

DISCUSSION BULLETIN

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BULLETIN MATTERS

With number 37 the Discussion Bulletin begins its seventh year of publication. Five years ago, when we began our second year, the DB was still mimeographed on 8 1/2 by 11 inch paper and stapled. We switched to the present format with number 9 and expanded from twenty to twenty-four pages. Reproduced below is the equivalent of "Bulletin Matters" from DB7, which I believe will interest readers who have a taste for nostalgia and an interest in the philosophy that informs the DB:

TO OUR READERS

With Number 7, the Discussion Bulletin begins its second year. The prospectus that occupied this space in the first issue expressed



the hope that the DB would be a forum for what we called "third force" revolutionaries--the non-Leninist, non-social democratic, anti-statist, anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian socialists, to describe us in terms of what we oppose.

We are a "political" sector consisting of parties, unions, groups, and individuals that appears to be more diverse in our tactics and objectives than we really are. Whether we call ourselves syndicalists, socialist industrial unionists, anarchists, DeLeonists, council communists, Marxists, libertarian socialists, or left communists--or a combination from the labels above--we are probably agreed on our vision of the socialist society: The means of production and the services will be socially owned. To the extent that industrial technology and planning require regional and national organization, it will consist of industrial congresses and councils of democratically elected delegates. But whenever possible production will be decentralized, and decisions will be made directly by the producers in the workplace. There will be no state, no coercive power over the individual. And there will be no exchange and thus no wages or money.

The differences among us are probably greatest in the tactics we advocate for reaching our class and for destroying the system. But many of these are imaginary, rooted in the quarrels of our ideological ancestors seventy-five and a hundred years ago.

As we said in this space a year ago, the Discussion Bulletin was designed as an arena for exploding ideological myths and "... exchanging ideas, challenging assumptions, presenting theories, and perhaps resolving differences and beginning the first stages of limited cooperation." We feel the DB has made a good beginning. Six twenty-page issues have been published in thirteen months. These contained 59 articles and letters by 34 writers who represented nearly all elements of the "third force."

The Bulletin continues to be independent of any faction or group. It is published by an involuntary Discussion Bulletin Committee consisting of subscribers who have contributed time in the form of articles and letters or money in excess of the subscription price. They receive with the Bulletin a "Report" which contains a financial accounting, acknowledges contributions, and asks for suggestions.

What we hope is a temporary shortage of the brief controversial articles and letters (perhaps a result of summer distractions) has given us a chance to print a long historical article on a topic very appropriate to the purpose of the DB. It details the response of many British revolutionaries, both anarchist and Marxist, to the creation of the Communist Party of Great Britain. We have another longer historical document, this one on the recent history of the American SLP, which we hope to publish in an upcoming issue.

This issue also contains a letter by Monroe Prussack, an announcement of Steve Coleman's upcoming American tour, and an article by the French

Cont'd on p. 24

[The Russian revolution and the subsequent hegemony of Lenin and the Bolsheviks over the international revolutionary movement was a watershed in socialist history and a subject that should interest all DB readers. In his article below, Bob Jones describes the experience of British revolutionaries during those brief two or three years of innocence and optimism after the Russian revolution and the disillusionment that followed. In 1918 and 1919 British socialists expected the Russian revolution to provide the impetus toward the formation of a unified "communist" party with a revolutionary program tailored to British conditions. What they got instead was an international (the third or Comintern) controlled by the Lenin and the Bolsheviks who provided a set of "conditions" designed in accordance with the experience of Russian revolutionaries and a set of policies tailored to the needs of the new soviet republic.

Comrade Jones charts the resistance by anti-parliamentarian revolutionists, both anarchist and marxist, to Comintern authority and their efforts to create an independent libertarian Communist movement in Britain. In the U.S. the opposition centered, not on parliamentary policy but on Comintern demands that the new party reject revolutionary industrial unionism and work within the capitalist unions. While covered briefly by Draper among others, the American experience calls for the same kind of detailed analysis Comrade Jones gives us for Britain. -- fg]

Anti-Parliamentarism and Communism in Britain, 1917-21

by Bob Jones

In this article I intend to look at the growing British anti-parliamentary movement in the years immediately preceding the formation of the anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation (APCF) in 1921. In particular I will look at the attempts to unite the different anti-parliamentary groups into one communist party. These attempts were, I will argue, a natural development of the revolutionary movement in Britain. They were cut short by the formation of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), an unnatural development for Britain based on the Comintern's conditions. The subsequent formation of the APCF was, as a result, a pale reflection of what could have been.

At the onset we should try to clarify what we mean by "anti-parliamentarism". It is important to realise that for British comrades in 1921 anti-parliamentarism was not merely a negative delineation of tactics - a rejection of socialists standing for and sitting in parliament - though this was obviously a key element of the movement. Anti-parliamentarism has, at this time, to be viewed in the context of a burgeoning communist movement. Indeed, until the formation of the CPGB which took upon itself the definition of all things 'communist', it would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that the anti-parliamentary and communist movements were synonymous. To be a communist prior to 1920, even 1921, was to be an anti-parliamentarian. Only after 1921 was the prefix 'anti-parliamentary' needed.

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This was true of both Marxists and anarchists. Each shared a common set of ideas, including the centrality of the class struggle for social analysis and action; the conception of workers' committees and councils seizing the means of production; the ensuing creation of a soviet republic which initially would act as a 'dictatorship of the proletariat'; and, as a necessary corollary of these, the importance of direct action and anti-parliamentary agitation. While there was no unanimity on all these points, there was a broad measure of agreement emerging.

