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**HOW THE 'NINTH WORLD CONGRESS TURN'
MISDIRECTED THE WORK OF THE INTERNATION-
AL MARXIST GROUP, BRITISH SECTION OF THE
FOURTH INTERNATIONAL, By Alan Harris**

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How the 'Ninth World Congress Turn' Misdirected the Work of the International Marxist Group, British Section of the Fourth International

By Alan Harris

At the 1969 world congress a minority of delegates argued that the ultraleft orientation adopted by the majority would not only lead to disaster in Latin America but could not be confined to that one continent. If persisted in, the line would logically be extended both programmatically and geographically.

Despite protestations from the majority that this would not happen, the development of the British section of the Fourth International since then has proved the contrary. This document will draw a balance sheet of some key events within the International Marxist Group over the past three to four years to indicate how the incorrect method projected in the line of the majority resolution on Latin America has been put to work in Britain.

The policies and activities of the IMG since it was recognized as the British section in 1969 shows that the turn made at the last world congress has the same negative effects whether it has been applied within a colonial or semi-colonial continent like Latin America or to an advanced capitalist country such as Britain. The adaptation to ultraleftism its inspires and ratifies results in a move away from principled politics, a tendency toward revision of program, and defaults in party building.

To be sure, the British section has not suffered the same kind of losses and defeats as the POR (González) or the PRT (Combatiente). Nonetheless, the balance sheet shows that over the past four years in adapting to the moods of the youth radicalization the IMG has moved in an ultraleft and sectarian direction. After the last world congress we gave up our previously held mass action perspective for our solidarity work in defense of the Vietnamese revolution. Despite the central importance of Ireland for the British revolution we have failed abysmally to do any meaningful work to aid the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination. The rejection of the Leninist position on the Labour Party and our sectarianism toward the mass organisations of the working class have isolated us from the mass struggles developing within the working class. We have failed to give leadership to the struggles of women, students, immigrants and to win the maximum recruits these struggles make possible. We rejected the analysis and tasks of the youth radicalisation made by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International in 1969. The transitional programme and the Leninist concept of the party have been attacked and revised.

This has disoriented and miseducated our cadres and led to a fragmentation of the section. At the April 1973 national conference of the section there were six organised tendencies—none of which was able to win a majority. Five of these tendencies claimed to support the European perspectives document yet were unable to agree on how to implement its line in Britain! This has prevented us from making the gains for Trotskyism which the sharpening class struggle has opened up for us in the past three to four years.

The IMG has faced specific and difficult problems since it was formed in 1968. These were due primarily to the break in continuity of Trotskyist leadership and by the loss of cadres suffered through many years of "entryism *sui generis*." Many young revolutionists were required to take on the responsibilities of leadership immediately on joining the section. Coming primarily from the student youth and lacking experiences in the broader class struggle, they brought into the organisation ultraleft concepts.

Given this situation the international leadership had a unique opportunity and responsibility to assist the new section in developing a correct understanding of the transitional programme and the Leninist theory of party building. In this way the section would have been educated in principled politics and equipped to resist and fight all alien pressures, to overcome impatience and reject shortcut methods in party building.

The majority international leadership, however, was not able to give the IMG the correct political guidance, since the line it had adopted in the "Resolution on Latin America" was itself an adaptation to ultraleftism and a turn away from the method of the transitional programme.

It is within the framework of the turn taken at the last world congress that the ultraleft and sectarian developments in the IMG have to placed.

VIETNAM: a promising start—1966-69

In the years immediately preceding the 1969 world congress a promising new start was made to rebuild the British section of the Fourth International. A few comrades did essential and successful work in building mass actions in solidarity with the struggle of the Vietnamese people for self-determination.

With the cooperation of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation we initiated and built the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC). The VSC was a single-issue, nonexclusive, united-front-type coalition. Its central aim was to organise mass mobilisations in the streets in solidarity with the struggle of the Vietnamese people, in opposition to American imperialism and against British complicity.

It was not easy to realise this aim. The British "peace movement" had traditionally been in the hands of the Stalinists and pacifists (e.g. the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament movement, which had organised the mass Aldermaston marches in the late fifties and early sixties). But in appealing primarily to the radicalising youth, the VSC successfully cut across the peaceful coexistence line of the Stalinists and pacifists. The first actions of the VSC were small but laid the base for bigger demonstrations and rallies which followed. Our small forces became the dominant political tendency within the VSC, and on 27 October 1968, 100,000 people took over the streets of London to express their hostility to the war and their support for the Vietnamese people. The October 1968 demonstration was the biggest anti-imperialist demonstration seen in Britain for decades and shook the ruling class. The preparations for the demonstration and its success were no mean achievement, taking into consideration the small size of the Trotskyist forces giving leadership to the VSC.

Throughout the preparation for the demonstration it was necessary to struggle against both the ultralefts and the conservative elements attracted to the VSC. Many political battles were fought and won. We won the fight against the Maoist ultralefts who wanted to take the VSC in a sectarian direction and who wanted confrontations with the police—not to do so was in their opinion a waste of revolutionary potential. We won the fight against the independents, many of whom got tired of marching and sought to turn the VSC away from its single-issue character into a broad anti-imperialist front which would give less and less attention to the issue of Vietnam. We won the fight against the reformist line of "negotiations" and succeeded in forcing the YCL (Young Communist League, the youth organization of the Communist Party) and other left groups to come into the coalition which organised the mass demonstration.

Only by taking on these opponents and politically defeating them were we able to carry the October 1968 demonstration. In this process a number of important gains were made in the building of the revolutionary party. We established a national identity and prestige amongst the left forces far beyond our numerical strength. The Stalinists were on the defensive, having lost their initiative on this issue. The YCL like the IS (International Socialists) and other left groups were obliged to join in and participate in the mass actions. At the same time we successfully isolated the Maoists. Their "counter demonstration" on 27 October 1968 attracted less than 3,000.

Our call for a mass peaceful demonstration stood in sharp contrast to the ultraleft "confrontationist" line of the Maoists. Tariq Ali, the leading spokesperson for the IMG and VSC, explained our policy clearly at a press conference held on October 21 when he said: "We don't want any mindless militancy. We don't want any confrontations with the police." He repeated this position again on the BBC radio programme "The World This Weekend"

broadcast on the day of the demonstration: "We have made our position absolutely clear. We want it to be a very peaceful march in Central London and to end in Hyde Park with a rally. We are asking marchers on our march not to go to Grosvenor Square."

The reason why Tariq Ali advocated the demonstration should not go into Grosvenor Square (where the American Embassy is located), was because it was thought that the police could easily trap several thousand demonstrators in the square and provoke a confrontation (which is what they did on the previous VSC demonstration).

To prevent the possibilities of this happening our policy was to avoid taking the demonstration through Grosvenor Square and instead march direct to Hyde Park for a mass rally. By vigorously projecting the demonstration as peaceful in intent, we successfully countered the Maoist and police propaganda that a confrontation was "inevitable." Thousands of people joined the action on this basis.

The Healyites, who did not participate, were under such pressure that they felt compelled to issue a leaflet to the 100,000 demonstrators explaining "Why We are Not Marching." In keeping with their sectarian and insular politics they tried to dismiss the VSC as a "petty bourgeois protest movement." (The Vietnamese, however, had quite a different evaluation of the 1968 demonstration and gave it considerable publicity in their press.)

The mass-action perspective is abandoned

We made a number of new recruits from our work in defence of the Vietnamese revolution, the most prominent being Tariq Ali. Our comrades gained invaluable experience in building united-front-type coalitions, in defending our ideas against our opponents, in learning about the dynamics of mass action and the tactics to be followed in order to keep the coalition together on a principled basis and to bring in new forces. There is no doubt that more substantial gains could have been made if we had continued working along these lines.

Unfortunately after the 1968 demonstration, the majority leadership began to turn away from its previously held orientation to the Vietnamese struggle and its perspective of building a mass-action campaign. The October 1968 demonstration was the last action of any significance organised in Britain in solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle for self-determination.

Less than 18 months after such a massive and historic demonstration, in January 1970 at the time of Wilson's visit to Washington, D. C., we had given up our mass-action perspective in favour of a small demonstration consisting of a small proportion of "the vanguard." Discussions in our leadership centred around organising a siege of Downing Street (the residence of the Prime Minister) to protest his trip to the USA. However, on the day of the demonstration the relationship of forces between us and the police made it clear that for such an action to be successful many more forces than the "vanguard" were needed. A week later (after Wilson had arrived in North America) we joined a sectarian march and rally organised by the Healyite Socialist Labour League to "Stop Wilson Going to Washington" and agreed to Tariq Ali speaking from Healy's platform.

Tailing the 'vanguard'

Some months later we attempted to form through the VSC a coalition to organise a demonstration for 31 October 1970. By this time we were reluctant to work with forces to the "right" of us. Our image had become ultra-left and the VSC had been reduced to a shell. We could only attract hardened ultraleft and anarchist currents. These forces took over the organising committee. Realising that we could not take responsibility for an action which they organised, we were forced to abandon the 31 October demonstration. A year later, we gave up any attempt to build a united-front-type committee and organised our own torchlight parade which attracted around 100 people and marched through London for an hour or so calling for "victory to the NLF." This token action no doubt satisfied most of the participants but was completely ineffective in doing anything to aid the Vietnamese revolution, let alone secure a victory for the NLF.

As we dumped our mass-action orientation, it became a *principle* to make the key demand for solidarity action "Victory to the NLF." This slogan, which led us to adopt a sectarian stance, was considered by "the vanguard" to express a position of solidarity with the Vietnamese revolution. Our insistence on it isolated us from many forces who took a principled solidarity position—the right of self-determination for the Vietnamese people—and who were prepared to demonstrate for withdrawal of American troops and for an end to British complicity in the war.

By April 1972, when the Vietnamese were at a crucial stage in the long struggle against imperialist aggression, we had not only abandoned the concept of building mass actions in defense of the Vietnamese revolution but found it difficult to carry out even a token action.

We did not bother to print in the *Red Mole* either the statement of the United Secretariat or the call from NPAC (National Peace Action Coalition in the USA) for international solidarity actions on 22 April. Elsewhere, however, more than 23,000 marched in Sweden in demonstrations in 47 cities, the biggest demonstration being in Stockholm, where 11,000 participated. In Helsinki 5,000 people marched; in Paris 25,000; and in Berlin 10,000. In Brussels 2,000 attended a teach-in, and 2,500 demonstrated in Liege. In Zurich 25,000 marched. Several thousand demonstrated in Spain. In Australia over 20,000 demonstrated and in North America tens of thousands took part in demonstrations and rallies.

What was the response in Britain and how successful were British Trotskyists in mobilising support in defense of the Vietnamese revolution at such a crucial stage in the war? The answer to this question is to be found in the *Red Mole* editorial 15 May 1972. "Whereas in the rest of western Europe tens of thousands of militants came out on the streets last month in solidarity with Indochina, in Britain action was restricted to a puny meeting organised by the IMG in London and a slightly larger demonstration in Glasgow." That the IMG meeting in London was "puny" is indisputable. With Tariq Ali billed as the main speaker, the meeting attracted about 50 persons, many less than the membership of the London branch. Apart from Glasgow comrades who supported the Tendency, an organised minority within the IMG, and who were actively involved in building the April 22 Indochina Committee, which organised a demonstration of 500 in Glasgow, no attempt was made to build a united-front-type action in any other part of Britain.

Was the majority leadership of the IMG taken unawares, with no time to organise more than the "puny" token action? The *Red Mole* editorial on 17 April makes it clear that this was not the case:

"For many months now the Fourth International has been stressing the need for international mobilisations this spring, in response to a situation known to be reaching boiling point. In particular, in the United States through the NPAC and in France through the Indo-China Solidarity Front, our comrades have taken the lead in mobilising a large scale for the International Day of Solidarity on the 22nd of April realising that the Spring of 1972 would be an important period in the developing Indo Chinese revolution."

The editorial in *Red Mole* 15 May confirmed the initiatives taken by comrades in the International.

"The militants of the Fourth International have all over the world organised actions in recent months to stress the importance of the Vietnamese struggle. Paris and New York are but two powerful examples."

What accounts then for the British section's lack of response? The *Red Mole*, sensitive to the lack of response in Britain, came up with the following reasons in its editorial of 17 April 1972:

"What we can do is relatively small both because of the lack of Internationalism of most left groups and also because for us the major task must be the building of a solidarity campaign in support of the struggle of the Irish people against *our own* ruling class."

British Trotskyists do have a responsibility to build a mass solidarity campaign in support of the struggle of the Irish Catholics against British imperialism. This is a key question and a major task for the British section. But it is incorrect to suggest that the building of such a campaign cuts across the building of solidarity actions in defense of the Vietnamese revolution. Building a solidarity campaign in support of the struggle of the Irish people should have made it easier, not harder, to mobilise in support of the struggle of the Vietnamese people. The increased tempo of the class struggle at that time, which was reflected in struggles such as those around the Irish question, industrial issues and student union autonomy, should have made it easier for us to organise solidarity actions in defence of the Vietnamese revolution as compared with the late sixties.

The argumentation of the *Red Mole* might sound revolutionary to some, but in reality it is nothing more than a rationalisation for turning our backs on the Vietnamese revolution.

Additional reasons for our inability to build solidarity actions for April 22nd were outlined by the *Red Mole's* editorial 15 May:

". . . the fact that while in most European countries (including Spain) the groups of the extreme left are dominated by revolutionary internationalists, in Britain there is a tremendous insularity and chauvinism even in the ranks of the revolutionary movement. This was rationalised by some groups arguing that marches, demonstrations on anti-imperialist issues were pointless and the only way the Vietnamese could be helped was by working towards a revolution in Britain: i.e. doing nothing. This, coupled with a general belief that Nixon was ending the

was because of the pressures at home made Vietnam seem irrelevant to many revolutionaries."

