

# THE TASKS AHEAD

## The Perspectives Discussion at the 1976 National Conference of the International Marxist Group

*'I cannot help recalling a conversation I happened to have at the Congress with one of the "Centre" delegates. "How oppressive the atmosphere is at our Congress!", he complained. "This bitter fighting, this agitation one against the other, this biting controversy, this uncomradely attitude!"*

*"What a splendid thing our Congress is!", I replied. "A free and open struggle. Opinions have been stated. The shades have been revealed. The groups have taken shape. Hands have been raised. A decision has been taken. A stage has been passed. Forward! That's the stuff for me! That's life! That's not like the endless, tedious word chopping of your intellectuals, which stops not because the question has been settled, but because they are too tired to talk any more..."*

*"The comrade of the "Centre" stared at me in perplexity and shrugged his shoulders. We were talking different languages." (Lenin - One Step Forward, Two Steps Back)*

This is the spirit in which the International Marxist Group, as every section of the Fourth International, seeks to hold its conference and pre-conference discussions. It is a method unlike that of any other major group on the British left. The Workers Revolutionary Party has expelled

before the 'conference' every single opposition tendency since 1960. The International Socialists have expelled every opposition to date and refuse serious rights of organisation and democratic discussion to minorities. In each case the word of the omnipotent leader, or of a tiny inner circle, is supposed to be a substitute for serious discussion within the membership.

The IMG attempts, within its organisational and political resources, to place itself in an entirely different tradition - that of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and the Communist movement before it was crushed by Stalin. Discussion and internal democracy is not a luxury but a necessity. It is the only way in which all the experience of the organisation can be brought to bear in determining its political line.

To gain that democracy requires serious rights of organisation and discussion for minorities. For the IMG conference, one delegate has been elected for every three members in order to allow serious representation of minorities; the fares of every tendency to speak at pre-conference discussion meetings in the areas have been paid by the national organisation; a total of 66 discussion documents have been

produced; each branch for the last two months has had regular pre-conference discussions, and on top of this each area of the country has had three aggregates at which speakers from the different view points have put forward their positions; and supporters of different documents have been able to organise themselves into tendencies and factions.

The discussion has centred on general perspectives in Britain, intervention in the trade unions, the Labour Party, the crisis in Scotland, questions of women's oppression and anti-imperialist campaigns. The contributions below represent a short summary of the five main positions which emerged in the course of the discussion.

At the same time there has also been a separate discussion, culminating in a full day at the conference, on the differences which have emerged inside the Fourth International on the question of Portugal (for documentation see *Intercontinental Press*, 22 March 1976).

After the conference the line which gains a majority will be applied. A leadership will be elected on that basis. 'Another stage', in Lenin's words, will be passed through. In a supplement to the paper after the conference we will discuss the outcome of the conference.

