

Chapter Five "The Marxist Group in the I.L.P.":
Autumn 1935 to Summer 1936

The Marxist Group in the I.L.P. appears to have reached its peak in early summer 1935. By summer 1936 it was disintegrating and Trotsky was repeating the advice, which he had already offered in November 1935, that its members should leave the I.L.P. and should join the Labour Party. The "minority" had forecast, in its document of October 12, 1933:

"Even if we fail in our main objective we should find ourselves at the end of the struggle, not only appreciably stronger than we are now, but stronger than we could reasonably hope to be if we remained at this stage an independent group".

This hope had been to some extent fulfilled.

This chapter analyses the process by which the Parliamentary Group of the I.L.P. inflicted a defeat on the Marxist Group, with the help of Brockway, and the policies of the leadership of the Marxist Group which contributed to its defeat. During the summer of 1935, Brockway's criticisms of Soviet foreign policy in the "New Leader", restrained and ambiguous as they often were, afforded a certain basis for the Marxist Group to collaborate with him and with Aplin in the London Division against the R.P.C. When Mussolini's armies invaded Abyssinia in August 1935, the leaders of the Marxist Group thought that they could get an agreement with Brockway and Aplin for a struggle in favour of "Workers' Sanctions", which might develop into an alliance with them against Maxton and McGovern, to drive the pacifists as well as the Stalinists out of the I.L.P. and to win it, with those who remained, to the Fourth International. They seem to have believed that they were only beginning to reap the fruits of their last year's work.

Harber, on the contrary, had already suggested that the possibilities for the work of Trotskyists in the I.L.P. were exhausted. He could not win much support for this view, and left the Marxist Group and the I.L.P. with a few followers, to join the Labour Party and the Socialists League. He collaborated with Charles van Gelderen in forming the "Bolshevik-Leninist Group in the Labour Party", which drew much support from the tendency opposed to the Stalinists in the Labour League of Youth which was evolving into the "Youth Militant"

group. The leaders of the Marxist Group argued that Harber's proposal was motivated, in part at any rate, by the hope of finding an easier environment than that of the I.L.P. in which to work.

At the same time, a theoretical consideration which deterred them from breaking with the I.L.P. was their belief that they would be aligning themselves politically with social-patriotism if they supported the Labour Party, even "critically", in the General Election of November 1935. The pacifists in the I.L.P. and the Marxist Group could agree that the official policy of the Labour Party (and of the Communist Party) of support for "League of Nations Sanctions" against Italy, would in practice be a means to recruit working-class support for the pursuit of British imperialist interests. They were influenced by the tradition of the I.L.P.'s resistance to the Great War (1), and reversed the electoral policy of "critical support" for the Labour Party, which they had earlier advocated, to adopt that of the I.L.P. leadership, which proposed that the I.L.P. should call on the electors not to vote in all those contests in which, either, no I.L.P. candidate was standing, or, the Labour candidate refused to repudiate the official policy of his Party. In practice, the only such Labour candidates were one or two pacifists.

In any case, as long as the leaders of the Marxist Group believed that they had more to gain from staying in the I.L.P., and were not preparing immediately to leave it, they had no alternative to carrying out its electoral policy. Further, their minds were influenced by the fear of imminent war, the belief that some "open", independent centre of opposition had at all costs to be created and the example of Liebknecht in the Great War. However, when it adopted the electoral policy of the I.L.P. it deprived itself of the one feature which clearly distinguished it from the supporters of Maxton and Brockway and which enabled it to identify with the movement in the working-class in favour of a Labour Government.

The only other distinguishing feature of the Marxist Group which these people could easily grasp was that it wanted the I.L.P. to declare for the Fourth International, in which they could see no point whatever. Therefore, when the Marxist Group dropped its own electoral policy

to adopt theirs, it appeared to have no further justification for existing, and strengthened the illusion that it merely wanted to involve the I.L.P. in some private dispute, based on "personalities", between Trotsky and Stalin, the political basis of which was beyond them. Consequently the Marxist Group thereafter could not extend its influence in the I.L.P.

None the less, the struggle between the pacifists and the Marxist Group about "Workers' Sanctions" did express, though on a small scale, real political differences, based on real forces in society. On the one hand, forces existed in the Labour Movement outside the I.L.P., to which Brockway could have turned for support, if he had wished to do so and had been in less of a hurry to capitulate to Maxton and McGovern (2). On the other hand, there was support for a pacifist, abstentionist, "Little England" point of view, which, for all the fervour with which the I.L.P. M.P.s denounced the "war-mongering" of the Labour and Communist Party leaders, enabled them to practice the traditional "live and let live" relationship of pre-disaffiliation I.L.P. with the trade union leaders. Their doctrine of "a plague on both your houses" relieved them of the political duty to encourage dockers or railwaymen to take action - which might at some point be "unofficial" - to stop supplies from reaching the Italian war-effort.

The work of members of the I.L.P. in trade unions was not systematically organised as an opposition to the leaders who supported the Right Wing of the Labour Party even after the York Conference in 1934 agreed that trade unionists might pay the political levy to the Labour Party. The I.L.P. had, indeed, a few serious, if somewhat bewildered, supporters among trade union militants, such as Charles Loughlin, who organised the abattoir workers in Leeds into N.U.D.A.W. and later went into Parliament, Will Lord of Todmorden, a bus driver who became a full-time official of Transport and General Workers' Union and Will Ballantyne, who became assistant general secretary of the N.U.R. These men generally carried on their struggles by their own inner light alone.

The Parliamentary Group of the I.L.P. organised its opposition to "Workers' sanctions" through the so-called "Inner Executive" of the National Administrative Council, which consisted of the three M.P.s,

Maxton, McGovern and Campbell Stephen, Brockway as General Secretary of the Party and editor of "New Leader" and of Aplin. Their majority in this committee secured their hold on the national office and the party press. They claimed to believe that "workers' sanctions could not be publicly distinguished from 'League of Nations Sanctions' and would help to create a psychology for war against Italy"(3). Brockway fell silent when the "Inner Executive" condemned his articles supporting "Workers' Sanctions", and justified his silence by the expectation that the difference would be settled at the next Conference - more than six months away! Meanwhile the war was going on, and the position of the I.L.P. got into difficulties those of its members who tried to present it to the public, because during the latter part of 1935 and the early months of 1936, the position of the Labour and Communist Parties was coming under criticism from people who wanted to find some way to prevent a war. The official position of the I.L.P. could attract only a few young men, the conscientious objectors of the coming World War Two, which enabled those who accepted it to say that they were opposed to war without laying any political obligations upon them. Consequently, many who might have been inclined to turn away from the Communist Party consoled themselves with the thought, "if it is good enough for Moscow, it is good enough for me". Others again were attracted by the Trotskyists.

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In autumn 1935 Aplin drafted a leaflet advocating "Workers' Sanctions" on the instructions of the London Divisional Council. The "Inner Executive" said that it must not be distributed. When Aplin tried to win support by circulating copies of the draft in the I.L.P., this also was forbidden. He then circulated a statement entitled: "Abyssinia: Must We Do Nothing?", in which he wrote:

"Fenner Brockway, as National Secretary, has ruled that the leaflet can NOT be circulated (throughout the Party) as its policy is contrary to Party policy. I have asked Maxton to show where our policy contravenes Derby decisions. The N.A.C. has made a serious blunder. Its negative, passive attitude is wrong both tactically and morally. And it has played into the hands of the organised treachery which I have been openly combatting in the London Division for the last six months. In the farrago of charges which constitute the R.P.C.'s silly efforts to justify its conduct, there is only

one point with any substance - and that is its claim that the I.L.P.'s Abyssinia policy is 'pacifist'. Even this is wrongly stated. What is wrong with the N.A.C. policy is not pacifism but passivism. Thorough-going convinced pacifists, such as the Quakers, are at least equipping Red Cross units to aid the Abyssinians. But the N.A.C. is not attempting even this ... Resolutions should be sent to Head Office supporting the policy of the Workers' Sanctions". (4) (5)

The conflict in the I.L.P. did not pass un-noticed internationally. The "Revolutionary Socialist Bulletin" of the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity (6) presented the relations between the I.L.P. and that body in an extraordinary light:

"The I.L.P. is the only political party opposing Sanctions through the capitalist-dominated League. It knows that they would be used for Capitalist and Imperialist purposes ... It advocates workers' action to stop war and has taken the initiative in forming local Committees of Action representative of all sections of the working-class opposed to Capitalist sanctions and war. It is calling a National Crisis Congress of all such organisations to plan resistance to war. This is to be held immediately after the General Election ..."

Meanwhile, the International Secretariat of the International Communist League, the Trotskyist centre, circulated two documents on the Italo-Abyssinian conflict. One is a "Declaration of the Bolshevik-Leninists of Italy, France and Germany", entitled, "The Position of the working class towards the Imperialist Conflict over Ethiopia". The other is an individual contribution to discussion, signed "Moulin" and entitled, "England and the War of Sanctions". (7)

"La Commune", the organ of the Frank-Molinier group in France, which had recently broken away from the official French section recognised by the International Secretariat, reported:

"The I.L.P. is turning strongly to the left, a tendency is developing in it for the creation of a Fourth International. Will it succeed in clarifying its positions and binding itself to the masses within the Trade Unions and the Labour Party?" (8)

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Shortly before the autumn Conference of the London Divisional Council of the I.L.P. on October 25 and 26 an issue of the "Bulletin of the Marxist Group" appeared. It contained nothing critical either of the "Inner Executive" or of Brockway for his subservience to it.

In an article entitled, "The Exposure of Gaster-ism", Matlow exploited the differences which had developed among the leaders of the R. P. C. (9), and attacked the policy statement which they had drafted for the Conference. Cullen could be seen to support the Communist Party without any appearance of reservations, while Gaster and Hilda Vernon were at pains to try to deal with the criticism that the policy of the Communist Party involved subordination to the interests of British Imperialism. There seemed still to linger in their minds the denunciations of the League of Nations which they had heard from, for example, the "Anti-War Movement" of 1933, and they appeared hesitant to rely on appeals to the League or to the "National" Government to preserve peace.

Matlow could, therefore, write:

"The awakening of Gaster was the result of a correct analysis of the Imperialist motives underlying the Italo-British clash. The motives of Britain having been exposed, it followed that the League of Nations was being used for imperialist aims, that the support of military and economic sanctions would commit the workers to the support of an imperialist war. The statement on the Abyssinian war had, therefore, to be anti-sanctionist. It had to reveal the League of Nations as a capitalist instrument. So far so good . . . Gaster waits hopefully for the Communist Party to return to the revolutionary road and collect the I. L. P. waggon. He does not realise that this divergence into Social-Chauvinism is the logical development of the whole Communist International line since 1924, and that the whole future of the Communist Parties in bourgeois-democratic countries lies in the rear of the reformist organisations.

"They assert, on the one hand, that as capitalism develops, so the drive for expansion develops; capitalism, in short, has no resort but to war. On the other hand, they write in the section on the League of Nations:

"When capitalism forced to the fore the need for expansion on the part of countries without colonies, the major powers fighting for the retention of the League as an instrument for the status quo, compelled those countries to withdraw from the League . . . the Soviet Union then joins the League . . . The League has now become an assembly of those countries whose interests are best served by peace. . . ."

