

These notes cover a lot of the issues raised by the Socialist Unity Campaign. Why are we doing it? How might S.U. groups work? What about relations with the IMF etc. There's no central thread or argument - more a jumble of ideas that have cropped in discussion with other BF and IMG comrades and reading various contributions so far.

### THE REASONS FOR WORKING WITH S.U.

(a) Change in political conditions and balance of class forces. The general

background to the current situation and the reformism of the Labour Party is well covered in the article on S.U. in the journal. The material basis which has conditioned the current involvement of revolutionaries in elections is the break up of the economic stability that was successfully established after the war. The 'you've never had it so good days if the 50s' have gone (can anyone remember them?) and economically capitalism is stuck in the stagnation of the seventies. In the period after world war II capitalism on a world scale 'worked': capital accumulation proceeded with unprecedented vigour and any 'social problems' or working class resistance were ironed out with a prescription of Keynesian economic and social policies. The situation now has changed: capitalism now has stagnated, despite what Dennis the menace may claim, and the Keynesian policies of state mediation of the economy to cover up capitalist exploitation on the one hand and stabilise the system on the other, which have been the basis of Labour Party economic thinking and planning either no longer work, or go against the dictates of the IMF. Internationally the independence movements in the 3rd world have made the problems of British capital even more acute by damaging the very basis of the British economy. We have moved into a post imperialist phase. The events of the post war years, then, have produced a prolonged economic crisis that has affected all areas of our lives and the body politic itself. A crisis that has thrown up the National Front and other ultra reactionary forces. Despite its rhetorical programme the Labour Party has 'proved incapable of coming up with any... socialist solutions and instead has attacked working class living standards, shut hospitals and cut services. Through its politics, which are often to the right of reformism, it has stifled the development of a socialist movement by not only forcing down living standards, but also attacking working class organisations, marginalising and atomising struggles and tying us all up in knots of 'legality' to the extent that we're confused and the mass of the people are alienated from the bourgeois political process and treat politics like a horse race where you always back the loser. What's the point of having a bet if you always lose money? (mind you current quotes on U.S. are a million to one.

(b) The Labour Party

During this period the Labour Party has been in power three times and each time it has disillusioned its supporters. Callaghan's mob are probably the most right wing Labour government of the lot and since 1974 Labour has consistently exploited its supporters and no longer deserves the support of working people and socialists. Many Labour Party activities are disillusioned, membership is falling and the corruption allegations will have their effect. Sometimes I feel amazed at the 'good run' the Labour Party has had publicity-wise, particularly amongst left-wingers who continually do the leg work and canvassing etc. It has never been a radical socialist party, its continuously sold out its supporters and even when it has had mass support, this has usually been a source of anxiety rather than confidence for the leadership. Yet it still plods on mainly because of its traditions and history and because in some senses it is the mass party of the working class. It has a lesser evil. On the left it has also benefited the collapse of the C.P. as an independent force in the fifties when many CPers left and eventually joined the Labour Party. It is they and the current CPers who have been amongst the most forceful of the party-of-the-working-class argument. However, what is clear now is that the Labour Party is incapable of providing any sort of socialism, other than the sort well-to-do cabinet ministers scream or bellow about at conferences and the sooner a wedge (not Benn) is driven between the party and its militant working class supporters the better. It is in fact this aim of providing an alternative that I see as the main aim of Socialist Unity. The last sentence in Miliband's book Parliamentary Socialism: the absence of a viable socialist alternative (to the Labour Party) requires us

to begin preparing the ground for the coming into being of such an alternative and one of indispensable elements of that process in the dissipation of paralyzing illusions about the true purpose and role of the Labour Party! (If anybody wants to understand the Labour Party and its history this is the book to read). If you haven't got the time and want the 'revised arguments' rather than the details, read the postscript.

