

Chapter Two

The British Section, International Left Opposition:

August 1932 - June 1933

There is a contemporary report, in the International Bulletin of the Left Opposition, (1) which reads:

"The English section was founded in December 1931. It began at this time with six comrades, who had joined together earlier during the fight against the bureaucracy. These comrades formed the committee and entered into relations with the International Secretariat and with L. T..

"Two possibilities of development offered themselves to these comrades. The former consisted of a public declaration which would have earned them immediate expulsion. The second consisted of establishing themselves in the (Communist Party) and influencing (it) by direct propaganda.

"One cell of the Party, the Balham Group, which contained four members, was led, under the influence of Comrade Groves, to enter into conflict with the Party leadership. The Balham Group began by a discussion on the Trade Union question, on which the Party leaders were in disagreement; then they managed to raise the important German question, to the point of stressing the febleness of the Party's united front policy and taking the initiative in South-West London (against the wishes of the Party) in creating a genuine united front committee, which began as a May Day Committee and later became a "Committee for Struggle Against War."

"This Committee was supported by branches in South-West London of the Labour Party, the I.L.P., of many trade unions, and by the Communist Party represented by Groves' group. Through this Committee, and inside the Party, the Balham Group attacked the Amsterdam Congress and mandated its delegates to support the proposals of the Left Opposition.

"The Balham Group also demanded a Party Congress and the opening of discussion in the Party. In September, the leader of the Group, even though he did not belong to the Balham Group, put forward its policy in his own branch, where he won every vote but two for a declaration to the Party members drawing their attention to the expulsions which were taking place at the same time as the preparatory discussion for the Congress was beginning."

By mid-autumn 1932 the Trotskyists had been forced by expulsion from the Communist Party into the position which they had hoped to avoid by diplomacy, of having to try to influence the members of the Party from outside. They did not accept the set-back passively and at once began

to distribute leaflets to as many Party members as they could reach. The first of their leaflets was "To our comrades in the Communist Party from the Liquidated Balham Group", which appeared towards the end of the same week as that in which Groves and Wicks were expelled. (2) It attacked the Party leadership for suppressing discussion, pointed to the decline in membership, in circulation of the "Daily Worker" and in the Party's influence, and criticised the political ideas underlying the Amsterdam Anti-War Congress. The leaflet ended with a list of eleven signatories, whose Party membership totalled fifty-nine years.

Another of their leaflets is entitled: "An Appeal to Congress Delegates from the Balham Group". (3) It bore the signatures of thirteen people, whose Party membership totalled sixty-three years. The appeal claimed that fourteen active Party comrades had been forced out of the Party in South-West London alone. It made the debating point that Palme Dutt was defending a viewpoint in the trade union discussion which came close to that of the Balham Group, and attacked the Party leadership for failing to recognise the most serious aspect of the international situation, the crisis in Germany. It described the Trotskyist criticism of the Amsterdam Anti-War Congress as "an elementary statement of the principles of the Russian Revolution", and closed by appealing to delegates to raise inside the Party Congress the re-admission of the Balham Group and to secure the admission to the Congress of a spokesman to put its point of view.

A third leaflet, addressed like the last-mentioned one to the delegates in the Congress, sets out the role of Trotsky in the Russian Revolution, the fifteenth anniversary of which was being celebrated. It criticised the Soviet bureaucracy for defending the "theory of Socialism in a Single Country", on the ground that policies based on this theory prevented a second Soviet state from being brought into existence:

"National self-sufficiency is an ideal of Hitler, but not of Marx or Lenin."

The leaflet also contrasted the fate of Rakovsky, an old Bolshevik and at one time Soviet Ambassador in London, with that of the current Soviet representative, Ivan Maisky, who had deserted from the Mensheviks to Kornilov in 1917 and who made his peace with the Soviet regime only after it had successfully emerged from the Civil War. (4)

Advertisements in the "New Leader" show that the Group was also keeping up its co-operation with the I.L.P. in Clapham. The issue for December 16, 1932, for example, announced that Groves would lecture on the following Sunday on "Trotsky and the Third International." The following issue announced a "One-Day School": "Lecture at Clapham 'Trotsky and England' Lantern Lecture: 'Life of Lenin'. Social. 1 shilling." "New Leader" for February 3, 1933 advertised Harry Wicks speaking at the Clapham branch on "Rosa Luxemburg and her Latter-Day Critics."

Meanwhile the Communist Party was keeping up its attacks. The "Daily Worker" for January 21, 1933 carried a statement from "our own correspondent" in Berlin, head-lined "A New Lying Attack on Stalin." (5) The article mentioned Stalin's recent speech claiming that the First Five-Year Plan had been fulfilled and went on:

"Comes a new attack on Stalin. Trotsky's daughter, Madame Volkov, has committed suicide because she was not allowed to return to the Soviet Union, declares Trotsky ... but in his autobiography he never loses an opportunity to praise the services which his daughters rendered to the opposition."

The "Daily Worker" also produced about the same time a report headed:

"Long Live the German Communist Party: Trotskyists Statement on Liquidating Their Group." (6)

This report purported to consist of statements by a majority of the German Left Opposition repudiating Trotskyism. The interesting reason which it contains for their doing so is that they disagreed with the criticisms which Trotsky made of a report by an American agricultural engineer named Campbell that in an interview with Stalin the latter had said that the Soviet Government had neither the time nor the money to concern itself with revolution in the capitalist world. The German Trotskyists' organisation had not, in fact, ceased to function, nor had its paper, "Permanent Revolution", ceased to appear, as the "Daily Worker" alleged. Its issue for the fourth week in January 1933 states that the report (carried first by "Rote Fahne", the daily of the K.P.D.) that the Left Opposition group had wound up was based on an impudent fraud. A group of Stalinist agents working in the Left Opposition had:

"gone so far as the publication of a spurious number of

'Permanent Revolution' in order to deceive its readers. All our comrades and readers who received our 'Permanent Revolution' were, of course, clear that what we had here was a manoeuvre, pre-arranged with the Party bureaucracy by the capitulators."

The Communist Party of Great Britain might well liquidate the Balham Group as one of its units and pursue it with attacks, but the South-West London Anti-War Committee continued to provide the Trotskyists with a foothold in the Labour Movement. In the end the Stalinists were able to dislodge them. The story opens with a circular addressed from the Committee to the local working-class organisations in January 1933: (7)

"South-West London Anti-War Committee

To the Secretary

New Morris Hall,
79 Bedford Road,
S.W.4.

Dear Comrade,

The South-West London Anti-War Committee has been in existence for ten months. It seeks to unite for common action working-class organisations. Its object is to arouse the workers to take united action in defence of their standards of living and against war. In every way the present Executive Committee has sought to secure this unity, and in spite of many difficulties has done much to build a basis in the local movement. Considerable propaganda against the war menace has been carried out, together with activity in aiding strikes and the unemployed, and in getting organisation of groups of Trade Unionists.

At this stage, the under-signed Executive Committee members have found themselves forced to protest against the methods employed by those local Communists attending the Anti-War Committee. On three occasions, decisions accepted by the full Committee, including local Communists. On each occasion the reversal has been secured by a large increase in the number of Communist delegates. This policy was persisted in: our efforts to check it have brought the announcement by the Communist delegates that the existing Executive Committee must be removed and a new one elected. Less than two months ago the present Committee was elected for six months with the support of all affiliated bodies including the Communists. Work along such lines is clearly impossible.

We have urged the reduction of Communist representation. Whilst now admitting that their representation is over-weighted, they will only make changes on condition that they elect the Executive Committee in accordance with their own wishes, and on condition that we agree with this. Such agreement on our part would imply our approval of methods which we believe would be against the interests of workers' unity.

We find only two ways out. One is to carry on without the Communists - to split the existing movement. The other is to resign from the Executive Committee and to work for a more effective and satisfactory united front.

We have chosen to resign, convinced that this is in the best interests of the Committee and that time will show our attitude was justified.

To those organisations affiliated we urge that they put unity before resentment of these methods: and to the unaffiliated we appeal for their support for the Anti-War Committee.

All these matters will be decided at the next full meeting on February 6th at New Morris Hall, Clapham, at 8 p.m.

Yours fraternally,

R. Groves (Chairman)
S. Kemp (Secretary)
S. Dowdall
I. Mussi

Balham Communist Group
I.L.P.
A.U.B.T.W.
Balham Women's Guild.

The circular itself may help to explain the Stalinists' success, for its tone is rather non-political and it limited itself to raising organisational considerations, without explaining why anyone should regard the proposals of the Stalinists as important enough to worry about. Another feature of the circular is that, according to a later statement in the internal discussion in the group during summer 1933, Groves sent it out and signed it on behalf of the three others whose names appear beneath it without authority from them or anyone else! Groves recounts:

"... 27 February, the monthly meeting of the anti-war committee and yet another attempt by the Communists to remove the Trotskyists. They came, primed with a suitable resolution ... and were repulsed again." (8)

However, that is not the full story. Groves might well write:

"the invaders built nothing and destroyed what others had built", (9)

but all that failed to explain how the Stalinists came to win, for two pieces of evidence show that they did re-capture control of the Committee. The first is a letter from Dewar to Bridgeman, the National Secretary of the British Anti-War Council, in late February. (12) At this time the Communist Party was campaigning for support for a British Anti-War Council to be held as a follow-up to the Amsterdam Congress and to emphasise Soviet opposition to the League of Nations. The Congress took place in Bermondsey Town Hall on March 4 and 5, and in the preceding weeks, some eleven preparatory conferences were held in various parts of the country. (10) The "Daily Worker" advertised a "South-West London Mass Youth Anti-War Rally", (11),

presumably to attract support for the Amsterdam "pledge" and to compete with the South-West London Anti-War Committee. Dewar asked Bridgeman for representation for the British Section, International Left Opposition, at the Bermondsey Congress. Bridgeman replied with a formal refusal, without argument. The question arises whether Dewar wrote in order to challenge the Stalinists who organised the Congress to refuse, so that the Balham Group could make capital out of the refusal of those who claimed to be for "unity", or whether the application was a last resort to get representation and a voice in the Congress which they could not get any other way.

