~~-BUILD-THE-SOCIALIST-LABOUR-PARTY-~~
-through UNITED MASS ACTION.

An Internal S.L.P. Discussion Document
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INTRODUCTION

We have written this document as a contribution to the debate taking place before and during the conference. It is not a tendency document nor is it intended for voting on; although we will be arguing in support of the general lines of the 3 main policy documents voted for by the National Executive Committee. We also however argue in favour of a number of amendments to these documents being put forward by various branches.

As we see it this policy conference has 2 basic functions: to outline an overall political approach for our party on major areas and secondly to sketch our a plan of action which will guide our practical work over the next year. These 2 functions ought to be related to each other. There isn't much point in having a brilliant programme on paper if it is of no use to us in deciding what to do now.

The first task of any Socialist party is to look reality hard in the face. We must be modest about ourselves. We are a small party, we have a few hundred members. We all want to build a mass Socialist party. The question that faces us is how this is to be done. General propaganda, participating in elections, involving ourselves in the day to day activities of the trade unions, in the community, and so on, - all have an important role to play in building our party. But there is something even more fundamental which will provide us with the key to going forward. It must be central precisely because our means cannot be separated from our ends. We will outline what we mean as simply as possible:

I) Socialism means power to the working people - self-government of the masses. It can only be achieved through the masses' own self-activity.

2) A mass Socialist party can only be built only through participating in and guiding mass struggles.

3) The major way to develop mass struggle is through the building of united campaigns around the key questions which face the masses (that is, workers, small farmers, students, and so on) and which have an explosive content.

4) Real struggles around modest issues today are I00 times better than those around 'perfect' programmes some time in the future.

5) The key to building mass campaigns is non-exclusiveness. No one, no organisation is excluded on principle. Whoever wishes to participate, provided they support the demands and agree to build it in a responsible way, may do so.

The last point is vital if we are to break down the sectarianism which has always paralysed the Irish left. People sometimes think that it is only small left groups which are sectarian, but what defines sectarianism is not size. You can have a thousand members, or twenty thousand, and still be sectarian. What defines an organisation as non-sectarian is its openness to working with other forces.

The ideas outlined provide the central thread to the sections of the document that follow. But other questions are dealt with as well. Dr. Noel Browne's paper on 'Socialism and Republicanism' has stimulated much discussion and interest. In our opinion Dr. Browne seriously underestimates the role of British Imperialism in Ireland and consequently is confused about Republicanism. We try to briefly outline an alternative view of the questions.

On the economic document we deal with a problem which we feel the NEC document falls down on--hoe do we build, here and now, in the unions. We attempt to outline an alternative perspective to those which are at present prevalent on the left. On one hand the 'get jobs for our people in the hierarchy' approach which is characteristic of the Communist Party and on the other the 'smash the bureaucracy' ideas of 'rank and filism'.

On the womens' document we argue that Socialists must have a positive approach to the womens' movement, that we must recognise its independence, that our women members should actively participate in it, and that we should seek to integrate feminist conceptions into our theory and parctice, always remembering that without the liberation of women we will not achieve true socialism.

We do not have a section on agriculture. This is not a reflection of our disinterest but of our ignorance. The Irish left is of course almost entirely centred in towns and knows very little about the countryside; indeed it is usually steeped in urban chauvinism. We think the document on agriculture should not be considered the last word on the question but rather as the first word, as initiating a debate amongst the SLP and with the rest of the left. We feel that much of the discussion around this issue has been confused because the correct starting point has not been adopted. On the one hand some comrades argue that we should be advocating collectivisation; others ask what policies are likely to gain votes. We believe the starting point must be around the question - what programme would be capable of drawing the most oppressed layers in the countryside - the small farmers, the agricultural labourers, the rural unemployed and underemployed - into struggle alongside the urban working class. We don't claim to have all the answers but we believe that if the question is posed in this way it will be possible to develop a more adequate socialist policy for the countryside.

