

Chapter Four

The Entry into the Independent Labour Party: the "Marxist Group in the I.L.P.";

Spring 1934 to September 1935

This chapter deals with the period of the participation of the "minority" of the Communist League in the independent Labour Party, up to the time of the controversy about the attitude of the party to the Italo-Abyssinian War, when the Trotskyists may be said to have reached and passed the peak of their influence in the I.L.P. No record has been traced to show exactly how many people formed the "minority", which broke away from the Communist League at the end of 1933, declaring their intention of working in the I.L.P. independently of the "majority", who wished to try to combine the work of a faction in the I.L.P. with the continued existence of the Communist League as a public, "open" organisation. The writer was told in 1935 that the supporters of the "minority", including those who had not yet joined the I.L.P. at the time of the split, numbered about fifteen, all of whom renounced responsibility for the Communist League and for its paper, "The Red Flag".

The "minority" consisted mainly of unemployed former students and of workers in factories in the East End of London. They appear to have made a slow start in the I.L.P. (1), but entered a period of much more rapid progress in autumn 1934, when they began to organise a group of members and sympathisers, the "Marxist Group in the I.L.P.", which the author believes, on the basis of his recollections of membership of it, to have numbered about a hundred at its height.

None of the "minority" had played a leading part in the Communist Party, either before or after the expulsion of the Balham Group in August 1932, or in the leadership of the Communist League, of which they tended to be its younger and less experienced members. The "Marxist Group in the I.L.P.", which they were able to establish with the co-operation of former sympathisers of the Communist League in the I.L.P. and of members of the I.L.P. whom they were able to attract, reached the height of its influence about the time of the National Conference of the I.L.P. at Derby, at Easter 1935.

During the summer of 1935 it entered a period of stagnation, during which a discussion began about what it could still hope to achieve by staying in the I.L.P. and at what point the disadvantages of being in the I.L.P. would outweigh the advantages.

Some of its leading members came to hope to win over Brockway and his following to the Fourth International. With this prospect in mind, they could be all the more easily induced to support the electoral policy of the I.L.P. of standing candidates against Labour candidates. If they were to stay in the I.L.P. they necessarily had to support its candidates, and could persuade themselves all the more easily to do so because they already opposed the official policy of the Labour Party of reliance on "sanctions" to be applied by the League of Nations to check the Italian aggression against Abyssinia.

They called on the I.L.P. to declare itself for "Workers' Sanctions", that is, for workers in industry, transport and commerce to refuse to permit military aid to reach Italy for use against Abyssinia, rejecting the pacifists' attitude of neutrality between Italy and Abyssinia. In September 1935 Brockway briefly declared himself in favour of "Workers' Sanctions", but gave up this position in the face of the opposition of Maxton, McGovern and other leading pacifists in the I.L.P.

In autumn 1935, therefore, while the Italian attack on Abyssinia was developing and preparations were being made for the General Election in Britain, the "Marxist Group in the I.L.P." was giving up what had been earlier one of the proposals which had attracted support to it in the I.L.P., that the I.L.P. should cease to isolate itself from the conflicts inside the Labour Party (for example, between the Socialist League and the National Executive Committee), should cease to stand candidates except in Glasgow against Labour candidates, and should in this way openly take its place in the movement of the working class to strengthen the representation of the Labour Party in Parliament. Consequently, the "Marxist Group in the I.L.P." found itself isolated, not only from the activists in the Labour Party, but from what was left of the rank and file of the I.L.P. as well. It re-inforced the impression, which its opponents wanted to create, that it only wanted to involve the I.L.P. in faction-fighting against

the Communist Party on behalf of Trotsky, that the political differences between Trotsky and Stalin were merely personal ones and that no one need be expected to understand them. It was unable to influence the pacifist wing of the I.L.P., which was being strengthened by the recruitment of young men who intended to be conscientious objectors in World War Two. A section of its leadership continued to entertain hopes of winning over Brockway.

In November 1935 the sympathisers of the Communist Party in the I.L.P. could no longer maintain their position as a "loyal" minority and the Revolutionary Policy Committee left the I.L.P. At the National Conference of the I.L.P. at Keighley, at Easter 1936, a majority of the delegates supported "Workers' Sanctions". However, this majority consisted not only of supporters of the "Marxist Group in the I.L.P." but also of a number of resolute opponents of Trotskyism. Brockway found a formula by which Maxton and McGovern were able to overturn the decision in favour of "Workers' Sanctions". The Communist Party was making a good deal of progress at this time and was able to exploit the internal differences of the I.L.P. against it. By the summer of 1936, therefore, the "Marxist Group in the I.L.P." had to face the fact that it had been defeated, and its forces had fallen apart into three more or less distinct currents. The first, a small group of which Denzil Harber was the leading member, had already left the I.L.P. in the course of 1935. Its members had joined the Labour Party and allied themselves with the group which was arising independently in the Labour Party League of Youth and developing towards Trotskyism under the leadership of the South African, Charles van Gelderen.

The second current, under the leadership of C.L.R. James, hesitated to face the possibility of a break with the I.L.P. It favoured the idea of an "open" organisation, independent of the Labour Party, particularly on the ground that some basis for public opposition to World War Two would be necessary, and because it still retained some hopes of winning over the I.L.P. as a whole to the position of Trotskyism.

The third current, under the influence of Matlow and Starkey Jackson, was moving in the direction of joining the Labour Party as

individuals and seeking association with the Harber - van Gelderen Group.

The Communist League, the leaders of which had themselves been formed in the Communist Party, with its emphasis on organisational independence from the Labour Party, was not in every way a good preparation for those who were to enter the I.L.P. Their insistence on theoretical discussion pre-disposed them to being regarded as hair-splitters, especially by I.L.P.ers who had been through the years of theoretical discussion which had led to dis-affiliation and then, seemingly, no further. Most of the entrists lived in and around London. There they were drawn into vicious in-fighting against the supporters of the Revolutionary Policy Committee. When they tried to move away from London into the provinces they were regarded often with the same general prejudice as the Revolutionary Policy Committee, as talkers rather than do-ers, as self-appointed "intellectuals" who could argue with knowledge from the writings of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky. They were not always easy to distinguish from the R.P.C.: after all, Cullen and Gaster talked about revolution too. They lacked experience in presenting their ideas concretely in the course of common activities, experience which was not easily to be got because the small groups up and down the country which by 1935 made up the I.L.P. provided limited possibilities of systematic work. Even in the hospitable atmosphere of the Clapham branch of the I.L.P., the print-worker and trade unionist Sid Kemp was heard to complain about Trotskyist "intellectuals", old ally of Groves and Matlow as he was (2).

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A great deal of discussion and controversy was taking place among members of the I.L.P. in 1933 and 1934.

"Controversy", the party's official discussion organ, began to appear in November 1933. The editorial of the first issue stated:

"At the present time our party membership is to a degree confused. This, to a large extent, is inevitable. Prior to the Bradford Conference the I.L.P. made no claim to be Marxist or revolutionary. Its position in relation to the class-struggle and to other working-class bodies was not thoroughly understood... After the break with the Labour Party the I.L.P. had to choose between reformism and the revolutionary road. It was after Bradford that the I.L.P. membership realised the fundamental difference and

the psychological change which had compelled the I.L.P. to sever its connection with the Labour Party."

The editor, C.A. Smith, posed the question:

"How do our Constitutionalists propose to wage the struggle for Socialism and Freedom and against Fascism and War?"

He criticised as equivocal the statement of the National Council, which had rejected anti-Parliamentarism but had left unclear the part which Parliamentary elections and debates would play in the struggle for Socialism.

The first issue of "Controversy" also carried Trotsky's article: "Whither the I.L.P.?" (3).

Early in 1934 the Trotskyist entrists issued a declaration (4) that they entered the I.L.P. with the intention of working loyally with it and accepting the discipline of its majority. An important practical consequence was that they accepted the restriction that they could not sell publicly a Trotskyist journal addressed directly to British readers. All that they could do to express their viewpoint in print was to address their own publications strictly to members of the I.L.P. only, supplementing their own publications with those of Pioneer Publishers in New York, consisting mainly of translations in pamphlet form of Trotsky's writings and of the "Militant".

At about this time they issued two mimeographed leaflets. Neither is dated, and both were issued "on behalf of the Islington branch". The first consisted of Trotsky's article: "France is Now the Key to the International Situation" (5). The second, headed "For Party Use Only", dealt with the United Front, from the standpoint developed at the Third and Fourth Congresses of the Communist International in 1921 and 1922, criticised the relations between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party, quoting paragraphs 10, 18 and 20 from the thesis, "On the Unity of the Proletarian Front" of the Fourth Congress, to indicate what the authors thought should be the strategy of the I.L.P. towards the Labour Party. This leaflet closed with a

comparison of the warnings and advice given in Trotsky's writings in 1931 and 1932 about the situation in Germany with statements in the press of the Communist International at the same time, and with extracts from La Verite, the journal of the French Ligue Communiste, in favour of a United Front of a revolutionary with a reformist party, including one from a speech by Jacques Doriot.

The paper on which these leaflets were mimeographed and their general style is like that used in "The Communist", the theoretical organ of the Communist League. They were probably duplicated at New Morris Hall in Clapham. The leader of the Trotskyists in the Islington branch was an exiled German comrade, who may have been able to establish collaboration in technical work with the "majority" more easily because he was not personally involved in the split.

The preface to the Trotsky article says unequivocally:

"The authors of this document are of the opinion that in this country it is not necessary to create a new revolutionary party apart from the I.L.P., which they consider capable of becoming the leading party of the workers, provided it carries out and bases itself upon Marxist principles."

Harry Wicks has informed the writer that in the spring of 1934 he attended a meeting of rank and file members of the Labour Party League of Youth, and met Harber there. The meeting discussed methods of struggle against war, but neither the "majority" nor the "minority" was involved at the time in the Labour Party League of Youth.

Shortly after the Annual Conference of the I.L.P. at York at Easter 1934, Harber reviewed the state of that organisation and that of the entrists in a discussion document: "The Present Position in the I.L.P. and How We Should React to It" (6). He followed up this document with a contribution to "Controversy" (7), in which he attacked Gaster. His article was entitled, "Jack Gaster Criticises the Leadership of the Party", and argued that Gaster's misplaced confidence in the Communist International as a revolutionary force precluded him from effectively criticising Maxton and Brockway or proposing effective policies as alternatives to theirs.

Trotsky was soon to pay a compliment to the I.L.P. entrists (8). He supported his proposal that the Ligue Communiste in France should enter the S.F.I.O. with the claim that:

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"the experience of the British section, on a small scale, is highly instructive. The 'majority' maintaining its 'organisation' actually finds itself in a state of constant strife and division. Certain leaders have left the organisation altogether. On the other hand, the minority that entered the I.L.P. has maintained its internal solidarity and its connection with the international Bolshevik-Leninists, has made large use of the publications of the League in America and has had a series of successes inside the I.L.P." (9)

The mimeographed papers of the "Marxist Group in the I.L.P." (10), covering a period of about a year, beginning in November 1934, provide most of the evidence which has survived of the activity of the Trotskyists and their supporters in the I.L.P. during the time when they reached the peak of their influence. These papers open with the first issue of the "Bulletin of the Marxist Group in the I.L.P." (11), in which an un-signed article records:

"The Marxist Group was the outcome of a rank and file conference called by four London branches ... At the inaugural meeting at Clapham on 3rd November, 1934, more than sixty members were present."

This article, head-lined "The Meeting of November 3rd", went on to refer to:

"... the decline and disintegration of the I.L.P.... The Masses do not look to the I.L.P. for they see no need of it. There can never be room for a centrist party - there is no stable position between Social-Democracy and a Marxist revolutionary party."

The object of the "Marxist Group in the I.L.P." was to be:

"To transform the I.L.P. into a revolutionary party, into the vanguard of the proletariat."

The Trotskyist entrists appear to have shared in rather than taken an exclusive part in forming the Marxist Group. They had, of course, prepared the ground for it by producing documents which set out their position on at least some of the important questions which pre-occupied some members of the I.L.P. They had also gathered round themselves those members of the I.L.P. who had earlier shown a sympathetic interest in the "Red Flag". As this preparatory work

advanced, they were able to present an "open", organised group, consisting of Trotskyists and their sympathisers, in the I.L.P., to challenge both the Revolutionary Policy Committee and those who for various reasons supported Maxton and Brockway. A sense of urgency had been injected into their work by the Plenum of the International Communist League in October 1934, where the delegates from Britain met for the first time a Canadian Trotskyist (12) who was to spend somewhat over a year in London and who had had experience, as a member of the Communist League of America, of working "underground" in the Communist Party of U.S.A. This man contributed an optimism and dynamism to the Trotskyists in the I.L.P., helped to raise their theoretical level and, especially during his early months in Britain, encouraged the development of their contacts in the provinces.

The four branches in the names of which the initiative was taken to call the Conference of November 3 were Clapham, South Norwood, Islington and Holborn and Finsbury. The introductory article in the "Bulletin" takes great pains to present the object of the Marxist Group as being to save the I.L.P. by reforming it, placing the Marxist Group on a basis of Party loyalty. The tone of the article suggests that the author expected it to be received ungraciously in some quarters and with open hostility in others. The reader is warned that "this does not pretend to present the detailed application of the programme of the group" and is offered a precis of three speeches in which its basic positions were presented at the Conference. As would be expected from pupils of Trotsky, the first is about "International Perspectives". The second criticises the orientation of the I.L.P. towards collaborating with the Communist Party. This is, however, not representative of Trotskyist opinions, as it suggests that there never was anything to be hoped for in the Communist Party of Great Britain. Nor does it show any awareness of the historic "turn" towards unity with reformists and Liberals in the policies of the Communist International which was already taking place and was to open a new period of growth for the Communist Party in Britain. Thirdly, Bert Matlow argued, in "Towards a Correct Revolutionary Policy" (13), that the I.L.P. should turn towards the trade unions and the Labour Party and should do its best to ensure the return of a Labour Government with a majority in the coming General Election.

This is not a general history of the Labour Movement, but the author ventures to suggest some more general tendencies which may have favoured the formation of the Marxist Group in the late autumn of 1934. Employment had been improving for a year in London and the South-East. Membership of Trade Unions and of the Labour Party was on the upturn. Some workers would be recovering the self-confidence which the world slump, the defeat of 1931 and the victory of Hitler in Germany had shaken. There had been agitation on behalf of the unemployed, in which the Communist Party and the I.L.P. had participated in local unemployed organisations, both of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement and attached to local trades councils, and this activity appears to have brought some support to both parties. The Labour candidates in Parliamentary by-elections and in municipal elections were improving their votes. Working people appeared principally to want to test by experience the full possibilities of Parliamentarism and of industrial negotiation. These same forces, however, would also stimulate a revolutionary minority. In particular, the Trotskyists (as the present writer remembers) felt that the Labour Party was unwilling and the Communist Party unable to offer organisational leadership and a programme of struggle to the masses who turned out in the huge anti-Mosley demonstration in Hyde Park on September 9, 1934, and that the responsibility rested on them to do what they could. Shortly after the inaugural conference of the Marxist Group, the Finchley and Golder's Green branch of the I.L.P. produced a memorandum about the "New Leader" (14). This is a constructive criticism of the paper, which was intended to appeal "popularly" to working-class readers, on the ground that it achieved, not simplicity, but superficiality. The author was probably John L. Robinson, a member of the Marxist Group, who had been a member of the I.L.P. at least since autumn 1932. He said that the editors could not be blamed for the ambiguities in the party's policy, but went on:

"Even within these limits the 'New Leader' falls short of what it ought to be ... The 'New Leader' is a political paper ... It must give news, but it is not a newspaper... 'Scoops' will do it more harm than good... To those who may be tempted to think that to write for the worker implies any mental 'softening', we would recommend that they spend half an hour reading or re-reading any work by Karl Marx, Engels, Lenin or Trotsky..."

Several of the articles in the "Bulletin of the Marxist Group" were

written by supporters of the Left Opposition, such as John Robinson, Bert Matlow and Bill Duncan, who had been in the I.L.P. before the split in the Communist League, some of whom, probably, never were members of that group. The Marxist Group was not intended, indeed, at its inception to be restricted to people who regarded themselves as fully committed to Trotskyism and as partisans of the Fourth International. The Trotskyists' original intention was to maintain an "inner", secret, Bolshevik-Leninist group, but all the energies of the entrists appear to have been absorbed in the formation and development of the Marxist Group itself. The difficulty soon presented itself that communications from the International Secretariat were not being seen and discussed by all those who had the right to do so. The Canadian comrade took the initiative in February 1935 of trying to re-establish the "inner group" by calling a meeting of twelve Trotskyists in London (15), which formally declared itself to be the Bolshevik-Leninist faction in the I.L.P. and was, as such, accorded recognition as a sympathising section by the International Secretariat. The "inner group", however, functioned no better thereafter.

During the winter of 1934-35 there were regular and frequent members' meetings of the Marxist Group. These were prepared by the Central Committee of the Group, which circulated documents produced by the leadership, in which Trotskyists predominated, after it had discussed them. The internal political life of the group developed and, for a time, general agreement was established. The members' meetings closely scrutinised the drafts of the documents, resolutions and amendments, by means of which the viewpoint of the Group was to be expressed in the I.L.P. The atmosphere was a very democratic one and provided valuable political education for those who took part in it. May Matlow, wife of Bert Matlow, was a highly effective secretary. Copies of articles in the "Bulletin" were mailed to I.L.P. branches in the hope that they would be discussed. A circular, dated November 12, 1934, the wording of which indicates that it was to be sent to "group leaders" in various places, suggests that discussions in I.L.P. branches about the "Peace Ballot" could help to develop opposition to re-armament, war-preparations and the policies of the Communist Party.

The second issue of the "Bulletin of the Marxist Group in the I.L.P." is dated December 1, 1934, and was produced for the second general

members' meeting on December 2. The first two articles return to the theme of Matlow, that the I.L.P. must turn its face towards the members of the reformist organisations of the working class. In another article, Duncan wrote about the humiliating failure of Brockway's candidature in a Parliamentary by-election at Upton in East London, where the I.L.P. put him up against a Labour candidate. Under the head-line, "Towards a Correct Electoral Policy", Duncan wrote that the partisans of the I.L.P. Parliamentary Group, such as Maxton and McGovern, had counted on a great success for their electoral policy of opposing Labour candidates. The Labour leaders had refused a United Front with the I.L.P.: what was the I.L.P. to do?

"Communists fight on behalf of the immediate aims and interests of the working-class... the immediate aim and interest of our class is the downfall of the National Government and its substitution by a Labour one."

Duncan parried the attacks which the Revolutionary Policy Committee could be expected to make, as they were still opposing a policy of support for Labour candidates, even though the line of the Communist Party had been changed to one of support for Labour in the municipal elections of November 1934. He argued: that the policies of the Communist Party in the "Third Period" and those of the I.L.P. as far as it had imitated them, had served only to isolate those parties:

"Where we have a greater following than that of the Labour Party, we must put forward our own candidates. If the Labour Party chooses to interpose its candidates, then it gives us the weapon which it has been using against us."

Maxton, then, could hope to hold his seat in Glasgow. There would be other, more sensitive spots among those Scottish constituencies which the I.L.P. might reasonably claim, but which it could not be sure of winning. North Lanark was one of these. The Conservative candidate won in the 1935 General Election with 22,301 votes, Jennie Lee for the I.L.P. followed with 17,267, while the "official" Labour candidate came at the bottom of the poll with 6,763, having split the working-class vote and let the Tory in. However, the Marxist Group was primarily concerned to discourage such candidatures as that of

Brockway at Upton or Bob Edwards in 1935 at Chorley, where the I.L.P. had no historical basis and the majority of the workers would probably regard its intervention as either disruptive or irresponsible, and would be led to reject the criticisms of reformism which Marxists would want them to hear. Duncan went on:

"In all probability the next General Election will be the last to be decided by the present method... In general we must actively support the social-democrats, criticising and ruthlessly exposing their theories and reformist programmes, sacrificing nothing of our avowed principles, propounding our concept of workers' democracy and proletarian dictatorship against the 'class-less' democracy of the reformists. We must, through systematic canvass, organise the most advanced section of the workers to demand the application of Labour Party promises in parliamentary and local councils. We must, through participation in every local struggle, identify ourselves with the workers' aims, giving to those struggles a political expression, digging ourselves in, until we become an integral part of the workers' life, popularising such slogans as "Down With The National Government", "For An Immediate Dissolution of Parliament", "For the Return of a Labour Government".

We support Social Democracy in order to destroy it; in order to destroy the illusions of democracy and develop revolutionary consciousness in our class... The relationship between such a policy as this and the United Front can easily be seen. We cease to be regarded as vote-splitters and to that extent we rehabilitate our party in the eyes of the workers."

In the same issue, an article entitled "Our Work in the Trade Unions" (16) supported the proposal of the Marxist Group that every member of the I.L.P. should work systematically as a member of a reformist trade union. It begins:

"The basis of the entire Labour and Socialist Movement in this country is the Trade Unions",

and suggested the following first steps by which the I.L.P. could win support and membership in the unions:

Enforcement of the clause in the constitution which required all members of the party to be members of a trade union, "in order to end the passive refusal of the pacifists", who rejected the trade unions because they did not "believe in" the class struggle, or that of members still under the influence of the ideas which the Communist

Party was putting forward in the years 1929 - 1931:

Insistence that members regularly attend trade union branch meetings:

Organised efforts to win trade union positions:

Payment of the Political Levy:

Building of fractions of I.L.P. members in the trade unions, round which to group second-layer, militant non-party workers.

"All Trade Union members must work in I.L.P. fractions, in which strict discipline must be maintained... The policy of these groups must be decided by the appropriate Party unit or committee, not by the fractions or groups, which exist to operate policy, not to decide it... At all branch meetings the reports of the Trade Union members must be heard and fully discussed ... the policy of unofficial committees and outside conferences must go. It defeats its own purpose, gives occasion for expulsion and loss of officers, and accomplishes nothing lasting. In its place must be put the policy which takes the movement as it is - the movement which we have - and seeks to make it into an effective weapon to meet the coming struggle.

Trade Unionists must, in self-preservation, help to organise the unemployed."

The article goes on to propose that the unemployed be organised round the Trades Councils:

"The recognition that the Trades Councils can be made a vital factor in the life of the locality - the centre of working-class activity and organisation - will lay the foundation for the future Soviet Committees ..." (17)

It concludes:

"This whole line of policy cannot be implemented by the I.L.P. in isolation: neither would the adherence of the Communist Party alter the position."

This second issue of the "Bulletin of the Marxist Group" also carried an article entitled: "Prepare the Fight Against Fascism" (18). This article argued in two directions at the same time, against those who said that Social-Democracy and Fascism are the same, and against those who said that to show opposition to fascism is to encourage it. The author drew on Trotsky's writings on the struggle against Fascism in Germany, showing the distinction between Bonapartism and Fascism to lie in that, under a regime of Bonapartism, defensive

and aggressive struggles can be carried on by the workers' organisations:

"During this period emergency decrees are passed, the police brutally suppress workers' meetings, their press, etc., but the greatest error is to call this Fascism... We put the question thus: 'Do the Trade Unions still exist?' Does the Labour Party continue to function?... If the answer to these two questions is 'Yes', then Fascism has yet to attain power... Thus our first task is to dig ourselves into the trade unions, to compel the Social-Democrats to fight, to fan the natural desire of the workers to resist, confining the battle at first to fighting through their own organisations, i.e. for the defence of the workers' standards of life and the rights they have won in past struggles. The second phase of the struggle must be the preparation now for the final fight. The workers must be educated in the need, not to rely upon 'police protection' against Fascism, but to defend themselves."

The December 1934 issue closed with a criticism of the Revolutionary Policy Committee, which at that time had a majority in the London and Southern Counties Divisional Council of the I.L.P.:

"Gasterism has, in practice, despite its verbal criticism of the Communist Party, associated the I.L.P. with various stunts set up by the Communist Party which have led nowhere... Is it to be wondered at that the membership under such leadership has declined since they came to power in London?"

The author of this article said that the Revolutionary Policy Committee demanded greater activity from the membership as a substitute for seeking a correct policy, and quoted back at the R.P.C. criticisms which it had made of the Communist International during 1934, which it contrasted with its support during 1933 for the affiliation of the I.L.P. to the Communist International (19).