It is true that sections of the left are insular and chauvinistic. This is nothing new and only reinforces the necessity for Trotskyists to fight even harder to win support for the Vietnamese revolution. As has already been pointed out, when the IMG was less than 100 strong in the years 1966-68 it set an example to the British left and forced the YCL, CP students, IS and others into united actions in defence of the Vietnamese. It is true that after October 1968 many antiwar activists (including some leading members of the IMG) wrongly thought that marches and demonstrations on anti-imperialist issues were pointless; that while it was correct to mobilise students on the Vietnam issue when the workers were relatively passive, it was a waste of time and energy given a rise in working class militancy; and that Nixon would quickly bring the war to an end.

These are not the reasons, however, for the IMG's failure to organise actions in defence of the Vietnamese revolution. The IMG initially fought against these ultraleft and sectarian forces who considered the Vietnamese revolution to be "peripheral" to the class struggle, who wanted to move away from a single-issue campaign and turn the VSC into a broad anti-imperialist campaign as a substitute for the revolutionary party, who were tired of marching, who saw no purpose in mobilising 100,000 people (some of whom were liberals, reformists, and pacifists).

We published a special edition of *The Week* (the predecessor of the IMG journal, *International*), Vol. 9 No. 11, March 1968, entitled "Vietnam and The Left, An Answer to Some Critics." One of the contributions in this publication is the speech given by Comrade Pat Jordan at the London Vietnam Rally, 22 October 1967. Before an audience of tens of thousands of supporters of the Vietnamese struggle, Pat Jordan stated:

"I want to address myself to one topic only: 'What can we do best to assist the people of Vietnam to defeat American imperialism.' First, and most obvious, we must build up the movement in this country which takes the line of American withdrawal because this is the most principled and most effective way of opposing the war."

He also made reference to the radicalising effect of the Vietnamese struggle on youth throughout the world:

"Comrades, we owe a great debt to the Vietnamese people. Their heroic example, their determination to fight to the end against American imperialism, their noble courage has inspired us all. All over the world young people have been won for anti-imperialism, for socialism by the strength of this example. Our debt is deep, let us repay it. Let us go forward from this meeting to make one of the most militant anti-imperialist demonstrations Britain has ever seen."

The October 1968 demonstration in London was supported by over 100,000 people, bearing out the correctness of the line put forward by Comrade Jordan.

Whereas prior to 1968 we fought against the critics of our mass-action perspective for the solidarity struggle, the majority leadership subsequently gave up the struggle against the erroneous concepts of our political opponents on this issue. Instead of fighting them, the IMG majority leadership ended up by adapting to them. This is the political reason why we stopped seeing Viet-

nam as a key issue. We wrongly thought that the Vietnamese struggle no longer was a major issue for the youth radicalisation; that with the rise of workers struggles the youth were no longer able to be mobilised on anti-imperialist issues; and gave up our previously held mass-action perspective, stopped building broad united-front-type coalitions, and tail-ended the "vanguard" instead of leading it.

This meant that in practice we turned our backs on the Vietnamese revolution, let the labour bureaucrats off the hook, allowed left groups to return to their old insular positions, and enabled the CP to regain the initiative on the Vietnam issue.

YOUTH: radicalisation expected to end

At the April 1970 IMG National Conference, the building of a Trotskyist youth organisation was projected as the central task and as a prerequisite for the section making gains in the next period. Although it was not at all clear what the practical political work of the new youth organisation would be (since the IMG itself was not clear, having just abandoned the Vietnam solidarity work which had been the central focus of the organisation from 1966-1968), the decision to set up a youth organisation was a correct one.

The creation of a Trotskyist youth organisation was quite realistic and indeed very necessary. With the continuation and deepening of the youth radicalisation, particularly amongst students, there was an objective basis for an independent revolutionary-socialist youth organisation in Britain. A Trotskyist youth organisation had the possibility of becoming a strong pole of attraction to radicalising youth, offering them an organisation in which they could further their understanding of Marxist theory and practice without demanding of them the total commitment required to join the section. Such a youth organisation had the potential of organising and leading the struggles affecting their generation. It would also recruit on a big scale and begin to train Trotskyist cadres who would later join the IMG.

The Spartacus League was formed during the summer of 1970 and soon provided evidence of the great possibilities that existed in Britain for the building of a Trotskyist youth organisation to complement the work of the section. Even apart from the confusion around the precise political orientation of the work of the Spartacus League, within a matter of months it had around 200 members and had formed several local branches.

Despite this promising start, however, less than one year later the IMG majority leadership decided that it was necessary to dissolve the Spartacus League by fusing it with the section! The main political motivation given for this step was that there was a general downturn in the youth radicalisation:

"In the period under review there has been a downturn in youth radicalisation . . . One of the principal reasons for this is the coming to the centre of the stage of the workers struggles. This has, so to speak, taken away the autonomy of the youth radicalisation." (*No! We Haven't Got All the Time in the World*, National Committee Perspectives Document, April 1971.)

Thus, within a year the IMG majority leadership abandoned its earlier correct view that the youth radicalisa-

tion had opened up the necessity for a Trotskyist youth organisation. It advocated the fusion of the Spartacus League and the IMG since, they argued, the youth radicalisation as a whole was on a downturn.

The youth radicalisation in Britain reaches new peaks

In order to assess the extent of this error, it is necessary to examine the facts. It is important to bear in mind that during the two years following the 1971 national conference of the IMG, when the decision to give up the Spartacus League was made, the biggest and broadest student actions ever seen in Britain took place.

At the end of 1971, the Tory government launched an attack on the right of students to democratically dispose of their own student union funds without being responsible to either the local college authorities or the law courts. The students responded by forcing, in January 1972, an Emergency Conference of their nearly 500,000 member National Union of Students (NUS) (which is led by the Communist Party) and mobilised a 30,000-strong demonstration in London, closing down virtually every major higher educational establishment in the country.

Large numbers of students were active in giving support to the miners' militant strike that spring. In addition to collecting funds and engaging in solidarity demonstrations, many students utilised their university facilities to aid the miners. Students were also the main group in the large actions that took place in solidarity with the Irish people, following the massacre of 13 unarmed civil rights demonstrators in Derry.

In this period, too, new and important struggles were also beginning in the high schools in Britain. Students from some of London's biggest comprehensive schools (which draw their students predominantly from the working class) had walked out of their classrooms demanding an end to canings and detentions, for the right not to wear compulsory uniforms, and for other democratic rights.

All of these actions took place before the May 1972 IMG/Spartacus League (SL) Fusion Conference! If a simple miscalculation was involved, why was the error not corrected in time? Why was the fusion that liquidated the youth organisation permitted to take place?

Adaptationism: the roots of the present student line

The majority leadership's Perspectives Document at the 1971 National Conference of the IMG argued that there were three factors contributing to the alleged downturn in the youth radicalisation. These reasons are worth examining in greater detail, for they reveal how an entirely wrong approach was beginning to emerge in the thinking of the IMG majority leadership and was quickly crystallising into a schema or dogma. This new approach amounted to orienting to the concerns of a thin layer of already radicalised youth and not to the objective needs of the broad struggles that were breaking out.

The first reason for the alleged downturn of the youth radicalisation was as follows:

"(1) a number of demoralising defeats which had been

inflicted on the students. In particular they had been shown to be incapable in many instances of defending themselves against attack. The latest example of this being the expulsion of Rudi Dutschke and other foreign militants." (*No! We Haven't Got All the Time in the World.*)

When news of the threatened expulsion of Dutschke became known, members of the National Union of Students (NUS) in the Cambridge area organised a London demonstration and rally in Trafalgar Square. This received broad support and sympathy. The speakers at the rally were student leaders, Members of Parliament, and other persons who believed Dutschke had the right to remain in Britain. The Spartacus League (SL) was not involved in the formal preparations of the demonstration and rally but organised a contingent of its members and supporters to take part in the protest.

At the rally the small SL contingent under the leadership of Tariq Ali did its utmost to shout down and prevent from being heard those speakers who were not considered to be motivated by revolutionary aims. In particular, the Labour MP came under heavy fire in the SL's attempt to prevent this reformist from speaking out in defence of Dutschke's civil rights.

Our intervention at the united-front rally got some press publicity which strengthened the ultraleft image that the SL had been developing. Our sectarian actions at the rally isolated us from the several thousand participants who, though not necessarily agreeing with the political views of Dutschke, wanted him to have the right to stay in Britain.

In order to stop the Tories throwing Dutschke out of the country, it was necessary to build a broad defence campaign able to put sufficient pressure on the government to lift the ban. It was our responsibility as Trotskyists to promote and build such a campaign. Instead, we *accepted* as inevitable that Rudi Dutschke would be expelled and substituted revolutionary rhetoric for the building of a campaign in defence of his civil rights. Students left the rally without any perspective of building a strong defence campaign for Dutschke and without the understanding that the SL could be looked to for leadership in defending them against further victimisations by the ruling class.

Another major reason put forward by the majority for giving up the youth organisation was:

". . . the decline of the anti-imperialist movement particularly of VSC. An important element here has been the irresponsibility and sectarianism of other tendencies which have abandoned the duties on this front. However, this is by no means the whole story: the rise of the industrial struggle, the conscious policy of the Nixon administration of defusing the anti-war movement, the way the capitalist press has played down anti-imperialist struggles, etc. is all woven into the process." (*Ibid.*)

This leaves out of account the balance sheet of our work on Vietnam outlined earlier. It was only because of the correct line and activities of a few Trotskyists in the years 1966-68 that the other left tendencies were forced out of their insularity and into activity in defence of the Vietnamese revolution. Why would we expect them to continue this Vietnam solidarity activity once we had changed our line? By abandoning our own responsibilities for this work we took the pressure off them!

The chief reason advanced by the IMG majority leader-

ship for the alleged downturn in the youth radicalisation was the following:

". . . the shifting of the main focus of the struggle to the industrial front, especially the fight against the (Industrial Relations) Bill. This has reinforced the 'workerist' tendencies amongst students and made wide layers feel that their struggles in centres of education is irrelevant." (Ibid.)

It is certainly true that "workerist" tendencies are prevalent among the radicalising youth. The deepest radicalisation has taken place among the student youth who are greatly influenced by petty-bourgeois ideology. But the fact that students turned toward the workers struggles when they began to develop was very positive and bore out the analysis made in the 1969 United Secretariat resolution on "The Worldwide Youth Radicalisation and the Tasks of the Fourth International." The need for students to look for a powerful ally in the working class demonstrated that, in coming to grips with the immediate crisis in the universities and colleges, many students quickly came to realise that the education crisis is only a part of the deepening objective crisis of capitalism.

The main problem that faced us was how to combat "workerist" inclinations. The correct way was to build a strong Marxist youth organisation and strive to win the leadership of the struggles in which the youth were becoming radicalised. But this was not what the IMG majority leadership attempted to do. Instead of countering the political weaknesses of the youth, they catered to them. The real reason for abandoning the youth organisation was that the IMG majority leadership were adapting its politics to the political backwardness of this thin layer of already radicalised student youth.

The politics of the IMG were more and more oriented to the concerns of this "vanguard" layer and so became oblivious to the actual radicalisation process that was taking place. Instead of combatting the idea that Vietnam was no longer so important, given the rise of workers struggles, or that the student struggles were no longer relevant, the IMG majority leadership itself began to foster these erroneous concepts.

The struggle of the high-school students provides an illuminating example. The majority leadership were not at all excited about the new struggles beginning in the high schools. The demands of these young students were essentially democratic in character and had a powerful dynamic. But the IMG/SL majority leadership were oriented toward the "vanguard" students (that is, those students who had already developed a conscious anticapitalist outlook) and, therefore, it did not regard the majority of these protesting students as potential recruits to the SL.

In their indifference to the demands of the high-school students, the IMG/SL majority leadership rejected the concept underlying the transitional programme and method: that revolutionists must play a key role in helping to develop a revolutionary consciousness of those drawn in struggle. We should have intervened to help our high-school comrades work out a series of democratic and transitional demands for the high-school revolt that would enable them to lead it forward. Our abstention from this struggle enabled the ultraleft Maoists to take the leadership, and it was not long before the educational authorities were able to isolate them and keep the lid on the militant school students movement.

Student mass-action perspective is abandoned

Instead of a downturn in the youth radicalisation, the facts show that since the last world congress the worldwide youth radicalisation has been reinforced by the rise of workers struggles. In France, Belgium, Greece, Spain, Italy, Sweden and Germany there has been a significant resurgence of the student movements.

In Britain the student radicalisation has centred on two issues: student union autonomy and, more recently, student grants. Both of these issues have mobilised and begun to politicise tens of thousands of students in Britain.

Far from correcting the erroneous projection that the youth radicalisation was on a downturn, the 1972 National Committee "Document on Student Work" reasserts the decline of the student radicalisation. "The current radicalisation of the working class," it announces quite forcefully, "has removed the last vestiges of autonomy from the student movement."

Moreover, it carries this position to its logical conclusion and denies that students can go into action at all, except on an explicitly anticapitalist understanding. "Conjuncturally," the document asserts, "the different layers of students can come together on a whole variety of issues. But this unity can only be forged through a common political understanding not through an appeal to some 'student interests'."

The essence of this position is that it is politically incorrect to project a series of specific demands for the student movement.

This line is the opposite of the method of the transitional programme, which requires Trotskyists to identify with and intervene in the struggles actually taking place and where possible to give leadership to them. In rejecting the method of the transitional programme, the IMG majority leadership put forward a sectarian approach aimed solely at those who are already politicised and ignores the pressing question of providing leadership for the broad student mass who are just beginning to go into struggle. Lumbered with this sectarian line, it was not possible to take advantage of the big openings amongst students over the past two years.