In any case, there has survived a copy of a letter circulated under the heading "South-West London Anti-War Committee", dated March 15, 1933 and signed "D. Capper, Chairman". (13) Everyone who has been active in Left-Wing politics in South-West London, or in the National Union of Teachers in that area, knows that Mr. Capper, a foundation member of the Communist Party, was a staunch supporter of its line in this period. The circular gives notice of a special meeting of the Committee to be held on March 20. The meeting was to be attended by Bridgeman and was to eject the Balham Group altogether. The circular gave notice of a resolution for this purpose, and at the meeting the following was carried:

"That this meeting of the South-West London Anti-War Committee decides that the continued association of the Balham Group (International Left Opposition) with the anti-war movement organised under the auspices of the British Anti-War Council shall be referred to that Council, for the following reasons, with a recommendation for its expulsion:-

1. That prior to and after the Amsterdam United Front Congress against War (August 1932) this Group and those with whom it is associated internationally carried on a deliberate campaign of vilification and condemnation of the Congress and of the British Anti-War Council set up as a result of the Congress.
2. That the policy of the Balham Group is in direct opposition to the policy and decisions of the Bermondsey Congress (March 4 and 5, 1933) and will, if tolerated, only result in further disruption of working-class anti-war activity in the district.
3. That the Group has been responsible for slanderous and untruthful attacks against the Soviet Government and has endeavoured to undermine the confidence of loyal workers in the Soviet Government, the defence of which must be one of the main tasks of any Anti-War Committee." (14)

We do not know how many were present at the meeting of March 20 or how many votes were cast for and against this motion. However, the Communist Party was taking the question of Trotskyism seriously, and about this time the first attempts to identify Trotsky with support for Hitler are found in its propaganda. (15)

In the spring of 1933 the Trotskyists continued to present their ideas in leaflets, in addition to selling the "Communist". Their leaflets warned against the imminence of a Nazi victory in Germany and the serious consequences which it would have, a prospect which the press of the Communist Party was tending to play down. The leaflet, "To All Communists and Militant Workers" (16) calls for a campaign to be waged by members of the Communist Party among Social-Democratic workers, "urging them to force their leaders into a united front for struggle against Hitler. Without the Social-Democratic workers Hitler cannot be defeated." The leaflet concludes:

"End Stalinist Treachery! For the Policy of Lenin and Trotsky! For World Revolution!"

Another leaflet (17) addressed "To the Working Men and Women in South-West London" warned that Hitler's foreign policy would lead to world war, and that, if the Nazis won power in Germany, living standards would be driven down throughout Europe and the Soviet Union would be placed in danger of invasion. Therefore a United Front of workers' organisations should be formed to resist Fascism.

II

The members and sympathisers of the British Section of the International Left Opposition had no doubt experienced a certain excitement during the period of the expulsion and of the demonstrations round the Party Congress, and they continued to grow in numbers. At the same time they had to face the problem of deciding for themselves how to work, how to apply their very limited resources. Trotsky had written from Prinkipo on September 6, 1932: (18)

"You ask for advice as to the attitude towards the Party and the workers' movement in general. My impression is that you don't need any advice in that respect, as your activity seems to be totally 'all right'. We are a fraction of the Party, but we are a very peculiar fraction, which has been expelled from the Party and is acting outside the Party. We must naturally occupy not only a theoretical position but a practical organisational position in every branch of the workers' movement. Our political adherence

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to the Party is expressed, not in our abstention from any work outside the Party, but in the content of that work ... we are fully agreed that the Left Opposition would be committing suicide by restricting itself to internal criticisms of the Party's actions, without devoting a great and growing part of its forces to the immediate action in the mass organisations under the centralised control of the Left Opposition as such."

This study has already shown that any review of the political evolution of the Trotskyist movement in Britain requires attention to its lively internal life and discussions. The written record of the discussions about what to do, which begins in early spring 1933, shows that there were disagreements between leading figures, and that the political content of these disagreements were not clear at first and began to become clearer only in the summer and autumn of 1933, when the discussion was concentrated on the problem of the relationship between the Trotskyists and the I.L.P..

The opening of the written discussion was precipitated by Wicks' account of the report he had given about the British section when he had met Trotsky and other international figures in the Left Opposition at Copenhagen. (19) The first contribution was from Purkis. He questioned whether the differences had been accurately presented. (20) His document says that the differences were not between "Propaganda" and "Action", but were about whether to try to build up the Communist Party or to build up groups outside and apart from it. He suggests that behind this difference lie the deeper questions whether the Communist International could be won back to a correct policy and whether disaster to it could be averted.

The second contribution is from Wicks. (21) He links back the discussion to Groves' alleged opposition a year or more earlier to forming a group of the Left Opposition. Wicks calls on Groves and Dewar to define their political positions more precisely, so that correct working relations can be established between leading comrades and put an end to "concentrating all the material and international communications in the hands of one individual". He argues that the emphasis of the work of the group must be in the direction of the Communist Party and militants under its influence. He uses the example to Groves' "resignation" circular to attribute to him and Dewar "primitive and individual

excursions towards an anti-party bloc."

Groves then enters the discussion. (22) He takes issue with those, such as Wicks, who show concern at the danger of tendencies towards "a second Communist Party."

"If we are to help in training leadership, we and our members must participate in every phase of the workers' struggle ... The difficulty for some of our members is that in this way we publicly clash with the Party."

He suggests that the Party members respect more those who openly differentiate themselves from them than those who stress rather the publication and distribution of Trotsky's writings.

"When we took upon ourselves the responsibility of building a British Section of the International Left Opposition, we did not thereby form just a translating bureau."

The fourth contribution came from Dewar (23). He reiterates the idea that the group should organise party and non-party workers to study the theoretical position of the Left Opposition which, at the same time, "must participate as an organised group, with its own policy and programme of action, in all phases of the class struggle." However,

"at all times the Communist Party must be taken into consideration and every possible approach made to it for united communist activity"

and

"our attitude to the Communist International and its national sections cannot be altered by considerations of the theoretical possibility of the collapse of the C.I."

The text of a resolution passed at an aggregate meeting of members of the group on March 12, 1933 lays certain specific tasks on the Executive (24). It tries to ensure, on the one hand, that the leading committee functions with administrative efficiency and, on the other hand, that the members turn their faces outwards. It opened the campaign for the printed paper, "Red Flag", to be out by May 1, 1933. There followed a debate about the directive of the Executive Committee of the Communist International to the national Communist Parties to approach the Social-Democratic Parties with a view to united action based on mutual abstention of criticism (25).

Meanwhile, representatives of eleven sections of the International Left Opposition, in Europe and America, met in Paris on February 4 to 8,

1933, to make arrangements for an international conference which was projected (but did not actually take place) in July 1933. (26) The meeting discussed and amended a document drafted by Trotsky based in part on his consultations with leading members of the Left Opposition at Copenhagen. (27) The document, "On 'the State of the Left Opposition'" is Trotsky's report on these consultations. The "pre-conference" of February 1933 produced "The International Left Opposition: Its Tasks and Methods", which lays down the 'Eleven Points' (28) which politically identified the Left Opposition and differentiated it from all other tendencies. It also decided to try to establish an international political leadership, to consist of a "plenum" of one delegate each of the Russian, Greek, German, Belgian and French sections, the political continuity and practical execution of its work being assured by the International Secretariat. The meeting also re-stated the historical continuity of the Left Opposition from the first five years of the Communist International, regarding the International Left Opposition still as a faction of the Communist International and its national sections as factions of the national Communist Parties.

Groves was present at the "pre-conference", though, to judge from his account, he can hardly be said to have participated in it. (29) Nonetheless, his report is of some political significance, as it shows the cynicism of his attitude to the international movement which, in turn, may help to explain the reserve with which he and other leading members of the British section were to treat later in the year the proposal of the International Secretariat and of Trotsky that their group should enter the I.L.P. as a body. Trotsky was far from sharing Grove's disappointment with the pre-conference. (30)

About this time an approach was made to Trotsky from another quarter of the British Labour Movement. The following letter, a reply to an invitation the acceptance of which he thought might compromise him, explains itself: - (31)

"To the National Council of
Labour Colleges,
71 Prebend Gardens,
London W.6.
England
Dear Comrades,

Buyuk ada March 10, 1933

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You propose to me to express my views concerning the Karl Marx exhibition arranged by you and by which you intend to make a big "boost" for Marx and Marxism. It is not necessary to emphasise how near to me is every step which is capable of strengthening the influence of the ideas of Marxism in England where stand at the head of the working class reactionaries of the types of Henderson and Clynes who to the crown of their heads are filled with bourgeois prejudices and ecclesiastical superstitions. But to my great sorrow I note that your prospectus, which you have been so kind to send me, begins with a highbrow citation from H. de Man, an author who accomplished a retrograde evolution from the opportunist semi-Marxism to eclecticism and idealism and opened the doors wide to religious mystics. In the spheres of philosophy, sociology and history H. de Man stands, in the best case, on the level of the "true socialists" of the first half of the latter century. However, Marxism began its historical road with the ruthless chastising of the moralising philistinism. To put Marx under the shield of H. de Man is not much better than to put Darwin under the shield of the Archbishop of Canterbury. That is the reason why I must, with great regret, abstain from sending my greetings to the address of your exhibition.

I remain yours in the spirit of true and not falsified Marxism."

III

The British Trotskyists succeeded in spring 1933 in establishing their internal discussion bulletin. It was called "For Discussion" and sixteen issues in all seem to have been produced, though the first four have not been traced. By this time their earlier contact with individual members of the Communist Party seems to have diminished and they were beginning to pay more attention to the I.L.P. where they had contacts who read the "Militant" and, later, the "Red Flag" and who were later to join the "Marxist Group in the I.L.P." and the "Militant Group" in the Labour Party.

An example of these contacts with the I.L.P. is found in a letter (32) by four members of that party, addressed apparently to their fellow-members. One of those who signed it was Tom Kernot, who, with his wife Nan, were in the "Militant Group" in the Labour Party in North London later in the 1930's. The letter announces that the four are leaving the I.L.P. to join the Communist Party. They argue that "correctly to criticise the I.L.P. is to leave it." The rest of the letter follows the line of the Left Opposition: "Recognising that the present policy of the C.P. requires drastic changes, and appreciating fully the weakness of its tactics, we maintain that criticism of the C.P.

is no longer a legitimate reason for staying outside." They also sent statements to the "Daily Worker", the I.L.P. and the "New Leader". The reply of the "Daily Worker" is too good to miss; it reads:

"Dear Comrade,

We have considered the leaflet which you forwarded to us, and which clearly musters all the counter-revolutionary arguments of Trotskyism against the Communist Party. The whole line of this leaflet, except its first couple of sentences, makes the most sweeping attacks on Marxist-Leninist theory and practice. We do not know whether the comrades, whose names are attached to the leaflet, have had close connections with the Trotskyists, but the whole line of the leaflet is calculated to prevent the awakening workers from coming over into the ranks of the Communist Party en masse. We are very surprised to hear you state that the four points outlined in this leaflet are the standpoint of the Revolutionary Policy Committee (33) and would strongly question your contention that this is so. Such arguments as the leaflet produces are the arguments of Trotskyist elements, whether the comrades who have appended their signatures are conscious or not of this fact.

Yours fraternally,"

John Paton, National Secretary of the I.L.P., also wrote a reply, which shows clearly that the statement had bewildered him. He simply acknowledged the receipt of it, with the mild postscript: "I think your criticisms of the C.P. on the whole sound, but your conclusion to join the C.P. seems to me completely illogical." The correspondence culminated with a letter from John Aplin, London Divisional Organiser of the I.L.P. saying that the London and Southern Counties Divisional Council "accepted with regret" their resignations - to which Tom Kernot replied by return of post that, as he and the others had not tendered their resignations, they would like to know whether Aplin's letter "was to be regarded as expulsion." Aplin's reply, if any, has not survived. Brockway as editor of the "New Leader" replied:

"Whilst, of course, I recognise your right to reach the decision which you indicate, we hardly think it reasonable that the Organ of the I.L.P. should be used to urge people to resign from the Party."