On January 4, 1935 the Central Committee of the Marxist Group met to prepare drafts for a members' meeting to be held two days later, at which the content of the group's intervention in the spring Conference of the London Divisional Council of the I.L.P. was to be discussed. The Committee produced a circular, headed "For Discussion" and evidently to be handed out to I.L.P. members, the authors of which were clearly trying to find the simplest and clearest language possible in which to explain why the I.L.P. should take part

in the construction of a new International, rather than that of a loose association such as the "London Bureau"; and to spell out what the principles of the new International should be.

The Committee met again on February 1 to prepare the next members' meeting on February 3, 1935. By this time the contacts of the group were being extended in London and support had been discovered in Liverpool.

Its development was, however, interrupted by the reactions in the British Labour movement to the murder in Leningrad on December 1, 1934, of S.M. Kirov, a leading Soviet administrator. Kirov had replaced Zinoviev at the head of the Leningrad organisation of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and in the Political Bureau of the Party nine years earlier. The reports from the Soviet Union said that Zinoviev and Kamenev had been arrested, and one hundred and seventeen people had been executed, for complicity in the murder.

These reports had disturbing effects on many liberal-minded people in the West who had entertained the hope that the stress and strain of the years of the First Five-Year Plan and of forced collectivisation were giving way to greater harmony in Soviet life. The official explanations which Tass and the Communist Parties provided in no way allayed these new anxieties. The first version from Soviet radio and press laid the responsibility on a group of "White Guard" conspirators behind the actual killer, who was named as one Nikolaev. It stated also that the consul of a foreign power was involved. These first reports did not mention Zinoviev and Kamenev at all, but they did contain a statement that Nikolaev, before being shot, had confessed that the consul had given him 5,000 roubles for "expenses" and had told him that, if Nikolaev had a letter from his group for Trotsky, the consul could get it delivered. At this point the daily newspaper of the French Communist Party, "L'Humanite", took the further step of alleging that Trotsky was a ringleader in the plot to kill Kirov.

These sensational reports complicated the political work of the Marxist Group. Their personal relations with anyone at all sympathetic to the Communist Party or to the Soviet Government

deteriorated sharply, and they had to spend much of their time arguing, not directly about the important political questions affecting the Labour Movement, but about details in the Soviet reports and in Trotsky's past, bearing on the inherent improbability either that Trotsky could be involved in acts of individual terror or that the accused could really have done what they had confessed. In the sensational atmosphere which the reports generated, such details acquired enormous importance in day to day Left-Wing politics and peoples' attitude to them determined their attitude on many current questions. Accordingly, the third issue of the "Bulletin of the Marxist Group in the I.L.P." opened with Trotsky's statement: "The Charge-Sheet" (20). The rest of the issue kept up the attack on the Revolutionary Policy Committee. John Robinson criticised the draft policy statement of the London Divisional Council which expressed the point of view of the R.P.C.

Document No.1 in the Appendix to this chapter outlines the history of the Revolutionary Policy Committee. In his attack on it, John Robinson pointed to the contrast between the confidence which the R.P.C. placed in the Communist International and the actual record of disasters which that body had suffered since coming under the control of the Stalinist faction in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He also ridiculed the talk in the draft statement about "a rising wave of industrial militancy" by quoting the actual decline in days lost through industrial disputes, pointed to contradictory formulations of electoral policy, which he denounced as "eclecticism", and applied the same characterisation to what the statement contained about trade union work, which he called "denouncing Red Trade Unions at the front door and admitting them at the back".

On January 23, 1935, the "Friends of the Soviet Union", at that time a satellite organisation of the Communist Party of Great Britain, held a public meeting at the Conway Hall, the advertisements for which, in the "New Leader" and elsewhere, promised a "reply to anti-Soviet slanders" and a "full report on Executions and Kirov Murder". A lively account of what happened at this meeting has survived in a document, issued by the Marxist Group, entitled "A Personal Statement in Defence of Party Democracy" (21). This was written by three members of the Marxist Group who went to the meeting

to take up the possibility of discussing what was said from the platform.

The main speaker was one Ernie Brown, a functionary of the Communist Party. On the platform with him sat a leading member of the London Divisional Council of the I.L.P. and of the Revolutionary Policy Committee, called Rosenbloom. This man listened without protest to a series of allegations in Brown's speech that Trotsky was implicated in the murder of Kirov. This was formally a breach of the discipline of the I.L.P., since the "New Leader" in three preceding issues had expressed uneasiness at the allegations and had called upon the Soviet authorities to make public, if they could, whatever evidence the accusations and the executions might be based on. "International Press Correspondence" had replied to these requests by attacking Brockway for "his desire to help Trotsky and his colleagues to cover the traces of their crime against the Soviet Union and the toiling masses of the whole world". (22)

When Brown's speech was ended the three members of the Marxist Group managed, with some difficulty, to challenge Brown and to raise in discussion the demand for evidence to support his allegations, which repeated those of the Communist Party's press. As might be expected there were some sharp exchanges in the hall. A few days later they were surprised to learn from John Aplin, the Organiser of the London Division of the I.L.P. (who appeared to dislike the Revolutionary Policy Committee and the Marxist Group about equally, seemingly because he could not grasp the political content of their differences) that the London Divisional Council had suspended them from membership of the Party. It had done so, without inviting them to defend themselves, on the basis of charges laid by Rosenbloom that they had broken Party discipline and disrupted a working-class meeting.

The branches and federations of which the three were members refused to recognise the suspensions, which they declared to be in violation of the constitution of the Divisional Council. The National Administrative Council in due course over-ruled the London Divisional Council and lifted the suspensions. While it had no intention of letting the Trotskyists get control, it equally did not intend to let the R.P.C. strengthen itself at the Trotskyists' expense.

Here, however, was the first warning of the witch-hunt which the Communist Party and its allies were to launch against the Trotskyists in the summer of 1936 at the time of the first Moscow Trial.

The Marxist Group took the view that the leadership of the Communist Party was not just making mistakes which could be corrected by enlightenment and it expounded as clearly and forcefully as it could the traditional Marxist opposition to individual terror as a method of political struggle (23). The very idea that anyone in the Socialist Movement would adopt individual terror had hardly entered anyone's mind in the Labour Movement during the 1930's, and at first the Trotskyists were caught by surprise at having to reply to such allegations. Their reply took the form of arguing that, if terrorism really did exist in the Soviet Union, its existence could be explained only by the depth of the crisis in Soviet society and the total absence of political self-expression. The general argument of the Trotskyists was that the regime, driven by its weakness to turn to the League of Nations in the face of the threat from Nazi Germany, needed to discredit its Marxist critics by smearing them as terrorists, in order to isolate them in the Soviet Union and discredit them abroad, because they were its competitors for the confidence of the working-class and because the Kremlin would not be able to impress official political circles in such countries as France and Britain, with which at the time it was seeking closer relations, if Marxists could undermine the authority of the Communist Parties and their ability to manipulate important sections of the working class.

One result of the discussion which the Kirov assassination provoked was that the question began to be raised in the I.L.P. whether the Soviet Union could any longer be regarded as in any sense a "workers' state", or whether it should be characterised as "state-capitalist". Ethel Mannin had picked this idea up in 1932, probably from the Urbahns circle in Berlin, and written about it in the "New Leader" at that time, without producing an echo. At this time no one who regarded himself as in any sense a co-thinker of Trotsky would have called into question Trotsky's characterisation of the Soviet Union as a "degenerated workers' state":

"Given the abominable manner in which the Soviet tops are acting, can one unconditionally recognise the

U.S.S.R. as a workers' state? This is probably the way that certain idealists, certain moralists or merely ultra-left confusionists express themselves. Instead of analysing the concrete forms and stages of the development of the workers' state, such as are created by the conjuncture of historical conditions, these wiseacres 'recognise' or refuse to 'recognise' the workers' state, depending on whether the acts of the Soviet bureaucracy please them or no." (24)

These are the opinions expressed in the motions which the Marxist Group drafted to be presented by the branches in which it had a majority at the Annual Conference of the I.L.P. at Derby at Easter 1935. At this time anyone in the I.L.P. who thought that the Soviet Union was not in any sense a "workers' state" gave support to the Maxton-Brockway leadership and to the "London Bureau", and not to the Marxist Group. (25)

The Marxist Group was able also to present to the Conference a document about combatting the danger of war and about how war was to be opposed if it were to break out. This draft (26) was offered as a replacement for the draft of the Maxton-Brockway leadership, which attempted to amalgamate the standpoint of individual, pacifist refusal of military service with working-class mass-resistance to war. The document of the Marxist Group drew its main ideas from Trotsky's "War and the Fourth International". (27) It took up, in particular, the contribution which a General Strike might make to preventing the outbreak of war. This idea harks back to the pacifism and anarcho-syndicalism of the pre-1914 statements of Keir Hardie. In the I.L.P. in the mid-1930's it was the pacifists who denied the necessity to prepare consistently for the class-struggle, and tended to use general phrases about answering a declaration of war with the General Strike as a substitute. The "myth of the General Strike" had, indeed, been alien to the Marxist tradition for many years. Trotsky did not, however, totally exclude it, but located it in revolutionary strategy, when he attacked the pacifist conception of it:

"Here we enter into the realm of illusions; to inscribe in these theses a general strike as punishment for a given capital crime of the Government is to commit the sin of revolutionary phrasemongering... A General Strike without a victorious insurrection cannot 'stop war' " (Emphasis in original) (28)

The fourth issue of the "Bulletin of the Marxist Group" powerfully expressed the Group's preparations for the Easter 1935 Conference of the I.L.P. at Derby, the official report of which confirms that the Trotskyists contributed much more than before to the debates. The Group had grown and, while a few may have become weary or felt that the possibility of winning substantial forces in the I.L.P. may have been exaggerated or that the limit had been reached the Group clearly had gained energetic recruits, who were developing themselves politically with experience of controversy and activity in the I.L.P.

This fourth issue of the "Bulletin" carried a long and seriously reasoned article entitled "The Organic Development of the Marxist Group" (29), an attempt to analyse the evolution of the I.L.P. since 1929 and to present the Marxist Group as the logical and historically justified result of the earlier efforts of the members of the I.L.P. to break with reformism and seek a revolutionary road. The second article attempts to explain, with examples, what the Trotskyists meant when they characterised the I.L.P. leadership as "Centrist". The author of the article was a construction worker (Ernie Patterson), who for many years in his later life was a full-time trade union official, and whom no one could accuse of "intellectual theorising". He argued that the Draft Policy Statement of the National Administrative Council was no more than a collection of paragraphs loosely strung together:

"There is not one vital or new thing in it: if the whole were accepted, the position of the I.L.P. would not be one whit clearer than it was three years ago" (Emphasis in original).

He suggested that the statement had been produced by weaving together mutually inconsistent ideas, brought together from different sources, so that the document could secure the widest possible acceptance, even though it could not serve as a guide to common action. Denouncing this method as "eclectic", he went on:

"These generalisations are, however, for a purpose; they are used in the beginning to allow for the very general tactics which are brought in later.

To commence with the assertion (para. 1): 'Capitalism involves a constant struggle between the owning class and the working class', without analysing which special section of the working-class carries on that struggle,

allows the N.A.C. to attempt to build up the widest possible United Front, to support the March and Congress Council, Movement Against Fascism and War etc. etc.; allows them to give lip-service to the trade unions and at the same time 'attempt' to build up outside organisations. Look at the paras. 29, 30 and 31. They would damn the I.L.P. in the eyes of any average Trade Unionists. Para. 29: 'The I.L.P. recognises that the present organisation and policy of the unions cannot be effective in the struggle to end capitalism... By the nature of their agreements and understandings with employers, they prevent the successful conduct of a vigorous class struggle (emphasis in original)'. Para. 30: 'It becomes a weakness when the workers permit such agreements to involve collaboration with employers or restriction of the right to strike'. Why the word 'when'? Here and now the workers 'permit' such agreements, and, whether the N.A.C. like it or not, it logically follows from this paragraph that the Trade Unions, not 'when' but here and now, are a 'weakness'.

So we learn that 'the I.L.P. advocates the amalgamation of Unions, not to enable the workers to wage their fight more successfully, but because the Unions are (Para. 31) 'out of date', 'prevent the successful conduct of a vigorous class struggle', 'because they cannot be effective'. In short, they are no damn good at present. If someone is kind enough to try to change them, then the I.L.P. will (Para. 31) 'support every move': in the meanwhile, on with the March and Congress Council...

The Marxist Group amendments show the realisation that it is only the extension and development of the Trade Unions from the inside that will enable the workers to overthrow the present system.

It is in the evaluation of present day events that the N.A.C. is most dangerous. Everything outside the 'revolutionary movement' is a tendency towards fascism... What is this but the C.P. theory of Social-Fascism without a name?... The N.A.C. condemns the theory of Social-Fascism but here they put it into action and fail to recognise it...

Is there a single member who from the N.A.C. report could define the position of the parties at a forthcoming election? Seventeen candidates in a field of 615? What is the I.L.P. to do in the hundreds of places where there is no I.L.P. candidate?... The indications are that the workers will vote in large numbers for the Labour Party. Do we stand by and look at this advance of the working-class? Do we oppose it? Or do we accept the Marxist Group amendment and march with the workers until they realise by their own experience the inability of Social-Democracy to overthrow capitalism?"

The third article in "Bulletin of the Marxist Group" No. 4 attacked the "know-nothing" attitude of indifference to political theory with

which some members of the I.L.P. dismissed the arguments of the Marxist Group as cranky schemes to be grafted by London intellectuals on to the "pure and simple" socialism of the I.L.P. The article again advocated systematic trade union work. It called on the I.L.P. to support Labour candidates and to turn away from unrepresentative "united front" committees with the Communist Party and from the electoral confrontations with the Labour Party which the I.L.P.'s collaboration with the Communist Party encouraged it to undertake. The present writer would comment, with the advantage of hindsight, that this article did not go on to discuss the deeper questions which it raised by implication of organising a revolutionary opposition and winning support for it within the mass Labour Movement in opposition to the reformist leadership.

The final article in "Bulletin of the Marxist Group" No. 4 was a short series of polemics against the Revolutionary Policy Committee and the Communist Party. The first denounced the tactics of the R.P.C. in a wage-struggle of warehouse workers in London, in which the leadership of the London Divisional Council of the I.L.P. had tried to keep the strikers isolated from the full-time officials of the trade union concerned. A second piece criticised the unguarded welcome which the R.P.C. had given to the abolition of bread rationing in the Soviet Union, suggesting that this would mean a rise in the Soviet workers' cost of living without compensating wage-increases.

The Easter 1935 Conference of the I.L.P. at Derby marked the highest point which the influence of the Marxist Group was to reach, though the leadership of the Group did not recognise at the time that it had reached its peak. As one of the Marxist Group's conference documents argued, the I.L.P. was in decline. Furthermore, the prospect of reversing the decline was becoming more remote. The external activity of the party was contracting. Most of those who remained in it, as well as the few who were attracted to it, had decided positions. The Conference heard a speech by McGovern in praise of Trotsky which ended in an ovation for the latter, but McGovern was using sympathy for Trotsky to discredit the R.P.C., not to help the Marxist Group, and the Conference represented a further victory for the leadership of Maxton and Brockway and, in particular, for the "London Bureau". The R.P.C., as usual, produced a

Conference issue of its Bulletin, the theme of which was:

"We cannot allow the I.L.P. to be driven into becoming a predominantly anti-Communist, anti-Soviet Union organisation". (30)

Shortly after the Conference the R.P.C. produced another issue of its "Bulletin", consisting of an article, written by Jack Gaster, which the "New Leader" had rejected. This article was an attempt to present the new turn in the diplomacy of the Kremlin as necessary for the defence of the Soviet Union, and the foreword to it challenged the leadership of the I.L.P. to say in what respect Gaster's argument conflicted with the policy of the I.L.P.:

"Search all through the decisions... you will find nothing at all that criticises the Soviet Union's foreign policy and the trappings that go with it."

Gaster justified the entry of the Soviet Union into the League of Nations. The policies of the Kremlin:

"... had made a brilliant virtue of necessity, by successfully driving that wedge between England and Germany that was necessary for the maintenance of peace... What does the Soviet Union do? It enters the League of Nations... It enters the International Labour Office. It remains in the Disarmament Conference... Russia welcomes the opportunity of discussing the whole situation at first hand with the representatives of the British Government."

Eden had visited Moscow at the end of March 1935, and the Union Jack had been flown there to welcome him, and toasts drunk to the King of England. Brockway had written in the "New Leader" about the flags and the toasts as "trappings":

"... when entertaining Mr. Eden, (the Soviet Union) apparently indulged in a display of flag-wagging and toasting of the king which, while objectionable in the eyes of some of the workers of this country, was in accordance with normal diplomatic practice... This article is not concerned with the mistakes of the various national sections of the Communist International... These are not the consequences of or directly related to the attitude the Soviet Union now adopts in the field of foreign diplomacy... The I.L.P. has always reserved the right, as a workers' party, to criticise the Soviet Union... It puts first today... that it is the duty of

every worker to defend the interests of the Soviet Union by explaining to those workers who are confused by the 'trappings' the real meaning of its diplomatic manoeuvres as an attempt to gain time in which the workers' forces can be developed..."

Gaster tried to exploit against Brockway the equivocal attitude of the I.L.P. leadership, which, on the one hand, could concede the possibility that the diplomatic manoeuvres of the Kremlin might "gain time", while, on the other hand, they criticised the Soviet Government for entering the League of Nations. His article made no impact in the I.L.P., where the position of the R.P.C. was becoming untenable.

The fifth issue of the "Bulletin of the Marxist Group" appeared in June 1935. The most politically significant of its contents were in a series of "Notes of the Month". The first commented on the probable effects of the Franco-Soviet Pact on the working class of France:

" Bulletin No. 1 of the Marxist Group stated that the policy of 'Socialism in One Country' had damned the Communist International, and reduced the national Communist Parties to the position of pawns in the diplomatic moves of Litvinov. Further, we stated that 'the imperialist government of France was now considered a more stable ally than the revolutionary workers'. The Franco-Soviet Pact, concluded on May 2, shows to what extent this policy has been carried. The Soviet Union is pledged to come to the assistance of imperialist France, and in return she may rely (?) upon France as an ally in event of an attack on the Soviet Union. The logical consequence of such a treaty must be that, in order to 'defend the Soviet Union', the French Communist Party must aid the French Government in its plans and preparations for National Defence (in which M. Cachin has had some practice - 1914 - 1918). This must mean a cessation of revolutionary work in the State forces, at a time when that work is most vital. It is in the interests of the Comintern that the status quo must be preserved at all cost - nothing must disturb the uneasy balance of Franco-Soviet relationships, so the militancy of the workers must be damped down. The Comintern declares that the situation is not revolutionary and that the slogan of 'Arming of the workers' and 'Formation of Workers' Militia' is provocation. Large masses of workers in the S.F.I.O. are moving to the left, as the Stalinists move to the right, and are openly taking up a correct revolutionary line under the leadership of the Bolshevik-Leninists. The Seine district of the S.F.I.O. calls for the arming of the workers and workers' militia, while the Communist Party asks the Government to disarm the Fascists. The workers are preparing for the struggle

against Fascism - the Stalinists stand in the way."

The second of the "Notes of the Month" in "Bulletin of the Marxist Group" No. 5 discussed the replacement in the Cabinet of MacDonald by Baldwin. It was aimed alike at the R.P.C. and the I.L.P. leadership:

"... these changes are characteristic of the instability of governments in the pre-Bonapartist period. The task of a revolutionary party in the present period should be to call for the dissolution of the National Government and force into the hands of the Labour Party the power that they are reluctant to take."

The third and longest of the "Notes of the Month" described the break-up of the collaboration between the R.P.C. and the Maxton-Brockway leadership by means of which the I.L.P. had been led since 1932. It showed that the final breach resulted from no minor disagreement but from a deeply principled conflict. After some hesitation and internal compromise, the R.P.C. had finished up supporting the Communist Party and calling on the British Government to arrange for sanctions to be applied against Italy through the League of Nations. Neither the reformist-pacifist leadership of Maxton and Brockway nor the Marxist Group could make any concessions on this point. (32) "Bulletin" No. 5 also repeated the arguments for supporting Labour candidates critically in the coming election. It attacked, on the one hand, the candidatures of the I.L.P. which split the votes of Labour candidates and, on the other hand, the calls of the Communist Party for "unity" in support of Labour candidates which it condemned as unprincipled.

Important political differences were beginning to appear in the Marxist Group itself in summer 1935. They were about the perspective of its work. (33) Should it stay longer in the I.L.P., or should it withdraw, seeking some association, in the Labour Party, with the growing left-ward movement represented by the Socialist League? This discussion, as far as the present writer has been able to trace it, was inconclusive and, perhaps, was overshadowed by the intense conflict in the I.L.P. about the Party's attitude to the Italo-Abyssinia conflict. In any case, there is a gap of some three months in the documentary record, and the next issue of

"Bulletin of the Marxist Group", No. 6, appeared in October 1935.

In the late summer of 1935, Brockway, as Editor of "New Leader", wrote a series of articles in which he argued that the Italo-Abyssinian conflict involved imperialist aggression against an oppressed colonial country and that workers in Britain should not stand aside in indifference to it. He conceded that Abyssinia was governed by a barbarous tyranny, but denied that this gave Mussolini the right to commit imperialist aggression. He proposed that the interests of the workers in the capitalist countries, as well as the long-run interests of the Soviet Union, lay in direct action to deny war materials and other resources to Italy. This approach harked back to the memories of the mass actions of 1920, which led to the formation of the Council of Action and to the warning which the Labour Movement issued to the Government not to arm Poland against Soviet Russia, memories which had been revived in 1931 when Japan invaded Manchuria. For a few weeks in autumn 1935 the "New Leader" was putting forward the line that the I.L.P. should try to help Abyssinia, and that it should place no reliance on the Governments of France or of Britain to do so, whether they claimed to be acting through the League of Nations or independently of it, since the propertied classes of those countries would act against Italy only in such a way as to further their own predatory interests, and since, at the Stresa Conference in April 1935, it was believed, they had already given Mussolini a free hand in East Africa in order to divert his attention from adventures, such as the violation of Austria, in Central Europe. Brockway argued that, if Mussolini could show the Italian people that the people of France and Britain were lined up in collaboration with "their own" governments, whether or not the aims of these governments were disguised as "League of Nations" actions, the Fascist regime would then be able to rally the support of the people of Italy. The conclusion therefore followed that the I.L.P. should use its influence to encourage workers in Britain to organise such actions as would undermine the Italian war-effort, to set an example of an independent international working-class boycott of Italian imperialism, if necessary unofficial actions without the support or permission of their leaders.

Brockway was to write later: (34)

" So far as I could judge, (these articles) were received with enthusiasm by the Party. For the first time in many years all groups pulled together. The R.P.C. and the Marxist Group (Trotsky sent a congratulatory telegram from Mexico) (35) joined in acclaiming the lead given, and in London particularly the membership went on the streets with leaflets and speech-making, confident that they had a working-class policy with which to meet the campaign of the Labour and Communist Parties, both of which were demanding Government action which, in our view, would lead to war."

The Marxist Group took great heart from these articles, which for a time revived their hopes of winning over the I.L.P. (36)

Two reports, apparently provided to the International Secretariat in the early part of 1935, have been discovered and are reproduced in an Appendix to this chapter (37). They are of interest, not only as sources of information, but as illustrating what the Trotskyists themselves at this period thought about what they were doing.

Chapter Four

Footnotes

- (1) There is a document in the personal papers of the late James P. Cannon, which are now in the Library of Social History, 410 West Street, New York, N.Y., 10014, which contains some details of the Trotskyist Movement in Britain. It appears to have been written in 1936, but it is not dated. The author is unknown, and Earle Robertson has assured the writer that he was not its author. This document says that the minority "slept in the I.L.P. for several months" after entering it.
- (2) Sid Kemp was the first chairman of the Marxist Group. He was active for many years in the I.L.P. branch at Clapham. He worked in a clerical job in the printing trade in London and was an active member of one of the printing trade unions. He took part in the South-West London Anti-War Committee and was the delegate of the Clapham I.L.P. at the Party's Annual Conference in 1933.
- (3) "Writings: 1933 - 34", p. 53
- (4) "New Leader", February 2, 1934. The "New Leader", February 16, 1934, reports:

"A group of members of the Communist League (Trotsky supporters) have written to the National Council of the I.L.P. expressing a desire to join the Party. 'If given permission to do so', they write, 'we enter with the sincere intention of participating in all possible Party activities. While doing so, we wish to retain the right, as other members of the I.L.P., of comradely criticism and the right to fight for and to propagate (within the limits of the Party Constitution and discipline) our opinions, and in particular the necessity for the I.L.P. helping to build up the Fourth International.' The National Council has instructed the Secretary to reply that an organised group cannot be admitted to the Party to advance a particular policy, but that those who belong to it are entitled to apply for membership as individuals. If they accept the Constitution of the Party they are entitled to exercise the rights of all I.L.P. members to advocate within the Party changes of policy in line with the principles and Constitution of the Party."
- (5) "Writings: 1933 - 34", p. 238, published first in the "Militant", New York, March 31, 1934.
- (6) See Appendix to this Chapter, Document 2.
- (7) "Controversy", July 1934.
- (8) "Writings: 1934 - 35", p. 58, in "The Summary of the Discussion", dated August 6, 1934.