At the 1932 conference of the Irish Labour Party the president of the Irish Trades Union Congress (ITUC) complained that "the national issue still commanded a dominating place in the minds of great sections of the people; and to no small extent were the workers also taking sides in this academic political controversy". In a nutshell he encapsulates the dilemma and the impotence of the Irish left. Because 46 years later the Labour Party is still in the same old useless rut and the "academic political controversy" still rages.

There has never been any shortage of leftists in Ireland eager to write the obituary of Republicanism, convinced that the question of partition is irrelevant and that the Republican organisations are on their last legs. And they are always horrified to see the old Republican phoenix rise again from the ashes. And it will do so again and again - until the Irish left gets rid of its patronising 'More rational than thou' attitude towards Republicanism and registers the fact that partition and the presence of British troops on Irish soil are anything but academic controversies. These are very real questions for radicalising workers and if we cannot see that it reflects more on our shortsightedness than on theirs.

The policy document on the national question passed by the National Executive Committee of the Socialist Labour Party represents a healthy break from this type of sterile thinking and gives it a chance of breaking out of the rut the Irish left has found itself in. It emphasises that phenomena such as Republicanism, Orangeism, and the absence of a strong socialist movement can only be understood in the context of the political oppression of Ireland and the corresponding economic underdevelopment of the country.

The fact that the Irish economy has the lowest productivity in Western Europe, with the highest rates of unemployment and the lowest wages, flows from this. This economic backwardness is a result, in the first instance, of colonial domination. Our failure to achieve full independence and unification as a basis for sustained development has forced the working class to suffer greater oppression. Far from being an 'academic question' the national question is a vital material concern of the Irish working class.

From a crude determinist approach one might have expected that the social and economic deprivation which faces the Irish working class would have produced a powerful socialist movement. But life is never so simple. Political conflict in Ireland has not taken a simple 'Labour Versus Capital' form precisely because the Irish working class cannot satisfy its needs just by fighting around simple economic issues; it has to fight against the factors which have hindered the development of the productive forces. As a result working class discontent in this country has largely expressed itself in the form of opposition to what has been seen (correctly!) as the political power which has a stranglehold over Ireland.

This does not mean that the Irish working class has not fought consistently around the issues of wages, and so on; but for this militancy to advance to a political level it would be necessary for the working class to see itself and its struggles in relation to society as a whole. Strikes which are isolated in one industry or sector, cannot ...

face
overcome the problems which/the working class as a whole - unemployment, redundancies, low social welfare, poor health services, atrocious housing conditions, and so on. This can only be done at the political level - at the level of society as a whole. For a really strong socialist movement to arise it must have a perspective of achieving state power; because power in any society is exercised through the state. But in Ireland there are 2 states - or ather 2 statelets - and another one hov ring over us to keep things in order.

Any socialist movement which does not address itse f to the problem of political power, and especially to the issues of partition and British domination, is merely spitting in the wind. Which is precisely what the Labour Party has been doing for the last 60 years - and it always gets it back in the face. Sinn Fein and their leader DeValera are often attacked for saying in 1918 that "Labour must wait". True. But it is only half the truth. The other half, the really crucial half, is this: LABOUR WANTED TO WAIT. The Labour leadership did not want to enter the political arena in 1918 or 1922 because that would have forced them to mobilise the working class as a class with its own methods of struggle against British Imperialism. That was the last thing they wanted! Instead they wanted to talk abotu 'bread and butter issues' and leave the middle-class nationalists to lead the working class politically. When the civil war came they remained 'neutral' - but neutrality is always a backhanded way of supporting the status quo in a case like this. They stood by while the Free State Army, backed by the British and the middle classes, the big farmers and the Catholic church, crushed the workers, the rural labourers, and the small farmers into the ground. Is it any wonder that the working class has ever since treated them with the contempt they deserve.