The change in their relations with the Communist Party and the I.L.P. in the spring of 1933 did not enable its members to resolve their internal political differences about perspective, or improve personal relations in the leadership. A statement signed by Davis, Purkis, Wicks and Williams dated April 18, reveals the desperate efforts which were being made to understand the political source of the differences in the leadership. (34) Enquiries among survivors of the move-

ment in this period have not produced any firm figures for the membership, which seems to have been about thirty, to have been mostly young and to have consisted of workers, a few students but mainly unemployed. There appear to have been three branches, Battersea, Hackney and Central London, with most of the forces in South-West London. There were a few contacts in the provinces. One thing, however, is beyond dispute. This was neither a petty bourgeois nor a dilettante grouping.

The "Red Flag" appeared in print for the first time, as planned, for May Day 1933. It consisted of a single sheet, folded to give four pages, 15" by 10". The front page described it as "Monthly Organ of the British Section: International Left Opposition", and carried the banner head-line: For Lenin and Trotsky: Why RED FLAG appears: TO REGENERATE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT. (35) It advertised four bookshops in London where the paper, as well as several publications by the British and the American Trotskyists, could be bought. It also announced the next issue of the "Communist: Monthly theoretical journal of the British Section, International Left Opposition", and appealed for money.

Despite Groves' poor impression of the February pre-conference, he continued to keep up a friendly correspondence with Trotsky, as two of Trotsky's letters show. (36) The former discusses the proposal of the I.L.P. to publish the Copenhagen speech. The second encloses documents about the movement in U.S.A. which Trotsky thought might interest the British comrades, and asks questions about figures in left-wing politics in this country. Trotsky must have savoured the irony that Murphy, who had moved his expulsion from the Comintern in 1927, should have himself fallen foul of the bureaucracy.

"Red Flag", Vol.1, No.2, the June 1933 issue, carries as its main feature "All Eyes on Austria", and an introduction written in England to Trotsky's "It is Now the Turn of Austria". (27) "Red Flag" No.2 also replied to an attack by Andrew Rothstein on a recent article by Trotsky in the "Manchester Guardian", on the then-familiar line that Trotsky was a defender of Social-Democracy. There is also a short note defending Rakovsky. (38) It mentions a Reuter communique to the effect that Rakovsky was alive and practising medicine in the

vicinity of Yakutsk in Northern Siberia. The note, signed by Trotsky, comments: "If Rakovsky is not dead, Stalin by this measure condemns him to death."

"Problems of the Soviet Regime", by Trotsky (39) is promised for issue No.3. Six shops in London and one in Manchester now sell the paper. There is an advertisement for the pamphlet: "A Conversation with a Social-Democratic Worker on the United Front for Defence" (40) and for another pamphlet "Alarm Signal", a copy of which has not been traced. (41)

IV

The discussions in which the British Trotskyists were involved at this time arose out of the very real problem of constructing, with very small resources, the basis of a revolutionary organisation and of regulating the relations between those associated as comrades in this endeavour. They were able to hold a National Conference of members on June 18, 1933, which marks, on the one hand, a stage in their progress but which, on the other hand, opened a new period of increasing difficulty for them.

The victory of Hitler had aroused, and was to continue to arouse, much alarm among the politically-minded workers of the left-wing, whom the Trotskyists hoped to influence, and contributed to the improvement in the morale of the Labour movement generally in its recovery from the electoral defeat of 1931. For a time the Trotskyists were able to get some hearing for their explanation that the defeat had been due equally to the policies of the Social-Democracy and of Stalinism, in which the refusal of the German Communist Party, under the guidance of Moscow, to agitate for a united front to include the Social-Democratic leadership, had been important. Everyone knew in spring 1933 that the German working-class had been divided by its leaderships. However, as a reaction, a mass sentiment for unity developed, in the setting of which the criticisms levelled by the Trotskyists at the Social-Democrats and Stalinists could sound abstract and off-key. The Communist Party could attract sympathy on the basis of the general welcome for Soviet economic successes and the unceasing distortion of the ideas of the Trotskyists in its press and propaganda had its effect, since, small as the resources of the Communist Party of Great Britain then

were, they were far greater than those of their principal adversaries.

Further, the Trotskyists themselves were having to make a series of rapid adjustments to changes in the real situation and to keep pace with the development of Trotsky's thought. (42) Throughout their work as part of the International Left Opposition up to the summer of 1933 they had resisted the suggestion that second Communist Parties had to be constructed to replace the sections of the Third International. Their debates had been largely about how to surmount the obstacles placed in their way by the Stalinist leaderships and to intervene in the evolution of the existing Communist Parties; hence the argument about how far their work ought to consist of publishing basic historical and theoretical material in the hope that Communist Party members would read it, and how far they could involve themselves in practical activities which led to opposing the Communist Party in public. After February-March 1933, when the German Communist Party collapsed in face of the Nazis and when the leadership of the Communist International succeeded in suppressing all criticism of the policies which had contributed to the collapse, the question naturally arose whether it could ever again become a revolutionary organisation. At the same time, the development of the "Left Socialist" groups showed that sympathy for the ideas of the Left Opposition could appear among militants who had never been associated with or attracted to the Communist Parties.

There is so little information to be had from other sources about the British Trotskyist organisation at this time that perhaps it is permissible to reproduce in full the resolution which was submitted by the National Committee to the Conference in fulfilment of the instruction given by the members at the preceding aggregate on March 12, entitled "Our Future Tasks", and which was accepted by the Conference.

"Our Future Tasks"

Out of a number of tasks discussed by the committee, the following are set out as being the most vital. The Constitution now laid down together with the general tasks confirmed at the Members' Meeting on 12 March indicate the general road forward for the establishment of active groups and effective organisations.

- I. THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE: (1) To undertake the preparation of a statement on the British situation and our attitude toward the Party; and to complete this within six months from

this date. (2) To call a National Conference within twelve months from the present Conference. (3) To intensify discussion within our Groups upon the platform and tasks of the Left Opposition in preparation for the International Conference.

- II. REFORM OF THE PARTY: (1) Each Group to be set the task of winning more members from the Party to our organisation; (2) to give every aid and encouragement to those of our members within the Party and to make every effort to protect their Party membership. (3) In certain instances the Committee should consider the training of selected comrades for work within the Party. It must be recognised, however, that our chief source of strength within the Party must lie in the winning to our side of the best Party members. (4) to commence a continuous campaign directed towards the winning of Party members of standing and the preparation of materials on the experience and history of the British Party.
- III. THE YOUTH: (1) To commence the organisation of work within the Y.C.L., and to begin to direct attention to the Left Youth. (2) To publish as frequently as possible a supplement-sheet to the Communist dealing with specifically Youth questions.
- IV. THE RED FLAG: (1) To secure a minimum regular readers' circulation of 1000 copies per month. Definite readers make possible the planning of our papers for these readers and its extension on a concrete basis. (2) To establish a regular guarantee fund. Each Group to appoint a comrade to take charge of this fund and of the Group sales. (3) To devote as the paper develops a certain amount of space to problems of the British movement, encouraging our trade union comrades to contribute special material and seeking regular letters from worker readers.
- V. THE COMMUNIST: (1) To be issued as the medium for the publication of theoretical and informative materials of permanent value and for the discussion of British experiences and problems. (2) Not to be issued each calendar month but as the occasion arises.
- VI. INTERNATIONAL: To deepen our contact with the International Secretariat and to participate more actively in international events.

The National Conference of June 18, 1933 also agreed a draft constitution which aimed at providing a more formal structure as well as clarifying the perspective of the group. It can hardly have been said to have succeeded in the latter purpose, for the clause laying down the purpose of the British Section, International Left Opposition (Bolshevik-Leninists) reads that it considers itself a fraction of the British Section of the Communist International and that its purpose is "to give organisational form to the communists of Great Britain, those within and those formally outside the C.P.G.B., who are struggling to preserve and apply in the class struggle the fundamental teachings

of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky, and to reform and re-unite the Communist International on that basis". The next few weeks, however, were to bring great changes.

The spirit of this small group cannot be better illustrated than in the words of a circular to members dated December 8, 1932, as follows:

TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE BALHAM GROUP

Dear Comrades,

At the special meeting held on Friday, December 2nd, the Group discussed its present position and the position of each individual member. It was decided that the basis for the Group should be as follows:

That every member should accept the principles laid down by the Communist International at its first four Congresses.

That every member of this Group should give the Group meetings and discussions precedence over all other engagements.

That every member should accept the discipline of the Group and carry out all Group decisions to the fullest possible extent.

It was realised by the Group that in order to carry out the very difficult work immediately ahead of the Group it would be necessary to depend more than ever upon the loyalty and active co-operation of every member, and we ask you to intimate to the Group your acceptance or rejection of the points set out above and to attend the next meeting of the Group.

V

The materials assembled in this chapter show that by the autumn of 1932 the members of the British Section of the International Left Opposition had already begun to discuss where best to apply their efforts, a question which Trotskyists continue to discuss to the present time. By the summer of 1933 the question had become urgent. They had been cut off by expulsion from what they regarded as their natural milieu, the periphery and membership of the Communist Party, and they had to seek new forms and new methods for their work. In addition, this small group of people, which gathered round the Balham Group, had to adjust their minds several times to a succession of changes in the world around them.

When they had first turned towards Communism and the Communist Party, or at any rate towards the Revolutionary Left, they had had to

turn their backs on the predominantly reformist opinions of the British Labour Movement. They had then accepted the legitimacy of the Russian Revolution as a socialist revolution and as the first in a chain of such revolutions. Having found difficulty in the Communist Party in effectively presenting their ideas and participating in the class struggle, they had in 1932 developed their collaboration with the I.L.P., which produced certain results and gave them some satisfaction.

Meanwhile, in 1931 and 1932, they had had to go through the process of recognising that their difficulties flowed partly, not from the personal inadequacy of this or that leader in the Communist Party of Great Britain, but from the great historical process at work in the Soviet Union, and, consequently, that the Communist International had to be regenerated, against the opposition of the leading stratum in the Soviet Union and its clients in the leadership of the Communist Parties in the capitalist world.

Then less than six months after the expulsion of the Trotskyists, in Spring, 1933, the German Communist Party and the movements associated with it, such as the Red Trade Union Opposition, capitulated to the Nazis without striking a blow. In the months which followed, hardly a ripple of protest came from the other parties of the Communist International against the policies which the German Communist Party followed or those who inspired them from the Kremlin. The defeat in Germany, on the contrary, strengthened not the revolutionary but the conservative tendencies in the Communist International. The expectation of some of the Left Opposition, that they might be recognised as correct and honourably re-integrated into the Communist International, were completely disappointed.

They then had to change their perspective sharply, first to one of the construction of a new Communist Party in Germany, and, then, to the gigantic task of laying the foundations for a new Communist International and new sections of it in every country, including a Soviet section which would one day lead the political revolution to displace the Stalinist bureaucracy by force and restore the rule of Soviets in the U.S.S.R..

Nor was even this all. The political collapse of the Communist International and the call for the new International necessitated a new appraisal of the "Left Socialist" groups which had emerged or were emerging from the "official" Social-Democracy of the Second International. Instead of regarding these groups at best as likely to be drawn one day into a regenerated Communist International and at worst as futile pacifists and "left" Social-Democrats, the International Left Opposition had to recognise in them the most politically developed tendencies in the Labour Movement and to decide how to influence them, whether from outside or by "entry".

