

Chapter Six    The Debate About "entering" the Labour

Party: 1936 - 37

In the years 1934 - 1938, movements of the working-class in the Western world were driving forward their traditional organisations to express a will to improve living standards, to defend democratic liberties and to prevent war. Their origins may be traced in the same forces as produced the movements of resistance in China to Japan, in India to Britain, in Indonesia to the Netherlands and elsewhere.

The socialist and Communist Parties grew considerably in France and Spain. The Congress of Industrial Organisations greatly extended trade unionism in U.S.A. The Labour Party partly recovered from its defeat in 1931 in Britain and the Communist Party had a marked relative growth. By the summer of 1936 in France the Socialist and Communist Parties had received heavy votes in the first round of the elections and were being forced by masses of workers, undertaking stay-in strikes, despite the opposition of their leaders, to negotiate concessions from the employers and the State. In Spain the coup d'etat of Franco aroused wide-spread resistance despite the unpreparedness of the Popular Front Government.

In Britain, however, the I.L.P. and the Marxist Group were largely isolated from this international movement, thanks to the policies of the I.L.P. leadership, the delay of the Trotskyists in entering the I.L.P. and, subsequently, the support which the Marxist Group was induced to give to the I.L.P. leadership. This isolation accounts substantially, in the judgement of the writer, for the decline of the I.L.P. and for the disintegration, in summer 1936, of the Marxist Group. There was nothing "inevitable" about either process; both were the results of the mistakes of the leaderships.

By the summer of 1936 there were already two small Trotskyist groups working in the Labour Party. One was the "Marxist League", which evolved from the "majority" of the Communist League. The other was the "Bolshevik-Leninist Group in the Labour Party", the fruit of Harber's collaboration with Charles van Gelderen and the young workers whom the latter had won in the Labour League of Youth in the struggle of the paper "Youth Militant" against the Stalinist-controlled "Advance".

A wide debate opened among the Trotskyists and their periphery about whether all or some should join the Labour Party and, if so, what they should do there. This led to asking what is the function of the Labour Party, and harked back to the discussions in the early years of the Communist International. It still goes on. In 1936 it developed within the setting of the First International Conference for the Fourth International, the so-called "Geneva" Conference, of July 29 - 31, 1936.

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In all, three different viewpoints were expressed in a well-documented discussion. The "Marxist League", the group round Groves, developed from the Communist League, which had tried at first, in the early part of 1934, to work as an "open", "independent" organisation. Shortly after the split, both sides wrote complaints to the International Secretariat. The replies to their letters (2) show the "majority" wanting the I.S. to instruct the "minority" to submit to it, while the "minority" objected to the draft declaration which the I.S. proposed it issue when applying to join the I.L.P. In a slightly sharper tone than usual, Trotsky told the "majority" that their conservative sectarianism had provoked a split, the political responsibility for which rested on them:

"Avoiding a fractional struggle by provoking a split is a very simple technique, which has nothing in common with Bolshevism or Marxism. On the contrary, it is a product of the caricature of Marxism fabricated by the epigones."

At the same time he warned the "minority" that their split could be justified only by practical success in the I.L.P.

The "majority" accepted with ill-grace the recognition of both groups with equal status as "sympathising sections" by the I.S. Wicks has recalled, however:

"We never broke off contact, however loose, with the Trotskyist movement, and always considered ourselves part of it". (3)

Relations were embittered, however, by the "New Leader", which attributed to "former members of the late British Section of the International Communist League" the statement that "it had been liquidated by the International Secretariat". (4) The "majority" felt that the "minority" had gone beyond what was necessary to defend them against being regarded in the I.L.P. as "outside agents".

The Communist League was able to continue to produce "Red Flag" up to November 1934. Its members were active as trade unionists or in the unemployed associations sponsored by local Trades Councils (5). Groves explained how they tried to come to terms with the problem of perspective:

"Many of us felt that, while we ought to keep a centre going and a paper, there was no reason, if we could meet from time to time to report and discuss our work, why members should not work in the organisation in which they already were or were inclined to associate with... arbitrary decisions from abroad set up the 'new section' and recognised it alone... We decided, some dissenting and going off elsewhere, to accept the necessity for a looser, more flexible approach... It then seemed sensible to become individual instead of merely affiliated members (of the Labour Party)... when the Socialist League came our way, we decided to wind up the Communist League and form the local branch of the Socialist League, using this as our centre." (6)

At the end of 1933 "Red Flag" pulled off quite a "scoop" at the expense of the Communist Party. It issued an appeal for support of a campaign against the imprisonment in China of the Trotskyists, who included the former leader of the Communist Party, Chen Du Siu, and got eighteen signatures - including those of Tom Mann, Maxton, Brockway, John Jagger (a senior official of N.U.D.A.W.), Jack Tanner (already in the hierarchy of the A.E.U.) the nine members of the Executive Committee of the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association (usually regarded as sympathetic to the Communist Party) and the three national officials of the Chemical Workers' Union. The statement about Chen Du Siu was quite frank:

"... following his break with the leaders of the Communist International and his expulsion from the Chinese Communist Party... (he) assisted in the founding of the Chinese Section of the International Left Opposition". (7)

In January 1934 "Red Flag" published Trotsky's warning that the victory of Nazism strengthened not Communist but Social-Democratic tendencies. It was true that Social-Democracy was doomed to fail and that the formula "Either Fascism or Communism" was true - but only in the final analysis. Democratic slogans and illusions would have again to be out-lived in experience of struggle. The demand should be directed to Social-Democracy:

"... carry on the struggle for democracy not only in words but in deeds..."(8)

Through 1934 the paper demonstrated successive contributions to Marxist theory by Groves. These have later been neglected, undeservedly, for

which more than one reason may be suggested. His polemics were directed against the "left-ism" of the Communist Party (and of its imitators, the I.L.P.) in the specific forms which it took in the later part of the "Third Period", when the form of Stalinist policies was soon to change. Secondly, British Trotskyists have been led to believe that "nothing happened" in these early years. Groves himself, further, has done little to defend the ideas which he helped to bring to birth.

In the January issue, for example, there is a warning that the existing trade unions must be used as vehicles for struggle and that the set-back of the Labour Party in 1931 was only temporary. It is unusual to read in the leftwing press of the time such ideas as:

"... in penetrating the ranks of the reformist workers, the revolutionary movement will soon be faced with the problem of giving every aspect of the reviving workers' struggle political content and setting... To cry "Down with the National Government" is not enough... No one will suggest that we have reached the stage at which we can call for the dictatorship of the proletariat... only the slogan of "The Labour Government", on the basis of militant demands, can... bridge the gulf between the reformist workers and the small revolutionary section..."

The following month, Groves' article, "Vienna and the London Elections" welcomed the first Labour majority in the elections to the London County Council, especially after the Social-Democrats who had ruled Vienna since 1918 and Berlin since 1925 had been driven out. He looked further forward:

"real power, power won by force, power over the factories and the banks, power supported by millions of workers, is necessary to radically transform society. A Labour Council will find itself checked at every turn by the power of the capitalists, by their state... The militant workers... must set to work to arouse the rank and file to a sense of the dangers threatening. The movement must be equipped anew by the establishing of a new leadership..."

An economic recovery was taking place, said Groves. However modest, it need be neither denied nor deplored. Workers would be better able to fight for improved conditions of life. They would do so through their traditional organisations, now that the parties of the Communist International had shown themselves unable to offer an alternative. (9)

"Red Flag" carried in August an original analysis by Groves of the work of Palme Dutt, in the form of a review of his influential book, "Fascism and Social Revolution", which was another polemic against the "Third Period". It also campaigned for the right of asylum:

"Had the British Communist Party taken up the demand for Trotsky's admission, many of its own German comrades would not have been turned back so easily at the customs... it is curious that while Muenzenberg and other German Communist leaders can remain in Paris and go about their business, the leader of the Communist League should be threatened with deportation."

Earlier in the year, both groups had made approaches to Maxton in the hope that Trotsky, whose position in France became very difficult after the Doumergue Government took office, might be allowed to come to Britain, or, at least, to the Channel Islands.

"Red Flag" also contrasted the abuse which Trotsky's calls for a united front between the Social-Democracy and the Communist Party in Germany had evoked in 1932 and 1933 with the "desperation" with which the French Communist Party in 1934 was seeking agreement with the S.F.I.O. It also called for the Annual Conference of the Labour Party at Southport to reject the "Statement on War" of the National Council of Labour, of June 29:

"The Labour Party Executive did not consult the Trades Union and Co-operative Movements along the lines laid down at Hastings: they consulted with the object of ditching the Hastings resolution. Mr. Henderson of the Disarmament Conference has triumphed over the Labour Party..."

"Towards the Labour Party Conference" commends the resolution sent by the Balham and Tooting Labour Party to the Conference. This called for a campaign to bring down the Government and for a General Election. It also proposed such Socialist legislation as the nationalisation of land, mines, transport and banks, with workers' control, the abolition of the House of Lords, the re-organisation of the armed forces on a democratic basis, the independence of all subject peoples within the British Empire and the establishment with the Soviet Union of planned schemes of economic collaboration. These proposals were counter-posed to the "Immediate Programme" of the National Executive, which was attacked as a Liberal and not a Socialist document.

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However, growing pressures from two sides were restricting the possibilities open to the Communist League as an "open" group. The Labour Party was enjoying a strong recovery. The Communist Party, though smaller, was no less serious a competitor; it had appropriated the slogan

of "unity", established itself as a leadership for the unemployed and allowed its members to work flexibly in trade unions. It was soon to drop its electoral opposition to the Labour Party.(10)

The League opened a discussion on programme and orientation. The debate reveals external pressures rather than worked-out solutions to the members' problems. It did not clear up how the members' work was to be directed or co-ordinated, or what those in the Labour Party and the Socialist League were aiming at, beyond simple propaganda, and reached the formula, into which more than one meaning can be read:

"The League is not a party, but a group of revolutionaries working within the organised Labour Movement..."

The discussion was not, however, divorced from practical activity. In July 1934, for example, the League intervened in the conflict in the Labour League of Youth, which was experiencing a strong revival. A left wing, led at the time partly by the Young Communist League, was attacking the supporters of the Labour Party's official policy of reliance on the League of Nations. The critics denounced the League of Nations as the device by which British Imperialism would lead young workers into war (11). The Communist League issued a leaflet: "Forward Against Fascism".(12) This does not appear to have won direct support to it, but a group of young left-wingers in the Labour League of Youth started an unofficial paper called "Advance", which, at the beginning, was run by an alliance of supporters of the Y.C.L. with Trotskyist sympathisers, on the general basis of opposition to the official foreign policy of the Labour Party and of support for such ideas as the Communist League was expressing. "Advance" appealed far more effectively to young workers than did "New Nation", which Transport House officials produced. It soon came under the control of the Young Communist League and dropped its criticisms of the League of Nations, but those who continued to support the sense of the resolution of July 29 developed nearer to Trotskyism. A tendency was formed in which Charles Van Gelderen and Roma Dewar (sister of Hugo) were prominent and began to produce "Youth Militant". Harber and a few associates joined this tendency some time after leaving the I.L.P. and, probably in the spring of 1936, the "Bolshevik-Leninist Group in the Labour Party" was formed, with the intention of working not only in the youth movement but in the Labour Party and the Socialist League. (13)

By October 1934 Groves had made his mark in the local Labour Party and was elected delegate to the Annual Conference. His opponents managed to get his credentials taken away, on the ground that he belonged to an "outside" organisation, the Communist League. A supporter of the League, Bill Pyne, went in his place and protested against his exclusion. (14)

When the end of "Red Flag" came, it was unexpected but perhaps inevitable. The debate had been carried on in its pages (15)(16), but the leadership of the Communist League was losing cohesion. Robertson recalls that, when he went to see them in autumn 1934 on first coming to Britain, he found Groves and Wicks apparently un-interested in it and Dewar and Sara in opposition to each other. (17)

In 1935 Groves was working actively in the Socialist League and towards the end of the year was elected to its London area leadership. (18) The visit of Peter Schmidt to London early in 1936 opened a new period of correspondence with Trotsky, and the remains of the Communist League were re-assembled in a new group, the "Marxist League". (19) On May 1, "Red Flag" re-appeared.

The Marxist League existed for some fifteen months, always rather as a group of old friends, joined by a few newcomers such as Charles Sumner and Jack Winnocour. None of the former associates of the Marxist Group in the I.L.P. seem to have joined it. It survived the collapse of the Socialist League in May 1937 and, somewhat reduced, co-operated briefly with the "Militant" Group (Harber) in the effort to create the Socialist Left Federation as a replacement for the Socialist League. The same small leading group continued to keep in touch with each other and attracted some support in the Labour League of Youth in South-West London. They took part in 1939 and 1940 in the Socialist Anti-War Front.

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These, then were the origins of the Marxist League and the "Bolshevik Leninist Group", both of which were already in the Labour Party by autumn 1936. They were separate, partly because they were small and had little geographical contact, but also because they were making

independently the experience of working in this milieu. Besides, Groves and Harber were deeply suspicious of each other, Groves of Harber because the latter had been a leader of the "minority" at the end of 1933, and Harber of Groves whom he regarded as an unprincipled opportunist.

The largest group, though probably the least coherent, was still the Marxist Group, in which James was prominent. Most of its supporters were either still in the I.L.P. - though possibly in a state of suspended activity - or had just left it. They were divided. Some, led by Cooper, hoped for a further indefinitely prolonged stay in the I.L.P. Others were being influenced by Starkey Jackson, Harber and Matlow to join the Labour Party. Jackson sent a circular to provincial associates of the Marxist Group in autumn 1936 which influenced some of them (including the present writer) in this direction. A loose tendency attracted to the personality of C.L.R. James supported his efforts somehow to reconcile these positions.

Trotsky had already advocated a high concentration of forces in the Labour Party and the unification of the groups on this basis. At the same time, he left the door open for other, related activities, such as a fraction in the I.L.P. to organise the break from it, a "Lenin Club", which could make public declarations in the name of the Fourth International such as those constrained by the discipline of the Labour Party or the I.L.P. could not make, and, thirdly, a demonstrative attack on the policies of the Labour Party by some prominent individuals, like that of Liebknecht in World War One.

He expected the wave of class-struggle on the Continent to result in a higher level of struggle in Britain, which would wipe out the I.L.P. Meanwhile the rising influence of the Communist Party had to be resisted:

*Interview  
by  
Collins  
36-39 WPM* "... support critically the affiliation of the Communist Party (to the Labour Party) ... If we refuse ... we shall be riding against the mass desire for unity. The mistakes of the Communist Party ... and their inevitable alliance with the bureaucracy will give us the opportunity of winning their best elements. But only if we are in the Labour Party ourselves."(20)

On October 10 and 11, 1936, two consecutive conferences in London discussed the implications of the resolution on Britain of the "Geneva"



Conference.(21) Each tendency was developing its own style of work. There were differences, as yet incompletely analysed, between Harber and James about whether to be in the Labour Party and between Harber and Groves about what to do there. The conditions of the time did not give the opportunity for any one group to demonstrate outstanding superiority over the others. The subject matter of the discussion has engaged the minds of Socialists since the 1880's and still does so, but in 1936 and 1937 it led, not to agreement, but to prolonged argument, during which deeper theoretical causes for the persistent differences emerged.(22)

To the first meeting, on October 10, James brought all whom he believed to want to be associated, on whatever basis, with the Marxist Group and himself. They numbered thirty-four, a few of whom brought letters from absent sympathisers. James made an all-embracing proposal, intended to satisfy everyone at once. The discussion showed that it would suppress the differences but not settle them. He suggested that the groups should fuse into one, and that the new organisation, which would still not be strong enough to work completely in the open, should do fraction work both in the I.L.P. and in the Labour Party. The sole aim would be to gather sufficient forces for an independent party. The Labour Party would be the main field of work, but no one would be asked to leave the I.L.P. The new group would adopt the open Trotskyist journal, "Fight", which James and his supporters had produced on their own initiative, which called openly for the Fourth International and was on sale.

Collins proposed, as an alternative, the "Geneva" proposal for an early break from the I.L.P. and a "turn" into the Labour Party. Cooper, who wanted the main concentration to be on a longer stay in the I.L.P., forced from James the opinion that the I.L.P. would not soon collapse and that its platform was the best place for revolutionary propogands. Harber, who was present as fraternal delegate from his group, then extracted from James the admission that he did not interpret the "Geneva" resolution in the same way as those who drafted it had intended.

The first conference, accordingly, ended inconclusively. James' proposals were carried - but by 11 votes to 10. As if the Marxist Group were going to continue, it elected national leadership. This at once tried to bind everyone to support James' proposals at the next day's conference of all

the British Trotskyists, whether they agreed with them or not.

The Conference of October 11 opened with a declaration from Harber's group. It claimed some sixty members in London, forty of them in the Labour League of Youth, with small groups in Norwich and Sheffield and subscribers to "Youth Militant" elsewhere. Sales had risen from 250 in March 1936 to 800 of the October issue. The increase in membership had come from the rank and file of the Labour Party, with the exception of thirteen who had joined from outside (23) and a few from the Marxist Group:

"We are agreed on the principle of fusion ... on the basis of the resolution of the Geneva Conference. For several months we have been approaching the Marxist League for a joint members' meeting to discuss the future of both groups ... These efforts have been ... unsuccessful.

With regard to the Marxist Group, we have endeavoured to arrange with them joint activity on specific subjects, recognising the impossibility of fusion with the existing political differences... The James resolution... with its insistence that the main field of work... is in the Labour Party provided a basis for at least a discussion of the possibility of fusion of all groups..."

The Marxist League also produced a declaration.(24) It encouraged those who wished to stay in the I.L.P. to do so. They were to popularise there a programme designed to "open up avenues" to the rank and file of the Labour Party, because "the period for exclusive work in the Labour Party is drawing to a close".

The Marxist Group reported that it had about forty members in London, with groups in Liverpool, Glasgow, North-East Yorkshire, South Wales, etc., and in all about eighty members, making with contacts a total of 130. The Group was responsible for about 1,800 copies of "Fight". Members were on Trades Councils, etc.

The second Conference ended with setting up a Co-ordinating Committee of the Groups.(25) After this had met, the Harber Group issued a statement opposing organisational unity before agreement had been reached on a common tactic. The Marxist Group, it said, had reached contradictory decisions. The members had to decide which they wanted; did they still cling to the I.L.P. as the main field of work while paying lip-service to the need for more work in the Labour Party?

On November 7 the Bureau of the Fourth International wrote to the Marxist Group criticising it for not preparing to withdraw its members from the I.L.P. and for failing to attack the I.L.P. leadership and the London Bureau.(26) At this time Trotsky was interned in Norway and cannot therefore have had a hand in drafting the letter, which shows the high level of international leadership which the members of the Bureau achieved until in the course of 1937 one after another was murdered by the G.P.U.

Whether James produced "Fight" in order to provoke expulsion from the I.L.P. may be doubted. However, early in November he was expelled from it, the pretext being the attack on the I.L.P. in the first issue of "Fight". Their reasons for wanting to get rid of him probably had to do with their speculations about the possibility of a pact with the Liberals in Britain. Besides, they were involving themselves with the leaders of the Communist Party and of the Socialist League in the preparations for the "Unity Campaign", and appear to have been additionally anxious to oblige the Communist Party in the forlorn hope of protecting the P.O.U.M. and demonstrating that it and the I.L.P. were "not Trotskyists". James was no serious loss to them.

Members of the Marxist Group met in London on November 15 to agree a proposal from James that the Marxist Group declare itself an open, independent organisation and withdraw from the I.L.P. The voting appears to have been sixteen to six, with Cooper and others whom the I.L.P. had not expelled still wanted to stay in it.(27) The Bureau of the Fourth International then wrote a long and very serious letter to the Marxist Group containing a detailed explanation of the reasons why the "Geneva" resolution recommended the concentration of forces in the Labour Party and criticising the Marxist Group for what it saw as instability and sectarianism. It recommended that all the British Trotskyists should convene democratically a constituent conference:

"... where, according to the principles of democratic centralism they will discuss and decide which road is best. This conference will create the homogeneous and single organisation of the Bolshevnik-Leninists..."