The line leads to disaster

The Tory government's attack on student unions at the end of 1971 ushered in a new and higher stage in the British student movement. But our approach to this struggle was based on the consciousness of a thin layer of student radicals and not on the needs of the broader student mass. As the *Red Mole* explained (29 November 1971),

"For the moment the central message that the SUs are under attack has come across to the majority of students. But this can mean all things to all men. For the student conservative association this means that the wrong method has been chosen. . . . Whereas the 20,000 lobbying students of last week were more concerned with the financing of clubs and societies than the threat to independent political actions of students. . . .

"What is first of all necessary is a *political* campaign which explains that the proposals are not mainly about finance but are in essence an attempt to smash the political

organisation of students in support of the class struggle."

At a time when many student union funds were frozen, paralysing the operation of student-union clubs and societies, the slogan IMG comrades raised was not "Who Controls the Students' Union—Students or the State" but "Control for What." This approach completely ignored the extent and character of the Tory attack that in a very real way affected the majority of students. It was like arguing for a "red" trade union when the actual struggle at that point was for the right to organise an independent union.

The political line advanced by the IMG was a sectarian approach to an unfolding mass struggle. Like the Communist Party leadership, we had no realistic perspective for carrying the struggle on union autonomy forward. This ultraleft line on the question did not allow us to take the leadership of this struggle and in practice it allowed the initiative amongst students to remain with the CP.

The union autonomy campaign was immediately followed by the struggle against the present system of grants to students. This campaign opened up the possibility for the second time in two years (!) of developing a viable left-wing alternative leadership within the CP-controlled National Union of Students (NUS). But the IMG's line again cut across such a perspective. The political basis for our student work was that students have no common interests worth fighting for!

The Grants Campaign, however, is centered precisely around a specific student interest—a better system of grants for students! This explains the depth and breadth of support for the grants campaign. Many students are currently facing serious hardships due to inflation and cutbacks in education spending.

Following on from the successes of the union autonomy campaign, the grants campaign took on a mass character and became a major impetus to the student radicalisation in Britain. Since the November 1972 NUS conference, students have organised a national rent strike (involving the withholding of rent from college housing), boycotts of college cafeterias and major national demonstrations. Demonstrations throughout the country on 21 February 1973 mobilised about 60,000 students, and in March the first national student strike in Britain took place. In addition to these national activities, students have organised many special actions at a local level, including occupations, to further their claim for a decent grant.

A realistic perspective for carrying this grants campaign forward would have involved providing an action programme to unite students in struggle. The political line adopted by the IMG majority, however, excluded just this possibility. Instead, the tendency was to counterpose a nonexistent "more revolutionary" struggle to the existing one. This approach had a special appeal for some students who were already convinced of the need for a socialist revolution, but it did not resolve the pressing need to provide leadership for the majority of students who were still under the influence of the existing CP-led National Union of Students.

As with the student union autonomy campaign, the real way forward was to adopt a perspective of independent student mass action—which would have been capable of winning broad support in the working class and organised

labour movement. Insofar as the CP's handling of the grants campaign cut across this principle—as it did at every turn—we should have led a fight against the CP, basing ourselves firmly on the pressing need for students to rely on their own united strength. By intervening in the actual struggles of students, by giving correct expression to their demands, and by showing them how to struggle, we could have effectively started to challenge the misleadership of the CP.

Despite the lessons of the past two years, the IMG majority leadership continues to adapt to the workerist tendencies and depreciates the importance of mass independent student action. This explains why, despite the national impact and great opportunities opened up by the student union autonomy campaign and grants campaign, we have been unable to make any significant breakthrough in the student movement. Instead of actually leading students into struggle, the role of Trotskyists has been reduced to one of abstract propagandising from the sidelines of the student movement. The balance sheet of our youth work shows this adaptationism has meant the loss of valuable opportunities. By defaulting in leadership, we have let the reformist leaders of the NUS off the hook and allowed the CP to retain its influence amongst students. Moreover, we have miseducated our own forces and those we have been able to influence.

All indications are that in the next immediate period there will be a continuation of militant student struggles. The only way we can be in the leadership of these struggles is by correcting our erroneous line on autonomous student struggles and develop an orientation directed to the concerns of the mass of student youth and not just the "vanguard." This should proceed from a correct appreciation of the youth radicalisation as analysed in the United Secretariat resolution on youth submitted to the last world congress. It will require a concrete appreciation and application of the transitional programme and method to the struggles of the youth.

IRELAND: new rise in the Irish struggle

One of the most important developments in Europe over the past three to four years has been the explosive new rise in the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination. The struggle of the Catholic masses for elementary democratic rights developed in the north of Ireland into a confrontation with the forces of British imperialism. Nurtured by the centuries-old struggle of the Irish for national freedom and unity, this new upsurge took on the most advanced forms of struggle seen in Europe for a long time—mass demonstrations and meetings, mass non-cooperation with the authorities, armed defence of the Catholic areas, and the creation of "no-go zones."

Attempts to smash the civil rights movement and the Republican vanguard have been unsuccessful despite the harassment, imprisonment, persecution and torture which the 20,000 British troops are committing against the Republican vanguard and large layers of the entire Catholic community.

In a situation where British imperialism and its occupation army were trying to crush the heroic struggles of the Irish in a most brutal manner and deny Irish people the right to self-determination, revolutionaries in Britain had

a special responsibility to do everything possible to support this struggle. The duties of British revolutionaries couldn't have been clearer—it was to build a mass movement powerful enough to force the withdrawal of British troops and to stop the British government from blocking the process of permanent revolution unfolding in Ireland. Such a movement had the potential to concretely aid the Irish struggle, and the possibilities to bring down the British government. To build a movement of this character a policy was needed which could reach out to broad layers of the British population and get the support of the mass of British workers.

A movement of such dimensions takes time to build. It requires patient, persistent propaganda, agitation and action. From the outset the kind of actions and demands raised needed to be capable of reaching, educating, and mobilising the working masses and the British troops. The political basis on which such a campaign should be built is the principle of self-determination for Ireland. The central demand is for the "immediate withdrawal of British troops." This demand expresses the right of the Irish to self-determination in a concrete slogan aimed against the British government and formulates the policy of revolutionary defeatism in an understandable and realisable manner for the British masses.

The objective conditions for British revolutionists to build such a movement have existed since 1970. In the July 1970 issue of *Red Mole* the article "What Is to Be Done" correctly stated that "there must be an all-out effort to build an effective solidarity movement on an all-inclusive basis, on the principle of self-determination for Ireland." That is, the axis for building an effective solidarity movement was correctly seen at that time to be "the principle of self-determination." The three demands put forward for the solidarity movement were "Self-Determination for Ireland," "Withdraw All British Troops Now," "Release Bernadette Devlin and All Irish Prisoners." (*Red Mole*, July 1970.) This course was soon to be rejected by the IMG majority leadership.

Mass-action perspective abandoned

The May 1971 IMG national conference rejected "Withdrawal of British Troops Now" as the central demand for the Irish solidarity campaign on the grounds that it might be supported by the wrong people for the wrong reasons. The editorial of the *Red Mole* of 15 November 1971 gave expression to this point of view of the IMG majority leadership:

"Many genuine revolutionaries believe that the demand for the 'immediate withdrawal of British troops' is adequate for this purpose (the building of a solidarity campaign) and indeed it is essential to include this demand in the platform of any campaign but this demand on its own is unfortunately ambiguous. It can very easily be taken up and transformed into a 'Bring the Boys Home' campaign based on liberal issues with only a negative impact. Such a campaign avoids the issues of the class struggle, can exist completely independent of them, and in its worse form can even divert resources from that struggle."

To make sure that no "liberals" would be able to actively aid the heroic struggle of the Irish peoples for self-

determination by giving their support to a campaign which had "Withdrawal of British Troops" as its central axis, we changed our previously held ideas about the platform for the campaign. We made support for the "forces leading the armed struggle in Ireland" the central axis for a solidarity campaign. We had some difficulty in finding the exact formulation to express this and for a period the wording of the demand was changed at each national leadership meeting. These demands ranged from "Victory to the IRA," "Solidarity with the IRA," "Unconditional Support for the IRA in its Military Struggle Against British Imperialist and the Forces of Reaction in Ireland." The exact wording was dependent, not on how best to build a principled mass movement, but on how each shift in formulation would be accepted within the "vanguard." Under the influence of the Latin American resolution passed by the majority at the last world congress, the IMG majority had become infatuated with the question of armed struggle and wrongly thought support for the guerrillaist actions of the IRA to be the only principled basis for a solidarity campaign in Britain.

It is an elementary tactical error to demand of those forces who are prepared to work in a campaign "For the Immediate Withdrawal of British Troops," "For an End to Internment" and "For the Release of Political Prisoners" that they also immediately declare themselves "for" or "against" the "Victory of the IRA." To insist on this is an ultraleft and sectarian mistake of the first order. It serves to divide those people who have taken a principled position on the right to self-determination for the Irish people and cuts across the possibilities of mass mobilisations on a principled basis directed against the British government.

The IMG majority leadership made this error because they did not take as their starting point the needs of the Irish and British masses. They failed to understand that it was the responsibility of British revolutionists to begin to educate the British workers about British imperialism and to win their support for the demand of "Withdrawal of British Troops" as a step in the process of realising that they had no interests in British domination of Ireland.

A sectarian approach to an existing united front

We made the slogan "Victory to the IRA" the key demand of our front group, the Irish Solidarity Campaign (ISC). In making its starting point the "concerns of the vanguard" instead of the needs of the masses, this campaign could carry out nothing but small sectarian actions. When a broader united-front-type coalition was formed—the Anti-Internment League (AIL)—we still continued to maintain the ISC despite the fact that the AIL mobilised as many as 20,000 in October 1971. The reason was that the AIL was considered "liberal"—it only went as far as demanding the "Immediate Withdrawal of British Troops" and an "End to Internment." It did not declare for "Victory to the IRA." Therefore, the majority leadership of the IMG decided that the ISC still had to be maintained as a separate organisation.

Our perspective was to win the AIL to the slogan of "Victory to the IRA" or some similar demand. The *Red Mole* editorial 15 November 1971, in commenting on the

20,000-strong demonstration led by the AIL, explained:

"... that it is necessary to transform the present campaign against internment and for the withdrawal of British troops into a campaign which was in active solidarity with those leading the fight against the armies of British imperialism."

In reality there was no principled reason for the existence of both the ISC and the AIL.

Because Trotskyists were not actively giving leadership to the AIL, making sure that it was firmly based on a mass-action perspective, the AIL began to lose its support in the face of a temporary downturn in the struggle and started to disintegrate. It was at this point that the majority leadership of the IMG started to make a turn toward the AIL—not from the point of view of rebuilding it and turning it outward but to "capture" it and "win" it to the "Victory" slogan. After doing just that, we found we had "captured" nobody but ourselves. Now, under our sectarian leadership, the AIL like the ISC has finally collapsed. And there the situation rests today.

Valuable time and potential have been wasted. The balance sheet of three years' work shows that we are no nearer to building a mass solidarity campaign in defence of the Irish revolution than we were three years ago. Despite the formation of our front group, the ISC, and the capturing of the AIL, British Trotskyists have done far less than we could to aid the struggle being waged by the oppressed Irish Catholics. The failure of the British section to do this is the most glaring and serious example of abdication of revolutionary responsibility resulting from the sectarian politics of the IMG over the past 3 to 4 years.

Political support for individual terrorism in Ireland

The misconception that it was a principle for the solidarity campaign to be based on support for those organisations participating in the "armed struggle" has led to other political errors which disoriented our comrades. Apart from the confusion which existed for some time as to which section of the IRA we should support, this wrong concept was responsible for the IMG giving full support to a small group that was expelled from the Republican movement, Saor Eire, an anti-Leninist terrorist grouping based in the Irish republic.

In publishing the manifesto of Saor Eire in the 1 June 1971 issue of the *Red Mole*, without politically differentiating ourselves from it (either in that issue or any other), the readers of the *Red Mole* could only draw one conclusion: that the Saor Eire group was basically correct politically—or at least moving in the right direction on many questions dealt with in their manifesto. The editors of the *Red Mole* published the manifesto "... in the belief that it is an important contribution to the discussion in the way forward for the Irish revolution." In outlining how it sees the Irish revolution taking place, Saor Eire stated its position very clearly in the manifesto:

"Some socialist groupings, for various subjective reasons hold to the belief that the mass of the people must be politically conscious and that the objective conditions must be ripe before we start to make this revolution. Such attitudes will condemn them to endless discussion, the continual analysis of actions after the event and eventually to political extinction."

In outlining their origins and attitudes toward politics, the Saor Eire manifesto explains:

"We were a small group of fighting men who had not carried out any revolutionary action which would have distinguished us from the numerous groups and organisations that were involved in unproductive discussions. Our first step was to expropriate arms. By this revolutionary action we were able to finance our group. Small groups of revolutionaries were organised with whatever weapons were available."

According to Saor Eire's manifesto, the Irish revolution has no need for a political programme. Politics are put way down on the list of priorities; first and foremost comes the question of arms. The revolution can be made without the masses being politically conscious, without the objective conditions being ripe. Guns take priority over politics.

The *Red Mole* gave its readers more insight into the nature of the Saor Eire group in its issue dated 1-15 January 1971. Two full pages were given to Saor Eire to explain their views in an interview with a *Red Mole* reporter. In answer to the question about the kind of movement Saor Eire was trying to build the reply was straight to the point: "Saor Eire is a left wing armed group which is attempting to act as a fuse or detonator to the Irish struggle... as opposed to past forms the Republican struggle took, Saor Eire is centred around the cities and could be called an urban guerrilla group..."

