



T H E  
S O C I A L I S T  
L A B O U R L E A G U E  
A N D  
I R I S H M A R X I S M  
(1959 - 1973):  
A D I S A S T R O U S  
L E G A C Y

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A Historic Document  
of the  
League for a Workers' Republic  
(for the Reconstruction of  
the Fourth International)

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## The S.L.L. and Irish Marxism (1959 - 1973) - A Disastrous Legacy

The International Committee of the Fourth International, established in opposition to Pablo-ite revisionism in 1953, was founded on an ambiguity. Of the three major sections which constituted the International Committee, only the French section broke with Pablo on a relatively clear programmatic and political basis (having been expelled bureaucratically by Pablo in 1950 for criticising the political course which he advocated). The American section and the British section, later the SLL, only broke with the Pablo-ite Secretariat when the latter's liquidationist policies affect their own sections directly, in the form of the activities of the Cochrane-Clark and Lawrence factions in the American and British movements respectively. These events jolted the Socialist Workers' Party of USA and its British followers into a belated acknowledgement of the correct criticisms of the French majority regarding Pablo's politics. But the full disruptive effect on the Fourth International itself was not grasped by the new International Committee, especially by the SWP and the British. Cannon's famous letter did not characterise Pablo-ism as a liquidationist current foreign to Trotskyism. Herein lay the theoretical roots of the unprincipled reunification of 1963 of the SWP and the Pablo-ites.

### Struggle against the SWP

But the ambiguities inherent in 1953 did not affect simply the SWP, but also the SLL. For a period (1959 - 1963), the SLL with the French OCI led a vital struggle against the SWP's right-ward movement, which resulted in important political developments within the International Committee. This struggle, however, proceeded on the basis of a differing understanding of the issues at stake, which resulted in a failure, constant since 1959, to initiate the kind of international discussion that could have clarified the ranks of the Pablo-ite movement and, indeed, the ranks of the International Committee. The International Committee's federal structure was the organisational expression of these differences, because only a clarified, united leadership could function as a leading political centre of the Fourth International, in practice carrying out its reconstruction.

### No Internationalism

From 1963, and more especially 1966, the SLL has effectively abandoned the fight to deepen the analysis of Pablo-ism forced on them by the defection of the SWP to the revisionist camp. The reasons for this lie in the "national insular-ist" approach of the SLL, which is similar to the "American exceptionalism" of the SWP, both of which manifested themselves in the type of response both sections made to the 1953 crisis. It was this lack of a genuinely internationalist struggle that led to the political ambiguities of the International Committee (and indeed on the part of the Healy SLL leadership a refusal to examine the development of Pablo-ism before 1953,

including their own history therein as Pablo-Mandel's right-hand man up to the split itself). The SLL has never explained the political basis of its role from 1950 - 1952 apart from G. Healy's totally inadequate one-paragraph apology in "Problems of the Fourth International".

#### SLL in Footsteps of SWP

In the case of the SWP, the exclusively national orientation led to the 1963 re-unification. With the SLL we can see, especially in the last three years, the almost exclusive concentration of attention on the class-struggle in Britain, chosen by G. Healy as the country marked off for the first socialist revolution (just as the USA was by the SWP in 1946 - 47). For the Healy leadership the International Committee can only function as an organisational entity insofar as the prime necessity of building the SLL, the leading section, is recognised by the other sections. Other international work is made subordinate to this over-riding aim. This led to the paralysis of the International Committee from 1966 to 1971, and when the opposition of the OCI to this whole line became more and more sharp, the Healy leadership criminally split the International Committee without any political discussion.