- (9) The experiences of the "majority" of the Communist League, which did not enter the I.L.P., are reviewed in a later chapter. The source of the information on which Trotsky based this judgement is not known.
- (10) The documents of the Marxist Group which are quoted in this chapter were provided to the writer by the late Mr. Jim Wood, who collected them when he was a member of the I.L.P. Guild of Youth and of the Marxist Group in 1935. When the present study is completed, these documents will be added to the materials in the Brynmore Jones Library at the University of Hull.
- (11) The issues of the "Bulletin of the Marxist Group in the I.L.P.", or, as it was sometimes entitled, the "Marxist Bulletin", consist of a few sheets mimeographed on both sides, stapled together and priced usually at 1d. a copy.
- (12) This man was Earle Birney, the Canadian poet and academic, who at the time of his participation in the Trotskyist Movement in Britain used the pseudonym "Earle Robertson".
- (13) See Appendix to this chapter, Document 3.
- (14) From the Francis Johnson papers, which Mr. D. Bateman kindly permitted the writer to see.
- (15) The present writer was told, when he joined the Trotskyist movement in November 1934, that the intention was to maintain the secret "inner group" within the Marxist Group, not merely to maintain systematic contact with the International Secretariat, but to influence the course of the Marxist Group. The writer was present at the meeting of the twelve.
- (16) "Our Work in the Trade Unions" bears the name of Sid Kemp as author. Bert Matlow has informed the writer that a good deal of the article was written by himself, but that he was glad that Kemp allowed his name to be put on it, because Kemp was well respected in the I.L.P. and his name might abate the prejudice which the ideas in the article would encounter.
- (17) The idea that Trades Councils might play the role in the future of primitive Soviets was developed in a pamphlet which Groves wrote on the subject for the Socialist League, "Trades Councils in the Fight for Socialism". The idea was also developed in a motion from the Balham and Tooting branch of the Socialist League to the Annual Conference of the Socialist League in 1935, doubtless inspired by elements of the "majority".
- (18) "Prepare the Fight Against Fascism" was written by Max Nicholls, a London tailoring worker and a left-winger in the I.L.P. from 1932 onwards. Evidence of the serious anxiety which the tolerance shown by some of the police to the anti-Semitic and anti-working-class activities of members of the British Union of Fascists aroused in the Labour Movement

can be seen in the correspondence in the Cripps papers at Nuffield College.

- (19) The author was Bert Matlow.
- (20) "Writings: 1934 - 35", p. 132, where it is entitled "The Indictment" and dated December 30, 1934. Trotsky's statement argued as follows:

"The Soviet press makes a very circumspect use of the most recent 'amalgam' with Trotsky, and does not go further than utterances about 'ideological inspirers', but 'L'Humanite' speaks of my part in the assassination with almost the same certainty with which 'Le Matin' spoke of my participation in the murder of King Alexander and Barthou. If the terrorists knew anything about Trotsky - and it is not possible that they knew nothing about him - my irreconcilable attitude towards individual terrorism, an attitude which runs through my thirty years of revolutionary and literary activity like a red thread, could not have been a secret to them... The letter - if, let us repeat against all probability it was written - must remain in the archives of the G.P.U. as an unsuitable instrument".

Trotsky then mentioned previous instances in which the G.P.U. had tried to provoke or to compromise the Left Opposition.

Referring to this article, Isaac Deutscher wrote ("The Prophet Outcast", p. 280):

"On December 30, a fortnight before the news about the trial of the chiefs of the Leningrad G.P.U. was broadcast, Trotsky asserted, on the internal evidence of the official pronouncements, that the G.P.U. had known about the preparation of the attempt and had, for their own reasons, condoned them."

Trotsky explained that "L'Humanite" drew different conclusions from "Pravda":

"... not only by the fact that the idiocy of the Nikolaev-"consul"-Trotsky amalgam is much more obvious in Moscow than in Paris, but also because, by its essence, this part of the amalgam... is to exert an influence of the necessary kind on the French workers, through the medium of the United Front, and to exert pressure on the French authorities."

The Marxist Group followed up the publication of "The Charge Sheet" with a mimeographed edition of "The Kirov Assassination and the Stalinist Bureaucracy" ("Writings: 1934 - 35", p. 112, where the piece is entitled "The Stalinist Bureaucracy and the Kirov Assassination"). Like similar documents, this reached London in a French translation. In order not to lose time, the Marxist Group made its own translation, which is not verbally identical with that of the printed pamphlet issued by Pioneer Publishers in New York. The writer knows of

only one surviving copy of the London edition, which is in the Watson collection in the library of the University of Stirling.

- (21) The present writer was in the audience.
- (22) About the same time the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party expressed anxiety, in an interview with the Soviet Ambassador in London, that those accused in proceedings arising from the murder of Kirov had not had a fair or public trial. The interview is reported in the Annual Conference Report of the Labour Party for 1935. They got a reply on the same lines, though less abusive, as that received by the I.L.P. The position of the Soviet authorities was not easy. On the one hand, the Communist Parties needed the attacks on Trotskyism to ensure that there remained "nothing to the Left", as their course advanced towards agreement with reformists and Liberals. On the other hand, not only the accusations themselves but the replies of the Soviet authorities and the Communist Parties raised obstacles to the realisation of agreement with the reformists and Liberals.
- (23) See the Appendix to this Chapter, Document 3.
- (24) In "The Stalinist Bureaucracy and the Kirov Assassination", in "Writings: 1934 - 35", p. 129, where it is dated December 28, 1934.
- (25) See the Appendix to this chapter, Document 4.
- (26) See the Appendix to this chapter, Document 5.
- (27) "Writings: 1934 - 35", p. 318.
- (28) "Writings: 1935 - 36", p. 64, dated October 20, 1935. The discussion in the Second International before 1914 about the General Strike against war is mentioned in Braunthal, "History of the International", Vol. 1, p. 335 - 6. The Communist International took up the traditional argument against the formula of the General Strike to stop an outbreak of war in the Resolutions of the XIIth Plenum in 1932, using the argument that talk about a General Strike would serve to justify postponing what should be done immediately to prevent war or to prepare to oppose it if it broke out.
- (29) See Appendix to this chapter, Document No. 6. The authors of the document were Joe Pawsey of the South Norwood I.L.P. and the exiled German comrade who was a member of the Islington branch of the I.L.P.
- (30) "R.P.C. Bulletin", No. 17 and "R.P.C. Bulletin, Special Number, No. 18" were provided by the late Mr. Jim Wood and will in due course be placed in the Brynmore Jones Library at the University of Hull.
- (31) "Bulletin of the Marxist Group", No. 5, argued for support for Labour candidates on the basis of the experience of a Parliamentary by-election in South Aberdeen. The article

went to great pains to bring out the difference between the way in which the Marxist Group proposed that the I.L.P. should support Labour candidates and the way in which, since the municipal elections of November 1934, the Communist Party had been doing so, and this article is an early criticism from the left of the new tactics of the Communist Party. It contains an extract from a leaflet which the Communist Party issued in the South Aberdeen by-election, which suggests that at this stage the Communist Party itself was in some confusion: it reads:

"Despite the reactionary character of the campaign conducted by the Labour candidate in the interests of Labour leaders, who, as in the Jubilee, have quite blatantly shown their unity with the enemies of the working-class, we recommend the voters to vote for the Labour candidate as a means of expressing the mass unity of the working class against the Tory Government."

The author of the "Bulletin" article described the leaflet as "an amalgam of the theory of social-fascism and the right opportunist turn of recent date", and commented:

"The Communist Party therefore plays into the hands of the Labour reactionaries, by helping to submerge the workers' demands voiced in the Labour Party programme."

It was in such discussions as these that the idea of "critical support" by revolutionaries for Labour candidates was developed, from the starting-point in Lenin's "Left-Wing Communism".

(32) There are indications that already in May 1935 the widening divergence between the right-ward course of the Communist Party and the policies of the leadership of the I.L.P. made the position of the R.P.C. less tenable. "Bulletin of the Marxist Group", No. 5, reports, in "Notes of the Month":

"At the last meeting of the London Divisional Council, statements were made that leading members of the Council were working to split the party and carry a large section of the London membership into the Communist Party. These charges were made by John Aplin, Organiser of No. 6 Division, and an examination of recent decisions of the Divisional Council will show that these charges are not without foundation:

1. The letter issued to every member of the Division, over the signatures of (Bert) Hawkins and (Hilda) Vernon, on the question of Brockway's "New Leader" articles on Soviet Foreign Policy - together with the failure to take any firm action with the Harrow branch who refused to sell the "New Leader";
2. Refusal to send a speaker to a meeting of the I.C.O.S. because of the views of the National

Administrative Council. 'We were unable to approach any of our members to represent the N.A.C.' Brockway's reply to this was not read to the Divisional Council members;

3. Selection of Communist Party Speakers to take courses for the training of Party members;
4. Refusal to co-operate with the N.A.C. in the production of leaflets;
5. Appointment to N.A.C. speakers list of Dee, who had intimated that, because of his disagreement with I.L.P. policy, he could give no undertaking to confine his propaganda to the Party line;
6. Appointment to speak at a printers' trade union meeting of a member who had withdrawn from important party work because of her disagreement with the policy of the Party...

At the Divisional Council meeting the R.P.C. did not attempt to answer any of these charges - indeed, they made it clear that they were out openly to flout the authority of the N.A.C. Gaster states "the 'New Leader' articles are putting poison into the minds of innocent workers... My third reaction was to tear up my membership card..."

"The article of Harry Pollitt in 'Communist International', No. 10, is significant - he counsels the R.P.C. to stay in the I.L.P. and recover the lost support in the provinces and gain a mass sale for the R.P.C. Bulletin. The R.P.C. leaders, however, realise that time is running against them; as the prospects of a Seventh Congress of the Communist International become more and more faint, they would consolidate their rapidly disintegrating forces for a split. The I.L.P.ers must face the dangerous implications of this position before the disintegration of the London Division makes reconstruction impossible. Loyal members of the Party who desire to see the I.L.P. as a revolutionary force will line up against the wrecking tactics of these Stalinist agents in the ranks..."

- (33) The evidence of a discussion in the Marxist Group about whether to withdraw from the I.L.P. comes from three discussion statements which accompany the notice of a General Members' Meeting to be held on June 16, 1935. The collection is entitled: "Perspectives of the Working-Class Movement and the Future of the I.L.P.".

The first article reviews somewhat pessimistically the revolutionary possibilities outside the I.L.P.:

"In this country the situation is different from that in France, in as much as the British Labour Party

has none of the Centrist tendencies of the S.F.I.O.... Can we expect militant leadership from the Labour Party bureaucrats - obviously not, since their orientation is towards the petty bourgeoisie and a working majority in the next Parliament... The (Socialist) League contains good material but inside the League can never develop any revolutionary socialist direction, as it will have to limit its scope to the bounds of social-democracy. The League therefore is for us only a source from which material can be drawn. So long as the Labour Party continues under its present form of organisation, there is no prospect of the rank and file giving any revolutionary direction to the party. Revolutionaries who have entered the Labour Party can do so only by abandoning Communism.

The N.A.C., which for two years has based itself upon the broad mass of the ill-developed provincial rank and file and until recently maintained itself by playing off the Marxist Group and the Revolutionary Policy Committee against each other, now feel its basis narrowing as a result of our propaganda... The N.A.C. will attempt to check the advance of the Marxist Group by mobilising the lower layers of the Party against us. Such tactics would prove highly dangerous to the N.A.C.... any attempt to drive a wedge between the Marxist Group and the leading comrades in the provincial sections of the Party must result in the collapse not of the Marxist Group but of the N.A.C....

... the perspective of work taken by the Group at its first meeting remains basically unaltered. Derby conference showed that on immediate issues the tide was running in our favour... As far as the Labour Party is concerned, there would be no useful purpose served by the entry of militants to build up cadres within that Party... Left and centrist sections will raise their heads within the Labour Party and League of Youth... should be encouraged by every means in our power in their struggle against the bureaucracy. When sufficiently advanced they should be drawn into the I.L.P."

The theme of the second statement was:

"The left-wing of the Labour Party desire at present not to leave the Labour Party but to put up a fight against the right-wing leadership. We should do all we can to encourage this and not just to issue to them the ultimatum: 'Join the I.L.P.'. For even if we do, they will not heed. We must group around us the left-wing elements of the Labour Party and help them to organise their struggle in the Labour Party".

The third statement argued:

"The Labour Party will not win power in the next election; this will mean a transfer of struggle from Parliamentary to extra-Parliamentary field. The perspective is of a short stay in I.L.P. and preparation for break, as decline of I.L.P. narrows our circle of propaganda. It is not possible to join the Labour Party. A period of 'isolation' may be inevitable. This does not mean repeating the collapse of the Communist League, which did not have a correct perspective, did not do systematic trade union work and chose to stand isolated when there was a possibility of ending its isolation. By systematically pursuing work in the Trade Unions and other mass organisations - which is and remains one of our most important tasks - we will overcome all real isolation from the masses."

There is no evidence to show what, if anything, the meeting of June 16, 1935 decided. In the General Election of November 1935, at any rate, the majority of the Marxist Group aligned themselves with the rest of the I.L.P. They abandoned their policy of "critical support" for Labour candidates. Not only did they advocate support for such candidates as Maxton, who might fairly be regarded as authentic representatives of the working class, in the special circumstances of Clydeside, but also for all the other candidates which the I.L.P. put up, some of whom had not the slightest chance of winning and simply diverted anti-Tory votes from Labour candidates. The present writer, for example, worked in Bradford for Fred Jowett, who was standing against an official Labour candidate and a Tory. For good measure, the Marxist Group also advocated calling on workers to boycott Labour candidates who supported the Labour Party's official policy of "League of Nations Sanctions" against Italy. It has later become the opinion of the writer that these changes of policy, far from raising the standing of the Marxist Group in the eyes of either the leadership or the remaining rank and file of the I.L.P., tended to discredit them.

- (34) "Inside the Left", p. 326
- (35) Brockway's memory is at fault here. Trotsky did not arrive in Mexico until January 1937. We may also question whether the enthusiasm of the R.P.C. was as great as Brockway suggests for the policies which he advocated. If so, how can we explain that almost the entire remaining membership and following of the R.P.C. left the I.L.P. within the next couple of months?
- (36) The text of one of the leaflets issued by the London Divisional Council, supporting the line of "workers' sanctions" which Brockway briefly expressed in "New Leader", was reproduced in the November 1935 issue of "Controversy". The pacifist Inner Executive of the National Administrative

Council prohibited the London Division from circulating its leaflets to Party members in other parts of the country and Aplin, then London Divisional Organiser and a close sympathiser with Brockway, published it in defiance of the N.A.C. The text reads as follows:

WORKERS' ACTION CAN STOP WAR!
WAR IN ABYSSINIA! WAR PREPARING IN CENTRAL
EUROPE!
WAR THREATS IN THE FAR EAST!

The National Government has assisted the war-like Fascist powers to arm. It has encouraged Germany, Italy and Japan. Its talk of peace is so much hypocrisy. The National Government, though prepared to go to war to protect its imperialist interests in Africa from encroachment by Italy, wants peace now so that it can unite with Germany and Japan in preparation for war on the Soviet Union.

FASCISM MEANS WAR!
THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT MEANS WAR!
WORKERS' ACTION ALONE MEANS PEACE

In 1921 Workers' Councils of Action hindered war on the Soviet Union. The stopping of the "Jolly George" influenced the British Government to abandon its war of intervention. In 1935 Workers' Action can again stop war.

Already —

The South Africa dockers have refused to load food ships for the Italian army in Africa.
The Greek seamen have refused to ship goods to Italy.
The French dockers have refused to load or unload ships going to or from Italian ports.
The British Boot and Shoe Operatives have refused to work on Italian Army orders.
The crew of an Italian ship has mutinied and refused to transport munitions to Africa.

That kind of action can stop Fascist aggression on Abyssinia. It can stop the Fascist and Imperialist powers making their drive against the Soviet Union. It can prevent the outbreak of another war.

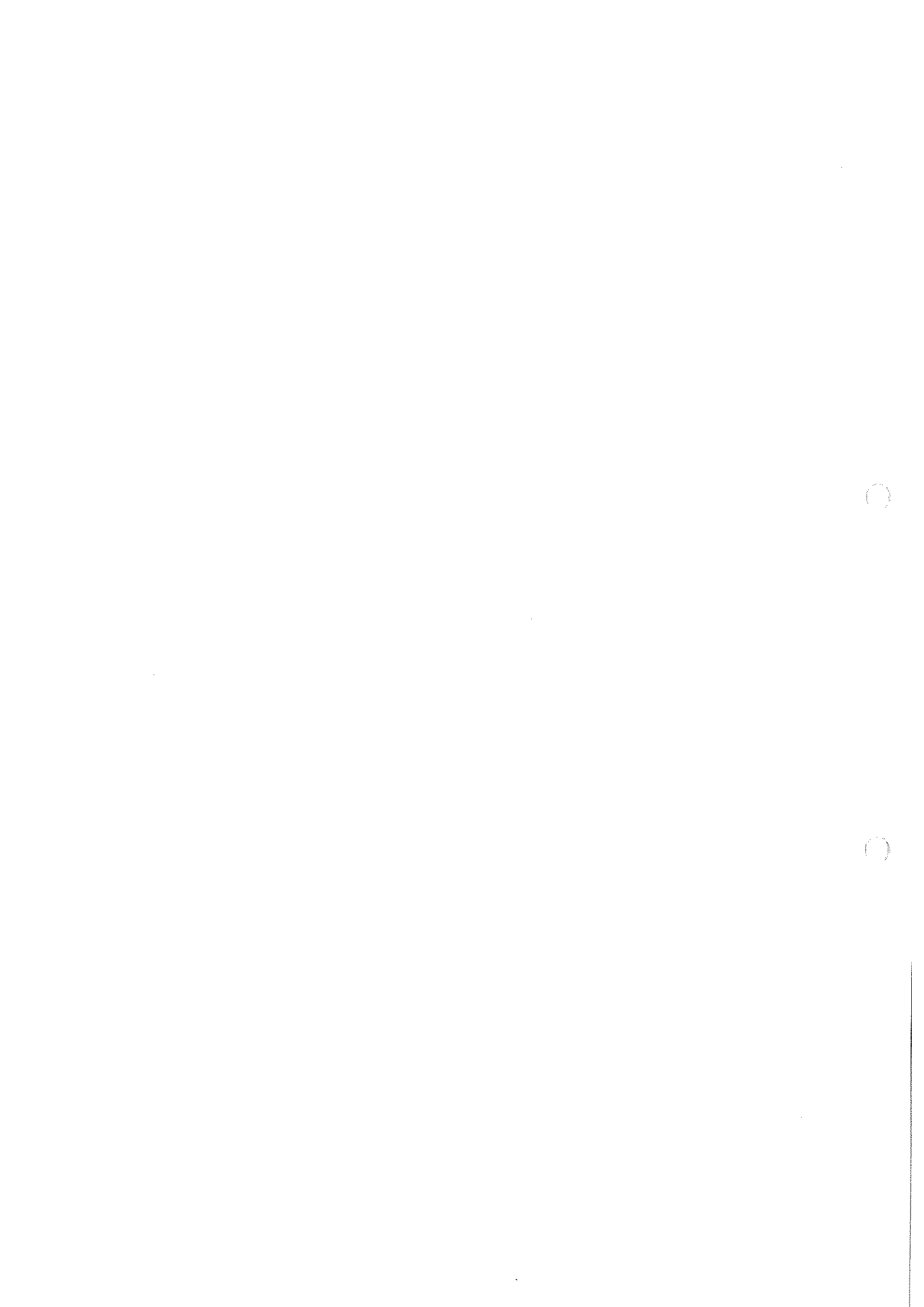
WORKERS, ORGANISE TO REFUSE!
to carry out orders for Italy,
to handle any goods for Italy or its colonies,
to let a single Italian ship load or unload in British ports.

WORKERS, STOP THE WAR!

- (37) The first of these reports was published in issue No. 1, dated May 1, 1935, of the Bulletin of the League of Communist-Internationalists (Bolshevik-Leninists), issued by the International Secretariat. This document was found by

| Mr. Louis Sinclair in the library of the Hoover |
Institution, Stanford University, California. It is
mainly about the Marxist Group. No authorship is
attributed in the original text. The report is reproduced
in the Appendix to this chapter (Document No. 7a).

The second document appears to be a transcript of the
record taken, in French, at a meeting at which a spokes-
man for the Marxist Group reported on the situation in
Britain. The text is in "Bulletin Interieure", No. 2,
May 1935, of the Ligue Communiste-Internationaliste,
and had been kindly provided by the publishing under-
taking, Etudes et Documentation Internationales, 29 rue |
Descartes - 75005 Paris. The document is No. 7b in
the Appendix to this chapter.



Document No. 1 A Note on the Revolutionary Policy
Committee in the I.L.P.

The original sources of the history of the I.L.P. in the period 1932-1935 mention the organised group of its members, the Revolutionary Policy Committee ("R.P.C."). No systematic study of this body has yet been published, and what follows here can be no more than an introduction, based on the materials which the writer has been able either to collect or to trace, for the main purpose of illuminating the inter-play of the tendencies which formed the environment of the work of the Trotskyists in Britain. The history of the R.P.C. indeed forms one essential strand in that of the I.L.P. However, the materials which have so far been recovered are less plentiful than those about the Trotskyists. So far the writer knows of no memoirs by members of the group, and the historians who have mentioned it, such as Mr. Dowse and Mr. Jupp, appear to have relied more on second-hand information than the primary sources justify.

The R.P.C. was never in any sense a Trotskyist organisation, nor was it appreciably influenced by Trotskyist ideas. An important influence on it from 1933 onwards was the "Right Opposition" in the Communist International, that of Brandler, Thalheimer, Lovestone and their supporters who dominated the German S.A.P. In 1934 - 35 the R.P.C. developed a sharp hostility to Trotskyism and to the Marxist Group. In the I.L.P. it was generally regarded as strongly sympathetic to the regime in the Soviet Union, and its criticisms of the "bad methods" of the Communist International have tended to be over-looked and forgotten, though they were an important element in the history of the I.L.P. The names of those who actually organised the formation of the R.P.C. are not certainly known. It was at first largely a group of intellectuals in London, the product of the same discussions as resulted in the "Marxist League" (discussed in Chapter I), the "Twentieth Century" and the "Adelphi", as well as contributing to the disaffiliation of the I.L.P. from the Labour Party.

The collapse of MacDonald's second administration and the heavy electoral defeat which followed it in 1931 fed a debate about what contribution, if any, Parliamentary activity could make to other possible roads to socialism, and about the possibility that the Parliamentarism of the official Labour Party establishment had no future. The background of the debate was a long conflict in the Labour Party, ever since a quarter of the delegates at the I.L.P.'s National Conference in 1925 had voted to condemn the record of MacDonald's first administration. The roots of this conflict lay deep in the aspirations which the growth of the Labour Party in national and local politics had raised and in the difficulty of getting them realised in Britain's declining state as a world power.

The temporary prosperity of 1927 and 1928 raised expectations that a Labour Government might improve the lot of the masses and control the economy if it had a majority in Parliament and were committed to the right policy. Relatively conservative elements in the Labour Party and Trade Union apparatuses had been strengthened by the defeat of the General Strike, and such

proposals as the I.L.P.'s "Living Wage Policy", the pamphlets of John Strachey in favour of expansionist State intervention in the economy and the Mosley Memoranda were received with a hostility which sharpened the differences between the I.L.P. and the official leaders of the Labour Party, (who now included MacDonal and Snowden, former leaders of the I.L.P. who had left it in the mid - 1920's).

