

PARLIAMENTARISM

and Communist strategy

Proletarian Pamphlet No: 3



INGREDIENTS:

p. 1 :

COBI STATEMENT on Parliamentarism

p. 3 :

The CPGB, IS and IWC at the '74 General Elections

p. 18 :

The great debate on Parliamentarism at the Comintern 2nd Congress (1920) - Bordiga's v. adopted Theses - with Bordiga and Bukharin's Speeches

p. 30 :

William Morris and J. T. Murphy on the need for anti-Parliamentarism in Britain.

\$1.00



Being an illegal party meant being a disciplined, combative one, for very survival. A party thus steeled in a non-democratic environment could accordingly use such legal, democratic openings as existed, without falling prey to democratic prejudices inherent in the parliamentary form. The reverse of course holds in western Europe where 'civil society' has centuries of strength behind it, where state power in the hands of the ruling class does not stand naked, with some form of 'representative government' holding sway, requiring and inviting 'improvement'. Thus (Second International) social-democracy had become part of the very functioning of parliamentary representation; eg post-1912 the German party (SPD) was the largest in the Reichstag, but was still powerless owing to the Imperial Constitution - which they respected. When this model party of the 2nd International became the government in new republican Weimar society post-1918, the SPD's main task was the physical suppression of proletarian revolution, in league with the proto-fascist Freikorps.

Thus the seminal and continuing struggle for communists in bourgeois democracy is to make and consolidate a fundamental rupture with the bourgeois worldview predicated upon what is held to be 'right, proper and civilised', in a society where 'consent' for such is obtained through the central legitimating agency that is parliament. The rule for real communists must therefore be abstention from parliamentary activity in any form, while the very particularity of exceptions, (supra), merely confirms this rule.

We shall now look at the social-democratic practices of the CPGB, IS and IMG in concrete;

***** SECTION 1 *****

The Communist Party of Great Britain

The CPGB's 1974 election manifesto argued that 3 aims needed to be achieved: "A Tory defeat, the winning of a Labour Government, and the return of communist MP's." The way to do this they argued, was to vote for their policies which "would cope with today's problems and at the same time open the way to socialism which alone can provide a lasting solution to the crisis". In the event the CP achieved only those aims which it shared with the Labour Party; even the much-vaunted Jimmy Reid did disappointingly badly. (His repeated election frustrations underlie his resignation from the CP recently). In the general elections of the 1950's and 1960's, it could generally be said that if Labour did well, so did the CP. Why the difference now? The answer is to be found partly in the particular reformist parliamentary policies that the CP adopted in February '74. An examination of what the CP was offering the working class suggests it had totally failed to distinguish what it claimed were communist policies from those of the (explicitly social-democratic) Labour Party. It had also failed to take into account the leftward 'socialist' moves made by the LP during its period in opposition. The CP's 1974 policy is strikingly similar to what it offered in 1970 and thus, even in parliamentary terms, inappropriate.

Because the CP presents no effective communist strategy for moving forward, it presents the Tories as "wreckers, the enemies of democracy, parading their red bogey as a screen to hide their vicious attacks on democratic rights." By contrast, the CP can thus present itself (having distorted the Tory position) as the champions of standing still: "Communist MP's and a big communist vote are needed", we are told, to "extend and defend our democratic rights". This is a further deliberate confusion. The Industrial Relations Act and Phase 3 did not represent fundamental breaches of orthodox bourgeois policy, and hence creeping authoritarianism. The adoption of similar measures by the other bourgeois democratic party in 1964-70 shows this - (a party which the CP was now asking the workers to support). These measures represent tactics used in the struggle between wages and profits, rather than a fundamental shift in the form of bourgeois class rule. And because they represent this, the trade union ideology of the majority of the working class has shown itself to be quite capable of defending itself against the IR Act and previously 'In Place of Strife.' The LP recognised in the 1970-74 period that such industrial legislation is counterproductive, since it antagonises the very supporters on whom a successful prices and incomes policy depends. So instead, it has gone for (a highly successful) Social Contract with the unions.

A communist analysis would have spelt all this out, and more, at the time of the election. But the CP was more interested in fighting previous battles (and tilting at windmills), battles which the industrial strength of the dockers and miners and other trade unionists had shown could be won without any help from Communist or left-Labour MP's.

The CP's attitude to the Tories' anti-communist propaganda during the election campaign amounts to more deliberate confusion. For the CP the red scare was not something to respond aggressively to -- instead the accusation "reds" is something they deny; and they then try to turn the tables on the Tories, by saying that it is the Tories who are making attacks on democracy. They would of course involve very real restrictions of the rights of the bourgeoisie. But the CP tries to evade this nasty issue, since it does not fit in very nicely with their peaceful road to socialism. They avoid the issue in two ways.

Firstly, they construct, just as the Tory and Labour parties do, a "national interest". Then like the Labour Party they define this as the vast majority of the nation. This for the CP conveniently avoids the necessity for spelling out the essential conflict of long term interests between the working class and the bourgeoisie. (The Tories' use of the term National Interest is in fact much more accurate. All the while that you have a system of national capitalism, there is a genuine national interest in the short run, which binds both workers and capitalists in ensuring that the system is as productive and united as possible. Class conflict is permitted at the economic level, so long as it does not threaten the system politically. The way to undermine the ideology of the national interest is, of course, to attack it politically, but this the CP refuses to do, preferring to redefine terms in a schoolboys' game.)

