

COMMUNISM
THE LABOUR PARTY
AND THE LEFT

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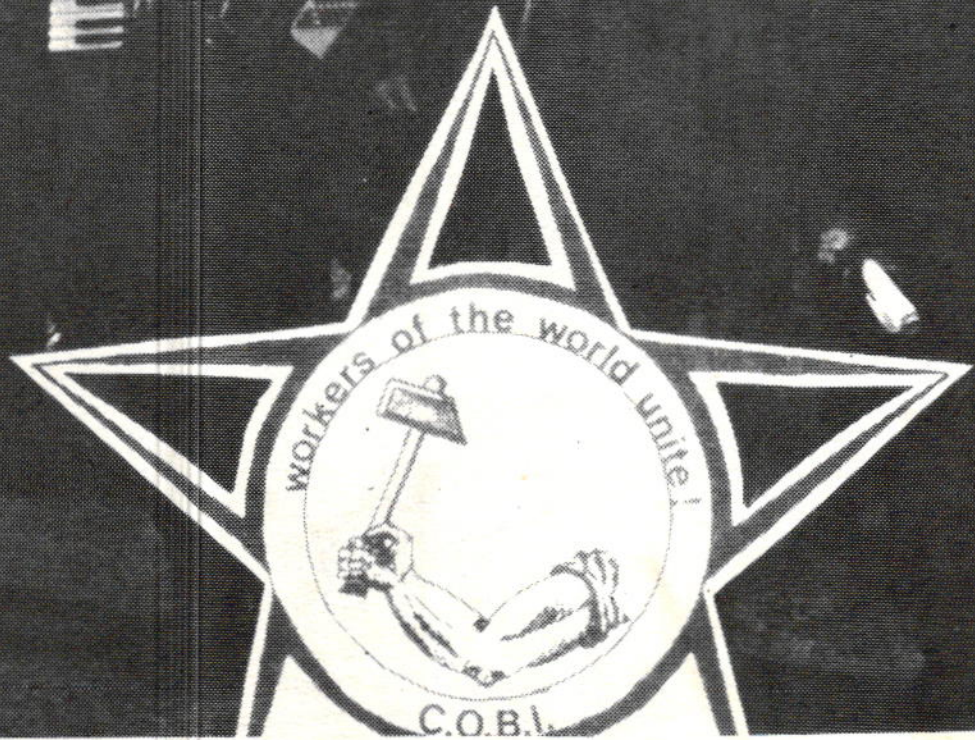
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WHAT IS THE COMMUNIST ORGANISATION IN THE BRITISH ISLES?

- 1) COBI is a Marxist-Leninist collective, formed on 1st January, 1974, in secession from the British and Irish Communist Organisation, now become revisionist. Its purpose is to integrate Marxist-Leninist theory with the concrete conditions prevailing in the British Isles, and, guided by this concrete development of Marxism-Leninism, to promote the development of communist politics among the working class of the British Isles. It aims, through its activities, to help bring about political and ideological conditions in which the formation of a new communist party in the British Isles will be a meaningful step in the development of communist politics as a link in the chain of proletarian internationalism.
- 2) We take the natural economic unit of the British Isles as the area of our organisation and oppose any attempts by bourgeois or populist nationalism to fragment working-class organisation within the above economic unit. We resolutely base ourselves on the proletariat of the whole British Isles without exception. As a European state develops, we shall extend ourselves accordingly.
- 3) In terms of the development and strength of its economic organisation, the working-class of the British Isles is second to none in the capitalist world; its political and ideological development is, however, much less advanced. In particular it lacks its own political party. Without such a party, a real communist party, it will be unable to decisively defeat the capitalist class, build socialism and advance to communism.
- 4) The history of the struggle to build such a party in the British Isles has largely been one of failure. The conspicuous exception to this was the Socialist Labour Party of Great Britain, whose emblem COBI has adopted, and whose valuable experience we intend to assimilate.
- 5) A major reason for this failure has been the inability of revolutionaries in Britain to make a complete break with capitalist ideology; their failure to break with the pragmatist outlook of the British capitalist class has led them to underestimate the importance of the Marxist-Leninist theory of scientific socialism. Without the guidance of this theory there can be no communist politics.
- 6) For these reasons COBI takes as its immediate tasks: the application of communist theory to the conditions of the British Isles, and ideological struggles against opportunist distortions of communism, such as modern revisionism and Trotskyism.
- 7) COBI demands the maximum ideological unity amongst its members. All members, in addition to engaging in practical work, must improve their understanding of scientific socialism and contribute to the ideological struggle. Nobody will be admitted to full membership of the organisation unless they have demonstrated their commitment to the class struggle and their understanding of scientific socialism.
- 8) To supplement the efforts of its full membership, COBI encourages a wider group of associate members to work in cooperation with it.

