

# The Politics of the Socialist Party

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Why are there two main organisations on the Irish radical left - the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party? This is a question that many ask today.

Both organisations work together in the United Left Alliance which currently has five TDs in Dail Eireann. But while working together in a common front against the right wing parties, neither the SWP or SP hide the differences that exist between them.

The purpose of this document is to trace the connections between the current political line and conduct of the SP and its fundamental politics developed over decades. Such a document is necessary not because we have any desire to quarrel with the SP - rather we wish to be able to work with them in a comradely and cooperative way where any divergences of perspective and tactics are debated openly and settled. Rather, its purpose is to clarify the differences in politics and methodology.

Given that this document, by its nature, is going to make a series of criticisms of the SP it is necessary to make one thing clear at the start: the members of the SP, both leaders and rank-and-file, are undoubtedly genuine and sincere socialists and working class militants who serve the cause of socialism with dogged determination, hard work and real commitment; this is precisely why we have been and remain keen to work with them in campaigns and strengthen our unity in the ULA. None of the criticisms presented here alter this.

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## The Roots of SP politics

The SP is the Irish section of an international Trotskyist tendency called the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) which consists of a number of affiliated socialist organisations - most of them very small - in a variety of different countries. Its 'parent' organisation was what was then known as the Militant Tendency in Britain and its political and theoretical leader was Ted Grant, a South African Trotskyist who came to Britain in the 1930s and who became a leading figure in the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) which for a short period in the late 1940s united most of Britain's very few Trotskyists. In the sixties, seventies and eighties what distinguished the politics of Ted Grant and of the Militant Tendency was their strategy of 'entrism' into the Labour Party, which was also adopted by virtually all their international affiliates in relation to their respective social democratic parties.

In Ireland, the Militant first appeared in 1973 with a paper bearing that name and proclaiming in its banner headline, An Independent Programme for Labour. The Labour Party was entering a coalition with Fine Gael at the time and many left wingers had left in disgust. Militant, however, warned against any attempt to build any alternative party to the left of Labour. The only place socialists could usefully be, they claimed, was in the Irish Labour Party.

This policy came to an end in the early nineties after the expulsion from the Labour Party of a number of their leaders. Like the rest of the CWI, the Irish Mili-

tant then took the view that the Labour Party and social democratic parties everywhere had become capitalist parties. In Britain, the change to open party building was strongly, but unsuccessfully, resisted by Ted Grant, who was expelled, and in the mid- nineties the name Socialist Party was adopted in both England and Ireland. In Ireland, former leaders of the Militant such as Finn Geaney also departed at this time. The current politics of the SP are a product of this whole long development. In particular they have been shaped by the following factors: 1) the legacy of Trotsky's Fourth International; 2) their analysis of Russia and Eastern Europe; 3) their prolonged 'entry' into the Labour Parties; 4) the poll tax campaign and their turn to open work in the nineties. We shall look at each in turn.

## **The Legacy of the Fourth International**

When, in 1933, the Comintern or Third International, failed to mount any serious resistance to the rise of Hitler and the Nazis, Trotsky decided that it was dead for the purposes of revolution. From that time on he sought to build a new revolutionary socialist international. Unfortunately circumstances were very much against him - this was a period of terrible defeats for the working class - and the Trotskyists made little progress. However in 1938 they decided to proclaim a new Fourth International. The founding conference in September 1938 was attended by only twenty one delegates from eleven countries (only one of whom, the American Max Shachtman, represented a substantial organisation) and met for only one day in a house in France.

They compensated for their actual weakness on the ground by adopting a grand name, 'The Fourth International

(World Party of Socialist Revolution)' and an even grander programme, written by Trotsky, entitled *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* which also became known as 'The Transitional Programme'. Since then the Trotskyist movement has undergone many splits and changes but in understanding the SP it is important to know that they and the CWI see themselves as the true 'orthodox Trotskyists' who still stand on the ground of this document and proclaim their adherence to its political method. They see themselves, and themselves alone, as the true heirs of Trotsky and of the whole Marxist tradition.