In yet another sense the destruction of the Labour Movement in Germany by Hitler marked a turning-point in the British Labour Movement. Politically-motivated people in the working-class and middle-class reacted to it with a strong mood in favour of united action between organisations, which usually also meant maintaining an appearance of agreement by discouraging controversy. The Trotskyists had criticised the Communist International up to 1934 for seeming too exclusive. After 1934 they criticised it for not being exclusive enough. They could be regarded as hair-splitters, and this impression was strengthened by another, that the Communist Party was "correcting" its former sectarian ways, because by 1934 few people remembered or understood clearly the earlier "Right" period of the Comintern in the years 1925-27 of the Anglo-Russian Trade Union Committee and the alliance with the Kuomintang. The Trotskyist criticisms of the regime in the U. S. S. R. could be distorted to suggest that they were not whole-hearted in their support for the defence of the U. S. S. R. Out of these confused sentiments could be manufactured some temporary acceptance of the monstrous mythology of the Moscow Trials.

Yet the Social-Democratic and Stalinist opponents of the Trotskyists, with the Stalinists in the vanguard, did not easily or cheaply isolate them, nor did they succeed entirely in doing so. The evidence all shows that the leaders of the British Section of the International Left Opposition and of the groups which succeeded it were able, energetic and courageous young people. They struggled for their ideas over a whole period with great tenacity and some of their work has lived after them.

The next chapter shows how, after the nucleus had been formed and had been expelled from the Communist Party, after it grew in numbers and began to discuss how to influence the workers' movement, it faced the immediate and specific problem of how to counteract the influence of the Communist Party in the I.L.P. and how to win that party to their ideas. This explains why the general discussion about how to build up the group became centred in the dispute whether to try to influence the I.L.P. from outside or whether, as Trotsky suggested, to enter it as a body (43).

- (1) The text of the report, in French, is from "Bulletin Interieur de l'opposition de Gauche", No.2/3, new series, April 1933. The original is in the Hoover Institution, Stanford, California, U.S.A.. The translation is by the present writer.

The reference in the report to the "many trade unions" supporting the South-West London Anti-War Committee has, of course, to be understood to mean no more than that the local branches of trade unions will have contributed small amounts of money to the committee and have been eligible to send delegates to its meetings.

- (2) Groves, op.cit. p.81.
- (3) *ibid.*, p.91.
- (4) *ibid.*, p.95.
- (5) Zinaida Lvovna Volkov was the daughter of Trotsky by his first wife, Alexandra Sokolovskaya. She was born in 1901, and from 1917 onwards was a member first of the Communist Youth and later of the Russian Communist Party. Her husband, Platon Volkov, was deported to Siberia in 1928 (according to Deutscher, "Prophet Outcast", p.281). In 1931 the Soviet authorities permitted her to travel abroad for treatment for tuberculosis. Her physical condition improved under treatment in Germany, but she suffered mentally from the Stalinist repressions in the Soviet Union and the progress of the Nazis in Germany. She intended to return to Soviet Russia until the decree of February 20, 1932, which deprived of Soviet citizenship Trotsky and his family. Doctors certified that a return to her native country was necessary for her mental health, but the Soviet authorities refused to admit her. In 1932, under the Chancellorship of Von Schleicher she was ordered to leave Germany and, in desperation, killed herself by gas poisoning, on January 5, 1933.

Trotsky wrote "An Open Letter to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union" about her suicide (dated January 11, 1933, in "Writings: 1932-33", p.69) in which he says: "Depriving her of citizenship was only a wretched and stupid act of vengeance against me ... The persecution of my daughter was devoid of even a shred of political sense ... Stalin imposed this death on her; she did not choose death of her own will."

The organ of the German Trotskyists (provided by a collaborator who prefers not to be named), "Permanente Revolution" (issue for the second week of January 1933, Year 3, No.2) carries an obituary which closes: "Zinaida Lvovna took her life because, as a result of her illness, she could no longer take part in our struggle in the Left Opposition. And without the struggle for the proletariat, for the aims of Communism, life no longer held any purpose for her. She is a victim no less of the bourgeois law of exile than of Stalinist revenge." The note is unsigned.

The despatch published by the "Daily Worker" reads:
"Trotsky's daughter, Madam Volkov, has committed suicide because she was not allowed to return to the Soviet Union, declares Trotsky. She had nothing to do with politics, he declares further. She was a victim of personal revenge. This is not only an attempt to play on sentiment in connection with the death of his daughter, but this is also a speculation on the short memories of his readers, when Trotsky makes these statements. In his autobiography he never loses an opportunity to praise the services which his daughters rendered to the opposition and particularly how they assisted in misleading the G.P.U."

See also Deutscher, op. cit., pp. 147-8, 188-9 and 195-8.

(6) The background to this incident may be traced in:

Deutscher: op. cit. pp. 25-26 and p. 182

Campbell, Thomas D.: "Russia: Market or Menace".

Trotsky: "Writings: 1930-31", p.24, p. 139, p.147, p.168, p.238, p.321, p.368.

"Writings: 1932-33", p.17, p.41

Spencer: "Strange Intêrlude: A Footnote to the Soblen Case", in "Survey", No.49, October 1963, p.113.

The issue of "Permanente Revolution" for the fourth week of January 1933 carried an article headed "Working to Orders: On the Capitulation of R. Well, A. Senin and others". This states:

"On Sunday, January 22, the Rote Fahne carried the news that in No. 3 of the Permanente Revolution the Left Opposition Group had liquidated itself. The news is based on an impudent fraud on the part of the capitulationists Well, Senin, Joko and Company, and went so far as the publication of a spurious number of Permanente Revolution for the purposes of deception. All our comrades and readers who received our Permanente Revolution were, of course, clear that what we had here was a manoeuvre pre-arranged by the capitulationists with the Party bureaucracy. We have great satisfaction in announcing that the National Committee cut across the plans of the capitulationists and removed them in good time from the Left Opposition. The Left Opposition branches all over the country stand united, on the basis of the Left Opposition. The 'liquidators' have liquidated themselves. The fact that up to four weeks ago they still made approaches under cover to the L.O. branches in the country, saying that they were the real true-blue 'Trotskyists', the actual fighters for the policies of Comrade Trotsky, has not helped them. They are already showing their true colours."

(7) In the archives of the Workers' Revolutionary Party and in "For Discussion", No. 7, June 22, 1933.

(8) Groves, op. cit., p. 75.

(9) *ibid.*, p.75.

(10) "Daily Worker", February 18, 1933.

- (11) *ibid.*, February 15, 1933.
- (12) Archives of the Workers' Revolutionary Party.
- (13) *ibid.*
- (14) *ibid.*
- (15) See, for example, W. Gallacher, "Pensioners of Capitalism: An Exposure of Trotsky and the Social-Democrats", a pamphlet issued by the C.P.G.B. in 1933.
- (16) Groves, *op.cit.*, p.100.
- (17) *ibid.*, p.105.
- (18) Now in "Writings: Supplement (1929-33)", p. 149
- (19) Possibly the report in the international internal bulletin of April 1933 is an extract from the record of Wicks' report. For the meetings at Copenhagen, see Deutscher, "The Prophet Outcast". pp.186-7.
- (20) The "Pre-Conference Statement of Comrade Purkis" is in "For Discussion", No.8. It reads as follows:

"Following the report of Comrade Wicks upon his visit to Copenhagen, we are of the opinion that the question of the differences within the British section was not accurately presented there by him in his report.

"There are certainly different emphasis placed by members of the Group upon 'Propaganda' and upon 'Action', but no member of the Group rejects either the one or the other.

"Disagreement, or even dissension, tends to arise around varying attitudes upon the following three positions:

- I.. That it is the duty of the British Group of the L.O. to limit its activities to work amongst Party members: and that the work should be done by means of circulating L.O. historical material and current literature amongst members of the Party. (This position is not, as far as we are aware, definitely held by any member of the Group).
- II. That the work of the L.O. is to win the Party to the L.O. line by presenting L.O. material, L.O. criticism, and an alternative policy to Party members: to bring the Communist Party case (from the L.O. aspect) before the mass organisations of the workers; to win the widest possible strengthening of the Party by winning recruits to the Party, sending them into the Party after L.O. training has been given to them, to fight for the L.O. position within the Party ranks. Recognises the possibility that this can be averted, and that the chief means of averting this are: (1)

positive L.O. criticism, and (2) new blood to the C.I..

- III. That the main work of the L.O. is to build up groups of revolutionary workers, Communists (Party and non-Party) to be trained by us for open, accepted, continued work outside the Party and apart from the Party. Working within the Party because it offers a fruitful sphere for winning new members to the L.O..

Disbelieving in the possibility of the C.I. being won to a correct policy, those who take this line reject the idea that disaster to the C.I. can be averted, do not aim at strengthening the Parties of the C.I. or inducing them to avoid mistakes, but "accept" the mistakes of the C.I. as strengthening the L.O. to carry out its inevitable future task of taking over the duties of the C.I.; a task which the certain decay of the C.I. must place on the shoulders of the L.O..

- (21) The "Pre-Conference Statement of Comrade Wicks (Jan.-Feb. 1933)" is in "For Discussion", No.10. It reads as follows:

"Since the Copenhagen meeting disagreement and dissension in our leadership has been accentuated. The majority of our Secretariat (Purkis, Sara, Wicks) endeavoured to terminate the amorphous fractional strife which was developing, by defining the points of disagreement and submitting a collective statement to your pre-conference Plenum. This effort of the Secretariat proved abortive: due to the obstructionist and fractional policy pursued by Cdes. Groves and Dewar. These two comrades refused (1) to define their position to the Purkis statement, (2) to submit at the special committee meetings an alternative statement, (3) to contribute to the solution of the disagreements beyond a formal declaration for Gourov's position and against a second party. This non-committal shapelessness inside our left opposition committee ... Efforts were made to resist the transition of the Balham Group to the Left Opposition; only when the entire membership expressed itself for becoming a unity of the Left Opposition did Groves and Dewar withdraw their opposition. The principle charges levelled against a section of our leadership by Cdes. Groves and Dewar are: (1) ignoring the English situation, (2) unwillingness to conduct independent activity as an organised political group. (3) laying prostrate before the Party.

"The first point, if it means that as yet our left opposition committee has no programme, no policy on the trade union question, no proposals on the day to day events, is largely true. That we have not yet subjected the English political situation to an analysis, in the light of the fundamental position of the Left Opposition, is not an expression of our desire to "ignore" the problem, but rather of the immaturity of our opposition group. For comrades to attack the leadership for this failure and to studiously avoid making any con-

tribution to the solution of this problem, contains the elements of an unprincipled position. The second and third points are one and the same questions. The differences in this field arise, on the one hand, from a different estimation of the stage of development, and on the other hand the resistance shown by members to the dangerous tendencies revealed by Comrade Groves in his interpretations of independent political activity. The existence of a strong Balham Group, which was expelled by the party, is naturally confronted with the problem of continuing its communist activities in the mass organisations of the workers. No-one has raised a voice against such activities. The critical point was reached, when the party on the anti-war committee succeeded by a large party representation in removing Cde. Groves from the Executive Committee of the Amsterdam Anti-War Ctee.. In answering the party, who carried through this policy, two courses were possible; (1) to base ourselves on the non-party delegates of this ctee., and split the ctee. against the party; (2) to explain our position to the party membership and non-party workers and attempt to get the bureaucratic policy of the party leadership reversed.