He recalled that in the pre-conference discussion the Marxist Group had proposed to substitute the phrase "the status quo" for the word "Peace" at the end of this passage, and that Gaster had heatedly opposed the change. He commented:

"The present workers' internationals are engaged in urging the workers into the coming imperialist war, according to the statement. Do we take any action? Hush! We might offend the Communist International."

The remainder of the October 1935 issue of the "Bulletin of the Marxist Group" consisted of a resolution reversing the electoral policy of "critical support" for the Labour Party which the Marxist Group had hitherto advocated, a "majority" statement supporting the change and a "minority" statement in opposition to it. (10) The resolution was carried at a meeting of members of the Group in London on October 20. We do not know how many votes were cast for or against it, or how representative the meeting was.

Reports on the autumn Divisional Conferences in London and in Lancashire appear in the seventh (and final) issue of the "Bulletin of the Marxist Group", which is dated November 25, 1935. (11) The London report claims that the remnants of the R.P.C. had hoped to stay in the I.L.P. long enough to rally some of their former supporters to spread disorganisation before leaving. Their defeat at the hands of the Trotskyists had ended these hopes. Cullen had withdrawn immediately, but:

"Gaster, frightened with the consequences of remaining behind to face the Trotskyist wolves, did a somersault, wrote out a resignation to the N.A.C. which charged them with pursuing the same policies as he had been advocating, added a pathetic note that he could not also enter the C.P. because he had been advocating such policies - and then caught up with the flying Cullen".

The report claimed the passing of Clapham's resolution, condemning Soviet Russian social-patriotism as the most serious blow to "the C.P. sentimentalists" and R.P.C. Other blows had been the passing of Holborn's resolution opposing Peace Councils and the defeat of Harrow's resolution upholding the Divisional Council's opposition to Brockway's articles on Soviet foreign policy from the Communist Party's standpoint.

However, the discussion of electoral policy had cut across the old frontiers of the groups. Gaster and Aplin supported the new policy of the Marxist Group. Hilda Lane of the Marxist Group voted with the 100% Stalinist wing of the R.P.C. for "critical support" of the Labour Party. The final policy statement included an amendment from Holborn to allow support for any Labour candidates pledged to oppose League of Nations Sanctions or a war carried on by the British Government against another power with the approval of the League. Another amendment specifically attacking the pacifism of McGovern was carried unanimously.

The "Bulletin" naturally made the most of the defeat of the R. P. C. which:

"... has retired, beaten; forced to accept unconditionally the Communist Party line, and, in doing so, exposed the pretence of criticism and independence which enabled them to maintain their hold ... "

Matlow wrote, in "The R. P. C. Exodus":

"A year ago the Marxist Group was formed, determined to break the Stalinist stranglehold on the Party's revolutionary spirit. To the organisational oppression used against us, we opposed our political ideas ... We shall strive to gain acceptance of our comrades for (our) principles, not by snatching votes or machine bureaucracy, but by helping to build up the theoretical basis of the party, for in doing so we recognise that we are laying the foundations of a future revolutionary party - which is our aim. We thank the R. P. C. for helping us - by their exit!"

Matlow then warned:

"Comrades should not think that the main battle has been won because the lunatic fringes of Stalinism has been driven out. The main fight can now be directed in London as in the provinces against I. L. P. Centrism."

The tone of the Lancashire Divisional Conference Report is objective and free from rhetoric. Control of the Divisional Council and of what was left to the I. L. P. there was shared between supporters of the R. P. C. and of Brockway. The Marxist Group was in a minority. The R. P. C. was not, however, like the R. P. C. in London. It was much more proletarian and there was no sign that, despite their sympathy for the Communist Party and the Soviet Government, its members intended to leave the I. L. P. Some members of the East Liverpool branch supported the Marxist Group while others regarded it with suspicion.

The Lancashire Divisional Council confronted the delegates with three draft motions, all on the subject of war. Branches could not move amendments at the Conference itself. Amendments which had been sent in before the Conference could be discussed, but they had not been circulated in advance! Resolution One was about "Action Against War - Before War is Declared". The text, like its supporters, spoke, on the one hand, of opposing war preparations and League of Nations Sanctions, and, on the other hand, of opposing a break with the Communist Party and with the United Front. They also proposed to draw Pacifists, Quakers and the Socialist League into common "anti-war" activity. However, the motion

confused as it was, called on trade unionists not to handle war materials and proposed work towards a General Strike in the event of war. The discussion on this motion raised, in general terms, the prospect of anti-war activity among the armed forces and preparations for illegality. An interesting decision was the formal rejection of individual resistance to conscription.

At this Conference, as in London, supporters of the Marxist Group opposed each other on electoral policy. The Conference decided "in principle" on "Critical Support" for Labour candidates except where I.L.P. candidates were standing, such as Bob Edwards at Chorley.

The question of the Fourth International was raised, but there is no record of voting on it.

These decisions do not appear to have led to any practical results in Lancashire.

As to the "Right Oppositionists", who stayed in the I.L.P. when the majority of the R.P.C. left, the writer has found nothing of interest apart from one catty remark by Brockway (13):

"Our conflict with the Right Communist Opposition arose on the subject of Party relationships. Although Brandler and Thalheimer had left the Communist Party, they still believed in C.P. methods, they still had the C.P. psychology ... When they began to associate with our international committee, they schemed to form groups inside the other parties to secure support for their policies. They sat at the table with I.L.P. representatives in Paris, but in London and Manchester they had their representatives intriguing to split the Party."

Brockway admits that on this occasion he delivered "the most savagely ironic speech I have made" - which suggests, after all, that the Trotskyists might not be the only people known to speak sharply to those whose deeds do not seem to match their words!

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The change in the electoral policy of the Marxist Group, which implied in practice accepting that of the leadership of the I.L.P., expressed the intention of the leaders of the Group not to prepare immediately to leave the I.L.P. and turn to the Labour Party. In the event, not only

did they not win anyone from the R.P.C., despite its internal wavering, but in the early months of 1936 they were unable to make any new gains from the ranks of the I.L.P. itself either.

Trotsky appears to have advised them to maintain their former policy of "critical support" and to prepare the turn to the Labour Party. We do not know whether the membership knew of or discussed his proposals at the time.

He was able to make a larger contribution to the debates in the British Communist movement between mid - 1935 and summer 1936 than at any other time since the middle of the 1920's (14). After his arrival in Norway on June 18, 1935, where his host was Konrad Knudsen, a Socialist member of the Norwegian Parliament, he was able to work in comparative peace and freedom until in the course of August 1936 the Norwegian Government interned and isolated him under pressure from the Kremlin following the trial of the "Sixteen" and the execution among others of Zinoviev and Kamenev.

He had earlier written:

"The fact that the I.L.P. has conclusively broken with the Second International, while continuing its sterile machinations with the Third, I cannot regard as an advance: it is only a form of the same confusion. If Fenner Brockway had declared for the Fourth International and thereafter returned to the Labour Party, that would have been a real step forward." (15)

Trotsky returned to the question of the future of the I.L.P. when, in autumn 1935, he described the Seventh Congress of the Communist International as signifying the end of the period of confusion in the policies of the International:

"The Congress ... marks ... the final entry of the Communist International into its 'Fourth Period', which has for its slogan, 'Power to Daladier': for its banner, a tricolour: for its hymn, the Marseillaise, drowning out the International ... In the days when the Communist International still played with all the rainbow colours of 'revolutionary defeatism', we warned that from the theory of 'Socialism in a Single Country' there would flow social-patriotic conclusions with all their treacherous consequences ... in the highest degree interesting (is) what will be the precise reaction of that Left Centrist party which has hitherto been closest to the Communist International, namely the I.L.P. of England. Will it be attracted by the vile 'realism' of the Seventh

Congress ('united front', 'masses', 'middle classes', etc. etc.), or will it on the contrary be repelled by the belated and all the more fatal opportunism (class collaboration under the hollow banner of 'anti-fascism', social-patriotism under the cover of 'defence of the U.S.S.R.', etc)? (16)

In the debate on electoral policy Trotsky came down emphatically on the side of the minority. His opinion is expressed in "Once Again the I.L.P." (17), which is the record of a discussion. The relevant exchange reads:

"Q. Was the I.L.P. correct in running as many candidates as possible in the recent General Election, even at the risk of splitting the vote?

A. Yes. It would have been foolish for the I.L.P. to have sacrificed its political programme in the interests of so-called unity, to allow the Labour Party to monopolise the programme, as the Communist Party did. We do not know our strength unless we test it. There is always the risk of splitting and losing deposits but such risks must be taken. Otherwise we boycott ourselves.

Q. Was the I.L.P. correct in refusing critical support to Labour Party candidates who advocated military sanctions?

A. No. Economic sanctions, if real, lead to military sanctions, to war. The I.L.P. itself has been saying this. It should have given critical support to all Labour Party candidates, i.e. where the I.L.P. itself was not contesting. In the "New Leader", I read that your London Division agreed to support only anti-sanctionist Labour Party candidates. This too is incorrect. The Labour Party should have been supported, not because it was for or against sanctions, but because it represented the working-class masses.

The basic error made by some I.L.P.ers who withdrew critical support was to assume that the war danger necessitated a change in our appreciation of reformism ... No, in war as in peace, the I.L.P. must say to the workers: 'The Labour Party will deceive and betray you, but you will not believe us. Very well, we will go through your experiences with you, but in no case do we identify ourselves with the Labour Party programme.'

There is also evidence that Trotsky thought that the I.L.P. experience should be closed (18). The leadership of the Dutch R.S.A.P. appears to have criticised him for being "too precipitate". He replied:

"Let us take the I.L.P. question. I really cannot reproach myself with any precipitateness on this question ... Since the last visits of Comrade R. and A., I formulated my observations that there isn't much to be done with the I.L.P. The three of us worked out a definite proposal for our British comrades (a manifesto for the

party, collection of signatures, etc.) Comrade Schmidt went to England and judged the plan to be incorrect. Naturally this was not without its influence on the comrades, as well as on me. I immediately said to myself, Schmidt knows the situation in the I.L.P. better than I do; perhaps he sees in the I.L.P. such aspects as escape me; therefore the decision should perhaps be postponed, in order to see the effect of big events (the war in Abyssinia, etc.) at the coming party conference of the I.L.P. To lose two or three months in a critical period is always a great loss, but it seemed to me, after Comrade Schmidt's intervention, that it is necessary to go through this new experience."

"R. and A" were Robertson and Johnstone, who was also known as "Alexander". Matlow told the writer several years later that Schmidt came to London shortly after the "R. and A." visit to Trotsky, that he pressed the leadership of the Marxist Group to stay in the I.L.P. and that while in London he also visited Brockway, with whom he had had a personal relationship over many years.

Schmidt had authority with the leadership of the Marxist Group because he had come to the leadership of the Dutch R.S.A.P. not merely as a result of his personal evolution from Social-Democracy, but because the prelude to the fusion of the O.S.P. and the R.S.P. to form the R.S.A.P. had been a sharp fight, which he had helped to lead, against the right wing of the O.S.P. led by De Kadt, and, even more, because he had supported the call for the new international in 1933. While Schmidt's advice to stay in the I.L.P. probably fitted in with what the leaders of the Marxist Group wanted to hear, the R.S.A.P. was pulling away from Trotsky in the direction of the "Left Socialist Parties" at this time. In the same letter Trotsky mildly reproached Schmidt and Sneevliet: while he had hoped that Sneevliet and Schmidt would come to see him in Norway, since he could not go to meet them in Holland, nothing had come of it:

"despite the fact that Comrade Schmidt visited the I.L.P. two, if not three times, during the period".