#### Sectarianism and Opportunism

The SLL is today travelling the road of the SWP from 1956 - 1963, even if the road is lit by left-ist, ultimatist and factionalist rather than by opportunist sign-posts. As we know, sectarianism can easily turn into opportunism in a short time. An indication of this can be seen in Healy's September 4, 1970 call to the Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International for political discussion, in which he characterises Pablo-ism as a Trotskyist tendency alongside the International Committee. Nowhere perhaps have the disastrous results of the SLL's political methodology been so clearly shown as in Ireland. It is to this that we must turn. It is a grave warning to revolutionary militants of the results of dishonest politics based on a) theoretical confusion and its deliberate perpetuation, and b) bureaucratic suppression of discussion on these questions within the International Committee itself by the SLL.

#### THE COLONIAL QUESTION AND THE SLL

In no other area is the ambiguous relationship to Pablo-ism of the SLL leadership more marked than on the colonial question. On the one hand, there is the position of uncritical support to the Vietnamese NLF, i.e. the unconditional support for the military victory of the NLF, which is absolutely obligatory, is never accompanied with the call for the building of the Trotskyist party. What is this but Pablo-ism, the capitulation to other 'revolutionary' leaderships outside the Fourth International as substitutes? This has gone so far as glorification of the 'transcendental' protracted guerilla warfare theories of Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi-Minh and Giap

(See "Fourth International", February 1968 issue). Similar to this is their position on the Arab Revolution, where criticism of the Arab bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie is very muted.

On the other hand, as an over-reaction to Pablo-ite betrayals in certain countries such as Algeria, there is a dismissal of the colonial question, coupled with 'critical' support to the reformist petty bourgeoisie, e.g. the MNA. The Pablo-ite leadership have made... unfortunately... important political capital from high-lighting these contradictions and about-turns of the SLL, which swing wildly between abstentionism and opportunism, after combining both, as in Algeria (and also, as soon we shall see, in Ireland).

#### IRELAND

Ireland poses special problems to the SLL leadership. Here a colonial question exists on their own doorstep. Since, for them, the first and decisive leap forward will take place in Britain, and since indubitably the means of class warfare against the British workers' struggles by the British bourgeoisie are being forged in Northern Ireland, they impermissibly draw the conclusion that the role of the Irish working class is to function as a simple auxiliary to the (legitimate) independent class movement of the British workers against their oppressors. Behind an abstractly correct internationalism ('Unity of Irish and British Workers') stands a denial of any independent role to the Irish working class, whose partition by British imperialism in the 'twenties so strengthened British imperialism against its own workers. History cannot be cheated. The Irish working-class must achieve its unity in this period of the total break-up of the old settlement ushered in since 1969, and strike a blow against British imperialism and its native client-regime, that will complement that of the English workers. There is a common enemy, and the revolutionary vanguard must co-ordinate both struggles as closely as possible. But the historic tasks are not identical.

#### Permanent Revolution

In Ireland, what is posed is a very complex process of Permanent Revolution; in Britain the straight social revolution, which is, however, completely bound up with the Irish revolution, and vice versa. The SLL's Luxemburgist position, deeply rooted in the British Left, and noted by Marx and Lenin long ago in relation to socialists in an imperialist country, has led them from the beginning not only to deny the existence of a national question in Ireland, but, in practice, to accept partition. This is why, from the early to the late sixties, we had Belfast and Derry... and in 1969 even Dublin... branches of the SLL! This represents implicit acceptance of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, carried through by imperialist violence and pogroms in 1920 to divide the Irish workers. This was also why the SLL never took seriously the question of building an Irish

section of the International Committee.

#### The Irish Workers' Group and the Socialist Labour League

In the mid-sixties, a centrist grouping emerged among Irish political militants in Britain, called the Irish Workers' Group. This had a vaguely Trotskyist programme and united the most diverse tendencies, from outright opportunists like Gerry Lawless, to a number of genuine, subjectively revolutionary elements. Both the People's Democracy and the Saor Eire groupings later came out of the group. The Irish Workers' Group was important insofar as it was the first organisation to emerge in Ireland outside the old Stalinist and Republican stronghold since the war. In the very late fifties and early sixties a number of militants like the Bolton brothers and Lawless had worked in close liaison with the SLL for a time. Lawless soon went with the SWP line and adopted Pablo-ite positions, and the SLL severed all connections with him.