Secondly, it prevents any understanding of the "national interest", by identifying the wreckers of the national interest with the Tories and "the profits and power of the big businessmen, bankers and property speculators they represent." They thus extract the economic class which has an interest in keeping the capitalist system going, and substitute for it a small group of politically motivated men. And on the other side, representing apparently the real "national interest", are arranged (following the indiscriminate class alliance spelt out in *The British Road To Socialism*) "workers, pensioners, students, professional people, small shopkeepers, farmers and manufacturers; all are victims of the Tories' disastrous policies" (emphasis added!) But this economic class (whatever the current differences between Lord Stokes and the property speculators) is a bourgeoisie with common interests, which in general have been furthered by successive governments, both Labour and Tory. So the CP gets itself into the position of pretending that the Tories represent only big business and not the maintenance of the capitalist system itself. Today the Tories are merely mainly the representatives of big business; they are also representatives of other categories and strata of the capitalist class; strata which the CP would pretend are somehow anti-capitalist.

Because the CP likes to "explain" things by constructing the Tories as the devil outside the system, rather than the espousers of the system itself, they are led to misrepresent entirely the fundamental facts of the current system.

The most significant of these misrepresentations is the lie about profits -- the motive force of capitalism. On the one hand we are told that the Tories are making "bigger and bigger profits"; on the other, that the Tories have made a bad situation worse by stopping investment and modernisation in British industry. The latter is true, the former false, mere propaganda to get you onto the populist anti-Tory bandwagon. The missing link is the fact that investment has been poor because the rate of profit has been unacceptably low of late. The CP's solution to this is really remarkable, and once again reveals the ideology of national interest and national capitalism with which it is infected.

The answer is: 1) that bigger wage claims must be made and a Labour government elected to "operate policies that will begin to bite into the profits of big business"; and 2) that "private investment overseas which is today running at over £1200m a year should be halted." So on the one hand the CP is actively, through its trade union wage struggle, advocating policies which will bite into profits, whilst on the other hand advocating measures to stabilise profits through a retrenched national capitalism. But the bourgeoisie and the social-democrats simply do not need such contradictory advice from the CP. The TUC has in fact had for years a policy which far more realistically takes account

of the realities of international capitalism and the EEC in particular, advocating temporary restraint and less counterproductive measures to reduce capital outflow, greater control of investment in return for certain restrictions of wage demands; the whole being conditional on various political concessions on the part of the government. Once again the CP ignores the fact that the Labour Party have a viable short term policy for capitalism. So when the CP advocates its extreme version of the Labour policy it merely appears (1) contradictory; (2) deceitful in dressing up its wages policy which is designed to cause economic collapse, as a policy to help investment; and (3) merely to have an irrational feeling of envy about profits. (An openly Luddite policy, while no more successful, would at least be more honest.) These economic policies, far from "opening the way to socialism", would simply throw a spanner in the working of capitalism (were they ever acted upon), without enabling a proletarian machine to be built. Such dishonesty will never work and never has in the past.

The CP's abysmal failure to explain how capitalism works -- let alone how to get rid of it -- is emphasised again here: "The economic crisis, the attack on wages, the three-day week, poverty, bad housing, and all the other problems of our society are caused by capitalism. So long as 5% of the population own most of the nation's wealth and use it to become richer still at the expense of the majority these problems will get worse." This condemns capitalism not for the Marxist reason that production is for profit not use value, and that because it is a commodity producing society, the distribution of resources depends upon the anarchy of the market rather than being consciously planned in the interests of the working class, but simply for its unequal distribution of wealth. It is in fact quite possible for modern capitalism to use fiscal measures to produce greater equality, yet still remain a commodity producing society with all its inevitable problems. The Labour Party have at least latched onto this, even if the CP has not. Similarly with its attitude to nationalisation the CP makes in the main the same demands as the Labour Party and yet falsely concludes that production for use will somehow inevitably develop. Quite contrary, however, are its claims that the miners' "claim should be met in full", because the commodity they produce happens to be in demand, which is an argument rooted in the premises of the market system. (The miners should of course have been supported but not on these grounds). Nor does the CP envisage there would be any breaking point with regard to nationalisation, preferring to suggest that profitable industry could be taken away from the private owners without resistance. The CP's device is to take over the Labour Party's "shopping list" and then to add a few items onto the end: "Other industries where a monopoly situation prevails should be early candidates for public ownership. Motors, key sectors of engineering, including electrical engineering, chemicals, food, and detergents are obvious examples." Their case for nationalisation is not based on the Marxist case of production for use throughout an economy controlled by and for the working class. It is a mish-mash of complaints against "monopolies" which are not, and against "industries in receipt of large sums of public money" (which is a moral not a Marxist point). Nowhere is a distinction made between those industries which the bourgeoisie would be prepared to see subsidised or taken off its hands altogether, and those which really are crucial to continued bourgeois power and which history shows they will struggle to keep. Once again the Labour Party shows itself to be more in touch with reality in identifying the current nationalisation measures necessary for the economic reorganisation and rationalisation of British capitalism. Neither has the Labour Party avoided the question, as the CP has, of how it is going to effect the transition -- through Parliament, the NEB and the vacillating desires of the floating voter. The CP has characteristically avoided the thorny problem of the political means of putting through a thoroughgoing programme for an economy based upon the socially planned production of use values. They do not see the mass of the working class as being involved, since they confine its role to the maintenance of free collective bargaining in the wages struggle. And if they propose no means of effecting their programme, the CP can hardly be surprised when the workers vote for the more realistic programme of the Labour Party, and the reliance upon MPs to do the job. For workers have been asked by the CP to

"make your vote tell", not to "make your organised power tell".

After giving the political job to the MPs, left Labour and communist, the CP gives the working class the task of maintaining collective bargaining. Thus they say: "there should be no incomes policy voluntary or otherwise. Experience shows that under capitalism incomes policy means cuts in real wages and increased profits." This last assertion is false for two reasons. First, it assumes that if the mass of profits is to be increased, then the capitalist class must necessarily force down the level of real wages. In fact, as Marx showed in part IV of the first volume of Capital, the development of the forces of production enables the capitalist class to increase the proportion of national income that goes as profits, without real wages falling, or even while real wages are rising. Second, it suggests that without making a fetish of free collective bargaining the working class is unable to defend its living standards. But recent history shows that the working class has the power to resist the erosion of living standards by exercising its might in the economic struggle, whether or not the government imposes an incomes policy. For this, the trade union response has always proved adequate. The greater danger to workers' living standards comes from the Labour Party, whom the CP told us to vote for, and their 'social contract'. It is the political arguments, put forward by the CP and others, for supporting Labour that have given a boost to the chances of the 'social contract' working. In return for phoney concessions on property speculators, taxing the rich, and repeal of the IRAct, (concessions which in no way defend or improve working class living or cultural standards or the possibilities of raising political consciousness) workers are now being asked to restrain their wage demands. The concessions are now being asked for by that very sort of Labour Government, the "new sort of Labour Government" full of Benns and Foots, which the CP was calling for at the last election.