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The Harber Group wrote to the Bureau on December 29 about the negotiations on the fulfillment of the "Geneva" resolution. It reported that the Marxist League was organising the distribution of the Bulletin of the P.O.U.M. in Britain - when Trotsky was sharply critical of the association of the P.O.U.M. with the Popular Front and the Government in Catalonia - and that it opposed "Youth Militant" in the youth section of the Socialist League. It said that James was moving away from Trotskyism in an ultra-left direction, and recommended that the best way to get a unified British Section would be for the Bureau to withdraw recognition from the other two groups, so that they would disintegrate and their best elements join the Harber Group. It is hardly surprising that the Bureau did not agree.

The Harber Group was soon to adopt the title "Militant" Group, under which to present itself openly in the Labour Party. In January 1937 the first issue appeared of its journal, "Militant", in duplicated form. Meanwhile the Marxist Group had withdrawn its members from the I.L.P., according to a statement in the second issue of "Fight", dated December 12, 1936. Harber had now come to the conclusion that a principled difference existed between the Marxist Group and the "Militant" Group on the question of a revolutionary organisation working within a reformist organisation, that is, a difference that was not merely one of tactics, and that until the Marxist Group had learned by experience that its ultra-leftism was ineffectual in practice, joint discussion between the two groups would be premature. (28)

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None the less, the three groups carried on joint activity in the British Committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky. This Committee was brought into existence to counteract the publicity received by the "confessions" of the sixteen defendants in the Moscow Trial of August 1936, who alleged that they had plotted to subvert the Soviet regime, in collusion with Trotsky his son Sedov and the Gestapo. Harry Wicks was the first secretary of the Committee, which supported the more important Committees formed in France and, especially, in U.S.A., to organise an enquiry to verify by examining Trotsky and other means whether these allegations contained enough substance for there to be a case for Trotsky to answer.

The allegations have long since been discredited, but at the same time the British Left reacted weakly to them, and this reaction may be understood in terms of the expectations which many people of liberal outlook in Britain had formed about the Soviet Union as a source of hope for peace and progress. The massive authority of the Webbs presented the brighter side of Soviet Russia as a kind of fulfillment of the Fabians' dream. But those who recognised the dark features of the regime none the less could accept it as an accomplished fact, if it were the only source of hope. After the triumph of Hitler, perhaps the working-class was historically unable to take power in the West? If it could not, then there could be no alternative to Popular Fronts between working-class and bourgeois forces, which the working-class must not disrupt by pursuing its independent aims, which might indeed disrupt the "unity of the progressive forces" and thereby help Hitler.

The work of the British Committee was largely in the hands of James and the Marxist League. There was a certain tendency to defend Trotsky in personal and literary terms. They had, in any case, reservations about Trotsky's criticisms of the P.O.U.M. and the London Bureau and about the wisdom of the Bureau. The Committee commanded slight resources, but James was able, thanks to his powers of oratory, to get invitations to meetings in various places up and down the country. Its relative lack of success may be explained partly in the terms that the Committee's work resulted to some extent in allowing the impression to be created that the problem was one of personal conflict between Trotsky and Stalin, an impression which might be unintentionally created, for instance by Henry Sara, also a powerful speaker, who very carefully and thoroughly exposed the inconsistencies in the evidence at the Trials. The "Militant" Group was concerned to try to defend Trotsky's reputation particularly because of the political implications of the accusations.

The "Daily Herald" published a letter, on March 30, 1937, signed by Charles Sumner:

"On April 7, the International Commission of Inquiry into the accusations brought against Leon Trotsky and L. Sedov Trotsky assembles at Mexico City for preliminary hearings of evidence.

Trotsky has publicly declared that he is prepared to abide absolutely by the decisions of the Commission, even to the extent of giving himself up to the Soviet authorities if the Commission

finds him guilty of any part of the charges brought against him. The British Committee asks for first-hand knowledge of the political activity, whereabouts or the movements of Trotsky or his son, Sedov, during the last seven years. Also for donations to make possible the continuance of this work." (29)(30)

The Kremlin and its supporters did not disguise that the purpose of giving wide publicity to the "confessions" was the hope of politically isolating the Trotskyists. In the long run, it may be, the publicity did the Soviet authorities no good. An immediate effect of it, however, was to help the Communist Party to defeat those in the Socialist League who opposed the "Unity Campaign", the proposal that it should associate with the I.L.P. and the Communist Party to advocate the affiliation of the latter to the Labour Party and a Pact between Britain and Soviet Russia.

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The essence of the agreement between the three leaderships was that, in the joint work, there was to be no criticism of Soviet foreign policy. This point was not made clear in the text of the agreement as published. The significance of this was that both the I.L.P. and the Socialist League had passed at their Conferences policies opposed to the Popular Front and against support of wars "in defence of democracy", of the League of Nations and of collective security. The agreement, therefore, made it difficult for them, on a joint platform, to counter-pose to the propaganda of the Communist Party the policies of their own organisations.

On the eve of a special national conference of the Socialist League, the only one of the three bodies whom its leadership even consulted, about whether or not to join the "Unity Campaign", the "Daily Herald" published the agreement that there would be no criticism of Soviet foreign policy. No doubt it did so in the hope of strengthening the anti-Communist right wing in the League to reject the agreement for anti-Communist reasons. A few days before, Groves, as a member of the National Council of the League, had sent a circular on the subject to branch secretaries. The writer has no doubt that the "Daily Herald" and the Labour Party had their own sources of information and knew a long time before what was agreed. They had, of course, no affection for Groves.

However, the "Daily Worker" exploited the "Daily Herald" revelations

against Groves, alleging in a bitter attack that he had "leaked" the information because, as a Trotskyist, he wanted to "disrupt unity". In the prevailing climate of feeling, however unreasonably, this association of Groves with the right wing isolated the Trotskyists. Their position was that the Socialist League had nothing to gain from an association with the Communist Party. Not only would it be prevented from expressing its own policies. It would also put itself in danger of being disaffiliated from the Labour Party, which would suit the Communist Party by disrupting a potential source of opposition on the left to the policies of the Popular Front.

The special Conference of the Socialist League decided to support the "Unity Campaign", after hearing the assurances of Cripps and Mellor that it was not endangering its existence, by 56 votes to 38. There were, however, 23 abstentions! It entered the "Unity Campaign", with the support of a minority. The national Executive Committee of the Labour Party faced the Socialist League with the alternatives: either break off the association with the I.L.P. and the Communist Party or be disaffiliated. At its last conference in May 1937 the proposal of Cripps that it dissolve itself, pending the Annual Conference of the Labour Party, "in the interests of unity" was carried - against the opposition of Groves and Harber.

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The first issue of "Militant", which appeared in duplicated form in January 1937, and was directed towards adult militants in the Labour Party, dealt particularly with the Unity Campaign, (31) an emphasis which was kept up in the second issue, in February, which also recorded the meeting on February 10 called by the British Committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky. (32) It defended the P.O.U.M. against the Stalinist attacks, which presented it as a "Trotskyist" organisation in alliance with the Fascists, though it did not identify the "Militant" Group with endorsement of the policies of the P.O.U.M.. An editorial in the third issue is in such a tone as to suggest that the author had lost all hope that the Socialist League could be salvaged. There appears to have been a confusion of thought or an un-resolved difference about how to handle politically the Socialist League. (33)

Negotiations between the groups continued. The "Militant" Group set itself the task of trying to assimilate the rank and file of the Marxist

League and thereby to remove Groves, whom it regarded as an obstacle, from its path. It hoped to avoid a simultaneous dispute on another front with the Marxist Group. It invited the Marxist League to a joint membership meeting on February 14, but the Marxist League insisted on the Marxist Group being there too. (34)

"Youth Militant" continued to appear in printed form alongside "Militant". However, at the Easter Conference of the Labour League of Youth "Youth Militant" were heavily defeated. (35) The May and June issues of the printed "Youth Militant" contain items of interest to adult members of the Labour Party (36). Then "Youth Militant" was discontinued and the first printed issue of "Militant" appeared in July.

The front page of the May "Youth Militant" was openly, if crudely, anti-monarchist. The head-line (devised by Starkey Jackson) read: "Britain's Last Coronation: Working Class Exposure of Patriotic Ramp". (37) The June issue suggested motions which local Labour Parties might try to get on to the agenda of the National Conference. One called for the ban on the Socialist League to be lifted, while condemning the "Unity Campaign" in left wing terms. Another called for the affiliation of the Communist Party to the Labour Party, on the ground that it had given up its revolutionary principles and adopted a programme "almost identical with that of the Labour Party".

In addition to their defeat at the National Conference of the Labour League of Youth (38), the Trotskyists found that their associates in the Labour Party were to some extent discouraged by the suppression, early in May, of the independent movement of workers in Barcelona led by the Anarchists and the P.O.U.M., as well as the demise of the Socialist League. What made the first discreditable was that the leaders of the P.O.U.M. capitulated to the authorities and called off the fighting, while the second was discreditable because, after the decision, those who had persuaded the conference to accept it acted as if they were glad to be rid of the League, and nothing more was heard of the promise that, after the Labour Party Conference, its reformation would be considered.

While the Marxist Group continued to be largely a propagandist organisation and the Marxist League was hard hit by the dissolution of the



Socialist League, to which a great deal of Groves' energies had been devoted, the "Militant" Group improved its foothold in the Labour Party. At the National Conference of members of the "Militant" Group on August 1 and 2, 1937, (39) it was reported that the Group had fifteen branches, of which eight were in the London area and one each in Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Hull, Sheffield; Leicester and Norwich. The membership was about 100 and the reports give an impression of lively activity. Members took part in the life of the Labour League of Youth and the Labour Party, attending meetings, recruiting, collecting dues and electioneering. They were also general propagandists. In some places they co-operated with the I.L.P. and Anarchists to defend the P.O.U.M., but not un-critically. They helped the Committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky. To anyone whom they could get to listen they denounced Popular Fronts and the Moscow Trials and explained why they thought the Second and Third Internationals were counter-revolutionary. Their work depended on the total entry of their members into the Labour Party and they were, therefore, unlike the Marxist Group, precluded from calling publicly for the Fourth International.

The "Militant" Group had a conscious resistance to being absorbed politically by the Labour Party. Harber educated it in the general perspective that, in the course of its development, the Labour Party would be disintegrated by the conflicting forces of the right wing leadership and the demands of the working-class, and that the Trotskyists had an essential historic role to play in fighting to secure the leadership of the opposition to the right wing, in order to prevent it from being misled by left reformists or centrists. Therefore the Trotskyists tried to avoid being compromised by being seen as the same as the Labour Party leaders. They did not accept nominations as candidates for local councils when such invitations began to be made as the result of the good impression which their activity created. (40)

The political discussion at the "Militant" Group's Conference in August 1937 centred on the problem of how to work in the Labour Party in the conditions created by the approach of war and by the dissolution of the Socialist League. Harber moved, on behalf of the Executive Committee:

"... work for the creation of the new revolutionary party can best be carried on by the formation, inside the Labour Party, of an open organisation, based on a partial programme. Such a partial programme must summarise our full revolutionary programme, with

the exception of one vital point. It will not openly advocate the creation of a new revolutionary party of the Fourth International".  
(41)

At this point a controversy arose in the Conference about the creation of such an "open organisation, based on a partial programme". The background of the debate was this. Cripps and the other leaders of the Socialist League had thrown those who wanted an organisation of the left wing in the Labour Party on their own resources. At the end of the special "dissolution" conference in May, a number of delegates and other members of the Socialist League met unofficially and, on June 9, Margaret McCarthy wrote to Middleton, the secretary of the Labour Party, to inform him officially that the Socialist Left Federation had been formed. The National Executive Committee took no action.

At the August Conference of the "Militant" Group, Starkey Jackson supported Harber's proposal and reported:

"The Socialist Left Federation was a small organisation of about a hundred members, but was in contact with hundreds of ex-Socialist Leaguers, and we could gain contact with these comrades through the S.L.F. The platform of the S.L.F. certainly does not come up to the programme which we would advance, but it is in no sense a final programme..... The S.L.F. actually exists, and, despite Groves and Co., there is no reason why we should not win the leadership - not mechanically but by political means... We must either enter the S.L.F. or smash it. To ignore it is to cut ourselves off from the left wing of the old Socialist League."

The proposals of the Executive Committee were closely questioned by delegates, especially those from the provincial cities, to whose local situation it seemed to lack relevance. In the end, the political report was carried by 43 votes to 19.

The most determined objection came from the Liverpool branch and was voiced by Don James. Harber alleged the Liverpool comrades had never yet committed themselves to paper, but Jackson's speech, as reported, referred to a "Liverpool paper" (which has not survived, it seems). This appears to have asserted that all official discussion on the subject of the perspective of the Group had been suspended since December 1936:

"As a result, the group had been condemned to tail-ism and had failed to give leads, particularly in respect to the Unity Campaign."

In actual fact, Jackson stated, the Executive Committee had continually issued leads where necessary. Statements were issued to the special

conference of the Socialist League. Immediately after the acceptance of the Unity Proposals, directives were sent to groups. The Executive Committee had presented proposals to the joint meeting with the Marxist League and the Marxist Group (February 14), which definitely posed the question of a left wing:

"... when it became necessary to review our tactics in the Labour League of Youth, the group adopted a paper calling for intensive work in the Labour Party towards the left wing."(42)

The majority decision did not, however, settle the problem of how to work in the Labour Party. Outside London, it appears, the branches did little to carry it out by starting branches of the Socialist Left Federation. They did not, generally, oppose the attempts of the London Groups to enter and develop the Federation. They appear to have thought that they were not in a position to rally the ex-members of the Socialist League, many of whom had by this time either been more or less won over to follow the Communist Party or had become discouraged and inactive.

Further, the "Militant" Group found itself unable to establish the relationship which it wished with the Socialist Left Federation. The "Militant" for September 1937 published a "Declaration of the S.L.F.", entitled, "Labour's Armaments Surrender", preceded by a mildly-worded but principled criticism of it, and followed by an application form to join it.(43)

The same issue carried the Programme of the S.L.F. and an appeal to readers of the "Militant" to join it.

The October 1937 issue of the "Militant" reported that the Socialist Left Federation had welcomed the "Militant" Group into membership during August, conceding that it had "no desire to interfere in any way with the activities or publications of your organisation". The "Militant" Group had made clear that it hoped to "transform the S.L.F. into a real left-wing organisation with the programme of revolutionary socialism". Then, on September 23, the S.L.F. demanded that the "Militant" Group cease publishing the "Militant", on the ground that it was necessary "to mobilise all forces behind the S.L.F. and its proposed organ". (44)

The November 1937 issue of the "Militant" introduces the "Militant Labour League":

"Convinced of the urgent necessity for such a body, based on a programme of revolutionary socialism... to fling down a vital challenge to the capitulatory policies of the right-wing leadership and the 'Unity' bloc."

It also said its final word on the S.L.F.:

"The only rights we claimed are those which the S.L.F. claims inside the Labour Party, ... to criticise a policy when we think it is incorrect... The weakness of the Bureau can be seen from the fact that it has expelled the members of the 'Militant' Group - more than half the members of the Federation - without the matter being discussed at the monthly branch delegate meeting... This bureaucratic action is an additional proof... that the leaders of the S.L.F. are afraid of revolutionary criticism, however comradely in tone. This fact alone makes them incapable of performing the task of building up the left wing in the Labour Party..."

The December issue justified the Militant Labour League by reporting that the Labour Party Unity Committees, which had come into existence in summer 1937 after the demise of the Socialist League had been dissolved after the Annual Conference of the Labour Party at Bournemouth. It laid the principal responsibility at the door of the Communist Party for the destruction of the last vestiges of the "Unity Campaign":

"An Anglo-Soviet Pact was the first and most important demand of the Unity Campaign. The C.P. is desperate in its desire that the Labour Party should support this. Transport House has the measure of Pollitt and Co. They have seen their slightest threats followed by abject surrender... the local 'unity committees' in many cases acted as the focal point for discontent in the party. Who knows but what they might have... begun really to express the desire of militants for a socialist policy?..."

At the same time as the un-resolved problem of how to work in the Labour Party faced the members of the "Militant" Group, they also were discussing how to deal with the Blackshirts. The differences are not clear, for lack of materials, but like those about the S.L.F. and the proposal to construct a "left wing" organisation, they form part of the background to the conflicts which resulted in the split in the Group in December 1937 and the formation of the Workers' International League.

The methods of the British Union of Fascists were to organise marches through areas in which they could hope to stir up anti-Jewish or anti-Irish prejudices. The only one of these which is still remembered is the one which failed, the proposed march through the East End of London on October 4, 1936. According to Brockway's account (45), he persuaded the Home Secretary to ban it on the ground that it would lead to a breach

of the peace. There were, however, many other marches in London and the provinces, in which the Fascists were able to march, under strong police protection. The parallel to the rise of Nazism was too close to be missed.

Articles in the issues of August, October and November described the efforts of opponents of the B.U.F. to prevent them from marching. They attacked the concentration by the leaders of the Communist Party on seeking a police ban on the Fascist marches, and called upon workers, through their organisations, to form their own defence corps:

"... which can organise the mass hostility against Fascism and drive the blackshirts off the streets."(46)

In the autumn of 1937 some members of the "Militant" Group played an active part in recruiting to the Amalgamated Engineering Union workers at a light engineering factory in Croydon, belonging to the Powers Accounting and Tabulating Machine Corporation, known to its employees as "Ackantabs". They were able to make some recruits and to get the trade union organiser into a meeting with the management to discuss trade union rates and the recognition of a shop committee.(47)

\* \* \* \* \*

In the course of 1937 the environment in which all the groups were working appears to have become less favourable. Supporters of the Communist Party were becoming influential in local Labour Parties. They were attracting the support of militants who might regard themselves as left wingers. The disappointment with the apparent ineffectiveness of their efforts, which was to express itself in the fall in individual membership in 1938 and 1939 was already beginning to be felt. Not only were the apparatuses of the Labour Party and the Communist Party consciously hostile, but the Trotskyists had difficulty in overcoming the barriers between themselves and militants and in writing a paper without seeming didactic.

Like all other groups, the "Militant" Group could not at once transcend the limitations of its leaders and the inexperience of its members. The architects of Labour Party "entrism" in Britain were Van Gelderen, Harber and Jackson. They resisted James when he talked of "building the independent party" as resolutely as they resisted Groves, whom they regarded as

capitulating to Stalinism and presenting his criticisms of Stalinism in such a way that they seemed to be mere factionalism which discredited him. Yet it may be significant that Van Gelderen had lived in England only a few years and had done his most important work in the Labour League of Youth, that Harber had joined the Communist Party in the "Third Period" and that Jackson had joined it just after the General Strike, when the Labour Party was busy closing down dissident branches and the Communist Party was picking up the pieces. Jackson had great experience of approaching workers, gained in the National Unemployed workers' movement, but politically he had been strongly influenced by Palme Dutt's "Socialism and the Living Wage".

In June 1937 a member of the "Militant" Group raised, in an internal bulletin, the problem of what should be the attitude of "Militant" Group members to the involvement of Labour Councillors, and, therefore, of local Labour Parties, in Air Raid Precautions. The problem did not become acute until the next year, but it was one of those which these inexperienced young people encountered as they penetrated into the real world of politics. But there was no sign that the "Militant" Group was losing momentum. Jackson was a loyal and efficient organiser. Subscriptions were collected regularly. The paper came out on time and sales were rising. The Executive Committee put no special pressure on provincial branches to join the S.L.F. or, later, to form branches of the M.L.L. where they thought that local conditions were not yet ready. Only the small branch in Liverpool was actively opposing the Conference decision.