Being an urban guerrilla group, Saor Eire had to work underground. As the Saor Eire spokesperson pointed out, "We are not participating directly as Saor Eire in any open political work." The spokesperson in the interview defines Saor Eire's existence and explains its relation to other political groups within Ireland. "We would not fall under the category of the party as Lenin understood it... we do not see ourselves in opposition to any of the present day groups; rather as an aid to help them build a party which can lead the working class to power." Saor Eire has now disintegrated and is no longer a factor in Irish politics.

In criticising the IMG majority leadership for politically supporting this openly avowed terrorist group it is necessary to remember that in doing so they were only following out the recommendation of the majority resolution of the 1969 world congress on Latin America. This was the tendency to play down Leninist politics and orient toward any group that took up the gun. Like the ERP in Argentina, the Saor Eire supported the guerrilla warfare line adopted by the majority at the last world congress. Both of these groups were in political opposition to the Fourth International on the need to build a Leninist combat party as a prerequisite for a successful revolution.

The non-response to the Derry massacre

On Sunday 30 January 1972, at the end of a civil-rights mass demonstration, the British army moved in and killed 13 unarmed demonstrators. In response to these cold-blooded killings the first general strike since 1913 was held throughout Ireland. There was a worldwide outcry against the Derry massacre and leading bourgeois

world papers were obliged to condemn the actions of the troops. Our response to the Derry massacre is another indication of how the emphasis given to the "armed struggle" has disoriented our movement and made it unable to understand the importance of mass actions, including peaceful mass demonstrations, in the process of politicising the masses around the question of imperialism. The response of the *Red Mole* in its February 7 issue was not to call for "No More Derrys," "Withdraw British Troops" but a call to "Avenge Derry" and "Open the Second Front." How *Red Mole* readers were expected to "Avenge Derry" or "Open the Second Front" was not explained. But the slogans sounded revolutionary to the *Red Mole* editors and that presumably was good enough.

In the same editorial the IMG's attitude toward mass demonstrations is spelled out:

"The demonstrations, unarmed and presenting an easy target, were the obvious choice to attempt and break the tightening noose of resistance. The army had failed completely to inflict a decisive blow against the IRA. The only way to defeat a rates and rents strike is by arresting thousands of householders. This was clearly impossible. The mass demonstrations provided the clearest target. Here lay the real hope of stemming the tide. Here one decisive blow could teach a terrible lesson to those who continued the resistance . . . the main lesson of the massacre in the Bogside is that the Irish people have to defend themselves guns in hand against British imperialism."

According to the logic of the *Red Mole*, unarmed demonstrations in Ireland, even large demonstrations, play into the hands of the British government. In fact, they present the British troops with easy target practice—they provide the "clearest target." And those who continue to participate in such demonstrations can be dealt a "terrible lesson" and a "decisive blow." Having failed to make any headway in building a solidarity movement in Britain, the IMG majority leadership arrogantly gave such advice to the leaders of the civil-rights demonstrations in Ireland.

The Irish civil-rights militants did not accept the advice given to them by the *Red Mole*. They did just the opposite. Within seven days they had organised an even bigger march and rally. Faced with this powerful display of solidarity and determination, the British troops were forced to stand on the sidelines looking on. This mass defiance of bourgeois law and order (like most demonstrations in Ireland, it was illegal) put the British troops on the defensive.

This action reinforced the lesson that revolutionaries have drawn over decades of working-class struggle—the best defence in face of repression is the mobilisation of the masses themselves. In this instance the Irish civil-rights leaders, by mobilising the masses in a large peaceful demonstration, reversed the tables and put the British government on the defensive. Instead of giving advice to the Irish people about the need for arms, it would have been politically more correct for the IMG to spell out that the main lesson of the Derry massacre was the urgent need to build comparable mass actions in Britain, powerful enough to force the British rulers to withdraw their occupation army.

That is not to say that British revolutionaries do not also have a responsibility to try to influence politically the leaders of the civil-rights movement. A major criticism that can be made of the IMG majority leadership is precisely that they failed to do this. Instead of trying to educate the leaders of the IRA to an understanding of the role of the revolutionary party and the necessity for mobilising the masses to defend themselves, in whatever way is necessary, the majority leadership of the IMG adapted to the backwardness of the Republican forces who were carrying out individual terrorist acts. Small guerrilla actions are no substitute for the actions of the masses themselves, even though such deeds might evoke the sympathy of the masses.

Our failure to attempt to politically educate the Republican vanguard is seen by our response to the bombings the IRA have carried out in Britain and Belfast. In response to the bombings by the Official IRA of the officers mess in Aldershot (England), in which several women cleaners were killed, the 28 February 1972 *Red Mole* wrote:

". . . No matter what criticism we might make of the tactics of the carrying out of this particular action the main fact is still that we unconditionally support the right of the IRA, or any other faction of the Republican population to carry on armed action aimed at destroying British rule in Ireland.

"The pacifists and liberals may weep and wring their hands with grief but even in their own moralising terms the just violence of the IRA is nothing compared to the centuries of British imperialist butchery in Ireland. In political terms we have explained, the struggle of the IRA is in the direct interests of the British working class. The fact that a bad technical error or tactical mistake meant that unfortunately British army officers were not killed by the blast, does not in the slightest alter the political content of the struggle of the IRA. It is in this light that we must look at the Aldershot incident.

"Victory to the IRA."

Red Mole, 10 July 1972, in an article written by Comrades Purdie and Lawless, states:

"The weakness of the Provisionals should not blind anyone to the importance of what they have been able to achieve. They have built up the most effective military resistance to British imperialism seen in Ireland since the Black and Tan war; never for more than fifty years has the British Army faced an adversary so formidable as the Provisional IRA.

"We refuse to criticise them for their military strategy; we do not accept that the bombing campaign was sectarian and we despise those on the British left who have echoed these slanders."

It is correct in principle to defend the right of oppressed peoples to use whatever means necessary to achieve their liberation. This does not mean, however, that in giving unconditional support to the fighters for Irish liberation we make political concessions to them. An essential part of our defence of the Irish liberation struggle is to make fraternal constructive criticism of political errors they commit and wrong methods of struggle they employ. For instance, while expressing our solidarity with the victims of the military junta in Chile, we constantly expose the bankruptcy of class collaborationism which paved the

way for the coup.

While defending the IRA against British imperialism we should, at the appropriate time, explain to the IRA that individual acts of terrorism carried out by their organisation are self-defeating and can only play into the hands of the British government. The Marxist movement has a wealth of experience to draw upon to show concretely that individual terrorist acts lead to the isolation of those who carry them out and make it more difficult to win support for their struggle. The IMG majority leadership has failed to promote this concept because it considers individual terrorism to be a minor tactical question of no political gravity.

How many more missed opportunities?

The way for British revolutionaries to give maximum aid to the Irish struggle, to help the IRA win a victory, and defeat our own bourgeoisie requires a strategy based on the needs of the Irish and British working masses and aimed at winning their support. To defeat our own bourgeoisie also requires a strategy that includes a policy toward the British troops, aimed at undermining the authority of the officer caste and winning as many of the British troops as possible to support the struggle for the right of the Irish people to self-determination. However, we have failed to carry out any effective propaganda or agitation amongst the British troops for this purpose. We have not done this in the name of the IMG nor did we try to convince the ISC or the AIL of the worth of this perspective. It is the main task of revolutionaries to mobilise in mass action all those in support of the struggle of the oppressed Catholics; complimentary to this task and an integral part of it is to develop a revolutionary-socialist policy directed toward the morale and outlook of British troops in Ireland.

The balance sheet of the British section's work in defence of the Irish revolution is one of missed opportunities and an abrogation of revolutionary responsibility. The reasons for this are rooted in our orientation to a thin layer of vanguard elements instead of basing ourselves on the needs of the Irish and British masses. Instead of politically educating this thin vanguard layer on how to reach out to the masses and strengthen themselves, the IMG majority leadership made ultraleft and sectarian adaptations. The armed struggle as such has been elevated above the application of Marxist politics. The line adopted by the majority leadership of the Fourth International at the last world congress induced the IMG to develop such erroneous proterrorist positions toward the defence of the Irish revolution.

THE LABOUR MOVEMENT: the deepening radicalisation

In the last few years both the Labour and Tory governments have tried to solve the crisis of British capitalism by stepping up their attacks on the living standards of the working class. Entry into the European Economic Community has meant an acceleration in the rationalisation of a number of British industries resulting in the least productive factories being closed down, an increase in the number of domestic and international mergers, and

an intensification of speedups on the factory floor.

The ruling class knows that its policy can succeed only if the workers can be driven to increase productivity while real wages are lowered. Toward this end, ruling class policy has tried to create a permanent army of unemployed, cut into the living standards, social services and democratic rights won through decades of working class struggle. With one of the highest inflation rates in Europe the government is trying to impose a limit on wage increases that is unacceptable to the majority of the workers.

Through the Industrial Relations Act the Tories hope to put the unions in a legal straitjacket, thereby keeping wage increases low. This Act has been used by the Tories to jail militant trade union leaders, curb rank and file militancy, and prevent solidarity actions. The ruling class also seeks through the Industrial Relations Act to draw the union bureaucrats into further class collaboration. The Tories are proceeding with the full knowledge that a confrontation with labour is inevitable.

Faced with this Tory offensive, the workers have not remained passive nor have they lacked the confidence to organise and fight back. On the contrary they have launched massive defensive struggles often in a most militant manner. To prevent factories closing down and to save their jobs, workers have occupied factories and conducted "work-ins," demonstrating that the bosses are not necessary for industry to operate. Against the wishes of their own labour and trade-union leaders, the miners and building workers have developed new struggle tactics, including "flying pickets," to win their strikes. Mass demonstrations outside Pentonville jail last year forced the Tories to release five dockers imprisoned for their trade-union militancy. And manifesting their opposition to the Industrial Relations Act, tens of thousands of workers participated in two 24-hour general strikes. In February 1971, 140,000 workers turned out to a demonstration called by the TUC (Trade Union Congress) brass to protect the Tory's antilabour legislation.

The big increase in the number of strikes, protests, demonstrations, rallies, work-ins, and factory occupations since 1970 has not been confined exclusively to the *industrial* workers, or even to those workers who have had long years of experience in working-class struggle. More often than not it has been the young workers, many of whom are gaining their experience in the labour and trade-union movement for the first time, who have been in the forefront of these struggles. Increasing numbers of young women workers, influenced both by this rise in worker militancy and by the women's liberation movement, have also been involved. Immigrant workers, determined to eliminate once and for all the racism which they encounter both inside and outside the labour movement, are joining together in strikes and other forms of militant struggle to fight their oppression and exploitation as Blacks and as workers.

The deep radicalisation which is taking place in Britain has started to "proletarianise" the white-collar and traditionally more conservative unions like the draughtsmen, civil servants, hospital workers and teachers. In fact, some of these workers (like the teachers), formerly conservative and backward, are now amongst the most radical. This is in part due to the entry of many of the radicalised students of the mid and late sixties into education where they have continued to advocate and

fight for their radical ideas.

Without a doubt the radicalisation that is starting to take place within the British labour movement, and is only just beginning, has opened up big possibilities for Trotskyists to recruit young workers. It was our responsibility to analyse this new situation and project concrete ways in which our relatively small organisation could move forward and take advantage of these favourable openings. Unfortunately the policies of the majority leadership in Britain were an obstacle to this.

Our 'turn' to the workers

The turn made by the IMG toward the working class, which was begun in 1970, was not based on an objectively correct analysis of the depth and scope of the radicalisation taking place in the factories and trade unions, or an assessment of the concrete political openings which this radicalisation afforded our small forces. The "turn" came about primarily as a result of the majority leadership bending before the workerist pressures that the radicalising youth were exerting on our movement. Thus this change in orientation was artificial and schematic.

As previous sections of this document explain, the thinking of the "vanguard," particularly the student "vanguard," was that revolutionaries should pay less attention to questions like Vietnam, the struggles of students, or to the Black and women's liberation movements. They believed that all these questions were peripheral to the "real" class struggle that was occurring in the factories and on the shop floor. Because our "turn" to the working class was in reality an adaptation to these pressures on our movement, it meant that we turned away from anti-imperialist struggles, the struggles of women, Blacks and students. It meant that the IMG majority leadership, in adopting this too narrow concept of the class struggle, which was so prevalent within the "vanguard," failed to respond to major struggles taking place outside the factories and workshops.

One example was the way the majority leadership were willing to champion only those struggles of women that occurred in industry. Socialist Woman Groups, which the IMG set up for this purpose, concentrated for a year or more in organising the women night cleaners. They organised pickets, wrote and distributed leaflets, collected union dues and organised community support. In reality, we tried to substitute ourselves for the normal machinery of a trade union without having the authority or weight of a trade union. In the end this work fizzled out and the women cleaners were left to fend for themselves again.

Before this, the 1971 national conference of the IMG decided to build an industrial campaign on the issue of equal pay/low pay. After 18 months it became clear that it was impossible to develop this campaign since it required roots in the trade-union movement that we did not yet have. This, too, was abandoned. Soon after this, the sectarian Socialist Woman Groups, which were only on the periphery of the women's liberation movement, folded up too. The lessons of these experiences, like many others, have yet to be drawn by the majority leadership.

In Britain the women's liberation movement began to emerge toward the end of 1969. At that time we were in a very good position as we had experienced women cadres who were able to give leadership to this move-

ment. We could have projected and fought for a fighting women's movement with a perspective of a mass campaign around key demands that were being raised by this movement and which had the potential of taking the movement forward (free contraception and abortion on demand, 24-hour nurseries, etc.). However, the adaptation to the workerism prevalent within the vanguard cut across this possibility. Today we are largely outside of the women's liberation movement. Four years later, we still have no adequate political line on the question of women's oppression and how to fight it. This has meant missed opportunities to make gains.

