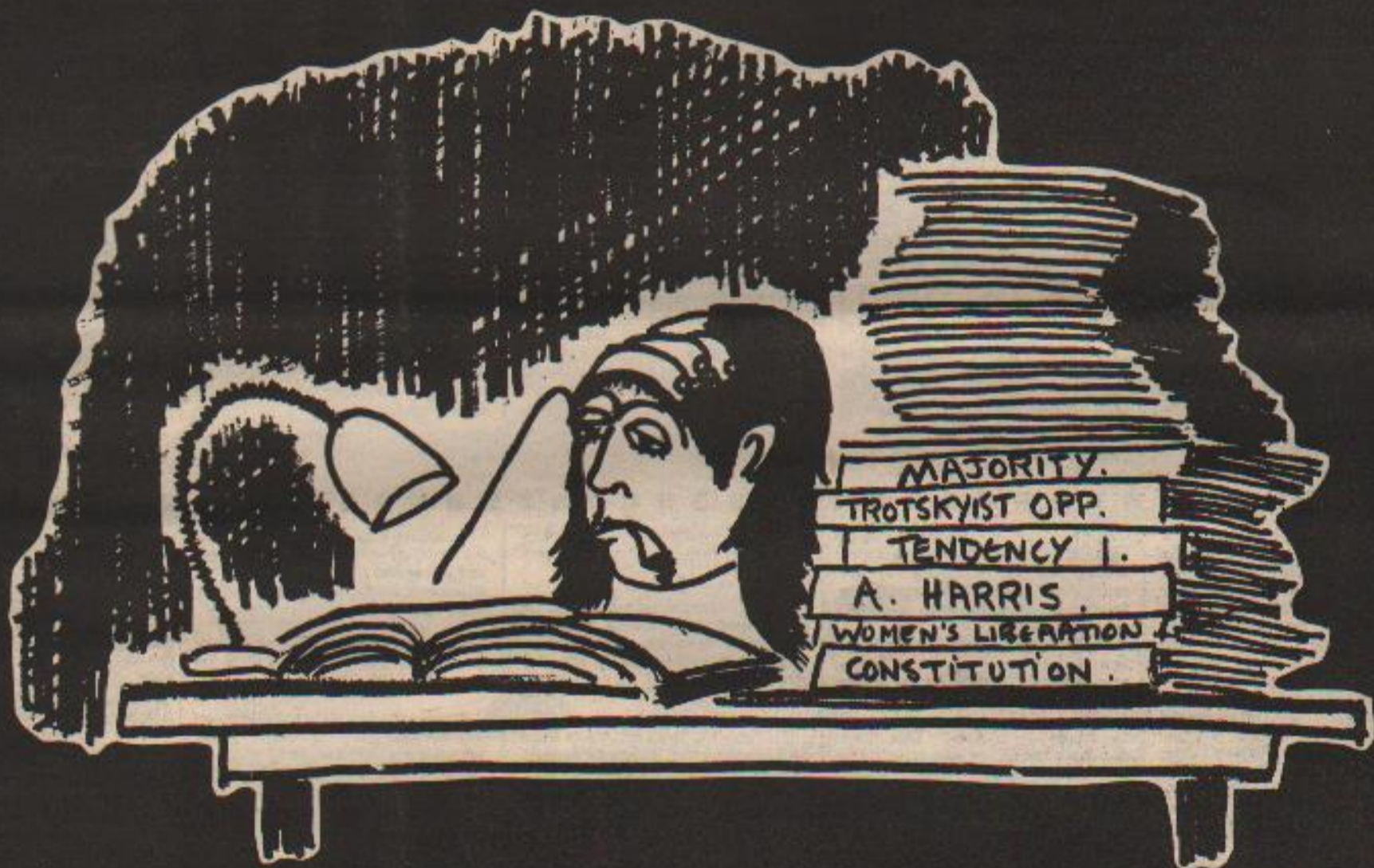




The fight for a socialist alternative



SIX POINTS OF VIEW

AFTER THREE months of debate and discussion about revolutionary strategy and tactics for Britain today, the International Marxist Group will be meeting in national conference next weekend. Socialist Challenge has already given space in two Battle of Ideas supplements because we feel that the issues under debate are of concern to militants well beyond those in the ranks of the IMG.