"Cde. Groves chose the former and failed, principally due to the opposition of the L.L.P. representative, refusing to swop in political domination from the party for that of the opposition. Forced to the second course, Cde. Groves made a declaration to all workers' organisations, which whilst appealing for continued support to the anti-war ctee., takes a blatantly anti-communist line ... Before leaving this question of the tendencies displayed by Cde. Groves, it is necessary to point out that in the statement presented by Cde. Purkis and K. establishes three positions in the ctee.. This attempted interpretation of the third position unquestionably applies to Cdes. Groves and Dewar. On the question of estimating the stage of our development, it is clear that in England, where the fight against bureaucratic centrism is only in its initial stages, the emphasis of our work must be in the direction of the party and the militant workers under the party's influence. The primitive and individual excursions towards an anti-party bloc, by Cdes. Groves and Dewar, can only have a retarding effect on the development of this work of winning the party membership for the line of the left opposition.

"How are these disagreements in the leadership of the English Opposition to be straightened out? The first prerequisite for advancing our work is the establishment of correct working relations between the leading comrades. The practice of refusing to define one's position, and separating oneself from the remaining committee members must be condemned. If a struggle in the leadership is necessary, then the positions must be defined so that the membership can advance to the solution of the problems. The steps taken after the Copenhagen conferences to develop a collective responsibility, and break the previous practice of concentrating all the material and international communications in the hands of one individual can be

further developed, so that the leading group is acquainted with all the problems and activities of the International Left Opposition and proceeds to develop its work and activities, in the spirit of the International Left Opposition."

Harry Wicks.

- (22) Pre-Conference statement by R. Groves, presented to the Secretariat Feb. 3, 1933; in "For Discussion", No.10.

"At present the British Section have a membership of twenty to thirty. They have a dozen contacts in London and one or two isolated sympathisers in the provinces. In no place outside London are there Opposition groups or even the beginning of such groups. THE COMMUNIST circulates principally in London and, with the exception of a few copies circulated in Wales, in Birkenhead, in Newcastle and in Southampton, it cannot be said to reach the Party members outside London. This isolation is partly to be explained by the secrecy imposed upon us by the fact that up to recently all our members were active within the Party, and partly by the slow development of Opposition work.

"We are now in a much better position to conduct our work openly in the name of the Opposition and also to cover, through this open work, such contacts as we have inside the Party. Such being the case, the question of how we are to proceed under the new conditions is all important, since we need not only to hold those supporters we have but also to make the most of the publicity surrounding the expulsions.

"The differences on the E.C. are not to do with "agitation or propaganda". Superficially they are not to do with the basis of the Left Opposition. All the members accept, in words at any rate, that the Left Opposition seeks to bring back the Communist International to its original principles. The differences are revealed most acutely when we face the problem as to how the Left Opposition's tasks can best be carried out in England.

"First we need to take into account a fact that distinguishes the English Party from other European parties. In this country the struggle within the Communist International produced no conflict within the British Party. None of the documents of the Opposition was available to English Communists. The Party leadership was able to stifle discussion with ease and the English Party members' knowledge of the struggle of the Opposition was gleaned exclusively from the resolutions of the Party leadership. Here, of course, is expressed the political backwardness of the British proletarian movement. This makes necessary careful and detailed explanations of the form of many early documents. Most of us agree that this needs to be done; some of our members, however, seem to be concerned exclusively with this.

"The publication of such material is not by itself a justification for existence. A printer could do this quite easily. We have as our work the regeneration of the C.I., seeking to win it back to the path of Lenin and Trotsky. Partly this can be done by the publication of Left Opposition material. But to regenerate the C.I. we have to train new cadres, new leadership. Stalinist rule stifles discussion and initiative, crushed the live and most thinking members into blind obedience and the mechanical carrying out of false policies. No alternative leadership can develop under such conditions for these conditions exist to prevent such development.

"It is here that those who are so ready to express their concern at the danger of tendencies toward a second party show hesitation. For if we are to help in training leadership, we and our members must participate in every phase of the workers' struggle. How otherwise can we learn to lead, to build, to win support, to grasp the feeling of the masses and to frame policies and issue the correct slogans? It is only by such a combination of theoretical study with practical activity that the Bolshevik-Leninists can establish the Communist Party at the head of the working-class. The difficulty for some of our members is that in this way we publicly clash with the Party. But once it is agreed that such work is essential then it must be recognised that we cannot avoid open criticism of false Party policies in the Unions and in the Factories. More than that, we must also learn to initiate campaigns, test our own slogans, and set them against those wrong slogans issued by the Party. We win the workers to Leninism, especially the Communist workers, by showing them the strength and correctness of our principles.

"But, exclaim our would-be publishers, you are lining up with the workers by such methods against the Party. To this we must reply: WE ARE TEACHING THE WORKERS TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE POLICY OF LENIN AND THE POLICY OF STANLIN. It needs to be emphasised that those who, in practice, deny the need for such mass activity are, in spite of their lip-service against anti-Party tendencies, actually denying the basis of the Party, i. e. the training of revolutionary leadership. To expect that the neatly produced papers and pamphlets will win us support in the Party and also develop a Bolshevik leadership inside the Party is to show a one-sidedness likely to retard the progress of Left Opposition ideas. Strangely enough, in the small area where the two policies have been contrasted in an embryonic form, the Party members show more respect to those who are accused of being anti-Party than to our would-be publishers who prostrate themselves reverently at the mention of the word PARTY.

"This conflict of opinion as to the best method of Opposition work for some time underlying all the arguments about the kind of material we should publish in the COMMUNIST. There are those who see only the necessity to publish material on Germany, articles by L.T., and documents of historical interest. It is true that in every way such material

needs to be placed in the hands of Party membership. But the Party members, the majority of whom are new, find their difficulties and their first questionings of Party policy when working in the Unions, the Factories and among the unemployed. Their difficulties are the difficulties of the revolution; we must help them, meet their difficulties and discuss them, offer our criticisms of the Party's mistakes and weaknesses and hammer out a satisfactory policy. When we took upon ourselves the responsibility of building a British Section of the International Left Opposition, we did not thereby form just a translating bureau. In common with the Communist parties of the world, the British Party suffered the heavy blows of the Stalinist policy. To do our work effectively we need to demonstrate this effectively on the home front. Sheltering behind the admitted necessity of publishing L.T.'s contributions to Bolshevik strategy and tactics, some members of our E.C. refuse to apply the ideas, the principles, and the slogans contained in this material to the daily problems and the main strategical tasks of the English revolution.

"From the above, the main differences on the E.C. can be seen. It is necessary that the E.C. lay down among its chief tasks:

- (1) The organising, wherever the possibility exists, of discussion groups out of which should come regular Opposition groups:
- (2) The work of these Opposition groups to be: penetration into the Party, not by just collecting a number of people and sending them into the Party, but by winning to our side the best and the keenest of the Party members: obligatory participation in all phases of the working-class movement; to fight side by side with the Party members wherever possible, but to criticise openly wrong Party policies and to place before the workers correct slogans and policies.
- (3) Regular publication of the COMMUNIST, devoting, save under exceptional circumstances, a half or even two-thirds of the paper to problems confronting the English revolutionary movement.
- (4) Issuing of agitational leaflets and leads on current problems: for example, the Tom Mann arrest, the Hunger March, the United Front, the T.U.C. Unemployed Demonstration, the credits to Russia, on Germany, etc. Where possible the groups should do this, but the E.C. must encourage and help them.
- (5) To establish contact with and gain support among the Left Wing Youth. To help them understand the real Bolshevism and to win them to our side.
- (6) Preparation of a pamphlet explaining simply what the Left Opposition is.

If the E.C. attempts these taks it will begin to correct our one-sided development.

London, 3 Feb., 1933

Reg Groves

- (23) The "Pre-Conference (1933) statement of Comrade Dewar" is in "For Discussion", No.10.
- (24) The original text of this resolution is in the Sara-Maitland papers, headed "Resolution". There is a translation of it into French in the possession of the E.D.I., Paris.

"This members meeting of the British section, International L.O., views with grave concern the situation inside its leading Committee. The non-functioning of the Committee has made the work of the active members much more difficult, has reduced the publication side of our work to nil, and has prevented the organisational consolidation and growth of our movement. The seriousness of the position is evident by the complete failure to respond to the critical developments in Germany. It is clear that such a position cannot be allowed to continue without harmful results to the L.O. and we therefore desire the following steps to be taken to remedy this unsatisfactory state of affairs. The committee of seven to be elected from this meeting. This Committee must consist of active and trusted Oppositionists connected with organised Opposition work with the members and the masses; must report regularly to the members; must keep documented records of its discussions and decisions; establish close and regular relations with the International Secretariat; must meet not less than monthly and choose from its members a Secretariat of three to carry on the work between Committee meetings. The Committee must set to work to carry out the following tasks within the next three months:

- (1) To secure the establishment of functioning Opposition groups wherever three or more of our members are in a given union, factory, area, or district. Such possibilities exist have done for some time, in two or three places and no further delay must be tolerated by the Committee. Where there are only one or two comrades every effort should be made to commence discussion groups of selected party and non-party comrades which should be given every encouragement by the Committee.
- (2) Where groups exist or are formed their work is to be penetration into the party and the working class for the winning of the best elements to our side for the work of regenerating the C.I.. Every member of these groups must, under the control of the groups, participate as actively as possible in all phases of the working class movement. In the Unions, Co-operatives, NUWM., etc., we fight side by side with the party wherever possible but speak out openly against false policies, and in their place advocate correct policies and slogans. The groups must also be training ground for our members and regular

classes and discussions need to be held.

- (3) Consider seriously the question of recruiting into the Opposition and take steps to win to our side more proletarian elements.
- (4) ORGANISE CAMPAIGN FOR PRINTED PAPER TO BE ISSUED ON MAY 1ST.
- (5) To publish at least three numbers of the Communist prior to the above date.
- (6) Issuing of more agitational leaflets on important current events.
- (7) Organising of ILO Pre-Congress discussion by the publication of material, and contributions in an internal bulletin. First issue to be out by the 30th March.
- (8) To consider seriously the weaknesses of our work among Left-Wing Youth, Colonial contacts etc., and to remedy same.
- (9) A full meeting of members to be called three months from this date to hear a report of the Committee and to discuss final resolutions, nominations etc., for the ILO Congress.

WE members assembled give our full and wholehearted support to the new Committee in the carrying out of these tasks. At such a critical time for the International movement it is necessary for every Bolshevik-Leninist to give devoted and unstinted service to the building of a strong British section of the ILO."

- (25) An attempt to appraise the background to the statement of March 5, 1933 by the Executive Committee of the Communist International, and the document itself, are in De Gras, Vol.III, pp.248-254. See also Robert Black, "Fascism in Germany", Vol.II, p.936.