The CP's disagreements with the Labour Party stem partly from tradition, and partly from its industrial basis. But it will not be able to undermine "social contracts" and social democracy if it has no positive political perspective, in which working class economic power can be used. The demand for independent trades unions cannot be compromised upon from a communist point of view, but this is by no means the same as confining the economic struggle to free collective bargaining, as the CP does. (And not the least damaging is the CP's refusal to come clean on what has been happening to profits in the UK economy).

More important is the light which this sheds on the CP's perspective for socialism. It offers nothing but "free collective bargaining", an extension of public ownership and a parliament of Left-Labour and communist MPs. Strikingly absent is the Marxist perspective of organised workers' strength in industry and society for proletarian political objectives, against both social democratic state capitalism and laissez faire.

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS

In view of the fact that in the pages of the Socialist Worker the Tories had long ago replaced capitalism itself as the number one enemy of the workers, the response of IS to the election was predictable well in advance. After having set up the Tories as the principal villain, their election reflex could only be to cry out for their ejection. The IS were caught on the horns of a dilemma: on the one hand their theory tells them that the Labourites are just as much agents of capitalism as are the Tories; the IS, to be fair, know that both will follow anti-working class policies. On the other hand, anti-Toryism remains the spontaneous form of political consciousness of much of the British working class; so, good tailists that they are, the IS are not willing to go against any spontaneous response, even though this 'spontaneous response' is no more than an expression of the spontaneous domination of the working class by capitalist (populist) ideology. IN ANY CLASS SOCIETY THE DOMINANT IDEOLOGY IS THE IDEOLOGY OF THE RULING CLASS. The political consciousness of the oppressed class always spontaneously expresses itself in a form that is limited by this ideology of

the ruling class. This ideology can only be expelled from its dominant position by class struggle, in particular ideological struggle. Until this occurs, there is a genuine contradiction between the political interests of the working class and its political consciousness. The contradiction will only be resolved when the working class ceases to support the Labour Party. The IS, however, in an opportunist manner typical of them, tried to have it both ways. They called for a Labour vote: so taking advantage of the anti-Tory bandwagon. At the same time they recognised that "A Labour government elected in 2 weeks time would be forced to act in very much the same way as the Tories" (SW Feb 16), and so were able to salve their theoretical consciences. The opposition between the theory and the practical prescription was apparently quite acceptable.

Their position was explained in more detail in the Feb 23 issue of Socialist Worker:

"A Labour victory does not mean socialism or even social reform, it does mean a government which in the short run at least, will find it harder to impose Tory policies and it means testing in practice yet again the claims of the Labour Party leaders. There is no other real choice. Vote Labour in spite of Wilson! Vote Labour in spite of its policies! Kick out the Tories carry on the fight!"

We will leave aside the suggestion that the Labourites will find it "harder to impose Tory policies". They do not intend to impose Tory policies, but they will impose ruling class policies; and because ruling class policies imposed by the "workers' own party" are less obvious than ruling class policies imposed by the Tories, they may even have slightly more chance of succeeding. Here, not for the first time in their history, the IS confuse a political party with an economic class, in this case the Tory party is substituted for the capitalist class.

Of more significance than this is what they have to say about testing in practice the claims of the Labour leaders. This is the traditional Trotskyist justification for voting labour: voting Labour to expose Labour, voting Labour to expose Labour leaders. This of course is a parody of the position Lenin put forward in 1920. It ignores the fact that the most politically conscious workers have now been taught by successive Labour governments to put little faith in such governments as the defenders of the workers' interest. Post-war experience suggests to many workers that, judged by economic criteria alone, Tory governments have been able to deliver higher living standards to sections of the working class than have Labour. The justification for voting Labour has disappeared among these workers, especially after Barbara Castle's 'In Place Of Strife' of 1969, and the fall in living standards in the 1966-70 period. The memories of these workers is not that short.

The lesson to be drawn from the period is exactly the opposite to the one that IS draws. The lesson is: that a Labour government, because it is supposed to be the government of the workers' own party, has a much better chance than have the Tories of getting away with anti-working class measures. In 1970 the healthy anti-Labour sentiments of the trades unionists who had resisted 'In Place Of Strife' led to the return of the Tories. Labour, coming into power after a period of Tory confrontation with the unions, may find it that much easier, not harder, to impose policies in the interests of the ruling class, given the level of consciousness of the majority of the working class. BUT IT IS THE MILITANT MINORITY OF THE WORKING CLASS WHOSE CONSCIOUSNESS IS IMPORTANT AND TO WHICH IS AND THE REST OF THE LEFT SHOULD BE ADDRESSING THEMSELVES. Unless this minority is first brought to adopt a communist consciousness, there is no prospect of it spreading to wider sections. IS mistakes, however, the consciousness of the average worker, who will vote Labour anyway (the workers IS does not influence in any case), for the consciousness of the leading sections of the working class. It is this leading section, whose lost faith in Labour IS are now trying in effect to restore. The slogan that the IS addresses to these left wing trades unionists is therefore contemptuous of their current

political consciousness and antagonistic to its further development. These workers, who are led by their trade union activities into struggle and away from social democracy, are being directed right back towards it by the IS. On the other hand, the less politically aware majority of workers will vote Labour in any case, but not for the tactical reason that IS advocates. This majority will vote Labour because of simplistic anti-Toryism, and the belief that Labour could not do worse in the present situation than the Tories have done over the last 4 years.