So long as the left confines itself to 'bread and butter issues' it will effectively be handing over the political leadership of the working class to Republicanism and Nationalism precisely because these ideologies are seen by the working class as more closely representing s their class interests than any servile labourism or impotent syndicalism. Republicanism is the guilty conscience of the Irish left; its persistence is a product of our failure. It can only be superceded if the left begins a serious fight against the domination of Ireland by British Imperialism. This is not to say that we should be uncritical of Republicanism, but that we should be critical of its weaknesses, and not at its strengths. We fully agree with the criticisms made of Republicanism in the NEC document - its militarist elitism. The Republicans believe that Ireland can be liberated by an armed elite whose daring actions will drive the British out. They offer "the people" only a secondary role - to give them material support and to be wheeled on to the stage for special occasions when they can applaud their heroes. As a result "the people" tend to get rather tired of the whole affair. With the decline of mass involvement the Republicans become isolated; they become more and more militaristic and less and less discriminate in their operations. The essential lesson of all genuinely successful anti-Imperialist struggles is lost on them - that the working masses can only be liberated by themselves, through their active involvement in the struggle.

It is however a big mistake to identify
with Fianna Fail
the Republican movement/just because they both claim to be 'Republican'. We judge people by what they do, not what they say. What Fianna Fail does is to govern the 26 Counties in the interests of Imperialism. The fact that it has Republican origins, or that it occasionally uses Republican rhetoric, proves only this: that even pro-Imperialist parties must respond to the aspirations of the Irish people for an end to Imperialist interference in our country if they are to maintain their support. Fianna Fail is no more Republican than the Labour Party is socialist. It would be tragic if genuine socialists allowed Fianna Fail's professed "Republicanism" to drive them into anti-Republican or ultra-left positions In the National Question. Unfortunately when it comes

to calling for a United Ireland the NEC document tends to do this. There is a feeling amongst many socialists that if you call for a 'United Ireland' without specifying that it has to be socialist you fall into the trap of 'middle class nationalism'. The opposite is the csse. By not calling for a United Ireland you are in fact letting Fianna Fail off the hook because you will fail to demonstrate to their supporters the enormous gap between their nationalist rhetoric and their pro-Imperialist practice. When FF call for a United Ireland what we should say is this: "Sounds great - but what are you going to do about it?". We already know the answer.

Likewise it is a mistake to identify Irish nationalism with Loyalism. The former is the nationalism of the oppressed. Loyalism is an opposite ideolagy. Like the racism of the poor whites of the southern states in the United States of America it is based upon the desperate need to maintain the few privilig es which they do have. In the land of the blind the one-eyed person is king; in the land of the unemployed having first rights to all jobs is a privilege. We will not break the Protestant working class from Orangeism by accomodating to it. Only by consistently fighting their backward ideas and simultaneously supporting any progressive struggles wiich they are engaged in can we win them to socialism. Whoever cannot distinguish Irish nationalism from Orangeism in this way would be incapable of distinguishing the Black Panthers from the Ku Klux Klan.

For the Labour Party a policy document was something you produced for elections to show what you would do when you got into government. It was all good Alice-in-Wonderland stuff. <u>It was completely irrelevant and unrelated to the party's practice.</u> This is perfectly understandable because the only people the Labour Party ever tried to mobilise were themselves. Socialists cannot afford to have the same frivolous approach to policy documents because a socialist party is by definition <u>a party of struggle</u> and its policy documents are a basic guide to its activities. As such the most important section of the NEC document is the final part which outlines what the party should be doing in the next year. This section emphasises that the key way forward in relation to the national question today is the struggle against repression. This is something we fully agree with; indeed we feel that unless there is an effective fight waged against repression now it is only a matter of time before every progressive movement, every struggle expressing discontent, is crushed in the bud.

But the real problem which we face is how this is to be done. How can the SLP build an effective campaign against repression? On this vital issue the NEC document falls down badly. The formula it suggests is that we seek to build a United Front of working class and anti-Imperialist organisations, which sounds great - very left-wing and all that - but what does it mean in practice? In practice it evades all the real problems which face socialists in fighting repression in Ireland today. In the first place who is to decide what is an anti-Imperialist organisation and what isn't? The Officials (Sinn Fein - the Workers' Party) claim the Provos are (objectively speaking) "agents of Imperialism". The Provos claim that the Officials are (in every sense of the term) "pro-Imperialist". But your problems are only beginning there. What makes an organisation a working class one? The social background of its members? What percentage of our party come from working class backgrounds? Or maybe what we are talking about organisations which represent the <u>objective</u> interests of the working class? That is an interesting point in itself when we consider that most of the left organisations in Ireland believe that they, and they alone, represent the objective interests of the working class. Everyone else is betraying them - which brings us back to our first point: who is going to decide?