On 2 February, 1978, Socialist Challenge printed a supplement which contained the line of advance put forward by the majority of the outgoing leadership. The second supplement — in the 9 March issue of the paper — reflected the IMG's debate on women's liberation.

With this issue of the paper, we publish a number of

contributions being presented to the IMG, as well as the views of some comrades outside the IMG who have been invited to attend pre-conference discussions.

IMG members contribute as individuals to both the written and oral debate in the organisation through the pre-conference discussion bulletins and in branch and area meetings. In addition, IMG members have the right to form tendencies and factions so that individuals can meet together across branches to develop their political positions, advance their most powerful speakers at the area and branch meetings, and generally to take steps to maximise their ability to win support for their positions.

The travel expenses of tendency and faction speakers to area meetings are met by the organisation, and equal time to that of the outgoing leadership is given to these groupings to present their views at such meetings.

Members of the IMG will participate in the debate at

conference, and elected delegates will choose between positions offered by the outgoing leadership, and those of IMG members contained in this supplement. There are two organised groupings around this general debate: the Trotskyist Opposition Faction, and Tendency One.

In addition, an individual contribution by comrade Alan Harris will be the political basis for delegations to conference. All minorities will be represented proportionally on the incoming leadership once a majority has been established for whatever positions command the broadest support.

In addition to this strategic and tactical debate, the IMG will be adopting a fundamental position on the norms of how a revolutionary organisation should function. A tendency has been formed concerning the organisation of women within the party, and delegations will also be elected on this basis.

ONE

'...unless the revolutionary left can provide answers to the present situation and evolve a strategy capable of linking it to the masses, its own crisis will continue apace.' (final sentence of centre-page article by JOHN ROSS, Socialist Challenge, 12th January 1978.)

The Trotskyist political programme alone provides these answers and indicates a strategy for advancing struggles of workers and oppressed masses towards the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist class rule, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the socialist transformation of human society.

Our programme is a body of ideas, policies and practice resting on the struggles and experience of all the workers and oppressed masses of the world. It expresses the historic tasks of a mass social class — the international working class. It champions the interests of all oppressed and exploited. It exists, is maintained and developed, only through the systematic, organised activity of revolutionary marxists.

Party

That is why Trotskyists insist on the necessity of building mass revolutionary parties in all countries as part of a world-wide Leninist party. Only such a party can organise consistent revolutionary action to advance the struggle for socialism. Only such a party is able to defend and develop the theory of the working class — revolutionary marxism — in order to carry forward the fight to resolve the crisis of proletarian leadership.

Without such a party it is impossible to build a leadership which, consistently basing itself on the global struggles of the workers and oppressed, is able to grasp the practical lessons and needs arising from these struggles in order to develop correct policies and a way forward to socialism. All working class history confirms this fact.

The opportunist leadership of the workers' movement today represents the main political problem facing the masses in the struggle to defend and advance their interests against the

ravages imposed by the decay of the imperialist system and all attempts to halt or reverse its decline.

Political defeat of the labour bureaucracy is a necessary condition for the emergence of a mass revolutionary party to replace this rotten leadership. Our programme and practice must therefore advance a political strategy to meet this task.

Sectarian Alternative

The IMG leadership calls for 'the construction of a socialist alternative to Labourist politics in the national arena' which 'would group together all revolutionary socialist forces to challenge social democratic politics all along the line.' (Battle of Ideas, 2 Feb 1978, p2).