(c) Fighting Fascism

The crisis has thrown us all into economic and political uncertainty. The National Front and other fascist organisations have gained support by exploiting this uncertainty, making scapegoats of black minority groups. They promise order and security, jingo independence from the E.E.C. and have duped many into believing that they can turn the clock back to imperial days when the sun never set etc; that British capital can regain an empire; and that all blacks will be deported. Their programme is increasingly and many of the instructive political prejudice that they prey on are potentially strong forces in society. They have all attempt to capitalise on at these elections, where because of the regimented political atmosphere the left can fight them, limit their vote as we have done already, and force the issue of fascism into the centre of discussion. Before the S.U. campaigns so far, in Stockford and Ladywood, have fought an anti-fascist platform and some of the main supporters have been immigrants. But while it is essential to attack and limit the ideas and activities of the fascists now, S.U. campaigns should not be restricted to this task and the test of minimal success in these campaigns will be when S.U. will be seen as an alternative force arguing for socialism and socialist policies, as well as a front to smash fascism.

(d) Building Left Unity

The last aim of S.U. is to build unity among the revolutionary left. In the long run all the revolutionary groups should work together in building the socialist alternative. S.U. will become a rallying point, and a focus to all militants to the left of Labour, and hopefully many within the Labour Party. Although there are only two groups involved so far we should hope that if not the party itself, at least large sections of S.W.P. rank and files will eventually work with S.U. The other 'main group' outside S.U. are the exs and independents and all the non-party political groupings including the Womens Liberation Movement, black groups, community groups, single campaign issues etc. So far the response of these sectors has been encouraging. Their support and participation is as important as the formal commitment of political organisations and has been stressed elsewhere, we will have to argue for our politics to prove that S.U. is more than an I.M.G. front, so that as many of the anti-capitalist movement can work within S.U. and make it a powerful movement itself.

General Comments on S.U. and a few Problems

The material base of a successful alternative to the Labour Party and the effectiveness of S.U. must mean that both the balance of forces in society as a whole and inside the revolutionary left are going to be significantly different from the last 30 years. If the political and economic conditions in Britain are not, S.U. will be based on voluntarism alone. What I see as the three distinct characteristics have been outlined above.

1. The end of prosperity - the stagnation of Capitalism and the limits of Keynesian policies
2. The rightward drift and pro-capitalist policies of Labour
3. The growing move towards non sectarianism on the left and the establishment of a more 'federal' autonomous left wing movement.

Despite these three conditions we will be swimming against the tide. The two party system in this country has proved to be extremely stable since the origins of parliamentary politics and bourgeois democracy in this country. There are admittedly cracks in this stability (growth of the S.N.P. vote and the success of the fascist parties but the hold of reformism in all its guises from a belief in piecemeal social changes and 'improvement' to disenchantment with the possibilities of political change is particularly strong in this country when a radical political critique of capitalist society has been restricted to small groups of intellectuals and students). This reformism in the working class is mirrored by reformism of stability in the political institutions of a