### Tendency 1

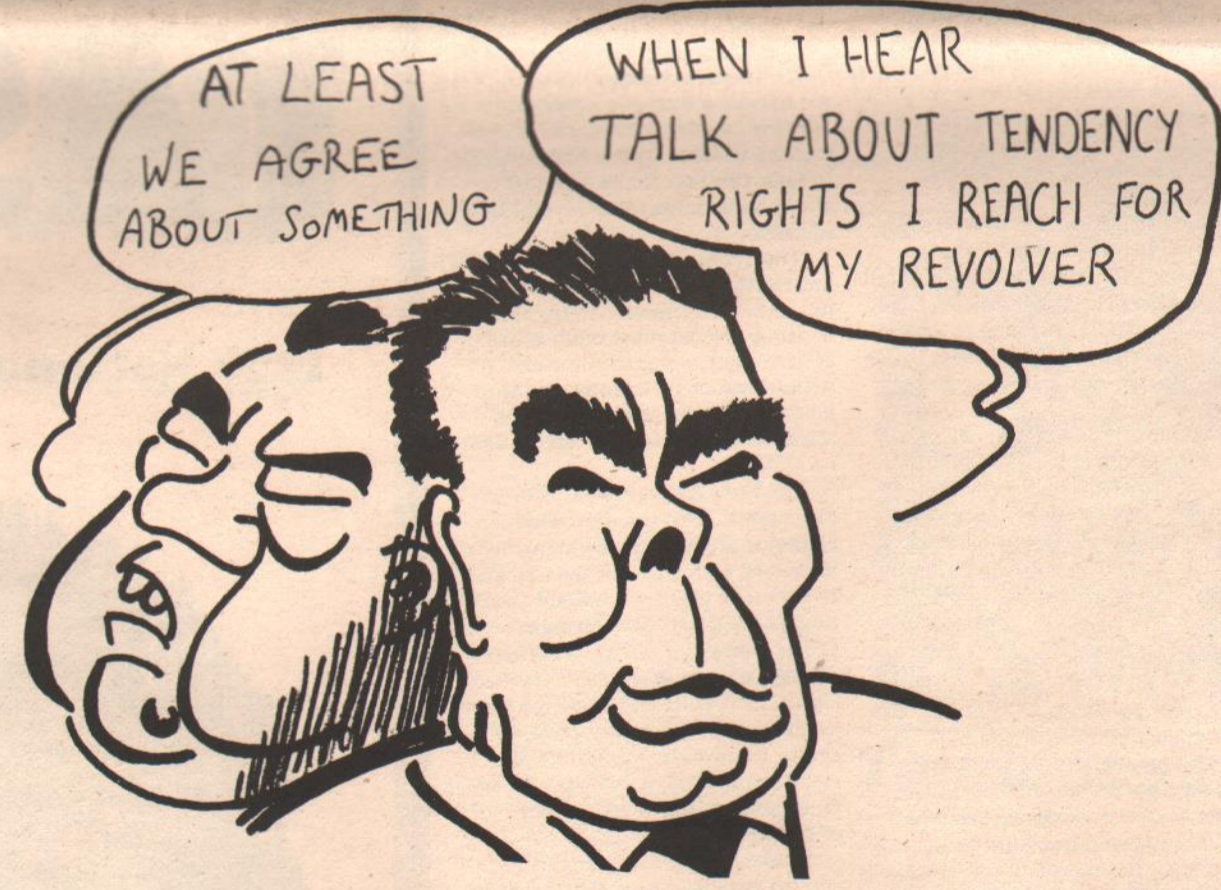
*(The contributors declared a faction in the IMG last November. The political basis and aim of our faction is to continue the struggle for Trotskyism against the line of the IMG and international leadership. Sections of our perspectives - dealing with women's oppression and the history of our struggle so far - had to be omitted from this outline for reasons of space.)*

1. The economic, political and social structures of capitalism today fall into ever deeper crisis throughout the world. The liberation struggles of the oppressed masses in the 'Third World' now combine with mounting struggles of the working class in the main imperialist centres - in Western Europe, Japan and America.

This process strikes many blows to the power of the imperialist ruling class. The state power of the bourgeoisie is overthrown in Indochina and Angola. The world revolution is on the offensive.

The reformist and Stalinist leaders of the workers movement can neither halt the tide of revolt, nor can they lead the way forward to socialism. These features of the world political situation create the most favourable conditions for the working class and for the building of mass revolutionary parties.

Events in Britain today can only be assessed within the material reality of this overall process. It would be a grave error to decide that the decline in the size and scope of workers' struggles in Britain during the last year signifies a reversal of the basic tide of events, which remain very much on the side of the working class. In the face of employers' attacks on jobs and conditions, of moves to strengthen the repressive powers of the state and attacks on basic rights, the betrayals of trade union leaders and Labour politicians have not wiped out the major gains of the



past years.

2. The working class rests on the experience of struggles which removed the Heath Government with its statutory incomes policy, and the apparatus of the Industrial Relations Act. They went on to win a big rise in living standards at the depth of the international recession in 1974.

Most importantly, the tens of thousands of militant workers who came forward to lead these struggles in occupations, organising picketing, political strikes and demonstrations have not accepted the cowardly collaboration of their 'leaders' with the anti-working class measures of the Labour Government. On the contrary, this decisive layer of militant workers now seeks a way forward against these attacks.

They turn to those trade union

and Labour leaders who have cultivated a 'left image' in the past. These elements reply with no more than empty rhetoric and verbal protests. Only the Trotskyist programme offers the answers which are needed. Our task is to put forward a line of struggle for that programme which will open the way to forging the militant workers into a new revolutionary leadership in the workers movement which can challenge the betrayals of the present leaders.

Our indispensable weapon for this task is the Transitional Programme, which embodies the practical method for leading the militant workers away from illusions in parliamentary reform towards a conscious struggle for socialism. To carry out this task in practice, it is necessary to reject the positions advanced by

the leadership of the IMG and the United Secretariat (USFI).

3. The only policy to defend living standards against rising prices and wage control is for a sliding scale of wages. To defend jobs, for work-sharing with full pay. To defend public services, for a sliding scale of public expenditure.