We oppose this on two counts: a) We should fight to group these forces on the full programme of revolutionary marxism — which includes building a revolutionary socialist International. The tendency of the IMG to counterpose the 'socialist alternative' grouping of revolutionary socialists to this task in practice threatens the political integrity and development of the Trotskyist movement.

b) It is a sectarian error to declare that organising those already 'converted' is a serious strategy to win new and decisive forces away from reformism.

The IMG attacks the SWP's project for organising militants, pointing out 'that left social democracy and its ideas had to be encountered before they could be combatted and defeated'. (ibid). It is a good point. We won't meet many reformist ideas in the course of 'grouping together revolutionary socialists'. Whether this project goes under the slogan 'Build the Socialist Alternative' or 'Build the Socialist Workers Party', in neither case does it offer a political strategy to advance the mass struggle and decisively challenge the labour bureaucracy.

Weak Link

Reformist politics predominate in the British labour movement from top to bottom. To break this chain we need to find its weak link. This cannot

be forces in and around 'the revolutionary left' who have broken already their links with reformism.

We must turn to the broad layers of militant activists in the trade unions and the Labour Party, in the shop stewards' movement and among the youth and oppressed sections of society. These militants, overwhelmingly influenced by reformism, have come to the fore in many struggles over the past period.

Their vanguard position, and close links with the masses, sharply confronts these militants with the conflict between the immediate needs of the mass struggle and the practical effects of class collaborationist politics.

This conflict has proved sharp enough in the heat of certain struggles for militants to take action which partially escapes the control and political framework of the reformist bureaucracy. The task for Trotskyists is to win this vanguard of militant workers to systematic and total break with reformism. It will not occur spontaneously.

Revolutionary Strategy

This means revolutionists must intervene alongside militant workers to open the road for consistent class conscious struggle. Propaganda for Trotskyist policies drawn up to meet the actual needs of the masses as opposed to the policies of class collaboration is a vital task. This alone is not enough.

We must fight in the labour movement for the creation of independent organs of struggle, representing and uniting broad sections of the masses, to advance their class interests against the capitalists. Initially, these organs of struggle will take various forms — from anti-racist committees, committees to fight Government cutbacks in the public sector, to prices committees and elected commissions to examine the workings of specific firms or branches of industry.

Within such bodies we should fight for revolutionary policies as well as demanding support from 'left' labour leaders for the policies and struggles they develop.

United Class Front

In this way the material basis is laid for building a united class front to carry forward struggles of workers and oppressed. It also prepares the way for the future emergence of real organs of workers power, uniting the broad masses on the basis of the widest democracy.

Soviet organs of workers' power represent the highest form of the class-wide united front. They will be the basis for workers' state power to replace that of the capitalists. We don't expect factory committees or soviets to spring up overnight — neither next week nor on the eve of the socialist revolution. It is necessary to take steps now to prepare the basis for this development.

The strategy outlined above for building pre-soviet organs of struggle and fighting for the united class front is one that answers the immediate needs of the class struggle and opens the road to socialist revolution. It is a serious political strategy to fight the bureaucracy, arming the militant vanguard with a line for the masses and creating the best conditions to win this vanguard to conscious and consistent rejection of reformist politics.

Elections

We oppose the Socialist Unity tactic which offers merely slogans for a 'socialist alternative' practically linked only to the strategy for a 'unified revolutionary organisation'. As we have argued, this is a sectarian line in the mass struggle and a false basis for revolutionary marxist unity. Our strategy leads to 3 tactical options for revolutionary intervention in bourgeois elections, all of them link with and reinforce our everyday work.

1. Stand Trotskyist candidates to propagandise the programme and strategy of revolutionary marxism.

2. Support candidates on a clear platform of support for independent organs of class struggle and principled, but partial, policies linked to specific struggles. For example, a platform of 'End all immigration controls, organise self-defence against racist attacks.'