This is unfortunate because there were major flaws involved in both the founding of the International and in its programme. In the first place it was highly problematic declaring the existence of a 'world leadership' without any serious base in the working class and bound to lead to a misplaced pride and arrogance. It led in turn to an over emphasis on, almost a fetishisation of, the importance of the programme at the expense of the movement of the working class from below. It also led to a belief that 'the leadership' can draw up the programme of the revolution in advance of, and without interaction with, the actual working class struggle. Marx, by contrast, used to say 'One step forward of the real movement is worth a dozen programmes.'

Moreover the economic and political perspectives on which the Transitional Programme was based, though plausible at the time, turned out to be mistaken. The programme declared that capitalism was in its 'death agony' and that, 'The economic prerequisite for the proletarian revolution has already in general achieved the highest point of fruition that can be achieved under capitalism. Mankind's productive forces stagnate.' From this Trotsky drew the conclusion that 'there can be no dis-

cussion of systematic social reforms' and that the reformist organisations, both Social Democratic and Stalinist 'will depart the scene without a sound, one after the other'. In reality none of this happened: the Second World War brought the end of the economic crisis and was followed by the massive post-war boom in which the productive forces grew rapidly; there were substantial reforms (such as the establishment of the National Health Service in Britain and a Welfare State throughout much of Europe) and improvements in living standards across Europe and the USA; and in general the Social Democratic and Stalinist parties grew in strength.

Finding themselves having to deal with these difficulties, and with Trotsky no longer alive to assist them, many of Trotsky's followers retreated into a conservative frame of mind in which defending the programme and maintaining the letter of Trotskyist 'orthodoxy' became all important. In 1946 Ted Grant was still repeating Trotsky from 1938:

The definitive decline of Europe, already begun in 1914, has been aggravated in the succeeding decades, and World War II has put its seal on this decline. While cyclical upturns will take place and are taking place at the present time, there can be no real growth of the productive forces as in the past. The chronic crisis and death agony of capitalism will once again be revealed in its full scope... The programme of the Fourth International will become the banner of the Eu-

ropean and world proletariat<sup>1</sup>.

Indeed Grant was still echoing the words of the Transitional Programme in 1979. '...we are now in the epoch of the death agony of capitalism. *There will be a tendency for living standards to fall in all the countries of capitalism, including the industrial countries, with only temporary exceptions*<sup>2</sup>.

It is a dogmatic and mechanical approach which still affects the leaders of the SP today. They still believe they have the correct Marxist programme and that advancing this programme is the key to the socialist transformation of society. This leads to a top down view of the relationship between the party and the working class. The party is in possession of vital insights which it must teach the working class because it has studied Trotsky's transitional programme. Less emphasis is placed on a party learning from a working class which has entered struggles and which will throw up its own demands.

## **Russia and Eastern Europe: the Stalinist States**

As 'orthodox' Trotskyists the Socialist Party, have always felt obliged to defend Trotsky's characterisation of Stalinist Russia as a 'degenerated workers' state'. They argued that the Stalinist bureaucracy had betrayed genuine revolutionary socialism in Russia but that the survival of state ownership and state planning meant that, despite Stalinism, Russia remained fundamentally non-capitalist and a workers' state. When in 1948 Tony Cliff first produced his analysis of Russia as state cap-

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<sup>1</sup>Ted Grant, *Economic Perspectives*, 1946, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/grant/1946/04/economy.htm>

<sup>2</sup><http://www.marxists.org/archive/grant/1979/08/world.htm>

<sup>3</sup>'Against the theory of State Capitalism - Reply to Comrade Cliff' <http://www.marxists.org/archive/grant/1949/cliff.htm>.

italist, it was Ted Grant who wrote the main reply to him<sup>3</sup>.