A thorough examination of the Labour Party economic programme would suggest in any case that the instinct of these voters (the relatively backward sections of workers) is correct in voting for Labour's short term economic progress. Labour can, with the help of the TUC leaders run the country without the Tories' confrontation, disruption, and lost production. The return of Labour does bring with it the possibility of a voluntary incomes policy, action against property speculators, increasing nationalisation, taxing the rich. This is exactly the mood that Wilson managed to capture for the last election, the mood of the average Labour voter. Labour has learned enough from the 1964-70 experience and the 1970 defeat to do exactly this. So, even by the targets it sets itself, the IS advocacy of a Labour vote is incorrect. For an organisation such as IS in its present position, its theoretical shortcomings and lack of trenchant political analysis is epitomised by its simple economist slogan "carry on the fight".

These were not the only contradictions into which the IS got themselves through their "vote Labour" line. After pointing out that "Labour is as much committed to keeping capitalism intact as the Tories. It will be forced to take the same sort of measures to deal with capitalism's crisis." They then follow this up by saying "But one thing will hinder the Labour politicians in their efforts to copy Tory methods -- a massive Labour vote. For such a vote would mean a rejection of the argument that workers are to blame for the crisis. It will make much more difficult any attempts by a Labour government to shift the blame onto workers' organisations." This argument is so patently ridiculous, such an affront to any standard of reason or logic, that one would think that even members of a notoriously philistine organisation such as IS would begin to doubt the mental competence of their leaders. A massive Labour vote is the absolute precondition for the Labour Party to be able to imitate the Tories. Without a big Labour vote, Labour would not get a majority of MPs, without which they cannot form a stable government. Unless they are the government they cannot begin to copy Tory methods. If Labour is to get a chance of copying the Tories, a big Labour vote is just what they need. A big Labour vote would, moreover, be taken by Wilson and Company as a mandate, as a proof that they had the "confidence of the Nation" behind them. With this Clear Mandate, they would feel justified in taking any measures that they saw to be in the 'National Interest'. And from their past record it does not take much effort to imagine what they would think was in the National Interest: attacks on the working class. To say that one thing will hinder the Labour Party in its attempt to imitate the Tories, and then say the one thing is a vote for the Labour Party is the epitome of misleadership. What will in fact hinder the Labourites in their attempts to attack the working class is the same thing that hindered the Tories in their attempts to impose the Industrial Relations Act; and that is class struggle.

Not content to call on their supporters to vote Labour, IS gave Wilson a few tips on how to win the election. He should, they said, take up the Tory challenge and fight the election on clear class lines. Apparently since 70% of the population are, according to IS, working class, this would ensure a Labour victory. This assertion is nothing but pure voluntarism. IS do not specify just what 70% of the population being working class means. But however they arrived at this particular statistical artifact, it is of no use for predicting election results. At the most it means that 70% of the population belong to certain occupational categories; but since when has this been an adequate indicator of voting behaviour?

Even if 70% of the population belong to families of wage earners, it by no means follows that they are all economically proletarians, (for some are unproductive wage labourers, e.g. workers in commerce or banking), still less does it follow that they think of themselves, or act politically, as members of the working class. In a capitalist society, unlike feudal or slave society, individuals are not 'officially' assigned membership of any particular class. Slaves were recognised as slaves by the laws of slave society; their legal status was quite different from that of their masters. They were things not men in the eyes of the law. Similarly, feudal law and custom bound the serf to the land and to his lord. His class position was clearly demarcated. But capitalist law treats the wage slave as the equal of his master. The employee is subordinated to the capitalist not by the laws of the state, but by the laws of economics. He is a wage labourer because all that he has to sell is his labour power. In capitalist economics, workers do not appear as members of a subject class, but just as the sellers of a particular commodity -- labour. As the seller of a commodity he is the equal of any other commodity seller.

Capitalist political and legal ideology reflect commodity production in that they treat people as formally equals. They give rise to notions of people as free individuals, citizens equal before the law, electors, each of whose votes carry the same weight. This ideology is not only promoted by the mass media, but like any ideology has some basis in social practice which tends to lend it credence. Heath too has only one vote; Poulson when discovered must suffer the full severity of the 'Law', and, of course, his fate is well publicised. This equality before the law has its consequences. As a result, in a bourgeois society people are individualised, atomised and separated from one another. Society appears as a mass of conflicting private interests. Opposed to this, only the state and the rule of law appear to stand independent, above private contestation, acting as neutral referee between interest groups. The bourgeois democratic state, which is in fact a form of capitalist dictatorship, can in this way be made to appear as the representative of the General Will of the people, in opposition to selfish private interests. Its status as the representative of the public interest is periodically confirmed by elections in which the various political parties, as the representatives of the various sectors of the 'public opinion', compete. The winning party becomes the government, guardian of the general interest and of national unity: the bourgeois dictatorship has been legitimised by its "democratic" process.

Capitalist political and legal ideology arose on the social basis of commodity production, on the basis of contracts between private producers. With the dominance of commodity production over the whole of society, a state structure arises which is supported by, and in its turn supports, that ideology, the result of which is to generalise the outlook of the commodity producer. Capitalist law and representative democracy tends to give everybody the outlook of bourgeois individualism.

It only tends to do this, it does not always succeed. The formalities of capitalist law are confronted by the realities of the class struggle. In their struggles the working class develop values of mutuality, solidarity and collectivism in opposition to the individualism and egoism of the bourgeoisie. But the capitalist class still has great advantages: it has on its side all the dead weight of historical inertia -- the dead weight of customary beliefs and acts going back into feudalism (e.g. respect for "rank"); especially pronounced in Britain where the bourgeois revolution was fought out in the superstructure in metaphysical (religious) and not explicitly political terms; where it was not fought out to the logical conclusion of the bourgeois republic, but where traditional and new ruling class saw that, in fact, each was better off with, rather than without, the other, and so fused into a united class, which could be both dynamic and stable.