The writer knew of no documentary evidence about this incident until the summer of 1978, when Robertson gave to him, from his archives, a hitherto unpublished letter to him from Trotsky, of which the following are the relevant passages. The original is in French and the translation is by the writer:

"H(onefoss) January 19, 1936

Dear Comrade Robertson,

Our comrade Schmidt is coming for some time to England, where he wishes to meet not only the leading elements of the I.L.P. but also the comrades of our tendency. He has the necessary addresses.

You know that comrade Schmidt is a leading comrade of the Dutch party, but that he has also now to play with Comrade Sneevliet the role of secretary for the Fourth International. It is especially in this capacity that he will make his investigations in England. You also are sure to know the excellent struggle which he has carried on in his own party against the supporters of the S.A.P. At the same time, I want to stress the fact that Schmidt is connected by a long friendship with the leader of the I.L.P. and that he feels perhaps a certain anxiety not to speak in a hostile way about our friends as "sectarians". He may perhaps be inclined rather to insist on the necessity for our comrades to continue their work in the I.L.P. I take into consideration all these circumstances in order to facilitate mutual comprehension.

Comrade Schmidt will also seek a contact with the comrades of the old "majority" who are now working in the LP. I hope that our friends will ease his task of gaining information and making contact. I would like to have your impression of his visit later ..."

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The hopeless defeat of the I.L.P.'s candidates in England and Wales in the November 1935 General Election showed that the working-class, to which alone it could appeal, was not likely in the visible future to accept it as a national alternative to the Labour Party. It had a substantial following only in the West of Scotland. Elsewhere its active supporters generally consisted of small, isolated and heterogeneous groups. It retained a somewhat broader basis in only a few places, for special local reasons, for instance, through its property in Bradford, its social club in Norwich and the following of Southall the pacifist in Birmingham.

There may have been sound reasons for the forecast in 1933 that the I.L.P. must either contribute to the construction of a new, revolutionary international or disappear, whether by being absorbed into the apparatus of the Communist International or simply disintegrating. Yet in 1936 it still existed, though on a diminished scale and in a changed form. Nor

had Palme Dutt's forecast yet been realised, that the leaders would find their way back home to the Labour Party. No great events had occurred such as could sweep the remains of it away. As an alternative to the Communist Party it was taken seriously nowhere except by a few young workers in the East End of London. New faces appeared infrequently at its meetings. Its membership, branch structure and activity were disintegrating.

However, the M.P.s, Brockway and the circle round the I.L.P. still needed it. It afforded them some modest national and international status, and placed few demands on them. Brockway's personal connections and the income from investments could raise enough money to meet the modest needs of its apparatus and of that of the "Left Socialist Parties". The Glasgow M.P.s had their seats at Westminster of which the Labour Party seemed unlikely to deprive them. Better days might lie ahead. Perhaps Brockway might one day negotiate an agreement with the Labour Party permitting them to sustain their credibility as "revolutionaries" by voting against the majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party (19).

At the end of 1935 the Marxist Group was still based principally in London, but it had some support in Yorkshire and in Glasgow and, to a less extent, in South Wales. It constituted a threat to the leadership. On the one hand, it could not hope to break their hold on the apparatus, such as it was. The Trotskyists did, indeed, contribute to the modest activity of the I.L.P. and helped to defend it from being disrupted by the attacks of the Communist Party. But now that the R.P.C. had gone and the party was becoming smaller and more isolated, the I.L.P. leaders needed the Trotskyists less than before. If, however, the Trotskyists were driven out, and went off into the Socialist League, they might there create, in collaboration with Groves' supporters who were already there, a centre in the Labour Party which would call into question even more strongly the very existence of the I.L.P.

The writer remembers somewhat desultory discussions in the Marxist Group during the spring of 1936 about the possibility of a turn towards the Socialist League. However, its activity was dominated by preparations for the Easter Conference. It was sustained by the illusion of a solid

alliance with Brockway, Aplin and their followers for "Workers' Sanctions". This alliance would outvote the pacifists, take over the apparatus and engage the I.L.P. in such mass activities as would make clearer by experience the counter-revolutionary role of Stalinism and the meaning of the call for the Fourth International.

The Group does not appear to have discussed its experience during the General Election afterwards. The writer has to record his impression, from personal participation in support of Jowett in Bradford, that anything which the Trotskyists contributed to the electoral effort of the I.L.P. earned them neither political support in the working class nor goodwill in the I.L.P. This judgement was supported at the time by Jon Kimche, an anti-Trotskyist supporter of Brockway, at the time (20). He critically analysed the new electoral policy of the Marxist Group as revealing inconsistency and light-mindedness. The Marxist Group had known perfectly well, when it first advocated "critical support", what the Labour leaders' position on war was; it had been made clear at the Southport Conference in 1934. He drew the conclusion that the Marxist Group were unprincipled and dishonest manoeuvrers. He warned the M.P.s and the supporters of "Workers' Sanctions" alike to beware of their machinations and quoted from a statement, which, he alleged had been "issued by the Trotskyists in London", ascribing to them statements that to fight to break formally the United Front with the Communist Party was almost as important as the fight against Pacifism and:

"... at this point the temptation to talk about a Fourth International must be withstood."

Indeed, critics of the Marxist Group might well say that it did not take its own policies seriously when, soon after the General Election, it placed on the agenda for the Easter Conference a motion again advocating "critical support" for Labour candidates, as if it had never deviated from that position.

The internal discussion of the I.L.P. about the Italo-Abyssinian war dragged on in the columns of "Controversy". James Carmichael, N.A.C. member for the Scottish Division, put the case for Maxton and McGovern (21), with a pessimistic picture of the weakness of the I.L.P.

"The only way the British working-class can menace Italian imperialism or aid the subject colonial people is by the development

of a movement in this country that in the given circumstances can successfully challenge and overthrow the British ruling class. To engage in swashbuckling about 'workers' sanctions' against Italy, in a country where we have U.A.B. schemes, Sedition Acts and the prospect of a desperate struggle in the mining industry, with every agency of the employing class and its government against the miners, is a dis-service to the British working-class. Nor does it help Abyssinians, to say nothing of the struggles of the Italian Socialists who are working underground. Fence as we like, any aid we give to the propaganda against Italy is an encouragement to the anti-Italian feeling, a necessity for the British Government if ever it should ultimately find it impossible to avoid war on Italy.. We have powers as a British working-class, but we cannot perform miracles... The defeat of Italian Imperialism by the way of working-class triumph can only be achieved by the Italian workers."

The convinced pacifists, who had joined the I.L.P. in order to express their views in some relationship with the Labour Movement, naturally supported the "inner Executive", though they were very fond of Fenner Brockway. Without fully committing the pacifists to the "Inner Executive", a certain Arthur South stated their case in the same issue. He did not content himself with the shallow pessimism of Carmichael. Indeed, he seems to have grasped the fundamental difference between the Trotskyists and the rest of the I.L.P., the belief in the revolutionay role of the working-class which characterises Marxists. He therefore began by attacking the Trotskyists' criticism of individual conscientious objection, the I.L.P.'s traditional form of opposition to war, hallowed by association with the heroic traditions of the Great War.

South did not, in fact, grasp quite accurately what the Trotskyist position was, for he wrote:

"The effect would be that the I.L.P. leaders would act as recruiting officers in the next war."

That he should have repeated what others, for example McGovern, were saying does not mean, in the opinion of the writer, who knew him, that he was consciously distorting his opponents' position. He would have scorned such a debating trick. He simply mis-understood, or was not equipped by his past training to understand, an argument based on the struggle of classes. So he went on, quite consistently, to attack the idea that revolutionary violence could ever play a progressive role in history, or that violence applied on behalf of one class might be historically progressive, while that applied on behalf of another might be reactionary.

1 C.L.R. James (who had come to the Marxist Group by way of the Finchley Branch of the I.L.P. in the spring of 1935 and with whom Robertson had made contact) tried to reply to Carmichael and South with a simple comment, which would have seemed effective enough to him but which would make no impact, especially in Bradford or Glasgow at the time:

"Comrade South is entitled to his opinions. But what is he doing in the I.L.P.? He and Comrade Lansbury should form a United Front and set off for the Ethereal regions. There they may find the sort of capitalist on whom they may hopefully sprinkle their holy water".

South could well have replied he was in the I.L.P. because he had been born there, and anyway what was James doing there?

James then attacked Carmichael and McGovern:

"They simply cannot grasp that revolutionary socialism in all its forms is an international movement... McGovern and with him most of the N.A.C. pay lip-service to internationalism but remain incorrigible National Socialists..."

meaning that the "Left Socialist Parties" served them as the "payment of lip-service" to internationalism.

A good deal of in-fighting between the three tendencies, into which the I.L.P. was now sharply divided, preceded the Easter 1936 Conference at Keighley. In "New Leader", which Brockway edited, his articles in defence of the "Left Socialist Parties" (now the "International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity") presented unfavourably the numbers and influence of the Trotskyists in various countries. He systematically, alleged, further, that the Trotskyists denied that the Soviet Union was a workers' state, however degenerated. The kindest interpretation to be put on his statements is that he simply did not understand what the Trotskyists meant (22).

These attacks formed the basis for a campaign against the Marxist Group to prohibit organised groups in the I.L.P., which would have the effect of prohibiting the Trotskyists from circulating their views even internally.

Trotsky replied to one of Brockway's attacks with his own views on the "International Bureau":

"... different hybrid organisations with quite a different past,

different ideas and a different future which, being without a roof have temporarily (L.T.'s emphasis) associated themselves... with the same certitude with which we some years ago warned the I.L.P. against the alliance with the C.P.G.B., we affirm today that the I.L.P. under its present leadership and on its present course is marching directly towards the abyss" (23).

There was an incident in which Jon Kimche tried to arrange for one of the North-West London branches of the I.L.P., which supported the Marxist Group, to change its position, an enterprise which ended in an "enquiry" by Aplin as London Divisional Organiser, who was able to allocate the blame equally between Kimche and May Matlow, as secretary of the Divisional Council. (24).

At the Keighley Conference at Easter 1936 the central political debate was on the motion supporting Brockway's articles in "New Leader" in favour of "Workers' Santions", which came from the London Division. It was moved by C.L.R. James, who reminded the delegates that he could claim to speak not merely for the working class but for the millions of the African peoples, and foreshadowed the struggles for colonial independence of the post-war years. Brockway's account suggests that he did not care for James' speech:

"The resolution... was moved by C.L.R. James... in a typically torrential speech... this had an emotional effect, but was used to support the argument that the case was nationalist rather than socialist..." (25)

The writer, however, still remembers the speech as one of the most impressive performances he has ever heard, partly because it brought out the international significance of the struggles of oppressed peoples for national self-determination in the world-wide opposition to imperialism.

The importance of the decision, which was carried by 70 votes to 57 (26), did not lie in any practical help which, at this late stage in the war, the I.L.P. might be able to organise by interrupting supplies to Italy, since Abyssinia was almost completely over-run by Easter 1936. It showed, however, that a certain majority of the delegates wanted the I.L.P.'s claim to "resist war" not to be confined to individual, pacifist resistance, but, however generally, to be based on efforts to secure the leadership of sections of the working-class, which would involve challenging their "official" leaderships.