One revealing example of this convergence of views was the interpretation, made by most sections of the revolutionary movement, in Britain, of the Russian revolution in sovietist and councillist terms rather than in terms of the determining role of a centralised and disciplined political party. This interpretation remained almost universal until 1920, when doubts about the exact nature and direction of the Russian revolution began to surface in Britain. It is also significant that these doubts emerged not over the political practice of the Bolsheviks in Russia - which were rationalised away into the existing political formulas (though this was not true of the London Freedom group) - but over the advice Lenin was giving to German and Italian communists to participate in parliamentary elections.

Completely absent was any notion of the centralised, disciplined party as the controlling agent of the revolution. This, however, was a key element in the Comintern's "21 conditions", which all communist parties had to accept. Thus Point 12 declares that the party must be built "upon the principle of democratic centralization", and speaks of control by "iron discipline" and of a party central body with "the most far-reaching faculties".

The acceptance of the "21 conditions" by the CPGB represented, therefore, a marked break with past British experience. What was the significance of this? For some, like the historian James Hinton, the unity negotiations resulting in the formation of the CPGB represented a "theoretical clarification". Hinton charts a development of revolutionary theory from syndicalism and industrial unionism via the experience of the shop stewards and workers' committee movement to the ultimate flowering of "the soviet idea of the revolution" in the CPGB. There is much that is wrong with this not uncommon interpretation. For our present purposes we must be content to note the simple points that the CPGB did not embody any "theoretical clarification" and had very little to do with "the soviet idea of revolution". The whole point of the unity negotiations was to set up Lenin's "party of a new type" that is, a centralized party loyally following the orders of the Comintern. Any theoretical or other discoveries made by British participants were subsumed within this task. The end result was that the existing revolutionary movement and any theoretical advances it had made were largely destroyed.

Let us examine this a little more closely. The first point to make about the 1920 unity negotiations is that they did not involve discussions of the theoretical significance of soviet power or the meaning of the dictatorship of the proletariat. There was already a fair measure of agreement on these issues. The main, almost exclusive,

topic of discussion was parliamentarism, in the form of parliamentary action and of affiliation with the Labour Party. As we shall see later, almost the whole of the revolutionary movement was anti-parliamentary and uniting around an anti-parliamentary platform. For the moment we shall assume this point and examine how the incipient "party of the new type" handled the question. In doing so we shall see how the path was laid for the destruction of the revolutionary movement in Britain.

What was the attitude of communists to the Labour Party? For anyone thinking in terms of communism (outside of certain sections of the British Socialist Party and the independent Labour Party) it was simply inconceivable to regard the Labour Party as having anything at all to contribute to the developing movement. Then, as now, the Labour Party, as far as any move toward socialism was concerned (never mind about communism!), was seen as a bad joke. As D. Manoin noted at the 1920 Communist Unity Convention:

"At the present time in Sheffield no matter how good a Socialist a man might be he was mobbed if at any Socialist or trade union meeting he said he was in favour of such (Labour Party) affiliation."

And Mrs. Bamber, from Liverpool, added:

"The industrial workers were sick to death of the position of the Labour Party at the present time, and she hoped that we, the Communist Party, showing the way not to reform but to the emancipation of the workers, would keep outside the Party that had done so much to delay the progress of the working class during the last few years."

If this was so obvious to many, why was the Labour Party affiliation ever considered as a serious policy? The BSP, the largest socialist body involved in the unity negotiations, was already affiliated to the Labour Party and continued to argue for affiliation. But a growing number of BSPers, including Comrades Manion and Bamber, were starting to reject the policy. There were clearly other factors at work. The most important of these was the Comintern directive instructing the British CP to affiliate, backed up by Lenin's rationalisation of the position in "Leftwing Communism: an Infantile Disorder". While the directive was crucial, perhaps more important was the kind of argument used to support it, a strange kind of argument, new to the British movement, and, I think, indicative of the kind of reasoning that was to undermine the communist movement in Britain.

It could be argued that up to this time the main aim of British socialists and communists had been the simple one of trying to make socialists and increase the class consciousness of the working class. Questions about the mechanics of seizing power were not widely discussed, most being content to rely on the ability of the working class to create its own organs of self-government in any revolutionary situation. Further, the Labour Party was to play no part in this process simply because it was not socialist and its actions had positively hampered the development towards socialism.

But such common-sense and seemingly obvious points were to come under attack from a new breed of "realists" and "hard-headed strategists" who were to play an important part in the unity negotiations. The common-sense view of the Labour Party now came to be seen as "naive" and "emotional"; one needed a longer-term tactical view.

The ultimate source of such a view was the Comintern and V.I. Lenin. "Left-Wing Communism" appeared just before the unity negotiations of July/August 1920 and ably summarised the lectures and advice Lenin had been giving British communists in the preceding months. In this work Lenin argued that "... revolution is impossible without a change in the views of a majority of the working class, and this change is brought about by the political experience of the masses, and never by propaganda alone." fair enough; but Lenin went on to insist that in consequence "... British Communists should participate in parliamentary action, that they should, from within Parliament, help the masses of the workers to see the results of a Henderson and Snowden government in practice..." In this way it was hoped that the masses would very soon become disappointed with the Labour Party and begin to support the Communists.