In the General Election of 1929 unemployment was a key issue. The Liberal Party presented an expansionist programme of spending on public works, while the Labour Party produced "Labour and the Nation", a broad programme of social reform drafted by R.H. Tawney, which undertook among other things to improve unemployment benefits and to humanise their administration. In the I.L.P. the younger leaders, among whom were several Clydesiders, had replaced MacDonal and Snowden, but were in no hurry to sharpen their differences with them. The possibility that the I.L.P. might break with the Labour Party was mentioned at the former's Annual Conference at Easter 1929, and the conflicts were brought to a head by the world economic crisis of 1929 - 33, which the Wall Street crash announced a few months after MacDonal took office for the second time.

Members of Parliament associated with the I.L.P. attacked and voted against measures which they regarded as betrayals of Labour's election pledges. Traditional radicals from areas of high structural unemployment such as the West of Scotland naturally had difficulty in defending the government's actions from the criticism of their own constituents. There also arose the question of the freedom of India from British rule.

When the Parliamentary Labour Party tried to "discipline" the dissidents in its ranks, the question arose, what control should the decisions of National Conferences of the I.L.P. exert on the voting of I.L.P.-sponsored Labour M.P.s? After the collapse of the MacDonal Government but before the electoral debacle, Brockway made a powerful attack on the Government's record at the National Conference of the Labour Party in October 1931 in his reference back of the report of the National Executive Committee on Discipline. However, the Conference was securely under the control of a leadership which seemed intimidated by the defeat of 1926 and its inability to cope with the crisis of 1930 - 31. A large majority supported the amendment of the Party's constitution to provide that any Labour candidate who, after election, failed to accept or to act in harmony with the Standing Orders of the Parliamentary Labour Party would be considered to have violated the Party Constitution. In the debate, Arthur Henderson warned that while individuals might invoke a "conscience clause", an "organised conscience" would not be tolerated.

Maxton appears to have hoped that discipline would become a less important question now that MacDonal and Snowden had departed. Though this hope was disappointed, the leaders of the I.L.P. were still reluctant to accept that negotiation was exhausted. They cancelled a Special Conference of the I.L.P. which was to have been held in November 1931 to discuss its relations with the Labour Party and, when disaffiliation was moved at the I.L.P.'s normal annual conference at Easter 1932 at Blackpool, the delegates gave the

leadership and the Labour Party another chance to reach a compromise by carrying "conditional affiliation" by the large majority of 250 to 53, which meant:

"whilst not desiring to disaffiliate from the Labour Party, affiliation could be continued only if a satisfactory revision of the Standing Orders were obtained."

The Labour Party's negotiators refused, however, to consider the I.L.P.'s alternative draft Standing Orders until it agreed in advance first to accept the existing Standing Orders. In fulfilment, therefore, of the decision at Blackpool, a Special Conference of the I.L.P. was held at Bradford at the end of July 1932, and resolved, by 241 votes to 142, to end the affiliation of the Party with the Labour Party.

Within this framework, advertisements and letters in "New Leader" in the early part of 1932 provide the first evidence of the existence of the R.P.C., which appears to have been a politically diverse group appealing to members of the I.L.P. on a basis of loyalty to the Party and concern for its future. All of its sympathisers could agree that they opposed "gradualism". All could agree that the programme and policy of the I.L.P. would have to be changed so that it would become a "revolutionary" party. Maxton and Brockway would have to be driven forward to carry through the first task, disaffiliation, which would free the I.L.P. M.P.s from the control of the Parliamentary Labour Party. What a "revolutionary" party would do would have to be worked out in the future, but in any case, even if there ever were an I.L.P. majority in Parliament, its government would avoid getting into the same position as that of Ramsay MacDonald by relying on "mass struggle". But if the I.L.P. was to rely on mass struggle in a crisis, why not at other times?

What then would be its relationships with Marxism and with the Communist International? The I.L.P. already had traditional views about both. They had been assured by such people as Brailsford and Bertrand Russell, in "New Leader" and at the Summer Schools, during the 1920's, that there could be no more slumps, that "Ford-ism had replaced Marxism", that the League of Nations would reconcile the Great Powers and that revolution was out of date. The world crisis had undermined these authorities. However, their ideas about Marxism also had been acquired piecemeal from other and not much more reliable sources, such as the "mechanical" Marxism of the pre-war Socialist Labour Party, embodied in the 1920's in the Kautskyan Marxism of the National Council of Labour Colleges, and in the early 1930's they were further assailed by the pretensions of Middleton Murry to interpret Marxism. Marxism had hardly yet become a subject for respectable academic study, and many of the basic texts were still not available in English.

They had some idea that they might learn from the social conflict in Russia and Central Europe in 1917 - 1923, when reformists had resisted revolutionaries. Their only sources were the traditions as far as they were kept alive in the Communist International. They had great difficulty in getting English texts of the basic works of

Marxism and Leninism which, in any case, not many readers were culturally equipped to master. However, the greatest obstacle was presented by the Communist International itself. Since the Sixth World Congress in 1928 the Comintern had been under the tight control of the ruling Stalin group in the Soviet Union. It fed into the Labour Movement the whole theoretical system associated with the so-called "Third Period" of the Communist International and expressed in the "Programme of the Communist International" drafted by Bukharin. This is not the place for a detailed analysis of this system and of the policies which flowed from it, the problems which they presented to the leaderships of the Communist Parties and to the working-class generally (including the I.L.P.), the devices which these leaderships improvised to try to get round these difficulties and the internal conflicts to which they gave rise. Nor can we discuss the social roots of these ultra-left policies and of the "right-ist" policies of the period 1925 - 1927 which preceded the "Third Period".

The keynote of the propaganda of the Communist International and of its presentation of Marxism, since the Fifth Congress in 1924, was the conception of "Socialism in a Single Country". The "Programme of the Communist International" expressed this conception in 1928 in the formula that the workers of the Soviet Union possessed:

"... in the country the necessary and sufficient material pre-requisites not only for the overthrow of the landlord and the bourgeoisie but also for the establishment of complete socialism..."

The theoretical arguments, in the light of Marxism, against this proposition are presented in Trotsky's "The Third International After Lenin", the component articles of which were hardly known in Britain in 1931. Since, according to the Communist International, the first duty of the working-class was to defend the Soviet Union, and since the Kremlin regarded as imminent the danger of intervention by the victorious Versailles powers and the leaders of the Labour and Socialist International, who stood for the League of Nations and the "fulfilment" of the Treaties, the keynote of the "Third Period" was defined at the Sixth Congress as devotion to systematic preparation for struggle against the danger of imperialist wars. This meant, in particular;

"... ruthless exposure of social-chauvinism, of social-imperialism and of pacifist phrasemongering ... The bourgeoisie resorts either to the method of Fascism or to the method of coalition with social democracy according to changes in the political situation: while social-democracy itself often plays a Fascist role in periods when the situation is critical for capitalism".

The revolutionary language in which these concepts were clothed raised the hopes of some in the I.L.P. that, in conditions of world crisis, the Communist International could replace the utopianism of the old I.L.P., which they wished to discard, with more practical perspectives of quick and drastic social change. However, the would-be revolutionaries in the I.L.P. could learn little from the Communist Party but that they ought to join it. They could learn nothing about the revolutionary process, the debates at the

First Four Congresses about Communist Tactics and the United Front and the international character of the class-struggle. They were not unwilling, but unable, to draw lessons from the earlier experiences of the Comintern, for example, from the collaboration of the Soviet leadership with the General Council of the British Trades Union Congress at the time of the General Strike or that with the Kuomintang and its contribution to the defeat in 1927 of the Second Chinese Revolution.

In the grip of Stalinism English-language Marxist studies withered. The Communist Party published a few important texts by Marx, Engels and Lenin, but the theoretical lessons which they contained did not find expression in the enrichment of the Party's practical work. After 1926 it ceased altogether to publish the writings of Trotsky. It struck another major blow at Marxist studies in the English-speaking world when Ryazanov was driven from his post as director of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow. His annotated edition of "The Communist Manifesto" and his symposium, "Karl Marx, Man, Thinker and Revolutionist", published by Martin Lawrence, were forgotten and became very scarce. "Labour Monthly" ceased publishing his scholarly articles after Palme Dutt supported the Stalin faction when in 1929 it settled accounts with its critics among the intellectuals of the Soviet Union.

The experiences of many members of the I.L.P. with the Communist Party had not been happy ones. They did not, however, all have the same reasons for taking a reserved attitude towards it. Some had always objected to the formation of the Communist International, had disliked the idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat and had identified it and the idea of a centralised international with their fear of the centralised tyranny of a leading group. Maxton, Brockway and such Parliamentarians as Wallhead and Jowett had taken this viewpoint from 1919 onwards and counterposed to it the idea of one, all-embracing, federal International, while they had always repudiated any support for counter-revolutionary intervention.

Others, who in the early 1930's might have come to think that the Communist International had been right to reject a Parliamentary Road to Socialism, found the Communist Party in the "Third Period" to be demanding a confidence which it could not win, to be out of touch with the working class, to be prone to revolutionary phrase-mongering, to be controlled mechanically from the top, to be unable to approach other tendencies except with a tone of ultimatum and denunciation, to be unable to present a programme which started from today's consciousness of the working-class and its situation and led to a Workers' Government.

They might sometimes with justification complain about its "bad faith", though on other occasions the complaints of such as Maxton were not necessarily justified. The Communist Party might well expect I.L.P.ers to match their words with deeds and draw attention to failures to do so.

Consequently, British intellectuals and workers who wanted to find out about Marxism had difficulty in doing so. The resources available to the Trotskyists were very small indeed and the

would-be revolutionaries of the I.L.P. had to rely on what they could get through the Comintern apparatus, which agreed with its reformist critics to the extent that they both identified Leninism with Stalinism. Despite the problems which the ideas of Palme Dutt presented, the Communist Party was able to present him as the prime source of information about Marxism and Leninism and his presentation of the Stalinist-Bukharinist conception of Marxism as that of Marx and Lenin themselves. His expositions of what he believed Marxism and Leninism to mean did not give evidence of wide reading or general culture and were strongly marked by a formal, abstract and mechanical method of thought. None the less, such writing as his regular "Notes of the Month" in "Labour Monthly" displayed a sweep, a boldness, an optimism and an authority which carried greater conviction in many serious minds than the utopian moralising of Maxton or Brockway, to say nothing of the intellectual poverty of lesser figures such as Paton or McGovern.

The analyses which the leaders of the R.P.C. got from Palme Dutt, and which they largely accepted as good Marxist coin (though they never forgave the Communist Party for its "bad methods"), were not original. They were based on conceptions developed by Zinoviev and Bukharin, which had come to dominate the Communist International at its Fifth Congress in 1924, though we do not know whether Dutt himself had any hand in drafting the original formulations. The cast of his mind admirably fitted him for expounding the form which these ideas took in the "Third Period" in which the Stalinist bureaucracy regarded the victorious powers of Versailles and their supporters in the Labour and Socialist International as the main source of danger of intervention. His economic analysis even while the boom of 1928 was still going on envisaged continuous deterioration. From the world crisis when it came there could be no recovery. The leaderships of the reformist mass-organisations had gone completely over into the service of the bourgeoisie. Further, they had already permanently lost or were in the process of losing their followers to the Communist Parties. They were "sufficiently exposed".

One aspect of the practical consequences of the "turn" in the policies of the Kremlin in early 1928 is described by Macfarlane ("The British Communist Party: Its Origin and Development up to 1929", pp. 228 - 9):

"In a statement issued by the party secretariat just before the Eleventh Congress (of the Communist Party of Great Britain in November 1929), it was categorically stated that there was no question of raising the Left Wing (in the Labour Party) again in any shape or form. At the end of the month the party closed down the 'Sunday Worker', in order to concentrate its depleted forces behind the drive for the new 'Daily Worker' to be launched in the New Year. The corpse of the Left-Wing movement was officially buried ten months after the 10th Congress delivered its coup de grace ... To the surprise of the Labour Party, the Communist Party had itself removed the main thorn from the body of

the Labour Party and put an end to one of the most interesting and successful experiments in Communist penetration..."

The Communist Parties were, of course, for "unity", but now they could not propose a "United Front" except "from below", which would exclude the reformist leaders and present to the reformist workers the problem that before they could get unity in struggle they had first to abandon their traditional allegiances. "Left Socialists" such as the leaders of the I.L.P., according to the strict application of this theory, and others such as the leaders of the Revolutionary Policy Committee in the I.L.P. were attacked, from time to time, on the ground that they were obstructing, by their criticisms of the Communist International, the movement of workers away from reformism to the revolutionary leadership and were "the most dangerous enemies of all". In 1932 this argument was used by the Communist Party just at the same time as the Communist International was collaborating with people like Barbusse in the Amsterdam Anti-War Congress and laying the basis for the British Anti-War Movement in which both the I.L.P. and pacifists took part. However, Dutt could brush aside such contradictions by his eloquent claims that the Communist International was the world-wide repository of revolutionary experience and that to criticise it placed the critic in the camp of the interventionist bourgeoisie. Naturally in conditions of world wide unemployment and crisis most people on the Left preferred to see what signs of hope they could in the economic developments in Soviet Russia.

One important result of these conflicting influences was the production of a document entitled "Memorandum on the Present Political and Economic Situation", which was drafted by Dr. C.K. Cullen and circulated to branches of the I.L.P. by the Poplar Branch in January 1932.

This document recognised that there had been a world-wide breakdown of international capitalism. It said that the policy of the I.L.P. should be re-stated in terms of objectives rather than of plans for transition, that immediate policy, related to the building-up of revolutionary organisation and to temporary phases of the struggle, must be planned with that objective constantly in mind.

"The two rival systems of Communism and capitalism cannot exist side by side without clash much longer... We must prepare ourselves first and foremost for industrial upheaval and plan the necessary organisation to ensure its success and seize power. ... Dictatorship will be necessary until the stabilisation of the power of the workers... Continued alliance with the Labour Party is impossible, not on superficial grounds of liberty of action in Parliament, but on grounds of fundamental policy."

Cullen proposed that the workers must be roused to a realisation of their needs. More use should be made of facts about Russia - what the Five-Year Plan has achieved. The methods of the Minority Movement should be studied. However:

"It may be that ultimately there will be a fusion between the revolutionary wing of the I.L.P. and the C.P.... Meanwhile, there are certain definite reasons why we are unable to join the C.P., and why we should continue our work inside the I.L.P. (though the decisions taken at Easter may affect our attitude). We disagree strongly with the tactics and what we think is the unsound psychology of the C.P. We believe that far more support can be won for revolutionary policy by a different sort of approach to the workers. We believe that there should be far more tolerance for those whose political education is still largely undeveloped while the economic fallacies of their views are pointed out to them. We believe that the Communist Party tends to suffer from the 'infantile disorder of Communism' which Lenin found an embarrassment... On the other hand, we believe that a revolutionary I.L.P. would approach the whole question of propaganda and organisation in a different manner and would appeal to potential revolutionaries among the workers whom the C.P. 'leaves cold'. We believe, too, that a large number of potential revolutionaries within the ranks of the I.L.P. would certainly not join the C.P. at present. A revolutionary I.L.P. has a slightly different role to play... Our difference from the C.P. would lie more in method than in actual plans and policy..."

The "Memorandum" was one factor, and, according to reports, an important one, in promoting the development of the R.P.C. There is no evidence that it was influenced by any direct agent of the Communist Party at this stage, but the fact that the Communist Party had the "Daily Worker" by means of which to exert an influence in the I.L.P. cannot be overlooked.

Ample evidence, indeed, suggests the contrary. At the end of 1931, the Communist Party was directing its attacks impartially at the leadership of the I.L.P. and at the elements which were coming together to form the R.P.C. In "Labour Monthly", December 1931, William Rust wrote:

"There are certain non-essential differences between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party which are being deliberately magnified... Sections of the I.L.P. have already reached the stage of holding oppositional fraction meetings and have actually elaborated and circulated a new draft I.L.P. constitution as a basis for organising the opposition throughout the party... Two tendencies are obviously struggling within this constitution, a new conscious opportunist attempt to dress up the old theory with new deceitful 'Left' phrases and a real desire to work out fighting methods of struggle because reformist theory and tactics have failed and led to defeat... The working class membership of the I.L.P. can play an important part in hastening forward the whole revolutionary process in Britain, providing they fight

I.L.P.ism in all its forms and for the triumph of revolutionary principles."

Soon after the Easter 1932 Conference of the I.L.P. Pollitt and Brockway publicly debated in London "Which Way For the Workers?". Brockway opened:

"It was not necessarily the case that the transition from Capitalism to Socialism would be carved out on the Russian model. Also, in his opinion, insistence that the transfer must come by armed civil war was equally as unreliable a doctrine as the inevitability of gradualness upheld by the Labour Party. If it is true that there can be no change in this country from Capitalism to Socialism except through armed civil war, that postpones the change to as distant a future as gradualism... If it were possible to elect to the House of Commons a majority of Socialists who were determined to carry through a decisive Socialist change, it would be a tactical advantage in the beginning of a rev. sit. ... even if you get your majority in the H. of C., it would meet with the resistance not merely of the H. of L., but by the aristocracy and the plutocracy. But in that situation with Socialist control of the Government you would have the advantage that you would be able to rely on the rank and file both of the army and the navy, drawn from working-class homes... I believe it would be possible, in that kind of situation, by disciplined industrial action on the part of the working-class to go through the crisis without having as the main instrument of change the actual armed revolution towards which Communists look as inevitable."

In reply, Pollitt denounced the I.L.P., appealed to the audience to join the Communist Party and did not mention the R.P.C. The I.L.P. was:

"... not a party of the working-class ... not a party of Socialism, but... a party of capitalism, which hinders and retards the workers' daily struggles... whose Socialism is a bastard Socialism, which involves nothing more or less than acquiescing in every theory appertaining to the capitalist state and the administration of all that the capitalist state power represents... Therefore, comrades, with such a party there can be no talk of unity, no talk of anything in common and there can be only war to the death... What has the I.L.P. to say to this question of wage-cuts? What stand has its permanent members like Mr. Arthur Shaw and Sir Ben Turner to say to wage-cuts?"

Arthur Shaw and Sir Ben Turner were leaders of Yorkshire woollen textile unions.

In May 1932, "Labour Monthly" directed its main fire against the R.P.C., in an article entitled, "The Tolerant Revolutionaries":

"Insistence on a revolutionary policy, with a method and a tactic different from the tactics of the existing revolutionary party, the Communist Party, expresses the lingering faith and hope that there might be some way out of the crisis for the working-class other than the Communist revolutionary path... The Easter Conference has raised many hopes among certain I.L.P.ers, but the character of the discussion shows that the I.L.P. remains an opportunistic party - a mask for the Labour traitors... The objective result of the (Poplar) Memorandum can only be to keep honest workers in the I.L.P. in the hope that it will adopt a socialist policy... Those members who want a revolutionary policy should join the Communist Party: a lively participation in the revolutionary struggles will remove all misconceptions re 'unsuitable methods'.."

From the very beginning, therefore, the R.P.C. presented problems to the Communist Party, and cannot be regarded as an instrument of its policies. The Communist Party, at the same time, presented problems to the R.P.C.

The crises and unemployment which at this time were general throughout the capitalist world, were raising sympathetic interest in the developments in the Soviet Union, and the ridiculous slanders in the bourgeois press tended to produce as a reaction a naive over-correction in the Left Wing press, which re-inforced the natural hope that all would go well in Russia. The "New Leader" was producing monthly supplements about Russia, the materials for which were supplied by official Communist Party sources. These tended to form an unjustifiably favourable impression which was to be followed later by disillusion. For example, "New Leader" for January 1, 1932 reported, under the head-line, "Russia's Advance":

"Whilst deterioration in standards of living and industrial and agricultural decay are occurring in every capitalist country in the world, Russia continues to advance... The success of the First Five Year Plan has exceeded expectations and the Budgetary position is much better than was anticipated. It is confidently expected that the Plan will be completed by the end of 1932."

In the issue for February 2, 1932, Pat Sloan reported:

"In Soviet Russia Socialism is not the music of the future. It is a reality of the present."

The same writer, a member of the Communist Party introduced in "New Leader", June 10, 1932 as "our own correspondent in Moscow", reported, under the head-line "Russia is wonderful but don't be expecting too much":

"Survivals of capitalism and the capitalist psychology still exist in Russia, and to combat them a dictatorship and strict discipline are

necessary... in industry there is the danger of bureaucracy on the one hand and the lack of will to work on the other."

During the negotiations about the Standing Orders of the Parliamentary Labour Party in autumn 1931, according to Brockway, Arthur Henderson:

"... challengingly raised the issue as to whether we had any real faith in Parliament. He had gathered that we ultimately believed that the transfer from Capitalism to Socialism would not be made through Parliament but by a direct struggle for power between the working class and the possessing classes. Did this mean that we stood for Socialism by revolution? As a matter of fact, Henderson was pressing the I.L.P. further towards its logical end than it was prepared to go at the moment, but he was quite unsatisfied by my reply that the I.L.P. would use Parliament as fully as it could be used." ("Inside the Left", p. 238 - 9).

In the past the I.L.P. had always disposed of Henderson's awkward question by quoting from its 1922 Constitution:

"The Independent Labour Party takes part in the struggle of the workers to win freedom from the economic tyranny imposed by the capitalist class and the capitalist State. It holds that the best way of effecting a peaceful change to Socialism is by the organisation of the workers politically to capture the power of the state and industrially to take over the control and the management of the industrial machine.

The Independent Labour Party recognises that circumstances may arise when a Government or reactionary class might attempt to suppress liberty or thwart the national will, and hold that to defeat such attempt Democracy must use to the utmost extent its political and industrial power."

However, this formula had now become too general, after I.L.P. - sponsored M.P.s had been put under pressure to vote for Government measures which not only they regarded as reactionary but were in conflict with decisions of I.L.P. conferences. None the less, there has been difficulty in later years in understanding why so many people, for so many reasons, regarded disaffiliation as the central issue, and why the struggle over it was so sharply waged. Brockway, for example, was to write a decade later:

"Personally I was not greatly excited over the disaffiliation issue... If I could have got reasonable liberty within the Labour Party I would have stayed inside." ("Inside the Left", p. 239).

But this was precisely the problem: Henderson knew that it was not just a matter of giving "reasonable liberty" to Brockway, but of recognising the existence in the House of Commons of a rival to the Labour Party.

Some commentators have wondered why no compromise could be reached when they observe (as was observed in 1932) that the political content of the statements of the I.L.P. was hardly to be distinguished from that of the statements of the Labour Party. Perhaps the explanation lies in recognising that diverse elements sought disaffiliation for different reasons and with differing degrees of enthusiasm. Some, like Maxton and Brockway, appear from their speeches at the time to have been willing to be called revolutionaries and to let the I.L.P. be called a revolutionary party in order that they might retain its leadership and go on as before, as Parliamentarians, saying the same utopian things as they had been saying for many years without having to face their practical consequences. Others (such as some, but not all, of the R.P.C.) saw in disaffiliation the first step towards liberating the I.L.P. from the Parliamentary dogma of the Labour Party and opening a discussion about combining Parliamentary activity with industrial struggle. Many others again, including some of the R.P.C.'s early supporters, hoped that the I.L.P. could still become the instrument for swift and drastic social change even by Parliamentary means if it could break from and fight against the control of the leadership of the Labour Party. There had always been a strong streak of pacifism in the I.L.P., but the pacifists were divided on the question of disaffiliation, some going to the Labour Party, such as Ponsonby, while others seized the opportunity to oppose the Labour Party electorally, such as Joseph Southall.

In 1932 to oppose disaffiliation, if one were a member of the I.L.P., meant to identify oneself with the Standing Orders of the Parliamentary Labour Party and, therefore, with the more conservative wing of the party. People like E.F. Wise and P.J. Dollan believed that the only possible road led through the Labour Party and, therefore, that Standing Orders had to be accepted. This does not mean that they defended the whole record of the MacDonald Government, and, when they founded the Socialist League in autumn 1932 after leaving the I.L.P., they soon went too far for G.D.H. Cole in challenging the leadership of the Labour Party. But they did not regard themselves as or call themselves revolutionaries.

At the level of the discussions in 1931 - 32, many of those who advocated disaffiliation did so because they could see nothing but adaptation to capitalism if the Parliamentary Labour Party could dominate the way in which I.L.P. M.P.'s voted. Disaffiliation seemed to offer the only alternative. Ever since 1893 the I.L.P. had been an open, legal party. Since 1900 it had been an essential element of the Labour Party. There could have been no question at this time of "entrism". Nor did anyone raise the possibility of independent support by the I.L.P. for the Labour Party as conceived in the theses on the United Front by the Third and Fourth Congresses of the Communist International, because these ideas were hardly known. The "United Front" had been presented by the Communist Party since 1928 solely in terms of a "United Front from Below", excluding the leaders of reformist mass parties.

