

Joe, Jack, M-A, Doug, (Gus)

January 11, 1978

JAN 19 1978

Dear Comrades,

In addition to the points for the agenda of the January 27-29 meeting proposed in the Bureau letter of January 7, the leadership of the British International Marxist Group has proposed, and the Bureau has concurred, to place a discussion of the perspectives of our movement in Britain on the agenda.

Enclosed are materials presented to a recent IMG National Committee meeting, which will acquaint comrades with the issues. The general line of the enclosed resolutions were adopted by the IMG National Committee.

Comradely,

Stateman, for the United Secretariat Bureau

Dear Comrades,

We do not have enough copies of these documents to mail to every single member of the USec, so we're asking that comrades in the same country share one set. There's only one exception to that -- a small document on Socialist Unity -- of which I'm enclosing eight copies.

As well, can you see to it that comrade Blance receives copies of all the preparatory material we've sent out for the January USec.

Pola

S O C I A L I S T U N I T Y

When the IMG Political Committee decided in the early part of 1977 to stand candidates in elections, it agreed that their campaigns would be based on the need for a united fight back against the pro-ruling class policies of the Labour Government. This meant that its candidates had to campaign around three central themes: 1) the need for an alternative programme; 2) the need for united class-struggle action; 3) the need for a united revolutionary alternative. Such policies demanded a fight for a revolutionary alliance, hence our call to the SWP for joint-candidates.

The Stetchford, Birmingham, local elections, and the LCC elections, were fought under the masthead of the IMG around the above themes. They did however attract the support of organisations like Big Flame as well as some independents. The success of these interventions, albeit of a modest character, had an impact beyond the localities where the candidates stood and prepared the way for the formation of Socialist Unity, and the standing of a Socialist Unity candidate in Ladywood. Because the programme and the organisational form - a united, open, revolutionary alliance - corresponded, both to the needs of the class struggle, and coincided with a growing understanding inside sections of the vanguard for united activity, the Socialist Unity campaign got far more support and far more votes than the SWP in that election. This set the ground for Spitalfields and the Socialist Unity 19 November Conference. The Conference and the meetings that preceded it were the first steps towards turning Socialist Unity from being solely a means of intervening in a particular election, into the basis of a national organisation.

Socialist Unity by standing in elections poses the question of the construction of a party. Bourgeois elections brings the question of politics to the fore for everyone, not just for revolutionaries. At the same time the matter of representation is also posed. This is why all our material in Ladywood spoke of Socialist Unity as a party, not a coalition. In reality - right now, Socialist Unity is a propaganda bloc. The logic is either to bring its participants closer together or to lead to an explosion. But more than this is involved. Socialist Unity is a revolutionary alliance which therefore gives primacy to the mass struggle. Its intervention in elections is aimed at stimulating the mass struggle. The logic therefore is for joint work in the mass struggle, it cannot restrict its activity to electioneering. The question of on-going collaboration is immediately posed, even if not recognised explicitly at first.

A number of the forces working inside Socialist Unity are beginning to see it as a possible vehicle for constructing a new revolutionary organisation. For varying and different reasons which are related to their past positions on the IMG organisations like Big Flame and the Workers League tend to see it as being a more favourable area for them to approach building a common organisation. As far as a certain current inside Big Flame are concerned, the present Socialist Unity conforms much more to their 'movementist view' of the structure and building of a revolutionary party, than does the proposals in Socialist Challenge of a democratic centralist party. We are therefore confronted with a very difficult tactical problem. On the one hand we must respond to those forces inside Socialist Unity who see it as a means of regroupment. On the other hand we must avoid disrupting our electoral project by giving it a final form too quickly. In the present political situation - a Labour Government in power, a crisis of the traditional leaderships inside the workers movement and a development of the class struggle, particularly at the grass-roots - makes Socialist Unity an attractive pole for sections of the vanguard. Its political strength, and attractiveness for the vanguard resides in its insistence on revolutionary unity,

which is brought to the fore in its election campaigns by it being open to all revolutionary forces - particularly the SWP.