The answer to all this is really very simple. They decide themselves! Whoever, whatever, organisation wishes to participate in a mass action campaign against repression is free and welcome to do so!

This might all sound semantic - a debate over words - but it isn't. What we are discussing are sharply differing estimates of what constitutes political rellity in Ireland today and how it is to be changed. Those who propound the "United Front of Anti-Imperialist and Working-class organisations" line have a particular conception of the way forward. Their United Front = the Left + the Republican movement + the Trade Unions + the Labour Party. Now it is difficult to know whether they are projecting what they think is desirable or whether they actually think it is possible at this moment in time. But lets forget about their desires and examine what is possible.

THE LABOUR PARTY:

We all know that the Labour Party passed a resolution at its recent conference calling for the repeal of all repressive legislation. We also know that the party leaders who voted for this motion were the very same people who introduced many of these laws. The leopard changing its spots? This wretched leopard will never use its claws against repression. Can anyone really believe that the Labour Party, in its present shape, will join a united front against repression? Such naivety would be truly amazing! If we dismiss the Labour Party from our equation we are left with the following: United Front = Left + Republicans + Trade Unions.

THE TRADE UNIONS:

The active participation of the trade union movement is crucial in the long run if a mass anti-Imperialist movement is to be built. But is it feasible today? Lets put it another way. Is it conceovable that, given their present leadership, the ITGWU and the WUI are going to join a United Front against repression? We only have to ask the question to see its absurdity. Perhaps the advocates of a "United Front of anti-Imperialist and working class organisations" are really suggestion that we must first all get rid of the leadership of these and other unions and then build our united front. In other words nothing can be done now! This is certainly the impression one got at the Coalisland conference Against Repression where the major piece of advice that the official SLP delegate had to offer those attending was that they should become active in their trade unions and call for the abolition of the separate Northern Committee of the ICTU. Most of the delegates at the conference did not even have jobs! The problem with people who fetishise the trade unions is that they are incapable of seeing any other phenomena outside of the Trade Union movement. In fact the way in which the unions will probably be involved in a campaign against repression could turn out the opposite of these peoples' schemas. It will only be when large numbers of people (including trade unionists of course) are mobilised on the streets, independently of the trade union movement will it be possible for militants in the unions to force their leaderships to participate. Our equation now only has 2 terms on the right hand side: United Front = The Left +Republicans.

THE LEFT AND THE REPUBLICANS:

In the South it is most likely the left and the Republicans who will make up the hard core of a mass campaign against repression. However even here the aim of the campaign is surely to extend its support beyond the confines of these forces. To exclude non-Republicans or non-Socualists on principle would mean cutting yourself off from a wider audience.

In the north, where the repression is most advanced, we are dealing with a very different ball-game. The left is fairly marginal and the largest left organisation, the Officials, are very badly discredited in the ghettoes. Which leaves one term in our equation which has any real power - the Republicans, essentially the Provos and allied groups. The last 5 years have demonstrated very clearly that the Republican movement is not capable of building an effective campaign against repression. Although they maintain a considerable base in the ghettoes they are isolated from the majority of the nationalist population. They tend to attempt to subordinate any mass campaigns which they are involved in to the armed struggle and consequently weaken them. Over the past 2 years there has been a growing awareness among anti-Imperialist militants, including many Provo supporters nad members, that if British Army and RUC repression are to be defeated a broad based campaign of mass action will have to be built. The Coalisland conference was the culmination [illegible] of a long process of re-thinking; it was also the beginning of a new wave of mass action.