Not only the laws and official state institutions, but also capitalist forms of personal existence such as the institutions of the family, and private life in general, generate their own brand of individualism: consumerism. The

consumer of commodities, like their producer, is always an individualist. The proletarian values of collectivism and solidarity, on the other hand, need to be nourished in the class struggle, without which they wither. But at most times and for the majority of workers struggle is intermittent and occasional. In addition, most women do not participate actively in the class struggle: individuated as housewives and consumers they are easy prey to capitalist ideology.

As a result of the ideological, legal and constitutional structure of capitalist society, any electoral party which presents itself as a class party will do badly in the elections. The ideological system which presents the state as the representative of society as a whole, serving the interest of the nation as opposed to private individuals, results in any party which claims to represent a class, rather than the whole nation, appearing to the general public as the representative of narrow, sectional, private interests and not the proper guardians of a "public interest" supposed to embrace commonly an amorphous citizenry.

So long as political activity is constrained within the framework of parliamentary democracy, this framework exerts an immense pressure on electors, even those who are economically workers, to vote against any party which puts 'narrow, sectional interests above those of the nation as a whole'. To be able to resist this pressure electors must repudiate their loyalty to the nation in favour of loyalty to their class. But, if this degree of class consciousness existed, we would be in an immediately pre-revolutionary situation and this certainly was not the case during the last election.

For IS to tell Wilson how to win elections is like the Pope telling the Devil how to sin. A born opportunist like Wilson would have few qualms about fighting elections on class lines, if he saw some personal advantage in it. Wilson, however, has a much clearer understanding of the workings of the electoral system than the IS appear to have, so he realises that to fight on class terms would be political suicide. If he had gone along with the IS advice the swing to the Liberals would have been a landslide.

This voluntarist attitude to elections is only one aspect of the personalisation of politics that is endemic to the IS. Lacking a consistent dialectical materialist standpoint, the IS repeatedly fall back into attributing political developments to the personal characteristics of individuals. They explain the conduct of the Labour election campaign in terms of the treachery of the Labour leaders, rather than as the result of the bourgeois electoral system, which makes such conduct inevitable. This personalisation is exemplified by a series of 8 articles appearing in their paper on Feb 23rd. The cover of the issue bore the heading: "Ugly Face Of Toryism", "Eight pages inside on the Heath record", set next to a picture of Heath with his nose held up in the air. With this combination, IS managed to depoliticise Heath's own phrase: "the unpleasant and unacceptable face of capitalism". For the IS it would appear that the face is just ugly not unacceptable -- and if we are to take their symbolism at face value, what they object to is Ted Heath's face, not the capitalist system. In their propaganda, the IS have a tendency to reduce capitalism to Toryism and that party to its most visible leading members. The politics that flow from this are inevitably moralist, not Marxist. It neither helps workers understand capitalism, nor does it present workers with any course of political action other than voting Labour, and most workers would do this anyway.

Far from going all out to smash any constitutional illusions that their followers might have, IS actually support constitutional notions and secret hopes in the Labour Party. Quite independent of the IS and their ilk, the masses have become increasingly cynical of the fraudulent charade that passes for politics in this society. Politicians with their protestations, posturings and cheap false promises are coming to be regarded with contempt. Participation in voting has been declining -- in 1970, 11½ million did not even bother to vote. Insofar as the poll rose in 1974, it was only after an election called

in what the press did their best to portray as an atmosphere of high crisis, and after an unprecedented barrage of propaganda over the TV night after night for weeks. In the face of this general decay of electoral politics, what did the IS do?

Did they attempt to guide this impotent, half-formed rejection of bourgeois democracy towards the positive alternative of proletarian dictatorship?

OF COURSE NOT! Terrified by the decline in support for the Labour Party, they pulled out all the stops in a desperate effort to corral workers back into the party fold. Their national committee statement on the election is almost entirely devoted to urging support for Labour. Only in its last two paragraphs does it offer any alternative.

"But while the system is left intact, the symptoms of the crisis will recur and the pressure for workers to bear the burden will grow, prices will continue to shoot upwards and governments will keep trying to hold back wages. No amount of tampering with the system can change this. Only a complete revolutionary transformation of society can do so, with the taking of economic power away from the ruling class and organising production for need not for profit.

"But such a transformation demands more than voting Labour or militant strike action -- it demands above all the building of a mass revolutionary movement. That movement does not yet exist, but we have to build towards it. So while fighting for a Labour victory we have to build up our efforts to build a real alternative, a revolutionary workers' party, by arguing the full blooded socialist case."

The first 3 sentences of this are correct in sentiment, if imprecise, (for instance inflation is just one possible expression of capitalist contradictions). It is also true that capitalist crisis can only be solved by the revolutionary transformation of society with production for need not for profit. When the IS reduce this revolutionary transformation of society to the taking of economic power away from the ruling class, they are, however, committing a serious political error. The revolutionary transformation of society, i.e. the smashing of capitalist social relations and the building of socialist relations, requires three types of revolution: economic, political, and cultural revolutions. Of these the IS mentions only the economic -- the taking of economic power away from the ruling class. But the economic revolution cannot be the first of the three revolutions. This first revolution must be the political revolution, which involves the smashing of the capitalist state, and the establishment of a workers' dictatorship. Unless the political power of the capitalists has been smashed, the working class will be unable to take over capital's economic power. The destruction of capitalist political power requires the violent overthrow of the existing state. At no point in the IS national committee's statement is the need for revolutionary violence, and a workers' dictatorship, made clear. Instead all that they say is required is the building of a mass revolutionary movement, which they later equate with the building of a revolutionary workers' party (presumably IS). If the actions of the IS are anything to go by, this revolutionary party would have as its main activities: organising militant strike action, and persuading people to vote Labour -- apart that is, from recruiting more members. This is certainly not what the revolutionary transformation of society "demands above all". A revolutionary party is of course required, but it is not an end in itself. It is no use unless it educates the working class as to the need for the proletarian dictatorship, and organisationally prepares the working class for the seizure of state power, by formulating strategy from its theoretical work. As Lenin once said:

"To confine Marxism to the doctrine of class struggle means curtailing Marxism, distorting it, reducing it to something which is acceptable to the bourgeoisie. Only he is a Marxist who extends the recognition of the class struggle to the recognition of the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is what constitutes the most profound difference between the Marxist and the ordinary petty (as well

as big) bourgeois. This is the touchstone on which real understanding of and recognition of Marxism is to be tested..." (State and Revolution).