Unfortunately this sort of argument leads directly into the nightmarish world of the mechanistic and manipulative party politician. In Lenin's words:

"The strictest loyalty to the ideas of Communism must be combined with the ability to make all the necessary practical compromises, to manoeuvre, to make agreements, zigzags, retreats and so on, so as to accelerate the coming to power and subsequent loss of political power of the Hendersons ... to accelerate their inevitable bankruptcy in practice, which will enlighten the masses in the spirit of our ideas, in the direction of Communism..."

Or in Lenin's oft-quoted phrase: Communists support the Labour Party "in the same way a rope supports a hanged man".

A good example of these intellectual contortions comes from R. Page Arnot's intervention at the Communist Unity Convention on the Labour Party affiliation issue. He readily agreed that "we were all sick of the Labour Party", but that didn't necessarily mean that leaving the Labour Party was "the best tactic for the revolution". Arnot, as befitted the new revolutionary tacticians, was thinking ten steps ahead, in terms of Communists in the Labour Party "splitting off" and taking "a very large number of the organised working class with us". The essence of the new outlook was to look at matters "as tactics in a military sense": that is, to "think the thing out coldly and clearly and get rid of emotion". Those who did not have the requisite military skills and simply pointed out that the Labour Party was hopelessly reactionary and would tar the Communist Party with the same brush were said to be using "emotional arguments".

In this manner communist policy ceased to be a matter of debate and

discussion by the rank and file based on observable experience of the working class and its institutions. Instead, policy was now determined by long-term tactical perspectives from above - an ever-changing series of intellectual permutations and combinations known as the party line. This, when coupled with a centralized party demanding absolute loyalty, ensured the speedy elimination of any ideas and practice developed from the class struggle by the pre-existing communist movement in Britain. If its members didn't conform to the tactical line, they were simply disregarded as "naive" or "emotional". Edgar T. Whitehead noted the process at work at an early period of its operation in 1920:

"I do like this word 'naive'. It clinches the argument. All logic falls flat before it. Anti-parliamentarians are so 'naive', in the face of the mephistophelian astucity (sic) of these revolutionary parliamentarians."

There could be no direct answer to such charges of 'naivety' because the party had developed its own particular logic, impervious to any questioning from outside.

Anti-parliamentary communists became increasingly puzzled by the attitude of the "Maiden Lane Communists" (CPGB) to the parliamentary question. Edgar T. Whitehead voiced a question which was baffling many: "Why do the Maiden Lane Communists want participation in Parliament so much that they would rather split the movement than forgo it?" Given that the propaganda value of electoral activity was not a serious difference with anti-parliamentary groups, and given the repudiation of Parliament by the organised Workshop Movement, what possible reason could there be for wanting to pursue participation in Parliament at all costs? Whitehead concluded "... it is almost inconceivable that Maiden Lane should have been so blind and mad as to cease to take into account these realities, and instead, sheep-like, to blunderingly follow a tactic dictated from Moscow..."

But this is almost certainly what did happen. The increasing invective and abuse from Maiden Lane was part of what Lenin called the "liquidation of 'left' doctrinairism" - a necessary stage the class-conscious vanguard (the Communist Party) had to press through to establish its supremacy. We have no space to document this process further, though we should note it can be seen in its most dramatic and pathetic form in the amazing intellectual somersaults of people like William Gallagher and J.T. Murphy, who were very effectively "liquidated". The unity negotiations were in fact a crucial phase in the "liquidation of 'left' doctrinairism" in Britain. Rather than attempting to unite the existing revolutionary groups in Britain (the negotiations created more divisions than unity) the main aim was to create Lenin's "party of new type", a party strictly conforming to the Comintern's conditions and with little regard for the British situation. This, and its consequences, were clearly foreseen by the anti-parliamentarians at the very foundation of the CPGB. Thus Whitehead notes:

"Maiden Lane must understand ... it is Britain we are dealing with, and British Industrialists and Proletarians, British historical conditions, and British realities. Until Maiden Lane faces these facts, gains

some backbone and grey matter of its own, and ceases to be merely a gramophone for the Moscow Records, we can do no other than to build our own party, propagate our Soviet and Communist principles in accord with realities."

Unfortunately Maiden Lane was incapable of facing these facts and continued to play Moscow records. The tragedy of this is that in the process a real possibility of unity was lost and, indeed, destroyed.

What was this possibility? Put simply, it was the chance to bring about a unity of a number of anarchist and Marxist groups who had in common their support of the Russian revolution and who were developing toward a common communist philosophy. If carried forward, there was a possibility of uniting once again the differing contributions of Marx and Bakunin in a communist movement of great potential significance.

At the outset it must be realised that long before the Russian revolution there was a rapidly developing and largely non-sectarian movement. A good example of its nature on the eve of the Russian revolution is given by Jim Griffiths in describing the activities of the Communist Club at Ammanford (South Wales). Griffiths reports on a series of meetings held at the club in the early days of 1917:

"The aim of these meetings has not been to propagate any particular brand of Socialism or Communism. They have aimed rather at providing a common platform - a workers' Forum - where all who are interested in social problems can meet, and freely and frankly exchange opinions on vital social questions, the members of the club being convinced that the providing of opportunities for such meetings is the greatest service they can render to the working class movement at the present time. If the movement is to survive the hard times ahead, it must cease wasting its energies in fruitless wrangles over this, that or other policy. It must return to first principles ... We must aim at securing an intelligent class-conscious rank and file."