Only a 'few years' left

The way in which we tried to intervene in the workers struggles was far out of proportion to what we could realistically accomplish given our relatively small forces. This was clear to anyone who attended our meetings during this period. These meetings were generally attended not so much by workers but by youth, particularly students. Despite the new wave of workers militancy, the meetings that attracted the most people were those that related to anti-imperialist issues, students and women.

The majority leadership justified the "turn" on the basis that there was not much time left before a decisive showdown and unless we got an "implantation" in the working class we would be unprepared to counter the coming right-wing development in Britain. The "Perspectives Document" submitted to the 1970 national conference, "From a Propaganda Group to a League for Revolutionary Action," informs us:

"We have at most a few years to help create a conscious leadership largely from our own efforts. The alternative is clearly a decisive defeat for the working class and a period of reaction.

". . . we are, in a sense, in a vicious circle just now; our ability to intervene in the many struggles and even explosions which are inevitable in the coming years is strictly limited by our small size; and yet unless we can intervene in this kind of struggle we will find it difficult to grow in size and influence.

"Our essential task is to use the few years breathing space that we have—which will give us many opportunities—to make a qualitative leap from a propaganda group to a league for revolutionary action—this is the only way to break the vicious circle."

Tailing the "vanguard," the majority leadership had become convinced that not a leftward but a rightward development was in the offing. By the time of the 1971 national conference, the burden on our small movement became almost unbearable. The Perspectives Document, called, "No, We Haven't All the Time in the World," informed us that:

"Over the next period the class struggle will be at a returning point in Britain—all feelings of complacency must be swept aside. Either the working class makes big advances in that period or a right wing development will take place. . . .

"If we fail the price will be a high one. . . .

"There is no easy answer. Everything we do—especially the big steps we take—will be full of dangers. But it is much better to try and fail than to remain safe but impotent. We say categorically that the day of the small

group is over—we grow large or we degenerate into a sect. The choice is ours. . . .

"Let anyone unwilling to face this gigantic task leave now. . . .

". . . let us never forget—we haven't all the time in the world."

If we were to brave the impending catastrophe, it was argued, it was no longer possible to build the party in the old plodding way. We were trapped in a vicious circle and the only way out was to gain an implantation in the working class by a forced march. Once this "turn" was put into effect, it was argued that the party would grow at a much faster rate.

What was involved was more than recognition of the new possibilities to reach militant young workers. The new orientation was really beginning to warp our judgment of what was happening in the class struggle and what our response should be, given our relatively small forces.

Because it was based on the concerns of the vanguard and not on an objective assessment of the class struggle, the new orientation soon began to distort our understanding of the major working-class struggles that did occur. This could be detected in 1970 when, under the influence of the subjectivity of the "vanguard," it became clear that we were revising the fundamental concepts of Lenin on the nature of the Labour Party.

The Labour Party—a fundamental question

Until 1970 our position had been one of critical support to this reformist mass party based on the trade unions. A change was projected just prior to the last election held in June 1970, when the 15 April issue of the *Red Mole* carried a major article by editorial board member Robin Blackburn. (He was not a member of the IMG at the time.)

In his article, which was entitled "Let It Bleed," Blackburn argued that the Labour Party is a "capitalist party" not essentially different from the Tory party or the Democratic Party in the United States. He argued that the Labour Party's hold over the British working class had now become so weakened that revolutionaries could not justify a vote for it against the Tories in the election. He went on to explain that the best way revolutionaries should conduct the fight against both was to ". . . pull none of our punches. We should disrupt the campaigns of the bourgeois parties and their leading spokesmen using all the imaginative and direct methods which the last few years have taught us."

The national secretary of the IMG at that time, Comrade Pat Jordan, wrote a "critique" of this article. Unfortunately, it was so weak and ambiguous that most readers of the *Red Mole* could come to no other conclusion than that Blackburn's positions, which were at least clear, were those of the IMG. In the same issue of the *Red Mole* that carried Comrade Jordan's "critique" a much clearer and more precise lead was given as to what militants should actually do on election day. This was pictured in the punch line of a cartoon strip which showed red moles beating up a Labour and a Tory election speaker, trampling then underfoot and tearing up the "Vote Labour" placard and then joining a long line of moles triumphantly carrying the red flag. This was the real position of our movement, stripped of all camouflage and demagogy.

The Oxford comrades of the IMG had no difficulty in taking the "new" line seriously and implementing it. When Labour Party bureaucrat Michael Stewart tried to speak at a public meeting in Oxford, our comrades there were instrumental in breaking it up. The Political Committee endorsed the actions of the Oxford branch showing they, too, agreed with the main thrust of Blackburn's article. Busting up Stewart's meeting was rationalised by claiming that this was the way to fight the Labour bureaucracy. But just the opposite occurred—we played right into their hands. Not surprisingly, the Labour leadership and the bourgeois press were not slow to give the maximum publicity to this incident in which they hypocritically portrayed the Trotskyists as being opponents of free speech, both in and out of the labour movement, while they were its champions.

To make 100 percent sure that no one thought we favoured a vote for the Labour Party as against the Tories, an IMG leaflet characterised the election as a "carnival." Thinking it necessary to "give a lead" in the "carnival," the leaflet urged workers to "throw aside illusions in labourism." The best way workers could do this under the circumstances, it was claimed, was if they ". . . confronted the task of constructing a new working class party which expresses the revolutionary essence of that class." The leaflet ended with the stirring message in bold print: "The Real Struggle is After the Election and Build the Revolutionary Vanguard." This sectarian and ultraleft policy was almost identical to the Maoist line. Their election stickers read, "Don't Vote—Revolution."

Instead of this sterile approach, we could have found ways of taking advantage of the election campaign to explain our ideas on the Labour Party; why it should be supported against the Tories, and why it was necessary to fight for an alternative leadership and programme. We could have utilised the increased interest in politics during the election period to explain our fundamental thinking on the burning issues of the day—like Ireland, NATO, antilabour legislation, inflation, women's liberation. We could have utilised the election to educate our own forces and others about the superiority of our programme and what has to be done to realise it. We did none of these things. Instead we were content to remain on the sidelines making abstract propaganda about a "new working-class party." Not surprisingly, our call for the workers to form a new working-class party got no more response than our call to break up Labour Party election rallies.

It should also be pointed out that, on top of calling for abstention in the last election, the majority leadership of the IMG opposed the idea that Trotskyists could run their own candidates under their own name and on a revolutionary-socialist programme. The majority leadership think that bourgeois elections are not very important. They act as though it would be reformist for revolutionaries to participate in them and that it would only help to spread parliamentary illusions within the working class.

This whole sectarian approach results in missed opportunities to build the IMG. We miss out on making new contacts and recruits and getting our programme and organisational principles known to wider layers of militants who have yet to hear about us. As Lenin correctly explained—such a policy is "infantile."

Giving up our previously held position on the Labour Party presented a certain dilemma for the majority leadership. If we are against the election of a Labour government, then what type of government do we favour? The majority leadership answered this with the formula "For a Workers Government Based on Democratic Trade Unions."

How was this abstract slogan to help us in the concrete circumstances? The slogan obviously had nothing to do with the realities of the class struggle *today*, since the only alternative government to the Tories which the workers are prepared to identify with and support right now is a Labour government. While the British working class have illusions in many things, thinking that their unions — which belong to the Labour Party — can form a government by themselves is not one of them. They have recognised for decades now that their unions are basically instruments for defending and advancing their rights on the job. The workers have also understood that they needed a political party to form a government that would fight for and protect their political interests (whether Labour governments have done this in the past or will do so in the future is a different question). It is because the workers understand the limitations of the trade unions that they initiated and built the British Labour Party.

For about one year the majority leadership put forward the slogan "For a Workers Government Based on Democratic Trade Unions" despite the fact that it did not make sense to most people. Without any evaluation, we quietly dropped this slogan at a special national conference held in December 1972 and went on record in favour of calling for a Labour government. The "Document on Government" presented by the Political Committee to this special conference stated:

"Nevertheless in the event of an election this conference i) Where no revolutionary candidate is standing [which "revolutionary" candidates?—AH], calls for a vote for Labour as the majority party of the working class and because the victory of this party will strengthen the confidence and combativity of the working class. ii) Calls for the formation of a government by whatever party of the working class has a majority at the time a government can be formed. At this moment in time this means concretely a labour government."

These formulations are dangerous. Trotskyists have never supported the Labour Party on the grounds that it is the party with the majority of working-class support. If this was our criterion, we would have no option but to support the capitalist Democratic Party in the United States. After all, do not a lot of workers and certainly most of the trade-union bureaucrats give their support to this openly capitalist party?

This reasoning behind our return to a pro-Labour position is wrong. If not corrected it will take our movement to the right. Our stand in favour of a Labour victory in the next election must proceed from a clear class characterisation of the Labour Party. The correct position is that the Labour Party, while having a reformist, bourgeois programme and treacherous leadership, is not a capitalist party like the Tories but is organised and financed by the workers and based on the mass organisations of the working class. In today's conditions, in the absence of a revolutionary alternative, we call for the election of a Labour government to replace the Tories.

The radicalisation that has taken place in Britain up to this point has by and large bypassed the Labour Party, although there are many indications that this is changing. The radicalised youth attracted to Trotskyism show a healthy contempt for the Social Democracy and Stalinism. They have a generally correct understanding of the treacherous role played by the reformist bureaucracies of both camps. At the same time many of these radicalised youth do not see the contradictory nature of the Labour Party as explained by Lenin in "'Left' Wing Communism, An Infantile Disorder." Their most common error is to see the Labour Party in a one-sided way, to equate the rank and file with its bureaucratic leadership, and to overlook its dual and contradictory character. It is our job to educate the radicalising youth in a correct understanding of these fundamental questions of a class character.

The confusion by the majority leadership about the nature of the Labour Party and what our strategy and tactics should be toward it has made it impossible for us to respond in a correct manner to the big working-class struggles when they have broken out. It has meant that we have tried to impose our own level of consciousness upon that of the masses, misjudged the actual tempo of the class struggle, and substituted abstract schemas in place of a programme of class action to fight the Tory offensive. Our wrong orientation toward the Labour Party has miseducated and disoriented our comrades (and other forces we influence). This has made it impossible for our movement to make the maximum gains out of the deepening class struggle.

The crisis at the Upper Clyde Shipyards

Let us get down to concrete cases. It was inevitable that our orientation toward the "vanguard," which is at this time generally ultraleft, would seriously affect the judgment and reactions of the majority leadership in the specific workers struggles that developed.

The first decisive test came in July 1971 when the Tories tried to eliminate 8,000 jobs at the Upper Clyde Shipyards (UCS) in Scotland. Workers responded to this threat to their livelihoods by organising a "work-in." The long and bitter struggle which ensued marked a turning point in the British class struggle.

Due to the treachery of the trade union and Labour Party bureaucracies, a number of big strikes (such as the post office workers) had previously ended in setbacks and the newly elected Tory government had managed to get its antilabour legislation on the statute books. The action by UCS workers had the potential to reverse this trend. These workers made it clear that they were prepared to put a stop to the closure of factories and the elimination of jobs. This new form of militant actions was an inspiration and showed the way forward to the whole working class movement. This high point in working-class struggles presented a special opportunity for revolutionary socialists. It tested the theory and practice of every left-wing group in the country.

Because we had few comrades active in the trade unions, and nobody actually working in the yards, our response had to be primarily one of propaganda. Within these limitations a certain amount of agitational work could have been conducted, especially in those unions where

we had some influence. Within Trades Councils, trade-union branches, shop-stewards committees and the like, resolutions could have been presented and a broad support campaign initiated.

A prerequisite for any effective work we could have done around the UCS events was to keep ourselves firmly rooted in the struggle there. The IMG majority leadership failed to do this. Our line during these events showed how remote our leadership was from the reality of the UCS struggle. In response to the sit-in, the front-page headlines in the 15 July *Red Mole* read: "The Occupation of the Clydeside: First Step to a Scottish Workers Republic?" The August 1971 *Red Mole* Special Clydeside Supplement stated:

"If the workers are to keep the yards open and avoid this catastrophic defeat, then they *must* keep control. The dangers of being disarmed and sold out by the existing leaderships is very great (their performance up to the present time is discussed below). The dangers of Tory nationalisation when the working class has already advanced to a situation of de facto workers' control (and the technical demands of occupation would quickly lead to the creation of elementary organs of dual power), across key industries throughout a region, are even greater.

"If the working class are not defeated by surrendering their control for 'nationalisation' or by the union bureaucrats through defensive demands, then clearly the Tories will be forced to send in the Army, firstly to intimidate the workers, then to clear the yards by force.

"Thus the implication of the present situation is that only by pursuing the question of *power* in Scotland can the Scottish working class avoid catastrophic defeat. It is make or break. At the same time, this battle over the future of the lynchpin in the economy of Scotland raises the national question. The British bourgeoisie have no future for Scotland. At the same time they can't tolerate the loss of it. Its future must lie in the hands of the working class.

"It is clear that preparations for the occupation cannot be purely technical. They demand education. They will involve the creation of an embryonic workers' militia, a high degree of political leadership which understands the revolutionary logic of the situation."

The *Red Mole* obviously did not realise that the only section of the UCS yards that was partially controlled by the workers was the gates. Production was maintained in more or less the same manner as before. The only difference was that the Shop Stewards Committees had some discussion with the management about the running of the yards. The vast majority of the UCS workers had no say in the decision-making. The Shop Stewards Committees and the Co-ordinating Committee was led by the Stalinists, and democracy within these committees had been curtailed.

