labour Party leaders has made no difference to the essential character of the party they lead. It is the mass party of the organised working class, created by the trade unions to represent Labour in Parliament ... It is not only a reformist party, but also the political expression of the trade unions.'

'Political expression of the trade unions'? 'Working class party'? 'Mass party of the organised working class'? What opportunist heresy is this, appearing in a book published by the SLL and scrutinised by none other than Healy himself?

Fryer's comments on entry would prove no less perplexing for the rank and file WRP member today:

"Marxists have not learned the ABC of their science if they do not face the mass organisations of their class - the trade unions and the Labour Party - participate in their activities, and in so doing test their own policies. The building of a new revolutionary leadership will be a 1000 times more difficult if the revolutionary movement does not have roots in

these mass organisations ... The leaders of the Labour Party follow the pro-capitalist policies of the right-wing trade union leaders - but the party they lead is rooted in the working class. Through it the mass of the workers assimilate their political experience, irrespective of whether they become individual members of it .. It is no good turning one's back on the Labour Party because its leaders are reformist. Before the workers will accept Marxists as political leaders they have to test out various charlatans and demagogues. While they are doing so it is worse than useless to build one's own pure ivory tower of immaculate 'Marxism'. The place for Marxists is in the class struggle - and that includes the class struggle going on in the Labour Party ... Marxists are not members of the Labour Party because they entertain any illusions about its leaders or about its possibilities as an instrument of working class power. They have no such illusions (though the WRP October 1974 election slogan 'force Labour to carry out revolutionary policies' suggests that this is not the case with some of the present party leadership). On the contrary it is the most effective way of dispelling such illusions. Co-existence with the right wing in a common organisation for a certain period can heighten the struggles against that right wing and, step by step, expose its treachery before the workers in practice - not by abstract denunciations from without but by concrete demonstrations from within of the lessons of each struggle and each betrayal ..."

Fryer laid down four conditions for entry work: "(1) The British ruling class is in crisis, and is less and less able to rule than in the past; (2) the majority of the working class is organised, in some form or other, in the Labour Party; (3) the right-wing leadership is in crisis, and the majority of the party's active rank and file want a more left-wing policy; (4) the revolutionary vanguard is a very weak minority." (pp.151-152)

Whilst one can argue that the conditions for entry cannot be set out in the form of a blue-print, it is certainly true that conditions Nos. 2 and 4 would be paramount in deciding the issue in so far as entry work in the British Labour Party is concerned. And on those two alone, we must conclude that the WRP should not have been formed, and that the place of Trotskyists is fighting the reformist leadership where it hurts them most - in the trade unions and the Labour Party.

Behan and the WRP

This brief but representative survey of the archives brings us up to 1960, and the struggle with Behan. Healy would do the movement a service if he reproduced all the documents pertaining to this faction fight, since they would show that he has now taken up Behan's sectarian line and pushed it further even than its author intended it to go; while the line then defended by Healy and the SIL majority is

now being denounced in Workers Press as 'revisionist'. We should note here that this episode in the movement's history has now become so embarrassing to the Healy leadership that Banda had to misrepresent Behan's real position in the pamphlet 'A Menshevik Unmasked'. There, Banda writes: 'In the sixties, a group around Behan - mainly building workers - opposed the discipline of the party and its line in the unions, and marched out under the tattered banner of rank and filism' (Ibid, p.6) This is in every way a lie. Behan supporters marched out under the leftist banner of launching the 'open revolutionary party', to which Healy and Banda were then opposed, and in fact proceeded to set it up - the so-called 'Workers Party'. There was no dispute over the trade unions. The clash was over the Labour Party, its class nature, and whether it should continue to be the centre of the SLL's work. Healy said it should; Behan disagreed. Finally, Banda knows full well that Behan was not the only champion of rank and filism at that time. The entire movement had, beginning in the Autumn of 1958, and carrying right through the next year, devoted considerable time and energy to setting in motion a rank and file movement. This can easily be verified from a study of the movement's press of the period, and the main internal party documents. And we should add, the term 'rank and file' was specifically used to denote the type of movement being built. But enough of Banda's rather tiresome falsehoods. The main question is how did the SLL majority react to Behan's sectarianism?