In this non-sectarian atmosphere socialists were beginning to forget their "fruitless wrangles" and move towards a common conception. Thus within the anarchist movement there was a growing section of what Guy Aldred called "Marxian anarchists" who were distinguished from the other anarchists (especially "Kropotkin anarchists") by their acceptance of the Marxism analysis of the state and their recognition of the importance of the class struggle. These anarchists were becoming increasingly impatient with those who, in the words of Freda Cohen, a member of the Glasgow Anarchist Group, were merely content with "fine phrases or poetical visioning". What was needed, she continued, was "knowledge ... for the class struggle, by giving a scientific basis in place of a sentimental belief." Thus, Cohen concluded, knowledge of economics, history and sociology are of primary importance", and due recognition should be given to the fact that "industrial unionism, IWGBism (referring to the Industrial Workers of Great Britain), the Shop Steward movement, etc, are questions that

concern the daily life of the worker (and) ... are coming more and more to the fore. We must discuss them thoroughly and define our attitude towards them."

These were also the concerns of many SLPers and left-wing members of the BSP and ILP. Workers in these socialist groups were beginning to share a common literature and to exchange views and debate the key issues raised by the political and industrial struggles of the moment. James Morton, for example, of the London Industrial Workers' Committee, took part in a debate with the SLP in 1917 on direct action and ordered six dozen copies of the anarchist pamphlet "Direct Action versus Legislation" for distribution at this and other meetings.

Rank and file members of socialist bodies were starting to question the established political shibboleths of their particular group. SLPers, for instance, started to query the DeLeonist attitude to political action; some, like Joseph Linden, leaving the SLP to join the anarchists. Within the anarchists too there was dissent. Robert Selkirk, an anarchist from Cowdenheath, questioned Aldred's rejection of the workshop struggle: "It is as well to speed the day when 'the Socialist organisations will cease to be glorified debating clubs and become fighting units'. And this can be done in the despised 'workshop struggle'." A number of anti-parliamentarians and anarchists (like R.M. Fox and E.T. Whitehead) accepted the importance of the 'workshop struggle' at this time and thus came close to the position of dissident SLPers and socialist militants in the Shop Stewards and Workers' Committee Movement.

The important point to note here, perhaps, is that these questions were a matter for debate and discussion within a developing anti-parliamentary movement. Thus on the 'workshop struggle', for example, Aldred was to make a speedy and effective reply to "such palliative fights for petty ends", as he viewed them, in his debate with T.L. Smith of the Workers International Industrial Union (WIIU). There were other fierce arguments between collectivist and communists, between those for and against action in the workshop, and between others on the precise nature of the anti-parliamentary attitude to the ballot box. Such arguments were, however, as Aldred noted in 1918, "becoming less real", with a "growing tendency of socialists to accept a common theory and to meet on a common democratic footing". Moreover, this tendency was "a natural growth, capable, truly, of extensive and intensive cultivation; but in 1918 Aldred was well aware of "a hypocritical parade of unity" by those whose "desire is not for unity but for capture". Such a "mechanical inspiration from without", as Aldred described it, would destroy the natural growth within the movement towards unity, and this is precisely what happened at the Communist Unity Convention in 1920.

But what happened in the intervening years? A number of important initiatives were made in this period (1918-20) to articulate the approaching unity in organisational terms. We will briefly examine two of these initiatives: the formation of the Communist League and that of the Labour Abstentionist Party - both established in 1919.

The more important of the two, the Communist League, was an attempt

to unite dissident branches of the SLP with London anarchists centred on The Spur and Freedom papers. From it we get the first paper in Britain called The Communist but - more significantly - a real attempt to unite Marxists and anarchists in one organisation. The first step towards the new group came from the London District Council of the SLP who in February 1919 issued a proposal to convene a conference for rank and file members of the British socialist movement to discover a basis for communist unity. The proposal was accompanied by a lengthy manifest which included a draft constitution for a new communist League. Key elements in the constitution were (a) a call for local workers' committees and councils to aim at seizing the means of production and creating a proletarian dictatorship; (b) the ultimate aim of a Republic of federated communes; and (c) a declaration that parliamentary vote is obsolete and that direct industrial action should be adopted as the alternative.

The unity conference took place on 16 March, 1919, and the Communist League was established on an explicitly anti-parliamentary programme. George Rose well expressed the spirit behind the new movement in the first issue of The Communist:

"... we know that there must develop the great working class anti-Statist movement, showing the way to Communist society. The Communist League is the standard bearer of the movement; and all the hosts of Communists in the various other socialist organisations will in good time see that Parliamentary action will lead them, not to Communism but to that bureaucratic Statism correctly named by Hilaire Belloc the "Servile State" ... Therefore, we identify ourselves with the Third International, with the Communism of Marx, and with that personification of the spirit of revolt, Bakunin, of whom the Third International is but the natural and logical outcome."

The essence of the new movement was thus an attempted fusion of Bakuninism and Marxism in an anti-parliamentary movement working for the creation of revolutionary workers' councils and factory committees.

Over the next few months the League developed and expanded. An attempt was also made to unite with the Workers' Socialist Federation (WSF), but the WSF had its own plans. While most branches of the League were to be found in Scotland and London, William Mainwaring announced the formation of a Treherbert branch in South Wales in May 1919. Mainwaring did however reject the League's constitution on a couple of details, including the interesting point that it was nonsense to speak of the parliamentary vote as "obsolete": "To say it is obsolete will lead many to suppose that it was once useful. To this we do not agree."