But to confine Marxism to the doctrine of class struggle is just what the IS national committee statement does. In substance all that they propose is the militant prosecution of existing forms of struggle, and those take place without the existence of IS anyway. So no simple change of line or tactics can liberate IS from Economism and hopeless tailism; for these derive from the (eclectic) bases upon which IS is constituted. Thus IS cannot, and will not, be able to offer the proletariat meaningful class leadership. The IS are bound to remain cheerleaders and populist moralists, as long as they remain the IS.

The IS proclaim themselves to be followers of Trotsky; whether or not this claim is justified we are not interested in disputing. However, they also claim to be Leninists. But their line on the election, which totally failed to emphasise what for Leninism is the crucial strategic question that must be presented at elections -- the dictatorship of the proletariat -- indicates that they have abandoned Leninist strategy, even if they had ever adhered to it in the past (which is doubtful). The way that they play down the strategic aim of proletarian dictatorship in favour of the more forceful prosecution of existing, spontaneous working class practice, shows that they have adopted the standpoint of the notorious revisionist Bernstein whereby; the movement is everything and the aim is nothing (c.f. his "Evolutionary Socialism", 1898).

By urging support for the Labour Party during the elections, they show that they have also abandoned the cardinal principle of Leninist strategy:

"What is the fundamental strategic rule of Leninism?

It is the recognition of the following:

- 1) the compromising parties are the most dangerous social support of the enemies of the revolution in the period of approaching revolutionary outbreak;
- 2) it is impossible to overthrow the enemy unless these parties are isolated;
- 3) the main weapons in the period of preparation for the revolution must therefore be directed at isolating these parties, towards winning the broad masses of the people away from them.

"In the period of the struggle against tsarism, in the period of preparation for the bourgeois democratic revolution (1905-6), the most dangerous social support of tsarism was the liberal monarchist party, the Cadet Party. Why? Because it was the compromising party, the party of compromise between tsarism and the majority of the people, i.e., the peasantry as a whole. Naturally, the Party at that time directed its main blows against the Cadets, for unless the Cadets could be isolated there was no hope of a rupture between the peasantry and tsarism, and unless this rupture was ensured there could be no hope of the victory of the revolution. Many people at that time did not understand this specific feature of Bolshevik strategy and accused the Bolsheviks of "Cadetophobia"; they asserted that with the Bolsheviks the struggle against the Cadets "overshadowed" the struggle against the principle enemy -- tsarism. But these accusations, for which there was no justification, revealed an utter failure to understand the Bolshevik strategy, which called for the isolation of the compromising party in order to facilitate, to hasten the victory over the principal enemy.

"It scarcely needs proof that without this struggle the hegemony of the proletariat in the bourgeois democratic revolution would have been impossible.

"In the period of preparation for October the centre of gravity of the conflicting forces shifted to another plane. The tsar was gone. The Cadet Party had been transformed from a compromising force into a governing force, into the ruling force of imperialism. Now the fight was no longer between tsarism and the people, but between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. In this period the petty bourgeois democratic parties, the parties of the

Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, were the most dangerous social support of imperialism. Why? Because these parties were then the compromising parties, the parties of compromise between imperialism and the labouring masses. Naturally the Bolsheviks at that time directed their main blows at these parties, for unless these parties were isolated there was no hope of a rupture between the labouring masses and imperialism, and unless this rupture was ensured there could be no hope of victory in the soviet revolution. Many people at that time did not understand this specific feature of Bolshevik tactics and accused the Bolsheviks of "excessive hatred" towards the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, and of "forgetting" the principal goal. But the entire period of preparation for October eloquently testifies to the fact that only by pursuing these tactics could the Bolsheviks ensure the victory of the October Revolution." (October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists, Stalin).

At the present moment and at the time of the General Election, which party was the party of compromise between the working class and the bourgeoisie? The Conservative Party or the Labour Party? Clearly it was and is the Labour Party. It was thus against the Labour Party, not the Tories, that Leninists should have directed their main blows. The failure of IS to do this emphasises the gulf which separates their politics from revolutionary Marxism-Leninism, from scientific socialism.

THE INTERNATIONAL MARXIST GROUP

The IMG line, like that of the IS, was to call on workers to vote Labour (except where Trotskyist candidates were standing).

They are in the same dilemma as the IS; for months they, along with the IS and the CP have been trying to pass off anti-Toryism as socialism. They had called for a general strike to eject the Tories, so that when the Tories resigned without such a strike, the IMG had no option but to call for a Labour vote. But at the same time, the IMG show some awareness of the difficulty of conducting a proletarian politics within the frame of capitalist constitutionalism.

They say that in the event of an election:- "workers will return to the normal routine of home and job, and the Tory lie machines of press and television will get to work on them individually. Workers in this position are far more vulnerable to all the rubbish about the 'rule of law', the 'national interest' and the 'sovereignty of parliament' -- ideas which are supported by the Labour Party leaders and union bureaucrats as well as the Tories -- than are workers united in struggle against all these institutions of capitalist class rule." In order to avoid all of the above occurring the IMG advised that: "Instead of playing into the hands of the Tories and responding to the general election call by halting the struggle, all the struggles should be stepped up. The miners must proceed with their strike. ASLEF should step up their industrial action." Then they advocate a national engineering strike, and round it off with: "Other groups in struggle with the Tory government -- such as students -- should take up the opportunity of the election to step up their struggles."