An example of the practical problems which confronted the active rank and file of the I.L.P. can be found in "New Leader", January 1, 1932, in an article head-lined "Boycotting the P.A.C.s?":

"Should Socialists refuse to serve upon the Public Assistance Committees which are administering the Means Test? Should Councils with Labour majorities refuse to administer the Act altogether? The Councils at Wigan, Church, Newcastle-Under-Lyme and other places have already gone on strike, and in other places Labour members are refusing to serve. The Stoke-on-Trent Council, after declining to administer the Act, has rescinded its decision, on receiving an assurance from the Ministry of Health that it will not interfere with decisions if they are within the Benefit scale. It is time a common policy was reached in this matter. We throw out the suggestion that a minimum scale might be made the test... To boycott the P.A.C.s altogether would mean leaving the unemployed at the mercy of the Tories or of Commissioners appointed by the Government."

The R.P.C. tried, as best it could with its own resources, at the Special Conference of the I.L.P. at Bradford at the end of July 1932 to make the I.L.P. politically independent of the Labour Party, to break it from reformism. It did not succeed, however, in overcoming the resistance of Maxton and Brockway. By this time the partnership of Cullen and Gaster had been formed in the leadership of the R.P.C., with Gaster, the younger man, intellectually impressed by Cullen but, at the same time, regarded by Maxton and Brockway with much more friendliness and tolerance than Cullen. At Bradford, indeed, the R.P.C. was kept firmly in its place and its attempts to present itself as a new leadership were defeated. The decisions of the Conference helped organisationally to isolate the militants of the I.L.P. and to send it down a futile road of electoral opposition to the Labour Party, but the "Times" reporter placed his finger accurately on the point that the Conference did not settle the principal question:

"Some London branches wanted 'the use of mass strength' to be defined as 'seizure of key sources of power by such means as may be necessary in any particular situation', and supporters of this amendment definitely desired preparations for the use of physical force. The E.C. opposed and the amendment was rejected; and so was another amendment which would have substituted the phrase 'political and industrial strength' for 'mass strength', thus ruling out a resort to physical force. The E.C. would neither add to nor subtract from the original phrase, and the conference was content to leave it without too close an interpretation". ("Times", August 2, 1932).

The confusion persisted. In "New Leader", December 16, 1932, Paton was writing:

"The acceptance of the new constitution (at Bradford) meant therefore a clean break with the past policies of the I.L.P., which, from being a party of social reform, became a Marxist and revolutionary Socialist Party... The Party's attitude to the purely electoral plan for achieving socialism is quite definitely stated in the new constitution... It states that, in Britain, 'electoral activity for the capture of all the organs of government is essential'... this is only one aspect of the general struggle, in which it foresees the likelihood by the interests behind capitalism of resistance to real socialist advance... (it) speaks of the need to prepare the minds of the workers... that it can be met only by the use of their mass strength for the capture of power... But it seems to be necessary to avoid dogmatic assertion with regard to circumstances which cannot be foreseen... Politics founded on dogmas are foredoomed to futility..."

Brockway's statement in "Inside the Left" that Gaster was responsible for moving that the I.L.P. trade unionists should oppose the payment of the political levy to the Labour Party is contradicted by the conference report, which shows that Campbell Stephen was the mover. No doubt the R.P.C. supported this policy because, under the influence of the Communist Party in the "Third Period", they regarded this as a way by which to make the I.L.P. politically independent of the Labour Party.

By no means discouraged, the R.P.C. leadership called a conference of delegates from I.L.P. branches in London on August 28. According to the "New Leader" (September 2, 1932), half of the branches in London sent delegates: the conference decided:

"... after a very full discussion of the Bradford decisions ... with one dissentient and one abstention 'that all militant revolutionary socialists should maintain their membership and activity in the I.L.P.'"

In the issue for October 21, 1932, Gaster wrote a feature article head-lined "The Hunger Marchers Are Coming". He called for support for a mass demonstration in Trafalgar Square on October 30 - without a mention of the Communist Party!

There is no reliable statistic for the membership of the I.L.P. at disaffiliation, or, what would be more useful, to suggest its active membership. Dutt based an estimate of 11,750 (in "Labour Monthly", September 1932 p. 534) on a statement by Paton in "Forward" (August 13, 1932) that the 389 votes in the Bradford Conference represented 3.3% of the paid-up membership.

Paton gave a rough estimate of the relative sizes of the I.L.P. and the Communist Party at the Derby Conference of Easter 1933:

"... they had been informed recently by Harry

Pollitt that the C.P. membership was 5,200, a large part of it of a fluctuating and unstable character, while the I.L.P. has a membership of more than four times greater."

Somewhat similar figures were given by J.R. Campbell in "Labour Monthly", September 1933 (p. 589), of 6,000 for the Communist Party and 15,000 for the I.L.P.

It is clear that the leaders of the I.L.P. did not take precipitately the decision to disaffiliate, which was reached only after years of discussion. The question rather arises whether Maxton and Brockway should be criticised for letting the discussions with the Labour Party drag on too long and for evading the problem of showing themselves to be in favour of the unity of the working-class as a politically independent force and thereby spreading confusion among their supporters. It is no less clear that none of those who prominently supported disaffiliation can be positively identified as an agent of the Communist Party or even as a close sympathiser with it. For the suggestion that the Communist Party engineered the break of the I.L.P. from the Labour Party there is no documentary evidence whatever.

Brockway, indeed, spoke at the I.L.P. Summer School immediately after the Special Conference about his differences with the C.P.:

"...in a revolutionary situation the pacifist cannot stand aside but must use his influence for the disciplined action of the working-class to prevent or limit violence and bloodshed... The three great reasons why the I.L.P. cannot associate itself with the Communist Party are (i) Moscow domination, (ii) their revolutionary policy is always in terms of civil war, and (iii) their political morality is an adaptation of capitalist morality..."

Like Dutt and the Communist Party, Brockway also identified Stalinism with Bolshevism; since he opposed Bolshevism he tried to use the same arguments against Stalinism. Consequently he was without theoretical defences against the Communist Party. When it did something which his schema had not permitted him to foresee, such as offer unconditional united action in spring 1933, or turn towards the League of Nations in 1934, he could only try to deal empirically with each event as it came along and at each "turn" allowed the Communist Party to place the I.L.P. at an unnecessary disadvantage.

However, at the time of the 1931 General Election and after it the question haunted the I.L.P.: is there any good reason why we ought to go on voting for Labour candidates after the 1929 - 1931 experience? One idea certainly held the majority of the I.L.P. together after Bradford, their basic agreement that it was right to stand candidates against the Labour Party's candidates, whether "on principle" or because the Labour Party was, anyway, discredited beyond recovery. This belief resisted their experience for several years, beginning with the municipal elections in November 1932, in which the I.L.P. stood 71

candidates in various places, 28 of them in Glasgow, most of whom were badly beaten.

Those of the former leadership who staked their future at Bradford on the I.L.P. moved into a politically new world. Their preceding experiences had prepared them for it only by a training in the arts of manoeuvre. With disaffiliation accomplished, they asked themselves, why could not the I.L.P. dispose of the Labour Party as they believed the Labour Party had dealt with the Liberals, by expressing in reformist-pacifist-utopian phrases the aspirations of the masses? The "Leeds Weekly Citizen", that provincial bastion of Labour Party orthodoxy, wrote off these hopes in a nasty editorial on August 5, 1932:

"The Communist Party will have no difficulty in making hay of this veiled and cautious manifesto, for the C.P. knows where it stands and does not hesitate to state its case openly: it does not pretend that its camp is a parlour... Any organisation foolish enough to try to eat the Labour Party will die of that diet."

Autumn 1932 was, however a period of great, indeed euphoric hopes in the I.L.P. In reality the Party was beginning to crumble and to enter a period of chronic instability. The anti-Marxists and pacifists and Parliamentarians were divided. Some left while others stayed. The hopes and confusion of those who stayed were voiced in the talk about "revolution in hearts and minds" of Middleton Murry, who briefly was taken seriously in summer and autumn 1932.

The attitude of the Communist Party, however, towards the I.L.P. as a whole and the R.P.C. in particular, continued to be one of hostile criticism. However, it changed. Wicks informed the writer that he met Gallacher in the visitor's gallery at the Special Conference at Bradford and the latter told him that the C.P. leaders had under-estimated the political significance of the developments in the I.L.P. The Communist Party began to take more seriously the possibility of winning people from the I.L.P. In the winter of 1932, however, "New Leader" carried a series of attacks on the Communist Party on the ground that in united activities in support of the unemployed, the latter "placed its interests as a party above those of the class". Meanwhile, the 12th Congress of the Communist Party at Battersea in November 1932 (the same one as endorsed the expulsion of the "Balham Group") resolved to pay "special attention to winning over members or branches of the I.L.P.". The change was an empirical relaxation, an adjustment not easy to make but a belated and partial recognition of reality.

Those who have accepted that the R.P.C. was an agency of the Communist Party or that it was at all times urging the I.L.P. to subordinate itself to the Communist International have overlooked the content of the position which its documents show it to have held from autumn 1932 for about the next year. The R.P.C.'s exchanges with the Communist Party, indeed, make highly improbable even any suggestion that there was an influential agent of the Communist Party in its leadership at this time. The

Communist Party attacked the R.P.C. on the ground that it had not fought for a revolutionary policy at Bradford and that it was an obstacle to members of the I.L.P. being won to the C.P. Gaster replied robustly, making the best case that could be made without an analysis, which none of the R.P.C. leaders was prepared to make, of the international political roots of the policies of the Communist International since 1924:

"At Bradford it was clear to everybody except the correspondent of the 'Daily Worker' that the issue was being fought on policy... the rejection (of the R.P.C.'s main amendments to the Constitution) was due to the fact that the NAC put across a new draft Constitution which the branches had not had time to discuss...

The I.L.P. wants a real united front, not a sham one. It would be unreasonable to ask Parties to forego their principles, but no united front can be presented to the capitalist class if every occasion on the meeting of workers as a united front is to be a debate on their various differences and not an appeal for support on the points of unity...

The I.L.P. like the Communist Party has made many mistakes, but the I.L.P. has honestly admitted these mistakes...

(The Communist Party) calls itself the Party of Marx and Lenin, but, quite frankly, must not a revolutionary Party be a Party of convinced revolutionary socialists who can form the spearhead of the wider working class movement and not consist largely of people who have acquired a parrot-like knowledge of some phrases of Marx and Lenin and who interpret the very necessary discipline which a rev. party must exert on its members as a blind faith in its leadership?... (They) suggest that all who are not within the ranks of the Communist Party are consciously and deliberately traitors to the working class movement - bulwarks of the capitalist system - social-fascists. Frankly I cannot accept that...

If the Communist Party were to overcome its narrow sectarianism, its false approach, the jargon of its rank and file and the virulent mis-representation by some of its leaders and its press of all who dare to differ, there might be no need for the I.L.P., but until that is done, there is room for the I.L.P. as a real revolutionary workers' party".

That the R.P.C. was taking seriously its purpose of developing the I.L.P. in this direction is confirmed by the activity of W.N. Warbey, who, as Education Secretary of the London Divisional Council, issued seven "lecture memoranda" late in 1932 on:

Declining Capitalism and the Necessity of Revolution
Revolutionary Method
Revolutionary Policy in Relation to Existing Forms of
Government

Revolutionary Policy and the Industrial Struggle
I.L.P. Policy in relation to Imperialism and War
I.L.P. and the International Working-Class Movement
The United Front and I.L.P. Relations with the working-
class movement.

The R.P.C. itself was changing. Now that disaffiliation had been achieved, some of those (such as Kate Spurrell and Campbell Stephen) who had supported or worked with it were moving away. While Cullen, Gaster and Warbey seem to have wanted to take the I.L.P. closer to the Communist Party (though Cullen appears to have been the most enthusiastic) others doubted the ability of the Communist Party to make the revolution it talked about, disliked its "methods", thought the revolution remote and hoped to find an easier road.

The R.P.C. tried to contribute to the discussion, which formed part of the preparations for the first national conference of the I.L.P. since disaffiliation, at Derby at Easter 1933, by drafting a new constitution, which, they hoped, would pin the leadership down, end playing about with the word "revolution" and commit the party to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Their attempt to make the I.L.P. a revolutionary party in this sense posed immediately the problem of removing the obstacles which both the I.L.P. and the Communist Party appeared to present to uniting in one revolutionary organisation. Few in the I.L.P. would take any such suggestion seriously without a recognition of the "bad methods" which they experienced whenever they read the Communist Party's press about the I.L.P., let alone tried to collaborate with it, and without some ways to correct these "bad methods" being suggested.

Early in 1933 Cullen wrote asserting the independence of the R.P.C. from the Communist Party. His tone was that of an equal, who felt behind him the force of a left-ward moving I.L.P. which he appeared to believe was larger and more important in British politics than the Communist Party. He addressed its leaders with the comradely courtesy of one who expects one day to take his place among them and who does not have to permit himself or his group to be bullied.

"We welcome the changed tone of these approaches to the I.L.P. rank and file and the assurance that the C.P. will work with those I.L.P. workers who follow up the disaffiliation policy by being prepared to build the unity of the workers in struggle around immediate demands directed against wage-cuts, unemployment and war. For that is what the R.P.C. members are trying to do, and, moreover, unless we mis-read all the indications, what the vast majority of the I.L.P. is beginning to realise must be done, although many of them have not yet cast off all their pre-occupations with the work that they rightly or wrongly considered to be necessary in a different phase of the struggle."

Cullen went on, over-optimistically as events proved:

"Nor do we believe that even the leaders of the I.L.P.

are so blind to the events of the day that they put any hope in the possibility of achieving a peaceful or constitutional revolution..."

However:

"The R.P.C. wants something more than an 'assurance' from the Communist Party that they will work with us in 'building unity in struggle around immediate demands', something more than a welcoming hand gloved in hedgehog skin... while we welcome rather than fear hard-hitting, we prefer it to be above the belt..."

... whatever the differences, it is obvious that we must aim ultimately at a united revolutionary movement. We are not concerned with the question as to whether one organisation will swallow the other, either whole or piecemeal... There is still a great part for both the I.L.P. and the C.P. to play in and for the working class. The time has not yet come when either can serve the working class best by losing its separate identity."

The R.P.C. introduced into the pre-conference discussion the suggestion that the I.L.P. should popularise the idea of constructing "Workers' Councils". The idea seems to have started with a Scottish De Leonist in the I.L.P. in London called William Dunbar, of whom history has little else to record. The idea may have appealed to the R.P.C. as a means by which they might bring together under their leadership various strands in the ranks of the I.L.P. The idea could attract, on the one hand, those who wanted local co-operation with every section of the Labour Movement and who did not like the idea of such affairs as the anti-war committees which the Communists tended to dominate, and, on the other hand, the "left", who wanted to co-operate locally with the Communist Party, who could see in "Workers' Councils" some "independent" parallel to the apparatuses of the mass reformist organisations and even as a translation into English of the Russian word "Soviet".

"Workers' Councils" may have seemed, then, to provide the basis for that political independence of reformism which the R.P.C. had already tried to establish at Bradford. At the same time, and no less important, it seems to offer a means for the R.P.C. to win a strong enough basis in the I.L.P. from which to bargain with the Communist Party, to set as the terms for unification that it give up its "bad methods".

Men as able as Cullen and Gaster may well have expected that they would win a strong position in the leadership of a future united Communist Party if they could induce its leaders to reform their ways and could demonstrate to the I.L.P. rank and file that they had done so.

This would be a normal method for any group which had not grasped that "sectarianism" and "bad methods" of the C.P.G.B. were symptoms of its politics, which it could modify but not renounce, given that the CI was the bureaucratised expression of the policies

of the Stalin regime, which since 1928 had expressed themselves in regarding Social Democracy as the "main enemy" of the working-class. Partial turns to the united front from below in anti-war committees, occasional polite exchanges or work in trade unions could do little to improve the impression which the CP made on workers while it worked in this framework.

For the Communist Party leadership, therefore, the possibility of such concessions to the R.P.C. simply could not arise, and it dashed the R.P.C.'s hopes of a new Communist Party united on its terms with bitter attacks. Pollitt wrote, for example, in "Communist Review", February 1933:

"The coming Easter Conference of the I.L.P. and the challenge to the existing constitution (of the I.L.P.) raised by the so-called Revolutionary Policy Committee make it necessary for our Party to give constant and sympathetic attention to carrying out the line laid down by the 12th Congress in relation to the I.L.P.... No Murry's, Cullen's or Gaster's can give this lead to the I.L.P. membership, just as only the workers and those who prove their convictions in daily struggle can really carry out this line."

The Communist Party attacked the "Workers' Councils" proposal, not only on the orthodox Leninist ground that it played down the leading role of the revolutionary party, but also on the ground that it was a diversion from the main question of the moment, the attitude of the R.P.C. to the Communist International. It claimed that the winter Divisional Conferences of the I.L.P. in London and Lancashire had passed motions in favour of closer relations with the Comintern on the initiative, not of the R.P.C. but of rank and file members. "What", asked Dutt, "still holds back the Left Wing of the I.L.P. from Communism?" The R.P.C. was told, not necessarily to join the C.P. immediately as individuals, but to fight to carry the majority of the I.L.P. over into the C.P. on the open basis of the platform of the Communist International and to drop

"... suggested reasons, though not of a very clear character, but rather of a subjective and personal character, criticism of faults and manner but not in basic policy of the Communist International... beneath which... lie revealed certain basic issues of revolutionary principle which are not yet clearly understood".

This misunderstanding (according to the Communist Party) would only strengthen the reformists in the I.L.P. and play into the hands of Maxton and Brockway, who were toying with some new international half-way house between the L. & S.I. and the Comintern and who anyway wanted to get back into the Labour Party.

Then the sudden realisation burst on the British Left that the situation in Germany was far more serious than anyone but the Trotskyists had led them to believe. Immediately there resulted, on the one hand, a wide spread impression that there could be no

peaceful, reformist road to Socialism, that the role of violence in politics must be recognised. At the same time, on the other hand, far from having destroyed the democratic illusions of the masses and freed them from the influence of the Social-Democracy the disaster in Germany greatly strengthened sentiments for unity to defend democratic institutions and the past gains of the workers' movement. Working-class militants in Western Europe were beginning to react against the threatening rise of Nazism with impatience to get rid of the barriers which leaderships seemed arbitrarily to have erected to frustrate the elemental desire of unity in action.

Already, representatives of eleven European and American sections of the International Left Opposition had met in Paris on February 4 - 8, 1933, and cabled to the Executive Committee of the Communist International:

"In face gravity German situation and threat against USSR we demand urgent convocation world congress Communist International with participation International Left Opposition Invite Comintern to propose united front to organisations Socialist and Labour International Profintern Amsterdam International for common action German and international proletariat against German Fascism for defence U.S.S.R."

On February 4, the "Seven Left Socialist Parties" also had issued an appeal to the Second and Third Internationals for a united front, as they saw it. Their appeal referred to Fascism and the growing war danger:

"They cannot be met and overcome by the toleration of capitalist policies based on conceptions of class collaboration which have disastrously affected working-class conditions and fatally discredited the Labour and Socialist International... Nor can they be opposed successfully by the Communist conception of the 'united front' as a tactic to be used for Party advantage.. This unity... cannot be achieved unless the parties affiliated to the Third International cease to be groups under the dictatorship of a central organisation, which isolates them from the struggle of the working class in their own countries."

On which the "Daily Worker" commented, on February 11:

"If this is correct, what surely follows from all this? Is it not that the Labour and Socialist International and all who support it must be denounced...? But.. on the contrary... the manifesto appeals for unity with this class-collaboration body... This is not the way to build workers' unity but the way to destroy it..."

Then the Labour and Socialist International issued its appeal, on February 19:

"If the working class is beaten by the Fascist attack in Germany, the workers of Central Europe will be in the most serious danger and the reactionaries in all countries will be encouraged to make inroads upon the social achievements of the working class... we call upon German workers, the workers of all countries, to cease their attacks upon each other and to join together in the fight against Fascism... The plans for the formation of a block of Fascist states to oppose France and its Eastern allies is threatening to divide Europe once again into two camps arming against each other... If the antagonisms of the great powers paralyse the League of Nations, if the leadership of the middle class falls to an increasing extent into the hands of Fascist groups, it is perfectly clear that only the power of the workers can avert the world catastrophe..."

Early in March there came from the Communist International a call, not for discussion at the international level, but for agreements to be negotiated within each individual country between the Communist and Social-Democratic Parties. Idris Cox admitted, in "Communist Review", July 1933 that this:

"came as a surprise to the whole party, including the leadership."

Communist Parties were to propose common defence against fascism, against wage-reductions and cuts in unemployment benefit, with a surprising acceptance of the demand of the L. & S.I. that mutual criticism be suspended:

"...the E.C.C.I. considers it possible to recommend the Communist Parties during the time of the common fight... to refrain from making attacks on Social-Democratic organisations. The most ruthless fight must be conducted against all those who violate the conditions of the agreement in carrying-out the united front, as against strike breakers who disrupt the united front of the workers."

As was to be expected, the Labour Party, the Trades Union Congress and the Co-operative Party rejected the proposal, with the argument:

"Reaction on the Right has bred Reaction on the Left, which is displaced by triumphant Reaction of the Right... Today as in the past British Labour must re-affirm its faith in Democracy and Socialism."

The I.L.P., however, welcomed the idea. Agreement in principle on a United Front was reached with the Communist Party before the Easter Conference and a more detailed agreement completed on May 24.

The Easter 1933 Conference of the I.L.P., at Derby, has sometimes been represented as a success for the R.P.C. The present writer believes, on the contrary, that this is a superficial judgement and that the Conference created conditions which not only prevented the R.P.C. from further extending its influence but led to the crisis which paralysed and disrupted it later in the same year.

At Bradford neither Cullen nor Gaster had been elected to the National Administrative Council. Consequently, the Standing Orders Committee at Derby was firmly under the control of the two tendencies which dominated the N.A.C., the traditional Parliamentarians like Jowett and the Centrists, like Maxton and Brockway, who were prepared to play with phrases about "revolution". It based the debates, not on motions arising from branches, but on sections of the N.A.C.'s report and of the Constitution. The result, which without doubt was designed, was to put difficulties in the way of the R.P.C., as that body was to complain afterwards. It could not present a general, consistent, alternative to the documents of the N.A.C. but could only try to amend them on specific points. The documents which finally emerged, therefore, tended to be an eclectic hotch-potch, containing vague formulations which could be and were interpreted differently by different elements in the party.

Brockway, opening the conference from the chair, sounded a note which won him an ovation:

"We pledge our support in the common fight against Fascism. We know that Fascism is the sign of the weakness and not of the strength of Capitalism ... We declare to the workers of Russia that if any conflict develops between the British Government and Russia, our stand will be with them... We see approaching everywhere the final struggle between Capitalism and Socialism..."

The Conference then decided to support the National Unemployed Workers' Movement, which was controlled by the Communist Party, and defeated the opposition of Middleton Murry.

The first important debate arose from the section in the report of the N.A.C. on "The International". This recommended that the I.L.P. leave the Labour and Socialist International, and reported at some length on the "left socialist" parties and groups.

W.N. Warbey then moved the resolution of the London Divisional Council, which the R.P.C. supported, to:

"... instruct the N.A.C. to approach the secretariat of the Communist International with a view to ascertaining in what way the I.L.P. may assist in the work of the International."

He argued that:

"... if the working class were to fight on an international basis they must have some international

organisation and co-operation... The NAC... showed a recognition that these 'left socialist' groups could not attempt to set up an international of their own... No hope was given of trying to set up a Fourth International... there was no hope of co-operating with the Labour & Socialist International on a platform of revolutionary socialism... With the Communists they had no fundamental disagreement on policy. They disagreed on organisational methods... that was why the resolution did not ask them to apply for affiliation... it left the field clear to be worked out in accordance with the practical realities".

Warbey's seconder, a young worker from Merseyside, simply argued that the approach to the Communist International was a logical conclusion from the United Front.