What was at stake in this argument was not just what label to attach to the Soviet Union, but what constituted the essential, the fundamental, difference between capitalism and a workers' state. For Cliff it was which class controls production and therefore runs the society, for Grant it was the form of property (private versus state property). This became especially clear in relation to the establishment of Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe. These regimes became 'communist' not by virtue of the working class in these countries taking power but by virtue of the advance of the Red Army. If state ownership was the decisive criterion for a workers' state these countries had to be regarded as workers' states, even if 'deformed' and not fully socialist, and this was Grant's view and the view maintained by the whole of the CWI to this day. So fixated was Ted Grant with the state property criterion that even concluded at one point that Burma and Syria were workers' states with planned economies. In other words the overthrow of capitalism and the creation of the economic foundations of socialism did not have to be 'conquered by the working class itself', as Marx put it, but could be established from above by a 'leadership' (in this case the Red Army). The subsequent military victories of 'Communist' forces, armies based on the peasantry rather the working class, in North Korea, China, Cuba, Vietnam and Cambodia, all of which established state ownership of the main means of production, reinforced the point that making this the key criteria led away from the self emancipation of the working class from below as the essence of socialist transformation. This in turn has dovetailed, in the political practice of the SP, with the focus on 'the programme' over and above the struggle.

Moreover if the Red Army can establish a series of workers' states over the heads of the workers, why shouldn't this be possible for a 'socialist government' with a 'socialist programme' in parliament? Here we see one of the original roots of the SP's current electoralism.

## The Effects of Entrism

The tactic of entry into the mass social democratic parties was advocated by Trotsky, and adopted by his supporters in 1934 (it was known as 'the French turn' because it was first based on the situation in France) as a short term measure to relate to the masses of workers who, at that point, were joining these reformist parties. It was adopted by the Militant tendency as a long term (indeed more or less permanent) strategy and raised almost to the level of a principle. The long period, lasting more than three decades, during which entrism was pursued had a profound effect on shaping the politics of the Militant Tendency, the CWI as a whole, and the SPs of Britain and Ireland.

In the first place in order to remain in the Labour Party and not be expelled they had to disguise some aspects of their Marxist politics. In public they denied they were a revolutionary socialist or Leninist organisation, insisting they were only a current of thought around the Militant paper (when in fact they were a very tight democratic centralist party). They also presented themselves in the Labour Party, not as revolutionaries who wanted, as Lenin in *The State and Revolution*, to smash the capitalist state but as left reformists who believed socialism could be brought about by electing a Labour Government pledged to socialist policies. No doubt, in private, the Militant leadership told a different, more revolutionary story, but since they recruited publicly on the

‘Labour Government with socialist policies’ basis there is little doubt that many of their members and, even more so, of their supporters accepted the left reformist parliamentary perspective.

The fact that they stood candidates, and got them elected as City councillors and MPs in Britain (such as Derek Hatton, Terry Fields and Dave Nellist) as Labour Party members, who had to be especially careful what they said, only reinforced this tendency.

As entrists they also adapted to their Labour Party hosts in other ways. They adopted a very narrow economic approach to the working class. By economicism we mean a near exclusive focus on bread and butter issues and a failure to raise more difficult issues concerned with repression in the broader working class movement. For Lenin:

Working-class consciousness cannot be genuine political consciousness unless the workers are trained to respond to *all* cases of tyranny, oppression, violence, and abuse, no matter *what class* is affected ... the Social-Democrat’s [i.e. Marxist’s - JM] ideal should not be the trade union secretary, *but the tribune of the people*, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects<sup>4</sup>.

But, in practice, this was not at all the approach of the Militant Tendency. All issues other than straightforward economic and class issues were either ignored or massively down played. Thus while they

played a leading role in the Anti Water Charges campaign in the 1990s or in the fight against bin charges, they did not play a substantial role in anti-war campaigning at any time. They joined the Irish Anti-War Movement only after the massive mobilisation on 2003 and then left afterwards. Instead of targeting US imperialism as the main enemy, they tried to balance a condemnation of ‘terrorism’ with opposition to the US war efforts.