A novel feature of the Communist League was its attempt to create a decentralized ruling body called 'the Local Delegates's Committee'. This embodied the principle of an elected delegate committee (each branch electing delegates proportional to membership) with mandated delegates subject to both immediate reporting back and instant recall

if they failed to follow their mandates. The aim here was to sweep out "boss domination and cliqueism" - "it must be a movement of the rank and file, expressing itself to the rank and file." A real test of this new ruling body in practice was to be the first national conference of the movement. It is not clear, however, whether the conference ever took place, for the Communist League disappears without a trace towards the end of 1919 or early in 1920.

This, however, was not the end of attempts to find a basis for unity between anarchists and Marxists. Aldred in particular continued to pursue closer relations with SLP, BSP, and ILP comrades. In his important article "Bricks and Mortar" of October 1919, Aldred again spoke of the revolutionary movement "drawing closer and closer together on a platform of practical revolutionary effort". There was now common agreement that the Soviet Republic could be established by parliamentary action but there was still considerable division over the question of the precise usefulness of parliamentary action.

To overcome this division, and particularly addressing SLPers, Aldred proposed the "Sinn Fein" tactic (ie. communist anti-parliamentary candidates using the ballot box for agitational purposes, with a pledge not to take the oath and not to sit in Parliament if elected). While preferring the straight anti-parliamentary position of boycotting the ballot box, Aldred put forward the 'Sinn Fein' alternative as "a tactical compromise ... for effecting a wider unity".

The tactic was put to the test in the Paisley by-election of 1919-20, when Aldred offered to support the SLP candidate if he stood as a communist-anti-parliamentarian. Aldred's offer no doubt had some effect on the local SLP branch for, when William Paul declined to stand as their candidate, they decided to forget all compromise and conducted a 'boycott the ballot box' campaign particularly aimed at the Labour Party candidate, Biggar. Their leaflet concluded: "Every vote withheld is a vote for socialism ... Abstain from voting. Work for the social revolution."

Such action was perhaps indicative of a growing unease in the ranks of the SLP with the parliamentary policy of the party. Though we know quite a bit about the activities of SLP dissidents like Paul and Bell, who were to form the Communist Unity Group of the SLP, we know very little about the developing anti-parliamentarism in the party as exemplified by the Paisley action. There is evidence that other SLP branches were accepting the anti-parliamentary position. For example, we know that Aldred was running a mission in 1919 under the auspices of the Shettleston SLP, which, in the words of its secretary, J. Bowman, was to "thump home that anti-parliamentary truth..." Realising that "this is not the SLP position", Bowman insisted "there must be no parliamentary sidestepping". This attitude to Parliament also surfaced at the Carlisle conference of the SLP in April 1920, the conference spending an unusual amount of time discussing the case for and against parliamentary action.

Similar developments were also taking place in branches of the BSP (for example, in Scotland at the Tradeston and Alderston Branches) and,

almost certainly, in ILP branches. The rank and file of these parties were getting impatient with the traditional party arguments for parliamentary inaction and were beginning to co-operate with individuals across party lines in practical propaganda. Individuals and branches were moving towards communist unity on their own initiative, independently of party leaders. Thus, for example, in May 1920 a Communist Group was formed in Paisley of exBSP members, while in June J.E. Scott announced the formation of the Acton Communist party by discontented members of the Acton and Chiswick branch of the Herald League. The parliamentary constraints of the old parties and organisations were now hampering revolutionary propaganda, as Scott notes: "We have stood always for the Revolution and extreme propaganda but could not carry on whilst affiliated to the National Labour Party through no fault of our own."

It was also at this time (May 1920) that the Labour Abstentionist Party made its brief appearance, being largely the creation of Edgar T. Whitehead of the WSF. The Party's programme was largely a summary of the anti-Parliamentary "Sinn Fein" position as evolved by Aldred in the 1918-19 period, but spiced with Whitehead's distinctive conception of independent proletarian ideology. Although it is not clear how much support the Party could command, it did at least have the unqualified support of Tom Mann, who wrote commending "the fine tactics of the Irish Sinn Feiners" and desiring "to see the same tactics resorted to in Britain". The formation of the Party is thus another indication of the growing anti-parliamentarism in the movement.

Within a few months of these developments, however, hopes of a rapprochement between Marxists and anarchists were dealt a fatal blow with the Communist Unity Conventions. We have seen how the ensuing CP, based on the ludicrous programme of participation in parliamentary elections and affiliation to the Labour Party, was completely out of step with the evolution of the revolutionary movement in Britain at this time. But why didn't this evolution continue independently of the CPGB? This is a very difficult question to answer. One historian has argued that the secret hand of Moscow gold was at work, which, in creating a situation of financial dependency for small revolutionary groups, slowly but surely ensured that they were all sucked into the CPGB. There may be some truth in this, but the process was a little more complicated than that.

It is clear that after the formation of the CPGB in August 1920 the new party was subject to a Comintern directive to unite with other selected revolutionary groups on the basis of the "21 condition". As a result any further negotiations towards unity on an anti-parliamentary programme were a non-starter. But why didn't these other groups create their own initiative independent of Moscow? Unfortunately they could not ignore Moscow and the CPGB especially as most (including the SLP, WSF and the SS & WCM) were on the Comintern's hit list. What is surprising, though, is that in the subsequent negotiations most of the revolutionary groups gave up their allegiance to their anti-parliamentary principles without much of a fight.