Clearly the IMG are right to call for such struggles to be maintained or developed. If workers had begun such struggles before the election, the election was no reason to give up, or to cancel any new struggles. But the reason that the IMG gave for continuing the struggles was wrong. The main reason for continuing the struggles should have been the defence of workers' living standards, and more importantly, the development of working class initiative and solidarity. Instead of this, the IMG see the main justification for the continuation of the struggles as being the role that these could play in ensuring the Tories' defeat in the general election. There are two things wrong with this. First, a Tory defeat meant a Labour victory, and as we have argued above, this is not a role for communists. Second, if the reason for continuing the struggles was to defeat the Tories at the election, then if it could be shown that continuing the struggles would not help defeat the Tories

at the election, then it follows the struggles should not be stepped up, but abandoned. Thus on the basis of what they said, we would be justified in thinking that the IMG would only want struggles stepped up if that would have weakened the Tories' chances, whilst strengthening those of Labour. If, on the other hand, the escalation of the mass action would have spoilt Labour's chances and helped the Tories, then the logic of the IMG position should have led them to call for these actions to be curbed.

Were the IMG correct in thinking that mass actions help the Labour Party during elections?

We don't think so, and neither does the Labour Party nor academic political scientists at large. Extending the struggle was certainly correct from the viewpoint of the development of class unity amongst those workers who were engaged in struggles already; but its effects on the election would have been favourable to the Tories. Those actually engaged in struggle, i.e. miners and railway workers, would be very unlikely to go out and vote for the Tories even if they did return to work. Miners are hardly renowned as floating voters. On the other hand, when it came to the mass of the electorate, who were not on strike, nor likely to be, then the continuation of the strikes was one of the things that the Tories were counting on to win them the election. Strikes hurt the Labour Party's chances at elections. You can't have it both ways -- you can't use the same tactics to win elections and to develop mass struggles among the working class. Capitalist elections are based on the suppression of class struggle and, in order to develop, the class struggle must step clearly outside the limits imposed by elections and capitalist law and order. If you want to do well in elections it helps if you can suppress the class struggle and avoid public discomfiture, as the Labour Party is only too well aware. So it goes to great lengths in the run up to elections to ensure industrial peace.

In their election manifesto, "Capitalist Crisis and the Struggle for Workers' Power", section 3, the IMG quite clearly point out the impossibility of reaching socialism by using the capitalist state.

"The working class can never advance towards socialism through parliament or the law. Every great working class revolution has always booted parliament aside and moved to replace this capitalist side show with institutions of real working class democracy. The material out of which such institutions can be built already exists. In every big struggle the working class has created its own organisations to carry on the fight.

"In great upsurges like the 1926 General Strike in Britain, or the general strike which swept France in May and June of 1968 the working class actually took over the administration of all aspects of social life through such bodies. In Spain in 1936 workers in parts of the country responded to a military coup of General Franco by taking things into their own hands. They reopened factories that had been shut down and took on unemployed workers to produce for need not for profits; they set up a workers' militia to fight the fascists; and reorganised the whole transport system to move weapons and men to the front.

"This is the way forward for the working class. Instead of relying on the capitalist parliament they should extend and strengthen the organisations that arise out of their own struggle, to lay the foundations for a workers' democracy, a workers' state."

All this is excellent; it presents the working class alternative to the capitalist parliament. Despite this, they repeatedly talk of a 'left wing government' or a 'workers' government', and of what such a government would do if it was in office. But just what do they mean by a workers' government?

A government is the executive body of the state. A workers' government would be

one which governed in the interest of the working class. The question is when the IMG talk of a workers' government, of what type of state does this form the executive?

Clearly a workers' dictatorship would be headed by a workers' government. But a workers' dictatorship can't exist unless the old state machine has been smashed, unless the capitalist class have been politically and militarily defeated within the territory of that state. When the IMG, however, talk of a workers' government they do not say that the formation of such a government must be preceded by the overthrow of the existing state. If the IMG meant that a workers' government must be based on a workers' state then this omission would be inexplicable. Thus we must assume that what they mean is an elected government based upon a parliamentary majority. Despite this they say:

"A workers' government would not base itself upon parliament and the machinery of the capitalist state, but upon the struggle and organisations of the working classes. It would encourage the development of institutions of workers' democracy, only these could give it a firm foundation and permit it to take measures necessary to dismantle the capitalist system and establish a planned economy."

The IMG seemed to be advancing two distinct strategies. The first involved a revolutionary upsurge in which parliament was to be 'booted to one side' and replaced by institutions of workers' democracy. This would of course entail the overthrow of the existing state and government, and their replacement by a proletarian dictatorship. The first strategy is thus for the revolutionary overthrow of the state and its replacement by the soviet form of working class dictatorship. Their second strategy on the other hand seems to involve reliance upon parliamentary means to secure the election of a left wing government. This government would then take measures to dismantle the capitalist system. In order to help it in this task it would 'encourage the formation of institutions of workers' democracy'.

The IMG present these strategies in totally mixed up fashion, not distinguishing one from the other. Even more serious, for a revolutionary organisation, the strategies are not linked to the current situation. How is a workers' government to be formed? which political party will lead it?

