

CLASS STRUGGLE

THE LESSONS
OF CHILE

R.
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LEFT
UNITY

COMMUNISTS AND

REFORMISM
IN AN IMPERIALISED COUNTRY

The Rot in
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MOVEMENT?

BROWNE - MERRIGAN GROUP

What Kind of Party?
DOES THE WORKING CLASS NEED

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IRISH
WORKERS
GROUP

REVOLUTIONARY REGROUPMENT

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When the founding members of the Irish Workers' Group were expelled from the Socialist Workers' Movement two years ago, they immediately issued a statement to the left groups and papers (never published) in which they described the political basis of their opposition within that organisation, the bureaucratic nature of the SWM and the wholly undemocratic manner of our expulsion. The statement concluded with a call for regroupment and fusion of the left as a strategic priority in the fight for theoretical principle, political clarification and programmatic development. In the draft publication of the Irish Workers' Group manifesto, in November '76, and in the first issue of CLASS STRUGGLE in June '77, we further repeated and explained our position on regroupment. None of our articles was replied to by the representatives of the Left in Ireland.

Recently, the Independent Socialist Party has published a document "For Revolutionary Regroupment" which attempts to give reasons why and on what basis fusion of the left might take place. Further, a public meeting was organised by the ISP with invited speakers from PD, ISA and SWM to discuss the topic. As the IWG was not invited, one of our members at the meeting asked the ISP why. We were informed that because of the IWG's "sectarian" attacks on the rest of the Irish left we had effectively excluded ourselves. Such an "explanation" for an act of blatant political sectarianism comes suitably from a sect whose basic argument on the need for regroupment derives from an "analysis" which concludes that what essentially divides the left in Ireland is pettiness and organisational fetishism. It serves to underline further the IWG's view that on matters of principle in general the left are not only woolly and confused but profoundly unserious.

In this article we will spell out more fully the attitude of the Irish Workers' Group to the question of regroupment and fusion, to the politics of the ISP as evinced by their article and to the nature and source of the very real differences within the Irish left.

I W G A N D R E G R O U P M E N T

When, as ex-members of the SWM, we called two years ago for regroupment and fusion of the left, we did not merely because we were a handful of comrades spread over four cities, isolated from the class struggle and the relatively larger marxist and republican groupings. It indeed had been our sole consideration we could justly have been accused of posing organisational solutions to our own isolation. No doubt our arguments to defend such a manoeuvre would have been couched in terms similarly vague, pious and abstract as those of the ISP in their document "For Revolutionary Regroupment". On the contrary, we did so for three reasons.

1. The total bankruptcy of the methods and solutions (the programmes) of the existing revolutionary and republican left as the basis for building a vanguard marxist party of the Leninist type in the Irish working class.
2. As a consequence of this failure, the fragmentation and splits among these groups, coupled with growing demoralisation and frustration of sections of militants in the working class movement, trade unions and Labour Party, and in the anti-imperialist forces.
3. The international crisis of leadership in the working class globally at a period of heightening class struggle (revolutionary and pre-revolutionary situations in Portugal and Spain, economic and social upheaval in Italy, France and Britain) making urgent the task of a serious analysis of the strategy and tactics of the marxist tendencies in living struggles as the only principled basis for the re-elaboration of a new International and programme.

Therefore, in the documents of the IWG we have begun

1. to re-outline the ABC of the marxist tradition as codified in the programmes of the first four congresses of the third (Communist) International, i.e.
 - a. the programme, method and experience of the bolsheviks of Lenin and Trotsky.
 - b. the defence and development of Bolshevism undertaken by Trotsky

and the Left Opposition in the battle against the Stalinist counter-revolution, culminating in the fight for the Fourth International incorporated in the Transitional Programme of 1938.

2. In the light of these traditions and the method inherent within them of revolutionary Bolshevism in action, to analyse and evaluate the tactics, strategy and programmes of the various marxist tendencies in Ireland and internationally.

3. To pose our own tactical and strategic alternatives to the centrist and opportunist politics of the marxist and republican left as part of a principled process to create a collective leadership of revolutionary socialists wedded intransigently to the struggle for theoretical clarity, merciless self-criticism, revolutionary activism, unbending hostility to capitalism, loyalism, clericalism, and all ideologies and currents which stand in any way for their continuation.