Such a candidacy/platform makes no pretence to answer all the immediate tasks facing the working class. It does show a line to advance the mass struggle on a particular question and begins to reveal, in practice, an overall political strategy (of which it is a part) for defeating the labour bureaucracy in the course of advancing the immediate interests of the workers and oppressed.

3. In many areas there will be no candidates supporting a principled strategy for workers power against class collaboration. Here, militants and class conscious fighters will vote Labour.

Revolutionists should campaign independently under the slogan: 'Vote Labour, but fight for workers power'. This would combine propaganda for Trotskyist programme with a fight to win support for specific policies and methods of struggle that are the basis of everyday revolutionary intervention in the locality.

As with the other electoral tactics, we aim to win Labour activists, trade union and other militants to support this campaign.

Summary

Trotskyists must fight among militant workers in the class struggle, using the strategic method of the transitional programme to help them to throw off the dead hand of reformist leadership and show the way to lead present struggles to victory through the socialist revolution.

Leading people into the editorial offices of Socialist Challenge into Socialist Unity and so on, does not begin this process.

The Trotskyist Opposition Faction has major political differences with the IMG leadership. It is impossible to detail these in the space available here. The above statement only indicates some of the main points of an alternative line to that offered by the leadership at this conference.

TWO

A big challenge faces the IMG at its upcoming National Conference — can we make a real turn away from small group politics towards the beginnings of a new radicalisation which is affecting all sections of the mass movement, workers, women, the youth, black and gay people?

The IMG National Committee proposes that the IMG should continue its main thrust towards 'revolutionary regroupment', under the slogan, 'For a Unified Revolutionary Organisation.' We believe that such a line adds up to an orientation towards the existing far left organisations and their periphery.

Such an orientation severely distorts the work of the IMG in the mass organisations in the autonomous movements (such as the women's liberation movement), the way we take up campaigns, our electoral policy and Socialist Challenge.

We think that the way the NC poses the re-groupment method of party-building cuts across a proletarian orientation, in two ways:

1) We have tended to tailor our programme to fit in with the political positions of other far left groups. For example the Socialist Unity programme does not include the call for a Labour Government, and 'Our Common Ground' is ambivalent on our class position on the nature of the 'Stalinist states' as bureaucratised workers states.

2) Because the orientation of the IMG begins from the sentiments of the far left, we have failed to project an orientation with sufficient energy towards the mass organisations and towards new activists and militants who are emerging in the mass movement.

As a result the IMG is orientated

towards having 'debates' with relatively small layers grouped around the far left, and is not orientated towards winning new forces, particularly from amongst the youth.

In the present period thousands of new forces are coming forward in the mass struggle looking for alternatives to capitalism, and the rotten policies of the Labour leaders. This new radicalisation can be seen reflected in a number of ways:

1) the re-emergence of the mass struggle in the unions (such as the FBU strike and the teachers' pay struggle).

2) The strong support for far left candidates in national trade union elections — the 38,000 in the last elections of the Transport Workers' Union; the 22,000 in the Engineering Union elections.

3) The new wave of youth radicalisation, in the vanguard of which was the black youth in their response to the racist campaign in the summer of 1976; but which now involves thousands of young people who have been involved in mobilisations against the fascists (at Lewisham, the anti-YNF rally in Birmingham, and so on) against unemployment, and school students taking solidarity actions with the teachers over pay.

4) The continued radicalisation of women, reflected in significant strikes over pay, conditions and union recognition, the strengthening of the women's liberation movement, and the further crystallisation of the socialist-feminist current.

5) The number of important struggles involving black and

immigrant workers — obviously Granwicks being the most outstanding example.

6) The new stage in the struggle for gay liberation following the 5000 strong Gay News defence demonstration and the formation of the Gay Activists Alliance.

The way the IMG relates to these developments and its ability to fight to build a clear current in the mass movement around a class struggle programme will be the most important test in the coming period. Our authority to fight for principled revolutionary unity will depend on our ability to implant ourselves in the new radicalisation.