This is where the real crinch comes. If you are to draw into struggle sectors who don't support the Republican movement you must have an orientation towards the party which the majority of the nationalist community support - the SDLP. However the position on United Fronts contained in the NEC document is passed at this conference all members of our party will be committed to opposing <u>any</u> SDLP participation in campaigns against repression.

The end result of the 'leftist' formula in the NEC document is this - nothing will be built at all! Of course the purists who advocated this line have good reason for doing it. The SDLP is a middle-class party. To engage in a united campaign with SDLP members or even members of the Irish Independence Party (IIP) is to engage in a bloc with the middle classes and to sow all sorts of illusions amongst the workers. But they miss one little point - the majority of nationalist workers already support the SDLP. The only way we can break them from this party is by engaging them in struggle where they gain confidence in their own ability to organise and no longer look to the middle classes for leadership. There is no way that we can draw in large numbers of SDLP working class supporters into struggle if from the very beginning we <u>exclude on principle</u>the party which they support. This is the only way a mass campaign can be built and Socialists can win the leadership of the anti-Imperialist movement in Ireland. But of course our purists don't want to soil their lily-white hands by having anything to do with such 'unprincipled alliances'.

There is another objection to such a broad-based campaign. Such a campaign would be a 'pan-Catholic alliance' and would 'alienate' the Protestant workers because they would see middle-class politicians involved in it. The people who argue this look back to the Civil Rights movement and say that if it called for workers' unity things would be different today. The whole point which the civil rights movement demonstrated was that the struggle for social equality and democratic rightsthreatened the privileges of the Protestant caste. It was defence of these privileges which 'alienated' the Protestant workers from the struggle of their Catholic fellow-workers. One does not win people from reactionary ideas by accomodating to them. Anyone who imagines that by making your campaigns agsanst repression more 'socialist' that Protestant workers will flock to it must recently have fallen from one of the space-ships in 'Close Encounters'.

The SLP faces huge opportunities in the coming period in building broad based campaigns against repression, North and South. Or if it prefers it can choose a perspective which sounds very 'leftist' but that will achieve nothing at all. The conception which we have outlined and which a number of branches are advocating at conference may not sound quite

so leftist but its content is much more revolutionary because it relates to real struggles and not abstractions. We are not saying that it will be easy to build such campaigns but we are convinced that in the coming period it will be actually possible; and more than that, it is the only way.

THE WOMENS' MOVEMENT AND THE LEFT

The new upsurge of feminism, which has developed since the I960's, took the left by surprise. For forty years the socialist movement had 'forgotten' about women. Of course they hadn't totally forgotten - they had merely ceased to register the fact that women are oppressed. This little oversight is probably the clearest expression of how theoretically impoverished the workers' movement had become in the intervening period. Their initial response to the new movement was of course, suspicion and hostility. Not that this is surprising. The general response of the left to any new phenomenon, or indeed anything which it does not directly control, tends to be along the same lines. Since the I960's the left has been able to adopt a more composed attitude, but the underlying hostility is still widespread. Now it is veiled, it has had to cover itself up a little bit. This hostility usually takes the following forms.

'WOMENS' RIGHTS YES = WOMENS' LIBERATION NO'

This is the way reformist organisations such as the Labour Party try to keep the womens' movement boxed up. Yes they admit that women are denied their rights in many areas but a few changes in the law here and there will solve the problem. What they fail to see, or don't wish to see, is that the sexual division of labour, which is deeply rooted in capitalist social relations, is at the heart of womens' oppression. We can see this clearly by noting that although the 'long boom' of capitalism in the I950's and I960's created a bigger number of opportunities for women, and increased the female proportion of the total workforce, the tasks of the woman in the home remained much the same. Work such as cooking, cleaning the house, washing, and so on, is of course necessary but there is no rational reason why women alone should have to do it. Yet the solution of this problem would require full socialisation of these tasks, where the state would provide the necessary resources. No capitalist regime could even begin to do this, especially now in more depressed times, when with unemployment increasing it can cover this fact up by sending women out of the workforce, 'back to the home'. The whole dynamic of the womens' struggle is directed against capitalism itself.