At present Socialist Unity is made up of three component parts. Firstly, there are the revolutionary groups - IMG, BF, WL, etc. Then there are those independents who are either revolutionary Marxists or sympathetic to revolutionary Marxism. Most of these people are in the periphery of one or other of the far-left groups. Thirdly, there are some forces who are just breaking from reformism and who are attracted to Socialist Unity because they see it as a means of organising class-struggle forces. Some of these people still look favorably on some of the alternatives put forward by the SWP, and even the CP. However, they are in general repulsed by the sectarianism of the SWP and are becoming increasingly disenchanted with the way in which the CP tails the left social democracy. A key task is to win this section to acceptance of the need for a revolutionary party and there is no doubt that providing Socialist Unity maintains its fight for united action of the revolutionary left it will continue to attract growing numbers of these people.

The Socialist Unity Conference showed the type of forces that it is beginning to draw around it. The composition of the Conference was IMG-110, Big Flame-30, other groups-40, out of a total attendance of just over 300; thus some 120 nonaligned people attended. The vote for the Martin Shaw amendment on future organisation of Socialist Unity reflected a mood amongst sections of the far-left like Big Flame and WL, as well as amongst a fairly high number of independents for a more structured form of organisation. Without doubt amongst these people, there are those who see Socialist Unity as a substitute for a revolutionary party, just as there are others who see it as a means of evading the question of the revolutionary party. The IMG however, has to begin, not from its reservations about the intentions or otherwise of these currents but from the actual dynamic that Socialist Unity injects into the move towards revolutionary regroupment. For Socialist Unity to become a new revolutionary organisation it means that it has to adopt a revolutionary programme. Now, Socialist Unity, is based on agreement around aspects of a revolutionary programme. It would have to be won over to democratic centralism, and convinced of the need for an orientation towards revolutionary regroupment, which means continuing its present course of fighting for united action with the SWP and forces at the base of the CP and left social democracy. If a new organisation comes into existence without agreement on fundamental questions, then all it will spawn will be a centrist formation, destined to split and fragment. Furthermore, if it does not recognise, that it only represents one stage, in the essential fight for revolutionary regroupment, it would simply become another sect. The IMG should therefore make clear that it stands for Socialist Unity adopting the above positions, whilst at the same time, not making conditional, its participation in Socialist Unity, on an immediate acceptance of a revolutionary programme. This means that we should approach the other groups of the far-left working in Socialist Unity, to see if we can get agreement on the long-term perspectives. This will serve a number of purposes. Firstly, it will open the way towards a discussion on regroupment, with the different organisations, and clarify whether or not they see Socialist Unity and joint work simply in the terms of some loose revolutionary alliance. Secondly, because it will take place in the context of Socialist Unity, it will provide a framework for both on-going discussions and work that does not simply place regroupment in terms of fusion with the IMG. Thirdly, providing agreement is reached on the long-term tasks, it will place tactical questions like what structures Socialist Unity needs, within the more overall political considerations around programme.

Until we open up such a debate, it is impossible to say how far things will develop. But what is vital is that we do not conflate our preparedness to go as far as possible with the forces already in Socialist Unity, with the point and purpose of our electoral intervention. Socialist Unity is the electoral expression of how the fight for our conception of how a socialist alternative will be built at this stage. The Socialist Alternative we want to construct cannot be reduced to regroupment of the smaller groups on the far-left, important, in the immediate sense such a regroupment would be as a means of beginning to break the log-jam on the far-left. Even if within a short period of time such a regroupment did take place and a new organization emerged, it would immediately afterwards turn its attention towards building a new alliance for intervention in elections. For a number of reasons the best ground for putting across our conceptions of party building is the electoral terrain. It is in elections that the fragmentation of the revolutionary left is most clearly exposed and where the differences on issues of programme are seen to be minor from a class point of view. Also elections reveal that the differences in social weight between the various revolutionary groups are quantitative, rather than of a qualitative character. It has been around elections that our line for a unified revolutionary organisation has got its best expression - shown in the defeats that we have inflicted on the SWP - and in relation to programme with the CP.