For full elucidation of these premises see Proletarian No.1, and if you wish to know more about COBI contact:

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COMMUNISM AND ELECTIONS

Parliamentary elections are the high point of the political process in a democratic capitalist state. The election of February 1974 was thus significant not because of the repercussions which its result produced within the bourgeois political system, but also for the light that the advent of the election shed upon the politics of the various political groups to the left of the Labour Party. These groups were forced to respond to the election, and in so doing, to clarify and justify their attitude towards parliamentary politics in general and the Labour Party in particular.

From these groups there emerged two main lines on the question. The main body of the Left, the CPGB and the Trotskyist groups called on workers to vote for the Labour Party. In opposition to this the much smaller Marxist-Leninist groups and the anarchists denounced the election as a diversion from the class struggle, and advocated a boycott. On this issue COBI definitely supports the latter line. It considers that currently a call to support the Labour Party is an opportunist distortion of communist politics.

For communists the question of what line to take over bourgeois elections is not one of principle but one of tactics. There are certain circumstances in which communists would be justified in participating in parliamentary elections themselves, or in calling for support for reformist candidates.

1) Under conditions in which a large, but not yet predominant, section of the working class have been won to the support of communist politics, the communist party might enter a united front with the reformists. The objective in this would be to unite the working masses in defence of their immediate interests and, by demonstrating the duplicity of the reformists, to wean the more backward sectors of the masses away from reformist politics. It is evident that none of the preconditions for such a front hold in Britain today; no genuine communist party even exists, nor do substantial sections of workers support communist politics.

2) If the proletariat's basic democratic rights were being threatened by a growing fascist movement, then the need to use all forms of struggle to defend the workers' right to organise themselves freely could justify support for all consistent anti-fascist parties. This situation does not presently exist, nor did it at the time of the election.

3) Communists do not hesitate to use any tactics which increase the combativity and political consciousness of the masses, and shift the balance of class forces in favour of the working class. If the election of a reformist government would extend and intensify the class struggle to the benefit of the working class, would unite the masses and would weaken the hegemony of the bourgeoisie, then communists would be bound to support its election. For this to be the case, however, the programme of the reformists must amount to a prolongation of popular struggles and aspirations, and the reformists must be consistent in their support for workers' struggles. This is seldom the case. Under most circumstances the Social Democrats and their ilk are the firemen of capitalism.

If, on the other hand, far from being an extension of popular aspiration and struggle, the reformist programme is an instrument for their reintegration into the existing order; if, as usual, the reformists constantly equivocate and shy away from supporting the masses in their struggle; if they seek to divide the masses whilst uniting the 'nation', then their election does not promise any significant development of the class struggle in favour of the proletariat, and communists have no business supporting them. At best, communists can enable the working class to avoid the negative experience of relying on the reformists and subsequently being betrayed by them. If communists are too weak to achieve this, then at least they can give a clear warning of the futility of relying on the election of a reformist government to deliver the goods.

On the terms outlined above, it is clear that the Labour Party did not meet the conditions for communist support in the election. In any general election it is the duty of communists to denounce parliament as a sham. Such a denunciation, however, is futile if it takes place in the abstract. It is futile if it is not related to the main form of parliamentarism prevalent among those sections of the masses accessible to communist propaganda or agitation. The attack on parliamentarism must be closely linked to the way in which belief in parliament currently sabotages the interests of the workers. During a general election the chief way in which this occurs is through the entraining of the energy, militancy, and emotions of sections of advanced workers into support for the Labour Party. Under these circumstances the general attack on the bourgeoisie must be closely linked to an attack upon the Labour Party in particular.