'MIDDLE CLASS WOMENS' MOVEMENT NO - WORKING CLASS WOMENS' MOVEMENT YES'

For the vulgar workerists among us the problem with the womens' movement is that it is not working class enough. But they are never very precise in their meaning. It is of course true that the majority of feminists in Ireland come from middle-class or lower middle class backgrounds. But then so do many socialists, including very often those who make this criticism. Perhaps what is meant is that the demands of the womens' movement are of no relevance to working class women or don't have an anti-capitalist thrust. But this is simply untrue as we argued earlier. Underlying this argument is another which is never spelt out because if it was it would ref.. ct too clearly on the deep-rooted conservatism of those who put it for ..d. These people think that it is only working class women who are oppressed. But if this is true something follows from it - working class women are oppressed because they are working class not because they are women. In other words women are not oppressed as women; women per se are not oppressed at all. We come round full circle. And

what we see is this: that those who today reject the womens' movement because it is middle class will attack a genuinely working class based womens' movement tomorrow because it is 'splitting' the working class.

Of course as socialists we want to build the womens' movement among the working class, to build it simultaneously as an ally and a component part of the workers' movement. But if we are to succeed in doing this we must be able to relate to and to lead those women who are radicalising now, or are already radicalised. To do this we must understand the nature of the Irish womens' movement as it exists at present and how it came into being.

Two major factors determined the evolution of the Irish womens' movement: the small percentage of women within the workforce and their resultant weakness, and the degree of oppression, especially sexual repression, which flows from clerical power in Ireland. Neither of these factors falls from mid-air, both are rooted in the socio-economic backwardness of Ireland caused by colonial domination. The small percentage of women in the labour force (I3.I%) and the fact that so many of them work in areas where they are extremely vulnerable, e.g. offices, sweatshops, ensures that they play only a very marginal role in the labour movement.

In the I960's and I970's there emerged a new layer of women who were not only economically but also socially independent (i.e. from the family) the majority of these coming from middle class or lower middle class backgrounds. It is quite natural that it was from this layer that the bulk of activists in the womens' movement came. The weight of sexual repression and the social weight of the churches ensured that questions of basic democratic rights such as contraception and divorce became the focuses around which the movement developed. Given the absence of a vibrant culture in the labour movement this layer of radicalising women did not clarify its relationship to the working class or to socialist politics. However through their struggles against clerical control and against successive governments they have become thoroughly alienated from bourgeois politics.

No mass movement fighting for womens' rights can be built by by-passing this layer of radicalising women. Instead we must work amongst them seeking to unite the diverse sectors of the womens' movement through drawing them into action around the key issues which face women in Ireland today. To do so, our women members should, wherever possible, actively involve themselves in the womens' movement. Not only would this strengthen those feminists who do have a perspective for mass action but it would also give our party great credibility amongst radicalising women. If we succeed in building mass action campaigns around contraception and other explosive issues we will shake the power of the Catholic church in this country and open tens of thousands of women - and men - to radical ideas.

So far we have concentrated our arguments on the need for our party to adopt a positive approach to the independent womens' movement. It is one of the great merits of the NEC document that it does have such a perspective. However as the document (which we support) points out, it is not sufficient to relate to the existing womens' movement. We must combat the oppression of women in two other areas - the trade union movement and in the communities. As there is general agreement in the party on fighting for womens' rights in the trade unions we won't dwell on the point. Instead we will deal briefly with the issue of the communities.

The vast majority of working class women do not participate in the labour-force. We cannot reach them through the trade unions. They are to be found in the communities, isolated from each other be-

cause they have no focus for coming together around their common needs. They ahve no organisation which speaks for them or through they can speak. To overcome this isolation and passivity we must begin to work within the communities agitiaing around those issues such as nurseries, health facilities, family planning clinics, price rises, and so on, which can draw the people in working class communities, and especially the women, into common action. This is a slow and difficult process. It would be very easy to get drawn into activities which have no political potential. However if we gear ourselves into organising the people in the communities into fighting themselves for their rights we can begin to establish a fighting base in the working class communities.