With this somewhat more balanced picture the ideas raised in the *Red Mole* about the situation having "already advanced to a situation of de facto workers control," of "pursuing the question of *power* in Scotland," and "the creation of an embryonic workers militia" were nothing more than empty "left" rhetoric. They amounted to a substitute for a real analysis and demands around which we could make a meaningful intervention.

The biggest political obstacle to the UCS workers were

the Stalinists who completely dominated the yards. The Stalinists took the view that the shipyards could become "viable and profitable" and, therefore, held back the workers from recognition of the need to bring the entire weight of the labour movement behind the UCS workers.

Instead the IMG majority leadership were demanding that the "work-in" be transformed to a "sit-in." This pre-occupation with offering tactical advice detracted from the real need to combat the pernicious role of the Stalinists at UCS who refused to give the workers any real perspective for struggle.

In point of fact, the slogan to "transform" the "work-in" to a "sit-in" was not even linked to the living dynamic of the struggle at the UCS. Because of their lack of information and the erroneous impression given by the Stalinists that the yards could be made "profitable," the workers saw no point in a strike or "sit-in" since they were demanding the right to a job. This was the reality of the UCS struggle, which was rejected by the IMG majority leadership on the basis that the right to employment is a bourgeois concept.

It was necessary to recognise the actual level of consciousness of the UCS workers and understand that in the first place our task was a political one—of popularising and supporting the "work-in" and of helping the workers to understand the bankrupt policies of their Stalinist leaders. The slogan to transform the work-in into a sit-in totally isolated us from the UCS workers.

Workers' control

Preoccupied by this tactical question, the IMG majority leadership missed the opportunity of advancing ideas around "workers control" that were much more attuned to the struggle. The workers at UCS wanted to continue working and should have been supported in that stand wholeheartedly. For one thing it was the first step toward the workers actually controlling the work situation themselves. A strike or "sit-in" in this situation would have defeated this objective. Demands for workers control were very appropriate and would have cut across the influence of the Stalinists (who greatly feared just this possibility) and helped to advance the struggle to a higher level.

However, it is not surprising that the IMG majority leadership did not take advantage of the opportunity to present some of our fundamental ideas on workers' control. The reason why becomes clear when we read from a centre spread in the *Red Mole* of 13 March 1972 how one of the central slogans of our movement (even incorporated in *The Transitional Program*) has no longer any validity:

"We are therefore completely opposed to workers taking over and running their factories or industries within capitalism. What occurs when this is tried, for example at UCS, is the demoralisation of the workers and the discrediting of the whole idea of workers control. It is not the job of socialists to tell the working class that the organisation of its own conditions of production under capitalism is the solution to its problems, on the contrary it is necessary to point out that this is not in the slightest a solution to its problems. Far from socialists being in favour of workers taking over and running their own factories, they are totally opposed to workers taking *any* responsibility for the running of firms under capitalism. Socialists must

explain that it is *not* the management itself which oppresses the workers, but the entire production relations of capitalism. Any propaganda for workers control must therefore have this as its key point. NO WORKERS RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE RUNNING FIRMS UNDER CAPITALISM must be the absolutely central slogan of any campaign for workers control."

What was necessary at UCS, because of the unique form of struggle, was to mark out and develop a path in the direction of workers control of production, which would of itself be a preliminary stepping stone to workers management of the whole economy. Trotsky was not of the opinion, and correctly so, that workers should hold back from operating their own factories under capitalism. As Trotsky pointed out:

"What state regime corresponds to workers' control of production? It is obvious that the power is not yet in the hands of the proletariat, otherwise we would have not workers' control of production but the control of production by the workers' state as an introduction to a regime of state production on the foundations of nationalisation. What we are talking about is workers' control under the capitalist regime, under the power of the bourgeoisie. . . .

"The epigones have purely mechanically adopted the notion that workers' control of production, like soviets, can only be realised under revolutionary conditions. If the Stalinists tried to arrange their prejudices in a definite system, they would probably argue as follows: workers' control as a sort of economic dual power is inconceivable without the opposition of soviets to the bourgeois power; consequently—the Stalinists would be inclined to conclude—to advance the slogan of workers' control of production is admissible only *simultaneously* with the slogan of soviets.

"From all that has been said above, it is quite clear how false, schematic, and lifeless is such a construction. In practice, this is transformed into the unique ultimatum which the party puts to the workers: I, the party, will allow you to fight for workers' control only in the event that you agree simultaneously to build soviets. But this is precisely what is involved—that these two processes need not necessarily run in parallel and simultaneously. Under the influence of crisis, unemployment, and the predatory manipulations of the capitalists, the working class in its majority may turn out to be ready to fight for the abolition of business secrecy and for control over banks, commerce, and production before it has come to understand the necessity of the revolutionary conquest for power." (*The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, Pathfinder Press, pp. 78, 81.)

The fight for workers' control is an important part of the transitional programme and becomes posed especially acutely during times of big class upsurge, regardless of its duration.

Our response to the UCS crisis showed that we had little understanding of how to relate in a meaningful way to a living struggle. We had preconceived notions as to how the class struggle *should* unfold but the UCS workers did not conform to them.

These preconceived ideas were not rooted in any analysis of the real struggle taking place at UCS, but came from the stereotyped concepts of the class struggle that are prevalent amongst radicalising student youth. Our un-

derstanding and response to the UCS crisis was, therefore, "lifeless, abstract, and schematic." Through adapting to these layers, the majority leadership rejected the starting point of the transitional programme and method—that it is necessary to base ourselves on the real struggles and needs of the working class.

The sort of ideas we could have emphasized and won support for were "Open the Books," "Nationalisation under Workers Control," "For a Sliding Scale of Hours and Wages," "Full Support from the Labour Party and TUC," "Broaden the Shop Stewards Committees," "For the Democratic Election of all Workers Representatives."

The struggle for democratic rights

One of the consequences of focusing on the "concerns" of the "vanguard" and not those of the masses is that it is often difficult to determine the precise stage of the struggle, whether it is at the beginning or end. This point is brought home quite sharply in relation to the IMG majority's views on the question of defending democratic rights won by workers over long years of struggle. The general approach of the majority leadership has not been to see the importance of these issues, but to downplay them. They consider that the workers have long passed by the stage of struggling to defend and extend their democratic rights. This line of thinking completely militates against the real role that Trotskyists can and should be playing. Moreover, it is totally misleading on how to win the leadership of the working class.

If we are serious about "gaining an implantation" in the working class, we have to understand that a real "implantation" involves our comrades winning recognition as revolutionary working-class leaders. Our main aim, therefore, ought to be to give expression to the needs that workers actually feel and to provide a perspective for struggle. It is only in this way that we will win their allegiance.

In this process the defence and extension of democratic rights are especially important. The policy of the Tory government (and of the Labour government before it) is to cut into these rights which the workers have struggled for and won. As the crisis of capitalism deepens and the Tories step up their offensive, the workers feel this attack more and more. They are also prepared to fight to retain and advance their rights.

Revolutionaries are duty bound to be in the forefront of these struggles. We are the only force which has a rounded policy for the defence of democratic rights. Such a perspective involves the workers relying on their own strength, utilising extra-parliamentary methods of struggles, and applying whatever tactics are efficacious in the given situation. The Stalinists and the Social Democrats reject this approach, relying on lobbying parliament and MP's.

In the past few years there has been no shortage of opportunities to test this method in the heat of the class struggle. Three instances stand out: the struggle against the Industrial Relations Act; the defence of five imprisoned dockers in July 1972; and the defence of the 24 building workers who are being victimised and put up on legal charges because of militant picketing in last year's building strike. These three major assaults by the government against workers' rights provided opportunities for revolutionary socialists to test out their line. It was quite possible for

even a small revolutionary group like ours to have an important impact on these struggles and thereby to make recruits.

The Tories have proceeded to implement anti-labour legislation similar to that drawn up by the previous Labour government. When the Labour government was in power it was compelled to retreat when the unions started to organise and fight back. The Tories, however, are determined to drive ahead despite big working-class opposition. In response to this challenge, it was necessary to unite the whole of the working class behind the fight against the Industrial Relations Bill. What was needed was a programme of class action that showed the way forward for the working class in their fight against both the Tories and the Labour bureaucrats who obstructed a militant united response.

The impact that this attack had on the working class is clear from the following quote from the *Red Mole* of 8-22 March 1971:

"December 8th: 350,000-500,000 workers strike, against the advice of the TUC; January 1st: 10,000 workers strike in Birmingham; January 12th: one million workers are involved in the TUC's 'lunchtime' protest; about one third of them also use the day to stop work completely. February 21st: 140,000 or more workers go on the TUC demonstration in London; probably 1-2 million are there in spirit; this is bigger than any demonstration including the October 1968 demonstration on Vietnam; March 1st: at least 1 1/2 million A. U. E. W. workers strike."

The *Red Mole* was not very inspired by these big working-class demonstrations. The same article complains that the most popular slogan on the marches and rallies was "Kill the Bill"—a slogan which expressed clearly the desires and aims of those participating. The *Red Mole* just could not understand it. ". . . nobody has explained clearly what *Kill the Bill* might realistically imply!" Perhaps the slogan was too complex for the *Red Mole* to comprehend.

Even the most revolutionary slogan would not have made much difference, however, because the demonstrations "have not had effect on the Tories, or will not have any effect. . . ." And why were the Tories unaffected by these militant demonstrations which apart from the February 21 one took place in the "bosses time"? ". . . the Tories know that the workers will be back the next day," replied the *Red Mole*. So what *would* have made the Tories sit up and take notice? If the workers had *never* returned to work? Correct! According to *Red Mole*, "The only attack which can have any effect is an unpredictable attack. This means that an indefinite general strike is the only answer."

In response to the Tory offensive and the big working-class reply to it, all the *Red Mole* had to say was that any action short of an "indefinite general strike" was inadequate. Not seeing one in sight, the *Red Mole* made it clear that the perspective for continuing the struggle was not very good. "It is clear that the Tories, no matter what action is taken, will not withdraw the Bill from Parliament." The *Red Mole* went on to say that the main task was to organise "councils of action." The fact that councils of action did not flow out of this struggle against the Industrial Relations Bill made no difference to the *Red Mole*.

The same type of error was repeated during the cam-

paigned to free the five imprisoned dockers. The dockers were put in Pentonville prison because of their militant picketing activity against threats to their jobs. The campaign built around defending the five dockers mobilised thousands of workers who saw this action as a threat to the whole trade-union movement. As a result, the Tories were forced to back down before this militant show of strength and to release the five dockers.

The response of the *Red Mole* "Strike Special" dated 25 July 1972, while making a good start, drifted into a world only a select few could understand:

"The most immediate task of the moment is to FREE THE FIVE! This is a task for mass action by the working class which must be combined with preparations to RESIST FURTHER ARREST!

"Already the strike movement has spread far beyond the docks, extending hour by hour to wider sections of workers. We must GENERALISE THE STRIKE, till it embraces the whole working class.

"The movement launched by the dockers is not a passive withdrawal of labour for a wage claim, but a political struggle against the I. R. Act and the Government. Therefore, the old industrial tradition of leaving the factory and going home must be replaced by the new tactic of MASS OCCUPATIONS OF FACTORIES AS BASES FOR EXTENDING THE STRUGGLE.

"From such bases the miners' tactic of MASS PICKETING OF OTHER FACTORIES STILL WORKING must be organised, as well as all the other necessary activities for spreading the movement.

"From the start this struggle is being led against the opposition or passivity of the official trade union leaderships, and while the fight must go on to win every union to the movement, the leadership must remain in the hands of the rank and file organisations if the offensive is to be carried to a successful conclusion. Therefore MASS MEETINGS MUST BE CALLED TO ELECT STRIKE COMMITTEES to lead every group of striking workers. . . .

"Bodies like trades councils, because they are based purely on delegates from trade union branches, are too narrow for the task of uniting the representatives of the great mass of workers in factories and housing estates. Therefore, as in 1926, COUNCILS OF ACTION MUST BE FORMED to draw together all the forces of the working class in every locality. As the local leadership of the strike the councils of action must include delegates of strike committees, Tenant Associations and all other rank and file organisations of the working class in the locality.

"The state will not stand idle in the face of a massive working class challenge to capitalist authority and, as in the miners strike and all other great class battles, violence will be attempted against strikers, pickets and militants. As in 1926, to deter and resist such violence, WORKERS' DEFENCE GROUPS MUST BE FORMED BY STRIKE COMMITTEES AND COUNCILS OF ACTION. Not one more worker must fall into the hands of the police, the courts and the jails of the capitalist state.

"While the decisive force in the struggle will be that of the organised working class, we must immediately create SUPPORT COMMITTEES embracing all those ready to work in support of the movement."

The *Red Mole* sweepingly suggested that the following organisations join together in order to put these demands

into action: IMG, IS, SLL, Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), the Militant Group, The Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), "and other organisations of the revolutionary left." *Noticeably absent from this list are the biggest organisations having working-class support—the Labour Party and the Communist Party!* This is appealing to the new mass "vanguard" with a vengeance.

A more recent example of this unrealistic approach to working-class struggles, especially the need to defend democratic rights, is the case of the "Shrewsbury 24." The Shrewsbury building workers are in an extremely tough situation. They face a trial that could last up to five months and possible heavy fines and imprisonment or both. They are on charges arising out of their militant trade-union activity during last year's building workers' strike.

The IMG have made this a priority campaign. Some members have done a great deal of hard work on this. However, the fundamental attitude of the majority leadership is as wrong as it is on all other matters relating to the defence of workers democratic rights.