We will now examine the justifications used by those who supported the Labour Party in the election.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

The CPGB's 1974 election manifesto argued that 3 aims needed to be achieved: "A Tory defeat, the winning of a Labour Government, and the return of communist MPs". The way to do this, they argued, was to vote for their policies which "would cope with today's problems and at the same time open the way to socialism which alone can provide a lasting solution to the crisis". In the event the CP achieved only those aims which it shared with the Labour Party; even the much-vaunted Jimmy Reid did disappointingly badly. In the general elections of the 1950s and 1960s, it could generally be said that if Labour did well, so did the CP. Why the difference now? The answer is to be found partly in the particular reformist parliamentary policies that the CP adopted in February.

An examination of what the CP was offering the working class suggests that it had totally failed to distinguish what it claimed were communist policies from those of the Labour Party. It had also failed to take into account the leftward moves made by the Labour Party during its period in opposition. The CP's 1974 policy is strikingly similar to what it offered in 1970 and thus, even in parliamentary terms, inappropriate.

Because the CP posits no effective communist policy for moving forward, it presents the Tories as "wreckers, the enemies of democracy, parading their red bogey as a screen to hide their vicious attacks on democratic rights". By contrast, the CP can thus present itself, having distorted the Tory position, as the champions of standing still. "Communist MPs and a big communist vote are needed", we are told, in order to "extend and defend our democratic rights". This is a further deliberate confusion. The Industrial Relations Act and Phase III did not represent fundamental breaches of orthodox bourgeois policy, and hence creeping authoritarianism. The adoption of similar measures by the other bourgeois democratic party in 1964-70 shows this -- (a party which the CP was now asking workers to support). These measures represent tactics used in the struggle between wages and profits, rather than a fundamental shift in the form of Bourgeois class rule. And because they represent this, the trade union ideology of the majority of the working class has shown itself quite capable of defending itself against the IRAct and In Place Of Strife. The Labour Party recognised in the 1970-74 period that such industrial legislation is counterproductive, since it antagonises the very supporters on whom a successful prices and incomes policy depends. So instead, it has gone for the Social Contract with the unions.

A communist analysis would have spelt this out, and more, at the time of the election. But the CP was more interested in fighting previous battles, battles which the industrial strength of the dockers and the miners and other trade unionists had shown could be won without any help from Communist or left-Labour MPs.

The CP's attitude to the Tories' anti-communist propaganda during the election campaign amounts to more deliberate confusion. For the CP the red scare was not something to respond aggressively to -- instead the accusation "reds" is something they deny; and they then try to turn the tables on the Tories, by saying that it is the Tories who are making attacks on democracy. They would of course involve very real restrictions of the rights of the bourgeoisie. But the CP tries to evade this nasty issue, since it does not fit in very nicely with their peaceful road to socialism. They avoid the issue in two ways.

Firstly, they construct, just as the Tory and Labour parties do, a "national interest". Then like the Labour Party they define this as the vast majority of the nation. This for the CP conveniently avoids the necessity for spelling out the essential conflict of long term interests between the working class and the bourgeoisie. (The Tories' use of the term National Interest is in fact much more accurate. All the while that you have a system of national capitalism, there is a genuine national interest in the short run, which binds both workers and capitalists in ensuring that the system is as productive and united as possible. Class conflict is permitted at the economic level, so long as it does not threaten the system politically. The way to undermine the ideology of the national interest is, of course, to attack it politically, but this the CP refuses to do, preferring to redefine terms in a schoolboys' game.)

Secondly, it prevents any understanding of the "national interest", by identifying the wreckers of the national interest with the Tories and "the profits and power of the big businessmen, bankers and property speculators they represent." They thus extract the economic class which has an interest in keeping the capitalist system going, and substitute for it a small group of politically motivated men. And on the other side, representing apparently the real "national interest", are arranged (following the indiscriminate class alliance spelt out in *The British Road To Socialism*) "workers, pensioners, students, professional people, small shopkeepers, farmers and manufacturers; all are victims of the Tories' disastrous policies" (emphasis added!) But this economic class (whatever the current differences between Lord Stokes and the property speculators) is a bourgeoisie with common interests, which in general have been furthered by successive governments, both Labour and Tory. So the CP gets itself into the position of pretending that the Tories represent only big business and not the maintenance of the capitalist system itself. Today the Tories are merely mainly the representatives of big business; they are also representatives of other categories and strata of the capitalist class: strata which the CP would pretend are somehow anti-capitalist.

Because the CP likes to "explain" things by constructing the Tories as the devil outside the system, rather than the espousers of the system itself, they are led to misrepresent entirely the fundamental facts of the current system.