At once the Parliamentary Group refused to be bound by the decision of the majority in the Conference. Brockway recounts that, after the vote:

"Maxton calmly remarked that the Parliamentary Group would have to re-consider its position... tendered his resignation as Chairman of the Party and as a member of the National Council, and reported that McGovern and Stephen agreed with him. He added that the Parliamentary Group were unable conscientiously to carry out the policy endorsed by conference, and would therefore act independently on this issue, whilst hoping to carry out I.L.P. policy in other respects... I had no doubt that if Maxton's statement were repeated to the Conference, a split would take place... faced by the prospect of losing Maxton and the Parliamentary Group, the majority would rally to them, leaving those who took my view a futile and isolated section. I decided on compromise, and when James Carmichael proposed a ballot of the membership, I agreed at once, though without any illusion as to the result... I myself drafted the compromise resolution and moved it" (27).

The "Marxist Group in the I.L.P." mobilised 39 votes against Brockway's motion.

The "Times" reported that the London Divisional Council of the I.L.P., now under Trotskyist control since the walk-out of the R.P.C., attempted to commit the I.L.P. to policy declarations for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and that:

"... the I.L.P. will work for the turning of Imperialist War into Civil War and the overthrow of its own capitalist government..."

Campbell Stephen opposed, on behalf of the N.A.C., and the London motion was lost (28). Margaret Johns on behalf of the Marxist Group criticised the activities of the Parliamentary Group in the House of Commons as ineffective and verging sometimes on mere clowning, but the N.A.C. was able to press home the organisational consequences of its political victory and secured the expected decision to prohibit unofficial groups. Even in London the Marxist Group henceforth could express itself only within the limits permitted by such opponents as Kimche, C.A. Smith and Aplin.(29)

Trotsky had sardonically remarked in the preceding November, in reply to the question, "Should the I.L.P. forbid groups?":

"It can hardly do that without forbidding its own leadership, which is also a group, a Centrist group, protected by the party machinery..."

* * * * *

One decision taken at Keighley was to be of great importance later on. This was to issue a fresh appeal to the Labour Party and the Communist Party for a United Campaign. On the one hand, the report of the N.A.C. to the Conference mentioned that "affiliation to the 'Movement Against War and Fascism'" (which presumably meant the "Anti-War Movement" which John Strachey had run in 1933) had been continued, but that, since the General Election of 1935:

"the divergence of view between the I.L.P. and the C.P. had been such that discussion with the C.P. was not renewed".

On the other hand, while the Keighley decision was no more than a gesture at the time, it formed in the autumn of 1936 the original basis for the "Unity Campaign", which involved the I.L.P., the Communist Party and the Socialist League and resulted in the destruction of the Socialist League.

Trotsky reacted to the submission of the majority at Keighley to the Parliamentary Group and to the manoeuvre of Brockway almost with incredulity. Then he quickly produced a satirical article, entitled "Dictators and the Heights of Oslo", which the Marxist Group circulated as a mimeographed pamphlet without, as far as is known, incurring any reprisals:

"McGovern's conclusion that it should have been the I.L.P.'s task to 'stand aside from quarrels between dictators' is an exemplary model of the spiritual and moral impotence of pacifism... The most shameful thing of all, however, only comes after the voting... the tender pacifist Maxton put the revolver of an ultimatum at the breast of the conference. So we see that there are dictators, not only in Rome and Addis Ababa, but in London. And, of the three dictators, I consider the most harmful who grabs his own party by the throat in the name of his parliamentary prestige and his pacifist confusion. A party which tolerates such conduct is no revolutionary party; for if surrenders (or 'postpones') its principled position in a highly important and topical question because of threats of resignation made by Maxton, then at the grave moment it will never stand the immeasurably mightier pressure of the bourgeoisie... My conclusions? The cause of the I.L.P. seems to me to be hopeless. The 39 delegates who, despite the failure of the Fenner Brockway faction, did not surrender to Maxton's ultimatum, must seek ways of preparing a genuinely revolutionary party for the British proletariat. It can stand only under the banner of the Fourth International." (30)

The leaders of the Marxist Group were caught unawares by the double blow of the defection of Brockway and the "ban" on its propaganda. The

writer was at the Conference as a visitor, and was present at a meeting at Keighley after the Conference closed, where its members discussed with their enemies, the supporters of Aplin and Brockway, who had voted for the "ban" on groups, how to influence the "plebiscite" without breaking the "ban". Confusion and uncertainty prevailed in its ranks. No documents have been found about any internal discussion on the results of Keighley in its ranks, and the author believes there were none.

The leading anti-Trotskyists, such as Aplin, quickly recognised that the Marxist Group had no longer any prospect of seriously influencing the I.L.P. The leaders of the Marxist Group, however, decided not to make an immediate, organised withdrawal, but to go through the "campaign" leading up to the plebiscite, in the somewhat forlorn hope of rallying support. A statement, "The Marxist Group Disbands" appeared in the May 1936 issue of "Controversy" (31). The debate on "Workers' Sanctions" dragged on in "Controversy", which just after Easter produced an undated issue entitled "Special Supplement No. 1," containing a debate with the thought-blocking title: "Italy and Abyssinia: Should the Workers take sides?"

McGovern, Maxton and Southall confronted Brockway, Edwards and James. Maxton and McGovern justified their rejection of the Keighley decision on grounds of "conscience". They drew an analogy between this and the I.L.P.'s rejection of the Standing Orders of the Parliamentary Labour Party in 1932 - though they did not suggest that anyone else in the I.L.P. had a right to a conscience. Indeed, in the normal May 1936 issue of "Controversy", the editor, C.A. Smith, attacked the M.P.s for having consciences which, apparently, permitted them to do nothing:

"It appears from the N.A.C. Minutes subsequently issued to Divisional Councils that the members of the 'Inner Executive' on Easter Sunday evening presented to the N.A.C., through their Chairman, their resignations from the Inner Executive Committee, the N.A.C. and the Parliamentary Group. On Monday morning, Maxton states that the Group, supported by other members of the N.A.C., could not 'conscientiously' carry out the Conference decision"

Writing under head-lines: "Party Loyalty and Party Discipline: The N.A.C.'s Conscience", he inquired just what it might be that these consciences did permit their owners to do. However, as usual, he carefully "balanced" the contents of this issue of "Controversy". It could

not therefore, be regarded simply as the mouthpiece of the Inner Executive, but, at the same time, it inevitably conveyed the impression that the I. L. P. was a "free for all". This impression of being fair to everyone was, the writer believes, one of the influences which induced C. L. R. James and his supporters to stay in the I. L. P. longer than they would have done if they have taken Trotsky's advice. After Keighley, nothing that "Controversy" published would make any difference to the Inner Executive and the M. P. s.

C. A. Smith neatly "balanced" an article denouncing the terror in the Soviet Union by a statement from the "Friends of the Soviet Union", which attacked the I. L. P. and the Trotskyists alike. C. L. R. James' article attacked the Parliamentary Group, but from the strange angle that it was McGovern rather than Maxton who was to blame for brow-beating the Conference. In terms of personal psychology, this may well be true, but the fact remains that whoever planned the blow, Maxton delivered it.

James wrote:

"The Italo-Abyssinian question not only exposed the Stalinist wing and drove them out of the Party. It left the field open between those who are thinking in terms of revolution and those who, whatever they say, are thinking in terms of extreme left-wing, anti-war but essentially reformist politics . . . When Brockway made his speech, incomparably the finest speech of the Conference . . . the applause continued, died away, came back again, died down and came back more strongly only Maxton and Brockway could have swung Conference back to the old confusion. Both did it to avoid a split. Both, not only Brockway . . . Maxton is aware that the 'no workers' sanctions' position is an impossible one, and I shall prove that left to himself he would have accepted the Party line. But the feeling in the Conference was so strong that he feared the threat of McGovern and Co. would have been met very sternly . . . The actual voting figures were not a true indication. That is why he associated himself with the do-nothing group. And it was Maxton who frightened the Conference and not the others. If the Party sticks to its guns it has no fear of losing him".

James' article was long, and the second part appeared in the June 1936 "Controversy", where he tried to prove that Maxton did not "really" oppose intervention on behalf of Abyssinia, but only deferred to his fellow M. P. s. James no doubt was impressed by Maxton's prestige as an orator, which was far above that of the other M. P. s or Carmichael, but anyone who knew Maxton could have argued no less plausibly that Maxton cared not a toss for theoretical considerations and his support would not have been worth much even if he had given lip service to "Workers' Sanctions", the implications of which conflicted with his entire past political formation. (32)

The M.P. had been enabled, thanks to Brockway, to know the relation of forces in their favour. Whatever victories James could claim on other questions of less immediate relevance made no difference to their conduct. However, James' arguments seem to have carried some weight with members of the Marxist Group, encouraging them not to leave the I.L.P. forthwith and speculating on a new bloc with Aplin and Smith in London. Perhaps James' limited political experience misled his quick intelligence into exaggerating these possibilities. A reference in his article to an incident in which Maxton was involved in Parliament reveals his continued hope of winning over Maxton and Brockway. Some obscure Labour back-bencher put to Maxton during a debate the direct question; "Was he in favour of the continuing export of oil to Italy?". Maxton, usually so ready in repartee, hesitated. Dalton moved in to bait him. Then Maxton said:

"I would prevent any company from selling oil in these conditions or any other conditions, and my honourable friend may be perfectly certain in any direction in which we could save the lives of Abyssinians, or Britishers, or Italians, we would be ready to support any steps".

The Hansard report goes on:

"Interruption. J. Maxton: "No! It is not sanctions".

James recounted this exchange in the hope of showing that Maxton was not totally committed to the Parliamentary Group's policy of doing nothing. He went on to say that Maxton:

"... broke the back of the Conference by threatening to resign if Conference did not accept the compromise motion drafted by Brockway. What caused this change? Obviously the attitude of the other members of the Parliamentary Group. It is here that Brockway made a fatal mistake. He, as the main agent of success against the do-nothing group, ought never to have proposed the compromise motion. Delegates voted, not only for the arguments, but because a party leader in whom they had confidence had advanced them... And when Brockway took upon himself the job of washing the dirty linen, he robbed the less resolute of their confidence. He is obsessed by the fear of a split, and one of his arguments was that, being united on everything else in regard to war, we could afford to compromise on this. Let us see how united the conference was..."

James made as much as he could of the "victories" in which the Conference had rejected the recommendations of the N.A.C., for example, on the necessity to struggle against Fascism, to support colonial revolutions, and for trade union democracy:

"My reading of the Conference is that we have a long way to go yet, but are heading in the right direction, and willing: The reactionary

elements on the N.A.C., however, whose prestige and reputations have helped them hitherto, are now at the end of their tether and have had to come out openly as reformists. Brockway, I must insist, is wrong if he thinks we are united on everything else. But there is a majority in the Party for progress. If he and others stand and fight, all those who matter in the I.L.P. will rally round. It is the constant give-away before the reformist elements in the N.A.C. which is ruinous. If Brockway and the rest face the issue, there is a majority, and support from outside the party as well."