capitalist society. Here Gramsci's separation of civil and political society is illuminating in understanding the jumble of attitudes, contradictory and complimentary that we all hold at any one time and provides a much better lead than simple directives to 'break the hold of reformist attitudes in the working class' which assumes that political decisions particularly casting votes are rational decisions reached as a result of rational political analysis and in some ways linked the ideas of the party concerned. It also assumes that if the 'right' argument is put the voter will easily see the folly of her/his ways, in other words a particularly superficial interpretation of the role of ideas in general and reformism in particular, which P.T. has pointed out is much more than a vote for Labour and covers and covers a whole set of attitudes about politics, lifestyle, leisure time, consumption, the family etc. etc. When reporting on the first S.U. meeting in Brum J.T. in outlining some of the disagreements with the I.M.G. I thought, drew very optimistic conclusions about S.U. and its possibilities. For example when discussing reformism, the need for an alternative and the rightward trend in the class he argued that it was more or less because there was no alternative to the bourgeois parties that increasing numbers voted for the N.F. or the Tories. I would agree that the two party system has had a stabilising and in some ways mesmerising and mystifying effect, in terms of an either/or electoral clique, but in some ways the implications of the argument was that all we had to do was stand S.U. candidates and the support would be there straightaway. Apart from some stabilising features of the current political line up outlined above, and the few candidates to the left of the Labour have stood at elections they have generally been unsuccessful. The C.P. had two MPs in the post war elections, both in exceptional constituencies and after that its support nose dived. So the precedents of an alternative are not encouraging. To understand the nature of reformism, the Labour Party etc. and all the other things we are fighting we must be aware of historical precedents and the conditions in which we are working. (The same incidentally goes for 'the project' and strategies for regroupment on the left). Another piece of J.T.'s optimism which I can't share; that the next election will be the result like the Feb 74 election of the class struggle. With things on as low an ebb as they are at the moment this seems unlikely. What is much more likely is that the govt. will call an election at the moment when they feel most secure; when the inflation figure is down, when the working class is weak, and when the TUC and Union leadership are doing a sound policing job. Lastly J.T.'s point about the Labour Party and the unions: the Trade Unions and the Labour Party is not based on political decisions of any group of workers at any time or particular time as to when they are most likely to get support; if they don't look to the Labour Party now as they used to, this means that the connexion between the party and the Unions is weaker. The link and relationship between these two monsters of capitalist society is unfortunately much more embedded than this. The link is a historical and traditional one in which the TUs gave funds and support to the Labour Party so that it would be the independent parliamentary voice of the working class, which in the early years of this century it was. It meant that the political party of the working class could strike out from the Liberals (how things change!!!) and push for independent Labour policies. It soon changed, but the fundamental relationship between the TUs and the Labour Party still holds: the TUs finance the Labour Party, have powerful block votes at conference, sponsor MPs etc. The link is very strong even if the original purpose has become distorted. It has also had its effect on minimalising the influence of the revolutionary left. Socialist Unity is in its infancy, it has just begun and the project itself is a very long one. S.U. too, has not been borne of struggle. As a political initiative it is filling a vacuum created by the pro capitalist policies of Labour and the sectarian party building of the SWP. We are beginning at a low point in the struggle and not as a result of the power of a monument that has been created for that space. At the moment it reflects the need of the revolutionary left to come in from the cold, out of the ghetto, from under a stone or wherever we've been hiding.

What of Our Relationship With the IMG

Up to now the IMG have been major partners and collaborators as far as I know. It has been good. We do have all sorts of differences and disagreements with them which are important: political backgrounds, theoretical disagreements, political practise etc. etc. We will have to argue for our politics continuously not just to open the campaign, or get the right decision, but to develop and contribute our political ideas and practise to other strands on the left. The IMG is a high-carde organisation (that's somewhere at the other end of the line from 'mass practise') its attitudes are deeply rooted in programmatic politics. Organisationally and in terms of ideas, they are, sometimes, not so much sectarian,

but 'blinkered'. At times in IMG meetings I've felt like screaming 'get into the streets and learn from the experiences of ordinary people! There 'Vanguardism' stuff and formal attitudes towards the class and politics in general, there religiousness (Leon the father Ernest the son too.) and lack of support from working class are their weakness and debilitating features. Its not, however the same throughout the organisation and they do have some fine, flexible militants whom we have worked with and will be able to work with. Never the less I really feel we have plenty to teach them (hows that for left elitism). I also feel that Soc Challenge is deteriorating. There's too much bickering about how dumb CP. is OK. Mandel goes in for it, but a jokes a joke and in the long run a know-all attitude of smartness and sharness will not build unity. Also the 'obituary' of Scanlon which more or less read 'if Hughie had a disiplined, and organised understanding of contempory capitalism and the object needs of the working class (free after hours study at your local FI centre) he would'nt have betrayed the working class and been confused by silly utopian arguments about a socialist society the block collums of print seem to be getting longer and longer too.

### Socialist Unity as an Organisation

The idea has been floated that we might end up with an organisation emerging from a successful S.U. campaign if joint activity involving independant and local militants continues after an election. I'm against this for two main reasons

- 1 S.U. success will be in part the result of its non-party initiative and action. Many are and will be involved because it is a movement, and not an organisation. Its political heterodoxy will be its strength. Class before party.
- 2 It would ignore and cover up some of the differences, say, between B.F. and the I.M.G. alluded to above.

Our task generally within S.U. is to push for our politics in discussion and action and to maintain our perspective of class before party. Participation in elections will opportunism and 'organisational policies' - neither should replace our general political views or activity.

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