Anti- imperialism has always been a particular weakness (as it was for Social Democracy historically) .Thus they treated the anti-imperialist IRA as equally as bad as the pro-imperialist UVF and UDA. They refused, for example, to support political status for republican prisoners during the hunger strike of 1981 instead demanding a labour movement inquiry to determine who was and who was not a political prisoner. This, despite the fact, that many of the union leaders played an active role in conniving with the British and Irish states in trying to break the H Block movement.

On Palestine they tend towards two statism, advocating both a Jewish and Arab state despite standard socialist objections to ethnic exclusivity, and to equal opposition to Hamas and Zionism. They oppose the boycott of Israeli goods as a concrete way giving support to the Palestinian cause. In both these cases they covered their effective abstention by reference to Trotsky’s opposition to individual terrorism and by, formally correct, but completely abstract calls for socialism.

Often what motivated these choices was a reluctance to offend or challenge the prejudices of ‘ordinary’ workers in the Labour Party or trade unions whose votes they needed in elections or for positions in the movement. For example, at the start of the great Miners Strike of 1984-5

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<sup>4</sup> V.I. Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, *Collected Works*, Moscow, 1961, Vol.5, pp.412-23

in Britain many of the miners (for very understandable reasons) held very backward sexist and homophobic views and would chant sexist slogans on their demonstrations. The Militant comrades were unwilling to argue with the miners about these things, saying they were just part of working class culture, and criticised SWP members, who did challenge these ideas (in a comradely way) as being middle class.

Unfortunately this is a habit that persists to this day in the practice of the SP in both Britain and Ireland and it is linked to their 'socialism from above' approach and their electoralism. If you see the mass of workers as essentially a passive army of supporters because socialism will be introduced by a government with the correct socialist programme, then it doesn't matter very much if their heads contain various backward and reactionary ideas, but if you see the working class as emancipating itself in revolutionary struggle then the fight for the consciousness of the class is of paramount importance.

Obviously the SP comrades believe their approach is correct but this leads them to defend it by attributing *more* backwardness to the working class than is justified and by quietly going along with conservative ideas when they can be used against others on the left (especially the SWP). Thus for example, they have been happy in the past to denounce the SWP as 'all middle class students' or 'supporters of the IRA'. Indeed during their period in the Labour Party they used to argue that since the Labour Party was 'the mass party of the working class' anyone not in Labour Party (again, especially the SWP), were not really part of the labour movement at all.

Another legacy of entrism was that to operate semi-secretly under the hostile gaze of the Labour leadership Militant had to operate with a highly trained,

strictly centralised core membership or cadre. This is in some respects a strength, and one which they retain, but unfortunately it went hand in hand with training their cadre in sectarian contempt for others on the left (especially their main rivals i.e. the SWP). Obviously any small left wing party needs its members to understand its political differences with other left parties but it does not need to educate them in a spirit of arrogant contempt which makes working together very difficult. This is what Militant and later, the SPs have tended to do.

Finally, the experience in the Labour Party led to a strategy of organising that stressed manoeuvring in back room committees to win control of particular campaigns. All the emphasis is on gaining key positions and bizarre alliances are sometimes formed in pursuit of this objective. Thus in the current anti-household campaign the SP have formed an effective alliance with anarchists and left republicans to gain control of key positions. They have even argued against the United Left Alliance intervening in the movement with coherent tactics that have been debated democratically within the alliance.

## **The Poll Tax, the Water Charges and the Turn to the Open Party**

The abandonment of entrism and the turn to open party building was basically a product of the expulsions they experienced in the Labour Party in both Britain and Ireland. What made this particularly hard to cope with was that this was not supposed to happen. For years the Militant leadership had proclaimed that it was virtually a law of history that workers would flood into the Labour Party and that the party would move to the left.

The move out of Labour was preceded

in 1989-90 by the struggle against the Poll Tax. First in Scotland (it was the making of Tommy Sheridan) and then in England and Wales, Militant were able to launch and lead mass campaigns of non-payment. Similarly, in Ireland the Socialist Party played an important role in the fight against water charges and managed to secure the election of Joe Higgins to the Dail, primarily as an anti-water charges candidate.