As the Labour Government is more and more affected by the crisis, and as the scabbing role of the bureaucracy is shown up, and as the Lefts - Tribunites and CP - are more and more paralysed by their line, so will the forces prepared to support a socialist alternative increase. Ladywood which took place in the early stages of a new growing opposition, revealed only a glimpse of what can be achieved. Providing we pursue our line for revolutionary unity we can exert big pressure on the SWP, and if we are able to win significant support and votes for Socialist Unity, we can start having a real impact at the base of the CP. This does not mean that we base ourselves on the conception that our biggest gains will be directly from these two organisations. In fact the reverse applies. The main sections we will organise around such a line will be the unaligned forces from the broad vanguard. From the point of the main road forward, we have however to turn the unity offensive in that direction, because they constitute the biggest pole of attraction for the vanguard right now. We have to try and polarise the vanguard around the reformist politics of the CP and the sectarianism of the SWP.

This means that Socialist Unity has to maintain its open orientation and in fact steps up its unity offensive towards the SWP. If the main forces in Socialist Unity do however reach political agreement on the need for a unified revolutionary organisation, and are prepared to come together to build one, and consider that Socialist Unity is the best means of doing so, we must not dissapate that opportunity, otherwise other forces will do the job for us. Given such a situation, then we should take that forward along the lines of fighting for it to adopt a revolutionary programme and being a democratic centralist organisation. We would then campaign for a new electoral alliance, of which Socialist Unity would be a part of.

I suggest the following things be done:

- 1) A letter to be sent to Big Flame, Workers League, and the Liberation Communist Group, suggesting a leadership meeting of these organisations, and the IMG be called, to discuss Socialist Unity and perspectives for revolutionary regroupment. A similar letter could also be sent to Martin Shaw, asking does the group of ex-SWP comrades also want to participate in such discussions.

2) At that meeting the IMG should put forward its long-term perspectives for Socialist Unity, and explain what it sees are the tasks of Socialist Unity now. It should also suggest setting up a structure for an ongoing discussion on this issue, and for an interchange of political documentation on these subjects.

3) That to take advantage of the opportunities that the May elections provide for raising the issue of a united revolutionary slate and strengthening the process towards revolutionary regroupment, the IMG in every area where it has branches will offer to work for the adoption of class-struggle candidates and pledge its full support to Socialist Unity.

4) To make sure that we have an effective intervention around the May Socialist Unity campaign, the IMG will offer to Socialist Unity the services of Biggs, Cannon, Manzano, Denis, Banner, Drake, Savage, King as full-time election workers for the three weeks of the May elections.

5) That Socialist Challenge will increase its coverage of Socialist Unity and pledge to Socialist Unity that in the six weeks prior to the May elections each week it will give two pages to the campaign and one week it will produce a four-page special for Socialist Unity. The special would be edited and written by elected members of the Socialist Unity Steering Committee - i.e., it would carry the line of Socialist Unity -- and be used for sale in the elections.

6) The IMG comrades on the Steering Committee be instructed to raise the following propositions:

a) The Steering Committee to write to the SWP, suggesting a united slate in the May elections, failing that there be a discussion with the SWP to ascertain whether or not we can get agreement on aspects of a programme which both Socialist Unity and SWP candidates could stand on. Finally, if we cannot get agreement on either of the above, then we suggest a non-aggression pact between the SWP and Socialist Unity.

b) Socialist Unity organising a series of regional speaking tours in the New Year to start preparation for running candidates in May.

c) Socialist Unity making a direct approach to the CP branches in the areas, particularly those where revolutionary candidates have polled higher votes than the CP before, asking the CP not to split the vote and give support to Socialist Unity candidates.

d) Socialist Unity begins preparation of a statement concerning elections, explaining why it stands candidates, what are the aims of its campaigns, what its attitude is to other revolutionary candidates, what attitude it has to independent class-struggle candidates, to the Labour Government in general and left-wing Labour candidates in particular.

e) Socialist Unity organising a national school in the Spring for agents and candidates and producing a bulletin dealing with all aspects of elections - i.e., law, rights of candidates, campaigning, etc.

J. King