Therefore, our documents frankly and sharply addressed themselves to the record of the Irish left and drew firm and harsh conclusions about that record. We have been accused by the Irish left of egotism, of claiming a monopoly of the truth. These accusations were entirely predictable. Rather than seeing our polemics as laying the basis for a principled and sharp debate on strategy, tactics, programme - the issues that do divide the left - the ISP, the ASR, and the SWP - have accused us of "sectarianism" thus again displaying utter confusion about marxist terminology. For marxists sectarianism is a concept characterising tactics and strategy. For liberals its use refers simply to what they ignorantly regard as the 'abusiveness' and 'congenital' divisiveness of the left. We refute completely the charge of political sectarianism. As we have shown, it is the Irish left who have combined the worst excesses of opportunism with sectarian manoeuvring on matters of political principle. We are not in the least surprised that they regard our use of "labels" unhelpful to debate and discussion. As Trotsky never tired of pointing out in his fight in his fight against the centrists of the 1930s who opposed him tooth and nail:-

"Without plumbing the gist of programmatic differences they repeat commonplaces on the 'impossibility' of any one tendency claiming to incorporate in itself all the truth. Ergo? Live and let live. Aphorisms of this type cannot teach an advanced worker anything worthwhile, instead of courage and a sense of responsibility they can only instil indifference and weakness....revolutionary ardour in the struggle for socialism is inseparable from the struggle for truth." (1938 writings)

The Irish left's wish to avoid "sectarian" labels reveals all the more the nature of their politics. As if serious marxists can throw away the only precise and scientific language of analysis, if used correctly, and still claim the use of a living and creative instrument for intervention.

No! The reality is harsh. The left's thin-skinned responses to our attack are no more than their evasion of debate. For them to have to seriously characterise the Irish Workers Group politically and scientifically would demand an examination of our strategy and tactics, our political method, our interpretation and identification with the marxist tradition. To do this effectively would in turn require examination of their own political and theoretical traditions, the drawing up of a serious balance sheet of their activities in the last six years. Rather than do this, they will go on abusing us mindlessly.

THE INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST PARTY

The ISP emerged around a number of individuals associated with the "marxist" left in the IRSP who walked out of that organisation 18 months ago. The record of these lefts within the IRSP, at one time the most healthy leftward-moving current in left republican politics, represented the most shameful capitulation to the worst forms of conspiratorial republicanism and demagogic sloganeering. Despite having the majority in the National Committee, despite having conference resolutions of the most impeccable socialism, the marxist left lacked the most elementary understanding of how to hold the firm ground of principle and on that basis conduct a tactical fight to rid the organisation of its right wing. Their 'marxism' was revealed as a soggy mess of platitudes,

totally incapable of being employed as a method of analysis, or a tool of intervention, orientation and struggle. No fight occurred! The left, increasingly outmanoeuvred and divided in itself, simply fell apart. Eventually, a disparate group resigned, only to disintegrate further - some returning to the IRSP as convinced republicans, others to sterile scholasticism, others still to the limbo land of their "careers". Part of the present leadership of the ISP bear full responsibility for what happened to the IRSP. The most hopeful opportunity for establishing a genuine working class marxist movement was completely destroyed without even the need to analyse the lessons of this tragic episode being even recognised before the emergence of a new tendency should begin. This, at least, would have enabled the marxists to clarify their understanding of theory, strategy and programme and incorporate the lessons within a more fully developed political perspective. Instead, after months inside the sterile gasbag of the "Irish Committee for a Socialist Programme", a new "party" was announced on the basis of a "programme" of soggy platitudes - as in the IRSP. Recruitment of the most politically raw individuals began. It was immediately evident that the leadership of the ISP had learnt nothing from their experiences. The ISP's "Five-Eight" and "Hard Station" reveal that one form of right-opportunism (left-republicanism) has been replaced by another form of left-opportunism, economism and workerism.

"The attitude of a political party towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest criteria of the seriousness of the party, and of how it fulfills in practice its obligations towards the class and towards the labouring masses. To admit a mistake openly, to disclose its reasons, to analyse the surroundings which created it, to study attentively the means of correcting it - these are the signs of a serious party. This means the performance of its duties, this means educating and training the class, and subsequently the masses. By neglecting this, by failing to proceed with the utmost care, attention and prudence to investigate their self-evident mistakes the left proved themselves not to be a class party but a circle of

intellectuals, and a handful of workers who imitate the worst characteristics of the intellectual".
(Lenin - Left-Wing Communism.)