These two struggles have provided a mainly positive experience for the current fight against household charges. However this is not the whole story. There are other aspects of the anti-poll tax struggle which the SPs are less keen to remember or celebrate and which could have a bearing on their behaviour in the current household tax campaign.

The first is that the campaign by no means consisted just of mass non-payment and the poll tax was not defeated just by non-payment. On the contrary, from the start of the struggle there were mass demonstrations and protests at town halls, some of which turned into attempts to storm those town halls. Then on 31 March 1990 the Anti-Poll Tax Federation (under Militant leadership) called a national demonstration in London. In the run up to the demo Militant started to worry that it might turn violent. They did their very best to try to prevent this. On the coaches to London Militant stewards tried to get everyone to pledge not to be violent. In the event, however, the police attacked the march and it turned into a massive riot in and around Trafalgar Square.

Inevitably there was a media storm against 'violence' and calls for 'exemplary sentences' by the Labour establishment like Roy Hattersley. Sadly the Militant leadership also condemned the riot and blamed it on anarchists. Steve Nally, Militant member and secretary of the Anti-Poll

Tax Federation, said they would 'hold an enquiry and name names'. Subsequently Militant attributed the defeat of the Poll Tax exclusively to non-payment and denied that the mass demo and riot had anything to do with it. Tory Minister, Alan Clark, in his diaries, tells a different story. 'Civil Disorder. Could cut either way, but I fear will scare people into wanting a compromise - just as did Saltley Colliery [in the 1972 Miners Strike]. In the corridors and the tea room people are now talking openly of ditching the Lady to save their skins.' Doubtless the SP are now embarrassed by this rather shameful episode but the memory of it may be a factor in their original hostility to mass protests in the Household Tax campaign.

It is already noticeable that the move of the household campaign to mass civil disobedience has taken place in areas where the SP has little influence. In New Ross and Donegal, for example, crowds of people have invaded council chambers. The SP, by contrast, has emphasised public meetings and a national indoor rally rather than a mass national demonstration to the Dail.

Two other things need to be said about this period. The first was that the election of Joe Higgins to the Dail on an anti-water charges ticket opened up a huge opportunity for the SP but they proved unable to adapt their party to dealing with a huge influx of workers. Political education remained confined to the grooves of a narrow propagandist group and those who joined as fighters against wage charges soon found it difficult to adapt to the long meetings discussing the Transitional Programme. After an initial surge of recruitment, many left.

Unfortunately, the current SP leadership drew the conclusion from this experience that an even deeper immersion into sectarian politics was required. In 2004,

against the background of the bin charges dispute, for example, the party produced an extraordinary pamphlet attacking the SWP and former key figures that had left, including Joan Collins, currently a TD and Dermot Connolly, the former party secretary. In it, they proclaimed that 'Based on experience going back many years we do not believe the SWP has a positive role in the re-development of the movement'. The aim was to clearly inoculate their membership against any genuine dialogue with others on the left. The result of this experience has led the SP to adopt a dual approach.

On one hand there is a genuine attempt to engage with mass movements and to encourage them into existence. But this is often combined with a political methodology of manoeuvring and denouncing perceived rivals on the left.

On the other the combination of the extremely hostile environment in the Labour Party and the success of the Poll tax and anti-water charges campaigns convinced the Militant leadership to make a final break from Labour. However entrism had been so central to the Militant and CWI tradition, so much their political trademark, that this created a substantial political/theoretical problem for them. Were they to concede that decades of entrism had been a failure? Or perhaps they could acknowledge that the strategy was more problematic than they had previously acknowledged? Neither of these options seemed to have appealed. Instead they opted to argue that entrism was no longer appropriate because the Labour Party had qualitatively changed. From being 'the mass party of the working class' it had become, they said, a purely capitalist party, indistinguishable from the Tories or Fianna Fail. This merely exchanged one mechanical position for another.