It is a central part of the Trotskyist line to fight for and to help the advanced workers develop the means by which such policies can be taken up and put into practice. Without this, such policies are reduced to empty slogans. Thus, the fight for workers inquiries into the operation of different firms and branches of the economy is a central part of the Trotskyist programme and struggle for the coming months.

4. The struggle against British

imperialist domination in Ireland is a major part of the crisis for the ruling class. The defeat of British rule in Ireland will be a milestone on the road to workers power in this country. While the IMG on paper has a principled record of defence of the right to self-determination for Ireland and for immediate withdrawal of British troops, in practice our work has been confined in small circles of the TOM, mainly among elements who already oppose British rule in Ireland.

The pacifism and parliamentary illusions which dominate the workers movement are falsely seen as a uniform anti-Irish chauvinism. This has led us to abstain in the debates in the unions and the Labour Party, leaving the field open to the Stalinists and the reformists. To reverse this we must turn the energies of every member towards a fight in the workers organisations against youth unemployment and recruitment into the army.

Under the slogan of 'Unemployed youth into the unions - not into the army' we must campaign for jobs, not guns in the service of imperialism, for the youth. Together with this we must agitate for workers defence of every union and Labour Party member detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. On this basis we will politically prepare and build the forces for a mass working class movement under the banner 'Ireland is One Nation - Britain Out Now'.

5. The international rise of workers' struggles points to the burning need to build a world party for socialist revolution. Such a party must be based on the development of a Trotskyist programme which draws on the experiences of the workers movement and points the way forward in the struggle for socialism. It will be built in a common struggle for this programme in every country.

The forces of the IMG must be turned towards the task of political re-construction and re-building a strong world party - a real Commu-

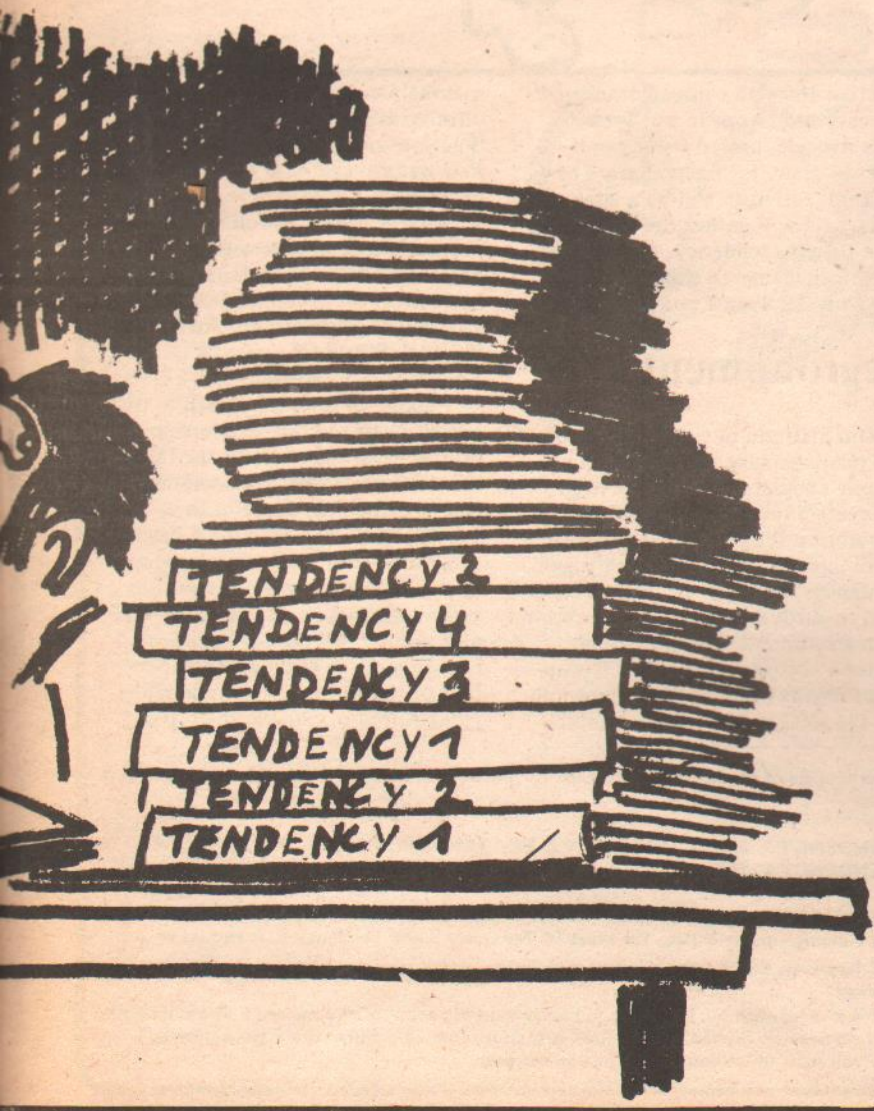




Photo: CHRIS DAVIES (Report)