The ISP document on regroupment illustrates our criticisms even more clearly. Devoid of any concrete political analysis of political traditions or programmes, period or perspective, its facile impressionism leads to the ISP conclusion that a "united" revolutionary left will represent a "strong" current on the basis of agreement on a list of worthless platitudes. The IWG rejects this document completely. "Unity" on the basis proposed is at best an opportunistic manoeuvre naively undertaken by the ISP, and cynically by the SW, to recruit members to their economistic perspectives of party-building. It is regrettable that the ISP display again the same frivolous complacency, the same arrogant indifference to theoretical and political principle so evident in their time in the IRSP.

O U R D I F F E R E N C E S

Unlike the ISP, we do not believe that the divisions among the left are, at base, superficial. It is no doubt true that petty factionalism needlessly exists but it is more a symptom than a cause of the differences.

It is obvious that the left internationally is in disarray and impotent as a force for real intervention in the struggle for working class power. Any attempt to explain the fragmentation of the Irish left must also at the same time relate to the political and programmatic crisis of leadership existing on a world scale.

The origins of the divisions within the marxist left are rooted in the fragmentation of the world Trotskyist movement after the death of Trotsky, the decimation of the most experienced cadres in the war and the emergence of a new world order. The objective factors of the defeat of the working class by fascism and Stalinism, the hegemonic role of American Imperialism, provided the basis for an unparalleled development of productive forces underpinning both the economic prosperity and political stability in west European capitalist states. This new world order posed for the then inexperienced and weak forces of the Fourth International problems of analysis from which only the creative

re-elaboration of the Transitional Programme in the light of a changed historical reality could have spelt out a new strategic and tactical path for international proletarian power. Instead, the Fourth International failed to redefine its perspectives adequately or unanimously, the Trotskyist movement split into a series of groupings and sub-groupings. Basically the worldwide divisions of the Trotskyist left relate to their understanding and use of the world programme embodied in the Fourth International in 1938. It is from this relationship that one can best recognise the serious and profound differences of method employed by the differing national and international currents of modern Trotskyism. The particular debates and issues, the questions still remaining to be resolved, underlying this historical division deserve a separate and detailed treatment. Broadly, however, there are three major positions.

1. THE FETISHISTS

In this category fall the W.R.P. in Britain, Workers' League in Ireland. It represents the most dead-end sectarian perspective for whom the world stood still in 1938 with the Transitional Programme. Forever proclaiming the "imminent" collapse of capitalism these groups combine the most sectarian and factional self-promotion of their own organisation, ritualistically denouncing "revisionism" with the most opportunistic softness on reformism, a position defended by applying a few "correct" slogans from the Transitional Programme.

The League for a Workers Republic (Section of the Organisation for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International) represents in Ireland a special category of this current. Afflicted with the same spirit of catastrophism and the ritual borrowing from the Transitional Programme (see their 1977 Conference documents in Workers Republic), the LWR's perspective involves waiting for the masses to catch up with the Transitional Programme, and that, indeed, through the Irish Labour Party. This reduces them in practice to a passive propagandist sect accomodating at every turn around a minimum programme to every left-reformist current in Labour Party and Trade Union bureaucracy.

2. THE ECLECTICS

This current, represented by the United Secretariat of the Fourth International was the only one to attempt to positively react to the changed world conditions facing revolutionary socialists in the Fourth International. In Ireland it is now represented by the Movement for a Socialist Republic. However, the total failure of the USFI to ground their theoretical, strategic and tactical positions in a concrete political economy of the new world order meant it was wholly incapable of translating the ideas and method into living struggle in the working class. It developed a chronic ideological instability either stridently ultra-leftist or supinely opportunist (the present tactical orientation being blatant capitulation to reformism, whether of the Trade Union Bureaucracy, Labour left or Stalinism). The MSR, like the USFI in general held a position on the Permanent Revolution which identified the Provisional-spearheading of the national struggle with the working class leadership of that struggle, in effect obliterating the need for a working class marxist programme and party. The USFI sees the Transitional Programme as a storehouse of nandy slogans to dignify their theoretical and political distortions. All concrete questions of revolutionary practice are dissolved into a grand picture of historic "process" of the "revolution" with slogans of the Transitional Programme signposting the way. At the moment, underleath reams of blustering proclamations the MSR systematically and supinely tails trade union bureaucracy, feminists, and nationalists. On the question of fighting unemployment it proposes a "national plan", like the trade union bureaucracy, offering no political content and at the same time completely ignores the question of the state as outlined in the last issue of Class Struggle in "communists in the trade unions".