Light is shed on the discussion on the United Front in the British group by a document in the Sara-Maitland papers signed, "H.A.", presumably by "H. Allen", an American academic who was in London at this time. Miss Margaret Johns has informed the writer that "Allen" supported the "minority" which decided at the beginning of 1934 to go into the I.L.P.. The document reads:

"In accordance with the resolution of the National Committee (British Section) of 30 March, 1933, the following statement of position in relation to CRITICISM AND UNITED FRONT POLICY is submitted:

The offer of the Executive of the C.I. to withhold criticism for the duration of the united front is contrary to the elementary principles of the revolutionary united front policy. A communist organisation should not make (nor accept) openly

or by "understanding" such a proposition. To do so would be to take the first long step on the road that Stalin built in the matter of the Anglo-Russian Committee and the Kuomintang - the road of opportunism and consequent betrayal of the working class.

It is natural that Social Democrat leaders should try to establish an agreement for the withholding of criticism during the united front period. They and they only would stand to gain by it; because (1) their hesitations and betrayals would not be immediately exposed before the workers, and (2) such an agreement would furnish a convenient pretext for their breaking at any moment the united front.

By such an agreement the CP would lose four most important advantages of the united front:

- 1) The general revolutionary education of the working class;
- 2) The immediate exposure of the social democratic leaders;
- 3) The opportunity of demonstrating before the masses the irreducible difference between communism and social democracy;
- 4) The major portion of the pressure for holding the social democrats within the united front.

A further reason against accepting as correct the Executive's offer of no-criticism, and one that is of particular force to ourselves as Bolshevik-Leninists, is that: If we accept it as correct to have no criticism in relation to the united front, then still less can we demand for ourselves the full right of criticism upon our return to the official Party or even criticise the Stalinists from our present position. In other words, if the united front precludes criticism of one temporary ally by the other, then how can Bolshevik-Leninists justify their criticism before the masses of the Party leaders? It is clear that there is not a very long step between the acceptance of the Stalinist no-criticism of the social democrats under the united front and the Roman Well type of capitulation before the Stalinists.

The position taken here is not to be undermined by the giving of examples of the wrong sort of criticism employed by the Party in the past (e.g. Social-Fascism). Such criticism should not be used, not because a united front happens to be in existence, but because it is bad criticism - bad whether or not a united front happens to exist. Any criticism that is sound Marxist criticism is as much justified during the existence of the united front as it is in the periods (which should be as few and as short as we can make them) in which a united front does not exist.

While it is true that during the united front we shall usually find it more useful to intensify our criticism in direct relation to the development of the united front, this by no means signifies that we temporarily ignore the past crimes

of our united front allies. Their present-day behaviour is too intimately tied up with their behaviour in the past to allow us to do that. Nor does it signify that we cease or even mitigate our criticism of the social democrats in relation to matters not directly involved in the united front agreement. Here again the ties are too close to permit our considering that.

5 April 1933

H.A.

- (26) "Documents of the Fourth International", p.8, pp.13-46.
- (27) "On the State of the Left Opposition" in "Writings: 1932-33", p.24.
- (28) "The International Left Opposition: Its Tasks and Methods" in "Writings: 1932-1933", p.48.
- (29) Groves, op. cit., p.74. Breitman informed the writer, in a letter August 31, 1977 that Wicks informed him, while he was in U. S. A. earlier in the summer of 1977, that Groves left the pre-conference because he was not interested in what was going on.
- (30) "A Great Success" in "Writings: 1932-33", p.129. "In the last few years, not a few documents have been written, including the official Comintern programme, which had only one single aim: to gloss over ideological contradictions, reconcile irreconcilable opinions, justify total errors, and conceal the vacillations of the leadership, not to speak of its formulae. The programmatic theses offered at this conference were of quite a different kind. The purpose of these theses - which distinguished the Left Opposition from all other currents and groups in the Communist camp - was to show why it opposes them as particular organisations, and, moreover, not to show it in abstract, theoretical formulae which permit of different interpretations, but with concrete reference to revolutionary experiences in all countries of the world. In the eleven paragraphs of the theses there were not the slightest political 'improvisations'; every line presented only the headings of the definite chapters of past fights in which the views of the Bolshevik-Leninists came implacably into collision with the views of bureaucratic centrism."
- (31) The text of this letter has been supplied by Mr. Louis Sinclair. The exhibition commemorating the 50th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx was held at Transport House on March 4 and 5, 1933. "Workers' Notebook", in "Daily Worker", March 7, 1933, described what went on in these terms:

"The National Council of Labour Colleges and the National Trade Union Club held a meeting in London on Saturday to commemorate Marx.

The well-known "Marxian" scholar, Mr. George Hicks, proposed the "Immortal memory of Karl Marx."

He expressed great concern lest the large number of Marx manuscripts in the Social-Democratic headquarters in Berlin should be interfered with by the Nazis.

We are not aware that Mr. Hicks showed any concern when the German Social-Democrats, trampling Marxism under foot, were asking the workers to vote for Hindenburg as a lesser evil compared with Hitler.

Laski Patronises Marx

Mr. Hicks was followed by Harold Laski, who is competing with G.D.H. Cole as the "theoretician" of the Labour Party.

"Was it not about time the Labour Party became a Marxian Party? He was a bit tired of a Labour movement that took its inspiration from the dead nonconformity of the 1860's, and from moribund Gladstonianism. He might not pass muster as an orthodox adherent of Marxian economics; it was by Marx the historian that he was moved, but still more by Marx the Man."

Harold forgets his little booklet on "Karl Marx", where the alleged fallacies of the latter are politely "exposed" in the best Laskian manner.

When Marx critics begin to ask why is not the Labour Party Marxian? then it is time to wonder what the game is.

Did Marx Turn in His Grave?

The joke of the evening was a telegram from Herbert Morrison, in which he said that he personally had a great respect for Marx's doctrines, although it had been the fashion to neglect them in this country.

This was too much. At the mere idea of the author of the London Transport Bill having the slightest knowledge of, let alone respect for Marx, even the most case-hardened trade union bureaucrats had to guffaw.

The next "Marxian" to speak was Jean Longuet, of France, whose only claim to being a "Marxian" is that he is Marx's grandson.

After Longuet, Ben Tillett spoke and the meeting concluded.

Hicks, Tillett, Longuet, Laski, Herbert Morrison. This is the assembly of "Marxists" whom the National Council of Labour Colleges assembles to do honour to Marx.

All that was wanted to complete the picture was John S. Clarke with his pet snake, Sir Ben Turner, with Marx's "Capital" in one hand and the Bible in the other, and the galaxy of N.C.L.C. "Marxists" would have been complete".

This sardonic language might be misleading. The relations of the Communist Party with the National Council of Labour Colleges were more complex. Henry Sara reviewed the first volume of Trotsky's "History of the Russian Revolution" in "Plebs", September 1932 (p.196), and defended Trotsky from the slanders of the Stalinists. In the course of 1933, on the other hand,

T.A. Jackson is frequently met writing in "Plebs", among other members of the Communist Party. The June 1933 "Plebs" attacks the German Social-Democratic Party for making possible the victory of Hitler, without mentioning the role of the K.P.D.. At the same time, there are several efforts in the columns of "Plebs", for example, by Arthur Woodburn, to exploit the Trotskyist criticisms of "Third Period" ultra-leftism for the benefit of reformism. The role of the N.C.L.C. is an interesting part of the intellectual history of the British Left which awaits its historian.

- (32) The papers about the four I.L.P.ers are in the archives of the Workers' Revolutionary Party. The New York "Militant" published the letter July 8, 1933.
- (33) The Revolutionary Policy Committee is the name of an organised faction which arose in the I.L.P. in the period before that party dis-affiliated from the Labour Party in July 1932. The Revolutionary Policy Committee played an important role in the I.L.P. in 1933 but finally capitulated to Stalinism towards the end of 1935. Its basis and evolution are described in Chapter IV of this work. The Revolutionary Policy Committee expressed certain criticisms of the Communist Party's "Third Period" ultra-leftism, but acted as a screen in the I.L.P. to protect Stalinism there from the deeper theoretical criticism of the Trotskyists.
- (34) From the Sara-Maitland papers:
STATEMENT FROM MEMBERS OF THE 1931-1933 COMMITTEE OF THE BRITISH GROUP OF THE LEFT OPPOSITION.
April 18, 1933.

The British Group of the Left Opposition is the only organised opposition fraction working within the C.P.G.B.. Consequently there is real danger of 'right' and 'ultra-left' elements gravitating to the L.O. and seeking in it an outlet for their non-bolshevik tendencies. This makes it essential that the differences which exist in the L.O. shall not be smothered or ignored in the name of 'organisation', but shall be exactly defined and a correct line patiently sought. We have to draw attention to the recent events and decisions in the British Group which demonstrates the dangers it is running into by ignoring the politics of its internal difficulties and differences.

The foundation meeting of the British Group was lamentably unconcerned with politics. It was marked by a vigorous determination to get an L.O. group set up in Britain at all costs; and also by the absence of any attempt to ensure political unity of the basis of an L.O. platform. Comrade Shachtman's main demands were: - (1) a typewriter and duplicator for 'publicity'; (2) a comrade willing to be 'martyred' by expulsion from the party; (3) an address of a reputable comrade for organising purposes. Shachtman cannot be blamed because the foundation meeting was a meeting of friends; but it was everyone's duty to ensure that the meeting was

united not only on personal grounds but on political: this was not done.

The original failure has been repeated throughout the group's existence and the point has now been reached at which a meeting of the British Group (summoned by the Balham Group, not by the Central Committee) has removed the original executive and replaced it by another; without requiring or permitting reports (organisation, financial or political) upon work; without information as to the suitability of the new committee for the tasks facing it; without any report as to the character of those tasks. The old committee was removed and the new one elected in response to the explicit demands of Comrade Groves for the break-up of the alliance of Sara, Wicks and Purkis and the election of a committee in which Groves should have the 'hegemony'.

Comrade Groves is active. He is, in some ways, able. But even if he possessed a monopoly of political ability it would be in the highest degree undesirable to present to any individual political 'hegemony'; and Comrade Groves' political abilities certainly do not entitle him to such a position, as the record of the British Group of the L.O. makes very clear. We ask consideration of our view of the position of the British Group of the Left Opposition.

The work of the British Group is hampered by the British Party's almost complete ignorance of the substance and history of the 'Trotskyist' controversy. The main tasks facing the group are: -

- (1) Publication in Britain of all essential material on the issues raised by the Left Opposition.
- (2) Training of cadres by collective work on Opposition theory; collective consideration of the application of Opposition theory to the problems confronting the British Party and working class; and associated Opposition work in the British working-class movement.
- (3) The organisation of Opposition work in the Party.
- (4) General propaganda for Bolshevik Leninism directed to the working-class organisations.

Although the American comrades have published so much L.O. material in English, the difficult character of the American versions, and the high price of their pamphlets, have made it difficult to secure for them any considerable circulation. (Reports of sales must evidence this). Consequently the production of the material in a cheap English edition is imperative. But the financial and technical difficulties, the differences on policy, the overbearing manners and the contempt of Comrade Groves for the opinions of his comrades have been permitted to hinder even the duplicating of L.D.T.'s material in any consider-

able quantities. (Here it must be remarked that the publication in the 'Bulletin' of 'Germany: the Key to the International Situation' and the 'Letter to a German Worker' was opposed by Comrade Groves with great vigour; and that the sales of these by the Balham Group were extremely small. There is even evidence of refusal to sell. The publication of these pamphlets was one of the few things on which Groves' policy 'British Material not Trotsky Documents' was resolutely fought).