A proletarian orientation therefore involves the IMG in making a turn towards the mass movement, Labour party, trades unions, social movements and the youth. Such an orientation will be decisive if we are to win a base amongst workers and youth. The recruitment of a serious number of workers and youth to the IMG over the coming period will both be proof of the IMG's ability to relate to present radicalisation, and will qualitatively lay the basis for transforming the IMG into a better instrument for building the revolutionary party.

Given the broadness of the radicalisation the IMG must combine tactics which involve a vigorous intervention into the life of the mass organisations and social movements through:

*promoting centralised political campaigns (anti-racism, abortion, troops out of Ireland, unemployment, solidarity with dissidents in the bureaucratised workers' states, for democracy in the workers' movement).

*building united fronts to defend the basic interests of the working class and oppressed (like the fight against attacks on democratic rights; against wage controls).

*building a class struggle tendency in all sectors of the mass and social organisations.

*taking the first steps to building an autonomous revolutionary youth organisation by launching a youth paper

*the use of electoral tactics to complement our orientation towards the mass organisations and to build a class struggle pole popularising a global alternative to that of the bureaucracy.

*transforming Socialist Challenge into a genuine workers' paper.

In the space available it is impossible to detail such an orientation. However, it is important to take Socialist Challenge as an example of the type of line involved. At present Socialist Challenge is aimed towards the far left and its supporters. It is a very 'in' paper — you have to be quite politically (and culturally) experienced to benefit from reading it. I have tended to have a very commentatorist approach.

Yet if we understand that there are thousands of new militants and activists emerging in the mass struggle it is necessary for revolutionaries to have a paper — and a general political method — which makes revolutionary socialism accessible. It is not a question of 'watering down' our politics. In practice it's a question of making our political line clearer — and relating to the existing consciousness of the newest militant.

Socialist Challenge must therefore be transformed into a campaigning

paper, leading forces to organise around building initiatives in the class struggle, educating militants and activists in Marxism, having debates with them, not existing radicals or ageing bureaucrats. Within this spirit Socialist Challenge must become a builder of the IMG, winning recruits and organising sympathisers for the organisation building the revolutionary party.

This approach to the paper is an honest and revolutionary one. It will not repel other organisations who want to discuss the prospect of building a united organisation. Rather it will show them the way forward in relating to the class struggle.

To these organisations we should not adopt gimmicks, or compromise our programme, but open up discussions on the main political questions which divide us — with no pre-arranged agendas on either side. But to make these discussions meaningful we must place them in the context of joint work in the mass struggle. Only that will create the conditions for a favourable outcome.

Our tendency has been formed because we want to put forward an organised alternative position to that of the leadership. However, we do not think our differences are of a programmatic nature, but revolve around the precise tactics that the IMG needs to adopt in the coming period.

TENDENCY ONE

THREE

AS THE RULING class offensive deepens and the class collaborationist character of the labour bureaucracy becomes more exposed, important new layers of workers are radicalising and taking a more critical attitude towards the trade union and Labour Party leaderships.

In particular, the number of young workers who are prepared to fight for their rights is growing as more and more sacrifices are demanded of them.

The radicalisation is deeply affecting the traditionally more conservative layers of the workforce too. A number of white collar, public service and technical unions are developing radical currents.

The leadership of the Fire Brigades Union (together with their counterparts in the TUC) were able to sell out the firemen's strike, but they were not able to prevent the first strike in the history of the union from taking place.

This strike, like Grunwicks where Asian women went on strike, shows the deepening mood of militancy developing within very diverse sectors of the population. Today, most strikes soon take on a political character and more often than not begin to question the capacity of the labour leadership to lead. This feeds and deepens the radicalisation.

This conflict between capital and labour is at the heart of the class struggle but it does not constitute its sum total. The nature of the ruling class offensive also has a social and political character. Youth, students, women, blacks, immigrants, have all, to one degree or another, been affected by and responded to the

ruling class offensive.