There is a fair amount of Comintern trickery in these negotiations

DISCUSSION BULLETIN

P.O. Box 1584, Grand Rapids, MI 49501

REPORT #37

August 25, 1989

Members of the DB Committee

Dear Comrades:

There are more developments to report in the ongoing saga of Girard's attempt to balance the DB accounts: The approximately \$20 error reported in the last financial statement was apparently a mistake. When I couldn't get my figures to agree with the bank statement and check book, I went back to the original \$21.67 deficit balance for April 23. When that figure is used, the beginning balance for this report is \$70.35 and the balance is within \$0.20 of what I get from the check book and bank statement. This is close enough for me.

Many subs expired with number 36, and as a result our income increased a bit and this together with somewhat reduces expenditures enabled to more than cover expenditures for this issue. Nevertheless, we still have a deficit from the lean months last spring. This could easily be wiped out if all readers whose subs expired with DB36 would renew. The price of subscriptions outside the U.S. has been increased to \$5 for surface mail and \$10 for air mail, no objections having been received to the plans to do so discussed in the last report.

CONTRIBUTIONS

From June 24 through August 25 we received the following donations: Harry Wade \$16; Anonymous \$17; Laurens Otter \$24.43; Jeff Stein \$3; Ed Jahn \$4; Edward Willey \$4; Charles C. Collins \$4; Paul Burkett \$7; Bob Rossi \$2; Francis Smith \$10; Monroe Prussack \$7; Jack Cedar \$5. Total \$97.43 Thank you, comrades.

FINANCES

Balance	June 24, 1989	deficit \$70.35
<u>Receipts</u>		
Contributions	\$ 97.43	
Subs and sales	<u>84.00</u>	
total	\$181.43	

via their British stooges. Most notable is William Gallacher in his notorious attempts to discredit John Maclean in the eyes of the SLP Executive Committee and his machinations in relation to the Communist Labour Party (which under Gallacher's guidance became a conduit to funnel Scottish communists into the CPGB). But despite Gallacher & Co., it must be also be noted that the members of the SLP, CLP, WSF and other groups were willing accomplices in this trickery and the intellectual somersaults it involved. There was, as it happens repeatedly in the history of British socialism in the twentieth century, a complete abdication of critical judgment when basic principles and beliefs are put to the test by supposed friends and allies.

Thus the British communists were a push-over when faced with the simplistic and ludicrous arguments that the Russian revolution depended on a united revolutionary movement in Britain and that, towards this end, Lenin and the Russian Bolsheviks knew best with respect to tactics as they had already created a successful revolution. If there were any doubts you could rationalise these away by fondly imagining you could work for a change from inside the CPGB and/or the Comintern. The Scottish communists accepted this latter nonsense from Gallacher and many others were to find themselves on the same slippery slope. In most cases intelligent people simply rejected their own revolutionary traditions and experience for the sake of a collective delusion - loyalty to the party.

A good example of the processes at work is found in the political trajectory of Edgar Whitehead in the latter half of 1920. Whitehead was closely involved in attempts at unity among the anti-parliamentarian groups after the Communist Unity Convention of August 1920, including a proposed conference in September 1920 to bring together revolutionaries associated with The Spur, The Worker and Solidarity papers. The "anti-Labour Party and anti-parliamentary in tactic" nature of such revolutionaries is stressed. Later, Whitehead wrote a series of uncompromising anti-parliamentary articles in The Spur. In October 1920 he could write as follows: "None more than ourselves desire complete unity for action throughout the whole of the parties inside the Moscow International, but it has got to be a unity on an effective tactic. With the salt of the proletariat instinctively opposed to Parliamentarianism it is impossible to march forward along a parliamentary road."

And Whitehead repeated the argument with increasing eloquence in November in his discussion of "Maiden Lane sophistries". The sophistry to which he devoted particular attention was the current nonsense of "revolutionary parliamentarianism". For Whitehead, "Parliamentarianism means talk", and "'revolutionary parliamentarianism' (means) revolutionary talk"! - or from another perspective: "it is on the industrial field where Communists must be busy, there and everywhere where there are workers. There are no workers in Parliament. Get out of it!" But the following month all suddenly changed. In December 1920 at the Cardiff conference of the CP (British Section of the 3rd International), Whitehead and other voted overwhelmingly in favour of acceptance of the Comintern's 21 conditions, including point 11 in

favour of parliamentary action. This amazing turnaround was justified, Whitehead explained, by the relative insignificance of British theoretical concerns in the face of demands for "loyalty to the world revolution". From then on Whitehead was to become a vigorous champion of the new CPGB and the Comintern.

Many other comrades were to follow a similar path; Henry Sara and Robert Selkirk are two that spring to mind. This kind of transformation was not limited to Britain - a similar process occurred in the U.S., for example, with Robert Minor being a particularly famous and influential instance. The same kind of arguments were used; thus Minor, for example, stressed loyalty to the revolution and suggested that the anarchists could act as the left-wing of the Communist Party!