The Labour Party had **never** been simply a working class party. It had **never** had a predominantly working class leadership; it had **never** fought consistently for working class interests; and it had **never** governed in the interests of the working class when in office. On the contrary it had **always** propped up capitalism and accepted all the key priorities of the capitalist class. There was no heyday of working class politics in the Irish Labour Party. Labour, for example, had led the campaign against Noel Browne's Mother and Child scheme in the 1950s and even when it turned left in the sixties, it was led by a member of the Knights of Columbanus, Brendan Corish.

Lenin described the British Labour Party as follows:

...most of the Labour Party's members are workingmen. However, whether or not a party is really a political party of the workers does not depend solely upon a membership of workers, but also upon the men that lead it, and the content of its actions and its political tactics. Only this latter determines whether we really have before us a political party of the proletariat. Regarded from this, the only correct point of view, the Labour Party is a thoroughly bourgeois party<sup>5</sup>.

Lenin summed up the contradictory character of the Labour Party by defining it as a 'capitalist workers' party'. So when Labour moved rightwards under Blair or Spring it was a quantitative shift rather than a fundamental change. Moreover what constituted the 'workers' element in this capitalist workers' party, namely its working class base - as expressed in its

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<sup>5</sup> V.I.Lenin, *On Britain*, London 1959, p.460)

vote, its membership and its organic relationship to the trade unions - was weakened but clearly did not disappear.

By adopting the undialectical view that the Labour Party was now a purely capitalist party the SP threw away decades of Marxist analysis of Social Democracy in favour of a position they would previously have denounced as ultra-left.

This is what lies behind the Irish SP's current dogmatic and sectarian refusal to contemplate sharing a platform with even former Labour Party representatives in campaigns. These, it is argued, must first prove, their genuine socialist credentials before being allowed to share platforms. This sectarian approach misses out on opportunities to bring many more people over from Labour to the radical left.

## The SP today

The politics of the SP in Ireland today are a product of all this history. Yes, they are committed and hard working socialists who undoubtedly are genuine in their desire to end capitalism, but they have a mechanical and formalistic view of how this is to be achieved. They emphasise the question of the programme over struggle from below and the 'socialist programme' they so exalt emphasizes nationalisation and state planning over the self-  
emancipation of the working class. They retain an economic view of working class struggle, showing little interest in other issues. They are still weak on issues of anti-imperialism, especially in the North where they equate republican nationalism and orange loyalism, demanding that any united left formation in the North must be based on acceptance of their position. In their own words:

The opposition of the Social-

ist Party to the extension of the ULA into North has nothing to do with being slow to move on the issues that affect the working class, but is based on having a principled and sensitive approach to the conflict of national aspirations [Note '*conflict of national aspirations*', i.e. *loyalism - loyalty to British imperialism - is regarded as a 'national aspiration'*] that exists in the North.

We believe that a new workers party in the North, even more so than elsewhere, must be based on the emergence of a layer of working class activists from struggles. It is vital that a new formation is rooted in the understanding of the need to oppose both loyalist and republican sectarianism,...and for workers unity against sectarianism and capitalism.

While sometimes over the last years, the SWP have argued for workers unity, that does not mean that they have overcome their one sided view of the national question [i.e. *opposition to imperialism*] which has been a hallmark of their position.

The SWP approach has been infected with the view that republicanism as it emerged during the Troubles is progressive, and that includes an approach that tends to excuse Catholic sectarianism while highlighting and condemning loyalist sectarianism<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup>What programme for the United Left Alliance?, [www.socialistworld.net](http://www.socialistworld.net), 14/07/2011

In the history of the Marxist movement there is a particular term, 'centrism', which accurately describes the political character of the SP. The term comes from the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) which at the time of the First World War contained three currents - the right, led by Scheidemann and Noske, who were openly reformist, supported the War and helped suppress the German Revolution (including being complicit in the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht); a revolutionary left led by Luxemburg and Liebknecht, who opposed the War, and became the Spartacus League and then founded the German Communist Party in 1919; and vacillating between the right and the revolutionary left, the Centre led by Karl Kautsky. In words Kautsky proclaimed his commitment to Marxism and 'revolution' but in practice he always avoided drawing revolutionary conclusions or pursuing revolutionary action. Hence Lenin and Trotsky developed the term 'Centrism' to describe political tendencies that waiver between revolution and reform; that in the abstract adhere to a revolutionary programme but are conservative and cautious when it comes to action.