The most significant of these misrepresentations is the lie about profits -- the motive force of capitalism. On the one hand we are told that the Tories are making "bigger and bigger profits"; on the other, that the Tories have made a bad situation worse by stopping investment and modernisation in British industry. The latter is true, the former false, mere propaganda to get you onto the populist anti-Tory bandwagon. The missing link is the fact that investment has been poor because the rate of profit has been unacceptably low of late. The CP's solution to this is really remarkable, and once again reveals the ideology of national interest and national capitalism with which it is infected.

The answer is: 1) that bigger wage claims must be made and a Labour government elected to "operate policies that will begin to bite into the profits of big business"; and 2) that "private investment overseas which is today running at over £1200m a year should be halted." So on the one hand the CP is actively, through its trade union wage struggle, advocating policies which will bite into profits, whilst on the other hand advocating measures to stabilise profits through a retrenched national capitalism. But the bourgeoisie and the social-democrats simply do not need such contradictory advice from the CP. The TUC has in fact had for years a policy which far more realistically takes account

of the realities of international capitalism and the EEC in particular, advocating temporary restraint and less counterproductive measures to reduce capital outflow, greater control of investment in return for certain restrictions of wage demands; the whole being conditional on various political concessions on the part of the government. Once again the CP ignores the fact that the Labour Party have a viable short term policy for capitalism. So when the CP advocates its extreme version of the Labour policy it merely appears (1) contradictory; (2) deceitful in dressing up its wages policy which is designed to cause economic collapse, as a policy to help investment; and (3) merely to have an irrational feeling of envy about profits. (An openly Luddite policy, while no more successful, would at least be more honest.) These economic policies, far from "opening the way to socialism", would simply throw a spanner in the working of capitalism (were they ever acted upon), without enabling a proletarian machine to be built. Such dishonesty will never work and never has in the past.

The CP's abysmal failure to explain how capitalism works -- let alone how to get rid of it -- is emphasised again here: "The economic crisis, the attack on wages, the three-day week, poverty, bad housing, and all the other problems of our society are caused by capitalism. So long as 5% of the population own most of the nation's wealth and use it to become richer still at the expense of the majority these problems will get worse." This condemns capitalism not for the Marxist reason that production is for profit not use value, and that because it is a commodity producing society, the distribution of resources depends upon the anarchy of the market rather than being consciously planned in the interests of the working class, but simply for its unequal distribution of wealth. It is in fact quite possible for modern capitalism to use fiscal measures to produce greater equality, yet still remain a commodity producing society with all its inevitable problems. The Labour Party have at least latched onto this, even if the CP has not. Similarly with its attitude to nationalisation the CP makes in the main the same demands as the Labour Party and yet falsely concludes that production for use will somehow inevitably develop. Quite contrary, however, are its claims that the miners' "claim should be met in full", because the commodity they produce happens to be in demand, which is an argument rooted in the premises of the market system. (The miners should of course have been supported but not on these grounds). Nor does the CP envisage there would be any breaking point with regard to nationalisation, preferring to suggest that profitable industry could be taken away from the private owners without resistance. The CP's device is to take over the Labour Party's "shopping list" and then to add a few items onto the end: "Other industries where a monopoly situation prevails should be early candidates for public ownership. Motors, key sectors of engineering, including electrical engineering, chemicals, food, and detergents are obvious examples." Their case for nationalisation is not based on the Marxist case of production for use throughout an economy controlled by and for the working class. It is a mish-mash of complaints against "monopolies" which are not, and against "industries in receipt of large sums of public money" (which is a moral not a Marxist point). Nowhere is a distinction made between those industries which the bourgeoisie would be prepared to see subsidised or taken off its hands altogether, and those which really are crucial to continued bourgeois power and which history shows they will struggle to keep. Once again the Labour Party shows itself to be more in touch with reality in identifying the current nationalisation measures necessary for the economic reorganisation and rationalisation of British capitalism. Neither has the Labour Party avoided the question, as the CP has, of how it is going to effect the transition -- through Parliament, the NEB and the vacillating desires of the floating voter. The CP has characteristically avoided the thorny problem of the political means of putting through a thoroughgoing programme for an economy based upon the socially planned production of use values. They do not see the mass of the working class as being involved, since they confine its role to the maintenance of free collective bargaining in the wages struggle. And if they propose no means of effecting their programme, the CP can hardly be surprised when the workers vote for the more realistic programme of the Labour Party, and the reliance upon MPs to do the job. For workers have been asked by the CP to

"make your vote tell", not to "make your organised power tell".