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS, TRADE UNIONS AND POLITICS

Possibly the most dangerous and pervasive myth amongst Socialists is the notion that because we are a dangerous and deepening economic crisis, the working class will move rapidly to the left and begin to fight for socialism. There is no justification for assuming this at all. Indeed on the contrary we can say that unless Socialists prove capable of leading a fightback against the employers and against the governmentthe opposite process will occur; the working class will become demoralised, less militant, and depoliticised. Given this it would be very foolish for us to see our role as being one of cashing in on the discontent brought about by the crisis. Rather we should see our task as putting ourselves at the head of those workers who do want to fight back and of giving them a perspective for doing so.

The NEC document on the economic question goes a long way to providing such a perspective. It sets out a whole series of demands around which struggles can be developed. And yet there is a glaring ommission in it. It doesn't say <u>how</u>. It offers no<u>strategic</u> way forward. How do we get these ideas across to the more combative workers? Just publish them in our paper? Or should we raise them at every trade union meeting we go to? We would suggest that if we do we will end up boring everybody to tears. and thoroughly isolating ourselves in the process. The real art of politics is choosing those demands which have a real cutting edge at the <u>present moment</u> and concentrating our fight around these.

But this in itself does not answer all the problems. It does not answer how we are going to build around these demands. Here we suggest that the problem be broken into two - that we have a <u>short-term</u> perspective and a <u>long-term</u> one.

Lets take the short-term perspective first. Our task must be to bring together all those trade unionists who are prepared to fight against the attack on the standards of living of the working class and on its right to organise. Our aim should be to build a broad united front cutting across union divisions. Such a body should be built around the key demands of the moment; along the lines of the following:

1) Against National Wage Agreements

2) Against redundancies - Nationalise!

3) For a trade union campaign against unemployment.

4) For a national minimum wage.

5) For Equal Pay — in defence of married womens' right to work.

6) For the right to strike - opposition to all anti-trade union legislation.

7) Nationalise all mineral resources.

Building such a broad current would be a powerful stimulus to unleashing the energies of militant workers. Here again we must emphasise that it be non-exclusive in character, and that it be open to all trade unionists both ordinary members and shop stewards of full-time officials. If we go along with 'rank and filist' conceptions of excluding full-time officials and crudely attack the bureaucracy we will be cutting off our noses to

to spite our faces. In the first place there are quite a number of TU officials who feel frustrated with the situation they are in and would be prepared to participate in such a current if it got going. But as well as that we would be weakening ourselves before the bulk of TU officials who don't want to fight back, because we would be giving them an excuse for not participating. Instead of openly having to admit that they are not prepared to fight the employers and the government they would be able to accuse us of trying to split the trade union movement.

We are not saying that such a broad current can be built overnight. It will take time and work. Probably the best way of popularising the idea and getting it off the ground would be through building united campaigns around single issues as they crop up (e.g. a campaign against the national wage agreement). If it is built in a non-exclusive and non-sectarian way it could serve as an example for bigger and better things. However if we use it as just a party-building stunt we will narrow its field of attraction and turn off a lot of good militants. We will in effect lose out in the long run for the sake of short-term gains.

The perspective which we have outlined above is clearly different from one of tailing every strike, and becoming another 'rent-a-strike' support committee. We must insist that simply advocating more strikes and more militancy just isn't good enough. That doesn't mean that SLP members shouldn't be to the forefront of any conflicts with employers in their own place of work. Nor does it mean that we shouldn't intervene in key conflicts, that is conflicts which have the potential for becoming national issues or which will have a big impact in a particular area. But here also we nust think out our approach. Take the case of Ferenka. The SLP came out with what sounded like a really radical demand, "nationalise under workers' control", no less. No messing around there! Our statement was published in the papers, and then..... silence. If instead we had been a little more modest in our demands, if we had simply said "nationalise now" and gone out and built a broad campaign in support of the Ferenka workers, with meetings up and down the country, it could have a huge impact. We could have linked up in the minds of thousands of Irish workers the question of the domination of ourceconomy by foreign capital with the question of our stagnating development and the failure to provide jobs. More than that we could have won; and nothing succeeds like success. No doubt we will be accused of scandalous opportunism for saying this by those who think that a revolutionary programme is something you use to make love with. But that doesn't worry us, because we are more concerned with building a real movement than scoring points in a petty argument.