The Labour Bureaucracy

An objective assessment of the class struggle in Britain shows that the capitalist class, through the Labour government, has had considerable success in implementing its anti-working class measures. It has been able to make the workers pay for the capitalist crisis through unemployment, the cuts, austerity, inflation, and the use of troops to break strikes, in a far easier way than it imagined possible.

Without doubt, the ruling class has been able to drive ahead with the most blatant and reactionary measures against the working class without meeting any real opposition from the labour movement.

Why has this been possible? Why hasn't there been massive opposition to the Labour government's reactionary measures? How can Callaghan and company 'get away with it' with such relative ease?

The ruling class offensive has been successful due to the support and collaboration of the Labour Party and trade union leadership. Not only have these labour bureaucrats co-operated with the government, in some cases the leaders of the most powerful trade unions in the country (Jack Jones, Hugh Scanlon, for example) have become the architects of anti-working class policies.

The militancy of the firemen showed that it was possible to win their strike. But militancy is the one thing the labour bureaucrats cannot tolerate. It frightens them, upsets their day-to-day routine, gets in the way of their cosy relationship with the ruling class

and undermines their privileged positions.

This is why they called off the firemen's strike at the earliest possible moment without winning a single substantial demand.

For the bureaucrats any struggle against the Labour government is seen as a struggle against themselves. The labour bureaucrats, however, cannot stop the class struggle. They can divert it but they cannot suppress it, regardless of however many agreements they might make with the bosses and the government. Much to their consternation the class struggle keeps breaking out, often where they least expect it (the FBU, Grunwicks).

The labour leadership is not all-powerful but it does have a deep hold on the labour movement. It is this entrenched position of the labour bureaucracy and its commitment of total collaboration with the Labour government which accounts more than anything else for the fact that there has been no real fight back against the reactionary measures of the Callaghan administration.

But the fact that the Labour bureaucracy cooperates with the ruling class, has no stomach for a fight, and preaches class collaboration is not new. It has been doing this for decades. But at the same time, particularly in periods of capitalist expansion, it has been able to get economic and political concessions from the ruling class.

Today this situation has fundamentally changed. Because of the crisis, reforms are not there any more just for the asking. The cup-in-hand approach gets nothing from the bosses these days. It is this new phenomenon — that the labour

bureaucracy cannot even maintain past gains, let alone win new ones, which will lead to big social explosions and exacerbate the divisions which already exist between the rank and file and the bureaucracy.

To deepen these divisions and fundamentally change the situation so that the bureaucracy is no longer able to maintain its grip on the labour movement will require the mobilisation of millions against the ruling class and the labour bureaucracy which supports it.

To this end Trotskyists project building a class struggle left wing in the Labour Party and trade unions as part of our strategic aim for the working class to develop a revolutionary socialist leadership. This requires us to have an orientation towards the Labour Party and trade unions and work within them to promote and win support for our class struggle programme and methods.

The fundamental task facing Trotskyists today is to elaborate and apply a proletarian orientation, which will allow us to sink roots, increase our influence in the labour movement, and win working class militants to the IMG. This is necessary to achieve our long-term goal of building a class struggle leadership in the labour movement and a mass revolutionary party.

Tasks

It is only by agreement with, and carrying out of, this fundamental task that alliances will be built which can strengthen the IMG.

The political resolution and theses on tactics submitted by a majority of the IMG national committee to the

April national conference project Socialist Unity and 'revolutionary regroupment' as important ways to build our organisation in the next period. Because these projects are not based on deepening and extending our work in the labour movement, they cut across a proletarian orientation and become an obstacle to building the IMG.

We can take important steps to overcome the plethora of left wing groups which presently exist, not through general calls for unity, but by carrying a political offensive towards them. At the same time we must show by our concrete work in the labour movement, and by building the united front type coalitions on key social and political questions, that we are the most able and dedicated class struggle militants, equipped with the programme and organisational concepts that can build a Leninist type party.