The aged Fred Jowett wrote in the May 1936 "Controversy", revealing how the Inner Executive had ruled out any effort to promote unofficial action to stop war supplies. Quoting what he wrote for the Bradford "I.L.P. News", for September 6, 1935, he wrote:

"I expressed the view that the correct working-class policy for opposing a capitalists' war would be international boycott, to hinder and if possible prevent supplies of war materials, to stop the war. What I wrote related to Mussolini's Italian army being then in Abyssinia to conquer, subdue and seize Abyssinia... In my article... (which I mention because it was quoted by Fenner Brockway at the Conference) I made it clear that working class action to obstruct supplies of war materials to stop a capitalist war 'must be international or it will fail in its purpose', and that the adoption of the policy was dependent on the decision of an international conference of Trade Union and Socialist Party Leaders, which was due to meet the following week... and decided against independent working-class action to stop war. That decision made a boycott of war materials to stop Mussolini's capitalist war in Abyssinia impossible... the call would not be responded to if it were made, and would therefore do more harm than good."

Jowett's defence of the Inner Executive was "balanced" by a reply from Margaret Johns:

"It is the duty of a revolutionary party always to give the correct analysis and the correct policy, so that ultimately the workers will see its correctness. Thanks to the Inner Executive, the I.L.P. failed to do this, and the policy of inaction put forward made it easier for the Labour and Communist leaders to rally the workers behind the League of Nations... Comrade McGovern seems incapable of grasping the class distinction between League sanctions and working-class action. The British Government is probably extremely grateful for the knowledge that it would have the full backing of the Labour movement for the application of League sanctions whenever it suited its purpose to apply them. But would it have been so grateful if the workers had taken the matter into their own hands and carried out an independent boycott? I doubt it. Such independent action by the working class movement would have been as much an attack on British capitalism as upon Italian capitalism... It is the duty of all members who wish to see the I.L.P. a revolutionary party in action, and not merely one which passes pious resolutions against imperialism and for internationalism but does nothing about it, to see that the result of the ballot gives an even greater majority for the revolutionary line of the

independent working class action against an imperialist power which attempts to enslave a backward colonial people". (33)

The preparations for the plebiscite were, of course, in the hands of the N.A.C., which drafted the voting paper in such a way that anyone who opposed "League of Nations Sanctions" would be predisposed to vote for the Maxton-McGovern point of view and that supporters of "Workers' Sanctions" could not differentiate their viewpoint from that of the pacifist opponents of "League of Nations Sanctions". As reported, the results gave a majority of the proportion of 3:2 to the Inner Executive, and of 355 votes on the decisive question of refusal to back either side. About 1,750 voting papers appear to have been completed, but no one to this day has explained where sufficient members could have been found to account for this figure, unless there was a deliberate effort to get voting papers completed by inactive and "social" members. (34) The N.A.C. followed up its victory with a statement, "United Policy Against War"(35), which hinted at further concessions but postponed clarification while repeating the formulae of the past.

By this time the members of the Marxist Group were beginning to conclude for themselves that they could not extend their influence in the I.L.P. and that, in any case, there was nothing left worth winning. While its leadership was divided and uncertain, Trotsky made his views quite clear:

"I deem it absolutely necessary for our comrades to break openly with the I.L.P. and to transfer to the Labour Party, where, as is shown by the experience with the youth, much more can be accomplished."(36)

It was about mid-summer that Sam Collins the Hackney taxi-driver and member of the Marxist Group, used his week's summer holiday to visit Honefoss and consult Trotsky. His report on their discussion (37) was circulated in an internal bulletin of the I.L.P., doubtless on the initiative of Matlow, whose orientation towards joining the Labour Party Trotsky commended. (38)

- (1) The later judgement by Professor Milliband reveals the political nature of the resistance of the I. L. P. to the Great War.

"Though many members of the I. L. P. went to jail as conscientious objectors when conscription was introduced, the Party itself did not seek to extend its opposition to war beyond constitutional and legal forms, and its propaganda soon came to dwell most insistently on the need to bring the war to an end by a negotiated peace... Men like Fenner Brockway and Tom Johnston were pacifists, but they believed that the war was the result of imperialist rivalries which the working-class on either side had no cause to support."

He goes on to show that the attitude of the I. L. P. had been such as to attract:

"... in effect, articulate representatives of that special breed of English middle-class and upper-class radicalism, which had been an essential part of the Liberal tradition..."

- (2) The present writer has marshalled detailed evidence that there existed sympathy for "Workers' Sanctions" in another work, "The Socialist League: 1932-1937". There are numerous documents in the Cripps papers at Nuffield College also, approving his criticism of the League of Nations and opposing intervention on either side in the Italo-Abyssinian dispute.
- (3) During autumn 1935 the Lancashire Divisional Council of the I. L. P. organised a week-end discussion on the problems presented by the Italian aggression on Abyssinia. McGovern was present to defend the position of the "Inner Executive". Supporters of the Marxist Group, as well as supporters of Brockway who regarded themselves as anti-Trotskyists, tried hard to explain to McGovern that "Workers' Sanctions" were not the same as "League of Nations Sanctions", because the activity which they would involve would be completely different. The writer was there, and was dismayed to see that McGovern grasped this distinction no better at the end than at the beginning. He argued that any call for "Sanctions", as such, against Italy placed Abyssinia in the same position as "poor little Belgium" in 1914, as a focus for chauvinism. He denounced the Soviet Union as a "reactionary dictatorship" and defended the conciliatory attitudes of the Foreign Office to Mussolini and Hitler as contributions to peace. He resented no less strongly than the Marxist Group being attacked by the Communist Party as a "Trotskyist", an association which he and they alike tried, without complete success, to avoid.
- (4) In the Francis Johnson papers
- (5) Earle Robertson informed the writer many years later that he, with other members of the Marxist Group in London, organised open-air

meetings in the East End to call for "Workers' Sanctions", and that their meetings were attacked by the members of the British Union of Fascists.

- (6) The original is in the International Institute for Social Research at Amsterdam. The author of the article is not identified in the source. The document is numbered, "New Series, No. 1", and dated November 1935. It was issued by the I. L. P., 35 St. Bride's Street, London, E.C.4.
- (7) "Bulletin de la Ligue Communiste - Internationaliste (Bolshevique - Leniniste), No. 5, dated October 1935. The original is in the Bibliotheque de Documentation Internationale Contemporaine, University of Paris, Nanterre.
- (8) The file is in B.D.I.C. The source of the report is not indicated. For details of the origins of the Frank-Molinier Group, see "The Crisis in the French Section: 1935-36", Pathfinder Press, New York, 1977.
- (9) The difference in the leadership of the R. P. C. in autumn 1935 is discussed in "Bulletin No. 22 of the Revolutionary Policy Committee", a copy of which was preserved in Jim Wood's papers and will in due course be deposited at the Brynmore Jones Library at the University of Hull.

The foreword to the bulletin reads:

"Yes, there was a crisis in the R. P. C.... There was a sharp cleavage of opinion on the Abyssinia question and the line we should take on Sanctions and our attitude to the broad peace movement.

There were several conferences of R. P. C. supporters, a few 'personalities' exchanged with some real straight from the shoulder hitting, a general election of the Committee resulting in one or two changes in personnel, a great deal of heart-burning and a devil of a lot of hard thinking, a determination to maintain revolutionary unity - and the R. P. C. proceeds with its work."

Cullen stated the position of the majority of the R. P. C. in "The War Crisis":

"We are all agreed that the rival Imperialist governments and the rival capitalists which they represent and the interests which they serve will attempt to find the most profitable solution for themselves. But what other facts have to be taken into account? ... Side by side with the destruction of culture under Fascism comes the growth of the new workers' culture of the Soviets, compelling new standards of morality and justice even among bourgeois intellectuals. The very existence of the Soviet Union is a challenge and a menace to a Capitalism driven more and more in self-defence to adopt Fascist measures ... We see... a real community of interests among the workers and a limited and

— temporary community of interests among the general mass of the population including the middle-classes... The invitation of the Soviet Union to join the League, necessitated by new conditions and made with the anticipation that it could be a useful bargaining weapon and also a sop to working-class opinion, and the acceptance by the Soviet Union of this invitation (emphasis in original) brought new difficulties to the Great Powers; for the U. S. S. R., instead of being utilised by the Powers each for their own interests, is using the situation to play off the rival imperialisms against each other and to voice the demands of the masses that the promise of collective security and of protection for small nations shall be put into operation... The workers of this country are concerned with the League, not as the instrument for the abolition of war (which can only result from the overthrow of capitalism) but with its temporary utilisation as a temporary re-inforcement for their immediate demands and for the postponement of war while they build up their forces... In 1935 we have the existence of the League, set up by the capitalists as a Golden Calf for the workers to worship, but capable of being used as a stalking-horse by the workers for their own objectives, and in that League we have our own powerful representative leading and consolidating the opposition to the designs of the imperialist powers. By mass pressure within and without we can either compel the League to implement its promises of collective security or through its failure expose it more completely as a sham... The National Government is in a dilemma; it does not desire the downfall of Mussolini but is faced with rising indignation against the failure of the League, while in addition it must prevent Mussolini going too far lest vital British interests are endangered... If the Government puts an embargo on Italian shipping and the dockers prevent the ships sailing, are the dockers supporting the National Government? If we make a mass demand on the National Government, are we 'supporting' it?"

In the development of this theme, Cullen tried to cover himself further against the charge of "preaching national unity":

"The abolition of war (which can only result from the overthrow of capitalism) has already been noted... Though the sharper differences between rival imperialisms may still provoke inter-imperialist war, the basic conflict is between Capitalism and Communism, between the exploiting and the exploited classes."

He concluded:

"Does any Socialist who is not tainted with sectarian prejudice think that the Soviet Government, the Communist International and the Communist Parties of the whole world... are really 'betraying the workers' in the interests of the Soviet Union when they line up behind the call for Sanctions?... The immediate need of the moment is to smash the National Government; for this we must try to unite the whole working-class of this country. The only practical alternative at this stage to the National Government is a third Labour Government. The very failure of the Labour leaders to distinguish their line on Sanctions from that of the National Government, and the trick that the Government has played upon them, will do much to force the fight on to those working-class issues which are the

stepping-stones to revolutionary struggle... If in this fight the I.L.P. insists on maintaining its ultra-left sectarian line, isolating itself from the mass-organisations of the workers, it will lose the last shred of respect which clings to it".

In the same bulletin, the counter-statement by Hilda Vernon and Gaster restricted itself to an attempt to analyse the role of the League of Nations, without at the same time directly calling Soviet foreign policy into question:

"The British Government does not want to see a forceful organised working-class in this country taking action against imperialism, albeit the rival imperialism of Italy; nor is it anxious to see a defeated Fascist regime in Italy... Working-class interests are served by the defeat of both imperialisms... The attempts of the National Government to stalemate Mussolini are taking the edge off the resentment of the people at Mussolini's aggression. And, if it can be done, the National Government will use the League of Nations for this purpose... The League of Nations as an institution for the powers is finished - world forces have altered - the League system no longer fits. The proposition is put forward that because the League is being superseded the working class should fight for its maintenance. We see the situation as one that promises, through break-up of the League, hope for the working class to be able to advance against their war-making governments behind the leadership of the revolutionary movement... It is not that the motive forces of imperialist states have changed, but that the field of activity is changing from the past to new world war. Therefore it is in this new field of activity that we must fight - the war preparations themselves. Shall we be doing this by fighting for the League? If so, how? We still cannot believe that this is the right strategy... we feel impelled to voice alarm that already the dangers of the new attitude to the League is showing itself in a tendency to overlook that even in the policies of those who most ardently support the demand for action through the League, this can be only an auxiliary to direct working-class action."