3. THE NEGATIVES

This ideological current is represented by those tendencies who after the failures of the Fourth International and the split of 1951 rejected both the Fourth International and the Transitional Programme itself. The best known example of this current

is the I.S. group, now SWP, in Britain and its sister-group SWM in Ireland. In rejecting the Transitional Programme of 1938 as irrelevant to the 50s, 60s and 70s, the IS were inevitably to reject the whole idea of a transitional programme as relevant. In doing so, IS and SWM rejected the possibility of elaborating a programme except as a result of a mass party already having been built. In turn they further reject the possibility of building a new international without similar mass parties existing. In essence a purely organisational concept, this tradition has returned to the programmatic traditions of the Second International - a minimum/maximum programme in which the day-to-day struggles for reforms (minimum) are divorced from any struggle for workers' power (the maximum), e.g. workers control is not seen as a transitional and fighting perspective but as something to be implemented after the revolution, and national unity similarly, at root.

It thus rejects the whole creative development of theory and practice, party and class, programme and strategy established by Lenin and the Bolsheviks in 1917 and codified in the first four Congresses of the Third International. The practice of the I.S. and the S.W.M. is basically perspectiveless, resting upon the semi-spontaneous consciousness of trade union struggles to build a revolutionary marxist party. Any attempt to intervene in all struggles of the class on the basis of a scientifically worked-out programme and strategy, revising and elaborating it in the light of experience, new and broader tasks etc. in order to raise every struggle to the sharpest point of conflict and the highest form of revolutionary political clarity and class consciousness, is attacked by SWP and SWM as giving magical significance to a programme. Thus, the dogmatists who fetishise the 1938 Transitional Programme and those who recoil in horror at any kind of programme are united in having no living theory to guide their activities and develop their perspectives. They are, in consequence, both crudely economic and workerist. Both pose abstractly the building of the "party" and "socialism" as the answer to the concrete needs of millions of workers

facing unemployment, wage freezes, inflation, repression, denial of civil and political rights etc. Increasingly unable to offer a concrete political strategy to answer these needs, these groups retreat to an increasing sectarianism concealed by adventurist ultra-leftism. In Britain the SWP, unable to analyse reformism and apply the tactic of the United Front, poses itself as the alternative organisationally to the Labour Party and is already on the way to becoming another W.R.P. In Ireland SWM has shown the same tendencies in its attempts to get a "right to work" march off the ground last autumn, in its involvement in the unemployed action committees in the worthless stunt of "free bus fares". In conditions least suitable for repeating the significant but superficial gains of the IS group, SWM has made no solid gains anywhere. Though still confirmed in its smug, self-satisfied feet-on-the-ground realism, it is the realisation of a narcissist.

The ISP in its present form operates with much less sophistication on the same ideological terrain of the SWM: a purely formal commitment to Marxism and Trotskyism.

The Militant group in the Labour Party, while claiming to be Trotskyist and claiming allegiance to the Transitional Programme, are vulgar evolutionists in theory and parliamentary reformists in practice. Their British section have consistently refused to call for British Troops out of Ireland, in effect bulwarking the most virulent chauvinism in the British Labour movement. In Ireland the Militant combine the most worthless resolutionism in the trade unions and the Labour Party with an actual defence of the Coalition and the Labour Party leadership. After four years of Labour/Fine Gael misrule the militant group are no stronger in the party and the unions, yet they interminably predict the most catastrophic explosion of class struggle. Militant's sole perspective is a Labour Party majority government in five or ten years time on a tame reformist platform. Some revolution!