It is, perhaps, not without significance that Maxton and Brockway did not speak in the debate, and that the N.A.C. put up to oppose it John Paton, a supporter of the traditionalist Parliamentarians, who was to retire from the post of secretary of the Party, and from the Party itself, within a few months because he disagreed with co-operation with the Communist Party. He put the pre-disaffiliation position of the I.L.P. in a bitter attack on the Comintern which may have lost him some votes by sounding out of tune with the current mood for unity. Paton argued that the failure of the Comintern had been even more colossal and spectacular than that of the Labour and Socialist International. In Germany the Social-Democratic Party undoubtedly proved at the critical moment to be devoid of leadership and incapable of any revolutionary effort. But the same was true of the German Communist Party, and in an even more definite sense, because its failure was a failure to deal with the situation which it was specifically created to meet. Its failure had been due to wrong policies imposed from the centre. Dictatorship might be all right for Russia but would not do for Britain. The recent instruction from the Comintern to the national parties to seek national agreements with national sections of the L. and S.I. was a continuance of its old rigidity and seeking to detach local units from their central organisations. The I.L.P. had a truer conception of proletarian unity, based on a single, federal, all-embracing International, founded on the acceptance of a revolutionary socialist policy but not based on the dominance of the masses by a small revolutionary party.

Gaster tried to reply to Paton by arguing that the I.L.P. should not blame the Communist International for the "bad methods" of the Communist Party of Great Britain:

"If the C.P.G.B. had been controlled more effectively by the Comintern, it would have been a better and more effective organisation, for they did not carry out the policies laid down for them by the Comintern... (The I.L.P.) were in agreement with the Comintern though not necessarily with the C.P.G.B...."

Campbell Stephen also opposed the Warbey motion. However, it was carried by a small majority. The report gives the voting as 83 to 79, but the R.P.C. later said that the votes had been mis-counted and should be 92 - 82.

Immediately after this debate, the conference decided, apparently without dissent, a motion moved by Joseph Southall to:

"...make renewed efforts (notwithstanding past failures) to bring together all Left-Wing Parties, with a view to common action nationally and internationally."

Thanks to the Standing Orders Committee, the difficult question of what the I.L.P.'s leadership meant when it claimed to be "revolutionary" was discussed under no less than five separate and different agenda items, the voting on two of which produced overwhelming majorities for the Maxton-Brockway tendency, while that on the other three showed the conference to be deeply and fairly evenly divided.

A section in the report of the N.A.C., "The Place of Parliamentary Activities", was moved by Maxton, who had no more to say than that:

"... (the report) did not throw away the Parliamentary weapon - it retained it as one weapon to use in the struggle to revolutionary socialism, but they gave it diminishing importance in the struggle as compared with what had been the general view in Labour Party circles."

The report actually included a mention of "Workers' Councils" among "effective industrial and class organisations for the successful conduct of the class-struggle outside Parliament."

This report was a piece of unfinished business left over from Bradford. The subject had been inconclusively debated since then, and a sub-committee consisting of Maxton, Brockway, Skinner, Paton and Smith, none of whom could be regarded as committed supporters of the R.P.C., though Smith worked with them in London, produced the formulations by which they could hope to hold together politically heterogeneous and divergent tendencies in the Party after Bradford. It was heavily attacked by the traditional Parliamentarians, who also played a large part in opposing the changes which the R.P.C. proposed in the Constitution of the Party.

However, the speech with which Middleton Murry moved the reference back of the report, against Maxton, was not in tune with the sentiments of the time:

"It was most necessary to pay attention to the traditions, customs and political habits of the people with whom they were dealing and through whom they hoped to establish a workers' dictatorship... if there were a threat against parliamentary institutions... made by the reactionary side, they could get a genuine

revolutionary mass movement... The Briton fundamentally was a parliamentary man... Only by supporting Parliament would they have freedom to get the revolutionary organisation of the working-class to implement the use they could make of the Parliamentary weapon..."

The Conference recognised that a vote could not be taken on "The Place of Parliamentary Activities" in isolation from the discussion on the R.P.C.'s draft constitution, which presented Workers' Councils as an alternative to Parliament. Cullen, in moving it, tried to draw the distinction between the democracy permitted by the British Constitution and the "workers' democracy" of the political and trade union rights of the working class:

"Their representatives went to Parliament as a result of the class struggle... they could surrender step by step and tell workers to wait for a General Election... or they could develop the struggle by fighting with the methods of the class struggle. They could not have both."

Dunbar seconded.

"They had got to pull the mass away from capitalist democracy before Fascism developed... They opposed a working-class democracy to capitalist democracy... The day to day struggle was insisted upon in the Bradford constitution and now they had to put it into operation."

An argument then arose about whether every concession won by the working-class is really a blow against capitalism, and whether Workers' Councils were to be constructed here and now or at some higher stage of the class struggle in the future, and the questions of principle involved in a discussion on reform or revolution were obscured. The Constitution remained largely as it had been drafted at Bradford, demonstrating once again that the desire to turn away from the "gradualism" does not itself answer the question: what is a revolutionary policy? It did not, indeed, define the I.L.P. as a "revolutionary" party. The document based itself on a mechanical forecast of catastrophe, such as was in vogue at the time, due to "under-consumption", as the reason for rejecting policies of reformism and class collaboration. Electoral activity for the capture of all the organs of Government was essential, but was only one aspect of the general struggle. The minds of the workers must be prepared for attempts by capitalism, particularly in circumstances of a complete economic breakdown, to resort to some form of dictatorship, and to overcome it by the use of their mass strength.

So far the constitution gave something to everyone, and everyone could read into it the justification for going on doing whatever they regarded as correct. It did not mention Workers' Councils, let alone the violent seizure of power, the dictatorship of the proletariat or the construction of workers' states. The constitution as a whole was accepted by 119 votes to 37. We do not know who made up the minority. The majority, however, rallied to the N.A.C.

and baffled the efforts of the R.P.C. to pin down the leadership to formulations which (even if incorrect) were not ambiguous.

But this was not good enough for the traditional Parliamentarians such as Murry, Skinner, Paton, Southall or Jowett, who wanted no playing about with revolutionary phrases which would bring the I.L.P. closer to the Communist Party. The first three soon left the I.L.P. The aged Jowett remained, with his electoral basis in Bradford, while Southall, the Quaker artist from Birmingham, had nowhere else to go.

The Conference agreed on immediate, united action with the Communist Party to resist war, fascism, a break with Russia and capitalist attacks. The important point here was that joint councils were being formed in the localities, giving the Communist Party contact with the rank and file of the I.L.P. The I.L.P. made its points, that both parties must try to win the co-operation of the trade union, co-operative and Labour Movements, and not to act in a way to limit united action. It warned that strikes should not be advocated except when there was a prospect of success and that the agitational method of demonstrations should not be carried to the extent that familiarity with them destroyed their effect or exposed demonstrators needlessly to police attack.

However, the N.A.C. also conceded that it would support unofficial strikes, would appear on the same platform as the Communist Party, while it remained quite unable to criticise in theoretical terms the concept of "social-fascism" which underlay the whole thinking of the Communist Party in the "Third Period".

To many of the rank and file of the I.L.P., who found themselves isolated from the mass-organisations of the working-class, the turn to the Communist Party seemed at first to offer a break-out into a new world of activity as well as a political advance on reformism, which brought them episodically into conflict with the official leaders of the Labour Party and the Trade Unions and, sometimes, with the police.

However, the turn to the United Front had a great advantage in the short run for Maxton and Brockway. They could go on using the same general, reformist-pacifist-utopian language as in the past, spiced now with phrases about "revolutionary socialism". Their authenticity was guaranteed by the Communist Party, which obviously could not have formed a United Front with them if it had really believed that they were "social-fascists".

Meanwhile the local United Front Committees might incidentally give an impression of activity (and, as the N.A.C. was to complain, divert the efforts of members from the "real" aims of the I.L.P., whatever those may have been), but they served to isolate those who took part in them from the mass organisations and to undermine the branches of the I.L.P.

Trotsky was to write, in August 1933 (in "Whither the I.L.P.?", "Writings: 1933 - 34", p. 56):

"In the field of ready-made formulas, the bureaucracy of the British Communist Party is immeasurably better equipped. Precisely in

this lies its present advantage over the leadership of the I.L.P. And, it must be said openly: this superficial, purely formal advantage may, under the present circumstances, lead to the liquidation of the I.L.P. without any gain accruing to the Communist Party and to the revolution. The objective conditions have more than once pushed tens and even hundreds of thousands of workers towards the British section of the Comintern, but the leadership of the Comintern is only capable of disillusioning them and throwing them back. If the I.L.P. as a whole should enter the ranks of the Communist Party today, within the next couple of months one-third of the new members would return to the Labour Party; one-third would be expelled for 'conciliatory attitudes towards Trotskyism' and for similar crimes; finally, the remaining third, disillusioned in all its expectations, would fall into indifferentism..."

In the end, the draft on "The Place of Parliamentary Activities" was carried without dissent. The conference report does not indicate whether there was any opposition to the proposals of the N.A.C. for co-operation with the Communist Party. But there were deep disagreements in the conference revealed by the almost equal votes for and against various sections of the constitution, which finally neither declared for pure and simple Parliamentarism nor so much as mentioned Workers' Councils, let alone the violent seizure of power, the dictatorship of the proletariat or the construction of workers' states.

In the new N.A.C. the control of the Party remained securely in the hands of the supporters of Maxton and Brockway and of the traditional Parliamentarians, who, none the less, were to find, after a few months of the Party's co-operation with the Communist Party, that the spirit which this co-operation expressed made the Party no place for them. Only Gaster, representing the London Division, could speak for the R.P.C. on the N.A.C.

In the short run, then, the Conference ended in a sweeping victory for Maxton, McGovern and Brockway. Not only had they retained control of the apparatus and dictated the terms of the constitution. They had also appropriated the banner of "unity" from the R.P.C. Even while at first sight the decision to approach the Comintern might seem a victory for the R.P.C., it was set within the framework of the "All-embracing International" of which Brockway's international contacts were to be the harbinger. It is true that in the long run the I.L.P. could not hold together as it was, but while in the long run the N.A.C.'s acceptance of co-operation with the Communist Party proved to promote the decomposition of the party, in the short run it could appear to have made irrelevant the talk of the R.P.C. about forming one party.

The outcome of the Easter 1933 Conference of the I.L.P. posed, therefore, the question:

For what purpose did the R.P.C. continue to exist?

"No. 6 Division R.P.C. Monthly Bulletin No. 9, May 1933", dated April 29, euphorically re-stated Cullen's perspective:

"The first place in our work was to bring about disaffiliation and to work for the United Front...

To prepare the I.L.P. psychologically and organisationally to play its part in the establishment of a United Communist Party, it is essential that there should be no individual tearing-up of cards, but that the efforts of all our members should be directed to building up support for this objective within the I.L.P. We welcome the fact that the Communist Party has changed very considerably in recent months, even prior to its receipt of the C.I. directive on the United Front. However, there are still faults and mistakes in the application of the C.P. line which call for our criticism and which in our United Front activities we can help to remedy... It is essential that the whole structure of the I.L.P. machinery shall be completely altered to enable it to fulfill its new function..."

About the same time Gaster circulated a memorandum entitled "Party Policy" to his fellow-members of the N.A.C. In a conversation with the writer many years later, C.A. Smith defined Gaster's method as "deductive", and this document suggests that he hoped to disperse the confusion left (and created) by the Easter 1933 Conference by sheer intellectual effort, and, as a loyal member of the I.L.P., to win over such figures as Maxton, McGovern and Brockway to the idea of Workers' Councils as the instrument of the working class for the capture of power. The writer believes that this was a lost endeavour, and that Gaster was looking backwards in time to a field where the battle had already been lost.

"The present position of the I.L.P. is expressed not only in the internal confusion, but, as a result of that confusion, in its extraordinary failure to attract any substantial support or even interest among the organised working-class movement or among organised workers... a definite inability on the part of the I.L.P. membership to express itself with one voice on matters of fundamental principle... the instruments of ruling-class authority must be smashed as a preliminary to laying the foundations of the Socialist organisation of the community, and those means of authority cannot be used as the means for laying those foundations..."

Gaster admitted that the Communist Party had failed through its lack of understanding of working-class psychology; it had not approached in a realistic manner the question of fighting the reformist leadership; it had a wrong conception of the place of street-fighting, etc.; it has a completely unrealistic view as to

the revolutionary content of the working class today. But, in Gaster's opinion, none of the other objections which were raised against unity between the I.L.P. and the C.P. (for instance, that the I.L.P. had nothing to gain from it) were sound. United Front activities were, therefore, to be encouraged.

By the summer of 1933 the hopes which the N.A.C. and the R.P.C. alike had entertained at disaffiliation were being falsified. The I.L.P. was not growing. Its influence was declining, while that of the Communist Party seemed to be rising somewhat. The I.L.P. attracted few recruits, either from newcomers to politics or from the Labour or Communist Parties, and many of its branches were crumbling. The working-class was once again turning to the Labour Party, as the results of Parliamentary by-elections showed. The I.L.P. could defeat Labour candidates only in exceptional contests. By 1934 even such a prominent figure as Brockway could take only a handful of votes against a Labour candidate, and the candidatures of the I.L.P., like those of the Communist Party, were coming to be regarded as disruptive.

The phrases in the constitution of the I.L.P. did not serve as guides to the members in their activity. They could only hold together groups of propagandists who were either not going to take part in the class struggle or were going to do so according to their own lights. But the essence of the change which the members of the I.L.P. wanted to make at Bradford and then at Derby was that the I.L.P. was no longer to be a Parliamentary Party or a party of propagandists and free-lances. Consequently, the United Front, in the short run, came as a god-send to the N.A.C., because it seemed at first to provide a justification for the very existence of the party.

However the experiences of the members with the "United Front" and the impressions which they received from the exchanges between the NAC and the Communist International tended to widen the differences between them and the C.I. rather than to raise the confidence of the would-be revolutionaries in the C.P.

At first the I.L.P. branches in many areas entered enthusiastically into "United Front" activities. Their experience, however did not bring the parties closer together, as the R.P.C. had hoped. The joint committees did not provide closer contact with the working-class, from which they were isolated. The impact of the C.P., with its relatively large resources, professional staff and daily newspaper tended to disorganise I.L.P. branches and to give rise to accusations that it was poaching I.L.P. members. The N.A.C. was soon to warn branches against being diverted from the "real aims" of the I.L.P. - whatever those might be.

Some of the I.L.P.'s members simply dropped out, either going to the Labour Party or leaving politics. Branches collapsed.

The Parliamentarian Right Wing went in to the attack to try to break the centre from the R.P.C. McGovern and Wallhead opposed the decision of the N.A.C. on April 14 to continue and develop the United Front agreement with the Communist Party and Wallhead then left the I.L.P. Allen Skinner wrote in "New Leader", May 5,

under the headline: "Is the R.P.C. a Danger?", that the decision of the London Divisional Conference in favour of the approach to the Comintern had been imposed on the Conference and pre-arranged by an unofficial meeting of the R.P.C.

In August 1933 Paton, who had been General Secretary of the I.L.P. since 1926, resigned because he opposed the "United Front". Objections to it came also from South Wales and the North-East and the leaders of the Lancashire Division, J.T. Abbott and Elijah Sandham recommended to the branches there that they cease "United Front" activity.

This explicitly reformist wing in Lancashire remained in the Party, however, until the national conference of Easter 1934 at York. The N.A.C. even then did not recommend its expulsion, but merely proposed that the Conference:

"...strongly deprecates the action of members, branches and divisions contravening Annual Conference decisions, and, in particular, opposition to the United Front, and calls on the N.A.C. in future to take all possible action to secure loyalty to Annual Conference decisions..."

Middleton Murry put to the conference a motion from the Manchester Branch stating that the present policy of the I.L.P. was not revolutionary, and that a "real revolutionary policy" was that of a constitutional approach to Socialism. He regretted the tendency to discipline Lancashire because they were constitutionalists. The recommendation of the N.A.C. was carried by 135 votes to 31. However, 59 votes were cast for the reference back of this recommendation, on the ground that it was not strong enough, and the voting against the reference back was only 97. Gaster's motion that Sandham's name be removed from the panel of endorsed Parliamentary candidates was carried, but only by 88 to 71.

During the summer of 1934 the old Lancashire leadership led a group out of the I.L.P. to form the Independent Socialist Party, with which Middleton Murry toyed briefly. The policy statements of this group, some of the founders of which had been resolute opponents of the proposal in 1921 that the I.L.P. join the Communist International, are quaintly reminiscent of the early days of the I.L.P. and of the Bruce Glasiers, but its traditions were to influence the Labour Movement in the Manchester area for many years.

Maxton and Brockway did not like having to break with these old friends but they had no alternative to doing so if they wished to retain their own positions in control of the apparatus of the I.L.P. It could survive only as long as they could hold together the politically disparate elements of it, the radical anti-militarists who had no idea of regarding themselves as Marxists or revolutionists, who often, indeed, rejected the class struggle and believed themselves guided by Methodist morality, together with those who wanted to know how the working-class was to move forward from the day to day struggle to taking and holding state power. If Maxton and Brockway had not broken with Sandham, the writer believes, the I.L.P. may well have fallen apart in 1933 instead of in 1946. This conflict further reduced the numbers of

the I.L.P. In Merseyside it had the effect that the handful of workers who stayed with the I.L.P. constituted almost the only provincial and proletarian basis for the R.P.C., which they regarded as the consistent opponents of the deserters Abbott and Sandham. Elsewhere, however, the R.P.C. had to take the blame, as "London intellectuals" and "agents of the Communist Party" for the disastrous consequences to the I.L.P. of the "United Front". Among the remaining membership the NAC was relatively strengthened.

Maxton and McGovern had their seats in Parliament and Brockway, a professional journalist and a man of wider intellectual interests and culture, had his own methods of keeping politically and financially afloat. But the leaders of the R.P.C. could do nothing to maintain their influence. They had staked everything on their forecast that a thriving I.L.P. would exert the pressure which they desired on a Communist Party which would be relatively isolated and stagnant.

While the United Front was disappointing the R.P.C., not only by not producing the expected influx of workers, but by being offered as a substitute for their aim of uniting the I.L.P. with the Communist Party, the correspondence between the I.L.P. and the Comintern likewise was not getting anywhere, and the enthusiasm of Brockway for the "Left Socialist" Parties was becoming more credible as dissident fragments of both the Labour and Socialist International and the Comintern gathered round. By this time there may have been some weariness and disappointment among the leaders of the I.L.P. and it is more probable that there were agents of the Communist Party trying to work among them. But the question of the "bad methods" of the Communist International would not lie down. The R.P.C. could not quietly accept the Communist Party's explanations that there had been no defeat, that the K.P.D. was stronger than ever, that Hitler's regime was on the verge of collapse and that, if there had been a defeat, it was all the fault of the Social-Democrats. The disaster was still too close. The exiles were arriving and telling what they had seen.

To be sure, Adler, one of the intellectual leaders of the Labour and Socialist International had written that:

"... the slogan is heard that the general staff (of the German Social-Democratic Party), which lost the battle, should be court-martialled. Talk like this is of little purpose".

Dutt commented:

"On this basis is erected a whole system of double book-keeping to cover the debacle in Germany."

In a dangerous manoeuvre, because he needed as much as Adler to ensure that bygones would be bygones, Dutt was not slow to turn to the advantage of the Communist International the reluctance of the Social-Democracy to investigate what went wrong. This amnesty enabled the Communist Party for many years to bury old memories of "Social-Fascism", the "Red Referendum" and the "Third Period" generally, freeing it from the burden of its history to develop new

lines of attack on Social-Democracy for opposing the Popular Front without having its own record thrown up in its face.

It is true that at the same time Brockway continued to flirt with the Comintern, giving "conditional" support to the "Anti-Fascist Conference" at the Salle Pleyel in Paris on June 4 - 5. The purpose of this "conference" was to suppress discussion of the causes of Hitler's victory under cover of attacks on the Social-Democrats, and to silence the Left Opposition. Like its predecessor, the Amsterdam "Anti-War Congress" of autumn 1932, it was stage-managed to highlight isolated individuals from intellectual bourgeois circles. All that Brockway asked was that:

"... the independent socialist parties were officially invited and were represented on the committees responsible for organisation, agenda, etc..."

At the same time, new international influences were beginning to be exerted on the I.L.P. and especially on the R.P.C. in the London area. These took the form of rather more developed criticisms of the policies of the Communist International.

In May 1933 the Trotskyists, the British Section of the International Left Opposition, began to publish the "Red Flag", which, with the leaflets of the group, began to draw on the history of the Soviet Union and of the Communist International since the rise of Stalin, to attack the idea of taking the I.L.P. into the Communist International. The Trotskyists argued that the K.P.D. had been compelled, on the instructions of the Kremlin, to pose the question of "working-class unity" in such a way in Germany as to ensure that the German working-class remained divided and passive before the Nazi threat. They analysed the policies of the Kremlin as the expression of the conception that Socialism could be constructed in Soviet Russia alone. They explained that this conception served the interests of the Soviet bureaucracy, and that, on the same social basis as it had developed the right-ist policies of 1925 - 27, the bureaucracy was utilising the Comintern, under the cover of revolutionary phraseology, in the "Third Period" since 1928, as a defence against what it regarded as the imminent danger of intervention by the victorious Versailles powers and the Labour and Socialist International by a rapprochement between the Kremlin and the anti-Versailles elements in German nationalism. In the application of this policy within the workers' movement, Stalin's saying that "Fascism and Social-Democracy are not antipodes but twins" found practical expression.

Campbell observed, at a "Labour Monthly" Conference in the East End of London on August 13, 1933, that the difference between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party were now:

"... not in the historical objections nor in the last few months' differences, but in a new series of differences, not rooted in the rank and file experience of the I.L.P. but in the Trotskyist sewer!"

The German component of the "Left Socialist Parties", the

Socialistische Arbeiter Partie, also began to exert an influence on the R.P.C. This party, which before Hitler had claimed 14,000 members, was formed from a split in the Social-Democratic Party in autumn 1931. Those who led the split were driven out and the leadership was taken over by German representatives of the "Communist Opposition", the international tendency of Bukharin, Brandler, Thalheimer and Lovestone, otherwise known as the "Brandler-ites" or the "Right Opposition". This tendency was formed at a Conference in Berlin in March 1930 after Bukharin's supporters had been repressed and driven from their posts in Russia in 1929.

It concentrated its criticism on the "bad methods" of the Comintern in the "Third Period", and attacked such practices as calling Social-Democrats "social-fascists" and as "the united front only from below". However, it supported the policies of the Communist International when they turned away from ultra-left to the right. In 1934 it applied to be admitted to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern on the basis of "joint struggle against Fascist dictatorship, reformism, centrism and Trotskyism" - only to be rebuffed. In 1936 the S.A.P. declared for the Popular Front and fell apart. In 1933, therefore, the S.A.P. could hope that the I.L.P. would ultimately unite with the Communist International, but only on such terms as the "Left Socialists" would dictate. It therefore encouraged the R.P.C. not to press for immediate affiliation of the I.L.P. to the C.I. - in any case an increasingly remote prospect. At the same time its line of argument served to obstruct discussion of the origin and social content of the creators in the Kremlin of the ultra-left course, and to conceal how in the preceding right wing period of 1925-27 the underlying ideas of Bukharin had taken the Kremlin into disastrous alliances with the General Council of the British T.U.C. and with the Chinese Kuomintang. It therefore played the role of a defence of Stalinism against Trotskyism in the I.L.P. and in the R.P.C.

It is clear even from the fragmentary data so far recovered that in the summer of 1933 the R.P.C. entered a period of crisis which soon paralysed it by internal dissensions and led to desertions and to a split. The problem which faced the leaders of the R.P.C. was where to go next. Not only would applying to join the Communist Party as individuals have been to admit a humiliating defeat, but even if they had wished to do so they could not have taken their followers with them.

Lovestone's paper, "Labour Age", was being sold around its periphery in competition with "Red Flag" and the New York "Militant". Wicks has told the writer that at this time he used to be invited to meetings of supporters of the R.P.C. in London, and that J.R. Campbell also used to be there, though he did not seem to grasp the problems which pre-occupied the R.P.C.

They had admitted Dutt's claim that the Communist Party could change its "bad methods"; they had allowed the inference to be drawn that the change on the question of the united front in Spring 1933 had been due not to opportunism but to learning the lessons of experience. Dutt had also trained them to regard any criticism of what was going on in Soviet Russia - the bureaucratic mismanagement of the First Five Year Plan and the forced collectivisation

are today generally admitted - as an impermissible concession to counter-revolution. The leaders of the R.P.C. could not, therefore, feel sympathy with the Trotskyists, who were explaining what was happening in Russia, not as the outcome of Socialism, but as a result of the mismanagement and self-interest of the bureaucracy which endangered the gains of the October Revolution (see, for example, Trotsky's pamphlet, "Soviet Economy in Danger").