In the coming period we must concentrate on consolidating, developing and giving leadership to the work some of our supporters are doing in the labour movement. We must increase the number of supporters we have in the LP and trade unions; organise effective solidarity actions with strikes and other working class struggles; take into the Labour Party and trade unions the demands of the independent campaigns — on Ireland, women's liberation, racism, anti-imperialism, and seek to get active labour movement support for them; work out ways and means to win the most exploited and oppressed layers of the working class — women, blacks, immigrants and youth — to the IMG.

ALAN HARRIS



Badges available from the Other Book Shop, 328/9 Upper Street, London N1.

FOUR

The 1978 Conference of the IMG is important in a number of ways. For the IMG itself, it is an opportunity to consolidate the orientation which underlies both Socialist Unity (SU) and Socialist Challenge (SC): the building of a broad 'class struggle tendency' in the working class movement, together with the building of a united revolutionary left in general.

The British far left has experience in plenty of the pitfalls in building revolutionary organisations. The sectarian disaster of the Socialist Labour League led by Gerry Healy left us with a rump: (the Workers Revolutionary Party) The failure of political development and internal democracy in the International Socialists left us with an organisation (the Socialist Workers Party) large and flexible enough to take some important initiatives, but politically and organisationally too narrow and sectarian to really begin to break out of

the left's marginality.

Both of these failures have helped to litter the left with still more organisations, some of them doing good work in limited areas, most of them embattled in the dead-ends of tiny sects.

The IMG has a special responsibility since, while still by any serious standards a very small organisation, it is the largest group of the far left apart from the SWP. It therefore has a major role, not just in expanding and uniting the forces involved in SU and SC, but also in leading our forces to exert a consistent, principled pressure for unity on the SWP, and furthermore in influencing the larger forces under the broad sway of left-reformist politics.

The key for the IMG must be to continue to accept all that this responsibility entails, and not to be lured into any short cuts either by limited successes already achieved by the present orientation, or by any partial setbacks.

Campaigns and style

On the main lines of your tactics, then, there is little disagreement. In particular, your commitment to non-exclusive class struggle tendencies in the unions is very important. It is your serious attitude to ongoing TU work, as well as work in other movements — such as the women's movement, which is a major reason why the IMG is now much more respected among militants.

At the same time, there are some queries. In the political situation which you describe, the very paralysis of much of the organised working class can, in the short run, give a new lease of life to the sorts of protest movements which were important in the '50s and '60s.

The anti-Nazi movement, and maybe the anti-nuclear movement, especially merit a consideration which your documents do not give them. The SWP, after all, has really been living politically off anti-Nazism for much

of the last year or two.

Secondly, this raises a more basic issue. The IMG talks of 'the recomposition of the vanguard of the workers' movement', without seeing how much this involves also the renewal of that vanguard. It is not just the influencing of existing militants and organisations that is important, but the way in which new people are brought into activity and become 'militants' in various fields. This relates, obviously, to the criticisms of SC which have been made quite widely.

Regroupment

While the IMG has been right to stress the primary importance of the political basis for regroupment, it is probably the case that these secondary questions of tactics and even style are the greatest stumbling blocks for many people. It will be necessary to discuss them more, as well as to argue that they should be secondary to the politics.

The issue of regroupment of forces within and through Socialist Unity is rightly put in the context of larger revolutionary unity. It is however of real importance, precisely as a step towards that unity. The period after the May elections must be used by the IMG, Big Flame, the International Socialists Coordinating Committee and others in SU to discuss the issues involved, and begin to formulate the steps which are necessary.

The general principles for regroupment put forward by the IMG are in the main ones on which there can be wide agreement. It will be necessary, however, to discuss frankly the areas which in the past have been contentious, such as relations with the Fourth International.

MARTIN SHAW, (member of the International Socialists Coordinating Committee).