The same bulletin also published the manifesto in which the R.P.C. presented the electoral policy which it proposed for the I.L.P.:

"... in all constituencies where a Labour candidate is opposing the National Government in a straight fight, the I.L.P. should work for the return of the Labour candidate and should popularise the idea of working-class unity to force the Labour Government on a path of working-class struggle... The N.A.C. should make an approach to the Labour Party offering to withdraw candidates in all except three or four selected constituencies, and asking the Labour Party to withdraw its candidates in those constituencies. In the event of this approach being rejected, the I.L.P. should still withdraw a large number of its candidates, and throw all its resources into the election to secure:

1. The defeat of the National Government, and the return of a Labour Government.
2. The election of a group of revolutionary candidates in those constituencies where there is mass support for the

revolutionary movement, including the two Communist candidates in Rhondda and East Fife.

3. The further development of working-class unity on the basis of militant struggle against war, Fascism and capitalist attacks on the economic standards of the workers."

(10) The resolution of the meeting of the Marxist Group of October 20 on electoral policy read:

"That since the policy of support of the League of Nations and of economic and military sanctions by the League is directly opposed, not only to the real defence of the Abyssinian peoples but to the interests of the working-class of the world, and can do nothing but extend the present war into a world conflict:

and since the Labour Party and Communist Party leadership continue to support the National Government in this policy and so stand in the role of social-chauvinist traitors to the cause of the working-class revolution;

(Resolved) THAT the Marxist Group must view the forthcoming elections in relationship to impending war situation. The outbreak of war will destroy the liberties and conditions that workers have wrested from capitalism. The Labour Party is committed to support of such imperialist war and therefore they will not be called upon to implement the progressive part of their programme. The M.G. policy of critical support of Labour candidates was based upon the use that could be made of their progressive promises in exposing the reformist leadership. As only the reactionary platform will be operative, our policy of critical support cannot be implemented in the forthcoming election, and in order to oppose the workers' imminent betrayal, we urge the following:

1. Inside Labour organisations to endeavour to secure the removal of sanctionist candidates and their replacement by anti-sanctionist.
2. To give critical support to all working-class anti-sanctionist candidates who are prepared to fight the official policy. This does not apply to the I. L. P. seats.
3. To nominate I. L. P. candidates in all other constituencies where the Party machinery makes this possible, especially in working-class areas.
4. Where official Labour Party pro-sanctionist candidates are fighting, the I. L. P. must stand on its own platform, and inform the workers that all candidates in the constituency will lead them to imperialist war, and workers can give no support to the Labour Party candidate, but to express their desire for peace through extra-parliamentary action, work inside their organisations, setting up of local committees of action, boycott against all war preparations, and preparations for a General Strike and to recruit members for the I. L. P. in its fight against war.
5. To give fullest support to the activities of the I. L. P. which already co-incide with the above programme, including the

special efforts to assist in the £2,000 War Resistance Fund Campaign which the N.A.C. has inaugurated.

A supporter of the majority defended this position in "Elections and the Coming War":

"The Marxist Group has consistently advocated a principled United Front with the Social-Democratic organisations, and in furtherance of this tactic was prepared to give critical support to Labour Party candidates... The Marxist Group was prepared to give emphasis to the progressive demands and compel the reformists to attempt to satisfy them. The position of the reformist leaders in the period of declining capitalism would be untenable; they must openly betray themselves before the workers. The M.G. appreciated that this would, if we had done our work effectively inside the reformist organisations, enable us to secure the leadership of the workers.

In what respect has the position with which we are confronted now in the forthcoming election altered? The policy of the Labour Party remains the same. The attitude towards war was fully declared in 1934 and its treacherous nature was realised by the M.G.... the Labour Party has already declared its intention of participating in this war, either behind or inside the National Government or as a Labour Government... they are ready to mobilise the workers for support of an imperialist war... the exposure of the reformists' leadership in action will not be possible... The only basis for advocating critical support policy therefore does not exist... Unless we can successfully stop our government's war preparations we are doomed to war. This we can do only by extra-parliamentary action, by advocating boycott and strike against all war preparations... As communists we realise that all talk of replying to the outbreak of war by a general strike is sophism.

The revolutionary policy of the party must be carried into effect along the following lines:

1. To call for a National Party Conference to secure the acceptance of principled position and to fight and eradicate all pacifist tendencies.
2. To place in the foreground of its election campaign the concrete methods of workers' struggle against the Italo-Ethiopian war; the creation of workers' councils of action, their mutual organisational contact and co-operation, the means of their defence against government interference, fascist attack, Communist Party disruption.
3. The party must patiently explain to the workers that these methods of struggle are only the first round of a fight which will terminate with their armed revolutionary struggle against their own ruling class..."

The position of the minority, against the reversal of the policy of "critical support" for Labour candidates, was put by John Robinson in "The Marxist Group's 'Third Period'":

"To state that the tactic of critical support cannot serve any useful purpose when the progressive content of the Labour Party sinks into the background is to expose a complete lack of

understanding of the revolutionary tactic of the united front...

The tactic is based on the contradiction which exists in a Social-Democratic Party between the leadership and the masses.. This internal contradiction arises through the tendency of the working-class rank and file - proletarian social content - to undergo radicalisation in capitalist decline, and the bureaucratic leadership, which gives social-democracy its political content, to move towards the bourgeoisie in times of crisis.

The development of this contradiction is and remains the task of the revolutionary party, until the exposure of social-democracy is completed, and until the proletariat has transferred its allegiance and confidence to the soviets.

The mode of development will vary according to the objective conditions, but whilst the workers continue to have faith in the Labour leadership the tactic must not be abandoned...

The emphasis of the progressive demands... and the forcing of the reformists to attempt to satisfy them is but one method... it is by no means necessary that the demands of the workers be voiced by the bureaucracy (which in all cases adopts the 'demands' under pressure...)

It was the proletariat rather than Kerensky that was so anxious for the defeat of Kornilov, and it was the masses, and not Kerensky, that wanted the war to cease....

The I. L. P. can adopt more progressive demands than the Labour Party bureaucracy, but this does not dispense with the need for a united front with the Labour Party... Today the voice of the workers for peace is not genuinely echoed by the bureaucracy; despite this, the workers are determined in their efforts to return Labour candidates and are ready to put aside the war issue for the time being...

The temper and attitude of the workers cannot be ignored by the I. L. P., and a refusal to assist the workers in their immediate task of returning a Labour Government will lead to isolation...

The line of the I. L. P. is against the stream - against the chauvinism that is poured out upon the workers by the ruling class, the Labour bureaucracy and the Communist Party... the I. L. P. cannot afford isolation... only by close contact with the workers can we hope to bring the war issues to the front...

By demanding that the candidate voices the demands and acts in accordance with the will of the organised workers in the constituency, we can link parliamentary and extra-parliamentary struggle - and by this bridge of critical support the I. L. P. can turn the face of the workers from the former to the latter struggle...

Yesterday we had to be content to await the conflict which could only sharpen when the Labour Party came to power; today the conflict is already sharp - it is between the will of the masses to peace on the one hand and the inescapable necessity for social-democracy in Parliament, sanctionist or anti-sanctionist, pacifist or non-pacifist, to support the coming war; on the other...

The new policy... of electorally opposing Labour Party candidates in a few cases and electoral boycott in the majority of constituencies means, in short, the abandonment of the masses to the tender mercies of the bureaucracy... The vote-splitting of the I. L. P. and the boycott will be construed as a boycott of the Labour Party and the Trade Unions (whose political expression the Labour Party is)... the I. L. P. will be boycotted - the bureaucracy will impose a black circular, and the masses will dutifully return to the bureaucracy, and stop their ears to the vulgar bawlings of 'outsiders'. Electoral boycott... means **BOYCOTT OF THE WORKING CLASS...**

In addition to the above, are all the other errors of the Third Period - No difference between the Labour Party and the Conservatives and Nationals -

Here is social-fascism - the united front from below and Red Trade Unions. Social-Democratic parties with their internal contradictions - working class in social content capitalist class socially and politically... The revolutionary party gives political expression to the social content and brings it into conflict with the leadership, i. e. develops the contradiction... the new policy... will isolate the I. L. P. and hence any mobilisation... will be a disruptive action, drawing the workers away from their historic organisations and not towards them. The conflict will not develop between the masses and the bureaucracy, but between a few anti-sanctions workers and those inside the official Trade Unions."

- (11) The author of the report on the Lancashire Divisional Conference could have been either Harry Cund or Don James, and is more likely to have been the former.

Harry Cund was a self-educated worker who had been a merchant seaman. He was the caretaker of the (un-licenced) premises of the Kirkdale I. L. P., at 2 St. Hilda Street, where the local unemployed, of whom there were many, spent their time. He was a patient and good-natured man, who may never have fully realised the contribution which his experience enabled him to make to the Marxist Group. When the I. L. P. collapsed in Liverpool towards the middle of 1936, he moved to Manchester and got a job running a milk delivery trolley. He died a few years later of a heart attack.

Don James came from a lower middle-class family and had been employed as a clerk in the office of an insurance company. He was involved in the demonstrations early in 1935 against the introduction of the relief scales proposed by the Unemployment Assistance Board, had been victimised and was unemployed for some time.

- (12) The reasons which the R. P. C. majority gave at the time for leaving the I. L. P., and thereby ending the existence of the R. P. C. itself, are in two articles by Cullen. "The Revolutionary Policy Committee and the I. L. P." (in "International Press Correspondence", No. 59, November 9, 1935) says:

"The R. P. C. came into existence early in January 1932 as a result of growing agitation amongst the rank and file of the I. L. P.

for direct participation in working-class struggles in place of the reformist and idealist propaganda which was the outstanding characteristic of the I. L. P. at that time. In August 1931, when the economy ramp was in progress, a number of London branches, failing to get any satisfactory reply from either the National or the London Divisional Councils of the Party to their demand for an officially organised mass demonstration of protest against the economy cuts, had decided to take action themselves"

Cullen then described the joint activities between the I. L. P. and the Communist Party which Groves mentions in "The Balham Group".

"Out of these came the beginnings of united front activities, and as another result some of those comrades who had been most active were elected to the London Divisional Council of the I. L. P. It soon became obvious that the existing machinery of the I. L. P. was not adapted to the discussion of the new problems facing the workers... From various quarters came the call for an unofficial committee to plan concerted action. The R. P. C. was the result. From the first the R. P. C. set itself the task of winning the I. L. P. away from reformism. Such an objective necessarily involved disaffiliation from the Labour Party on policy grounds..."

Cullen's other article, "Why We Broke With the I. L. P." (in "Labour Monthly", December 1935, p. 741), like that in "International Press Correspondence" did not directly mention the R. P. C.'s criticisms of the Communist International. It justified the decision of the R. P. C. "... and its supporters... with very few dissentients, to leave the I. L. P. and make application to the Communist Party for membership" on episodic considerations rather than analysis of the experience of the R. P. C.

The phraseology of the "Third Period" can still be seen:

"It is obvious that the attacks on the workers are to be intensified, that the ground is to be prepared more fully for the introduction of Fascism and that it is more than likely that the threatened attack by the capitalist world on the Soviet Union will take place".

Cullen then came nearer home:

"The I. L. P. leaders see so little difference between a National Government of this character and a reformist Labour Government that our professors of unity proceed not only to divide the workers in as many constituencies as possible, but to carry on a violent anti-Labour campaign in the 'New Leader'".