\* \* \* \* \*

Then, in November 1937, an attack was launched from within on the leadership. Amid general amazement, members found themselves plunged into internecine struggles. These appeared to have no direct connection with the problems or frustrations of their day to day work. They were about whether the leadership was "too intellectual" and whether a "circle spirit" had developed among those who had had working relations going back even to before the split in the Communist League.

The documents, which are plentiful, show that everyone agreed that they should work in the Labour Party. No attention was paid to the Marxist Group or the Marxist League. The leadership was caught by surprise.

The political differences, whatever they were, had no chance to come to the surface and be discussed in their own right before the Group was torn apart. The outcome was a disaster for the Trotskyist movement in Britain.

The attack was led by Ralph Lee, one of the party of four South African Trotskyists who appear to have arrived in London in spring 1937. Their group in Johannesburg had been involved in at least one strike of Bantu workers and they had thought it wise to go into exile to avoid police action. The others were Mrs. Millie Lee (now Mrs. Haston), Heaton Lee, a mining engineer (who had no family relationship to Ralph Lee) and a journalist named Freyslich, whose association with the others soon ended. Ralph Lee appeared to be not short of money, from what source is unknown. They got in touch with Ted Grant, who had come to London, with his associate Frost, in 1934, joined the Marxist Group in the I.L.P. and was now a member of the "Militant" Group. Through him and Charles Van Gelderen they came to know Ken Alexander, the Canadian journalist, who was secretary of the "Militant" Group.

They looked round the groups. (48) Alexander is understood to have given them the date and place of the August 1937 Conference of the Group, where they presented themselves and asked to be taken into membership. The Conference agreed to accept them as full members. Harber objected, but only that the Conference knew no more about them than they said about themselves.

At the same Conference, Harber moved and the writer seconded the motion:

"In view of comrade H's work in Bradford, he be accepted immediately as a probationary member".

The motion was carried unanimously. The "comrade H." was Gerry Healy, with whom the Leeds branch of the "Militant" Group had been working in the summer, running open-air meetings (on the Bradford car park) and selling the paper.

The four South Africans were assigned to the Paddington branch. There they met Haston and probably Healy. Ralph Lee's energy and ability were soon recognised and he was co-opted on to the Executive Committee.

The first of the series of events which precipitated the split in the

"Militant" Group and the expression of its problems in a highly distorted and personalised form was an exchange of letters between Charles Van Gelderen and his brother in South Africa. He chanced to mention that the four had arrived in London and were working with the Group. His brother replied, in rather vague terms, that some scandal was attached to Ralph Lee, in connection with the conduct and the funds of a strike which the South African group of which he was a leader had supported. He suggested that the Lee party be treated with caution while the facts were established.

Van Gelderen mentioned this letter in the small circle of close associates with whom he worked in the leadership of the Group, but not to Ralph Lee. At his friends' suggestion, he wrote back to his brother asking for solid evidence to confirm or refute the allegation, which was suspected of having a Stalinist origin. His brother seems to have had difficulty in getting the definite information requested, and did not reply for some time. Meanwhile the tale gave rise to a certain amount of ill-advised gossip in the leading circles of the Group, and no one could be quite sure afterwards who had or had not been told about it.

The next event, harmless enough to all appearances, which contributed to the crisis, is an item in the minutes of an Executive Committee meeting of September 19:

"From Com. S.S. Resigning from position of Lit(erature) Sec-  
(retary), owing to serious eye trouble. Res. accepted with extreme  
regret and Sec. instructed to convey to S.S. the appreciation of  
the Cte. for his valuable work. The matter to be referred to the  
Secretariat".

The question arose, who was to be appointed as permanent literature secretary. The decision was important. The Group relied heavily on Pioneer Publishers, New York, who had to be paid regularly and promptly. The literature secretary had, therefore, to be someone both efficient and financially reliable. Millie Lee was the obvious person, but first the tale from Van Gelderen's brother had to be cleared up.

The third incident likewise seems at first to have nothing to do with anything else. The minutes of the same Executive Committee Meeting include a report from Jackson on differences which he met at the Liverpool branch:

"Liverpool group still persist in attitude taken up at National  
Conference. Only D(on) J(ames) maintained his position on the  
question of the maintenance of a separate B.L. organisation.



S.L.F. worrying comrades most".

The minutes of a later Executive Committee meeting report that the Liverpool branch had refused to sell the September "Militant", which carried the application form to join the S.L.F. and had attacked Jackson on the ground that he held simultaneously the positions of National Secretary, "Militant" editor and fraction leader in the S.L.F., which was:

"bad for group and created danger of bureaucracy".

The E.C. remarked that it had had to take a risk and that in any case the S.L.F. work was ended: it decided to take no action at present.

The same minutes record that Jock Haston was elected to the E.C. and that there was a discussion about the fascist march in South-East London:

"Cde. R(alph) L(ee) maintained that the decision of the Secretariat was politically incorrect and that the pamphlet should have been issued. It was decided that the pamphlet should be read and discussed at the next G(eneral) M(embers) Meeting. R.L. to put the point of view of the Sub-Committee (which drafted the pamphlet). Decided that the Secretariat exceeded its powers on this matter (Decision not to issue pamphlet) but that the E.C. was at fault in not appointing a higher body to check the work of the Sub-Committee".

The record does not tell what the draft pamphlet contained to give rise to controversy about how to fight fascism. Jackson moved, and had unanimous support for the motion:

"The E.C. notes with pleasure the energetic participation of group members in resistance to Mosley South-East London march... in actual struggle we... demonstrated the utter futility of the Stalinist slanders against us. The E.C. realises that more could have been done with more adequate preparations..."

On the following day (October 10) the London area members had their usual monthly meeting. Harber reported:

"Paddington (branch) was operating very well... highest "Militant" sales... great local activity. Regular weekly business-like meetings were held. Members had been expelled from the L.L.o Y. by the Stalinists, but the local (Labour) Party had expelled the Stalinists. The group was agitating for re-building the League and re-admission of the Stalinists".

There was some discussion about how they were conducting their war on two fronts, but:

"... in view of the long agenda... this matter should be discussed through the Internal Bulletin."

The same meeting also discussed criticisms of the "Militant" from Paddington. They condemned one article as "vulgar", and, correctly, protested that

Jackson was still using the term "Communist" to describe the Communist Party, after the mistake had been pointed out. He accepted the second point, which was due, he said, to oversight. The question of vulgarity was a matter of taste. There was nothing politically incorrect in the article. Ralph Lee was elected to the editorial board. There is no report of an anti-fascist pamphlet being discussed, but the minutes end:

"Cde. R.L. gave a lecture on the position in China and the tasks of our movement. A considerable discussion ensued, and it was decided that the paper which formed the basis of the lecture should be circulated".

The storm broke a month later, at the General Members' Meeting on November 14. On the preceding day the Executive Committee had passed a unanimous vote of confidence in Ralph Lee. He continued, however, to contend that the old leadership had slandered him in order to exclude him from responsibility. The old leadership could not exactly state to whom they had mentioned the letter from Van Gelderen's brother, and created the impression that they were irresponsible gossips, while Ralph Lee cast himself the role of an accuser.

Yet another incident fed the fire. A member of the Leeds branch had been in Paris ten days earlier as a visitor to the National Conference of the French Section of the Fourth International, the Parti Ouvrier Internationaliste. While he was in Paris, he was taken to meet Camille (49), a leading member of the International Secretariat. In a talk about the British movement, Camille asked this man to confirm that Lee was a member of the "Militant" Group, and whether the Executive Committee was aware of a project for a theoretical journal about which Lee had written to him. The man reported the conversation to the Executive Committee, where it added fuel to the flames, because he was a friend of Jackson and therefore suspected of extending internationally the plot against Lee!

The decisive London General Members' Meeting was on December 19. Before it opened Ralph Lee presented charges against the officers of the group. There was a long wrangle about the minutes, after which Harber moved, as a preliminary to the hearing of the charges:

"No Bolshevik can consider splitting on such an issue and at such a moment":

Van Gelderen reported that his brother had now written:

"I am very happy to be able to inform you that Comrade R.L.'s name is cleared without a doubt. It can be taken for granted that the slander originated in the unscrupulous ranks of the Stalinists..."

However, Harber and Jackson were then attacked so savagely for "irresponsibility" that it is hard to reject entirely the possibility that Ralph Lee and his followers had already decided to split the Group. Harber's motion was carried by 23 votes to 6, with 9 abstaining, among whom was Lee himself. Haston then declared that he had nothing in common with the majority of members of the group. The minutes continue:

"J(ock) H(aston) then walked out of the meeting amid cries of 'shame'. G(erry) H(ealy) (Paddington) said he associated himself with J.H. and followed him out. The following comrades also walked out..."

to the number of eight, including Ted Grant. Harber moved their expulsion, which was carried by 26 votes to 6.

Ralph Lee and Haston at once announced the formation of a new group, the "Workers' International League" and a new journal appeared soon afterwards. (50)

Too late to affect the relations of the opposed tendencies, a letter dated January 1, 1935 arrived from Johannesburg. It expressed the opinion that Lee had acted unwisely in two strikes of Bantu workers, and had split in two an organisation in South Africa interested in the Fourth International. The letter, from a political opponent of Ralph Lee, went on:

"There is, however, no truth in the statement that R.L. appropriated money. This I regarded as slanderous... I regard R.L. as a bad element in the movement, not because he is lacking in intelligence, but in character. He finds it impossible to submerge himself to the cause, and is vindictive and anarchistic."

Another letter, also too late, came from Johannesburg. Dated February 21, 1935. It was written by an African worker, in a careful hand, and is signed, "Member of the Committee, African Metal Trades Union". It testifies warmly to the support which R. Lee and his associates had given in a strike. On an attached sheet there are the faltering signatures of nine other African workers. A tenth signed with a cross, against which someone wrote the name - "Comrade Saucepan".

The International Secretariat denounced "as a pure calumny" the accusation that R. Lee had stolen funds destined for the Metal Workers' Union. It criticised "several grave mistakes" committed by the leadership of the

"Militant" Group, which were used by Lee in order to talk about a plot against himself. The resolution of the I.S. went on:

"The I.S. considers it its duty to condemn actively the action of Lee and his companions in this affair... which brought them to split the "Militant" Group and to create a new minute, independent so-called Trotskyist group on a basis devoid of all political meaning... requests all the groups to... prepare at once the political and programmatic bases for the unification of the forces of the 4th International in England..."

Most of the members of the Liverpool branch left the "Militant" Group to join the W.I.L. which attracted altogether about a third of the membership. That it could do so, without any preliminary discussion of the political causes of the upheaval, indicates both the frustration and the immaturity of the movement. But the damage did not end with the expenditure of resources in inter-group struggle.

The W.I.L. rejected the resolution of the I.S. They "welcomed the renewed efforts of the I.S. to find a programmatic basis for the unification of the Bolshevick-Leninists in Britain", but they argued that the I.S. was wrong to blame them for the split. They had not resigned, but had been expelled. They went on:

"If the comrades of our group accepted the expulsion and did not appeal to the 'national membership', it was because:

1. the national membership is fictitious
2. because the actions of the leadership after our expulsion re-enforced the conclusion we formed before the expulsion that both leadership and the remaining membership were irresponsible..."

Their difficulty is easily understood, but in the hope of giving some semblance of regularity to their position, they now began to argue that the "Militant" Group did not exist - and this line of argument was to lead them into deeper waters. In fact, Haston and Healy worked without success to disrupt the "Militant" Group in Yorkshire during the spring of 1938, and the W.I.L. does not seem to have left any documents to support its claim by evidence.

When in the summer of 1938 the delegates of the Socialist Workers' Party, Cannon, Shachtman and Gould, invited them on behalf of the I.S. to unite with the other groups to form the unified British Section of the Fourth International, the Revolutionary Socialist League, the leaders of the W.I.L. wrote a "Contribution of the Workers' International League to the Discussion of the Tasks of the Bolshevick-Leninists in Britain", which

shows that its authors knew little of the long discussions about whether and how to work in the Labour Party which had gone on before any of the leading figures of the W.I.L. became prominent. The document contains a few echoes, but ends by basing its "entrism" on the expectation that the I.L.P. would shortly return to the Labour Party, a forecast which was not fulfilled. The empirical "turn" of the W.I.L. during the war to "open", "independent" work and the conceptions held by the majority at the founding conference of the Revolutionary Communist Party in Spring 1944 can be traced back partly to this "Contribution".

No less serious for the future of the whole Trotskyist movement was the systematic writing-out of history of everything which Trotskyists had done in Britain before 1938 by which they justified the existence of their organisation. Such falsifications include the statement in one of their wartime documents (51):

"From 1934 to 1938 a continuous series of splits took place. The political lines were, as a rule, not fundamental in character, but on questions of tactics, which were raised to immutable principles. The factions were characterised by a core, who, generally speaking, broke along lines of personal affiliation..."

These are quite independent of any committed by such open enemies as the Communist Party or the I.L.P. Whole areas of experience and of errors have been obliterated from the record and have been unnecessarily repeated, in particular, those associated with the real problems with which the "Militant" Group was trying to grapple, of how revolutionary Marxists should work in the Labour Party, and remained to bedevil again the work of later Trotskyists.

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The work of the Marxist Group, like that of the Marxist League, is less adequately documented than that of the "Militant" Group. Its inaugural public meeting was held in London on December 16, 1936 (52), followed by a members' conference (53). The principal source of information is its journal, "Fight for the Fourth International", eleven issues of which appeared, roughly at monthly intervals, between October 1936 and November 1937. It was well-produced and consisted largely of propaganda for general ideas, written by James and one or two other intellectuals. This was supplemented by pieces from Trotsky, documents of the Third

International and of the Movement for the Fourth International, general reports from workers (whom James would meet at the public meetings where he spoke for the Trotsky Defence Committee or for the Group), comments on passing events in the Trade Unions and the Labour Party and book reviews.

"Fight" asked its readers to join the Group or to work with it as an "open" organisation. It asked them to give money and to support the Trotsky Defence Committee (54). Several articles discussed its attitude to the Labour Party - not with complete consistency. It wanted the "National" Government replaced by a Labour majority, but seemed unsure about its own share in that process. The February issue (No. 4) said:

"... this line can be fought for anywhere, in the Labour Party or out of it... It does not go all the way. The best way to put the line into practice is inside a revolutionary party..."

However, when the July issue (No. 8) attacked Labour's "Immediate Programme" and denounced its leaders as "flunkeys of capitalism", it did not suggest that the programme might form the basis for a common struggle for a Labour victory. "Fight" had earlier suggested that members of the Labour Party should scrutinise what their M.P.s did with their time at Westminster, but seems to have paid no more than lip-service to such activities. On July 20 it sent to the Marxist League a document which suggested:

"The wider field of mass work, that of the factories, workshops, Trade Unions and Co-op: must of necessity be neglected or only touched in relation to the Labour Party perspective... The Marxist Group recognises the need for fraction work to be done in the Labour Party but considers that this must be done by the independent group co-ordinating such activity in line with its main tasks... The newly-formed S.L.F. provides a valuable arena for the B.L. fractions and could become most effective if the M.G. and the M.L. were one group..."(55)

Soon afterwards, however, the Central Committee of the Marxist Group wrote to contacts in Coventry apparently discouraging them from joining the S.L.F. (56) In the August issue (No. 9), an editorial entitled, "For Revolutionary Independence" (57) went for the "groups working in the Labour Party". Conditions had changed, it argued, since the end of 1933 when entry into the I.L.P. would have been correct. The Moscow Trials and the turn in Soviet foreign policy had improved the prospects for an "open" party, which could make contact with workers via the trade unions

and its open appeals. In any case:

"It is our task to raise the red flag of International Socialism. The workers are searching for it. They will not find it hidden away in the rotten archives of the Labour Party:..."

The same issue, however, spoke also of the "growing unrest, formation of opposition groups, revolt of Constituency Labour Parties", which the leadership kept in check with the aid of the Stalinists.

In October they called for a "United Front":

"... a militant front against the National Government and war... the only real issue which at this moment can unite the working class" (58).

"Fight" hailed the constitutional concessions to the constituency parties as "won by a year of hard work and organisation", to which there is no sign of a contribution by the Marxist Group. The November issue (No. 11) called for a campaign to bring down the "National" Government, for Labour M.P.s to walk out of the Commons and for a One-Day General Strike, because:

"We of the Marxist Group... would struggle with our fellow workers for the return of the (Labour) Party... since it is a big step forward on the road to revolution... (it) would be a terrific blow to the war preparations..."

On the civil war in Spain and, in particular, the role of the leadership of the P.O.U.M., the analysis of "Fight" differed from that of Trotsky and went through more than one change. The October 1936 issue (No. 1) called the P.O.U.M.:

"... the most progressive element in the working class movement... in the measure that it can surmount its serious centrist deviations and separate itself from the hesitant elements within itself, it can become the instrument by which power can be taken in Catalonia..." (59)

The article did not detail these "deviations". However, the December 1936 issue (No. 2) stated:

"The P.O.U.M.... in the early days... put forward some correct slogans, 'For Soviet Power', 'Land for the Peasants'... Now the P.O.U.M. is veering to the right. One of its leaders, Nin, has entered the Catalán Government, of which Companys, a bourgeois, is still a member..."

The following issue, however, (January 1937, No. 3) hailed the P.O.U.M. as:

"... THE left Party now fighting in Spain, which workers must

support..."

The February 1937 issue (No. 4) reprinted a piece from the P.O.U.M.'s English-language bulletin, entitled "For Workers' Democracy", and prefaced it with an editorial note:

"... we criticised the P.O.U.M. for taking office in a government which was a bourgeois government... Now the government (with the collaboration of the P.S.U.C., the Spanish Communist Party) has expelled the P.O.U.M. Events have therefore forced the P.O.U.M. to accept a correct position..." (my emphasis J.A.)

"Fight" did not consider, however, that the P.O.U.M. leadership still accepted the Governmental formula that the workers and peasants in Catalonia must not take power as a means of winning the war against Franco. Nor did it draw the inference that, if a centrist party can be "forced by events" to do the right thing, the struggle for the Fourth International would not be historically necessary'.

In striking contrast is the statement in the April issue (No. 5) of the Bureau for the Fourth International:

"... The P.O.U.M. and the C.N.T. - F.A.I., after having recognised and even helped to create the elements of Workers' Power... have helped by their collaboration in the government... to liquidate Workers' Power... The P.O.U.M. has remained a centrist party by reason of... a divorce between its phrases and its real policies..."

The statement closed by calling for support for the appeal of the P.O.U.M. for an international commission to examine the Stalinist charges that it had associations with the Gestapo or with terrorism. However, the same issue of "Fight" carried also a piece by James, entitled, "The Leninist Policy for Spain", containing not a word of criticism of the P.O.U.M. leadership. (60)

By the time the June issue appeared (No. 7), the leadership of the P.O.U.M. had capitulated in Barcelona and the party was being cut to pieces. An editorial preface to an account of the Barcelona rising reveals that "Fight" had been criticised for its tolerant attitude to the P.O.U.M. leadership. The article described how the workers had completely controlled the city for two days. Order could be restored only when the Government brought in troops from Valencia and when, at the height of the battle, the Anarchist leaders told their members to lay down their arms. The rank and file of the P.O.U.M. had fraternised with the "Friends of Durrutti" who defied



their Anarchist leaders. However, "Fight" did not report that the P.O.U.M. leaders had followed the Anarchist leaders a day later by telling their forces to go back to work.(61)

There was a sharp turn in the July 1937 issue (No. 8) in "P.O.U.M., the I.L.P. and Spain", an un-signed critique of Brockway's pamphlet, "The Truth about Barcelona". It showed that, too late, the rank and file of the P.O.U.M. were rejecting the leadership, and how the phrases about workers' power had covered its actual acceptance of the Governmental slogan which denied that the movement of the masses would promote victory in the civil war. It concluded:

"The P.O.U.M. leadership is bankrupt and must be liquidated ... Centrism has betrayed the struggle in Spain".