After giving the political job to the MPs, left Labour and communist, the CP gives the working class the task of maintaining collective bargaining. Thus they say: "there should be no incomes policy voluntary or otherwise. Experience shows that under capitalism incomes policy means cuts in real wages and increased profits." This last assertion is false for two reasons. First, it assumes that if the mass of profits is to be increased, then the capitalist class must necessarily force down the level of real wages. In fact, as Marx showed in part IV of the first volume of Capital, the development of the forces of production enables the capitalist class to increase the proportion of national income that goes as profits, without real wages falling, or even while real wages are rising. Second, it suggests that without making a fetish of free collective bargaining the working class is unable to defend its living standards. But recent history shows that the working class has the power to resist the erosion of living standards by exercising its might in the economic struggle, whether or not the government imposes an incomes policy. For this, the trade union response has always proved adequate. The greater danger to workers' living standards comes from the Labour Party, whom the CP told us to vote for, and their 'social contract'. It is the political arguments, put forward by the CP and others, for supporting Labour that have given a boost to the chances of the 'social contract' working. In return for phoney concessions on property speculators, taxing the rich, and repeal of the IRAct, (concessions which in no way defend or improve working class living or cultural standards or the possibilities of raising political consciousness) workers are now being asked to restrain their wage demands. The concessions are now being asked for by that very sort of Labour Government, the "new sort of Labour Government" full of Benms and Foots, which the CP was calling for at the last election.

The CP's disagreements with the Labour Party stem partly from tradition, and partly from its industrial basis. But it will not be able to undermine "social contracts" and social democracy if it has no positive political perspective, in which working class economic power can be used. The demand for independent trades unions cannot be compromised upon from a communist point of view, but this is by no means the same as confining the economic struggle to free collective bargaining, as the CP does. (And not the least damaging is the CP's refusal to come clean on what has been happening to profits in the UK economy).

More important is the light which this sheds on the CP's perspective for socialism. It offers nothing but "free collective bargaining", an extension of public ownership and a parliament of Left-Labour and communist MPs. Strikingly absent is the Marxist perspective of organised workers' strength in industry and society for proletarian political objectives, against both social democratic state capitalism and laissez faire.

THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALISTS

In view of the fact that in the pages of the Socialist Worker the Tories had long ago replaced capitalism itself as the number one enemy of the workers, the response of IS to the election was predictable well in advance. After having set up the Tories as the principal villain, their election reflex could only be to cry out for their ejection. The IS were caught on the horns of a dilemma: on the one hand their theory tells them that the Labourites are just as much agents of capitalism as are the Tories; the IS, to be fair, know that both will follow anti-working class policies. On the other hand, anti-Toryism remains the spontaneous form of political consciousness of much of the British working class; so, good tailists that they are, the IS are not willing to go against any spontaneous response, even though this 'spontaneous response' is no more than an expression of the spontaneous domination of the working class by capitalist (populist) ideology. IN ANY CLASS SOCIETY THE DOMINANT IDEOLOGY IS THE IDEOLOGY OF THE RULING CLASS. The political consciousness of the oppressed class always spontaneously expresses itself in a form that is limited by this ideology of

the ruling class. This ideology can only be expelled from its dominant position by class struggle, in particular ideological struggle. Until this occurs, there is a genuine contradiction between the political interests of the working class and its political consciousness. The contradiction will only be resolved when the working class ceases to support the Labour Party. The IS, however, in an opportunist manner typical of them, tried to have it both ways. They called for a Labour vote; so taking advantage of the anti-Tory bandwagon. At the same time they recognised that "A Labour government elected in 2 weeks time would be forced to act in very much the same way as the Tories" (SW Feb 16), and so were able to salve their theoretical consciences. The opposition between the theory and the practical prescription was apparently quite acceptable.

Their position was explained in more detail in the Feb 23 issue of Socialist Worker:

"A Labour victory does not mean socialism or even social reform, it does mean a government which in the short run at least, will find it harder to impose Tory policies and it means testing in practice yet again the claims of the Labour Party leaders. There is no other real choice. Vote Labour in spite of Wilson! Vote Labour in spite of its policies! Kick out the Tories carry on the fight!"