It seems reasonable to suppose, however, that the most powerful influences to disorganise the R.P.C. must have been the falsification of the whole general perspective which it had been taught by Dutt in 1932. After all, the economic decline was not irreversible. There was a marked revival of employment in London, the South-East and the Midlands. Nor had the defeat in 1931 permanently discredited the Labour Party. The masses had not turned from reformism to revolutionary leaderships. When Labour won control of the London County Council in February 1934, avenging in a certain sense, as Groves pointed out in "Red Flag" the defeats of the workers in Berlin and Vienna, the sneer of the "New Leader", "Pink London" only showed an insensitivity, which it shared with the Communist Party.

The R.P.C. could not but feel its isolation, and be drawn in the wake of the N.A.C.

At the end of August 1933 the International Communist League took part in the Paris Conference of the Left Socialist Parties and, together with the S.A.P. and the two Dutch Left Parties, produced the "Declaration of Four", for new parties and a new International. Several militants who had been actively associated with the R.P.C. broke from it and announced themselves as partisans of Trotsky. They included Hilda Lane, an old pre-disaffiliation cadre of the I.L.P., Joe Pawsey, John Robinson and Bill Duncan, all of whom were later to play leading roles in the Marxist Group in the I.L.P. and later in the work of Trotskyists in the Labour Party.

Thalheimer, writing in "New Leader", November 3, 1933 asked: "Can the Comintern be Reformed?". Polemicising against the Trotskyists' call for work towards a new International, he replied:

"The I.L.P. can reform the Communist International by establishing its Communist character."

But the correspondence between the I.L.P. and the Comintern dragged on. The Comintern badly needed some success after its series of defeats culminating in the victory of Hitler early in 1933, but it had no concession to offer, since its basic policy excluded the I.L.P.'s idea of using the "Left Socialist" Parties as a bridge to the mass reformist parties of the Labour and Socialist International and since the Kremlin could not admit the possibility of its "Communist character", that is, its policies, being "established" by the I.L.P.!

To Paton's first letter, the Comintern replied some five weeks later:

"If... the I.L.P. supposes that the deep divergence of principle between the Second International and the Communist International could be covered up by unprincipled rapprochement and conciliation, we openly announce that this would be a most harmful delusion... If the members of the I.L.P. are really developing in the direction of adopting our programme, then possibilities exist in Britain for the formation of a single, strong, mass Communist Party..."

The N.A.C. answered that:

"... the present disastrous position of the international working class movement is due to the failure of the policies of both the Labour and Socialist International and the Communist International... We propose to call a World Congress of all organisations which are prepared to co-operate on a revolutionary Socialist basis. We shall be inviting the Communist Parties together with other sections of the working-class ..."

The Comintern showed no interest in this suggestion that it should sit down in conference with the "Left Socialists" to hear what the Trotskyists had to say to its spokesmen! Two months later, however, it made a final, desperate effort to win the I.L.P. by its proposal of September 17 that the I.L.P. should join the Comintern as "a sympathising party", with a right to a consultative vote, which, its letter added, "has been advanced by some members of the I.L.P." In a later letter, the Comintern undertook that it would:

"... not interfere on questions pertaining to the internal organisation of the I.L.P. You will, of course, choose and select your own officials and leading organs, run your own publications... The only demand the Comintern will make of your party and your policy is that your activity and that of your officials should be in line with the policy of the Communist International... It will have no right, after final decisions have been taken, on any question, by the highest authoritative body of the world Communist movement (Congress, E.C.C.I., etc.) to operate policy contrary to accepted policy."

But the policies of the Communist International were precisely what was in question. Early in 1934 the Communist International appears to have set to work a new faction in the I.L.P. under its direct control. At the Annual Conference of Easter 1934 at York, this faction proposed immediate "sympathetic affiliation", and was defeated by 126 votes to 34. The R.P.C. proposed sending a delegation to Moscow for discussions "on the spot", and was also defeated, but only by 98 votes to 51.

The editorial in "New Leader" (April 6, 1934) commented:

"A year ago the Conference instructed the National

Committee to ask the Communist International how the I.L.P. could co-operate. The Communist International suggested sympathetic affiliation. This year's Annual Conference has maintained its offer of co-operation, but has declined the method suggested by the C.I."

The same issue reports the receipt of a cable from Kuusinen in Moscow demanding that, as a condition of acceptance into the Comintern, the leadership of the I.L.P. be changed.

The York Conference resolved to continue the association with the "Left Socialist Parties, with a view, not to the formation of a new International, but of working to establish one inclusive revolutionary body. A motion declaring for the Fourth International received only 20 votes, but another expressly condemning the idea was heavily defeated. It accepted the recommendation of the N.A.C. that the national co-operation of the I.L.P. with the Communist Party should be based on specific objects as jointly agreed from time to time, and every section of the Party would be expected to carry out such a minimum co-operation.

At the end of 1933 Dutt was already criticising the R.P.C. for not effectively influencing the I.L.P.'s attitude in the negotiations. In February 1934, a writer in "Labour Monthly" complained:

"The active organised forces of the Left (the R.P.C.) were against its immediate formation (of a united Communist Party) consequently there has been little propaganda in its favour and consequently weak support... It is obvious that the Right Wing were taking the offensive and that it necessitated a counter-offensive from the Left, but the National R.P.C. failed to function (owing, I believe, to unfortunate internal difficulties) practically leaving the field to the Right".

The N.A.C. appears to have disposed of the "Communist Affiliation Committee" without difficulty. The R.P.C., however, appears to have been revived during the summer of 1934, and to have come more under the direct influence of the Communist Party. The tendency which Harber described as "Right Oppositionist" (see Document 2 in this Appendix) became direct defenders of Stalinism against the attacks by the Trotskyists described in Chapter IV.

One of the leaders of the new faction, the "Communist Affiliation Committee" (Eric Whalley), wrote in "Labour Monthly" for May 1934 that Cullen had "very ably" moved to amend the motion of the N.A.C., but:

"The essential weakness of the (R.P.C.'s) case lay, however, in the fact that they themselves could not make an adequate criticism of the N.A.C., because their line of sending a delegation, their opposition to sympathetic affiliation immediately, was a

concession to the N.A.C.... Previous to the conference there was division in the revolutionary wing of the I.L.P. The R.P.C., partly paralysed by its own internal dissensions and confusion, was far from being the force in the party that it had been at Blackpool, Bradford and Derby."

The York Conference strengthened the hold of the N.A.C. on the national organisation of the numerically reduced I.L.P. The leadership had lost many who supported it in 1932, but in the provinces it retained an age-ing pacifist tendency, as well as those would-be revolutionaries, by no means all sympathetic to Trotskyism, who, for various reasons, rested their hopes in a struggle to reform the I.L.P. rather than in joining the Communist Party as individuals. What remained of the R.P.C. was more influential in London than elsewhere, though it retained the confidence of a few workers in Merseyside, and moved during summer 1934 into closer sympathy with the Communist Party.

An important element in the background of the remaining eighteen months during which the R.P.C. remained in the I.L.P. was the development in Soviet foreign policy. Almost immediately after Hitler came to power, the Kremlin began to sound the possibilities of a new relationship with France and the "Succession" states in Central and Eastern Europe with a view to maintaining the status quo and resisting the "revisionist" aggression of The Third Reich. In an interview with the sympathetic American journalist, Walter Duranty, Stalin floated the idea, in November 1933, that the Soviet Union might be more favourable to the League of Nations:

"The League may become a certain factor in retarding the outbreak of hostilities or in preventing them altogether. If that is so, then we shall not be against the League... despite its colossal shortcomings..."

Hesitant and exploratory as these suggestions were in 1933, the "turn" into which they were to develop in 1934, in the closer relations of the French Communist Party, first with the S.F.I.O. and, later in the year, with the Radical-Socialists were taking the "anti-war" activities of the Communist Parties in directions where the great majority of the I.L.P. could not follow. Only the R.P.C. chose to follow the Communist Party, with the inevitable result that, sooner or later, it could no longer maintain the position that it was a loyal minority seeking to change the policy of the I.L.P. The great majority of its supporters left the I.L.P. in November 1935 and some then joined the Communist Party.

From autumn 1933 onwards, also, the Communist Party was able to take advantage of the passivity of the opposition of the Labour Party to the "National" Government's proposals for administering unemployment benefit to mobilise a Hunger March and a "Unity" Congress at Bermondsey Town Hall, followed by a demonstration in Hyde Park and local meetings on February 25. Aneurin Bevan and Dorothy Woodman broke the "ban" of the Labour Party leadership and spoke alongside leading members of the Communist Party and of the I.L.P., who included Maxton, Brockway, Cullen, Gaster and two future supporters of the Trotskyists, Sid Kemp

and Karl Westwood.

The general activity of which the unemployed movement formed part, and which, some eleven months later, rose to such a height that the Government was obliged to withdraw the first proposals of the Unemployment Assistance Board, could be claimed by the Communist Party as a success for their propaganda for the "united front". This success attracted some support to the I.L.P. as well as to the Communist Party.

While these developments provided the grounds for new differences between the majority of the I.L.P. and the Communist Party, they drew the R.P.C. into its train. The political basis of the "Right Opposition-ists" came to seem to be less justified now that the Communist Party could claim that its "methods" were now being successful. While the leaders of the R.P.C., especially Gaster, did not obediently tail behind the Communist Party, sometimes adhering to old policies which the Communist Party had allowed to drop and sometimes appearing slow to grasp its new policies, the C.P. could now move new forces into the R.P.C. and control it more closely. Its secretary, for example, was now Hilda Vernon, a long-standing member of the I.L.P. whom Pollitt had won over in the joint anti-war activities against the Hendon Air Displays, and who worked full-time in the office of the National Unemployed Workers' Movement.

Now that the Trotskyists were working much more actively in the I.L.P. in London, the Communist Party had a pressing reason for strengthening its foothold there, and used the R.P.C. to do so. At the London Divisional Conference in summer 1934, the R.P.C. increased its representation in the London Divisional Council, which they were to run for the next year in an increasingly unstable alliance with the full-time organiser, John Aplin, who was in general a supporter of Brockway. When the next Divisional Conference met, in February 1935, there appear to have been fifteen branches, a quarter of the total in the country, in and around London, and three tendencies clearly defined in them. The Conference was dominated by the alliance of the R.P.C. and the supporters of the N.A.C. against the Trotskyists. It supported a motion drafted by the Divisional Council in favour of continued association with the "Left Socialist" Groups while exploring the possibility of co-operation with the Communist International. It voted down the Fourth International. It also voted down in principle the support of Labour candidates in the coming General Election. However, it carried a motion from the Divisional Council, in favour of the introduction of disciplinary machinery, which could be used equally against the R.P.C. and the Marxist Group, and rejected by only four votes a motion by Jon Kimche to bar members of "unofficial groups" from holding offices in the Party.

The position of the R.P.C. was beginning to become untenable by the time of the Easter 1935 Conference, and its deepening differences with the pacifists and the Trotskyists alike in the I.L.P. were revealed in the article by Gaster, quoted in the text of Chapter Four, which "New Leader" rejected and which "R.P.C. Bulletin No. 18" published in April 1935.

A short time later, Dutt made a final appeal, in a pamphlet, "For a United Communist Party", in which he quoted from the same R.P.C. Bulletin:

"We cannot allow the I.L.P. to be drawn into becoming a predominantly anti-Communist 'anti-Soviet Union' organisation, under the disguise of the 'honest Socialist' having to answer the honest doubts of the workers..."

He offered the Communist International as:

"... the historic outcome of the whole development of the world revolutionary movement directly growing out of the revolutionary wing of the old Second International... the call is not to the founding of some new local temporary fragment on the basis of a quicksand of confusion by the first little group of reformist leaders that has just 'discovered' the necessity of a 'revolutionary' policy..."

It may be doubted whether this pamphlet won anyone over from the I.L.P. at the time, though there seems a likelihood that it may have diverted a few people to the Communist Party who might otherwise have joined the I.L.P.

The R.P.C. was thrown into some confusion in the conflict in the I.L.P. in summer 1935 about the Party's attitude towards the Italian aggression on Abyssinia, because it had to face the argument that the Communist Party's call for "sanctions" to be applied by the Great Powers operating in concert through the League of Nations could result in a war against Italy in which Britain would be defending her imperialist interests with the support of workers mobilised under the banner of "defend an oppressed country". In the internal discussion Gaster for a time resisted the Communist Party's position, (in R.P.C. Bulletin No. 22), but in October 1935 the R.P.C. withdrew its forces from the I.L.P. For details, see Chapter Five of this study.

Chapter Four

Document No. 2.

The present position in the I.L.P. and how we should re-act to it.

by D.D. Harber

Up till now we have paid most attention to work in connection with the Easter Conference of the Party and without knowing the outcome of this Conference it has not been possible to draw up detailed plans of work for the subsequent period. It is the object of the present draft to help to remedy this deficiency by sketching the present position in the I.L.P. and indicating the possibilities of work that it opens up for us.

A. The present position in the I.L.P.

The result of the York Conference has been a triumph for the supporters of a 2½ International. The reformist wing of the party has proved stronger than had been expected by some of us (witness the rejection of preparation for illegal work and the support of the parliamentary candidature of Sandham). This in fact confirms the analysis of the present trend of Centrism towards the right given by Comrade Trotsky.

Bureaucratic centrism appears to have definitely lost the day in the I.L.P. A directly Stalinist resolution received only 34 votes as against 126 and the Right Opposition resolution of conditional affiliation to the Communist International 51 votes against 98. That direct support for the Fourth International is as yet small is shown by the 20 votes cast for it and the 137 against. That many I.L.Pers have a Fourth International at the back of their minds is shown by the rejection of a resolution expressly condemning the formation of a Fourth International by 107 votes to 64. It must also be remembered that the 20 votes for the Fourth International are largely the expression of a spontaneous movement, while the Stalinists and the Right Oppositionists had months of work behind them.

It seems that we must revise our views as to the vanishing of the I.L.P. from the political field in a few months in the event of no positive policy being adopted. How many members the I.L.P. has at the present moment is uncertain - Brockway's estimate of 15,000 to 18,000 seems much exaggerated, while the figure of 4,000 given by L.T. in his last article on the I.L.P. seems too low. What is certain, however, is that there has been a considerable increase in membership during the past few months, and that this increase is still continuing. This is clear, not only from the statements of the leaders but also from the direct experience which we have of branches in the London area. Almost every branch appears to have experienced the influx of new members. How far this influx is due to general causes and how far it is caused by the Hunger March Campaign is not clear, but even admitting that it is caused mainly by the latter, it means that there is still some future for the I.L.P. even in its present condition of hopeless confusion,

since there is nothing to stop similar campaigns being held in the future with similar results.

The type of new member also seems to be a good one. An example of this can be seen from the Holborn and Finsbury Branch. During the discussion of the resolutions on international relations on the agenda of the Easter Conference, a comrade who had only that evening joined the Party declared that he had joined because he considered that the Hunger March had shown that the I.L.P. was pursuing a revolutionary policy, and because experience had taught him the uselessness of the C.P. This comrade voted for the Fourth International. Experience has shown that comrades of this type can be very quickly won over to the position of Bolshevik-Leninism. This, incidentally, also shows what a large increase in membership could be obtained if the I.L.P. really was pursuing a clear-cut revolutionary line.

B. Our Future Work in the I.L.P.

The above facts show that it would be a mistake to lose heart at the small number of votes cast for the Fourth International at York, and at the trend to the right. A field for our work still exists in the I.L.P. We must aim at winning the I.L.P. for the Fourth International and for the principles of Bolshevik-Leninism at the next Annual Conference. Should we grow sufficiently rapidly during the next few months we must press for the calling of an extra-ordinary conference. In any case, we must recognise that, so far as can be seen at present, the I.L.P. has still got some months of life before it, even as it is at present.

The near future should see a Stalinist offensive, with the object of splitting the I.L.P. now that winning it en bloc has failed. Since, however, the Stalinists have shown themselves to be so weak inside the I.L.P., and since the Right Oppositionists can have no desire to help them in splitting the party, it is probable that the centrist leadership, supported by the right wing, will be able to support this attack. We should in the future consider our main enemy to be not so much the Stalinists, but the hopeless centrists and right-wingers who form the present leadership of the party. While there was still a chance of the Stalinists or Right Oppositionists getting control, we had to direct our main attack against them, and avoid criticising the leadership too strongly. Under the existing circumstances, however, we must now turn our attack upon the supporters of a 2½ International. At the same time we should assist them in getting rid of the Stalinists from the party (numerous expulsions of C.P. fraction workers may be expected in the near future).

We should also carry on the attack against the Right Opposition. Much support for Conditional Affiliation to the C.I. came from comrades who did not believe that the C.I. would carry out the conditions laid down, but would expose itself by not doing so. Many of the comrades who took this line could have been won to our side months ago, had our work been properly organised in the I.L.P. In the absence of this, they went over to conditional affiliation. We must now show them that the C.I. has sufficiently exposed itself by its attitude towards the I.L.P. and win them to the Fourth International. We must also pay special attention to

work amongst new members. In many cases these form very promising material, and are much easier to win over than those who have been in the party for a long time and have become accustomed to taking a centrist position on everything. Comrades should make efforts to get into friendly relations with new members as soon as they join. This will contrast favourably with the more reserved attitude which older members of the party generally adopt in such cases. It must be remembered that in some branches the majority of the members have joined within recent months.

We must not devote all our efforts purely to work for the Fourth International. If the I.L.P. as a whole is going to declare for a Fourth International it will not do so for some months yet. Meanwhile we can save time by getting the party to accept some of the basic principles of Bolshevik-Leninism. We must work out policies for trade unions, work for united front tactics, etc and get branches of the I.L.P. to support them and urge them upon the leadership. Thus if we subsequently succeed in winning the party to the Fourth International we shall have less educational work to do afterwards.

Turning briefly to organisational questions, it would seem that we would now not unduly endanger our position by coming out openly as the Fourth International Committee of the I.L.P. As such we should issue a bulletin for circulation inside the party like the R.P.C. does. Otherwise we will find it difficult to get over our propaganda.

C. Work amongst members of our own fraction.

It must be remembered that we cannot guarantee winning the I.L.P. as a party to our position. It may be that under certain circumstances we may be forced to split, taking with us out of the I.L.P. as many comrades as we can. With this possibility in mind it is especially important to make all members of the fraction real Bolshevik-Leninists, so that, in the event of a split becoming necessary, comrades shall not let themselves be influenced by considerations of sentiment etc. but should resolutely adopt the correct revolutionary line. Hence group discussion on the principles of Bolshevik-Leninism is absolutely essential and should start at once, especially in groups containing new members. Each group should immediately go through the 11 points (they should be duplicated for this purpose) and the Group leaders should report to the Committee on the result. It is essential that comrades (especially new comrades) should read not only the writings of L.T. on current problems, but also the basic works of Marx and Lenin. Comrades should be selected by agit-prop to form a speakers' panel for inner-fraction discussion of Marxism-Leninism. The internal bulletin of the fraction (distinct from the bulletin to be circulated inside the I.L.P.) should be got out as soon as possible.

We cannot hope to work successfully in the I.L.P. so long as the majority of our own comrades are not clear on questions of theory.

Chapter Four

Document No. 3

A Summary of "Towards a Correct Revolutionary Policy", by Bert Matlow, in "Bulletin of the Marxist Group", No. 1.

The article begins by characterising both the I.L.P. and the Communist Party as "centrist parties with little following among the organised workers". It continues:

"We must recognise that the mass of the workers are at present organised in reformist organisations accepting the leadership of Social Democrats. Such leadership can only function within a bourgeois-democratic state and when confronted with a crisis in such a government must split and disintegrate. We must so organise the new revolutionary I.L.P. to find in this collapse its opportunity, and providing it has already secured prestige and following among the organised workers will be able to lead them forward to the overthrow of the capitalist state machine and to the establishment of workers' control as a stage towards the building of socialism. Avoiding the present anarchistic stunts, work must be based upon the Trade Union members inside their organisations. Political activity of Trade Unions must be developed. The political levy must be paid as the price for participation in the workers' present political fields.

The mass of workers pin their hopes upon the return of a Labour Government. We must help to secure a Labour Government as a necessary step forward... The recent Party leaflet on the National Government proves the futility of propaganda on the mis-deeds of the National Government when no objective alternative is offered. Their cry must be "DOWN WITH THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT". The Labour leaders must be forced to echo this cry. THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT MUST BE MADE THE ALTERNATIVE. To attack always must be our policy. The National Government must not be allowed to continue. The Labour movement must raise the question and secure pledges from candidates regarding the wiping-out of anti-working-class legislation and the definite introduction of measures of benefit to the workers."

The article re-states, within the context of the I.L.P., the traditional position of the Left Opposition, developed during 1934 by Groves in "Red Flag" and in the struggle against the conceptions of the "Third Period". The earliest attempt of

which we have evidence to present this policy is the leaflet "Five Communist Reasons for Voting Labour", which the National Committee of the Communist League issued in connection with the by-election at North Hammersmith in Spring 1934.

Matlow pointed out that the stock argument of the Labour leaders and the Parliamentary Labour Party during the 1924 and 1929 - 31 administrations had been that they were "in office but not in power", that is, that they did not have a clear majority and could not, therefore, be blamed for not carrying out socialist policies. The I.L.P.'s own pamphlet, "Six Months of Labour Government", published in 1924, had said: "With a Labour majority the positive remedy can be applied, but not before". The next step should therefore be to ensure that the working class voters had the opportunity of testing in practice a Labour majority in Parliament.

The article is the first of a series which builds up, in successive issues of the "Bulletin of the Marxist Group", a very serious challenge to the "left-ist" attitude to the membership of the Labour Party and the Trade Unions, under reformist leadership, which gained ground partly though not entirely through infection with the ideas of Stalinism in the "Third Period", in the I.L.P. in the early 1930's. Matlow tried to establish once again the traditional views of Lenin about British reformist organisations, based on his writings on Britain before 1914 and on "Left-Wing Communism", as well as on Trotsky's "Where Is Britain Going?"

Since disaffiliation there had existed in the I.L.P. a majority of leading members based on implicit agreement to oppose the Labour Party electorally and either to ignore or to seek some substitute for work through the reformist trade unions: such substitutes were "Workers' Councils", "Street Committees" or even "Red Trade Unions". This common ground enabled the reformist-pacifist Scottish M.P.s and their circle to co-exist more or less peacefully with the leaders of the Revolutionary Policy Committee. The Marxist Group attributed the decline in the I.L.P. largely to this abstentionist attitude towards the mass reformist organisations.

Chapter Four

Document No. 4

The following is the text of the amendment presented by the Marxist Group to the Policy Statement of the National Administrative Council, debated at the Annual Conference of the I.L.P. at Derby at Easter 1935.

"The crisis is universal in the capitalist world and takes the form of an open social crisis of the whole system. The only non-capitalist power, the U.S.S.R., succeeded in this period of crisis in demonstrating the superiority of socialist (and even near-Socialist) forms of economy, achieving, in the First Five-Year Plan, a marked industrial and technical advance. These successes were achieved in the face of a growing bureaucratic degeneration in the Soviet state and society, which encroaches on the control of the proletarian basis, thus endangering the realism, the socialist class-content, which is the essence of true socialist planning.

The bureaucracy, depending for its existence on the maintenance of the proletarian state, but always seeking to preserve its narrow caste self-interest, is in a centrist position. This bureaucratic centrism expresses itself in the progressive decline in the democracy of the Soviets, the proletarian organisations, the machinery of government and the Communist Party, the setting-up of the impracticable vision of Socialism in a single country as the aim of Soviet Russia, reactionary-utopian in a closely-knit world economy, and finally, in the zig-zag vacillations of policy which result, as one un-Bolshevik, bureaucratically imposed line runs itself against the wall and is hastily scrapped for another.

The decline in proletarian democracy and the rotten regime in the Party of the Soviet Union shows the path that the bureaucracy has taken in consolidating its own interests; positive indices of this trend are the abandonment of the income-limit for Party members and the 'justification' of extreme social-economic differentiation under the "Six Conditions of Comrade Stalin" in 1932, the drafting of the Second Five-Year Plan with a general absence of direct political control and the point of production (such as have not been known in Russia since the darkest days of War Communism), viz. the allocation of Polburos appointed from above to control all Collective Farms, Soviet Farms, M.T.S. etc. The regime of bureaucratic centrism is fully reflected in the Communist International.