After July, no more was said about helping the P.O.U.M. and the August issue carried an appeal from the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists.

As an intellectual, prop. gandist journal, "Fight" did not attract many recruits. The Marxist Group tended to remain as Jones' personal associates. The paper was read by hundreds of workers as well as by intellectuals of the Left. However, the serious effort which it represents was made in the shadow of the I.L.P. and its reluctance to accept Trotsky's critique of the P.O.U.M. expressed a more general attitude, which two significant passages, selected from many others about books, illustrate.

The June issue (No. 7) recommends Max Eastman's book, "The End of Socialism in Russia", though the reviewer admits that it failed to show why Soviet Russia had come under the domination of a counter-revolutionary bureaucracy and that it totally lacked perspective. Eastman was one of those whom Trotsky called "Intellectuals in Retreat" but "Fight" did not suggest that works of this school would contribute to undermining Marxism and spreading pessimism.

Again, in the November issue (No. 11), a writer describing the Trotskyist movement itself showed that he was at once patronising and under pressure from the I.L.P. circles. "Fight" had no need to apologise to the I.L.P. and their associates, but he wrote:

"The Trotskyists have committed serious errors. Our isolation,

leading us to sectarianism, the polemical character of our propaganda and agitation, lack of contact with the mass movement, leading to bitter internal quarrels and splits, the imitation of Trotsky's faults by followers incapable of imitating his virtues, these other grave errors..."

Here is the influence of Souvarine, whom Trotsky described as a "gangrenous sceptic":

- (1) "Documents of the Fourth International", Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973, pp. 79 - 152.

The delegates from British groups were C.L.R. James, representing the Marxist Group, and Harber, representing the "Bolshevik-Leninist Group in the Labour Party", with two observers whose identity I have not been able to find. The Marxist League was not represented.

The introduction to the documents of the conference (op. cit.) reports that "another English Group" was "invited but unable to come for material reasons". The resolution of the Conference on the Tasks of the British Bolshevik-Leninists, the text of which was not known to the editors when the documents of the conference were issued in 1972, (the writer understands), says that it:

"... regrets the absence of a representative of the Groves group and the fact that it has not sent a document to the Conference. The Conference invited them to give their approval in principle to the official documents which have come out of the Conference".

A footnote in "Writings: 1935 - 36", p. 539, states that Dewar "refused" to attend the Conference. In a letter to the writer, dated, August 11, 1977, Dewar states:

"The note has it that I 'refused' ... but, of course, I did nothing of the kind. As a member of an organised group I could only accept its discipline and the decision was that to send anyone would be a waste of time and money that could be more usefully expended."

A short press communique, issued after the Conference, appears in "Service d'information et de Presse", dated August 11, 1936, issued by the International Secretariat for the Fourth International. The original is in B.D.I.C. It consisted largely of a denunciation of the policies of the Popular Front Governments of France and Spain, and stated:

"... the reports in various newspapers of what purports to have been a joint conference between representatives of the Third and Fourth Internationals at Breda are completely based on imagination ... the Second and Third Internationals have become bulwarks of capitalist anarchy and of the bourgeoisie which is threatened by the proletarian masses ..."

- (2) "Oeuvres", Vol. 3, p. 208, publ. Institut Leon Trotsky, Etudes et Documents Internationales, 29 rue Racine, 75005, In French, entitled "Problèmes Posés à la Minorité Britannique", and, p. 210, "Sur La Déclaration de la Majorité du Comité National de la Section Britannique du 17 Décembre - Projet". Both letters are dated January 23, 1934.

(3) Letter to the writer, August 25, 1977.

(4) New Leader, March 23, 1934. The report reads:

"We have received a statement from former members of the late British section of the International Communist League, who are applying for membership of the I.L.P. They express the view that the defeat of the working class in Germany confirmed the degeneracy of the Second International and the collapse of the C.I. as an instrument for the world proletarian revolution ... The building of a new party would be painfully slow. The possibility of a speedier way is provided by the I.L.P., which, despite its past mistakes, represents a potentially revolutionary force. Provided that it avoids the false policy which has strangled the C.I. it will become the future revolutionary party of this country. The British Section of the International Communist League has been liquidated by the International Secretariat. Many former members disagree with us on this matter, but we are convinced that developments in the I.L.P. will lead most of them shortly to join us. I.L.P. members' embittering experiences with the C.P.G.B. and the C.I. should serve not to weaken but to strengthen their concern for the defence of the U.S.S.R. For this experience shows that not only is the Workers' Soviet State threatened with imperialist plottings from without, but that the degenerating bureaucracy is paving the way, even if unconsciously, for counter-revolution from within. Only a genuine world revolutionary movement can safeguard the U.S.S.R.: only a fourth international can re-create that movement. In entering the I.L.P. we unreservedly state that we do not give up any of the principles of Bolshevik-Leninism; while observing the Constitution of the I.L.P. we shall fight for their theoretical development and practical application in the work of the I.L.P."

No means exists today to find out what the "minority" may have told the I.L.P. leaders!

The May-June 1934 issue of "Red Flag" complained:

"In the 'New Leader', there recently appeared a statement to the effect that the Communist League had been 'liquidated'. Our correction of this mis-statement was not published in spite of repeated requests..."

(5) They worked in the "official" Unemployed Associations, not the National Unemployed Workers' Movement. These associations, attached to Trade Councils, can be traced in the annual report of the Trades Union Congress from 1931 onwards. They appear to have been started to counteract the influence of the organisations which the National Council for Social Service was initiating. Groves and his associates would have been excluded, in any case, from the N.U.W.M. by the Communist Party, which controlled it. In any case, however, they thought that the Trades Councils' associations were more important because they were linked to the trade union movement.

- (6) Letter to the author, dated November 11, 1976
- (7) Mr. Harry Wicks has preserved the documents connected with this appeal. They are in the Modern History Archive at the University of Warwick. On Chen Du Siu, see Isaacs, "The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution", Stanford, 1961 passim, and the collection, "Leon Trotsky on China", Monad Press, New York, 1976.
- (8) "Red Flag", Vol. 1, No. 7, where the article is entitled: "Our Tasks: The Political Situation in Europe". It is also in "Writings: 1933-34", p. 136, where it is entitled: "Our Present Tasks".
- (9) In a by-election in North Hammersmith towards the end of April 1934, the Communist Party stood Pollitt against a Labour candidate. The Communist League issued a leaflet headed: "Five Communist Reasons for Voting Labour". See Appendix, Document 1, for extracts. On polling day, April 24, the "Daily Worker" attacked the Labour Party for being passive in the face of Fascism and leading to the working-class being disarmed. It also carried a front page statement:

"Another method of confusing the issue is that of issuing a leaflet entitled "Five Communist Reasons for Voting Labour". Whether the leaflet has been paid for by the election agent for the Labour Party we do not know. It really ought to figure in his election expenses. The leaflet is issued by a body calling itself the Communist League, but it is as difficult to find any Communism in it as to find fresh air and sunshine in a sewer. The type of arguments advanced by the writers suggests that they are either political idiots or tools of the Labour Party or both."

The Trotskyists were often embarrassed by the effort of the Communist Party to present them as allies of the reformists, while the reformists tried to exploit for their own benefit the ideas of Trotsky.

However, "Red Flag" for May-June 1934 (Vol. No. 9) recorded:

"In North Hammersmith... the Communist candidate lost some eighty votes. The tactics of the I.L.P. were little short of sharp practice. With disarming impartiality a questionnaire was presented to both Communist and Labour candidate... so worded that only the Communist candidate could possibly answer the questions in such a way as to secure I.L.P. support... we urge the I.L.P. members to stop this before the remnants of the I.L.P. follow the C.P.G.B. into complete impotence".

- (10) For Trotsky's perception of the right-ward shift, see "Writings: 1934-35", p. 17, "The Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union", dated June 16, 1934.

- (11) A Conference to London branches of the Labour League of Youth on July 29, 1934, convened unofficially and catching the officials of the London Labour Party by surprise, resolved, by a majority of 90 votes to 17:

"A situation is developing parallel to 1914 and we cannot see that the National Executive Committee is formulating effective proposals ... We do not propose to be betrayed, as was the youth of this country in 1914. In no circumstances would it be in the interest of the youth of this country for the Labour movement to support a war in defence of any capitalist state... 'Defence of Democracy' of the League of Nations might well be the excuse for another world war..."

Much of the story can be traced in the records of the London Labour Party.

- (12) The Communist League's leaflet denounced as "either fools or knaves" those who imagine that Britain can avoid the danger of Fascism:

"Condemnation of the harm which the Communist Party does by identifying the National Government with Fascism in no way excuses the failure of reformism to face its obligations... The foolish belief that the middle class are frightened away by strong socialist propaganda is shown to be false, because the Fascists win middle class support by promising strong action. Every attack on any section of the Labour Movement should be met with the combined resistance of the rest... Those who sincerely desire to fight against reaction, against war and for socialism, must declare implacable war against the enemies within our own ranks. We propose the formation of a left-wing group within the Labour League of Youth to effect its transformation into a really serious organisation... The Communist League... urged the United Front... when both Socialist and Communist Parties opposed it..."

- (13) Copies of the first two issues of "Youth Militant" have not been traced. The third issue is dated January 1936. It claims that the two preceding issues were sold out!

- (14) Groves' case was raised in the debate on the reference back of the section of the National Executive Committee's report on the United Front. The mover was Ellen Wilkinson, who was concerned, not about Groves, but about the Communist Party. Bill Fyne raised the question of Groves' credentials. According to the Conference Report, he said:

"Three days ago there was another delegate to come to this conference in place of myself - I am referring to Mr. Groves, who was a member of an organisation known as the Communist League. He was nominated from a full General Council on practically a unanimous decision. He was nominated because he was one of the chief workers in the constituency. The Communist League, I might explain, consisted in the first place of members of the Communist Party. These comrades, because they would not

accept the dictatorship which was in the C.P. - and still is - were thrown out. They did what the Labour Party wanted and got into the Labour Party. Since these individuals have been in our Labour movement it has grown 300%. They have fought on every occasion for the Labour candidate and they have opposed the C.P."

All the same, the reference back was overwhelmingly defeated! According to Groves, the League had met Bill Pyne in its work round the local Labour Exchanges; he worked as a part-time grave-digger in Streatham Cemetery. Groves remarked: "It took a good deal of courage to make that speech, too".

- (15) What appear to be the essential points may be summarised as follows:

In August 1934, W.G. Hanton produced, for the National Committee of the Communist League, a "Draft for Immediate Programme", which argued:

"The political slogan which unified all the immediate demands of the working class as a whole... is the fight for the return of a Labour Government... pledged not only to provide immediate relief... but to lay the foundations for socialism by nationalisation with workers' control... For the Labour leaders to be compelled to take a step forward... a tremendous amount of pressure will have to be organised..."

To expect that the at present numerically weak Communist League can by itself bring about this pressure is out of the question.

For our relatively small groups to enter the Labour Party for this purpose would mean only that they would be entirely dissolved...

It is necessary for the Communist League to concentrate as much energy as possible on the I.L.P. to alter its attitude to the Labour Party and draw it away from the false policies of the Communist Party..."

Groves' reply, "Statement to All Members concerning the present policy of the League and its International" (dated August 23, 1934) shows his worked-out ideas about how to work in the Labour Party and about the International:

"... To know the right quotations, to dole out chunks of the First Four Congresses;... is not the application of revolutionary theory... the work of a fraction within the Labour Party... is to formulate clearly... a forward policy, to win the members to the policy... members secured in this way are of greater value and reliability than those picked up casually at the street corner... Many of our groups spend far more time in personal disputes, wrangles and with the technical aspects of the work than they do with the problems met by our comrades in the unions, the Labour Party, etc..."

... there is the continual criticism made by many comrades, including leading comrades, of our attitude to the "New Party" and the "4th International". We are, we are told, putting this aspect of our work too much in the background... we express ourselves guardedly... In my opinion we have not been guarded

enough... The attempt to build the 4th International out of a grouping of the Left Socialist Parties has temporarily failed... We must seek to win every possible position in the local Labour Parties and the Trade Councils... our propaganda must be concentrated more and more upon the immediate issues before the workers...

We have received-unofficially- statements... that comrade Trotsky is urging the French comrades to enter the French Socialist Party. If this is so, then comrade Trotsky has... reached conclusions similar to those we have reached on the British situation. A further report, also received unofficially, says that the I.S. is urging that the British Communist League should turn towards the Labour Party and... issue the call for the resignation of the National Government. This has, of course, been our policy for a long time and the fact that the I.S. has been forced to amend its ideas... although a trifle belatedly, is a striking justification of the stand we made many months ago... It is also necessary that the members should know that the International Communist League is itself the victim of the present storm and stresses raging everywhere... This need not alarm us; our own experiences of the I.S. showed us the limitations of the I.C.L. and how much it was at the mercy of unstable elements. In our own organisation the turn towards social democratic organisations resulted in the more hide-bound comrades deserting...

The outcome of this discussion can be seen in two articles in the October 1934 issue of "Red Flag", Vol. 1, No. 11. "The Communist League: Its Past and Future" introduces "The Communist League and Its Immediate Programme", a statement by the National Committee.

These documents deserve further study. They form the political basis of Groves' work in the Socialist League and of the Marxist League's defence of the P.O.U.M. against Trotsky's criticism in 1936-37.

(16) Hugo Dewar has informed the writer that the immediate reason why no more issues of the first series of "Red Flag" emerged after that for November 1934, despite the optimistic promises in that issue, was that the paper had always had to be hand-set and the only comrade able to set it could no longer do so.

(17) Statement to the writer in summer 1978.

(18) Hugo Dewar informed the writer, in an un-dated letter received August 11, 1977:

"... it is also an error that I was in the Socialist League."

Dewar appears to have been a member of the I.L.P., though not connected with the Marxist Group, and to have been delegated to the General Management Committee of the Balham and Tooting Labour Party by a local branch of N.U.D.A.W.



(19) The essentials of the document, "Aims and Methods of the Marxist League", are:

"The MARXIST LEAGUE is an association of Labour Party members, Trade Unionists and co-operators, organised together for the study of Marxism, the training of Marxist leadership and the advocacy of Marxist policy and principles in the Labour Movement....

For the victory of the British workers a Marxist leadership is needed. This does not exist today in an organised form within the Labour Movement, neither is it to be found in the Communist Party nor in the I.L.P. Such a leadership is not made by proclamation, nor by slogan-chanting...

However, since only a minority of the members of the Labour Party support a Marxist policy, the Marxist League works loyally as an integral part of the Labour Party... against the common enemy...

The return of a Labour Government can take the Movement a step nearer to the attainment of power... certain clear principles, among the most important of which are...

1. The preservation of the leading role of the working class...
2. The active defence of all the democratic rights of the workers...
3. The strengthening of proletarian internationalism... Support for the defence of the Soviet Union... Opposition to all imperialist wars, whether waged as wars of 'defence' or 'aggression' or by the League of Nations...

The immediate aim of returning a Socialist majority... calls for united effort...

- (a) To compel the resignation of the National Government...
- (b) To secure that the Labour Party is pledged to ameliorative measures... to measures which will lay the foundation for the Socialist transformation of society...
- (c) to... transform the movement into a single fighting unit.

The letters from Trotsky to Groves and Dewar which have so far come to light, are, to the best of the writer's knowledge in "Writings: 1935 - 36", p. 250, "Questions to a British Group", dated January 15, 1936; page 264, "Some Advice to a British Group", dated March 7, 1936 and, page 361, "For a Common Goal in Britain", dated July 13, 1936.

- (23) Harber's statement is about the "Hyde Park Group". The "thirteen members who had joined from outside", whom Harber mentioned, were spoken of at the time as the "Hyde Park Group". They hardly formed a group in an organised sense. Militants had been leaving the Communist Party for years, some for better reasons than others, and all kinds of people used to meet for political discussions at Speakers' Corner. Haston gathered people round him and sold them the American "Militant" and the pamphlets of Pioneer Publishers. Starkey Jackson and Healy also took part in these discussions.

The report of the August 1937 Conference of the "Militant" Group says that some of the thirteen had dropped out because the group could not assimilate them. It was unable to assimilate Haston and Healy either.

- (24) The Marxist League contributed a short statement, the tone of which may be thought rather patronising. Its leaders saw themselves as the original Trotskyists with whom Trotsky had corresponded personally five years earlier. The supporters of the James-Cooper positions were to fuse finally with them in February 1938.

There is, however, one rather menacing formulation, aimed at the Harber Group, in the statement:

"The Marxist League dates back to the first days of the formation of a section of the International Left Opposition in this country. When certain of our comrades sought to work in the I.L.P. we made every effort, although we were powerless to prevent a formal split, to secure the recognition of a division of activity with at least a co-ordinating centre. This we were unable to obtain. We went on with our own work in the labour movement, with the publication of Bolshevik-Leninist material - confident that the logic of events would bring about an understanding of the need for at least co-ordination and co-operation in our work. We will not go into our efforts to secure this co-operation with a section of the I.L.P. comrades, nor into the ways and means by which our efforts were balked, so that the present situation was reached where there are now two Bolshevik-Leninist papers each competing for the same custom and support. Although a reckoning will in due course be made with the individuals responsible for this state of affairs, we nevertheless consider that at this time, with the exercise of some care, and with some agreement on vital protective measures, there can be brought about the beginning of actual co-operation between the Groups."

- (25) The October 11 session unanimously decided:

1. That the Bolshevik-Leninists in the Labour Party, the Marxist League and the Marxist Group, be urged to appoint two representatives to meet on or before

October 21, 1936, in order to make the preliminary arrangements for the setting up of a Central Co-ordinating Committee:

2. The functions of such a C.C.C. shall be:

- a). To act as a general advisory committee and a cohesive force to all groups with a view to organisational fusion:
- b). To make suitable arrangements in regard to the publication of the three B.L. papers ("FIGHT, "RED FLAG" and "YOUTH MILITANT") so that these journals shall supplement each other and not compete or overlap in publication of material.
- c). To institute a regular internal bulletin in which all shades of Bolshevick-Leninist opinion in regard to political and organisational issues can be discussed:
- d). To draw up as soon as possible a plan of joint work and political thesis, such thesis to be submitted to aggregate meetings of constituent groups for acceptance and then referred to a delegate conference of all groups.

(26) The source of the Bureau's letter of November 7 is International Internal Bulletin No. 1. The full text is in Appendix, Document 2. The Bureau's Declaration on the subject of the English Marxist Group, of December 15, comes from the same source and the full text is in Appendix, Document 3.

(27) James appears to have been alarmed by the criticism of the Bureau, though it did not change his opinions. On November 18 he wrote to Vereecken, the Belgian Trotskyist, who, he knew, had opposed the entry of the French section into the S.F.I.O. in 1934, and to Walter Dauge, who also was in the leadership of the Belgian Section of the Movement for the Fourth International, appealing to them for support. Vereecken did not reply, and James wrote again on December 31. Vereecken then undertook to oppose the exclusion of James' group. He also raised the question in the Executive Committee of the Belgian Trotskyist organisation, which mandated him and Lesoil to oppose the exclusion of James' group at the Bureau's next meeting, and to call for reports on the British tendencies to be circulated to the other sections for discussion. Vereecken ended:

"Meanwhile, I have seen cde. Braun of the I.S. He has assured me that he also was against exclusion and for calling a meeting of all the B(olshevik) L(eninists) in Britain. If this solution is adopted at the Bureau I shall do my best to see that this national assembly is convoked by a co-ordinating committee

grouping all the tendencies and I shall demand that our party shall send a delegation to it. Do not be too anxious. Above all, no unhealthy or damaging counter-manoevres."

The letters were found by Mr. Louis Sinclair in the Vereecken archive at the Houghton Library, Harvard University, and supplied to the writer by him.

- (28) Eugene (or Erwin) Bauer was a member of the International Secretariat of the International Communist League and a signatory, on its behalf, of the "Declaration of Four: On the Necessity and Principles of a New International", in August 1933. He later strongly opposed the entry of the French section into the S.F.I.O. and left the I.C.L. to join the S.A.P.