Into his attack on the I. L. P. leaders for standing candidates against the Labour Party in 1935 there creeps just a hint to show that he has not forgotten the support which the R. P. C. gave to electoral "independence" at the Bradford "disaffiliation" conference away back in 1932:

"In a less critical phase of the struggle, such a theory might be correct, but the dominant need is to smash the government of Hunger and War..."

After attacking the refusal of the Parliamentary Group to accept responsibility for defending Abyssinia, and the I. L. P.'s hostility to

the "Peace Policy" of the Soviet Union, he concludes that the R.P.C. must leave and call on others to do so because there is no longer any prospect of winning the I.L.P. to the Communist International:

"In a sense we have been defeated in our main objective, the building of a United Communist Party, to which the I.L.P. would and could have made an effective contribution as a Party. But the attempt has not been useless. From the first we set ourselves an almost impossible task".

C.A. Smith, writing in "Controversy" for November 1935, who was at the time hostile to the withdrawal and a supporter of Brockway, recorded that altogether about fifty people left, but that outside London the organisational effect was nil.

Whether they all applied to join the Communist Party and whether, having done so, any of them were rejected by it, is unknown. Whatever may have been their past reservations about the Communist Party, most of them seem to have been prepared to accept it in its new phase.

There remained the small minority of the former supporters of the R.P.C. who rejected the proposal to leave the I.L.P. These people had taken seriously the theoretical position that all was well in the Soviet Union, but that the "methods" of the Communist Parties in the capitalist world were "bad". Influenced by the ideas of the "Right Opposition", they knew that they would hardly be welcome in the Communist Party, but they still hoped that the I.L.P. could be won to some relationship with the Communist International through which each could correct the shortcomings of the other.

They issued an invitation to a conference (the original is in the Francis Johnson papers):

"

23, Holcroft Road,
E.9.
4th November, 1935.

Dear Comrade,

We are writing on behalf of ex-supporters of the R.P.C. who have formed themselves into a committee to see how far the open desertion of the Cullen-Gaster group has weakened the forces for Communism in the party. This desertion, engineered by trick politics, has followed a period of elimination by the R.P.C. of their former policy, and a complete reversal of their criticism of the C.P. The non-critical attitude adopted by the R.P.C. leadership towards the C.P. has driven away from them some of the best party workers. This process was deliberate, and was a preparation for the open splitting of the party, when the favourable opportunity arose.

We call upon all party members who support the line of sympathetic affiliation to the C.I. upon the basis of the 21 points, not to be panic-stricken, and not to give up the fight for real revolutionary unity in this country.

A conference is being called at 375, Cambridge Road, E.2., on Sunday, the 10th November, at 3.30 p.m. to which all party members who support sympathetic affiliation to Comintern are invited, when the present present position will be

reviewed.

Trusting to see as many members of your branch who support this line, at the meeting.

Yours fraternally,

C. DREW (Hackney)
K. Bronson (Bethnal Green)

No record has been found to show whether this conference took place and, if so, what came of it. As far as the writer can recall, there were three people in the I.L.P. who held this position. There was Jack Huntz, who had been National Chairman of the I.L.P. Guild of Youth in 1932-33, and, as such, a member of the N.A.C. There was Keever Bronson, a worker in the East End, and Drew, of whom he remembers nothing. The title, "Communist Unity Group", was adopted by them for a short time early in 1936. In the next couple of years they played a certain role in the I.L.P. supporting Brockway, the "London Bureau" and the policies of the P.O.U.M., defending them against Trotskyist criticism. Their thinking can be judged from something which Bronson wrote on the Seventh Congress of the Communist International, in "Controversy" for April 1936:

"The position of the Communist Party in a country that is attacking the Soviet Union is clear. It is their duty to turn that war into a civil war. But what of a country, say France, that might temporarily be compelled to support the Soviet Union?... the resolution (of the Seventh Congress) stated that 'if nevertheless war breaks out, it is their duty to work for a speedy termination'. This is the Stuttgart formula without any attempt at qualification".

The whole article shows that their attention was concentrated on the echoes of the revolutionary phraseology of the past rather than on what the policies of the "Popular Front" foreshadowed.

The I.L.P. published a pamphlet by Huntz on the Civil War in Spain in 1936, and Jay Lovestone published a pamphlet attacking the Trotskyists with a foreword by Bob Edwards, who is the only associate of this current about whom anything more is known. The son-in-law of Elijah Sandham and I.L.P. candidate for Chorley in 1935, he learned about Stalinism in a practical way when he was a member of the P.O.U.M. battalion in Spain. He later joined the staff of the Chemical Workers' Union, became its General Secretary, went into the apparatus of the Transport and General Workers' Union when it absorbed the C.W.U. in 1971 and sat as a Labour M.P. for many years.

(13) "Inside the Left", pp. 287-8

(14) The lively literary exchange, for example, between Trotsky and British commentators on "Where Is Britain Going?" is re-published in the collection, "Problems of the British Revolution", New Park, 1972.

- (15) "Writings: 1934-35", p. 188, entitled "To Comrade Sneevliet on the I.A.G. Conference", dated February 26, 1935.
- (16) "Writings: 1935-36", p. 129, in "The Stalinist Turn", dated September 7, 1935.

- (17) "Writings: 1935-36", p. 197, dated "November 1935".

"Once Again the I. L. P." is the record of a discussion between Trotsky and two Canadian Trotskyists, "Robertson" and "Alexander" who were living in London and working with the Marxist Group at the time. Robertson drafted the report, which, he told me many years later, was approved by Trotsky, and when he returned to London the Marxist Group produced it in the form of a mimeographed pamphlet which explained that the author had "availed himself of the opportunity which C. A. Smith once utilised" of having an interview with Trotsky.

Their visit is confirmed by a manuscript, in Robertson's handwriting, in a collection of personal papers which he allowed the writer to see in 1978, headed "Extracts from letter to Muste", which appears to be a copy of part of a letter by Trotsky. The relevant passage reads:

"We have now here two Canadian comrades, Rob(ertson) and Johnst(on) working in England in the Marxist Group of the I. L. P. We discussed for four days the Br(itish) and Cdn. questions and I had the opportunity of becoming more clearly acquainted with the situation in their movements and our links with them. And now we are proceeding to discuss American questions...

Yours fraternally,

L. D. T."

* * * * *

The opinion about electoral tactics which Trotsky expressed in "Once Again the I. L. P." was not episodic, and is confirmed by the report of a conversation which he had with James in Mexico in 1939 (see "On the History of the Left Opposition", in "Writings: 1938-39", p. 266). The report was recorded by James, who had no interest in exaggerating Trotsky's views, which were different from his. Trotsky is reported as having said:

"what is much more dangerous is the sectarian approach to the Labour Party. You say that I put forward the slogan of Blum - Cachin without reservations, then you remember 'All Power to the Soviets' and you say that the United Front was no Soviet. It is the same sectarian approach..."

The report continues:

James: There has been difficulty in England in advocating a Labour Government with the necessary reservations.

Trotsky: In France in all our press, in our articles and propaganda, we regularly made all the necessary reservations. Your failure in England is due to lack of ability, and also to lack

flexibility, due to the long domination of bourgeois thought in England. I would say to the English workers; 'You refuse to accept my point of view. Well, perhaps I did not explain it well enough. Perhaps you are stupid. Anyway I have failed. But now, you, believe in your party. . Why allow Chamberlain to hold the power? Put your party in power. I will help you to put them in...'"

- (18) "Writings: 1935-36", pp. 362ff, in "The Dutch Section and the International", dated July 18, 1936.
- (19) The suggestion that the I.L.P. should negotiate with the Labour Party with a view to re-affiliation was discussed in "Controversy" in 1937. There were talks a record of which is in the Middleton papers in the archives of the Labour Party. These talks were discontinued shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. See also Brockway: "Socialism Over Sixty Years", p. 352., and "Inside the Left", pp 274-5.
- (20) "Controversy", November 1935
- (21) "Controversy", February 1936
- (22) For example, "New Leader", March 20, 1936
- (23) "Writings: 1935-36", pp. 293ff. "Open Letter to a British Comrade", dated April 3, 1936, which the Marxist Group circulated in mimeographed form.
- (24) Francis Johnson papers
- (25) Brockway, "Inside the Left", p. 326
- (26) The presence of 127 votes in the conference cannot be taken to mean that every voting delegate represented an active branch, or as evidence that the I.L.P. was functioning in 127 different places.
- (27) Brockway, op. cit., p. 327
- (28) "Times", April 13, 1936
- (29) A suggestion that both the organised, "unofficial" groups in the I.L.P., the R.P.C. and the Marxist Group, should be restricted or prohibited was being discussed even before the Derby Conference of Easter 1935. The writer encountered somewhat the

same attitude when, in summer 1935, he visited the Bristol branch, where the R. P. C. and the Marxist Group alike were regarded as "alien elements". He learned with surprise that the branch some time before had resolved to ignore any communications which either group might send to it!

The Marxist Group was therefore constrained by the fear of provoking attacks from the leadership, and, in autumn 1935, perhaps from an exaggerated anxiety not to endanger its position in the I. L. P. Their concern is shown by the following letter, provided by George Breitman, of Pathfinder Press, New York, from the archives of the late James P. Cannon:

"Extract from a letter of Comrade Crux, proposition approved by the I(nternational) S(ecretariat)

Our group in the I. L. P. feels itself embarrassed about publicly signing the Open Letter. Perhaps it could resort to a procedure like this: to formulate an address to the leadership of the I. L. P. on the question of international affiliation. This address, in indicating the treachery of the Third International in the most burning question of war, drawing attention to the miserable position of the S. A. P. (disarmament), of the Swedish Socialist Party* (you will soon receive materials about that) and especially of Doriot, should conclude that the struggle against war and against sanctions is possible only under the banners of the Fourth International. An address like this signed by our sympathisers would have the same value as the signature of the Open Letter but could not be the ground for charging our comrades with indiscipline.

Crux"

No trace has been found of correspondence between the Marxist Group and the I. S. about this. The letter is undated. The reference to "sanctions", however, dates it almost certainly after the beginning of August 1935. The asterisk appears to refer to a note at the foot of the document; "See Unser Wort No. 11". "Unser Wort" was the weekly organ of the German Section in exile of the International Communist League. Issue No. 11 was published with the date November 1935 according to information kindly supplied by Mr. Louis Sinclair.

The "Open Letter for the Fourth International: To All Revolutionary Working Class Organisations and Groups" was drafted by Trotsky in Spring 1935. The delays in getting signatures resulted in its being published only on August 3, 1935, in "New Militant", New York, the weekly of the Workers' Party of U. S. A., the result of the fusion of the Communist League of America, of which the leader was James P. Cannon, with the American Workers' Party, led by A. J. Muste, which was one of the signatories. Trotsky's purpose was to speed up the international regroupment of revolutionary forces, begun in summer 1933, on the basis of preparing to found the Fourth International, and to resist the rightward course during 1934 of the Kremlin and the Communist Parties. The reference to the Swedish Socialist Party is to its pacifism. As to Doriot, see Braunthal, "History of the International", p. 420 and 424. After breaking with the French Communist Party, Doriot was associated for a time with the "Left Socialist Parties" ("International Bureau for Revolutionary

The open letter was
I. P.
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Socialist Unity") and was one of the three members, with a German, Schwab, the Spaniard Gorkin, of a "World Committee for Peace", the programme of which Trotsky characterised, "with perfect justification, I think, as an expression of the shallowest petty-bourgeois pacifism". Doriot broke with the Socialist movement, and, in 1936, founded a Fascist organisation.