#### No Independent Section

Neither then nor subsequently has Lawless ever had the slightest intention of building a revolutionary party in Ireland, but he was able, then and later, in the 1967 IWG faction fight, to point out factually Healy's consistent refusal to set up an independent section in that country. That was one of the weapons which he used against the 'Trotskyist Tendency', which opposed him in the faction fight from the standpoint of the need to build a Bolshevik-type party. Despite this, and despite the fact that their fight took place in abstraction from the international struggle between the "Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International" and the International Committee, the Trotskyist tendency submitted the documents of the fight in the group to the SLL. The SLL refused to intervene or even to approach the struggle going on. In doing this, it showed its sectarian, abstentionist and anti-internationalist outlook on vital problems of concern to the world movement, and greatly weakened the raw political forces looking objectively for a road to the International Committee.

#### Abstentionism

Healy, Slaughter and Co. may object that the Trotskyist Tendency included Sean Matgamna, expelled by them in 1963 and in recent years an extreme Pablo-ite. Such an objection would be infantile. In fact, the refusal to intervene strengthened Matgamna's hand against them within the new grouping that emerged as the League for a Workers' Republic, even though he operated in England as a leader of the 'Workers' Fight' Group.

#### The League for a Workers' Republic and the Socialist Labour League

In 1969 the League for a Workers' Republic wrote to the International Committee, asking for a discussion, which resulted in Cliff Slaughter's visit to Ireland in October of that year. To this meeting were invited the SLL's branches in Ireland and the League for a Workers' Republic, who had by this time built up a strong youth movement in Dublin, as well as a basis of support around certain layers in the Irish Labour Party. At this meeting the LWR put forward a position of substantial agreement with the International Committee, except on the questions of Cuba, China and Ireland. On Ireland, the LWR advocated the policy of secession of Catholic areas from the six counties (this was the aftermath of the August pogroms) and saw the crisis as one of social disruption flowing from British imperialism's democratic re-structuring of the Northern State. Both of these positions were based on an abstraction of the Irish crisis from that of the developing world crisis, and expressed the pressures resulting from the national isolation of the LWR. They were correctly attacked by Slaughter and his allies.

#### SLL's partitionism

However, certain facts about the positions of the SLL and its Irish followers should be stressed. First, they held a position of calling for a Workers' and Small Farmers' Government at Stormont! This position not only reflected the SLL's partitionist mentality, as well as the Walker-ite adaptation to the syndicalism and backwardness of the Protestant workers by their followers; it also divided the Northern and Southern struggles that together produced a pre-revolutionary situation in the autumn of 1969. Secondly, the SLL's Northern branches took on an abstentionist attitude to the 1968 - 69 Civil Rights agitation. This had a material effect on the struggle, unlike the secessionist theory, whose advocates had no base in the North and whose role was marginal as a result. It should have been said clearly that the theoretical roots of this mistake... the search for a 'pure' class movement, involving not only Catholic but Protestant workers... partly lay in the SLL's failure to grasp the inevitability of certain forms of struggle emerging from a specific historical, national background.

#### No Perspective

Thirdly, the failure to win sizeable forces from the 1968 - 69 situation was a repeat of the experience of 1964, where the youth won in the Northern Ireland Labour Party were prematurely split away, simply because it had also (correctly) been done in Britain. Not only was a valuable opportunity to win a decisive voice in the workers' movement thrown away, but the youth and the bulk of the strong trade union faction in the Belfast branch drifted away because of a lack of perspective by 1964.