On B.J. Field, see Cannon, "History of American Trotskyism", Pioneer Publishers, 1944, pp. 126 - 133.

- (29) See Saville, "May Day 1937", in "Essays in Labour History 1918 - 1939", p. 270. "A letter from the Provisional Committee for the Defence of Leon Trotsky" (un-dated) reads:

"On the 28th of October the Norwegian Government announced an Order in Council which states that 'a foreigner who is interned in accordance with the Provisional Order of 31.8.36 cannot, without the permission of the Department of Justice, appear as a plaintiff before a Norwegian Court. Such permission shall be refused when the relations of the State with another State demand it'.

This decision of the Norwegian Cabinet specifically deals with the case of Leon Trotsky, who instituted a libel action against the editors of 'Arbeideren', the organ of the Communist Party, and the 'Fritt Volk', the organ of the Norwegian Fascists. This legal action of Leon Trotsky was decided on after the previous decision of the Norwegian Cabinet to intern him and to restrict his literary activities to purely historical works. Thus the combined pressure of the reactionary and Fascist forces in Norway and the diplomatic pressure of the Soviet Government has been brought to bear on the Norwegian Government in order to prevent him replying to the charges made against him at the Moscow Trial.

By yielding to this combined pressure the Norwegian Labour Government has reduced the democratic right of asylum to a trap. Such an action established a precedent which is a direct menace to the international working class.

The trials still pending in the Soviet Union and the unsatisfactory character of the evidence submitted in

the Trial of August 19th - 24th which led to the execution of the sixteen, demands immediate action by the Labour Movement for an authoritative enquiry into the whole affair. We, the undersigned, appeal to the organisations of Labour for their support for such an enquiry through an International Commission set up by the international Labour Movement.

In our opinion such a Commission of Enquiry should investigate the materials in the Commissariat of Justice in Moscow and also the material and statements of Leon Trotsky. We call on all those who support this proposal to inform the Committee of their support, in order that the campaign for the democratic right of asylum for Leon Trotsky may be launched and the charges made against him may be fully investigated.

Signed: H.N. Brailsford; J.F. Horrabin;  
Reg Groves; Conrad Noel, Vicar of  
Thaxted; Stuart Purkiss; Fred Shaw;  
Rowland Hill; Irene Rathbone; Garry  
Allingham; Harry Wicks (Secretary)

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The Trotsky Defence Committee (Provisional) would be pleased to send a speaker to address your members on the case for Leon Trotsky. Application for a speaker should be sent to Harry Wicks..."

The Committee organised a public meeting in London on February 10, 1937, where Rowland Hill and Stuart Purkiss among the speakers had established positions in the trade union movement. Rowland Hill, like Purkiss, was a leading member of the Railway Clerks' Association and President of the Bradford Trades Council. He was a strong supporter of the National Council of Labour Colleges and a friend of Fred Shaw, the area organiser, as well as of the young Trotskyists in Leeds.

C.L.R. James spoke at many meetings in support of the Committee. "Charles Sumner" was the "nom de guerre" of Hilary Sumner-Boyd. This young American was of distinguished ancestry; his grandfather was an Abolitionist in the Civil War and his father a critic of Woodrow Wilson in World War I. He was born in Boston and educated privately, before going to Christ Church, Oxford, where he took a second in P.P.E. Just before the outbreak of World War Two he went to teach at Robert College in Turkey, where he died in 1976. For obituary, see "Times", September 18, 1976. He followed Harry Wicks as secretary of the Defence Committee.

- (30) The "Militant Group" also issued a statement in Trotsky's Defence, but of a rather more explicitly political character.

It is un-dated, but evidently was produced in early Spring 1937:

**"THE MOSCOW MASSACRES.  
THE TRUTH!**

**WHY WERE** Zinoviev and Kamenev executed? Why are Radek and Sokolnikov in jail?

Why are thousands of other Bolsheviks in exile in Siberia? **WHY IS** Trotsky, second only to Lenin in the leadership of the Russian Revolution, now accused of being an agent of Hitler out to overthrow Soviet Power?

**WHAT IS** the truth of the Moscow Trials which are bewildering thousands of honest workers all over the world?

**DO YOU KNOW -**

**THAT TROTSKY'S SON**, Sedov, was in Paris when, according to the evidence of the first trial he was supposed to be in Copenhagen, and that he has never been to Copenhagen in his life?

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"For Stalin there remains only one thing, to try to draw a trail of blood between the official party and the Opposition. For him it is an absolute necessity to link the opposition with crimes, with preparation for armed insurrection etc... It is for this reason that we must pay attention to the fact that Stalin, after expelling the Opposition leaders, tried in one way or another to push this group or that group, supposed to be in opposition, into an adventure or tries to concoct in case of failure, a "crime" or a "military plot", to make the Opposition responsible for it."

LEON TROTSKY

Bulletin of the Opposition, JULY 1929

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**THAT TROTSKY'S "Secret Letter"** was an open letter published in the Trotskyist press all over the world. (English, in the American "Militant" 9.5.32).

**THAT NOT** a single member of the Left Opposition (Trotskyist) was among the defendants at either trial but only those who left it years ago.

**THAT THE** accused at the first trial gave four different periods when the Trotsky-Zinoviev centre was organised - Summer of 1931, Summer of 1932, Autumn of 1932 and the end of 1932 and that the Prosecutor never attempted to reconcile these discrepancies?

**THAT THE "United Trotsky-Zinoviev" Centre**, according to the evidence of Bakaeiv, actually ceased activity in the autumn of 1932, i.e. before it existed!

**THAT ZINOVIEV**, Kamenev and several other members of the alleged "centre" were exiled from Moscow at the very time when the centre was supposed to have functioned?

THAT CONFLICTING evidence as to the actual composition of the "center" was accepted without question by the prosecutor.

THAT ALTHOUGH dozens of names were mentioned as having participated in the "plot" to kill Kirov, no attempt was made to bring these people to the trial as accused or as witnesses?

THAT AT the second trial the important statement that Piatakov flew from Berlin to Oslo to consult Trotsky has already been proved to be false by the Norwegian authorities and that no plane flew from Berlin to Oslo during that period?

THAT PIATAKOV was decorated only eighteen months ago for his services to Soviet industry?

THAT AMONG those shot or under accusation are eighteen former members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, and that out of the Political Bureau of Lenin's time, only Stalin remains?

These facts and dozens of other glaring contradictions and lies in the evidence are being withheld from the workers by the Stalinists. Trotsky, who completely denies any participation in the "plots", has demanded an International Working Class Tribunal into the charges; he is prepared to put before it all his private papers and to present conclusive evidence to refute the Stalinist lies.

THE STALINISTS ARE AFRAID TO ACCEPT HIS CHALLENGE! WHY?

BECAUSE SUCH an investigation would expose them before the eyes of the world. They cannot endure such an independent investigation. They want to be prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner.

BECAUSE STALIN has abandoned the world revolution and now relies on alliances with foreign imperialisms to defend the U.S.S.R. To do this he must prove to his new allies that he has severed all connection with the revolutionary past.

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Read

1/3d. BEHIND THE MOSCOW TRIAL 1/3d.

A political and legal exposure of the first trial throwing a brilliant light on the second...

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BECAUSE THE Communist International is preparing to lead the workers behind their own boss class in the next imperialist war and they are forced to discredit the Trotskyists who still advance the Leninist slogans of working for the defeat of their own capitalist government and its overthrow by the workers.

## IF THE CHARGES ARE TRUE

Then what must be the condition of the first Workers' Republic, if men who spent all their lives to achieve it, are so disillusioned that they prefer Fascism?

## IF THE CHARGES ARE FALSE

Then what must be the condition of the Soviet Union under Stalin when such horrible frame-ups and massacres can be perpetrated?

**WORKERS! DEMAND THE TRUTH! SUPPORT TROTSKY'S REQUEST FOR AN INTERNATIONAL TRIAL!**

### COMMUNIST WORKERS!

If the charges which your leaders bring against the Trotskyists are true, you have nothing to fear from such an investigation; if they are false then it is your duty to the working class to find out the reasons for them.

**LONG LIVE TROTSKY!**

**LONG LIVE THE SOVIET UNION!**

**LONG LIVE THE WORLD REVOLUTION! "**

Sources on the Trotsky Defence activities are:

"The Case of Leon Trotsky", Martin Secker and Warburg 1937.

"Not Guilty", Martin Secker and Warburg, 1937.

"Writings: 1936 - 37", passim, and, for the American activities:

"Herbert Solow: Portrait of an Intellectual", by Alan Wald, in "Prospects: An Annual of American Cultural Studies, No. 3, 1977;

"Memories of the John Dewey Commission: Forty Years Later", by Alan Wald, in "Arioch Review."

The British Committee survived at least until October 1937, when Secker sent out (on October 27) a circular advertising Secker and Warburg's publication, "The Case of Leon Trotsky". It concluded:

"May I make one final appeal to our friends for donations so that the British Committee may bring its work to a fitting conclusion unhampered by lack of funds?"



- (31) The first issue of "Militant" bears the sub-title "For Revolutionary Socialism", but not the name of any organisation. Its editorial, "Real and Sham Unity" argued:

"... there is taking place... a distinct shift to the left... a pale reflection of the continental struggles... expresses itself mainly in increased trade union membership and wage demands... it has begun to have important political echoes. The growing discontent among the rank and file of the Labour Party against the collaboration of their leaders with the National Government, the revolt of the constituency parties at Edinburgh and above all the growing demand for unity, are the political expression... attempts are being made to canalise the left sentiments of the masses behind slogans and leaderships which can only lead it to disaster. The most important move... is... the agreement between the leaders of the C.P., I.L.P. and S.L. ... hatched out in private... and kept a complete secret from their members... issued in the name of 'unity'... decked out... with 'left' phrases... only the thin end of the wedge for 'Popular Front' collaboration with Liberalism and sections of the capitalist class... The British - Soviet Pact is the central feature... not merely a mistaken compromise... a gross betrayal... It is useless for them to cry that they are 'placing their emphasis on the necessity for a change of government' before such a pact is signed, when they allow the Communists to demand it at once from the National Government... If the Socialist League accepts these proposals it will destroy itself... There are many issues on which they can agitate within their organisations for united action... the fight for unity must be waged inside the Labour Party..."

The text of the "Unity Agreement" was published as a supplement, incomplete but with special attention drawn to the points:

"... for a pact between Great Britain, the Soviet Union, France and all other nations in which the working-class has political freedom... parties to this... campaign... agree not to attack any group supporting the campaign..."

In the second issue of "Militant", Harber wrote "The Socialist League Turns to the Right", which trenchantly demonstrated that the majority of the leadership had capitulated to the Communist Party and renounced the position, which the League had overwhelmingly adopted at its Bristol Conference in June 1935, that in the event of a war breaking out in which Britain was involved, it was the duty of socialists not to support their own capitalist government but to fight for its defeat and its replacement by a working-class government:

"... even if the British capitalist government happened to be fighting in an alliance with the Soviet Union... At the same time (it) warned the workers against "League of Nations" wars."

Harber concluded:

"We call upon all branches and members stay in the League in order to fight for a return to its former policy, but to refuse to operate the unprincipled 'unity' agreement, which was undoubtedly forced upon the League by the National Council..."

Harber also made the interesting remark:

"A considerable section of the opposition to the 'unity' agreement... came from purely right wing elements... with such people we have little in common. The bulk of the opposition from the London district, which was almost unanimously opposed to the agreement, was however based broadly on the objections... in the last number of "THE MILITANT". Unfortunately, owing to short notice and lack of time for discussion in branches (only three days) and their isolation from the rest of the League, most of the left-wing elements in the provinces did not understand the political issues involved..."

The Special Conference of the League in London on January 16, 1937, gave 56 votes "for" the "Unity Campaign", 38 votes "against" and 23 abstentions. The Socialist League actually entered the "Unity Campaign", which led to its destruction, on a minority vote!

- (32) See footnote 30. "Militant" No. 2 reports, under a heading, "London Workers Demand Moscow Trial Enquiry":

"A crowded meeting of over eight hundred workers at the Memorial Hall... passed by a huge majority a resolution calling for the setting-up of an international working-class commission of enquiry into the allegations made against Trotsky at the Moscow Trials". Among the speakers were S. Silverman M.P., Henry Sara, Garry Allighan, Reg Groves, Leigh Davis, Harry Wicks, C.L.R. James and Stewart Purkiss."

The representative of the "Militant Group" was Leigh Davis. The report goes on:

"The Stalinists present kept up a continual barrage of childish interruptions and cat-calls and disgusted even many of their own supporters. Although the chairman had announced a retiring collection for the Spanish workers, one of the Stalinists attempted to take a collection during the speeches. Upon being restrained he accused the Trotskyists of not wanting to help Spain. A seller of 'Challenge' mingled anti-Semitic slogans with his sales talk! "

- (33) Van Gelderen confirmed, in a conversation with the writer many years later, that there had been a difference. On the one hand, the editorial of the third, mimeographed issue of "Militant", for March 1937, suggests that, whatever hope the

leaders of the Group may have had in getting the decision to support the "unity campaign" ignored or reversed, there were some who had already written off any prospect either of saving it or of mobilising a campaign against Cripps to try to persuade him to change his mind:

"... if war comes... we must use the disorganisation and discontent to overthrow the capitalist government and establish the Workers' Republic... The struggle of the workers for their immediate demands must be co-ordinated and supported by the whole Labour movement, and in the course of the struggle can be forged the workers' united front against capitalism and for the conquest of power. Such a united front would be an instrument for socialism and not, like the People's Front, one for the preservation of the existing system which breeds war and fascism. The realisation of a programme based on these demands means a struggle against the reactionary leadership of the Labour Party and the sham 'Lefts' from Cripps to Pollitt. This struggle must be given an organisational form and given it quickly. It is necessary to build within the Labour Party a new Left Wing movement around a militant programme... such a movement is in its embryonic stages already and all militant socialists must co-operate to form and lead it. The dissentient elements in the Socialist League could well join in... we have already taken the initiative in some localities. The exact organisational form is still a matter for speculation..."

But in the June "Youth Militant", Alexander commented on the demise of the Socialist League in different terms, less specific but perhaps better calculated to win sympathy from any who might still be hoping to persuade Cripps to change his mind and resurrect the Socialist League, or, at least, to go through the experience of trying to do so:

"In spite of the specious promises made by Cripps and others that the Socialist League would be in no danger of expulsion if it embarked on the 'Unity Campaign', Whitsun saw the end of that body, the only national organisation inside the Labour Party pretending to put forward a left-wing policy... Every constituency Labour Party should have a resolution to the National Conference demanding the re-instatement of the Socialist League.

We must get to work to replace the Socialist League by an organised left wing inside the Labour Party which sees as its first task the achieving of a revolutionary working-class mass party... The Socialist League... has paid the price of its own folly. Nevertheless, that is no reason why we should not use the Socialist League as a club against our reactionary leaders..."

The same issue proposed, as a draft motion to go to the National Conference of the Labour Party, that C.L.P.s condemn the action of the National Executive in disaffiliating the Socialist League:

"... In the past members of the Labour Party prominent as well as rank and file have participated in joint activity with the Communist Party and I.L.P. without any action being taken against them. Moreover prominent members of the Party have appeared on platforms together with Tories, Liberals and other enemies of the working-class, without the N.E.C. taking any disciplinary action.

... this conference declares its opposition to the 'Unity Campaign'... since it is the first step to the creation of a Popular front... with its consequent abandonment of the working class struggle."

Other draft motions which "Youth Militant" proposed condemned non-intervention in the civil war in Spain, and, in various formulations, called on the Labour Party not to support war credits or war.

- (34) See the "Militant" Group's "Statement to the Joint Meeting", "Report to Provincial Branch(es) on London Meeting" and minutes of London Executive Committee of the Militant Group, February 20, 1937, under the heading, "Socialist League":

"In London, three groups working in the Socialist League. Ourselves, M.L. and centrists round McCarthy, Allighan. Groves showed at joint meeting that they have short-term L.P. perspective. The people we can work with to form Socialist Discussion Circles are the Centrists, who have the addresses of all Socialist League branches and a certain following among the dissidents. The Emergency Committee is getting out circulars. We must move for federation of Socialist Discussion circles inside the Labour Party on the basis of dissident Socialist League branches. These Centrists are suspicious of us, as apparently Groves has slandered us to them, claiming that we are a fraction of the I.L.P. They distrust Groves. At the expected decision of the Labour Party Executive Committee making membership in the Socialist League incompatible with Labour Party membership, the membership in London will break up... agreement that Cde. Harber continue negotiations... on the basis of our programme for the Labour Party with the object of setting up a Federation of Socialist Discussion Circles round it."

The same minutes report:

"1,600 copies of the current 'Youth Militant' had been sold and over 70 branches of the Labour League of Youth circulated. The financial position was serious - the monthly loss on Y.M. was... £4."

The Report of the London meeting says:

"... Braun (from the International Secretariat, J.A.) made a long speech on perspective... he supported our general line, disagreed with our

League of Youth perspectives... Groves was asked point blank if his group was willing to unite with us. He said that 'speaking personally', he was for unity of all three groups, not of the two Labour Party groups. Most of his comments were calculated to play off the "Marxist Group" against us, try to show us fighting bitterly among ourselves, and so disillusion his rank and file with the idea of unity with us... If nothing concrete develops in the 'Marxist League' from this meeting, we may safely forget about them... with the assurance that the policies which the "Marxist League" as well as the 'Marxist Group' is following will inevitably condemn them to disintegration."

- (35) The editorial of the June 1937 "Youth Militant" reported that the great majority of the Labour League of Youth supported the leadership of Ted Willis, in the belief that his tactics of accommodation to the N.E.C. and his support for an "anti-Fascist" British-Soviet Pact would conciliate the Labour Party leadership. 'Youth Militant' had argued that a real fight for an autonomous League and against support for war would have led to the leadership of the League being expelled, and that the League should, as a united body, have prepared to break with the Labour Party for the time being:

"Conference has decided and we have publicly declared that we would accept its democratic decision... But the League of Youth is not the only section of the Labour Party which has a bone to pick with Transport House... (the) left wing is just beginning to crystallise and expresses in a loose, unorganised form the dissatisfaction of the rank and file with the policies pursued by the leaders..."

Alexander went on to list the grievances: the un-democratic way in which Party conferences were run; overt support in Parliament for re-armament; the Party's treacherous policy on Spain; support of the Monarchy and suppression of colonial peoples...

- (36) The mimeographed "Militant" No. 4 and the first of the printed series have not been traced.
- (37) The article did not analyse the role of the Monarchy in British politics. It spoke of:

"George, King and Emperor, who in his person so aptly embodies the characteristics of British Imperialism, even to its stuttering foreign policy... Few in the immense crowds... will not... think of the ghost at the feast... but hard-drinking, hard-living Edward was too stubborn for his capitalist

masters... How far the poison has already worked we can see... how many Labour Councils are participating in the treachery?"

- (38) "Youth Militant" reports on the defeat at the London Conference of the Labour League of Youth, in the June issue, do not mention whether any of the youth section of the Socialist League made their voices heard there. In 1936 they had issued a youth paper, entitled, "Socialist Youth", no copies of which have been traced. Groves wrote in the "Socialist", the monthly journal of the Socialist League until December 1936, in May 1936 about:

"group of C.P. sympathisers, united round the unofficial paper, 'Advance' successfully has the support of many Leaguers through its advocacy of 'self-government' and 'a fighting line for youth'. This paper is now cautiously laying down its position... for all the current slogans and tactics of the Y.C.L..."