The viewpoint of the committee majority was that the production of the material on the outstanding L.O. position, the collective study of the material, and the formulation of an L.O. position, the collective study of the material, and the formulation of an L.O. platform on the international issues facing British workers was immediately essential to the building up of the British Group.

The line of Comrade Groves can be seen from the manifestoes of the Balham Group, which, it must be emphasised, are very much more the expression of the individual thinking and line of Groves than Group documents. The Balham manifestoes evidence a much greater desire to snatch any opportunity to attack the Party leadership than to think out and prepare material which would build up respect among the workers for the policy of the Opposition. The Balham Group's line in the letters to the Secretariat on the Trade Union question, published in the Daily Worker, is the line of the 4th R.I.L.U. Congress; that of the more vigorous application of "independent leadership" (!) The letter of the Balham Group to the Party Congress placed the Balham Group with Dutt and Rust against Pollitt and Gallacher. (This in striking contrast to the sound line on this matter given in the Canadian 'Vanguard' which welcomed Pollitt's changed line while not ignoring its faults). The letter issued in connection with the S.W. London Anti-War Committee, prepared by Groves, was bitterly anti-party in essence. (Yet this letter employed one of the worst tricks of the Party bureaucracy by adding to it the signatures of L.O. comrades who had not signed the document, had not even seen it, but who when they saw it disagreed with it, and later, publicly retracted it.)

It is also to be noted that a curiously tactless and unconvincing document has been issued over the signature of four members of the I.L.P. who are under the political direction of Groves - repudiating the I.L.P., declaring their faith in the C.I., and declaring support for the line of the Opposition. When challenged on this matter by the I.L.P. headquarters, two of the four signatories have repudiated the statement.

These are some of the features of the work of Comrade Groves which make ridiculous his claim for 'hegemony' of his viewpoint in the committee (a claim supported by Comrade Dewar) and leaves us without confidence in Groves' political judgment.

On the other hand, we admit that Groves has played a large part - aided by Sara, Wicks - in creating the Balham Group which broke with the Party. It is, however, to be noted, that Groves opposed this group joining the Opposition. He preferred to campaign against the Left Opposition Committee amongst the group members; and to threaten the Committee with action by the Balham Group if it dissented from his policy (e.g. at a small Committee meeting those who, in opposition to Groves, were in favour of publishing 'Soviet Economy in Danger' in the Bulletin were threatened with the creation of a separate L.O. organisation; the Balham Group, which would remove them and elect a new committee.)

Reviewing the Committee work we admit that it was not sufficiently vigorous in defining differences and re-acting to events. We acknowledge the activity of Groves and Dewar (especially in work amongst the I.L.P. and with the I.L.P. against the Party). We consider that Purkis and Wicks have lacked insistence and determination in their work on the Secretariat and especially do we condemn them for permitting Groves - acting as an individual - to issue manifestoes in the name of the Group, whilst they failed to publish material on the German crisis because Groves absented himself from Secretariat meetings, admittedly to render impossible a quorum, and then objected to the publication of any manifesto which a full Secretariat meeting had not endorsed. (We condemn this legalism faced with Groves' obstructionism. Groves' conduct is, of course, even more reprehensible).

This situation created by the Balham-Group-called-General-Meeting does not bode well for the future of the British Group. It was ill-prepared (no reports; no analysis of differences of opinion; no lines of policy from those who were candidates for the Central Committee). It was irregularly called. (It was not endorsed by the Secretariat or the C.C.; one member of the C.C. was not advised of the meeting; another member - the treasurer - was not notified until the previous evening; another member, Comrade Sara, was absent on a month's propaganda tour and due to return the following day. (The removal of Sara from the committee was being widely canvassed by Groves). And yet Groves secured the attendance at the meeting of a non-member, Dr. Worrall, favourable to Groves' point of view).

It is true that Groves prepared the ground for the meeting; he did not, however, seek by political discussion to define differences, and to end political disagreement in a correct common viewpoint but sought in private interviews to secure 'support' and 'alliances'. (Both Purkis and Davis were so approached).

The meeting itself was regrettably lacking in a sense of responsibility. (It endorsed by a majority vote the participation in the meeting of Dr. Worrall; expelled from the Party as a police spy, when Groves was Assistant Organiser of

the C.P.G.B. London District, and deliberately by C.C. decision not admitted to membership as no complete examination of the charges has been made).

The meeting did not resent Groves' demand for hegemony; it elected a committee to support Groves' general line. (It is highly significant that a non-Party member, an I.L.P. er, M. Nicholls, who declared there was "too much Trotsky in the Bulletin", after making that statement, received nine votes).

The manifesto "Even now they blunder" and the editorial of the April issue of the Bulletin are the first fruits of the activities of the new committee; they go far to confirm our fears for L.O. development under Comrade Groves' hegemony.

The manifesto "Even now they blunder" utilises a selection from quotations compiled by Comrade Wicks, and gives the British Groups lead on the C.P.G.B.'s United Front proposals. It is not a "United Front" manifesto. (Neither the manifesto nor the April Bulletin editorial restates in the light of recent events the yet more imperative arguments for the United Front against Fascism!). It is not an intelligently critical, communist document, but an undiscerning anti-party document. (It calls the proposals half-hearted when they are dangerously "unity at any price". It says the C.I. 'has left the job to its sections to act nationally' when the fact is that it has instructed them on what lines to act nationally). It fails to offer the criticism - which any sound L.O. member must make - it does not critically examine; it does not mention in criticism, it does not even quote, the C.I.'s recommendation "during the common fight against Fascism to refrain from making attacks on the social democratic organisations." (It is to be noted that Pollitt's declaration of August 9, 1932, that the I.L.P. demand for the dropping of criticism "is a demand that must be mercilessly fought" is quoted amongst highly objectionable Party statements without comment, presumably either because Pollitt's declaration is wrong in principle or because any change whatever by the Party is a score for us. But in view of the fact that Comrade Groves has spoken publicly on the C.P.G.B. proposals without exposing "no attacks during common fight"; and since Groves defended that point of view to Comrade Wicks, it can only be concluded that the British Group endorsed the C.P.G.B.'s new policy of "refrain from attacks"). The manifesto does not raise the question of ending Red Trade Union organisations as an essential step to unity in the trade unions and factories.

Significantly the manifesto several times refers to the "United Front of Communist and Socialist organisations" without once making it clear that it is a united front limited to specific acts and measures on a specific issue. Significantly the manifesto "expects" - without resentment - that the Labour Party and Trade Unions will refuse to United Front, talks vaguely of a "serious campaign to rouse the masses" and thus finds another chance - on an incorrect charge - to attack the Communist Party. (No thought-out

L.O. proposals for pressure in reformist organisations or the reporting of Unity discussions are given).

There is no word in the document of the British Group of the L.O. - save the cry for the Lenin-Trotsky policy of the 3rd and 4th C.I. Congresses; meaningless to the mass of British readers - WHICH MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN ISSUED BY THE LEFT OR RIGHT WING GROUPS OF THE I.L.P. There are elements in the document which show it as the product of a mind mainly anti-party. There are points missing from this document which are vital points in the struggle of the L.O. against the policy of the Labour Party, the I.L.P. and the C.P.G.B.

The manner of the election of the new committee; the support of the meeting for the claim for the hegemony of Groves; the conduct of the meeting in changing its C.C. without discussing policy are things we cannot endorse. We are anxious to work for the Left Opposition, but we are unable to do so under a committee elected to give hegemony to Groves.

That the membership of the British Group shall be better equipped for the future work, it is necessary that the lessons of its last eighteen months' work shall be reviewed, analysed and reported upon.

That the work shall be efficiently performed it is essential that the political and organisational needs of the Opposition be considered and reported upon to the membership; and that recommendations for a panel of candidates be brought for election to a properly convened meeting of the membership.

We urge that the preparations for such a meeting shall be effected by a committee consisting of: - WICKS ALLAN SARA GROVES PURKIS and that it prepare a report and submit its report to a meeting of members before May 31st.

(Signed) H. Davis. S. Purkis. H. Wicks. E.S. Williams.

- (35) The first issue of "Red Flag" carries Trotsky's article, "The German Workers will Rise Again! Stalinism Never!" (in "The Struggle Against German Fascism", p.375). It published also a letter from the German Trotskyists, head-lined, "On the Anti-Fascist Front". This reports:

"The paper of our German section, "Permanent Revolution", was banned by the Nazis in common with all other revolutionary journals. Less than two weeks after, our comrades issued a new paper, 'Unser Wort', which is now being illegally distributed."

The same report confirms the impression, conveyed by the attacks of the Stalinists on the South-West London Anti-War Committee, that they regarded the suppression of the Trotskyists as a task of major importance. The report also refers to the opposition by K.P.D. officials to attempts to form united

fronts between K.P.D. members and Social-Democrats, expulsions from the K.P.D. of anyone associating with Trotskyists, and failure to prepare for illegality; especially in the factories.

The front-page article, addressed to "Comrade Reader", states:

"We do not at this stage seek to form a new party or a new international ... In the Communist Party of Great Britain, the reign of the bureaucrats has so far been uninterrupted and complete. Discussion of any real character has been prevented by the simple method of expulsion, and by keeping from the Party all the essential documents ... around our paper we shall group the best and most loyal revolutionary workers. In this way we seek to serve the interests of the working-class, to re-unite the true Communists of all countries."

(36) The letter about the publication of the Copenhagen speech reads:

"Dear Comrade Groves,

March 29, 1933

I am naturally not opposed to the idea of the Independent Labour Party publishing my Copenhagen speech. With the exception of such cases where I am bound by bourgeois publishers I recognise the right of any workers organisations publishing my works. Concerning the proposed introduction by Mr. Maxton, I could only express the wish that the author of the introduction explain clearly the differences which exist between us. Only such an open procedure can serve the cause of the working class.

I am also ready to send you all my manuscripts simultaneously with them being forwarded to the other sections; but unfortunately you have no-one there knowing the Russian language. An important part of these manuscripts, however, are translated into French at Prinkipo, and we will send you regularly all the French translations from here.

With the very best wishes, I remain
Comradely yours"

When the I.L.P. published the speech which Trotsky had delivered in Copenhagen on November 27, 1932, Maxton wrote a foreword, characteristically half-welcoming and half-disclaiming it. Trotsky wrote to the "New Leader":

"The foreword contains an idea to which I feel obliged to take exception. Maxton refuses in advance to enter into the merits of those disagreements that separate me and my co-thinkers from the new ruling faction in the U.S.S.R. 'This is a matter on which only the Russian socialists are competent to decide.' ... Admitting the possibility of the theoretical and practical solution of the problems of socialism within national limits, Maxton admits the correctness of the Stalinist faction, which bases itself

on the theory of 'socialism in a single country'."
("Writings: 1933-34", p.33: "Is Soviet Policy a Matter
on which only Russian Socialists are Competent to Decide?")