# AHEAD

## Discussion at the International Marxist Group



## Tendency 3

### 1. IS THE TASK OF THE DAY REPLACING THE PRESENT LABOUR PARTY LEADERSHIP?

Serious socialists see the need to sweep away the present leadership of the working class and replace it with one which fights for a thoroughgoing anti-capitalist policy. But this will require many years of struggle and the building of a new revolutionary party. What is the central task of today, of the next year or eighteen months?

The USFI theses say that it is to replace the present Labour leadership with an alternative one. The theses say that, '..... a necessary precondition for a generalised successful defence and counter-attack, reversing the limited gains scored by the bourgeoisie during the last six months,' is 'the emergence of an alternative leadership', and that this 'cannot be created in the immediate future - the coming 12-18 months which is the time posed - outside the Labour Party .....

From this flows the central IMG slogan of 'Remove the Callaghan-Healey leadership'.

We think this way of posing perspectives is wrong. The working class can counter-attack even if the lefts fail to challenge the Labour leadership. In our view the main slogan for today should be: 'Defeat the Labour Government's attacks on working people - For class struggle solutions to the capitalist crisis.' We think that such policies are summarised in our Action Programme, and the essence of it is the struggle to take control of the economy out of the hands of the capitalists through workers control and nationalisation of the banks and manufacturing industry.

### 2. CLASS STRUGGLE CURRENTS AND THE LABOUR LEFT.

The Labour Party's hold over the majority of the working class will only be broken during mass revolutionary mobilisations. This general historical truth is not, however, a sufficient guide to day-to-day orientation. In particular, it is wrong to think that the broad vanguard of working class militants is actively committed to the belief that if the lefts held power, the Labour Party would become an adequate vehicle for socialism. The experience of the working class since the war has left the bulk of class conscious workers cynical and sceptical about the lefts.

This relationship between the lefts and the broad working class vanguard has been demonstrated over and over again during the last months: the failure of the Manifesto groups; the lack of enthusiasm for the chauvinist campaign over the EEC; the lack of polarisation in the mass organisations over the Labour Party leadership contest; and many other examples. On the other hand, there has been a growth of movements expressing political activity outside the framework of labourism - the women's liberation movement and NAC; the anti-fascist committees; various solidarity movements; etc.

In addition, we have seen the development of trends at the base of the mass organisations seeking alternatives to reliance on the lefts: the National Assembly on Unemployment - basically organised by the CP; the IS 'Right to Work' march (which despite its sectarianism got substantial declarations of support from trade union bodies); and the MCAPP conference.

How should these currents fight within the mass organisations? Should their main task be to build 'a united left movement'? Vote the right out of office and the left in? Get all unions to affiliate to the Labour Party and flood back in the CLPs? That is the logical line for those who think that the key task is to replace the Labour Party leadership.

We disagree with this line. We think that the key task is to organise

a class struggle tendency on a definite platform of demands at the base of the mass organisations, primarily the unions.

Without the building of such an organised tendency, the bureaucracy will be able to continue to manoeuvre, aided and abetted by the CP.

### 3. LEFT CAUCUSES IN THE UNIONS

The lefts must be put to the test not just in words but by actions: we must demand that those who claim to oppose the Government's policies come forward with a platform of class struggle demands and organise around them. The CP leadership has refused to fight for such a class struggle tendency in the unions because this would embarrass its attempt to maintain a cosy relationship with the left bureaucracy. At the same time IS plays down the necessity for an adequate programme of action, and puts its own desire for recruitment first.

In our work towards building a class struggle tendency we seek to build left caucuses in individual unions, to develop existing rank-and-file movements to give them more adequate policies, and to establish cross-union contacts between such caucuses.

We consider it essential for the IMG to start a serious debate with the CP and IS militants on the need for such a class struggle tendency and on the kind of action programme required by the working class. The publications of the IMG must be geared towards the problems of this debate and our work in the trade unions must be based on a coherent plan of action on these policies.