#### Slaughter's meeting

The most significant thing about Slaughter's meeting was that, for the first time, the SLL proposed the setting up of an Irish Section of the International Committee. The real reason for this change of position became clear only three years later. It was not motivated by a desire to build an independent, healthy movement of the Fourth International at all. What it wanted was a factional ally, an extra vote, who could be used against the French in the internal struggle in the Executive of the International Committee, at a time when their Fourth World Congress was very close and where the SLL had to answer for their failure and refusal to put into practice the decisions and perspectives of the 1966 International Committee Conference. Accordingly, although the SLL acceded to the LWR's request for a period of further study before agreeing to join the International Committee, they immediately organised a secret faction in early 1970, composed of students, who split the LWR, before discussion had concluded, in May 1970. This secret faction was unknown even to the present author, as far as its secret activities outside the LWR were concerned. Three weeks later, the new Irish section of the International Committee was proclaimed. Three weeks later was the Fourth (Pre-) Conference of the International Committee. The ground for the split with the OCI had advanced another step. Only in this context can the SLL's methods be understood.

#### THE IRISH SECTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

The immediate task of the Irish section was, for G. Healy, the building of a strong youth movement. This is, of course, a key to the building of the Bolshevik Party itself. Healy, however, saw it as a substitute for the party. This was why in early 1970 he issued an ultimatum to Jack Vance, George Craig and Freddie Campbell, the Belfast Protestant militants who led the section, that, unless a big youth movement was built quickly, he, Healy, would split with them. This approach of the SLL runs like a red thread through the history of the SLL's 'Irish Section'. It re-calls Trotsky's words in the 'Transitional Programme': 'In their own circles, the sectarians customarily carry on a regime of despotism'. The building of this youth movement was not conceived of as issuing from intervention in the real class struggle, but of high-pitched activism of an abstract nature.

#### Youth Orientation

Such activities manifested in the organisation of dances, film series, meetings and sport, drew in large forces around the Irish Young Socialists, first in the North in late 1970, and then in the South, in early and middle 1971, from whom a nucleus of important cadres were won. But it was done at the expense a) of the adult movement, whose paper 'Vanguard' was dropped, and where the production of a theoretical magazine was continually put off, because Irish Young Socialists' work absorbed all its time, and b) the Irish Young Socialists itself, where political education was confined to a few classes and a series of public lectures, given by Healy in late

1970 and 1971.

### Socialist Labour League Chauvinism

When we say that the building of the Irish Young Socialists did not issue from intervention in the actual class struggle in Ireland, we mean precisely that. The entire content of the political activity of the Irish Young Socialists was selling the "Workers' Press" and their own "Bulletin", which concentrated on propaganda against the British Tory Government in England. Indeed the central political demand of the Irish movement to its own working class was for a General Strike to bring down... the Tory Government of Britain! This meant that the campaigns of the Irish Young Socialists were just part of those of the British Young Socialists, and consisted of taking delegations to an endless round of rallies in England: the Anti-Tory rally of February 1971, the 1971 Young Socialists' Conference, the Summer Camp (admittedly important), the All-Trade-Union Alliance rally, the Wembley Pool 1972 rally, Young Socialists' Conference 1972, the Summer Camp 1972, Empire Pool 1973, etc. In retrospect, given the isolation from the class movement that these policies produced, it is to be marvelled that the Irish Young Socialists held together so long. The warning signs appeared continually, though.

### Disillusionment

By early 1971, the entire old leadership in Belfast had left the movement in disillusionment. While in no way apologising for their backwardness politically, the major responsibility for their demise was Healy and Co's criminal chauvinist policies, foisted on the Irish movement, who were too backward to realise their content. It was inevitable that, with their base in the trade union movement, they would be the initial casualties. They represented, with all their weaknesses, the most advanced layer of the Protestant working-class, and were, hence, of extreme importance. (This however cut no ice for the SLL leaders, who have refused to recognise the division in the Irish working class, and proceed as if the Protestant workers were not dominated by reactionary ideology and have broken from it.) Their consequences for the whole Trotskyist movement in these islands is being felt negatively today in no uncertain manner.