Trotsky seems to have overlooked that Wicks had a good knowledge of Russian, acquired during his three years at the Lenin School in 1927-1930. Later in 1933 the group attracted two others, one of whom was D.D. Harber, who were not only competent in Russian but had made visits to the Soviet Union which were unusually extended for the period. For a biographical note on D.D. Harber, see Appendix Document A.. They were both graduates of the London School of Economics, and found their way to the Left Opposition because they found in the Bulletin of the Opposition an explanation for the contrast, which they had experienced, between the glowing claims of economic success made by the Communist Party's press on behalf of the Soviet government, and the actual privations and bureaucracy which they had seen in Russia during the First Five-Year Plan and the forced collectivisation.

The letter of greeting which Trotsky sent to "Red Flag" after the first number appeared is in "Writings: 1932-33", p.236, dated May 19, 1933. He recommended that a critical examination of the policy of the British Communist Party during the last eight or ten years would be a most important task in educating the Left Opposition.

"You should study the official publications of the party throughout this period carefully, digest them and reveal the party line on the main strategic problems ... The mere selection of the most striking quotations and the presentation of them in chronological order would expose not only the glaring contradictions of the 'general line', but also the inner logic of these contradictions, that is, the violent oscillation of the centrist bureaucracy between opportunism and adventurism."

It was to be a long time before this work was undertaken: see R. Black, "Fascism in Germany" and "Stalinism in Britain", and Woodhouse and Pearce, "Essays in the History of Communism in Britain."

- (37) "Writings: 1932-33": p.148, dated March 23, 1933.
- (38) This piece is not the same as "What About Rakovsky?", which is in "Writings: 1932-33", p.157, dated March 23, 1933. Yakutsk is in North-East Siberia, on the Lena River, north of the 60° parallel of latitude.
- (39) This is "The Degeneration of Theory and the Theory of Degeneration", in "Writings: 1932-33", p.215, dated April 29, 1933.
- (40) "A Conversation with a Social-Democratic Worker" is in "The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany", p.349, dated February 23, 1933. The duplicating of the pamphlet produced by the British section is well done, like all their technical work at this time.

- (41) "Writings: 1932-33", p.95, dated March 3, 1933.
- (42) "For Discussion" No.5 is dated May 24, 1933. It deals principally with the discussion in the British section of the lessons to be drawn from the collapse of the K.P.D., which dominate the whole of Chapters Two and Three.
- (43) During the summer of 1933 the Communist Party was enabled to extend its influence on the members of the I.L.P. thanks to a "United Front" agreement between the leaders of the two Parties. This agreement was the only substantial result in Britain of a series of international declarations in favour of working-class unity, which began to appear early in that year and which differed from the "unity" appeals which the Communist Parties frequently issued during the "Third Period" which consisted of calls to social-democratic workers to "unite" with the Communist Parties by abandoning their own organisations and leaderships.

The first appeals for united action between the major workers' organisations came from the pre-conference of the International Left Opposition, and from a meeting of "Left Socialist Parties" early in February. (For information about the "Left Socialist Parties", see footnote (22) in Chapter Three). An appeal from the Bureau of the Labour and Socialist International (the "Second International") followed.

In Britain the "Daily Worker" at first received these appeals (for example, in an editorial on February 22, 1933) with abuse, starting:

"In face of the present situation of rapidly deepening crisis and tremendously rising growth of working-class militancy, the Social-Democratic leaders, feeling the ground more and more slipping away from under their feet, are desperately striving through "Left" phrase-mongering and manoeuvring to keep their grip on the workers and at the same time sidetrack the whole working-class fight.

"The latest example of this can be seen in the 'call' which has just been issued by the Bureau of the Second International. In aim and purpose this manifesto is similar to that recently published by the seven 'Left' Socialist Parties, which include the I.L.P."

However, on March 5 the Executive Committee of the Communist International instructed its constituent Communist Parties to offer individually to Social-Democratic Parties (including, in Britain, the I.L.P.) agreements for joint activity on a basis of abstention from and suppression of mutual criticism. The Communist Party of Great Britain wrote in these terms to the Labour Party and the I.L.P.. The Labour Party rebuffed the approach:

"If the British working-class hesitate now between majority and minority rule and toy with the idea of dictatorship, Fascist or Communist, they will go down to servitude such as they have never suffered."

The I.L.P. replied favourably and a collaboration between the two Parties which already existed was developed into close co-operation at the level of local branches during the summer of 1933.

Chapter Two

Appendix

Document A Political Biography of D. D. Harber

Denzil Harber (born 1909, died 1966) studied at the London School of Economics in 1927-1930, where he learned Russian. He joined the Communist Party about 1929. In the summer of 1932 he visited the Soviet Union as a Russian-speaking courier to an American tourist. The effects of the forced collectivisation and of bureaucracy, which he saw, appalled him. On his return he tried to open discussion on his experiences in the Communist Party, but was met at first with disbelief and then with slander. Whether he withdrew or was expelled from the Communist Party is not known.

He discovered copies of the Bulletin of the Opposition in a bookshop in London, wrote to Trotsky and was put in touch with the Communist League, which he joined in 1933.

He supported the "minority" and went into the I.L.P. in the spring of 1934. He played a secondary part in starting the "Marxist Group in the I.L.P." and withdrew from it some time in 1935, to join the Labour Party and the Socialist League, believing that the "Marxist Group in the I.L.P." had not clearly defined what it aimed at achieving in the I.L.P. and that it had no future.

He collaborated with Charles Van Gelderen in developing the "Bolshevik-Leninist Group in the Labour Party", and represented this group at the "First International Conference for the Fourth International" in July, 1936. In autumn 1936, with Starkey Jackson, he drew former members of the "Marxist Group in the I.L.P." into the Labour Party and the "Bolshevik-Leninist Group". He represented this group at the "Conference of All the British Bolshevik-Leninists" on October 11th, 1936. That group adopted the name "Militant Group" when it began to publish the "Militant" in January, 1937, and as part of its leadership Harber defended the tactic of entry into the Labour Party against the advocates of "open work" such as C.L.R. James and criticised the leaders of the "Marxist League", such as Groves, when they worked in the Labour Party, on the ground that they did so in an opportunistic way. He took part in the unsuccessful struggle in the Socialist League in the spring of 1937 against the proposal of Cripps, Mellor and the Communist Party that the Socialist League should dissolve itself in order to open the road to a Popular Front.

With James he represented the fused Revolutionary Socialist League (the new group produced by the fusion of the James-Wicks R. S. L. with the "Militant Group" and the Edinburgh Revolutionary Socialist Party in summer, 1938) at the Founding Conference of the Fourth International. On account of bad health, Harber moved from London about this time and lived for the rest of his life at Eastbourne. He was continuously in the leadership of the R. S. L. until it fused with the Workers' International League to form the Revolutionary Communist Party in spring, 1944. He drafted the main contribution of the R. S. L. to the Fusion Conference, on the basis of his earlier polemics against the W.I.L. about what he regarded as its "left-ist" attitude to the Labour Party and about "the military policy of the proletariat",

which in his opinion was opening the possibility of a concession to social patriotism in the conditions in which the W.I.L. put it forward.

Harber was a member of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Communist Party from 1944-1949 when it liquidated itself. Precisely when he withdrew from its leadership is not known. He supported the economic perspective of Haston, forecasting a world economic revival after the war, against the "catastrophic" economic perspective of Mandel, Cannon and Healy. When Haston announced in 1949 that he no longer accepted the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state, Harber proposed his expulsion from the British Section of the Fourth International.

In 1948-50 Harber collaborated with Healy in the Socialist Fellowship. He withdrew from political life in 1951 and about that time stated to the writer that he had come to believe that the difficulties in the way of constructing the Fourth International would be insuperable in his life time, because of the strength of Stalinism as a counter-revolutionary force.

No.4 THE BULLETIN OF THE BRITISH SECTION OF
THE LEFT OPPOSITION

April, 1933 Price 2d.

- Pages 1-2 (Editorial: ... During the short period of its existence the British Section of the International Left Opposition has published, in all, three of Comrade Trotsky's articles on the German situation: "Germany: The Key ...", (May, 1932), "A Letter ..." (Jan. 1930) and the article in the present number. We have issued several leaflets and documents including Trotsky's preface to the Polish edition of "Left Wing Communism" ... Our efforts (to) place the material in the hands of the Party members have been severely limited by our small resources ... Your help is needed immediately: send all money to R. Groves, 11 Manville Road, London S.W.17.)
- 2 LENIN'S LAST WORDS TO THE PARTY
(contd. on P.4)
- i-iv (INSERT) THE UNITED FRONT FOR DEFENCE.
A Letter to a Social-Democratic Worker (from La Verite) (by) L. TROTSKY
(to be concluded.)
- 3-4 "NO THOROUGHFARE: HARRY POLLITT'S 'ROAD
TO VICTORY' SPEECHES (at the 12th C. P. Congress, Nov. 1932)
- 4 cont. from p.2

(Published by the British Group, International Left Opposition,
at 11 Manville Rd. S.W.17.)

No.5 THE BULLETIN OF THE BRITISH SECTION OF
THE LEFT OPPOSITION

May 1933 Price 2d.

- Pages 1-2 - IF WE LET THEM
(Editorial: "... The Daily Worker continues to shout about the danger of war of intervention against the U. S. S. R. - from the Far East - Japan. But the far more urgent danger, the directing of the imperialist powers of Fascist Germany against the U. S. S. R., is kept in the background ... No imperialist power is more caught in this tangle of contradictions than the British ... American imperialists have internal difficulties that they will try to solve by external expansion - at the cost of Europe ... There is one way out - the United States of Europe - a Proletarian United States of Europe; and then a proletarian United States of the World. The regeneration of the Comintern is a necessary stage in the fight for the International revolution.")
- i-iv (insert) LEON TROTSKY'S PREFACE TO THE NEW
POLISH EDITION OF LENIN'S "LEFT-WING
COMMUNISM: AN INFANTILE DISORDER"
- iv BRIEF NOTES ON THE 12TH PLENUM by LEON
TROTSKY

v-x Continuation - Letter to a social democratic worker -
L. Trotsky

(Printed and published for the British Group of the International
Left Opposition by Reg. Groves at 11, Manville Road, London,
S.W.17).

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L. TROTSKY

2-5 (Pages 3-4 missing) MARIA REESE ACCUSES!

5-6 ANOTHER GERMAN LEADER REVOLTS (Letter
from KARL FRIEDBERG to Piatnitsky)
L. Trotsky: "Soviet Russia in Danger: Sound the
Alarm"

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No.7 Letter from Maria Reese to the E.C. of the C.I.

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CONGRESS, MOSCOW, 1918, TO PRESIDENT
WILSON.

AMERICAN COMMENTS ON THE AGREEMENT
N.Y. Times. November 8th 1933
C.C. of C.P., U.S.A.

2-4 THE DIPLOMACY OF LENIN AND
THE DIPLOMACY OF STALIN -- A CONTRAST
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Max Shachtman

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Pages 1-3 A LETTER TO AN I.L.P. MEMBER. (By) LEON
TROTSKY

This is the same as "Cardinal Questions Facing the
I.L.P.", which is in "Writings: 1933-34", p.186.
It appeared in "The Militant", January 27, 1934,
under the title, "The I.L.P. and the Fourth Inter-
national: Letter to a Member of the Independent

Labour Party".

(Published by H. Dewar for the Communist League, 36 West
Side, Clapham Common, S.W.4.)

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