Most recruits were subsequently to leave the CPGB within a few years, thoroughly disillusioned (though some, like Selkirk, remained in it). Sara, for example, was to return to his revolutionary roots, but perhaps more common was the experience of Whitehead, who joined the Labour Party and became a vigorous anti-communist propagandist. This was the fate of many good comrades, and it is very easy, as Klugman, the CPGB's historian shows us, to dismiss them as opportunists and revolutionary dilettantes of no importance to the movement. But if anti-parliamentarianism and real communism is ever again to be of importance, it is a trajectory that must be probed and understood beyond such convenient insult.

One contribution to such an understanding might, some would argue, be the lack of any critical information about Lenin and the Russian revolution in the British socialist press. This may have been true of an earlier period, but when decisions were being made to join the CPGB, critical articles about Lenin and Bolshevik policies were already beginning to appear in British socialist literature. In The Spur, for example, a series of articles by Rudolph Grossman appeared from September 1919 onwards lambasting Lenin and the Bolshevik government. At first these articles were greeted with hostile disbelief by Aldred and others, but as Aldred in particular gained more information he came to the similar conclusions. Aldred, however, was an exception in conducting such uninhibited intellectual enquiry. Seemingly nothing could get through the mind-block of the "unity at all costs" school.

It was not long before the attitudes of this school became frozen into an immovable dogma. After the formation of the CPGB you criticised Lenin and Communist leaders at your peril. Thus because of his criticism of Lenin and Gallacher, Aldred suddenly found in August 1920 that his lecture engagements with the Greenock Workers' Committee and the Paisley BSP were cancelled and halls booked for his meetings were no longer available. In this manner the openness of the movement, with free discussion and debate, crumbled away after mid-1920 in the pursuit of unity with the CPGB.

Such developments also affected the SLP, which we should briefly mention. Individual SLPers were joining the CPGB, especially in Scotland via the CLP (John S. Clarke being one notable example). The SLP, because of this loss and the effects of unemployment was

declining in numbers at a rapid rate. To stem this decline the remaining members closed ranks and reverted to an undiluted DeLeonist position, leaving little scope for any development in an anti-parliamentary direction.

As a result of such retreats and the consolidation of the CPGB, what was left of the evolving revolutionary and anti-parliamentary movement came to be centred around The Spur and Guy Aldred. Aldred and his associates were now almost alone in being enthusiastic supporters of the Bolshevik revolution and yet not falling for the spurious unity line of the CPGB. All that could be accomplished now was to bring together the few remaining communist and anarchist groups that still adhered to an anti-parliamentary programme.

It was hoped to create a communist federation out of these remaining groups. The principle of federation - a federation of communist groups developed voluntarily from below rather than an imposed centralisation from above - was always an important and consistent part of the anti-parliamentary movement's proposals for unity. Aldred summarises the position in 1920:

"I have no objections to an efficient and centralised party so long as the authority rests in the hands of the rank and file and all officials can be sacked at a moment's notice. But I want the centralism to be wished for and evolved by the local groups and not imposed on them by a centre ... The Communist Party, the real party, must be evolved through a federation of local groups, a slow merging of them into one party, from the bottom upward, as distinct from this imposition from the top downwards."

The idea of a federation was coupled with a demand for self determination - the British revolutionaries should determine their own policy in relation to British conditions, irrespective of what Lenin and the Bolsheviks might say. Lenin was faced with different circumstances, Aldred argued, and he might be forced to compromise to save the revolution, but in England there was no excuse for compromise:

"Lenin's task compels him to compromise with all the elect of bourgeois society whereas ours demands no compromise. And so we take different paths and are only on the most distant speaking terms."

Or more directly we should stop "chasing the shadows of the great man (Lenin) ... It is not he who is running the British Revolution, but 'ourselves alone'. The policy of looking to him to mind our business is hindering and not helping the revolution." But increasingly such advice from Aldred and a few others was ignored as the move to join the CPGB gathered pace.

In practical terms, however, little progress was being made towards the federation that Aldred and the anti-parliamentary communists wished to see. Early in 1920 the Glasgow Anarchist Group issued a manifesto and put forward a proposal for unity along federalist lines. The Group

hoped to form a communist federation for Lanarkshire akin to the already existing Fife Socialist League. A similar federation of communist groups was planned for Wales towards the end of 1920. But apparently such plans remained at the proposal stage.

The Leeds Unity Convention of January 1921 (with the final fusion of the CPGB, CLP and BSTI), on the basis of the Comintern's 21 conditions, dashed any remaining hopes of a wider unity of parliamentary groups. At this time, Aldred appealed to the example of the KAPD (the Communist Workers' Party of Germany) as a party that had stood up to the Comintern on the question of parliamentarism. The KAPD had forced the Comintern to recognise it as a sympathizing party with consultative status. If anti-parliamentary groups could unite in Britain into a National Federation or Party, they could then enter into a close alliance with the KAPD and other continental Communist Parties to form an International Anti-Parliamentary Federation. In this way Moscow would be forced to recognise the reality of anti-parliamentary organisation and be compelled to grant anti-parliamentary groups some form of representation on the Executive Committee of the Communist International.