The 25 May 1973 issue of the *Red Weekly* (formerly the *Red Mole*) carries a major article in its centre spread authored by Ed Wyatt that explains to readers the attitude revolutionaries should take toward the question of democratic rights:

"We have to base ourselves on the situation as it is, not as we would like it to be. The right to picket will never be defended by appealing to standards of democracy or legality for which the ruling class no longer has any use. We must learn the lesson of the past that the only way the right to picket can be defended is by depriving the class enemy of its monopoly over the means of intimidation and its monopoly of armed force. Wherever the relationship of forces permits, militants must now begin to take up whatever physical means are necessary to defeat the enemy on the picket lines. It is in these clashes with the bourgeois state that the working class will be steeled to carry out an indispensable task if socialism is ever to be established: the crushing of the capitalist judiciary, its police and the armed forces once and for all."

Ed Wyatt makes a classical ultraleft mistake when he advises readers of the *Red Weekly* that the right to picket, for example, cannot be defended by an appeal to democratic and legal rights which the working-class movement has fought for and won over many years of struggle. Often it can. And revolutionaries must be in the forefront of all struggles on the question of defending and advancing workers' democratic rights.

As for the point Ed Wyatt makes about "militants must now begin to take up whatever physical means are necessary to defeat the enemy on the picket lines," this is nothing new to the working-class movement. The only possible reason for its inclusion must be to identify with the "minority violence" line that is prevalent amongst certain sections of the vanguard and which is contained in the European Perspectives Document. Needless to say, arming a picket line is not always the best tactic to defeat the class enemy. In fact—depending on the relationship of forces and other relevant factors—it can sometimes be the shortest route to the defeat of our class forces in a particular struggle.

Substitutionism

To expose the bankrupt politics of the current leadership of the trade unions is one thing. An integral part of this task must be the construction of a new, class-struggle leadership, having the perspective of replacing the old. Toward this aim we must seek to build a class-struggle left wing inside the unions. In this way the forces of the future revolutionary leadership are gathered together and tested in the course of the class struggle itself.

The labour bureaucrats cannot be effectively fought from the outside of the workers organisations, or by pretending they do not exist and count for nothing. It is necessary to recognise that most of the labour bureaucrats have some kind of a base in the workers movement and it is only by fighting them from within that they will eventually be replaced. The majority leadership of the IMG either reject or do not understand that a major part of our tasks must be the building of class-struggle left wings in the unions. Their line and actions over the past few years have led them to substitute other organisational goals for this task.

For example, for about a year our major orientation was to concentrate on building Claimants Unions (organisations of unemployed workers, persons on welfare, and others either destitute or on very low incomes). The Claimants Unions were influenced mainly by the anarchists and were often initiated by them. These "unions" came into existence when unemployment was drastically increasing but faded out of existence when unemployment dropped sharply. Our orientation, of course, ceased to exist when the Claimants Unions disintegrated.

Because we had no clear programme for our work inside the labour movement, we ended up not giving a political leadership to the unemployed but in giving advice on how they could claim the maximum security benefits. The fundamental error made in this work was to reject the concept that it is the employed workers—with the active help of the unemployed—who play the key and decisive role in the fight for full employment.

When the Claimants Union work fizzled out, without making an appraisal of what had gone wrong, the majority leadership projected another major initiative—the building of Socialist Trade Union Committees. As the name suggests, the idea was to get all socialist working-class militants together in one trade-union committee.

This method was not new in the IMG. It merely followed the approach we had taken previously toward the women's liberation movement. Thinking that all socialist women should get together in one organisation, we tried to build sectarian Socialist Woman Groups. In implementing this policy we found that we attracted few forces other than ourselves and were effectively isolated from the developing women's liberation movement.

Likewise with the Socialist Trade Union Committees. They were primarily initiated by student comrades—some of whom spent a colossal amount of time and effort trying to build up a local Socialist Trade Union Committee, to find that it attracted only ourselves and one or two sympathisers. The concept that these committees could be made viable misled our comrades into thinking that it was possible to bypass the existing trade-union movement. Rather than assisting our comrades to link up

with working-class militants, the Socialist Trade Union Committees isolated us from them.

A recurring theme in the propaganda of the majority leadership is the call for the setting up of "Action Committees." We have in fact been persistently calling for these "Action Committees" for the past few years and without any success.

The apparent reason for advancing this slogan is not that Action Committees flow out of the current stage of the class struggle but because such committees played a dynamic role in the 1926 British General Strike.

The idea behind these "Action Committees" is that if we can get more class-conscious workers (including the members of other groups) into them, this would put us in a strategically favorable position. Being free from any reformist pressure, it is believed that the participants within these committees would be strongly inclined to take our leadership. Once this process becomes advanced—when "Action Committees" are established on a regional and national scale—we would be well on the way to "outflanking" the bureaucracies of the existing labour movement.

The problem with this schema is that neither the class struggle, union militants, or members of other left-wing organisations are prepared at this stage to conform to the organisational concepts and forms arbitrarily worked out in advance by the IMG majority leadership. The repeated calls for militants to build "Action Committees" have fallen on deaf ears and, of course, we have neither the resources nor the personnel to build them ourselves.

All these organisational initiatives (which comrades were often pressured into initiating regardless of whether there was any real basis for doing so) have one feature in common. They were in fact organisations set up by left wings *outside* of the organised workers movement. They were all substitutes for the real fight it is possible and necessary to conduct. This fight has to be centred around the struggle to build class-struggle left wings inside the trade unions.

For a fighting programme in the unions

The crisis of working-class leadership is posed in the trade unions every time the workers move into big struggles. The traditional leaders of the labour movement are reformist to the core and have a long record of class collaboration with the bosses and their governments. The struggle to build a new and revolutionary leadership in the unions, as elsewhere, is therefore a long-term goal for Trotskyists.

Implicit in the majority leadership's schematic view of the way the class struggle will unfold is the concept that time is too short for any patient and persistent work inside the working-class organisations. Consequently it is not possible to build a class-struggle left wing which will become the alternative revolutionary leadership in the unions. As a substitute for this, the majority leadership looks for organisational shortcuts and ways around the mass organisations. They turn away from the real job that has to be done.

The new leadership which has to be built in the labour movement must be developed around a class-struggle programme that meets the urgent problems and needs of the workers. Inflation and unemployment are the most

crucial economic problems faced by the working class today. Central to a class-struggle programme that will enable workers to counter unemployment and protect their wage packets against rising prices must be the transitional demand for a "sliding scale of wages and hours."

This demand leads to a whole series of other demands that are relevant to the current struggles of the working class. These demands include nationalisation under workers control, open the books, factory and consumer committees, equal pay increases, unemployment compensation at union wages and retirement on full pay. At the same time we should demand a programme of public works to guarantee jobs for all. To defeat the Industrial Relations Act and any attempts made by the ruling class to integrate the trade unions into the state apparatus, we should put forward demands like "Hands off the Trade Unions" and "Repeal the Industrial Relations Act."

In addition, we would raise inside the labour movement demands relating to students, apprentices and immigrant workers. These demands would relate to full economic equality, political rights and economic security. We would also raise and fight for specific demands relating to women such as equal job opportunity, equal pay for equal work, 24-hour a day nurseries, the right to abortion and paid maternity leave.

These are just a few examples of the kinds of demands that the more class-conscious workers in the factories will be attracted to, raise, and fight for. These demands indicate the content of the programme that we must put forward in order to build a class-struggle left wing inside the existing workers mass organisations. Struggles around such demands will enable the masses to take their struggle forward.

It will also be necessary to explain the need for the trade unions to give support to the progressive struggles that are part of the deepening radicalisation. We should include in our programme for the unions demands that the British troops be immediately withdrawn from Ireland, that the government cease its attacks on students, that the unions give full support to the women's and Black liberation movements, and that the unions join in actions against the British government's imperialist policy in Asia and Africa.

By promoting and leading such struggles inside the workers movement we can win the most politically advanced workers into the revolutionary party. To do this, however, we must break from the sectarianism and ultra-leftism of the past four years that flowed from the adaptation on the part of the majority leadership to the workerist moods in the "vanguard." We have to reorient our movement to the mass organisations of the class and fight within them for the class-struggle programme outlined above. A major part of this fight inside the unions will include a struggle around demands for workers' democracy. This is the way we will not only outflank but eventually destroy the hold of the bureaucracy.

Our policy for the trade unions must include a call for the re-election of a Labour government. We advocate this despite the bankrupt policy of the Labour Party leadership. To the programme of the Labour Party we counterpose our programme—the revolutionary programme of class struggle.

By fighting for the concepts and method outlined above we will start to sink roots inside the labour movement.

This will enable us to recruit and train more working-class militants as Trotskyist cadres.

TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMME AND PARTY BUILDING: the dividing line between the Tendency and all the other groups

One of the fundamental criticisms made by the minority at the 1969 world congress was that the strategy of rural guerrilla warfare projected for Latin America displaced the method and tasks outlined in the transitional programme. The real "turn" of the 1969 world congress was a turn away from the method of the transitional programme and the Leninist strategy of party building.

The fundamental concept of the transitional programme is that the starting point for the intervention of revolutionists is the objective needs of the working masses. The method of the transitional programme is to lead the masses in struggle around a programme of immediate, democratic and transitional demands so that through their own experiences they see the need for revolutionary actions leading to the conquest of power.

The majority resolution on Latin America substituted for this method its continental schema of rural guerrilla warfare for a prolonged period. This was a turn away from participation in the mass movement, toward small vanguard groups which by their exemplary actions would *show* the masses the revolutionary way forward.

This vanguardist approach was initiated and developed by the IMG majority leadership. The outright rejection by some members of the IMG of the method and tasks of the transitional programme, and the confusion on this question to be seen among others, is the *source* of the differentiation between the Tendency, which was formed in 1970, and all the other groups and currents that have developed within the IMG.

The Tendency was formed with the aim of trying to correct the mistakes which the majority leadership were making in turning away from our mass-action perspective and orientation in defence of the Vietnamese revolution, in revising the Leninist position on the Labour Party, and downplaying the youth radicalisation. The differences have widened over the past 3 to 4 years and now encompass almost every aspect of our work—on Ireland, women's liberation, work in the trade unions, defence work, and how to fight fascism. The root cause of these differences is one of method. Despite general agreement on the analysis of the broad class struggle, we cannot agree on what Trotskyists should be saying and doing today to fully and fruitfully exploit the favourable situation in Britain for us.

Central to these differences over *how* to build the revolutionary party is the role of the transitional programme—its method and the tasks it outlines. The fundamental premise of the transitional programme is for revolutionists to find openings in the class struggle which enable them to intervene in a manner which exposes the inadequacies and failings of capitalism and shows the necessity for workers' power and the superiority of socialism.

To do this we start with whatever is objectively in the interests of the broadest working masses and what must be done to advance the class struggle nationally and internationally. Our task is to mobilise and organise the

broadest forces we are capable of reaching and influencing, and lead them in struggle to win concrete demands that correspond both to their needs and prevailing level of consciousness. In this way we advance the struggle and heighten the consciousness of those forces involved.

For example, it is in the objective interests of the Irish and British masses to defeat British imperialism in Ireland. We should, therefore, aim to involve the greatest numbers possible in a struggle against the British government to force it to withdraw its occupation army. It is also in the objective interests of the working masses in Britain to mobilise maximum support to defend and extend their civil rights. We, therefore, aim to build broad defence campaigns to prevent the victimisation of working-class militants and others.

In this process Trotskyists put forward two kinds of fundamental demands—democratic and transitional in character. The Tendency, in its "Tasks and Perspectives Document of the IMG," which it submitted to the 1972 National Conference [reprinted in *SWP Internal Information Bulletin, No. 3 in 1972*], clearly outlines the role of these demands.

"Democratic demands are related to the political rights of the mass of the people. Historically, they were struggled for and partially won during the bourgeois revolution. These include such rights as the right to self-determination, the right to assemble, due process of law, the right to strike, and others.

"But today the bourgeoisie has not only ceased to fight for democratic rights (such as self-determination for Ireland) but more and more the rulers try and take them away. The Industrial Relations Act versus the right to strike, the AIL Trafalgar Square ban versus the right to assemble, [the ban on the Anti-Internment League using Trafalgar Square for demonstrations—AH] the early morning police raids versus the right to be free from arbitrary search and seizure.

"The struggle for democratic rights is a 'bourgeois' struggle only in an historic sense—it was the bourgeoisie that first raised and fought for them. Today it is only the working class and its Marxist vanguard who can be consistent defenders of and champions of all struggles for democratic rights. And it is only a workers state that can finish this historic task. Thus democratic tasks are *our* tasks. They must be fought for by proletarian class struggle methods and not by bourgeois reformist methods (by independent mass mobilisations rather than dependence on parliamentary reform and judicial decision).

"Transitional demands indicate the solution to the economic and social needs of the working class which capitalism cannot grant. They lead towards challenging capitalist property rights and the bourgeois state. Such demands include the right to a job, the right to decent pay, housing, social security, etc. Transitional demands, such as a sliding scale of hours and a sliding scale of wages, pertain to the socialist economy of the future and are only realisable under it.

"Democratic demands and transitional demands are related in two ways. The first is that capitalism has reached the point where it becomes more and more incompatible with any form of democracy. The defence and extension of democracy thus become proletarian tasks along with the advancement of transitional measures that go beyond

capitalism although stemming from its present point of development.