### Administrative Methods

Before proceeding on to the interment period and its aftermath, which produced the effective break-up of the Irish Young Socialists, a word should be said about the role of Dave Fry, the leader of the Irish section. This man was hand-picked by the SLL leadership as their 'man in Ireland', and his political position has always been one of bureaucratic dependence. He represented no forces in the working class, nor an individual who had made a qualitative political development of any sort. Indeed, he was made Secretary of the SLL's new Dublin branch (1) in late 1969 within a few months from the time when he actually supported the intervention of British troops in

Ireland and had led a life of petty-bourgeois bohemianism as a student at Trinity College. In 1970 he took leadership of the section. These facts in themselves show the SLL's thinking in the setting up of a new section... what they wanted were political satellites, in the manner of Zinoviev's 'Bolshevised' Comintern, or Pablo's sections from 1946 - 1953, where centralisation and political homogeneity were carried through by administrative methods, without political clarification, such methods being epitomised in the selecting of right-hand men.

#### Soul Searching

Fry introduced into Ireland Healy's ultimatums and the type of internal regime that dominates the SLL, where there exist constant 'struggles' against tendencies and individuals, which bear no relation to the problems of intervention in the actual class struggle, but centre around failures to achieve organisational targets, e.g. number of papers to be sold, or finance to be raised, which are never analysed soberly, on the basis of the conditional, changing relation of class forces and that between the party and the class, but are said to reflect the conflict between theory and practice. To resolve this conflict, these individuals are required to make some abstract 'change' constantly. This semi-moral, idealist notion is very akin to Mao-ist "self-criticism". The best description of it, however, is contained in the Transitional Programme, where Trotsky states: "Since sectarians, as in general every kind of blunderer and miracle-man, are toppled by reality at every stage, they live in a state of perpetual exasperation, complaining about 'the regime' and 'the methods' (NB) and ceaselessly wallowing in small intrigues". This type of infantile practice, given theoretical gloss by the artificial so-called Marxist philosophy, introduced by the SLL leaders for the first time at the 1970 Pre-Conference of the International Committee, to cover up for their failure to have read the French documents which formed the basis of that Convention, was supposed to represent 'leadership' and 'political struggle' on Fry's part.

#### Internment and the National Question

Internment represented the turning-point that began to blow apart these "revolutionary" pretensions. While the class struggle in the South was still in the midst of a temporary lull since December 1970, and while the struggle in the North against Army repression had only reached a certain level, it was possible to check to some extent the logical consequences of functioning politically as if one lived in Britain. Such a possibility ended abruptly on 9th August, 1971. The national question burst on to the political scene. From then on, what was posed was the destruction of the sectarian state of N. Ireland, which had vast consequences for the struggle throughout both islands. Through the rent/rates strike, the mass struggle against Stormont exploded, linking up with the military struggle.

Scant Coverage

one of this was grasped one iota by the SLL or its Irish followers. Workers' Press in a series of editorials on the North, whose total number far lagged behind the coverage in the bourgeois press, which has always understood the implications of this conflict more keenly than the leaders of the SLL. These editorials made a number of formally valid points in criticism on the programme and perspectives of its Provisional IRA leadership, but never adopted unequivocally a position of critical support for the IRA, which abstentionist position it retains to this day. At the same time, the SLL began to praise the 'Official' Republican movement to the skies, to the point where, in early 1972, a Workers' Press editorial stated that the Officials only needed to read and study Lenin's "Materialism and Empirio-Criticism" to become Marxists. They were not talking of the rank and file, or sections of it, as the movement in Ireland, including this author, thought. They were talking of the Official movement, as such. Thus, not alone did they repeat the Algerian mistake, but they took up a clear, Pablo-ite position, of searching for alternative revolutionary leaderships. Healy had contacts with Sean Garland and other Sinn Fein leaders, which the Irish section (except possibly Fry) knew nothing about. So while the Irish comrades sought to recruit from the ranks of the Officials... in Derry and in Galway notably... Healy was going over their heads. Of course, when the Officials called their cease-fire in May 1972, demonstrating their basic reformist character, the SLL quickly issued a disclaimer in a series of five consecutive editorials in late May, where, in a totally un-principled manner, they even talked of the Officials 'bearing the mark of Cain', and of their 'betrayal of their Provisional Brothers'. I say 'un-principled', because the SLL's 'support' substituted journalistic jargon for real intervention in the struggle, as the April 1973 statement by the International Bureau of the Organising Committee for the Re-Construction of the Fourth International correctly points out. This sloganising also undercut any gains being made by the International Committee's statements after Direct Rule and the Provo cease-fire.