As early as March 9th, 1960, Healy tentatively answered Behan's line when he wrote in an internal political letter, that 'the main political orientation of the SLL is towards the Labour Party' and that 'even if the Labour Party split on the question of Clause 4, this does not mean that the wing headed by Gaitskell could automatically transform itself into a capitalist party.' This latter statement is exceedingly interesting, and faces both its author and Gale with a difficulty. For if even a right wing rump led by Gaitskell could not have been correctly described as a 'capitalist party', then surely that implies two things. One, that the Labour Party as it was then (1960, 46 years after its leaders supported the First World War) and is now, a workers' party with all the necessary qualifications. Secondly, that the quotation selected by Gale from Lenin is, on its own, insufficient to give a rounded-out analysis of the Labour Party, for in it Lenin described the British Labour Party as a capitalist party without any qualification.

We could, if we wanted to, play an unkind trick on unsuspecting WRP members. We could distribute to them, disguised as a WRP political letter, entire sections of Behan's main document 'Draft Programme of the Minority Faction', and be reasonably sure that the majority would presume it to be the work of the current party leadership. It abounds in chatter about the 'construction of independent parties' and the workers being in the process of freeing themselves from the grip of reformism; of entry providing a 'cover' for the left reformists, and the need to 'prepare for an open independent youth organisation.' That is why we insist that Healy, having expelled Behan with the support of the great majority of the cadre and the experienced 'entrists' who had laid the foundations in the SLL, then became the

executant of Behan's Programme.

The central document of the majority in 1960 was that submitted by the London Executive Committee, 'It Is Time To Decide'. It traces Behan's sectarianism to his Stalinist training in the Communist Party, and in turn, correctly sees this as bearing the imprint more specifically of third period leftism, especially in the CP's attitude to the Labour Party. It is ironic that this analysis can, in the light of subsequent events, be turned with equal force against Healy himself. Against the Stalinist line that the Labour Party is a political backwater, the document insists:

"The main arena ((of the struggle against reformism)) can only be in the mass organisation of the working class: the Labour Party ... One reason for the formation of the SLL was to recruit such workers (i.e. those from the CP) as fast as we could and arm them with a strategy based on taking the industrial struggle from the trade unions into the Labour Party, which is the political reflection of the trade unions, there to seek political solutions."

'The political reflection of the unions'? Gale no doubt endorsed and fought for this document. He was correct to do so. What has he to say now on this formulation, in view of his recent conversion to the notion that the Labour Party is not a workers' party?

Against Apparatus Methods

We have focused on the problem of the Labour Party because, together with the questions of the Transitional Programme and the Fourth International of which it is a national expression, it comprises the nub of our differences with the Healy leadership. The implementation of the Transitional Programme is not just a question of devising and firing out slogans only, but of developing them in the course of integrating the vanguard into the struggles of the whole class. Correct demands facilitate this process, but cannot substitute for a correct strategic and tactical orientation by the vanguard towards the traditional organisations of the working class: the trade unions AND the Labour Party. The Healy leadership is foundering on the same rocks of the Fourth International and the Labour Party. Its insular, even chauvinist attitude towards the struggle for the former, and its sectarian attitude to the latter, compromise two aspects of the same overall false orientation. Stealing bits from the platform of the Thornett Opposition will solve no more problems for the WRP than did Stalin's filching of the Trotskyists programme help to return the CPSU and the Comintern to Leninism.

As Comrade Thornett has by now probably become well aware, Healy is a past master at forming a bloc with other forces in the movement, squeezing them dry of ideas, and then ditching them. He is incapable of establishing stable, long-lasting political relations either on a national or international scale. His entire method militates against it, which is to seek to dominate his allies and