"The second and more important way in which democratic and transitional demands are related is in the method by which we defend and advance them. The method is the same in both instances—the proletarian method of mass struggle. The heart of this method is mobilisation of the masses assembled by capitalism as the human basis of its mode of production. The Transitional Programme deals with the problem of organising and developing this type of struggle and carrying it forward to its final conclusion in the victory of socialism." (p. 85-86)

Today when so many exploited and oppressed layers of society—workers, women, immigrants, blacks, youth—are seeking ways to defend and extend their democratic rights and to end their exploitation and oppression, revolutionists strive to be in the forefront of these struggles. Our aim is to give leadership to take these struggles forward in an anticapitalist direction. This is the way both to develop revolutionary consciousness and to recruit and train the cadres necessary for the mass revolutionary party. It is the *method* of the transitional programme.

The rejection of democratic demands

The IMG majority leadership explicitly reject this method. They reject organising around democratic demands, wrongly thinking them to be "liberal" and reformist. The 1971 national conference document of the majority, "No We Haven't All the Time in the World," shows the tremendous confusion of the majority leadership at that time:

"Revolutionaries are duty bound to support all the struggles of the masses—despite their limited nature and reformist or nationalist leaderships. We, therefore, support all democratic and reformist demands providing they have the function of stimulating mass struggle. We will always join such struggles ourselves.

"We, on the other hand, do not ourselves intervene by advancing a programme of democratic or reformist demands. In whatever field we are operating (as distinct from giving general support from the outside) we struggle for a transitional programme. In the course of doing this we will, naturally, say that we support or even adopt the democratic or reformist demands of others. But these latter demands will not be the kernel of our intervention. . .

"The essential difference between a democratic reformist demand and a transitional demand is that the former operates within the acceptance of the *status quo*, whilst the latter challenges the foundations of bourgeois power. A transitional slogan should also be distinguished from a full or revolutionary demand (the so-called full programme) in that it takes a particular problem facing the workers and instead of explaining that a social revolution is necessary to solve it makes a call for something which can seem 'reasonable' and 'fair' to the workers concerned. In other words a reformist or democratic demand is one which argues about the share of the cake under capitalism, a full demand says that the capitalist is not entitled to any cake at all and a transitional slogan insists that the sharing of the cake would be under

the control of the workers.

". . . we sometimes find that what appears to be an elementary slogan can become a transitional one in certain circumstances. For instance the slogan 'the Postworkers must win' had such a character during the postal strike, the key think being that it counterposed the power of the bourgeois state machine to workers power. . . .

"The transitional slogan is essentially directed at the advanced workers rather than the mass of the workers. We aim to win our influence indirectly through the medium of the advanced workers. Therefore our slogans are not determined by what the average worker will feel as feasible."

Out of all this confusion three main points come through:

1. Democratic demands are for reformists to champion.
2. Trotskyists fight only for transitional demands.
3. Transitional demands are directed towards the advanced workers. All three of these conclusions are dead wrong.

No wonder we cannot begin to build a mass solidarity campaign in defence of the Irish struggle for the *democratic* right of self-determination and reject the demand "Withdraw British Troops" as "liberal." Although if the reformists in the labour movement initiate a Troops Out Movement on Ireland, we will condescend to tailend it. No wonder we cannot do any effective defence work around the issue of political prisoners and other victims of the class struggle. No wonder we have failed to build a defence campaign around the banning of Ernest Mandel from Germany, Switzerland and France and left it to people outside the IMG to do what they could to protest the ban.

The IMG majority leadership reject the concept that the struggle for rights like the right to strike and the struggle for self-determination in Ireland, the right of women to control their bodies, can be the starting points for developing mass actions which can evolve and develop, posing new demands that help raise anticapitalist consciousness. The key is the mobilization of masses in struggle.

The concept put forward in the 1971 national conference document that transitional demands are essentially directed at the advanced workers rather than the mass of the workers is fundamentally in opposition to the position outlined by Trotsky in the transitional programme:

"It is necessary to help the masses in the process of the daily struggle to find the bridge between the present demands and the socialist program of the revolution. This bridge should include a system of transitional demands. . . ."

The tasks of the transitional programme (as Trotsky explains) lie in the "systematic mobilisation of the masses for proletarian revolution" (*Transitional Programme*). To consider that transitional demands are "essentially for the advanced workers" is an *elitist* concept in contradiction to the Marxist concept that it's the *masses* who must be prepared and ready to struggle for the socialist revolution. The revolutionary party can lead a socialist revolution but it cannot make one, neither can the "vanguard," nor can the advanced workers by themselves. We should never lose sight of the fact that if the masses don't make the socialist revolution, there won't be one—the socialist revolution will be made by the majority of the oppressed, not by a minority. The task of the vanguard party is to

lead the socialist revolution to victory, not try to substitute itself for the masses.

Transitional method under attack

Alan Jones, generally regarded as the most prominent theoretician of the IMG and currently its main leader, gave us his wrong-headed appreciation of transitional demands in his 1971 national conference document, "On the 'Theory' of Democratic and Transitional Demands and Other Stupidities":

"As we have noted, a transitional demand is one which poses the question of state power. But a mass movement of the working class on a demand which poses the question of state power is precisely a *revolutionary situation*. In other words a mass movement of the working class on a transitional slogan is not possible outside a revolutionary situation. . . .

"We have already noted that a mass mobilisation of the working class cannot occur on a transitional demand outside a revolutionary situation."

Comrade Jones elaborates his ideas further in the 1972 National Conference Perspectives Document, which he co-authored with Comrade Tariq Ali [reprinted in *SWP Internal Information Bulletin*, No. 3 in 1972]:

". . . a transitional programme by definition smashes the bourgeois state, i.e. the social relations of capitalist production of the state machine which defends them. There therefore exists no transitional programmes for 'sectors' e.g. women, blacks, students, etc. but only a transitional programme for the whole of society (within such a programme there are of course demands relating to the position of various social groups, but these are not demands 'for' sections of the population)."

Revolutionaries recognise that the aim of the revolutionary party must be to unite all the oppressed and exploited and their allies behind one programme—the programme for socialist revolution. At the same time it is essential to recognise that different layers of society have special interests—e.g., the West Indian workers in Britain who because they are Black are doubly exploited as workers and as Blacks. Therefore, it is necessary to formulate specific demands which take into account the special nature of their oppression. In other words, we see the transitional programme as the programme which unites all those forces that will struggle for socialism.

This method of combining the particular with the general and fundamental is totally rejected in the 1972 Perspectives Document. The authors of the Document consider that the Socialist Workers Party in the United States, because it has developed and enriched the transitional programme in relation to its work among Blacks, women and students, has developed a reformist orientation. In this Perspectives Document they write:

". . . In the case of the SWP this method is applied *logically* and leads to the approach of *mass* (i.e. mobilising function) *single-issue* (i.e. considered in isolation with confusion of where intervening and on what intervening economism) campaign on *democratic and transitional* (i.e. accepting capitalism/reformist) demands. In our case the influence of the Bensaid and Scalabrino methodology prevented us from going the whole hog, and instead we

finished up with the miserable eclectic hodge-podge whose results have already been described. What we have to do now is to break this empiricist methodology once and for all. This is what makes the theoretical points outlined at the beginning of this document of immediate *practical* importance and not a mere nit-picking. What in fact happens with the methodology of the SWP document, (a) Reformist programmes (b) talking to sectors only as the problem on sectors and in short a tendency to *adapt* to various petty-bourgeois movements."

It is precisely this rejection of the method of the transitional programme that has seriously damaged the ability of the IMG to take advantage of the new openings in the class struggle. In describing the transitional method, the IMG majority leadership have moved in a sectarian direction. In the *Transitional Program* Trotsky warns of these sectarian dangers:

"At their base lies a refusal to struggle for partial and democratic demands, i.e., for the elementary interests and needs of the working masses, as they are today. Preparing for the revolution means to the sectarians, convincing themselves of the superiority of socialism. . . .

"These sterile politicians generally have no need of a bridge in the form of transitional demands because they do not intend to cross over to the other shore. They simply dawdle in one place, satisfying themselves with a repetition of the self-same meagre abstractions."

Impeded by such a sectarian method, the IMG majority leadership have cut themselves off from the possibility of actively giving day-to-day leadership to the real struggles that break out. This default leaves the initiative with the Social Democrats and Stalinists who seek to derail these movements into the deadend of reformism. The result has been major missed opportunities for Trotskyism and party building in Britain.

Revising Lenin's concept of the combat party

If revolutionists cannot raise and fight for democratic demands, if the masses cannot be mobilised on a transitional demand outside of a revolutionary situation, what kind of demands do we put forward to "mobilise the masses" in our day-to-day work? Perhaps we should not be concerned with "mobilising the masses." Perhaps this is not the function of a revolutionary party outside of a revolutionary situation. Perhaps the party has another role. This is precisely the conclusion reached in the IMG majority 1972 Perspectives Document. For it, the primary task of the party is "to explain ideas" and not make "calls to action."

It claims that "Lenin specifically and at great length rejects the idea that it is the task of the party to call the masses to action. Lenin declares that he agrees completely with Plekhanov's formulation that the task of the party is to explain ideas to people. . . ." They continue:

"Once this point of Lenin's is understood, i.e. that the party does not 'call the masses to action' or 'mobilise' them then of course the problem we posed about the transitional programme disappears. It is perfectly possible to present a programme which destroys capitalism at any time, it is only if you conceive the party as calling the masses to action or the function of the party as mobilising the masses that you land yourself in either a bordigist

or Tendency position."

It is logical that, given the confusion of some comrades and the outright rejection by others of the transitional programme, that the next step would be to revise Leninism on the nature and tasks of the Bolshevik Party. Comrades Alan Jones and Tariq Ali reject the essential nature of the Leninist party as a *combat* party, with cadres deeply rooted in the class struggle who are able to give leadership to the masses and mobilise them in their day-by-day struggles against all forms of exploitation and oppression. They do not see that in this way the entire class struggle is turned into a school in which the masses gain in political understanding and in which the cadres of the mass revolutionary party are shaped and recruited. Instead they see the role of the party as solely a propagandist one, "explaining ideas." Presumably, on this prescription, when sufficient ideas have been "explained" and accepted by the masses, they will spontaneously make the socialist revolution.

This approach to party building has been tried and found wanting many times. The Socialist Party of Great Britain (SPGB), for example, has been doing this for the past fifty years or so. No one will disagree that today the SPGB has zero influence on the class struggle in Britain.

The approach of Jones and Ali is diametrically opposed to the method outlined by Trotsky in the transitional programme. In practice it means putting forward "maximalist" demands—relating to the consciousness of the most advanced layers, the "vanguard." This isolates the advanced layers from the masses and deprives them of revolutionary leadership.

This sectarian approach flows from the adaptations which the IMG majority leadership have made to pressures from the "vanguard" over the past 3 to 4 years. In adapting to the political weaknesses of sections of this "vanguard," we made our starting point the "concerns" of these "vanguard" layers instead of the needs and interests of the broad working masses. This wrong starting point has meant that the majority leadership have given up building united-front-type single issue coalitions on issues like Ireland and Vietnam. They wrongly thought that the "vanguard" has developed beyond such elementary anti-imperialist issues.

Adaptation to workerism also led the IMG majority leadership to develop a narrow, schematic view of the class struggle. They wrongly viewed the struggles of women, students, immigrants and Blacks as being "peripheral" to the authentic class struggle. The majority leadership, therefore, saw no purpose in raising and fighting for demands which related to the special interests of these sectors. This has resulted in the IMG's failure to provide any leadership for the women's liberation movement that started to develop in the late 1960's. We have remained on the periphery of this movement, which continues to open great possibilities for us. The majority leadership also failed to give leadership to the upsurge in student struggles and turned away from the youth radicalisation by giving up the independent Trotskyist youth organisation. By adapting to the changing moods and political weaknesses of the "vanguard" the majority leadership also revised the Leninist position on the Labour Party, the touchstone of class politics in Britain.

Correct the line—apply the method of the transitional programme

Through adapting to the "concerns" of this "vanguard," the majority leadership of the IMG have rejected the fundamental concepts of the transitional programme and have begun to revise the role of the revolutionary party. This has seriously disoriented and miseducated the membership of the British section and those we have been able to influence. We have missed out on many opportunities to advance the class struggle, gain new recruits and educate them in the Leninist concepts of party building. It is true that we have increased our size significantly since the last world congress. But all of our opponents on the left have also made considerable numerical gains. Some, like the International Socialists, have grown at a much faster rate and are around eight times as big. The test for our section in Britain is to be able to increase our size at the *expense* of the other left-wing groups. The only way we will change the relationship of forces is by correctly applying the method of the transitional programme to the concrete issues of the class struggle in Britain today.

In order to alter the balance of forces between ourselves and other left groups we must be ready to take the initiative in building united actions around clear class-struggle issues. It will be necessary to fight against organisational exclusion and to keep such struggles independent of the reformist bureaucracies. This is what was done initially with the VSC and what must be done to build a mass movement in solidarity with the Irish revolution. This is the general approach we will have to use to lay the basis for a class-struggle left wing in the unions, advance the struggle for women's liberation, and take the student struggles to a higher level.

We are unable to choose the field of battle at will. In the class struggle, battles break out as a consequence of forces over which we have no control at the present stage of our development. As a revolutionary socialist group we have no choice but to engage in these battles. But it is only by using the transitional method as our fundamental guide to our political activity today that we will win political hegemony within these movements and take the next steps toward the construction of the mass workers party capable of leading the successful struggle against capitalism.

The first prerequisite is that the guerrilla warfare line projected for Latin America at the last world congress must be reversed. The next necessary step is the rejection of "The Building of Revolutionary Parties in Capitalist Europe." There is no lack of evidence in the experience of the IMG in Britain to expose the errors of this document now up for consideration. Its general line with its "vanguardist" orientation has been carried out by the British section since the 1969 world congress with grievous results.

The opportunities for British Trotskyists have never been more favourable than they are today. To take full advantage of them it is necessary to draw all the lessons of the past period and correct the mistakes that have been made at their source.

September 28, 1973