"Class Struggle" in Ireland

One of this served only to accentuate the political confusion of the Irish leadership, young and totally inexperienced. After internment, the failure to relate policies to the new situation resulted in a catastrophic loss of youth, North and South, some of them the Officials. The line of alliance with Gardiner Place was no accident, because the respective of a "democratised Stormont" and that of a "Workers' and Farmers' Government Stormont" both share an implicit acceptance of partition. Talk of a United Socialist Ireland would scare away the Protestant worker. This was explicitly stated by Fry, who, at a meeting in Dublin just after internment said, he didn't give a damn about a United Ireland, but was only interested in classes and class-struggle.

"Republicanism"

At a Central Committee meeting, the present author was violently attacked for Republicanism-

sm by Fry, for drawing attention to Trotsky's 1916 statement, where he talks of the Irish workers swinging naturally to nationalism and syndicalism, and pointing out its relevant nature in the new period. As was the wont, these doubts and differences were suppressed, in the face of the imagined infallibility of the SLL and Fry. What finally drove the nail into the coffin of the Irish Young Socialists was the Right-to-Work campaign, which was a mere extension of that in Britain, and which only achieved any response in the town of Waterford and in Newry, despite a huge rise in national unemployment in Ireland in the first few months of 1972. A party of twenty youth were brought over for the six-week long marches in Britain, and Fry went over too, leaving the Irish section without a national secretary and only full-time organiser for a month and a half.

#### Not Published

At this time, of course, the SLL had carried out a split in the International Committee, against the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste. A series of documents from the SLL's International Committee "majority" and a couple of the less important statements by the French were the sole documentation on which the SLL's client sections had to evaluate the issues. The major policy statements of the O.C.I., in "La Verite", nos. 556 and 557, where they not only gave their position on the Bolivian, United Class Front and Philosophy issues, but also on the history and nature of the differences in the International Committee itself, were never published by the SLL, for obvious reasons. Naturally these sections, including the Irish, adopted the SLL line, which (without any opposition internally) proceeded to impose itself the more strongly.

#### Fourth Conference

In April 1972, at the Fourth Conference of the International Committee, Healy launched an attack, first on the American and then on the Irish section. One of the things the Irish were criticised for was (i) a failure to produce an overall perspective and (ii) a simply sectional orientation to such as the Official Sinn Fein! The second needs no comment: it simply demonstrates the self-deception and bad faith of the SLL leadership. As for the first, when it was promised in October 1972 by Fry, Healy dismissed it as of secondary importance, just as the 1970 Pre-Conference document by the French had merely been a 'smoke-screen'. Differences were, however, now beginning to emerge openly in the Irish movement.

#### Isolation

The present author became highly critical of Cde. Fry's dropping of any fight to develop a historical perspective. The pressing urgency for this stemmed from the now virtually total isolation and tiny size, with a half-dozen youth in Dublin and one-man branches in both Belfast and Derry. Secondly, they emerged round the need for an adult movement and press. The first signs of the re-awakening into struggle of the Southern workers came in July 1972, on the questions of a second national wages agreement and of Labour's

right-wing's decision to form a coalition partnership.