The "Marxist Group in the I. L. P." did publish the "Open Letter" for sale as a pamphlet within the I. L. P. They entitled it, "Stalin's Treason and the World Revolution". It was duplicated.

(30) "Writings: 1935-36", p. 317, "On Dictators and the Heights of Oslo", dated April 22, 1936.

(31) The final manifesto of the Marxist Group was published in "Controversy" and survives also as a mimeographed document in the Francis Johnson papers. It read:

"The N. A. C. secured the adoption at Annual Conference of its resolution calling for the disbandment of Groups. At the same Conference a political issue - the issue of working-class action - has produced a cleavage, and has shown how the Parliamentary Group, making use of its prestige and influence, endeavours to enforce a reversal of Conference decisions - to dictate the policy of the Party.

The Parliamentary Group (Maxton, McGovern, Buchanan, Campbell Stephen) threaten to split the Party by resigning from the N. A. C. (but not from their Parliamentary seats) because Conference decided to fulfill its international pledges and call upon the workers to take independent class action against Imperialist aggression and in defence of oppressed peoples.

The Parliamentary Group (towing behind it a majority of the N. A. C.) was prepared to smash the Party rather than accept a programme of action.

The I. L. P. leadership had reached the limit of concessions which it was prepared to make to the revolutionary and left wing elements within the Party. A corresponding sharp swing by the leadership to the right could clearly be seen at the Conference. At the same time these revolutionary phrasemongers launch a frontal attack upon the Marxist Group, the revolutionary wing of the Party, which was foremost in forcing their exposure. We realise that the Centrist Group on the N. A. C. will use to the full the organisational machinery of the Party in its endeavour to stifle the left wing inside the Party and silence the revolutionary criticism.

If, in the future, the I. L. P. is to have any real significance for the working class in its struggle for emancipation, it can only do so by rebuilding as the revolutionary vanguard with a leadership prepared to carry into effect the Party decisions. The forthcoming plebiscite will decide whether or not the I. L. P. is to become this revolutionary vanguard.

Whilst we affirm that the existence of Groups is essential to the full political development of the Party, we accept Conference

decision (emphasis in original). We realise that the struggle that lies ahead will, in the next three months, decide the fate of the Party. As members of the Party we shall stand alongside our comrades helping to defeat the disruptive Parliamentary Group.

We therefore call upon all I. L. P. comrades to join with us in the struggle against N. A. C. treachery, to mobilise opinion and support in the forthcoming ballot in order to secure a reliable revolutionary leadership. We shall, as individual I. L. Pers, continue to stand firmly for our revolutionary principles for the development of international working-class action.

The bankruptcy of the I(nternational) B(ureau) for R(evolutionary) S(ocialist) U(nity) has been exposed by our own N. A. C., who have betrayed their international pledges. We declare that only the building of the Fourth International, based on the principles of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, can bring emancipation to the toiling masses of the world.

FOR the revolutionary line of independent working-class action in defence of all oppressed peoples;

FOR the revolutionary struggle of the toiling masses against Capitalism;

FOR the building of the revolutionary vanguard of the proletariat;

FOR the unity and leadership of the revolutionary struggles of the toiling masses throughout the world;

FOR the Fourth International;

FOR the World Revolution, the defence of the U. S. S. R., the victory of the proletariat in every country, for International Socialism.

The Marxist Group"

- (32) James was taking quite a different attitude towards Maxton, with his efforts to win him over, from what Trotsky was to suggest, in a later discussion with James, should be his attitude. In "Fighting Against the Stream" ("Writings: 1938-39", p. 258-9, dated April 1939), Trotsky is recorded as having said:

"... not all our comrades entered the I. L. P., and they developed an opportunistic policy so far as I could observe, and that is why their experience in the I. L. P. was not so good... Rebellions of the rank and file are a familiar thing in the I. L. P. In preparing for a new convention Fenner Brockway becomes a patron of the rebellious section and secures a majority. Then Maxton says he will resign. Then Fenner Brockway says, no, we will abandon our victory. We can give up our principles, but not our Maxton". I believe that the most important thing is to compromise them - to put them in the mud - the Maxtons and the Brockways. We must compromise the I. L. P. with tremendous and pitiless attacks on Maxton..."

- (33) The report on the Keighley Conference in the "Times", April 13, 1936 bears on Jowett's point: it says that Brockway said, in seconding the James motion:

"... To his astonishment and great surprise the Inner Executive meeting at Glasgow, passed a resolution repudiating the whole line which the party had pursued. This resolution declared that ... the policy of the I.L.P. was to be neutral."

The "Times" report went on:

"Answering the charge that the policy of mass action by the workers to refuse to handle war materials for Italy was not practical, Mr. Brockway said: 'No one is suggesting that we should get a soap-box and stand outside Woolwich Arsenal and tell the workers there that they are to stop making munitions. The obvious correct action is to go to the organised trade union movement and ask that it shall support the policy of mass action by the workers'."

Brockway was trying to conceal the difference between Jowett's position and that of his temporary allies of the Marxist Group, who did not make "mass action" depend on the consent of the trade union leadership who supported "League of Nations Sanctions". There are indeed, points in Brockway's accounts of these proceedings at which the reader may pause to wonder how far Brockway was aware of the picture of himself that he was presenting. In "Inside the Left", he wrote (p. 328):

"Two years later, at the annual conference of the I.L.P. at Manchester, the Principle of independent working-class action against imperialist aggression was unanimously endorsed."

Yet, even as he wrote the words, Brockway knew, not only that in 1938 the I.L.P. had even less forces than in 1936, that he was in any case preparing to go back to the Labour Party and that, in any case, nothing would stop the leaders of the pacifists from again threatening to leave the party in order to get their own way, as their survivors were to do in 1946. The Manchester decision, far from justifying what Brockway did in 1936, as he intended, was no more than another step on the downward path of the I.L.P.!

- (34) The "ballot" papers were drafted as follows:

PLEBISCITE ON I.L.P. POLICY IN RELATION TO
ITALO-ABYSSINIAN WAR

THE QUESTIONS	YES	NO
Should the I.L.P. have declared against Italy and in favour of Abyssinia by advocating the refusal of War Materials to Italy?		
or		
Should the I.L.P. have refused to back either Italy or Abyssinia and opposed the sending of War Materials to either side?	YES	NO

Place a X under "Yes" or "No" after each question.

The doubt whether the "voters" were really all active members arises from a report in the "Times", April 15, 1936, on a statement at Keighley by Aplin on the Party's finances. Twenty per cent of the branches had almost failed to pay the fees or to make their basic contribution to the party's finances. On the Fighting Fund and the Election Fund, over half the branches had failed to do their duty and on the Quota Fund something like 75 per cent had not figured on the lists handled by Head Office.

(35) The text, from the Francis Johnson papers, reads:

"UNITED POLICY AGAINST WAR

IMPORTANT N.A.C. DECISION FOLLOWING PLEBISCITE

The plebiscite of the I.L.P. members on questions related to the Italo-Abyssinian war has resulted in a majority of 158 against the policy of "declaring against Italy and in favour of Abyssinia by advocating the refusal of war materials to Italy", and a majority of 355 for the policy of refusal to back either Italy or Abyssinia and of opposition to the sending of war materials to either side .

The National Council of the Party recognises that Socialist policy in relation to wars in which this country is not directly involved requires clearer definition and it instructs the Executive Committee to prepare a statement on this matter to be submitted, after endorsement by the National Council, to the Divisional Conferences and next Annual Conference of the Party.

The National Council of the Party does not regard the vote of the Party on the Italo-Abyssinian war as laying down a policy to be applied under all circumstances and asks the Executive Committee to examine the question of how working-class action in resistance to all Capitalist and Imperialist war can best be applied.

In the case of a war in which the British Government is directly involved the policy of the Party has been clearly defined and has the support of the united whole Party.

The Party stands for:-

1. The rejection of all proposals for unity with the National Government, or with any Capitalist Government that may be elected, in either war preparations or the prosecution of war.
2. In particular, opposition to any collaboration with the Government or with the employing class in the operation of the present re-armament program.
3. The repudiation of any obligation on the part of the working class to support a war because it has been authorised by the Capitalist-dominated League of Nations.
4. Opposition to sanctions imposed for Imperialist purposes and involving the danger of war.
5. The exposure of the illusion that peace can be maintained by any "Collective system of Peace" operated by Governments in a capitalist world.

6. The recognition of the class struggle as the basis upon which the fight against war policies, war preparations and war itself must always be carried on, and the stimulation of working-class determination to act both politically and industrially through its own class organisations.
7. In particular, the development of working class determination to meet the threat of war by massed organised resistance by any and every means, including the use of the strike weapon, for the purpose not only of preventing war but of overthrowing the Capitalist Government and securing working-class power.
8. The maintenance of the class struggle in the event of war taking place and the seizure of the first opportunity resulting from discontent, war weariness, or economic or social crisis to end war by the seizure of working class power.
9. The special duty of defending the Soviet Union by, (a) relentless resistance to any policy or actions by the British Government hostile to the U. S. S. R. and (b) the organised working-class refusal of war materials to any other Capitalist Government attacking the Soviet Union.
10. The organisation of resistance to all tendencies towards Fascism and the exposure of the war basis of the Fascist programme and practice.
11. Co-operation with working class movements pursuing a similar policy in other countries and the fullest possible co-ordination of the struggle on an international scale.

The National Council of the I. L. P. draws special attention to the International Congress Against War, Fascism and Imperialism which is to be held in October on the basis of the policy outlined above, and urges the Party to do all in its power to secure a large and representative delegation from British working-class organisations.

- (36) "Writings: 1935-36", p. 366, in "The Dutch Section and the International", dated July 15-16, 1936.
- (37) "Writings: 1935-36", p. 377, "Interview on British Problems", dated "Summer 1936".
- (38) After this chapter was drafted, a German text was received from George Breitman of a note, signed "L.D. Trotski" and dated "H., April 8, 1936", the translation of which by the writer is as follows:

"1. It is a classical device of Centrists to help themselves to our ideas in order to fight us, but this by no means proves that these gentlemen are really, actually drawing near to us. With young people and sincere elements this is sometimes important. With experienced people, however, it expresses only deep-seated lack of principles and bureaucratic "compromise".

*Remarks for a
drafted Comrade
Summer 34-35
P. 353*

2. The 43(!) splitters: if anyone reviews the history of the I.L.P. in one glance since it broke from the Labour Party, it is nothing but a history of splits, splintering, walk-outs, desertions. Count them all up and they will come to more than 43! The difference is merely that, in our case, splits are entirely the outcome of political or programmatic conflicts, as anyone can count up and enumerate in the light of documents. In the I.L.P., on the contrary, as in the S.A.P., everything takes place under cover of confusion, of lack of thought and of concealment. Hence, it appears, these brave gentlemen ran down their membership from 20,000 to 3,000 without any splits? Our method has, at least, two advantages: (1) The membership learns something from it: (2) We grow by it. The I.L.P./S.A.P. method does nothing for anyone and does not save those parties from going under.
3. The idea of the I.L.P. developing into a revolutionary party must now, I believe, be shown to be utopian. For the revolutionary party, we must construct our independent perspective.