We will leave aside the suggestion that the Labourites will find it "harder to impose Tory policies". They do not intend to impose Tory policies, but they will impose ruling class policies; and because ruling class policies imposed by the "workers' own party" are less obvious than ruling class policies imposed by the Tories, they may even have slightly more chance of succeeding. Here, not for the first time in their history, the IS confuse a political party with an economic class, in this case the Tory party is substituted for the capitalist class.

Of more significance than this is what they have to say about testing in practice the claims of the Labour leaders. This is the traditional Trotskyist justification for voting Labour: voting Labour to expose Labour, voting Labour to expose Labour leaders. This of course is a parody of the position Lenin put forward in 1920. It ignores the fact that the most politically conscious workers have now been taught by successive Labour governments to put little faith in such governments as the defenders of the workers' interest. Post-war experience suggests to many workers that, judged by economic criteria alone, Tory governments have been able to deliver higher living standards to sections of the working class than have Labour. The justification for voting Labour has disappeared among these workers, especially after Barbara Castle's 'In Place Of Strife' of 1969, and the fall in living standards in the 1966-70 period. The memories of these workers is not that short.

The lesson to be drawn from the period is exactly the opposite to the one that IS draws. The lesson is: that a Labour government, because it is supposed to be the government of the workers' own party, has a much better chance than have the Tories of getting away with anti-working class measures. In 1970 the healthy anti-Labour sentiments of the trades unionists who had resisted 'In Place Of Strife' led to the return of the Tories. Labour, coming into power after a period of Tory confrontation with the unions, may find it that much easier, not harder, to impose policies in the interests of the ruling class, given the level of consciousness of the majority of the working class. BUT IT IS THE MILITANT MINORITY OF THE WORKING CLASS WHOSE CONSCIOUSNESS IS IMPORTANT AND TO WHICH IS AND THE REST OF THE LEFT SHOULD BE ADDRESSING THEMSELVES. Unless this minority is first brought to adopt a communist consciousness, there is no prospect of it spreading to wider sections. IS mistakes, however, the consciousness of the average worker, who will vote Labour anyway (the workers IS does not influence in any case), for the consciousness of the leading sections of the working class. It is this leading section, whose lost faith in Labour IS are now trying in effect to restore. The slogan that the IS addresses to these left wing trades unionists is therefore contemptuous of their current

political consciousness and antagonistic to its further development. These workers, who are led by their trade union activities into struggle and away from social democracy, are being directed right back towards it by the IS. On the other hand, the less politically aware majority of workers will vote Labour in any case, but not for the tactical reason that IS advocates. This majority will vote Labour because of simplistic anti-Toryism, and the belief that Labour could not do worse in the present situation than the Tories have done over the last 4 years.

A thorough examination of the Labour Party economic programme would suggest in any case that the instinct of these voters (the relatively backward sections of workers) is correct in voting for Labour's short term economic progress. Labour can, with the help of the TUC leaders run the country without the Tories' confrontation, disruption, and lost production. The return of Labour does bring with it the possibility of a voluntary incomes policy, action against property speculators, increasing nationalisation, taxing the rich. This is exactly the mood that Wilson managed to capture for the last election, the mood of the average Labour voter. Labour has learned enough from the 1964-70 experience and the 1970 defeat to do exactly this. So, even by the targets it sets itself, the IS advocacy of a Labour vote is incorrect. For an organisation such as IS in its present position, its theoretical shortcomings and lack of trenchant political analysis is epitomised by its simple economist slogan "carry on the fight".

These were not the only contradictions into which the IS got themselves through their "vote Labour" line. After pointing out that "Labour is as much committed to keeping capitalism intact as the Tories. It will be forced to take the same sort of measures to deal with capitalism's crisis." They then follow this up by saying "But one thing will hinder the Labour politicians in their efforts to copy Tory methods -- a massive Labour vote. For such a vote would mean a rejection of the argument that workers are to blame for the crisis. It will make much more difficult any attempts by a Labour government to shift the blame onto workers' organisations." This argument is so patently ridiculous, such an affront to any standard of reason or logic, that one would think that even members of a notoriously philistine organisation such as IS would begin to doubt the mental competence of their leaders. A massive Labour vote is the absolute precondition for the Labour Party to be able to imitate the Tories. Without a big Labour vote, Labour would not get a majority of MPs, without which they cannot form a stable government. Unless they are the government they cannot begin to copy Tory methods. If Labour is to get a chance of copying the Tories, a big Labour vote is just what they need. A big Labour vote would, moreover, be taken by Wilson and Company as a mandate, as a proof that they had the "confidence of the Nation" behind them. With this Clear Mandate, they would feel justified in taking any measures that they saw to be in the 'National Interest'. And from their past record it does not take much effort to imagine what they would think was in the National Interest: attacks on the working class. To say that one thing will hinder the Labour Party in its attempt to imitate the Tories, and then say the one thing is a vote for the Labour Party is the epitome of misleadership. What will in fact hinder the Labourites in their attempts to attack the working class is the same thing that hindered the Tories in their attempts to impose the Industrial Relations Act: and that is class struggle.