However, in the first issue of the new series of "Red Flag", in May 1936, an unsigned article entitled "Socialist Youth and Policy" reported on the Manchester Conference of the League in 1936 with a side-swipe at "Youth Militant":

"... the conflicting political groupings within the Labour League of Youth managed to carry, in the teeth of Labour Party Executive Committee opposition, the demand for internal control and freedom for control of its organs and its officers. The political programme of the League needs to crystallise in a bold, convincing but simple form the basic principles of internationalism. But it must be worked for in a way that will secure the enthusiastic adherence of the large majority..."

To sling about catch-words with ultimatums and enforced, untimely divisions of all questions would, in the present state of the League, isolate the revolutionaries and assist reformism. To aim, as some groups are doing, at a quick, snap division and the subsequent dragging out of a small section is as disastrous in its results as the other tendency which seeks to obliterate political difference in the name of 'broad fronts'...

In actual fact the 'Advance' represents a very real and definite political platform - the conference debate on the Labour Party's Peace policy showed that 'Advance' works for organisational independence while creating conditions for political dependence on reformism..."

His attitude towards the Stalinists, which the "Militant Group" believed to have been too conciliatory even after they attacked him brutally in January 1937, is one of the

reasons by which the "Militant Group" explained in summer 1937 Groves' isolation in the Socialist League and his defeat at the Special Conference in May 1937. Harber also was a delegate to that Conference, but he felt, according to what he said at the time, that the battle had already been lost and that Groves had contributed to the success of the Communist Party in exploiting the slogan of "unity" and representing its policies as more "progressive" than those of the Labour Party leadership. "Red Flag" ceased with the May 1937 issue.

(39) The text of the record of the Conference has survived.

(40) The attitude of the "Militant" Group did not, however, completely exclude trying to get a voice in Parliamentary elections. Mr. Harry Wicks has told the writer that Harber encouraged Groves to stand for Parliament, before the latter was adopted as Labour candidate for Aylesbury. After the war, it appears, Harber also helped Groves to secure the Labour candidacy at Eastbourne.

(41) Harber went on:

"Since the whole object of such a partial programme is the recruitment into the new organisation of workers who not accept the full Bolshevik (Leninist) position, (i.e. Left Centrists), and since such workers may, and in fact should, out-number the B.L.s, there is always a danger that such a body may degenerate into an ordinary centrist organisation like the I.L.P. or the Socialist League. This danger can be obviated only if the B.L.s provide the political leadership of the new organisation, maintaining political and organisational contact with the Bureau for the IV International...

The maintenance of the independence of the revolutionary party was a fundamental principle of Bolshevism, no matter in what other party the field of work lay..."

(42) Jackson's speech went on to give a unique picture of the "Militant" Group. He made organising tours and visited the provincial branches. He is reported thus:

"The initial period of group activity had been almost confined to work in the Labour League of Youth, and in constant discussion on inter-group relations. The group had been up against the very existence of the Marxist Group and the Marxist League, which seriously hampered its work. Up to the summer (of 1937) the main task of the E.C. was consolidating the Group. When the Socialist League capitulated to the Stalinists, we were unable to capitalise the situation because of our unpreparedness. At that time we had





five members in the Socialist League. Even Liverpool did not begin consistent work in the Labour Party until January (1937). Did Liverpool think that after only three months' work we could have formed an open organisation of the type they suggest. The E.C. believed that in many localities the group is now in a position to form such a body... Because of the centrist position they hold, the Marxist League, in spite of three years' work in the Socialist League, have not developed to any extent."

In his closing speech, Jackson recalled that, as a member of the Communist Party, he had worked in a fraction in the Minority Movement, itself a fraction in the Trade Union Movement... It had been stated that many such groups would arise... That would probably be true if we did not enter and win the S.L.F. and thus provide a rallying-point for the growing left wing sentiment in the Labour Party.

- (43) The essence of the "Declaration" was an appeal to local Labour Parties to protest against the action of the Parliamentary Labour Party in abstaining from voting against the Armaments Estimates. It did not, however, mention at all the minority of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Communist Party, who would certainly oppose its call for "a clear, bold anti-war position, an exposure of capitalist profit-making from war itself and of the capitalist interests and aims behind the approaching war, a policy based upon the fundamental interest of the world's workers in opposing capitalist war..."

The "Militant" welcomed the declaration, but pointed to:

"... grave omissions... the minority of the Parliamentary Labour Party as well as the Communist Party are pursuing the identical policy as the majority in the sphere of foreign affairs... the only reason why the minority and the Communists do not openly support the Arms plan is because they do not 'trust' the Government... If the interests of British Capitalism demanded a temporary alliance with France or the Soviet Union, this opposition would collapse... this decision flows logically from the whole false conception of relying on imperialist alliance and not on working-class activity to stop war. To support Morrison and Pollitt against Transport House is to support Tweedledum against Tweedledee. Their attitude is simply another and less honest aspect of the same policy..."

- (44) The article in the October 1937 "Militant", head-lined "S.L.F. Leaders Sabotage Left Wing", reports that at the monthly meetings of the Council of the S.L.F. the representatives of the "Militant" Group were narrowly out-voted by the presence of seven members of the "Bureau" of the S.L.F.



These seven did not represent branches and had actually been elected, in June, when the S.L.F. had only twelve members, in a purely technical capacity, according to the report:

"The Bureau remains the same and consists for the most part of the very people who, by their weakness and vacillation, contributed to the defeat of the left wing in the Socialist League... the task of building the left wing will fall upon the Militant Group together with the best elements of the S.L.F...."

The only evidence of the proposed paper and, indeed, of the further activity of the Socialist Left Federation, is "The Call", No. 1, sub-titled "Monthly Paper of the Socialist Left Federation" and dated March 1938. One surviving copy is in the possession of the writer and no other issues have been traced.

The contents as a whole pose the question how would-be Communists are to present their ideas while they accept that they must for a period work in the Labour Party. "The Call" hardly mentions the role of the Communist Party. It seems to address Labour Party members as they would have been in 1933, and simply ignores the influence of the Communist Party which was wide-spread in the Labour Party in 1938. It reads as if the fight against the right wing of the Party could be carried on without being complicated by the Communist Party's presentation of a Popular Front as a left wing or "progressive" policy. It is as if the writers could somehow skirt round the controversies which fill the pamphlet literature and the left wing journals of the time, without facing squarely the unpleasant allegations against the P.O.U.M. and the critics of Stalinism elsewhere that they were "allies of Hitler". allegations which originated in the Moscow Trials.

At the same time, the "Call" does contain criticism of the Soviet Union, along a line quite different from that of Trotsky in "The Revolution Betrayed", which was published some months earlier. The criticism is in the form of a review, signed R.G., of Eugene Lyons' book, "Assignment in Utopia". This book was an early expose of the show trials and of the treatment of workers and peasants under the rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy. It is, however, the work of one whose "God has failed". Lyons took the view that the socialist foundations of the Soviet state had already been undermined and his conclusions, unlike those of Trotsky, were essentially pessimistic. Groves did not differentiate his views from those of Lyons. On the contrary, he concluded his review with the ambiguous formulation:

"There have been other critics of the Soviet regime: none so devastating as Lyons, because most others have been coloured by hostility to communism or to revolution. Lyons belonged to the movement built round the Russian Revolution, was part of it and shared its hopes and faiths. His story, for all its

subjectivity, voices a tragedy greater than that of the individual; the tragedy of a generation which entered on its post-war heritage so full of hope, so strong in attack, so certain of belief and so sure of victory. That today it is being forced to re-assess its ideals, to re-consider its politics in the light of its own bitter experiences..."

(45) "Inside the Left", pp. 271 - 2.

(46) For example, "Militant", August 1937, under the head-line: "Why They Passed":

"On July 4, Mosley and some 1,800 of his Blackshirt followers marched from Kentish Town to Trafalgar Square... guarded by thousands of police and amid the hatred of hundreds of thousands of workers - but he marched... only by understanding why this occurred will we be able to work out a policy to defeat fascism. Mosley's original intention of marching through the East End was squashed by the police ban... this ban was not imposed for any love of democracy... but because the workers of the East End had shown that the slogan of 'they shall not pass' was a reality for them. The simultaneous banning of workers' demonstrations is a classic example of the folly of relying on the capitalist state... the 'Daily Worker' shouting that it was the duty of the police commissioner to protect the peaceful citizens of London!... To attempt to rally opposition to fascism on these grounds is to assist the National Government in its war-plans by spreading anti-foreign sentiments. It is to the honour of many rank and file Communists that they were willing and anxious to fight fascism... by the mass, organised strength of the workers, but they were completely disoriented and confused by the official slogans of their party. The local Labour Parties too put up a good show, but their main efforts were directed towards 'bringing pressure to bear' on the Home Office to ban the march..."

"Militant", October 1937, under heading "Ban the Fascist March":

"... even more reactionary is the attitude of Dr. Salter: 'Leave them alone and they will look silly.'... Remember the great demonstration in Hyde Park, in September 1934. It was not the size of Mosley's demonstration that made him look silly, but its infinitesimal smallness in relation to the great workers' demonstration... We are not interested in 'democracy', the bourgeois institution which gives freedom of propaganda to our enemies. We are interested in defending the democratic rights of the

workers which Fascism is out to smash..."

More sensational is the account in "Militant", November 1937, headed "Barricades Bar Blackshirts", signed "A Barricade Builder" of a struggle in Long Lane, Bermondsey, on October 3:

"In the early morning, crowds of workers had gathered... Once again the police had showed which side they were on, but ferocious charges with batons failed to disperse the crowds. Halfway down the street a barricade went up, that distinctive fortress which has played so important a role since the days of the Paris Commune. With a marvellous instinct of revolutionary discipline, the crowds kept the cops busy while at the other end of the street strong hands dragged a tree, barrows, barbed wire and goodness knows what else into position. When the police at last managed to penetrate to the barricade and proceeded to demolish it (a fine sight to see the boys in bluesweating at the job), a second obstruction went up in another part of the street. Infuriated by failure, the police made indiscriminate charges, arresting anyone they could lay their hands on. But the workers rallied again and again, and it speedily became clear that it would be impossible to clear Long Lane for the blackshirts' march... How much more could have been achieved if the resistance had been organised..."

(47) "Militant", October 1937.

(48) Mrs. Haston told the writer many years later that they decided that the Marxist League was "too elitist", and that the Marxist Group was less serious than the "Militant" Group.

(49) "Camille" and "Adolphe" were pseudonyms for Rudolf Klement, who had been one of Trotsky's secretaries in Turkey and France. He was secretary of the committee responsible for preparing the Founding Conference of the Fourth International. He was kidnapped and murdered by the G.P.U. shortly before the Conference began. See "The Prophet Outcast", Isaac Deutscher, pp. 407 - 408, notes in "Writings: 1936 - 37" and "Writings: 1937 - 38" and "Cahiers Leon Trotsky", No. 1, 1978.

(50) There is a letter in the Watson collection, in the University of Stirling, addressed to Watson by "J.R. Strachan", which Mr. Louis Sinclair tells me was a name used by Haston, inviting him to subscribe to the new journal, which must have been written soon after the walk-out. Another ground for the impression that Lee's followers had already decided to split is provided by a letter from Haston to the "Militant" Group, dated December 11, in which he says that he refuses to attend any further meetings of the Executive Committee "in view of the distortions in the minutes of the last Committee meeting and also those of previous meetings".

- (51) The following passage from a document circulated in 1942 or 1943 by the leadership of the Workers' International League to its membership, entitled, "In Order to acquaint our Membership..." suggests that the authors were not aware of the political problems involved in the unification of the British Trotskyist Groups, and that they offered subjective explanations of them:

"... the International Secretariat was completely misinformed as to the real situation in the British movement, its strength, the forms of work it conducted, its support among the workers and in every other aspect of its activities. The loose connections between the I.S. and the British movement facilitated this. The Trotskyist Groups which evolved and disappeared were myriad... Each year - and sometimes twice a year - a 'unity' conference was called, but without any serious preparation or intention. The soft elements who had proved themselves incapable of any continuity of organised work, who had dropped out from time to time, appeared on the platform and played a predominant role in the 'discussions'. Each year it became more and more obvious that a genuine unification among the old leaders was absolutely precluded, because of the determination of the 'leaders' to retain their independence and resist any encroachment on their positions, and, most important, because of the absence of a genuine rank and file..."

While no source exists from which the social composition of the three tendencies can be accurately determined, some indication can be obtained from that of the Leeds branch of the "Militant" Group in 1938, which included, in addition to a professional civil servant and a social worker, a bricklayer, a foundry worker, a textile worker, and an engineer and his wife, a printing worker and his wife and a clerk.

- (52) The meeting was advertised in "Socialist", December - January 1936 - 37, and in "Fight", No. 2, December 1936.
- (53) The minutes of the secretariat of the "Militant" Group on February 13, which discussed how to handle the meeting next day with the members of the Marxist Group and the Marxist League, record the decision:
- "... offer Marxist Group concrete basis of unity along the lines of previous offers which have been rejected:
- (i) acceptance of the resolution of the Geneva Conference;
  - (ii) acceptance of the authority of the International Bureau and the International Secretariat;
  - (iii) Fusion at a joint National Conference on March 14;
  - (iv) A Committee to be set up proportionately on the basis of the national membership; this committee to operate for 3 - 6 months before re-election from the fused organisation.
  - (v) The constitution of the fused group to be adopted on March 14 on the basis of material to be circulated before that date.

- (54) The first issue of "Fight" suggests:

"Ask that a resolution be put to your Trade Union, Co-op or party branch to call for the organised working-class movement to appoint an international working-class commission to investigate charges against Leon Trotsky and the accused in the Moscow Trial and all relevant documents, so that the working-class may know the truth regarding the allegations against these men."

The April issue (No. 5) reports an attendance of "500 - 600" at the February 10 meeting.

It is perhaps not without significance that "Fight" does not mention the second bulletin which Charles Sumner issued for the Trotsky Defence Committee. This consisted of Trotsky's attack on Brockway for his refusal to co-operate in the international campaign for the investigation of the allegations against him. It is entitled, "Fenner Brockway: Pritt No. 2": see "Writings: 1936 - 37", page 221, where it is dated March 23, 1937.

- (55) The statement is directed to the Marxist League but obliquely includes the "Militant" Group. The essential paragraph reads:

"The error of the Marxist League and the Militant Group in confining their perspective for activity to the reformist Labour Party rests in their over-estimation of its potentialities as the provider of the revolutionary cadres. The Labour Party is a mass party in the sense that it enjoys the electoral support of the working class. In actual reality it is but a dues-paying organisation, its membership (active workers) being proportionately very small and in character purely reformist. The necessities of progress inside the Labour Party impose upon the revolutionaries therein the obligation of subordinating the questions of the revolution and the party to the immediate issues, which are essentially left-reformist. Furthermore the Marxists in the Labour Party are forced by circumstances to call and work to build up the Reformist Party without the political destruction of which the revolution is impossible..."

- (56) The text of the letter to Coventry, which comes from the Cannon archives, is in Appendix, Document No. 4.

- (57) There had earlier been a suggestion of a conference of the Marxist Group in July. We have as yet no record of it, but this editorial might perhaps be a result of it.

- (58) For the text of the leaflet which the Marxist Group produced calling a meeting on July 4, 1937, which is very similar to the appeal distributed at Bournemouth, see Appendix, Document 5.





(59) "Moulin" was a German Trotskyist of Czech. origin. He edited the paper of the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists, "La Voz Leninista". Arrested by G.P.U. agents in August 1937 he disappeared. Like him, Erwin Wolf (Braun), a Trotskyist of Czech origin, secretary of Trotsky in Norway, was also killed by the G.P.U. in Spain in 1937. For further biographical details see, "Cahiers Leon Trotsky", No. 1, 1978, published by E.D.I., 29 rue Racine, 75005 Paris.

(60) An example of Trotsky's criticism of the P.O.U.M. leadership in spring 1937 is in "The Spanish Revolution (1931 - 1939), Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973, "To the Editorial Board of 'La Lutte Ouvrière' ", dated March 23, 1937.

Brockway's defence of the position of the P.O.U.M. leadership is in "The Truth About Barcelona", a pamphlet, published in London in 1937. He confirms that the P.O.U.M.:

"believed that the workers would in time protest against the counter-revolution which the government was carrying through and that the demand for a Constituent Assembly would become so strong that the government would be compelled to submit... an insurrection would be wrong and inadvisable until after the fascists were defeated and there was a difference in its ranks whether even then an insurrection would be necessary." See "New Leader", June 4, 1937.

(61) While the May 1937 (No. 6) issue of "Fight" was being written, the P.O.U.M. was already coming under attack from the Government and the Communist Parties. The Republic had won victories on the Madrid and Cordoba fronts, but it had lost Malaga. Certain small gains had also been made on the Aragon front, held by the workers' militias of Catalonia. The first of two articles (both entitled "The Spanish Struggle") denounced the Government for starving the Aragon front of arms and thus aiding Franco. It quoted the statement by the P.O.U.M. leaders that they wanted a command unified under the control of the workers' organisations, but did not detect that this orientation towards workers' power remained platonic, on the level of general phrases.

It drew an analogy (drawn also in the statement of the Marxist Group to the Barcelona Conference) between the Spanish and the Russian Revolutions, as a proposal for the P.O.U.M. to adopt:

"The Kerensky Government was in essence a People's Front Government. In it were all the parties of the workers and peasants - except the Bolsheviks. It stood for democracy. In August 1917 it was attacked by Kornilov - equal to a Fascist nowadays. Nevertheless Lenin never politically supported the Kerensky Government... 'Use Kerensky as a gun-rest to shoot Kornilov - afterward we shall deal with Kerensky'..."



The article promised "critical support" to the P.O.U.M. It did not mention its leaders' efforts to divert the attentions of the Stalinists by distancing themselves (though in vain) from "Trotskyism".

The June issue (No. 7) reveals that "Fight" had been criticised for its tolerant attitude to the P.O.U.M. leadership. It published the statement for the Barcelona Conference, which consisted essentially of advice to the P.O.U.M.:

"The criticism of the Marxists against the ambiguities of the P.O.U.M. position, particularly in relation to the slogan of the "Social-Democratic Revolution" was met by the P.O.U.M. leaders with the cry 'Sectarianism'. .. The I.L.P. would assist the Conference if it could inform us how it can adequately defend the Spanish revolution without being 'unpopular'. To the extent that it conciliates the Stalinists, is afraid of prejudices, fails to carry on an ideological offensive against the Soviet Government and the Communist International, to the extent it betrays the Spanish workers. Thus the I.L.P.... prefers an unholy yet popular alliance with the Social-Chauvinist Communist Party of Great Britain... P.O.U.M. by co-operating with such governments (as the reactionary Republicans and Stalinists) certainly proved it was not sectarian - it was on both sides at the same time! The united Revolutionary Army can be created only when the unity of interest (between workers and peasants) is restored... when they refuse to recognise the authority of the official State and build the independent organs of power - the Councils of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants. Such action must inevitably lead to a conflict between the revolutionary army and the "People's" Army..."

Trotsky expressed his view of the proposed Barcelona Conference (see "The Spanish Revolution: 1931 - 39", p. 245 ff, "The Proposed Barcelona Conference", dated March 20:

"The I.L.P. and the S.A.P. became Stalinist at the very moment when Stalinism is revealed as the veritable syphilis of the workers' movement. The London Bureau expires or is ready to fold up. The different intermediary groups, terrified by their own inconsistency, seek support at the last minute from the Spanish Revolution... They think they can hide their definitive bankruptcy in the shadow of the heroic Spanish and Catalan proletariat... You must know what you are going to do at this conference ... participate with full independence... leaders who presume to create a new international cannot solidarise themselves in secret with the G.P.U. The least you can ask for... is complete support for an international commission of investigation. If the majority refuses, it will be necessary to quit the conference demonstratively."