#### Opportunities

Both of these opened up new opportunities to fight for the independence of the class and to win important forces. Hence the need to change the organisation, to bring in these individuals. The trouble was that the Youth Bulletin, though technically better since it became a printed fortnightly, was trying to be all things to all men, i.e. a newsletter appealing to both adult and young workers, with a title that repelled adult and did not strike the youth forcefully. These things all crystallised around my conception of orientation to the Labour militants and youth, on a programme of Labour fighting for power and being forced to lead on both the national and social questions. This was only articulated in embryo form. There was undiubtedly a tendency to orientate to the Labour Party almost entirely in this campaign and not to take it into other areas of the class struggle. But there never was any question of political or organisational liquidation into the Labour Party, as the SLL leaders lyingly accused me of later. In any event, they never fought to work out or discuss the tactics of this campaign with the Irish comrades at any stage.

#### Ultimatism

By late 1972, the financial and organisational problems of the movement, rooted in isolation (itself the final product of the preceding 2½ years' policies) became acute, and showed itself in the deterioration of the technical standard of the "Youth Bulletin", as well as at the Second Conference of the Irish Young Socialists. This led to the summoning of both Cde. Fry and this author to the October meeting of the International Committee. At this, Healy launched into an utterly disgraceful tirade against the Irish, denouncing them for opportunism, tail-ending the middle-class, reformism and... nationalism, because doubts had been raised about the major emphasis on "Workers' Press" sales in Dublin. This author was said to have lived on the surface of politics (which was true... because of SLL politics), and, above all, we had under-estimated the struggle in Britain. He then proposed, as an ultimatum, the suspension of the section, i.e. its expulsion, although this author took it literally, to mean temporary cessation of activity, during which I thought some things might be clarified. This was assented to by all present except Fry, who understood what was involved. After a short break, Healy relented, and said that, if an agreement were reached on sales of "Workers' Press" and Marxist literature in Ireland, he would not support the suspension of the section. Once again, in supine fashion, all agreed to the pronouncement of the leader.

#### Chauvinism

I have gone into great detail on this meeting, because, in a nutshell it demonstrates the essential, ultimatumist, chauvinist and idealist-sectarian methodology of the SLL

leaders. Following this meeting, unable to articulate this understanding, yet knowing it instinctively, this author declared to Cde. Fry that he could not continue in the Irish section. This was a tactical blunder, which, when learned later by the SLL leadership, led to his expulsion (commuted by Fry to a six-months' suspension, if financial and writing activities were agreed to) in December, despite the fact that he subsequently stayed in the movement. Meanwhile Mike Banda and Slaughter travelled over to 'clarify' the Irish section as a whole.

#### Firmness and Flexibility

Outside the Workers' League - the adult section had been publicly proclaimed - and under the impetus of the industrial mobilisation in the South against the arrest of McStiofain, an important political development was made by this author with regard to the national question. This was fought for with Fry, and resulted in an important series of articles on this question in the new "Workers' Struggle", itself an important achievement, which began to equip the movement to intervene in a revolutionary way around the question of Army terror, the white Paper, the local government and Assembly elections before the Northern workers and among the ranks of the Provisional IRA in Belfast. Unfortunately, at particular points, the then-leadership of the Workers' League was unable to combine political firmness and a necessary tactical flexibility towards (a) the Provo rank and file and (b) the Political Hostages Release Committee, adopting ultimatum stances, which tended to undermine work in these fields.

#### McStiofain

While this was happening, the SLL and Workers' Press, for the first half of 1973 said virtually nothing about developments in Ireland, North or South, despite the fact that in December 1972 they ran a series of articles by Ian Yates on Political Leadership in Ireland, and held a public meeting in London demanding McStiofain's release (to date their only practical activity on the Irish question in Britain). This author was engaged in writing a perspective which he had insisted on, taking in the struggle in Ireland since the early sixties, its relation to the British struggle and its political lessons. In the course of this, he developed a basic critique of the SLL's position on the national question here. For tactical reasons, this difference was communicated only to Fry, who expressed partial agreement with it and agreed to submit it to the August 10 meeting. Fry considered, however, that there was a danger of capitulation to the national bourgeoisie in it, and pointed to a review of "Freedom Struggle", never published, by this author, in which there had not been the usual simple sloganeering, but a posing of fundamental political questions in a concrete fashion to the Provo rank and file.