No communist could possibly describe a Labour government as a 'workers' government', but in the context in which the IMG manifesto appeared, a Labour government was the only candidate for the title of a 'workers' government'. The manifesto gave the impression that they thought it possible to obtain a workers' government by means of parliamentary elections, which once in office would 'simply' dispense with the apparatuses of the capitalist state, and shift its base onto the new organisations of workers' power that it would call into being. But it is to say the least utterly improbable that the only party capable of forming such a left wing government in the present period -- Labour -- should encourage the formation of institutions of workers' state power and then relinquish its grasp on the state apparatus, in order to lead these organs of workers' power in the dismantling of capitalism. The only recent government to bear any resemblance to the IMG's workers' government was the Allende government in Chile, which was far to the left of the Labour Party, but still showed itself both unwilling and unable to base itself on the mass workers' organisations, which developed under its rule. These organisations incidentally developed spontaneously out of the struggles of the workers; they were not 'encouraged' by the government. The Allende government was both unwilling, and unable, to surrender power to the workers' organisations for fundamental reasons -- overall it was a government of left social democrats, not revolutionary communists; and social democracy is but the reforming wing of capitalism, the agency whereby things change to remain the same. The Allende government was unable to hand over power to the workers' organisations because the old state refused to surrender sovereignty to the new organisations. Further, the state military-bureaucratic caste, in alliance with the ruling class, would not

voluntarily allow itself to be displaced, even if the excrescence of the old regime was prepared to do the displacing. So the old apparatus retained power which was never allowed to fall into the hands of the working class; it was always kept out of reach by the mediation of bourgeois parliamentary procedure and a traditional military elite.

In their manifesto, the IMG could avoid posing the question of state power when they dealt with the concept of a workers' government, basing itself on "institutions of workers' democracy". In practice it is a question that can be avoided only with disastrous results. What when are we to make of this idea of a workers' government as presented by the IMG?

First, it is a strategy with no real basis in the contemporary UK situation. If this were not recognised by those reading the manifesto, it would give rise to illusions that the Labour Party was the potential workers' government -- since this is the only reading that makes any sense. Second, for the IMG to advance speculative schemes about a workers' government does not at all help the principal task of communists during elections, i.e. combat parliamentarism. The shibboleth of a workers' government detracts from what it says about the need to "boot parliament aside", since it gives rise to the impression that the constitutional government would take the initiative in booting. Third, it fails to deal explicitly with the key question of state power and state apparatus.

Whatever their ideas on workers' governments, the IMG gave the election of a Labour government high priority: "the whole election campaign and in particular polling day itself must be the occasion for a massive wave of strikes and demonstrations against the Tory Government. The best situation for an election would be a general strike -- which would pose going beyond parliamentary elections to real workers' elections."

The Trotskyists seem to have a conditional reflex: whenever something is happening politically they respond by calling for a general strike. They present the general strike not so much as a definite tactic, more as a panacea. In this case, they are obviously just engaging in a spot of wishful thinking, not making a serious proposal. There was clearly no chance of the British working class organising a general strike just because the IMG wished to 'pose going beyond parliamentary elections'. Previously, when they had called for a strike to force the government's resignation, they at least had a clear demand or objective around which the strike was to be organised. Once the Tories had resigned the call for a general strike lost what relevance it once had. Besides this a general election would be just about the worse time for a general strike. For a general strike to occur at this time would be to ensure that mass action was speedily diverted into parliamentary politics.

The IMG's final justification for their opportunism over the Labour Party is that a Labour victory "would encourage the fighting spirit and self confidence of the workers' movement", whilst "A victory for the Tories would be a defeat for the working class". This last statement holds, if you believe that there is an identity between the fortunes of social democracy and the interests of the working class. Communists certainly do not believe this to be the case. Over the last few years, the British working class has shown that it does not lack 'fighting spirit' and 'self confidence'. This spirit and self confidence has been displayed and developed in the victorious economic class struggles of recent years. The working class has not allowed itself to be dismayed by the existence of a Tory government. What has encouraged the working class has been the real victories it has won in the heat of struggle. Unlike, it seems, some of our Left, the working class has not needed the type of phoney boost to its self confidence represented by a Labour election victory.

The working class is increasingly feeling, increasingly exerting, its industrial and social power. But these struggles lack coordination and real direction -- they are partial, basically defensive, and even sectarian (as in the cases of e.g. dockers, ASLEF, and the Boilermakers) because the proletariat is still

imbued with the ethos of capitalist normality.

Only a perspective transcending these horizons can enable significant sections of the working class to assert themselves in the interests of their long-term class interests.

As such a chain reaction can only be initiated from without, communists must immediately desist peddling militant populist/constitutionalist notions, make a clean break from the capitalist prison of "due process" no matter how admixed, and get at once to grips with putting truly scientific socialism -- Marxism-Leninism -- into the hands of the proletariat.

So long as dabbling with the Labour Party is the core of politics of those groups described above, and their ilk, they will debar themselves from the building of real proletarian consciousness: in fact, their superficiality will actively obstruct its development.

NOW AVAILABLE

Proletarian No.2: Inflation, Class Struggle and Scientific Communism.
Includes: Inflation - base and superstructure & 'For You, Mr. Worker!' by William Paul.
Price: 35p + 10p postage.

Proletarian No.3: Towards A Communist Programme.
Includes: Documentary Supplement of past programmes & Comments on the Transitional Programme.
Price: 40p + 10p postage.

Proletarian Text No.1: Documents of the Portuguese Revolution
Includes: Platform of the Portuguese Revolutionary Councils & PRP(BR) Manifesto.
Price: 20p + 10p postage.

Proletarian Text No.2: "Scientific Socialism: Its Revolutionary Aims and Methods" by William Paul, with COBI introduction.
Price: 25p + 10p postage.

!!! NEW !!!

Proletarian Broadside No. 1: "I.S.: The Crack-Up" -- Rout of the Rearguard Proto-Party.
Price: 15p + 10p postage.

Proletarian Pamphlet No.2: The Crisis of British Capitalism.
New extended second edition - 100pages, including graphic and statistical illustrations.
Price: 65p + 10p postage.

All literature available from our mailing address:
c/o J. Maisels, 3/8, May Court, Edinburgh EH4 4SD;
cheques and postal orders payable to COBI; bulk orders add 15% for postage.

International