Where local Labour Party organisations have turned towards the class struggle and campaigns like NAC, Chile and Portugal solidarity, etc., this is of great assistance in developing those struggles. But Labour Party bureaucracy places very narrow limits to the scope of such activity. Where there is such a clash we consider that the urgent needs of the class struggle come before Labour Party membership.

The lack of flexibility of the Labour Party is most clearly shown by the emergence of the Scottish Labour Party: threatened with electoral annihilation by the SNP, a section of the Labour Party bureaucracy broke to form this party. This is a potentially very positive development if the SLP

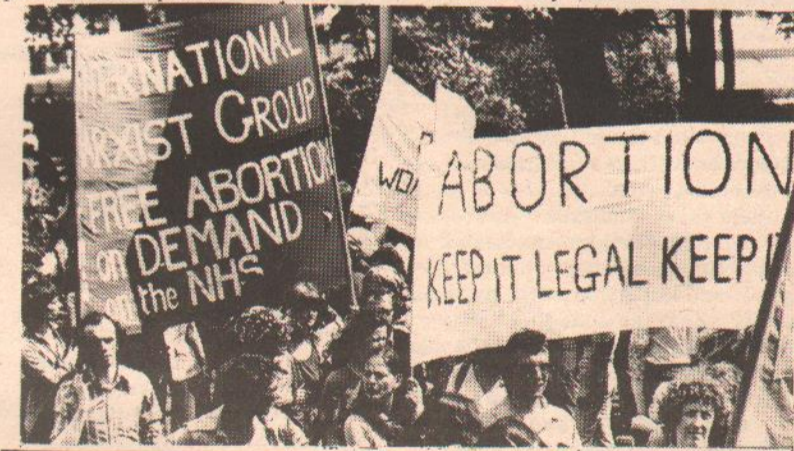


Photo: CHRIS DAVIES (Report)

## Tendency 4

Nowhere is the uneven character of the combined process of the European revolution more clearly shown than in Britain. The miners' strike brought down the Heath Government. By this action, they set back not only the Tory Party, but also the project of confrontation backed by the ruling class. Yet two years later, the labour movement bureaucracy has led the working class into a number of defeats.

Since the summer of 1975, the political defeat suffered at the hands of the bourgeois coalition headed by Wilson in the Common Market referendum, the effect of the £6 limit in driving down real wages by over six per cent, and the increase in unemployment to nearly two million (in real terms) have both accompanied and reinforced a sharp downturn in mass struggle.

The crisis, reflecting the underlying decline of the rate of profit, has continued to affect all the classes. This is shown by the continuing inability of British imperialism to defeat the Republican masses in the north of Ireland and the development of the national, social and economic crisis in Scotland.

develops a programme of class struggle demands for the Scottish working class.

### 4. CLASS STRUGGLE CANDIDATES

In the absence of any alternative party to the Labour Party, socialists will continue to vote Labour against the Tories, Liberals, etc. But in some Labour strongholds, socialists should seem to challenge the Labour Party electorally by standing class struggle candidates counterposing our programme of action to the rotten class-collaborationist policies of the Labour Government.

### 5. PREPARING FOR A NEW WORKING CLASS LEADERSHIP

The IMG is a revolutionary Marxist group which fights for the international needs of the working class and champions the rights of all oppressed groups: defence of the right of the Irish people to self-determination and immediate withdrawal of troops from Ireland; the fight against racialism; the struggle for the liberation of women; solidarity with the Portuguese and Spanish working class; and the fight against British imperialism's manoeuvres in Southern Africa. The British working class will never mount an effective challenge to its reformist misleaders until it has grasped the importance of these tasks.

We believe that the present crisis within the revolutionary left has a potentially positive aspect: that of facilitating essential political clarification, which can both promote unity in action by the revolutionary left and regroupment on a programmatic basis with the Fourth International.

At the same time we think that through correct tactics it is possible to start the process of breaking the total domination of the Labour Party over working class politics before the onset of a revolutionary crisis, and that it is possible to build a new revolutionary socialist party with significant influence amongst the mass of the workers before a decisive confrontation between the classes.

The successful building of such a party able to challenge Labour's monopoly hold over working class politics would enormously strengthen the possibilities of victory in the revolutionary crisis ahead.

## POTENTIAL

The racist measures of the Labour Government aimed at immigrants - with the collaboration of the TUC leaders - have provided fertile ground for the renewed growth and activity of the fascist groups.

These features of the objective situation have not eliminated the potential of the mass struggle of the working class as a principal political feature of British society, and do not represent a qualitative defeat. On the