This is the Socialist Party. They are formally committed to revolution but in practice highly electoralist. They have a top down and controlling attitude in campaigns such as the household charges campaign where they originally insisted on drawing up 'the plan' in advance and on everyone else adhering to it. Originally they tried to discourage protests and national demonstrations and arguing that all the mass of working class people need to do is 'stay at home and stay away from their computers'. Working people transform themselves and their consciousness in struggle. That, Marx says, is how they fit themselves to run society. But if what you

really want is just for them to vote for you, why not ask them to 'stay at home', so long as they remember you when it comes to the election.

The same electoralism is shown in their role in relation to the ULA. After much prevarication they agreed to the ULA before the last election - as an electoral alliance- but since the election they have opposed any development of the ULA beyond a mere electoral alliance, blocking virtually all proposals in that direction on the Steering Committee.

As true believers, sincerely convinced that they and they alone are possessors of the true Marxist method inherited from Trotsky, they are reluctant in the extreme to put themselves in a position in any campaign or in the ULA where they might be democratically outvoted by the rank and file. [The Socialist Party in Britain literally walked out en masse of the Socialist Alliance when that body adopted the democratic principle of one person one vote - and claimed this represented the SWP wrecking the organisation!].

A useful insight into the SPs real modus operandi is provided by Dermot Connolly's account of their behaviour over the question of a list of anti-bin tax candidates.

Having been members of the SP until very recently, and involved in its leading bodies, we can state without any doubt that the SP has been and remains absolutely determined not to become involved in any sort of election pact or list which would involve the SWP. However, given the events of last autumn, they had to respond to the pressure from working people that the bin tax campaigns should put up

a united front and really put it up to the right wing parties, and labour, in the June elections.

They therefore came up with the public position that they were in favour of a slate of anti bin tax candidates, provided it contained genuine people who had actually had involvement in the struggle. On paper this sounds fine. Why give a platform to political opportunists to jump on the band wagon? It is also the case that if a slate was open to anybody and everybody that some people with no real creditability would have stood, getting derisory votes and weakening the overall effect and thus the campaign.

The reality though was different. the SP were not concerned with putting forward a creditable list of candidates, but of ensuring that there was no list. At a meeting of the four campaigns to discuss a possible all Dublin list, it was quickly clear that we were not facing a situation where anybody and everybody was trying to get themselves onto this list. There could have been a list of twenty plus candidates, all of whom had played some role in building the various campaigns, and were likely to be nominated as candidates by local campaigns...

Instead the SP insisted on a limited list, which included only those SWP can-

didates who they couldn't argue against. When it was proposed by people at this meeting that areas where there was a question mark over the local campaigns' level of organisation and activity, such as in Ringsend or Coolock/Artane, we could write to the membership, calling a meeting and then judge whether to support candidates on the basis of the level of turnout and local support, This was rejected out of hand. So was a proposal to facilitate a meeting between the SP and SWP (who had made clear their willingness to co operate and withdraw one or two candidates) to try and resolve differences. **The SP eventually gave an ultimatum; either their version of the list or they would not participate in it.** [My emphasis - JM]<sup>7</sup>

Despite all these problems the SWP remains willing and committed to working in a comradely way with the SP in the interests of Left unity and the wider interests of the working class. We hope that joint work will improve trust and even help the SP to overcome some of its more mechanical approaches to issues. Doubtless we will also learn much in the process. We believe the Household Tax campaign can win and that the ULA, if it develops, still has the potential to be a pole of attraction to working people. But we are not willing to be tied down or restricted to the limits imposed by the SPs mechanistic approach to the struggle.

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<sup>7</sup>Dermot Connolly, 'The Socialist Party, Joan Collins and the Bin Tax Campaign'