#### Expulsion

In due course, the criticism of the SLL was submitted, and led to my second and final

expulsion by the International Committee, for 'liquidationism into the Provisional IRA', without the criticism even discussed at the meeting. This author was prevented from defending his position at the Dublin branch meeting that week.

#### WHITHER THE IRISH SECTION?

Looking at the press of the Irish section since August (1973), one is shocked at the fact that 80% of it consists of "Workers' Press" reprints and, of the rest, the material on the North is simply phrase-mongering that avoids the need for real struggle, while nothing is said about the struggle of the Shop Stewards Committee against the National Wage Agreement in the South, from whose activities the voice of the Workers' League is noticeably absent. While isolation, much of it directly inspired from London, is intensified, there is a reliance on interminable cabaret shows for finance, that now consumes all its activities. There is taking place a headlong retreat into a world of photo-montage fantasy, more and more removed from class activity. Already half of the cadre nucleus in Dublin has left. Groups won from the Official Sinn Fein in Derry and Dublin must soon follow, for they are joining a sinking ship. Its National Secretary, though dedicated, is not the type politically who is prepared to face the consequences of revolutionary integrity, especially when this leads one to scrutinise the role of individual leaders. If the Workers' League finally disintegrates, it will be a testament to the criminal, chauvinistic irresponsibility of the SLL towards the Irish proletariat.

#### The League for a Workers' Republic and the Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International

Even after the SLL faction's split, the League for a Workers' Republic continued to ask for further discussions with the SLL. Their letters were never answered. This weakened them greatly in 1971, when the Pablo-ite International Marxist Group began to intervene in and to organise around their Dublin youth section, who joined in its majority with the revisionists, and split from the LWR. The "two-nations" theory of the LWR was obviously a major factor in this, but the failure of the SLL once again to intervene against the "Unified Secretariat of the Fourth International" was also an important factor. None the less, this bitter faction fight against the Pablo-ites, later the RIG, clarified many questions for the LWR leadership, and helped them later to grasp the issues involved in the split in the International Committee. They contacted the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste in April 1972, and attended the second session of the Pre-Conference of the International Committee in the summer of 1972, later becoming a section of the Organising Committee for the Reconstruction of the Fourth International.

### Discussion

This article does not suggest that the OCI and the LWR have a monopoly of political wisdom (as others do), or that neither have made mistakes in the past. The national question (for example) comes in mind: Algeria and the OCI, who have since analysed their 1958 mistake, while the LWR are struggling with their own national problem, to rectify ideological and abstentionist errors committed in the past. The most important thing is that the national question, like all questions, is fully discussed, with positions freely taken and fought for within the OCRFI, whose fight to make the OCRFI become the leading centre for the reconstruction of the Fourth International is the sole rallying point for Trotskyists and for militants looking for a road to the Fourth International. The pamphlet is being published as part of the political discussion and clarification leading to the Open Conference, itself crucial to the rebuilding of the Fourth International as the centralised World Party of Socialist Revolution. It is directed, in particular, to members and international followers of the SLL, which in its own country now talks about "the end (!) of the role of the 'lefts' in the Labour movement after the 1973 Labour Party Conference" (Workers' Press, October 6, 1973), thus overthrowing all the teachings of Lenin and Trotsky on the Labour Party, and moving to an openly sectarian policy, epitomised in the "Transformation" (by decree, outside the conditions of development of consciousness among the masses) of the SLL into the Revolutionary Party. The SLL's future is in the melting pot, unless its ranks examine their history honestly and change course before it is too late.

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(1959 – 1973): A Disastrous Legacy

**Organisation:** League for a Workers Republic

**Author:** Dermot Whelan

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