We hold that the Transitional Programme of the Fourth International represented the international programmatic conclusion to the continuous political battles waged by Trotsky in the Left Opposition, then in the I.C.L. against Stalinism, centrism and reformism in the world working class movement. It therefore represented an international programmatic alternative to both the Second and Third Internationals. Its purpose was to become an instrument in the hands of revolutionary workers and intellectuals in order to bring the working class internationally onto a war footing.

It was a programme which, while starting from the immediate needs of the working class to defend itself, sought to carry the struggle inexorably to the goal of workers power. Trotsky creatively applied and developed the major tactical and strategic principles of Lenin and of the first four Congresses of the Comintern. He did this in the context of the Stalinist counter-revolution, imminent fascist take-over, deepening economic and political crisis pointing towards a new world war.

Thus, the transitional Programme of 1938 is nothing else but re-elaboration of the transitional method first clearly outlined by Lenin in April and September 1917 and further embodied in the programmatic theses of the 1919-1922 Congresses. The transitional method represents the highest programmatic and strategic development of communism in the epoch of Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism. It is the only means whereby the historic political and theoretical principles of the First International, the Paris Commune, the Second International and the Communist International could be concretely and creatively applied in a new epoch to pose the way forward from the immediate struggle of the working class to the overthrow of capitalism itself.

We reject completely the fetishisation of the 1938 Transitional Programme in one form or another by the representatives of the OICWI or the USFI. Both these international currents have proved themselves ideologically and organisationally bankrupt. However, in rejecting the fossilised 1938

programme we in no way identify with those who, in rejecting it, also repudiate the basic traditions, principles and method represented by that programme. These groups are equally bankrupt.

We believe that fidelity to the 1938 Programme and its method, to the traditions of the Comintern in its first four Congresses, is fidelity to revolutionary scientific marxism in its historically most developed form in the epoch of monopoly capitalism. In the new period of world capitalist crisis we have experienced in the 60s and 70s, this fidelity demands the re-elaboration of a new Transitional Programme and the building of a new International around it. It is abundantly clear that the solutions of Stalinists, reformists and economists have nothing to offer the working class in terms of coherent political strategy. In Ireland particularly, the working class need political solutions which relate specifically to the dimensions of the international crisis peculiar to an imperialised economy, and which offer a coherent interconnected and strategic alternative to their false answers, whether republicans, stalinists, reformists, rank-and-filists etc.

On the basis of such a strategy, organisations of struggle must be built which will not collapse when faced with the existing leaderships in the working class and anti-imperialist movement. At the very centre of such a perspective must be a governmental answer to deprive the ruling class not simply of parliamentary office but also of control over the real state forces, army, police, bureaucracy, economy. Such a governmental answer does not mean taking over the existing machinery of class rule. Instead it represents the central link in a strategic and tactical chain of slogans, demands and organisational forms which have as their starting point the immediate and most pressing needs of struggles of millions of workers and their families, and leads necessarily when taken up by workers, to the breaking up of the state machinery and replacing it with democratic organs of working class power. It is the

continued:
 perspective of a workers government,
 a specific form of the United Front
 tactic. As such, it is an absolutely
 integral part of the transitional
 method. While being directed to the
 basic question of what kind of gov-
 ernment does the working class need
 to defend itself concretely against
 the ravages of the ruling class
 measures and policies, it poses solu-
 tions for the rank and file organs of
 struggle which if taken up and imple-
 mented by the masses, lead step by
 step to a situation of civil war and
 the need for the dictatorship of the
 proletariat.

The workers government slogan is,
 therefore, a transitional means of
concretely preparing the working
 class for these steps. At the same
 time it offers the only means of
 breaking the working class from the
 hold and illusions of reformism and
 reformist parties. It does not
 replace the need for a revolutionary
 mass party and the dictatorship of
 the proletariat.

The Irish workers Group believes
 that the Irish Marxist left must
 begin seriously to address itself to
 the theoretical and political task
 of elaborating such a programme.
 We do not believe this is a recipe
 for a scholastic retreat from the
 need to intervene where possible in
 the living struggles of the Irish
 working class on the basis of already
 worked out alternatives.

The initiation of principled
 debate and discussion will be the
 first major step towards the creation
 of a collective marxist leadership
alone capable of providing the
 intellectual and theoretical resources
 adequate both to programme-develop-
 ment and serious party-building.

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