The events of May 3 - 8, 1937 in Barcelona are summarised by Pierre Broué in his collection, "La Révolution Espagnole" (p. 393), in a footnote to the French text of Trotsky's article,

published in English under the title, "The Insurrection in Barcelona: Some Preliminary Remarks" in "The Spanish Revolution: 1931 - 39", page 264:

"After several weeks of growing tension among the police and the militia in the rear, the explosion took place on Monday, May 3, after two lorries of assault guards under the personal leadership of Eusebio Rodriguez Salas, the chief of police, a renegade from the workers' and Peasants' Bloc, armed with a written order from the Minister of Public Order, a member of the "Esquerra", the party of President Companys, unloaded troops in front of the Central Telephone Exchange. The Asaltos immediately made their way into the building and began to disarm the C.N.T. militiamen who were defending it when the first shots were fired. In a few hours, at the news of the firing, the general strike broke out and the city was criss-crossed with barricades held by armed workers, with sporadic fighting here and there. In the following days, the insurgent workers were masters of Barcelona, but no leadership emerged from their ranks. The national leadership of the C.N.T. and the F.A.I., especially the Ministers of Federica Montseny and Garcia Oliver, appealed for an end to "fratricidal" fighting and for the barricades to be abandoned. The leaders of the P.O.U.M. tried to convince those of the C.N.T. that they should stand their ground, and then, after failing to convince them, pulled themselves together and following the C.N.T., issued the slogan of withdrawal, without having taken any direct initiative. In co-operation with the "Bolshevik-Leninist section" and especially with Moulin, the group "Friends of Durrutti" called on the May 4 for the formation of a revolutionary "junta". They were repudiated and expelled by the C.N.T. - F.A.I. leadership. 'Calm' finally returned to Barcelona when it was occupied by large forces in the course of May 8."

The reports in "Fight" No. 7 and in "Red Flag" for May 1937 under the title "Bloodshed in Barcelona" do not mention the attitude of the P.O.U.M. leadership. "Red Flag" reports a resolution of an enlarged Central Committee meeting of P.O.U.M. on May 13:

"... Seeing that the workers who fought in the streets lacked concrete objectives and a responsible leadership, the P.O.U.M. could not do otherwise than arrange and organise a strategic retreat..."

"Red Flag" commented:

"revolutionary workers can have nothing but praise for the conduct of the P.O.U.M. in these events themselves and their subsequent evaluation of these events..."

"Militant", however, judged the conduct of the P.O.U.M. leadership less favourably. In the August issue, under the heading, "Brockway Applauds P.O.U.M. Surrender", it mocked a statement by Brockway that he had been assured by Giral, the foreign minister of the popular Front Government in Spain, that the arrests of the leaders of the P.O.U.M. had taken place 'against the wishes of all the non-communist members of the Catalan Government'.

"Militant" commented:

"Of course they deny complicity - that is to protect themselves from inquisitive fools like Brockway. But they give every protection to the C.P. in their filthy work, because it is to their class interests to see that the working-class vanguard, however inefficient, is exterminated... To defend the P.O.U.M. against the Stalinists and capitalists is one thing - to praise its capitulation before the class enemy is another... The I.L.P., in its fear of the Communist Party on the one hand and of capitalist governments on the other, is incapable of telling the workers the truth of the P.O.U.M. betrayal..."

In fact, Brockway wrote in the "New Leader" for June 4:

"It is important that P.O.U.M. ... should concentrate on the fight against Franco... The Spanish Communist Party had justifiably criticised the absence of co-ordination at the front... P.O.U.M. must be careful not to resist proposal which will facilitate efficiency in the fight against Franco..."

This, a week before P.O.U.M. was outlawed, was followed, in "New Leader", July 16, when, as documents in the Frances Johnson papers show, Brockway well knew that the P.O.U.M. was being repressed, writing:

"The P.O.U.M. is pursuing a very wise policy. It is refraining from impossible proposals and concentrating on the advocacy of a new Government, representing the C.N.T. and the U.G.T."

- after the P.O.U.M. had already been crushed by raids on its premises and the arrests of its members on June 16, on the eve of its proposed conference!

Evidence of the repressions is in Orwell's "Homage to Catalonia" and Morrow's "Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain".

## Appendix to Chapter Six

Document No. 1      Resolution of the First International Conference for the Fourth International ("Geneva" Conference), July 29 - 31, 1936, on the Tasks of the British Bolshevik Leninists.

The Geneva Conference considers it an extremely urgent necessity to effect with the least possible delay the unification of the three English groups which at present are working on the basis of the fundamental principles and programme of the Fourth International. Clearly on this question of fusion, no group can demand that another dissolve itself and that its members join the first group individually. In the opinion of the Conference, the continued existence side by side of the three groups weakens the effectiveness of our movement, by the fact that, without there being apparent differences of principle, they are separate from one another and often work for opposed ends, this preventing the development of the progress of the Fourth International in Britain. The Conference sees no principled reason for such a division of the forces and demands a fusion on a democratic basis which will make possible the establishment of a section of the Fourth International in this country.

The Conference regrets the absence of a representative of the Groves group and the fact that it has not sent a document to the Conference. The Conference invites them to give their approval in principle to the official documents which have come out of the Conference.

The Conference is further of the opinion that the experience of the Bolshevik Leninists within the I. L. P. must be brought to an end and that this group which at this moment is working within that organisation must shift its field of work in the direction of the mass organisations, especially towards the Labour Party and the Labour League of Youth. It is true that the Bolshevik Leninists in the I. L. P. can do trade work, but they could do it much more effectively if in the eyes of the workers they were not associated with the bankrupt I. L. P. Their membership of the I. L. P. rises like an impenetrable wall between the Bolshevik Leninists and the mass movement of the youth, potential reservoir of revolutionaries, from which the British Section of the Fourth International will draw the greater part of its cadres as well as the base of the Labour Party. It is necessary to know not only the moment at which it is profitable for revolutionary Marxists to enter a reformist or centrist organisation, but also the moment when it is imperative to leave it, and to implant their movement and their ideas in another milieu. The I. L. P. today is nothing but a centrist sect in decline; further work within it can only condemn our forces to mark time and vegetate in a restricted area. The Labour Party, the Trade Unions and in particular the reformist organisation of the youth offer much greater possibilities to strengthen our movement and speed the growth of the section of the Fourth International in Britain.

The Conference recommends to the group which is working in the I. L. P. at this time to act in this way. If the Marxist Group decides to make a new experience (with the journal "Fourth International") it will without any doubt reach the conclusion that no further development

of the Bolshevick Leninist forces is possible in the I. L. P. But there is the danger that this experience involves a loss of time which would be damaging, because it would signify that the Marxist Group would remain without a real or clear perspective for a long period of time. The concrete methods of effecting the departure from the I. L. P. and entry into the Labour Party and the Labour Party's youth organisation, as well as the unification of the forces of the Fourth International in Britain within the Labour Party, must be left to the English comrades to work out.

The Conference instructs the International Secretariat and the General Council to follow the development in Britain with the greatest attention and to supply to the British Comrades all the help they can, in accordance with the line proposed by this resolution.

July 31, 1936

Appendix to Chapter Six

Document No. 2

From the International Secretariat for the Fourth International:  
Berne

November 7, 1936

To the Executive Committee of the Marxist Group, London.

Dear Comrades,

We regret that we have not received either the minutes or an official report of your national conference of October 10. The two resolutions accepted by the majority of the Conference, that of James and that of Cooper, have reached us only unofficially. It flows from these resolutions that the decision has been taken contrary to the decision of the international conference at Geneva that the group must continue its association with the I. L. P.

We do not wish to deal exhaustively with this resolution, in which you give what is, in our opinion, an incorrect appreciation of the I. L. P.: "revolutionary in comparison with the Labour Party or the Communist Party"; "attitude nearly correct on the Abyssinian and Spanish questions...." There is no such thing as a "nearly revolutionary" party or a "nearly correct" attitude. In the language of Marxism, you call it by the clear term Centrism. We do not want to reveal here the contradictions which exist in this same resolution in which you speak of... "the isolation from the masses" of the I. L. P., of its "organisational breaking-up", of the movement of its leadership to the right, of the "decline in number of its members"; the poor quality of its membership, its lack of industrial contacts, its specific attitudes correct only in superficial appearance and its centrist oscillations, the reasons why the I. L. P. "has become an obstacle for the correct development of the Bolshevik-Leninist work", and yet.... you decide to remain in this moribund body.

You speak of "crushing" the I. L. P., of making "a mass withdrawal" at the moment of a split.

The several days which have passed since this resolution was accepted already permit a verification of the correctness or falsity of your perspective. As had been predicted many times it is not you (!) who are going to crush the I. L. P., but it is the bureaucracy, much stronger than you, which is going over to the attack to divide you up and introduce confusion in your ranks. We do not have the exact figures of your membership either now or for the past six months. But it is a fact that you have lost many of them without effectively weakening the I. L. P. We demand from you that you send us an exact balance sheet, because these are the facts themselves which speak the clearest language

We have here your minutes, of 25 October, in which you discuss your attitude to be taken towards the sale of your journal, "Fight", outside the ranks of the I. L. P.



The attitude of the bureaucracy is crystal clear: "They have declared that the Trotskyists were engaged on an activity hostile to the party". But, on the contrary, your attitude is ultra-equivocal. What, for example, does this mean: "Our object is to utilise, to break from the I. L. P., a political question of the greatest importance which would permit such a split; in our opinion, the question of the sale of the journal is not such a question".

"Comrade Cooper declared that we should go over to the political question as soon as (?) they attack us on the organisational plane". If we understand correctly, Comrade Cooper is of the opinion that the prohibition of the sale of "Fight" is not yet an organisational attack and that it is necessary still to wait. It is absolutely correct that the question of "Fight" in itself does not represent a "political issue". But does this mean that we must wait on and on before leaving? The bureaucracy and all the experience of France proves this a hundred times will not attack us on the political plane, on which it is much weaker than we are. The bureaucracy of the S. F. I. O. began also by prohibiting "La Verité", and as our French comrades, under the influence of Molinier, did not go over in time to the counter-offensive on the political plane, the bureaucracy became stronger, the centrists (Pivert) and the sympathisers no longer solidarised themselves with us, and in the end we finished up by having a split in our own ranks.

Comrade Braun, when he was staying in London, explained to several comrades and in particular to Comrade Cooper, that with the first issue of "Fight" the opening of coercive measures will begin on the part of the bureaucracy and that the Marxist Group must be able to make a turn in twenty-four hours. But we are very much afraid that you are repeating the mistakes which have been so disastrous in France.

To call today for a national conference of the I. L. P. can form part of our counter-offensive. But to begin with, this is not a political question, and, in the second place, we are convinced that today we are much too weak to force them to have a conference. And, if that is the case, are you proposing to stay in the I. L. P. up to the Annual Conference at Easter? That would be fatal.

There are enough political questions which can serve you as a target for a vigorous attack, without withdrawing a millimetre; we greatly regret that you did not publicly take a position in relation to the Brussels Peace Congress. "Fight" has been silent on this important question. And all the same, such a resolution or open letter, from the very base of the I. L. P., would have been of enormous value to combat the centrists of the London Bureau. You did not help us.

In conclusion, we beg you to reconsider your policy on the basis of the facts, to go over at once to the offensive in the political domain, to treat questions of party statutes (National Conference of the I. L. P. etc.) of formal discipline etc. as entirely secondary questions, to trace a perspective of an open exodus from the I. L. P. with a political declaration which can be used in all our international press, and to apply your minds to bringing about the unification of our groups in the Labour Party and the League of Youth. Further, we request you to give us an exact report on the forces of the Marxist Group today.

While waiting to hear from you, comrades, we express our fraternal revolutionary sentiments.

For the I.S.....

Note on Document No. 2

This letter reproaches the Marxist Group for their silence about the "Brussels Conference". Confusion could arise here, because there were two "Peace" Congresses in Brussels in autumn 1936. One was the "World Peace Congress", September 3 to 6, organised by the "International Peace Campaign". There is an article about it in "Labour Monthly" for August 1936, by Sir Norman Angell, who was something of a fellow-traveller of the Communist Party at the time (Caute: "The Fellow-Travellers", p. 84) What happened there is reported by Pat Sloan in the October 1936 "Labour Monthly". Shvernik, the successor to Tomsky, as secretary-general of the Soviet Trade Unions, was there (Shapiro: "The Communist Party of the Soviet Union", pp. 350 and 571).

However, the Congress to which the I.S. referred was the "World Congress against War, Fascism and Imperialism", organised by the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity from October 31 to November 2, 1936. The results of this Conference may be summed up as concealing under revolutionary phrases the differences between different groups, some tending towards pacifism (I.L.P.) and others towards Stalinism (S.A.P.). The writer suspects also that it tended to raise in the minds of the leaders of the P.O.U.M. expectations about the help which they might expect from the I.L.P. which the I.L.P. was unable to fulfill. The Conference took place while Brockway was in the course of negotiating the "Unity" Agreement with the leaders of the Communist Party and the Socialist League.

The Bureau could hardly fail to know that James did not agree with Trotsky's criticisms of the P.O.U.M. and that he may even still have had illusory expectations from Brockway.

Appendix to Chapter Six

Document No. 3

DECLARATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL BUREAU  
FOR THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

on the subject of the English Marxist Group

The Bureau for the Fourth International, at its meeting of December 13, took note of the letter of the Executive Committee of the "Marxist Group" of November 21 to the I. S., in which it announces the decision of the majority of the London group of the Marxist Group to leave the I. L. P. as quickly as possible and to found an independent organisation.

1. The Bureau for the IV International must take note that this important turn is in contradiction to the decisions of the conference which was held four weeks previously, and that it rests solely on the basis of the decision of the majority of the London group (16 to 6). The Executive Committee of the Marxist Group ought to have called a new conference on this subject, preceded by a report and a discussion of a fundamental character involving all the members. Since this elementary rule of democratic centralism is not observed, the Bureau for the IVth International cannot recognise that the decision taken is valid.
2. Every important political turn requires that the leadership of the organisation as a whole submit a clear and true balance-sheet of the past policy. The leadership of the Marxist Group, has, however, not carried out this duty. There have been three different opinions in conflict in the past:
  - a). One part of the Marxist Group has supported the tactic established by the resolution of the Geneva Conference:  
"The conference is therefore of the opinion that the experience of the Bolshevik-Leninists within the I. L. P. ought to be terminated, and that the group which at the present time is working in this organisation ought to transfer its field of work towards the mass organisations, especially towards the Labour Party and the Labour League of Youth."
  - b). The Cooper tendency has outlined the perspective of staying in the I. L. P. until a split permits a "mass withdrawal". It would consider that the I. L. P. still is a good field of work because it "still offers a large liberty of speech and action to the B. L. s and the possibility to organise mass work...." "Since there are no decisive reasons or necessary circumstances, or crises in the I. L. P., we should prepare for the next annual conference (Easter) as the final point of the struggle".
  - c). The James tendency proposed to form an independent organisation of all the British B. L. s as a sort of organisation following fraction work in alien organisations (I. L. P. and L. P.):  
"Since the numerical force which would probably result from this fusion is not sufficient to form an independent B. L. party, the Marxist Group considers that the independent group must carry on fraction work in the different political parties, with the sole

object of gaining sufficient forces to form an independent Bolshevik-Leninist party" . . . in view also of the specific position in the various localities, the Marxist Group considers it inadmissible that all its members should be invited to leave the I. L. P. at once or within a fixed period."

The James tendency, just like that of Cooper, places all its hopes in the creation of a new journal ("The Fourth International", later "Fight",) while the Geneva resolution shows the danger which ignoring its decision would involve, in view of the complete lack of a political perspective. Four weeks after the October Conference, the Executive Committee of the Marxist Group saw itself obliged to declare for leaving the I. L. P. and recognising the correctness of the Geneva Resolution. None the less, it does not say one word about how its own perspectives have been shown to be false. On the contrary, it does not point to the responsibility which it bears for having stayed too long in the I. L. P., but it attacks in general - though in a disguised fashion - the tactic of entry into alien organisations. It quotes the passage from an article by Trotsky where he says that a party (but not a little propaganda group) must have complete organisational independence, and it adds that the experience of the B. L. s since summer 1934 proves the correctness of these words. This shows nothing but that, in the opinion of the authors of the resolution, the policy of the Bolshevik-Leninist groups - which precisely were only propaganda groups and not parties - was false. And they draw from this the following conclusion for the Marxist Group:

"In the light of what is said above, and of the fact that its influence in the I. L. P. has been compromised during the last two months of fractional struggle, when activity has consequently been weakened, and since its perspective of gaining more supporters is today very small, the group decides to form an independent organisation as soon as possible."

Not a word is said about the degeneration which has taken place during the last few months - and that is the sole reason for it - because they did not separate themselves soon enough from the rotting corpse of the I. L. P.

If they write in another passage of the same resolution that it is permissible to work within centrist-reformist organisations, they give by that a proof that the supporters of the resolution do not defend their opinions in a consistent fashion and that they are tangled up in their own contradictions.

In reality, the decomposition of the "majority" group, which in 1933 did not enter the I. L. P., and the undeniable success of the Marxist Group up to winter 1935 prove that the tactical step of entry was entirely correct. But, as the French experience has already taught us, we have to know, not only the right time to enter, but the right time to come out. The decomposition, the internal disputes, the passivity, result solely from the prolonged opportunist existence in the I. L. P., against the advice of the I. S., of the Geneva Conference and of Comrade Crux (Trotsky).

3. When you conceal the mistakes of the past months in this way, and when in consequence you start from false premises, you must necessarily reach false conclusions for the future. Instead of repairing the damage, you will greatly increase it.

Neither the split from the I. L. P. which Cooper expected, with the possibility of a "mass withdrawal", nor the numerical reinforcement which, according to the James resolution, would have enabled an independent organisation to be formed, have taken place. On the contrary; for more than six months, the Marxist Group has not gained a single member of the I. L. P. and, on the contrary, it has lost half of its former members.

Even though, therefore, these hopes, and with them the conditions for independence, have not been realised, a majority of the London group of the Marxist Group has decided - and that in direct opposition to the resolutions taken four weeks previously - to create an independent organisation. Not a shred of justification for the reasons for this decision is given, but reference is made, simply and in a completely general way, to the "international situation". There can be no doubt that not a single member of the I. L. P., even if he sympathises politically with the Marxist Group, will follow him into complete and hopeless isolation; at the same time you could probably always find comrades of the I. L. P., who would join the Labour Party to strengthen the Left Wing which is forming there, despite all the mistakes which have so far been made.

4. The decision of the Marxist Group to create an independent organisation has a result which is all the more disastrous because the fusion of all the groups, which the Geneva Conference characterised as an urgent necessity, will be obstructed by it. The resolution presented by Comrade James states, among other things; "The group understands that in these conditions an organic fusion with other groups is impossible." But, unlike the Marxist Group, which becomes weaker and weaker because it stays stuck in an opportunist fashion to the I. L. P., the Bolshevik-Leninist group in the Labour Party League of Youth, formed only in February of this year with six comrades, has developed extremely rapidly. It is today much stronger than the Marxist Group. Activity and optimism flourish there, and everything indicates that despite the enormous difficulties it will grow still more. Its principal task is to inoculate British youth against the Stalinist plague, in order that what has happened in Spain and in certain regions in Belgium, where the Socialist Youth, left to itself, has fallen totally under the influence of the Communist International, cannot happen in Britain. The decision of the Executive Committee of the Marxist Group, which makes fusion impossible, shows not only an action against the recommendation of the Geneva Conference but also against the Marxist Group's own declaration which it took at its National Conference of October 10, where it declared that the premise for the formation of an independent party is the fusion of all the B. L. s

5. By the decision to create an independent organisation, you also neglect completely to notice the changes in structure which are taking place in the Labour Party itself, and which will increase enormously as a result of the sharpening of the political situation on the Continent. Just as, in its time in France and especially in Belgium, a progressive Left Wing developed in the Socialist Parties, today an analogous process is taking place in the Labour Party. The Edinburgh Conference signifies, in this connection, an important phase in the history of the Labour Party. Let us quote what Stafford Cripps wrote in "Controversy", and what is confirmed by other words from Dalton, the leader of the Right.