This perspective of building a broad fighting current in the trade unions in no way cuts across the building of mass actions campaigns around specific economic questions. The most obvious example of this would be unemployment, but this is a very difficult one to get going. The vast majority of the unemployed are convinced of their own powerlessness. They see their situation either as a natural calamity or else as a product of Ireland's poverty. In both cases they can do nothing about it. Even those who see unemployment as a product of the irrationality of capitalism still feel the same powerlessness. And not without reason. If we go on a march demanding jobs we are not going to get them anyway, they argue. So, what is the point of the exercise? It is interesting that even in Britain far more unemployed youth have been mobilised against racism by the Anti-Nazi League and Rock Against Racism than by the Right to Work campaign. This doesn't mean that we should rule out the possibility of building a campaign against unemployment, but we shouldn't be too optimistic. And even if we do build a mass campaign against unemployment we must remember that unless it is paralleled by similar campaigns around more overtly political questions it will fizzle out leaving nothing behind but disillusionment and bitterness, as happened in the 1950's.

A mass campaign around the question of resources (as opposed to propaganda work) would probably have much greater potential precisely because it is more concrete in the sense that it has a clear focus. When you are talking about resources the point is very simple. The government cannot claim that we do not have any resources or that we cannot afford any. We can point to the fact that our resources are being looted by the multi-nationals while our young people are being denied jobs and the government is working hand-in-glove with foreign capital. We should give serious consideration to launching such a campaign,

In Ireland, much more than in most European countrirs, economic struggles once they are generalised will tind to become political - they will tend to confront the state. Because of our economic underdevelopment there is no way that Irish capitalism can accede to the demands of the working class once that class begins to move. The southern state does not have the same legitimitacy as other states nor does there exist a credible mass social democratic party which can channel the discontent of the working class in a 'safe' direction. Once threatened the ruling class through its various institutions, and especially its two political parties, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael, will launch a political offensive against the working class and its allies. Indeed they have already begun it with their attack on our democratic rights and on women. We will almost certainly be defeated unless we ourselves are prepared to wage a political fight in the workers' movement. By this we mean that the SLP must not limit itself to working in the trade unions and on economic issues. It must also fight for the unions to take up the defence of democratic rights including the demand for British withdrawal and for support for womens' rights etc. How do these relate to the mass fighting current in the unions which we spoke about earlier? This is a difficult problem.

It would be foolish at this stage to insist upon agreement about British withdrawal etc. before forming such a current. What we should do is to maintain our own independent positions fighting for the unions to take these up while also propagandising within such a broad current on these questions. At a certain stage it would certainly be necessary to insist that the current as a whole take up these questions even if it means parting ways with the more hardened syndicalist elements. This is a question of timing. In all probability when it comes to deepening the political content of such a current these questions would already be mass issues. It would not simply be our party that was pushing for them; the bulk of trade union militants would themselves be insisting on them.

The project which we have sketched above is not just a guide for our trade union work, it is the key to building a socialist party with a mass base in the working class. Through the fight for a militant left wing in the unions we open the door to the creation of such a party. The question has often been raised of the relationship between the Labour Party and the trade unions. We believe that it would be a mistake to call on the trade unions to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. This would only help Fianna Fail and help to further reduce the political consciousness of the working class. They would not then have to confront the problem of the need for a political party of their own class. Instead we should advocate in the unions that the ICTU call a conference to set up a mass democratic all-Ireland party of Labour. To this conference all working class groups, tenants' organisations, womens' groups and so on, would be invited to send delegates, including ourselves and the 'official' Labour Party. This new workers' party would give rights to all tendencies similar to what existed when the British Labour Party was originally formed. Of course we are not in a position to do this at the moment. We don't have that sort of strength in the unions. We can only arrive at that position through the building of a mass left-wing and thas is something that we can begin to work for now.

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