The theory of Socialism in One Country, with its narrowing of the conceptions of Socialism to the exchange of commodities and labour within the fixed

limits of a geographical fraction of the world, and its false doctrine of the possibility of the continuance of the two antagonistic systems - Capitalism and Communism - violates the whole principles of Leninism and Communist Internationalism, and fundamentally explains the weakness of the Soviet Union in the face of the capitalist world (e.g. handing over the Chinese Eastern Railway, reliance on the game of bourgeois diplomacy, the imperative necessity for Soviet economy of maintaining and extending the trade agreements with Hitler at the very moment when he was savagely bludgeoning the workers, etc.) The progress of the world revolutionary movement has been sacrificed at every step to this Stalinist dogma, though the development of the World Revolution is the only guarantee of the progress and of the very existence of the U.S.S.R.

The internal contradictions in the economy of the U.S.S.R. today (disproportionalities, glaring contrasts in industrial levels, persistence of 'tight places', etc. etc.,) grow with the social contradictions rather than diminish. The recent wave of State terrorism, shootings without trial, etc., illustrates the seriousness of the position inside the U.S.S.R.; the boastful assurance of a swift march to the classless society (in which the coercive functions of the State become unnecessary) are contradicted at every step by the progressively increasing severity of the Stalinist dictatorship. The lack of control by the basis, the increasing internal contradictions, lead to a situation of increasing chaos in the application of the Second Five-Year Plan and ever-greater peril of Thermidorean reaction, and must rouse the greatest apprehension in the mind of every revolutionary. There is every reason to fear that the recent wave of repression, for which the murder of Kirov gave the pretext, screens preparations for a new, drastic turn of policy, of which the abolition of the bread ration is a significant sign, which may not have gone through without severe social convulsions in the U.S.S.R. Nevertheless, since the U.S.S.R. remains essentially a proletarian state, our criticism must be accompanied by support and the call for the defence of the Soviet Union against imperialist aggression.

But the only real defence of the U.S.S.R. is the building-up of new revolutionary parties everywhere, united in a Fourth International, for the regeneration of the international workers' movement. Blind acceptance of every action of the U.S.S.R. and the C.I. must be regarded as criminal, centrist weakness in the present menacing

situation, as it tends to the fostering of illusions which, when exploded, lead to the decline in morale of the members' movement."

It may be of interest to note that the writers of the above draft do not appear to have been aware of the analysis of the Soviet Union contained in Trotsky's "The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism". In "Writings: 1934 - 35", this document is dated February 1, 1935. It was published, apparently for the first time, in "The New Internationalist" for July 1935 and there seems no reason to believe that those who were drafting the above motion in the early part of 1935 (actually between Christmas and New Year the first drafts were being written) had ever heard of Trotsky's idea that "The Thermidor of the Great Russian Revolution is not before us but already far behind... The present political regime in the U.S.S.R. is the regime of 'Soviet' (or anti-Soviet) Bonapartism... As the bureaucracy becomes more independent, as more and more power is concentrated in the hands of a single person, the more does bureaucratic centrism turn into Bonapartism."

The present writer remembers that in about 1936 he was discussing the change in Trotsky's opinion about Thermidor, and his conclusion that "The Thermidoreans can celebrate, approximately, the tenth anniversary of their victory", with a close associate of Denzil Harber, who told the writer that Harber and he had written to Trotsky suggesting that this correction should be made and that "Thermidor" be regarded, not as a "peril" but as a long-since accomplished fact. It will be interesting to see, when the "closed archives" are available, whether they contain any evidence about discussions which Trotsky may have had before he finalised his draft for "The Workers' State, Thermidor and Bonapartism".

Chapter Four

Document No. 5

The following is the text of the amendment dealing with the attitude of the I. L. P. to War, proposed by the Marxist Group to the Annual Conference in 1935, to replace the appropriate passage in the draft of the N. A. C.

"The contradictions of competing imperialism has produced a situation in which war may be precipitated at any moment. Any war which directly involves the two opposing major powers must, within a very short space of time, become a world war. Unless the proletariat is sufficiently strong and class-conscious to change war into civil war, war will result in the wholesale destruction of industrial centres and the breakdown of modern civilisation.

The modern conditions of warfare have rendered even more difficult the problem of the workers' struggle against war. The probability that the bombing of large industrial centres will precede the actual declaration of war renders unstable any war resistance that is not based upon revolutionary conviction of the workers.

We consider that the present theory of general strike action to prevent war will prove impracticable in the face of war conditions unless the organisational and ideological preparation has been based upon a detailed and realistic analysis of the probable conditions which will prevail. We therefore declare that all attempts to build the B(ritish) A(nti) W(ar) M(ovement), an isolated heterogeneous grouping, is a futile tactic and must be abandoned.

The fight to prevent war can only be effective if it is commenced immediately and must be based on the organised workers' movement. It must follow the line of a General Strike to dislocate the economic machinery of the country, followed immediately by the seizure of aerodromes, armaments factories, to prevent the murderous onslaught on the workers in other countries, and the seizure of wireless stations in order to silence chauvinistic propaganda and disseminate the revolutionary viewpoint. The seizure of state power must be placed on the order of the day.

The slogan of 'National Defence' is a counter revolutionary slogan to mislead the workers, and must be ruthlessly opposed. The real enemy of the working class remains in war time as in peace time their own capitalist ruling class. "National Defence" can have revolutionary content only after the workers have seized power (e.g. Russia). In the case of a world war, the U. S. S. R. will be forced to align itself with one of the imperialist blocs. This can in no way alter the irreconcilable antagonism of the workers of these countries allied with the U. S. S. R. to the war and to their bourgeois governments. It is only by the overthrow of these bourgeois governments and the establishment of workers' dictatorships that in the long run the defence of the workers' state can be ensured.

In the unlikely event of this country remaining neutral in a war which involved the U.S.S.R., our efforts should be the stoppage of all munitions and exports to all countries attacking the U.S.S.R. and, if necessary, a general strike to enforce this action.

Isolated wars in which small countries are the pawns of competing imperialisms (e.g. Gran Chaco) should be analysed to show the real economic forces behind them and used as propaganda against capitalism. Where possible, action to stop the export of munitions should be taken.

In the case of revolts of colonial peoples against their imperialist exploiters, all possible support should be mobilised among the workers of the imperialist countries. We realise that the building of a real revolutionary International is an essential factor for the successful fight against war, and that adequate preparations must be made for illegal underground working, so that, in the event of the workers' rebellion being smashed, the organisations may continue to exist to take the fullest advantage of war and post-war conditions.

Chapter Four

Document No. 6

Extracts from "The Organic Development of the Marxist Group", in "Bulletin of the Marxist Group", No. 4, Easter 1935.

"The party is in a state of flux, with a vaguely worded programme that is capable of several interpretations: while this state continues, there will exist within the party organised groups putting forward divergent lines of policy. What is the origin of these groups? Two clearly marked trends, beside that of the N.A.C., are visible at this Conference. These are the Revolutionary Policy Committee and the newly-formed Marxist Group.

Let us free our minds from idealistic notions purporting to explain the origin of the R.P.C. as the result of the sudden brainwaves of a few talented individuals, irrespective of the historical circumstances of the organic development of the I.L.P. What were the concrete conditions under which the R.P.C. came into being? Objectively, the growing dissatisfaction of the working-class generally, and particularly its class-conscious sections. The more forward elements of the Labour Party were in the I.L.P., so it was within the I.L.P. that the general dissatisfaction first showed itself concretely in organisational development.

The despicable spinelessness and ineptitude of the Labour Government in office resulted in the growth among the more leftward members of the I.L.P. of a heterogeneous mass-dissatisfaction of which the main trends were a vague but crystallising doubt as to the efficacy of the Parliamentary method, and a tendency still to place confidence in that method, while admitting that the bureaucrats of the Labour Party, the present leaders of the workers in the Parliamentary field, were completely incapable of carrying out the historic task of working class emancipation, and must be superseded. While the political ideology of this movement was far from uniform in its expression, the factor which knit it into an organised group was the necessity for disaffiliation from the Labour Party, a necessity dictated by both intellectual trends. In the House of Commons, the anti-working-class measures taken by the Labour Party bureaucracy compelled the Parliamentary representatives of the I.L.P. continually to oppose and expose them. The Labour Party bureaucracy was forced into the position of discussing disciplinary measures against the rebel I.L.P. group, and the question of Standing Orders developed peculiar significance. The necessity for a break became more and more evident; the dissatisfaction of the I.L.P. rank and file crystallised into the two trends above indicated. The ultra-loyal purists were concerned only with the independence of the party. Those members constituting a larger section, who, muddled perhaps and incapable of putting forward anything approaching a revolutionary Marxist line, nevertheless had advanced so far as to consider the question of policy as one of major importance. Because of their common and immediate objective, viz, dis-affiliation, these two

trends were forced together into a faction, the name of which obviously has very little significance. It was under these conditions that the R.P.C. was born. It was an historic necessity and, as such, it grew.

At Blackpool, disaffiliation was nearly carried, but that section which would have remained in the Labour Party if standing orders could be changed delayed the break. At Bradford; an adverse reply having been received from the Labour Party on standing orders, the I.L.P., with their M.P.s, decided to take the plunge. The historic task of the R.P.C. was completed. It began to disintegrate.

The R.P.C. which remained consisted of those members interested in policy, chiefly in the London area. To go on required a study of fundamentals (Marxism) and here the R.P.C. committed its greatest blunder. Its personnel was incapable of doing this job, so that it could do nothing but tail after the C.P., accepting the C.P. on faith as a 'revolutionary party'. Thenceforward the bankrupt leaders of the R.P.C. had merely to work towards the C.P., putting forward petty policy differences against an immediate merger of the organisations. It did not have to ground itself in Marxist theory, and even now the leading 'theoretician' of the R.P.C. admits that he has 'not time to read', arguing of course that revolutionary (here is a gap in the sense where a word must have been omitted in the original text J. A.) 'comes naturally from participation in the struggle'. In the estimation of the R.P.C., the first step in work towards revolutionary unity was united action (which they mistakenly call united front) with the C.P. and its subsidiaries. Lacking a firm Marxist basis, they had no conception of the true united front of the revolutionary vanguard with the mass organisations of the workers. When a sharp turn in the attitude of the Comintern to the I.L.P. took place and a United Front agreement was signed, the R.P.C. hailed this as proof that the Comintern was capable of reforming itself.

Shortly afterwards, the Derby Conference (1933) took place, and, their hands strengthened by the 'United Front' the R.P.C. were able to carry large sections of their policy statement; the N.A.C. were forced to move leftward in order to maintain their position. The R.P.C. were unable to take cognisance of the events in Germany and to draw the lessons from the collapse of the German section of the C.I. Instead, shortly after the Derby Conference, they took up a definite position in working for a 'United Communist Party', if certain minor reforms would be conceded. This caused a serious split in the R.P.C. Four Committee members with a considerable following broke away. Unable to defend their position then, the rump of the old R.P.C. collapsed and for nearly a year no meeting was held. It was only when the C.P. agents in the I.L.P. lifted their heads that the R.P.C. again appeared as an organised body.

Those comrades who had broken away from the R.P.C. were conscious that their task remained the building of a revolutionary party. They saw in the German collapse the crowning act in a series of defeats suffered by the Third International since it had departed from the fundamentals and doctrines laid down by its first four congresses.

They realised that the Third International was tied to the Foreign Policy of the U. S. S. R., which in the interests of the erroneous theory of 'socialism in one country' was prepared to sacrifice the revolutionary movement throughout the world. This line brought them close to that of the International Left Opposition (Trotsky Group), and when the declaration was made for the new international, they took up this position and advocated it within the I. L. P.

Early in 1934 this group was joined by certain comrades of the former Communist League, who had split their organisation, holding that the I. L. P. provided the basis upon which the revolutionary party could be built. These comrades entered the party with a declaration which was published in 'Controversy'. Those members of the former Communist League who refused to enter the I. L. P. maintained for a time a separate organisation, which has now ceased to exist through having an incorrect basis.

After the London Divisional Conference of Summer 1934, these comrades realised that an organised faction was necessary if the party was to be won for a revolutionary policy. Accordingly resolutions were passed by the Islington, Clapham, South Norwood and Holborn branches, calling for an organisation to put forward a clear revolutionary programme against that of the N.A.C. and the R.P.C., whose muddled and anarchistic policies were causing the disintegration of the I. L. P.....

The revolutionary party must be built. That party must be entrenched in the workers' organisation, must be composed of the most forward proletarian elements, must be capable of understanding clearly the revolutionary struggle and tactic, so that it will be able to lead the masses in their struggle for power. We do not, like the R.P.C., gloss over the preparations that must be made for armed insurrection, study of military tactics and the permeation of the armed forces...."

Chapter Four

Document 7 (a)

ON THE ACTIVITY AND PROGRESS OF THE ENGLISH BOLSHEVIK-LENINISTS

Published in "Bulletin of the League of Communist-Internationalists, issue No. 1, May 1, 1935.

Reflecting the extreme weakness of the workers' movement in England, the Left Opposition for a long time had only very weak points of support. The small group, composed predominantly of intellectuals, did not escape the infantile sickness of a political organisation in the process of formation. Internal conflicts obstructed the very difficult work among a very backward working-class.

The split of the I.L.P. from the Labour Party provided the opportunity of working within a Centrist party developing towards the Left, belonging to neither of the Internationals, and thus of emerging from hopeless isolation. The discussion on entry led to the split in this already feeble group. It was a minority which chose the road into the I.L.P. while the majority remained independent and tried to continue the publication of the organ, "The Red Flag", which only came out irregularly. As a result of the insignificance of the two organisations, the International Secretariat of the International Communist League considered them merely as two groups sympathetic to the League. The "majority" which remained independent soon disappeared from the scene, while the "minority" embarked on a healthy development.

The entry into the I.L.P. naturally did not cure the weakness of the group. Long months were devoted to internal discussion of all strategic and tactical questions; to identifying the questions which underlie practical work, adapted to the specific situation of Britain.

It was not easy to advance. Naturally, it was necessary to carry out conscientiously the political work of a militant of the I.L.P. to gain the confidence of the comrades. The principal difficulty consisted in the necessity to test out the ground in order to find out how to defend in action and propaganda the correct political line without breaking discipline. For, unlike the S.F.I.O., which none the less belonged to the Second International, there did not exist at all inside the I.L.P. the wide democratic liberties which our French comrades enjoy. The publication of one's own fractional public organ is not permitted to our English comrades, with the result that great obstacles oppose a wide propaganda of our ideas.

The I.L.P. has not developed at all in the last two years. Without a clear political programme, without any clear position, especially on the question of international affiliation, it was quickly taken in tow by the Communist Party. Many of its members, disappointed, left the I.L.P., while the remainder, in the majority, fell into resignation and passivity; the conditions of work were thus not at all favourable for our comrades. They formed themselves within the Party into the "Marxist Group" and were at least in London the only force to provoke a real interest in politics, shedding the light of Marxism over all questions and defending in the internal party discussion, openly, the

necessary conclusions which result in the necessity for the Fourth International. Soon a relatively strong Stalinist fraction rose against them, the "Revolutionary Policy Committee", advancing against them especially purely organisational questions and relying for preference on personal attacks and disciplinary measures (the divisional leadership in London is in the hands of the pro-Stalinists). Since the entry, the "Marxist Group" has raised the numbers five-fold. It is true that many among the new comrades have only a small knowledge of Marxism, but they see that the "Marxist Group" alone pays attention to the problems of the party. A remarkable interest in theoretical knowledge is showing itself among these serious workers. For this reason our comrades have considered starting classes on the fundamental questions of Marxism in addition to the discussion of current political questions. Progress is equally to be observed outside London. At Liverpool, for example, three of the four existing branches supported our line at the last regional conference. But a group analogous to that in London has not been formed because the comrades are overloaded with the work of the party as a result of the degeneration of the I. L. P. Good connections exist in the Lancashire region, at Southport at Glasgow, Edinburgh, Cardiff etc.

The fact that the comrades of the "Marxist Group" are gathering ground is reflected in the efforts of the leadership in the London Division to take organisational measures against the group. Some comrades have been removed from the list of party speakers; nor have they the right to speak on behalf of their branches. Gaster, a Right Oppositionist of the first water, called in one struggle for the exclusion of the whole "Marxist Group" from the I. L. P. This last is the most violent of the attacks against the defenders of the Fourth International originating from pro-Stalinist circles. But it failed pitifully thanks to the skill and resolution of our comrades and the sympathy which they have won among a large part of the militants in spite of, or because of, their outspoken attitude.

At a meeting organised by the "Friends of the Soviet Union", some comrades of the "Marxist Group" energetically protested against the unheard-of calumnies of the Stalinists at the time of the Kirov assassination; they addressed to the speakers questions which were very thorny for them. A short time after, the comrades received from the divisional leadership the information that they had been suspended from their functions as party members for breach of discipline and that they would have to appear before a disciplinary court. The accused comrades began at once a political campaign in the Party and jointly submitted a leaflet to every party member. The "Marxist Group" and a certain number of branches supported the attacked comrades, with the result that, under this pressure and in view of the absolute inconsistency of the Stalinist charges - which expectedly, had completely distorted the facts - the disciplinary trial was quashed.

At the last London Divisional Conference, the comrades of the Marxist Group presented resolutions or amendments on all the political questions, in which they unequivocally defended the "Trotskyist" line. The comrades of the "Marxist Group" got their point of view adopted on one question only; against the tactics of the Stalinists towards the unemployed. On the question of electoral tactics, they were in a minority by only one vote. However, it was due to the intervention of our comrades that the demand of the Stalinist fraction, for the adhesion of the I. L. P. to the Communist International, was repulsed. A resolution was passed to continue the affiliation of the I. L. P. to the London-Amsterdam Bureau, until its differences with the Communist International are straightened out (!).

Chapter Four

Document 7 (b)

REPORT OF AN ENGLISH COMRADE

(The original is in French: translation by the present writer)

The Bolshevick-Leninist group in England is probably one of the weakest in Europe. In the face of the formidable uproar of the Stalinists and the solidity of the ranks of the Labour Party, the position of a third party in England is extremely difficult. However, the year which has just elapsed has seen a real, serious and tenacious activity of the B.L.s, and the rising tension of the class-struggle in England gives hope for a marxist policy to be clearly and energetically carried into effect.

Before discussing the position of the Bolshevick-Leninists, here are some lines about the essence of the situation in England. English capitalism, thanks especially to its rigorous control of the finances and resources of the colonial dependencies, could stand up to the crisis more firmly than most other countries. While maintaining the price of industrial products and lowering the prices of raw materials, it has succeeded in getting through the last two years without serious internal convulsions. Some particular signs of a "recovery" appeared, a recovery which the capitalists themselves recognise as mostly illusory. The limits of this period of unstable equilibrium have almost been reached. Under the pressure of the crisis, the colonial slaves, not merely in India, but also in Africa, have shown clear signs of revolt and the Sedition Bill and other repressive measures have shown the nervousness of the British bourgeoisie. At the present time, the working-class in Britain is generally calm despite some sporadic eruptions against the new Unemployment Bill. But it becomes more and more clear that not only the working class but also a large number of the middle classes are absolutely dissatisfied with the National Government. One election after another shows this indisputably. The next General Election will take place in a year and the evident determination of the working-class to bring down the National Government has produced a vast upheaval in the ranks of the big bourgeoisie. The Right Wing wants to fight on a strictly Tory programme. Its rallying-cry is the legislation projected for India, to give India a government of its own and control 20% of its budget. But its ultimate aim is strong government, not merely in India, but in England also. Churchill is the leader of this group. The other group, led by Baldwin, wants to fight under the banner of the National Government and to "wait and see", in the typically English fashion. The struggle broke out openly at the time of the Wavertree by-election, at which Churchill put forward his son as a candidate. This is, theoretically, a good opportunity for the Labour party. But the Labour Party, even though the working-class is firmly in support of it, has no programme, and nothing is more certain than that it would lead the country to ruin if it came to power. The bourgeoisie want to keep control. At present, it cannot risk a Social-Democratic government. It could risk it in 1924 and again in 1929. At the moment of the crisis it could count on the Liberal Party to rally to it and place itself against the Labour Party.

But at present, if the Labour Party got power, it would probably do so on the basis of its own forces, and however solid the leaders may be with the Conservatives on all important questions, the working classes will expect results. If they do not get them, the situation in England will change roughly and in sharp fashion. The level of unemployment remains about at the level of the past year. It is true that there are few strikes, but the elections, the meetings of the masses against Fascism, the agitation against war show that the masses, in the calm English manner, are attentive to the political consequences. The bourgeoisie knows this. Garvin, of the "Observer", who speaks resolutely for the bourgeoisie like no one else, went even so far as to demand, a few weeks ago, another national government to include Lloyd George. He said openly that Lloyd George had no policy, but that the nation wanted the man; it is the confession of bankruptcy of the bourgeoisie. But the thing did not succeed. It is also to be noticed that the Labour Party refuses to listen to the official overtures which certain Liberals make to them or to the suggestions of Lloyd George. They know that this would reduce them in the eyes of the masses. Thus they all ceaselessly turn round the Labour Party, more nervous than ever, as nervous as they are, like a fish in a bowl, each as nervous as the others. For they know that, above all, they have no programme for saving capitalism. Unhappily the complicated zigzags of the Communist Party, its rowdy propaganda - particularly unsuited to the English temperament - the low quality of its leaders who influence no one, have caused immense damage to the revolutionary cause. The word Communist has a bad odour in England. The I.L.P. has not had enough courage to enter the C.P. It tries to affiliate to it as a sympathising organisation, but even though it calls itself revolutionary, many of its members were in disagreement and the Communist International was so demanding, negligent and insincere in its replies that even sympathetic affiliation failed. Thus the I.L.P. remains hung between the Labour Party on its right and the Communist Party on its left. In these conditions, the B.L.s decided to try to capture the I.L.P. The B.L. group had only sixty members, badly organised, but there are many good elements in Britain who support the Trotskyist points of view. Harry Pollitt of the Communist Party himself admitted in Moscow in 1934 that there were Trotskyists among the students, and the students in England are at last politically awakened as they had not been for 100 years - a sign of the times! The B.L.s decided to join the I.L.P., but a large number stayed outside. At the present time they have become disorganised. They maintained for a certain time the publication "Red Flag", a theoretical monthly, but publication is actually stopped at the moment. For practical purpose, the B.L.s consist of the group in the I.L.P. (which counts 70 members) and which is entitled "Marxist Group". But the circles of sympathisers are much wider and will soon grow still more. The group issues a weekly bulletin which is called the Bulletin of the Marxist Group. The bulletin is confined to the Party and its circulation is considerable. In the report of the regional conference, the "New Leader", weekly organ of the I.L.P., gives indications of the agitational force of the B.L.s, few as they may be numerically. The London region is the strongest of the I.L.P. and at this conference the resolution restricting the activity of unofficial groups was beaten by four votes only. The only unofficial groups of any importance in the I.L.P. are the two wings: the "Marxist Group" or B.L., which calls for the Fourth International, and another which calls for affiliation to the C.I. The "New Leader" itself distinguished the "Revolutionary Policy Committee" (Stalinists), the "Trotskyists" and the rest. The London regional council (Stalinist itself) has not been able to obtain from the conference approval for joining

the C.I. But the conference at the same time would not accept the orientation of the B.L.s towards the Fourth International. There was a compromise resolution demanding continued association with the C.I. That is typical of the hesitant, centrist position of the I.L.P. today.

Finally, the Conference decided on three resolutions to be sent to the National Conference, one demanding a very strict control of the I.L.P. youth organisation (I.L.P. Guild of Youth), another demanding the re-organisation of the "New Leader" and the third proposing a strictly disciplinary mechanism in the Party. None of these is essentially political. It is clear that the ideas of the London I.L.P. are in constant flux always and the "Marxist Group" has the possibility of spreading its ideas by a clever and persistent agitation. Its position may be summed up by saying that it is strong enough to sweep out a lot of rubbish, but not strong enough to impose a sharply defined policy on the I.L.P.

There have, however, been some disquieting happenings. As had to be expected after its ultra-left adventure ended in the German catastrophe, the Communist Party has made a sharp turn towards the right, and the entry into the League of Nations has pushed it still further to the right. It offers a united front to everybody and anybody. Soviet Russia joining the League of Nations was a terrible blow for the defenders of the Stalinists in the I.L.P. and the Kirov affair was another.

There exists a favourable opportunity for the Marxist Group. It has capable and energetic members. Its fundamental ideas are Leninist. It will have to perfect its methods of propaganda and hold itself in readiness. As in France, it is the critical moment when its policy, however feeble it may be, will prevail.