Not content to call on their supporters to vote Labour, IS gave Wilson a few tips on how to win the election. He should, they said, take up the Tory challenge and fight the election on clear class lines. Apparently since 70% of the population are, according to IS, working class, this would ensure a Labour victory. This assertion is nothing but pure voluntarism. IS do not specify just what 70% of the population being working class means. But however they arrived at this particular statistical artifact, it is of no use for predicting election results. At the most it means that 70% of the population belong to certain occupational categories; but since when has this been an adequate indicator of voting behaviour?

Even if 70% of the population belong to families of wage earners, it by no means follows that they are all economically proletarians, (for some are unproductive wage labourers, e.g. workers in commerce or banking), still less does it follow that they think of themselves, or act politically, as members of the working class. In a capitalist society, unlike feudal or slave society, individuals are not 'officially' assigned membership of any particular class. Slaves were recognised as slaves by the laws of slave society; their legal status was quite different from that of their masters. They were things not men in the eyes of the law. Similarly, feudal law and custom bound the serf to the land and to his lord. His class position was clearly demarcated. But capitalist law treats the wage slave as the equal of his master. The employee is subordinated to the capitalist not by the laws of the state, but by the laws of economics. He is a wage labourer because all that he has to sell is his labour power. In capitalist economics, workers do not appear as members of a subject class, but just as the sellers of a particular commodity -- labour. As the seller of a commodity he is the equal of any other commodity seller.

Capitalist political and legal ideology reflect commodity production in that they treat people as formally equals. They give rise to notions of people as free individuals, citizens equal before the law, electors, each of whose votes carry the same weight. This ideology is not only promoted by the mass media, but like any ideology has some basis in social practice which tends to lend it credence. Heath too has only one vote; Poulson when discovered must suffer the full severity of the 'Law', and, of course, his fate is well publicised. This equality before the law has its consequences. As a result, in a bourgeois society people are individualised, atomised and separated from one another. Society appears as a mass of conflicting private interests. Opposed to this, only the state and the rule of law appear to stand independent, above private contestation, acting as neutral referee between interest groups. The bourgeois democratic state, which is in fact a form of capitalist dictatorship, can in this way be made to appear as the representative of the General Will of the people, in opposition to selfish private interests. Its status as the representative of the public interest is periodically confirmed by elections in which the various political parties, as the representatives of the various sectors of the 'public opinion', compete. The winning party becomes the government, guardian of the general interest and of national unity; the bourgeois dictatorship has been legitimised by its "democratic" process.

Capitalist political and legal ideology arose on the social basis of commodity production, on the basis of contracts between private producers. With the dominance of commodity production over the whole of society, a state structure arises which is supported by, and in its turn supports, that ideology, the result of which is to generalise the outlook of the commodity producer. Capitalist law and representative democracy tends to give everybody the outlook of bourgeois individualism.

It only tends to do this, it does not always succeed. The formalities of capitalist law are confronted by the realities of the class struggle. In their struggles the working class develop values of mutuality, solidarity and collectivism in opposition to the individualism and egoism of the bourgeoisie. But the capitalist class still has great advantages: it has on its side all the dead weight of historical inertia -- the dead weight of customary beliefs and acts going back into feudalism (e.g. respect for "rank"); especially pronounced in Britain where the bourgeois revolution was fought out in the superstructure in metaphysical (religious) and not explicitly political terms; where it was not fought out to the logical conclusion of the bourgeois republic, but where traditional and new ruling class saw that, in fact, each was better off with, rather than without, the other, and so fused into a united class, which could be both dynamic and stable.

Not only the laws and official state institutions, but also capitalist forms of personal existence such as the institutions of the family, and private life in general, generate their own brand of individualism; consumerism. The