"The most significant development at the conference was without doubt the attitude of the constituency parties. The opposition to the platform . . . of the great mass of the delegates from the local organisations of the Labour Party, who voted together against the platform and against the block vote (of the trade unions) on all important questions. All their political feelings were outraged by their continual defeats, and the principal problem which arose from the Conference was that of the democratisation (!) of the Labour Party itself. The indignation was so great that one felt a spontaneous movement to improve the position of the constituency parties, in a meeting of delegates from the localities, which took place on the night of the Thursday, where 240 (out of 290 delegates) were present and declared unanimously for setting up an official ad hoc committee which was then set up to bring together the constituency parties so that they could make more effective their demand for wider power."

Only someone politically blind could fail to see that the Bolshevick-Leninists, protected by the growing opposition coming from the radicalised worker masses demanding democracy in the Party, contains enormous possibilities of development. Further on this point, the following remark by Cripps is equally very important: "Discipline will become impossible because the base of the movement will do what it feels itself called upon to do without regard to the apparatus."

The Marxist Group takes note in its letter that the splitting away of this Left Wing of the Labour Party is inevitable, and that this will join the right-centrists and strengthen them. It draws from this the conclusion that "even purely as a tactical question, an independent organisation, assuring a centre even a little stable and solid is an urgent necessity in England." But do the authors of this letter believe that a few dozens of isolated Trotskyists will check, from outside, this strong centrist current? It is absurd. It is only in the closest contact with this Left Wing, it is only as active members of this Left Wing, that you will obtain sufficient possibilities of influencing it, to win the revolutionary part of it for Bolshevick-Leninism. From outside, you will be regarded as impotent and hopeless sectarians, who fear contact with the masses, but who want to impose themselves on the masses from outside as sage counsellors. The "tactical" argument, the only one, of those who propose the creation of an independent organisation, crumbles from within itself.

6. The proposal of the majority of the London group to provide help for the B.L.s in the Labour Party from outside by "combined work" may be inspired by the best intentions. But the first who should give their opinion on this help should be the comrades who are in the Labour Party themselves. But they are the most severe opponents of this ever-hasty independence, and they declare that an independent group outside could only cause them harm, because they would in that case be regarded as agents of an alien organisation, from which an excuse could very easily be got to exclude them prematurely and without political motivation. This could happen, not only at the hands of the National Executive of the Labour Party, but even of the local organisations of the Labour Party which we wish to win. The combined work, in the way it is proposed, has proved itself to be completely impossible in practice itself. In Belgium, theoretically, such

a possibility existed, as a result of the existence of the independent Brussels group. But the collaboration with the comrades of the Action Socialiste Revolutionaire did not take place, and could not take place, for the reasons which have already been set out. Today, after the fusion, the situation is such that at Brussels, where there was the independent group, the Belgian Party is unfortunately still weak, and has not yet overcome its isolation. That is another argument against independence.

7. Further, the danger exists that an independent group, turning eternally in a vicious circle, will cultivate sectarian and opportunist tendencies in its own ranks. Field in America is an eloquent example of the political impotence which results from these tendencies. The personal struggles carried on, without principles, by Field, Oehler, etc., against our American section, and which the majority of the London group wish to avoid, is, as experience proves, the sole "political" activity of such a group. It is a bad symptom to see the majority of the London group write that "it is a vice of the Trotskyist movement to create differences, to erect them into unsurmountable obstacles and to wage a war of words on this basis." This is the eternal argument of the Fenner Brockways, Schwab, Field and tutti quanti. Another proof of the same opportunist influence is that they write that our movement has a "bad reputation" because of "fractional struggles" (as a result of impolite formulations: "philistine centrism"). The fractional struggle at certain periods becomes inevitable. The old Bolshevik Party also had a "bad reputation" in this respect. Intrigues none the less, which ought to be avoided, are always the accompaniment of a bad policy. That is why during the last year the struggle within the Marxist Group was full of personal bitterness, while the B.L.s in the Labour League of Youth were practically free from this.

8. The Bureau for the IVth International, on the basis of what is said above, is convinced that the Marxist Group must as a whole re-examine fundamentally the decision of the London majority, which cannot be binding for the whole national membership. No-one will reproach the comrades for having made mistakes in the past, from the moment that they recognise and openly correct these mistakes. But when a new vote is taken, you must also take into account the comrades who, with or without the consent of the leadership of the Marxist Group, have entered the Labour Party, and have expressed their votes in their manner of acting. The best solution in the present circumstances seems to be this. Let all the English B.L.s who recognise the decisions of the Geneva Conference for the IVth International convene by the democratic method a constituent conference, where according to the principles of democratic centralism they will discuss and decide which road is the best. The conference will create the homogeneous and single organisation of the B.L.s and will in this way meet the demand of the Geneva Conference for a "unification on the base of fundamental principles and the programme of the IVth International". Any solution which does not correspond to the wishes of the majority of the English B.L.s can only fail, and constitute a danger for the work of the B.L.s. The I.S. would in that case feel itself obliged to reconsider its relations with such a minority.

December 13, 1936

adopted by the Bureau for the  
IVth International unanimously

Document No.4

Letter dated August 12, 1937, from the Central  
Committee of the Marxist Group  
"To the Coventry Comrades"

The Central Committee, needless to say, is greatly encouraged by the progress that has been made in Coventry towards the formation of a section of the Marxist Group. The task of building the British Party of the 4th International can be accomplished only by those who are selfless in their devotion to the revolutionary cause; who recognise the difficult road they have to travel, and who, armed with the principles and discipline of Marxism understand the role of the revolutionary party. We do not suggest that an encyclopedic knowledge of Marxism is a pre-requisite to action but we do suggest that intellectual honesty is necessary; that political and organisational problems must be studied free from personal prejudice; that we must be able to accept criticism and in turn to criticise others; that the constitution, principles and decisions of the Group must be loyally applied by every Group member.

Copies of the Constitution are being sent to you and we would like to emphasise one paragraph that has a bearing upon a necessary criticism we have to make. This paragraph is headed 'Membership' and contains the words 'Open to all who accept and work for the principles, programme and discipline of the Marxist Group. Members must be active in the work of the Group allocated to them . . . . .'

After the July Conference, Comrade Christianson met the CC and discussed with them the possibility of forming a section of the Group in Coventry. Arising from the discussion he was instructed to call a meeting of his contacts and discuss with them the proposals and suggestions of the CC. These covered points such as:- The independent nucleus; work in the L.P., L.L.o.Y., I.L.P., C.P., L.E.C. and Co-ops; literature distribution; public meetings; local libraries; attitude towards the Spanish struggle; control of the suggested local paper. The CC naturally expected that the first report received from Coventry would deal specifically with these proposals. Unfortunately Comrade Christianson appears to have paid little attention to his instructions. We draw the attention of the Coventry comrades to this point since any development of this tendency may have a most damaging effect on future work.

We shall proceed to the 'Perspectives of Coventry local'. We had expected that the first task would have been a strengthening of influence among the organised youth. Instead we are confronted with a point that has never been suggested before:- 'Formation of a group of SLP with invitations to all left and C.P. members.' We entirely disagree with this perspective. While the revolutionary party realises the need for winning as great an influence as possible in the reformist organisations it does not have to borrow the discredited banner of the pseudo-lefts in order to do so. If the politics of 'Centrism' (such groupings as the SLP can never represent anything else) have not yet found an organised expression in Coventry we see no reason why the M.L. should introduce them. To imagine that the M.G. could control such a group and keep it as a platform for its own propaganda is purely utopian. To form such a group would mean that its principles,



its literature, its programme, its 'Leaders' would have to be publicised. It pre-supposes that the politically-minded are incapable of understanding revolutionary Marxism and must experience the bankruptcy of centrism before they make the next step forward. This is only true when this step (or, rather, stumbling block) is placed in their path by those who should know better. It may still be said that such a group, since it represents a national movement, would attract a better type to the L.P. than exists at present and so provide a rich field for M.G. permeation. For a handful of comrades does not the trade unions (they represent nine-tenths of the Labour Party membership), the Divisional L.P.s, the L.L. o Y., the C.P., the Co-ops etc., and the huge mass of dispirited and unorganised workers represent a rich enough and big enough field for revolutionary permeation. Would not a Marxist wing inside the L.P. appeal to the best type of worker and be able to influence him a hundred times more efficiently than the muddled opportunists of the S.L.P.? Is it not the duty of revolutionaries to criticise and expose such organisations? How would you balance the necessity of exposing with the responsibility of building such a group? (There is no analogy between such a task and the building-up of the Trade Unions). If you have the perspective of establishing the independent group in the near future wouldn't it create the impression that the Trotskyists were 'splitters'?

We believe that there is sufficient confusion in existence without creating more. We are sometimes forced to manoeuvre and adopt conspiratorial methods but such methods are never of our choosing. They are thrust upon us. You have sufficient tasks to fulfil to fully occupy a group many times your size. While we criticise this particular perspective we admire the spirit and enthusiasm that promotes it.

On the question of the paper you intend publishing we believe that Comrade Eozineback will be able to convey the views of the CC to you. We will rather state the decision of the CC on another matter that affects the organisational status of your section and briefly relate the question of the paper to it.

In line with its usual practice and pending the receipt of membership forms, the CC is prepared to accept into three months probationary membership comrades Rooneback, M.D., E.K. and L.R. We should not have to enlarge on such a decision. The revolutionary party must always guard against undesirable elements entering its ranks for disruptive purposes. Apart from Stalinist or police agents, position seekers, etc., the 'emotional' type of socialist (those who become ultra-left over small incident but invariably swing back to the right when their nerves improve) the emotional variety, the undisciplined, can all play a disruptive role. We cannot allow untried comrades to have full membership rights, to allow them to influence the policy of the Group would be to sooner or later ask for serious trouble (sic). We have no reason to believe that any of you will exhibit any such tendencies but the principle is accepted by all revolutionaries despite the fact that we all feel a sense of personal resentment when it is applied to ourselves. If you understand the necessity of guarding the internal affairs of the group then you will also understand the necessity of guarding our 'external' expression. Whether or not the paper you intend publishing is to be an official expression of the M.G., the articles that are written by M.G. members should be subject to the control of the CC.

It should be possible in the near future to issue a leaflet on Trade Union work with special reference to the Coventry position. This should help in establishing contact in the basic industries and drawing the militant trade unionist close to the M.G.

We should like a report on the possibility of work in the local Co-op guilds and councils. We find it provides a valuable and unrestricted platform in the London area. What about Coventry?

On all the other points you raise the CC will assist in every way it can. In a few weeks time we will try to send a representative of the CC to visit you when we could discuss things more fully. We also hope to co-operate with you in organising a public meeting in Coventry at which Comrade James would be the chief speaker.

In conclusion we would like to stress the necessity of work in the youth organisations. The L.L. o Y. cannot exist much longer. The Y.C.L. has been liquidated as a political organisation. The opportunity of organising an independent revolutionary youth movement cannot be missed by the M.G. Coventry seems specially qualified for work in this sphere and maybe the organisation of the British Youth Movement will find its origin among yourselves and your contacts. We know that your sleeves are already rolled up. We hope that the M.G. has entered upon a rapid stage of provincial development; and that the revolutionary party is at last taking root in this stronghold of imperialist robbers.

With revolutionary good wishes,

Central Committee Marxist Group

Note on Document No.4

This letter was provided by George Breitman of Pathfinder Press. The original from which it is taken is in the archives of James P. Cannon, in the Library of Social History, 410 West Street, New York, N.Y. 10014.

The name "Eozineback" or "Rooneback" may refer to G.A. Rouneback, who is found in "Youth for Socialism", June 1939, as author of an article about the Labour Party League of Youth.

## Appendix to Chapter Six

Document No. 5

### MOSLEY AND WAR

The capitalists of Britain are preparing for War. They will tell the workers all sorts of lies about it being a "League of Nations War", a "War for Democracy", or a "War against Fascism". But every intelligent worker knows that War and Capitalism are inseparable; that War is as natural to Capitalism as wage slavery, Banks, Trusts, Police forces, etc.; that wars are fought to safeguard profits, the control and the source of raw materials; and that the workers have nothing to gain, but everything to lose, by taking part in the mass murder for the benefit of their exploiters.

Behind all capitalist preparations the revolutionary class war, which threatens to overthrow Capitalism itself, develops and intensifies. We as workers attempt to organise, to agitate, demonstrate, and to struggle in every way against the extermination of millions of our class.

In so-called "democratic" countries, such as Britain, certain working-class "Rights" used to be allowed us, but as War approaches our capitalist masters, operating through the National Government, try to take away as many of those rights as they possibly can. Within a short space of time we have had the Trades Dispute Act, Emergency Powers Act, Sedition Bill, Public Order Bill, etc. Here we see that democracy is more and more ceasing to exist; that the capitalist dictatorship is trying to stifle the revolutionary class war. To find justification for such repressive measures and to further tighten their grip, they use Mosley and his fascist gang. Our "democratic" capitalists want to deceive us into thinking that they are opposed to fascism; that they have no more liking for Mosley's thugs than for the working-class. They allow Mosley to provoke us into open street clashes; then, in the interests of "Public Safety", they give still greater powers to the Police forces and pass more Bills that make the conduct of the class struggle ever more difficult for the workers. The workers also begin to think that Mosley is their chief enemy while all the time the National Government continues to attack and further enslave our class and lead them into the imperialist slaughter.

WORKERS OF LONDON! Mosley is the puppet of Capitalism, of the National Government. To fight him you have to fight the capitalists who control the strings. The fight against Fascism is the fight against Capitalism, whether it poses as "democratic" or not.

Fight against all encroachments on our hard-won right of Free Speech and Press, of Combination and Demonstration!

Organise in your T.U's, your L.P., your Co-ops, and fight for a militant policy!

Demand the united working-class front for struggle against war preparations! For the removal of all bans on working-class liberties!

Document No.5

(i) Biographical Note on Bert Matlow (1898- )

Bert Matlow was prominent in founding and leading the Marxist Group in the I.L.P. He later supported, for a time, the work of the "Militant" Group led by Harber, Van Gelderen and Jackson, took the chair at the inaugural meeting of the Militant Labour League and organised a group of its supporters in the Norwood Labour Party, which he represented at the Annual Conference of the Labour Party in 1937.

He came from a Jewish family in the East End of London and was educated at one of the old-established grammar schools supported by the London County Council, to which he won a free place. He was just saved from conscription by the Armistice of 1918, and had intended to plead conscientious objection. All through the 1920's he was a member of the I.L.P. in the East End, was influenced by George Lansbury and a friend of Dr. C.K. Cullen. He did not join the Communist Party. In the course of the struggle in the I.L.P. about and following disaffiliation he came into contact with the ideas of the Left Opposition. Having moved to South-West London, he was associated with the Clapham I.L.P. and with Sid Kemp. He joined the Trotskyists in the I.L.P. in 1934 and helped to start the Marxist Group.

Matlow was capable of bursts of great and well-directed energy. He especially contributed practical experience of the Labour Movement and shrewdness to the Marxist Group. He liked the contact with the working-class which the Clapham I.L.P. and later the Norwood Labour Party gave him. He seemed, however, to look for the spontaneous activity of the Labour Movement for support.

(ii)

Biographical Note on E. Starkey Jackson (1910?-1942)

Starkey Jackson was born in Hull . At the time of the General Strike he was employed as a railway clerk, and became unemployed as a result of his activities. He seems to have played some part in the local Labour Party about this time. Shortly after the General Strike he joined the Young Communist League and wrote for "Young Worker". He was the representative of the Y.C.L. in the first youth delegation to go from Britain to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1926, and later became assistant national secretary of the Y.C.L.

There may be significance in his recollection that he clashed with William Rust. His thinking was influenced by Palme Dutt. He was employed as an organiser of unemployed in the early 1930's by the Communist Party or the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, and was imprisoned for breaking a window in Downing Street in the course of a demonstration. In the years round 1931 he suffered considerable privations.

His contact with the Trotskyist Movement appears to have begun in 1935 or 1936, and his first appearance at one of its meetings to have been at the Morris Hall, Bedford Road, Clapham, in March 1936. After having felt himself isolated from real forces in the working-class, he seems to have welcomed and encouraged the "turn" of the members of the Marxist Group towards the Labour Party, where the building of the Left Wing seemed to him to be carrying out what the Communist

Party had been doing up to the beginning of the "Third Period" early in 1928.

He contributed to the "Militant" Group particularly by his insistence on systematically organised work and his enduring opposition to bohemian or anarchistic tendencies. He had much experience on which to draw, but did not see his role as that of a theoretician; he said more than once to the writer, "Harber makes the bullets and I fire them."

He had been personally friendly in his earlier years with the Irish Communist, Sean Murray and acknowledged that the latter contributed to his political education.

Jackson was the first of the leading members of the Trotskyist Movement in London, where initially its forces were concentrated, to take an interest in the work and problems of those in the provinces, and to advise them. To the great regret of those with whom he had worked in several parts of the country, he lost his life in 1942, when a transport in which he was crossing the Indian Ocean was sunk, apparently by a Japanese submarine.

There were short references at the time to his death, in the press of the two Trotskyist organisations, the Revolutionary Socialist League and the Workers' International League.

Jackson had a deep contempt for J.T. Murphy, first for deserting Leninism for Stalinism, secondly for moving Trotsky's expulsion from the Executive Committee of the Communist International in 1927 and, thirdly, for deserting even Stalinism in 1932, when he was expelled from the Communist Party, to join the camp of open reformism.

(iii) Biographical Note on C.L.R. James (1901- )

Cyril Lionel Robert James was born in Trinidad, West Indies. He was educated at the Queen's Royal College, Port of Spain, and has lived as a journalist, novelist, historian and teacher. He moved to Britain in 1932 to work as a Press correspondent, chiefly on cricket.

In the spring of 1935 he joined the leadership of the Marxist Group in the I.L.P., and was a delegate to the "Geneva" Conference in July 1936. Expelled from the I.L.P. in November 1936 he attempted to maintain the "Marxist Group" as an "open" Trotskyist organisation, with the monthly journal, "Fight for the Fourth International". The Marxist Group fused with the Marxist League in February 1938, to form the Revolutionary Socialist League, which fused with the "Militant" Group and the Revolutionary Socialist Party (of Edinburgh) during the summer of 1938, and gave its name to the new organisation. James moved to U.S.A. in autumn 1938 and worked with the Socialist Workers' Party until 1940, when he left the Fourth International and supported the standpoint of Burnham and Shachtman, and briefly returned to the Fourth International ("Johnson - Forrest" tendency) in 1947. In 1958-1960 he was Secretary of the West Indian Federation Labour Party.

James was the only intellectual figure in the Trotskyist movement in Britain in the 1930's to win some relative recognition during his participation in it. His political writings are:

"The Case for West Indian Self-Government"	1933
"World Revolution: the Rise and Fall of the Communist International"	1937
"A History of Negro Revolt"	1938
"The Black Jacobins"	1938
Translation of "Stalin", by Souvarine	1939

An interesting account of his discussions with Trotsky is in "Writings: 1938-39", pages 249-266. Trotsky's appreciation of James' political analysis of the Negro question as "an important and very good statement" is in *ibid.* p.298. James threw himself with enthusiasm, for over three years, into the work of the Trotskyist movement in Britain. It may be questioned, however, whether he understood the method of thought which Trotsky employed, and the writer believes that this accounts for his rejection of the purpose of the "Geneva" resolution on Britain and of Trotsky's criticism of the P.O.U.M.

Don't allow yourselves to be provoked into rash action by  
Mosley or the Police forces!

Organise for the revolutionary overthrow of Capitalism!  
For the workers' dictatorship!

Defeat Mosley and the preparations for War by defeating  
Capitalism!

FIGHT FOR SOCIALISM!

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MARXIST GROUP HYDE PARK RALLY

SUNDAY, JULY 4th, AT 7 P. M.

ALL RALLY TO HYDE PARK

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Marxist Group, 97, King's Cross Road, London N.

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