But no one was listening any longer. Shortly after, the KAPD was to get its 'marching orders' from Moscow: join the KPD (Communist Party of Germany) inside of three months or else! Clearly the antiparliamentary groups had no future inside the Comintern and all hopes of this were now dropped. Finally, at the 1921 Easter Conference of the Scottish anti-parliamentary groups, a Scottish Anti-Parliamentary Communist Federation was formed. This was the beginning of the AntiParliamentary Communist Federation which was to keep alive the hopes of a libertarian communism for next thirty years. (end)

Dear friends,

A famous French writer once wrote that there is no power so strong as an idea whose time has come. Many readers of N.B. surely believe that Marxian Socialism is the idea that today has that power. To defend itself from certain defeat in the arena of ideas, the capitalist class misrepresents socialism as something that already exists in the U.S.A., and China or even under capitalism in the public sector of the economy. Proof of success for capitalism in making people choose between false socialism and capitalism is that people agree that false socialism is undesirable and therefore choose capitalism by default.

When most people learn the true socialist belief that the state has no place under socialism, the capitalist class will have problems. Karl Marx made it clear when he stated that the existence of the state is inseparable from slavery. Writers for the Soviet Union admit that the state is supposed to wither away but they do not say when. People who are Marxists and honest about it see the state as a relic of the old social order. Unfortunately Michael Harrington, a man many people considered a socialist leader was a believer in the state as good for the people under capitalism as well as under socialism. He wrote a book recently in which he said that he would

be pleased if the capitalists spend the money they use to buy out other capitalists and to have an arms race for social good, now can supporters of capitalism hate a man who preaches hope that capitalism can work for almost everyone if the right people get elected? Many people who should know better repeat such ideas because the ignorant and desperate masses believe it is easier to get part of what they deserve than to get it all. It is the duty of Marxists to uphold ideas whose time have come and De Leon's program must also be included. It is our duty to educate the law of value as basic that capitalism can not avoid a crisis that can make us all seek solutions; it is certainly not the role of a socialist to tell the capitalist class how to spend the money which is theirs because of legal robbery. We should oppose all existing slave systems in favor of De Leon's program of socialist democratic industrial union government. The justice and mercy we consider to be part of our convictions and that will be extended to those who disagree with us will be realized under socialism because there will be no place for revenge. Unlike the French and the Russian revolutions, we will not punish the leaders of the old order in the name of justice. I believe it is mandatory that we stand for mercy and justice now and in the hoped for future.

fraternally yours,
 Monroe Russack

OUTSIDE AGITATOR AVAILABLE

The Discussion Bulletin has some good news for readers in the U.S. and Canada who are interested in the services of a most accomplished champion of non-market socialism. Steve Coleman, writer for the Socialist Party of Great Britain's Socialist Standard and platform speaker in London's Hyde Park, will be visiting the U.S. for two weeks at the end of April. Two years ago Comrade Coleman spent a few days in Grand Rapids, and while his powers as an outdoor speaker weren't put to the test, he proved himself as a debater. On one occasion he routed a panel of four economists before a student audience at a local college and repeated the performance with a second group of economists at a public meeting downtown. He was also very effective as a guest at a call-in radio show.

Besides his understanding of non-market socialism and his talent as a speaker, Comrade Coleman has the academic credentials--a Ph.D. and university teaching position--that make him acceptable to the authorities on college campuses. His most recent book, a biography of Daniel De Leon, will be published this fall by the Manchester University Press.

For further information on Comrade Coleman's itinerary, write to him at 46 Ballogie Ave., London NW10 1TA, England

Frank Girard

TIEN ANMEN IS NOT SO FAR AWAY

With great violence, the Chinese state is demonstrating today that it intends to rule over a population that it wants resigned and submissive. It is not hard to choose sides between the power which massacres, and the thousands of rebels who, in spite of everything, resist it. But such a choice doesn't make us take seriously the flood of crocodile tears unleashed by all the politicians who utter their laments at both official gatherings and press conferences.

One thing should be clear. Not a single state in the world - not even one of those whose leaders today presume to lecture on morality - would tolerate the profound challenges that the Chinese state has endured during recent weeks. Every single state, in a similar situation, would have launched its entire military arsenal. And first in line would be this French state, which is under the thumb of Mitterand, the former Interior Minister during the Algerian War. Don't forget that in 1968, the president of this French state - a certain DeGaulle - hurried off to Baden-Baden to garner support of the army in case it would be needed to put down the May troubles. And the leaders of the American and British states - experts in maintaining order both inside and outside their borders - are no better. Every state assassinates, either openly with their armies or covertly with their corps of secret service agents.

To subjugate, enslave, assassinate according to the needs of the state are not prerogatives of the Chinese state alone. Every democratic government has recourse to them when circumstances call for them. This puts the recent events in an even more tragic light since if the press reports are to be believed, the Chinese demonstrators actually were demanding more democracy.

To those who might happen to see this text, we would like to point out that there is no reason to exchange a single party of executioners for several rival parties where the executioners are dispersed among them and where each party defends the same basic values : enslavement to power, money and force. Don't let the politicians' pseudo-condemnations deceive you. They are condemning merely the too spectacular nature of the repression (which makes it hard for them to calmly carry on their own business) as well as the Chinese state's inefficiency in quickly restoring order. Fundamentally they are in firm solidarity with their Chinese counterparts.

Neither you nor we can expect anything from these parties of states. It's in opposition to them that we have to invent new relationships between beings freed from the mediations of money and power. We seek a human community where the very words of dictatorship or democracy would be no more than painful memories.

It is tragic to see the repression in China serve to promote the careers of politicians who are ready and willing tomorrow to take their turn at executing. The only effective solidarity with the Peking insurgents would be a world-wide refusal to resign to authority.

INTERROGATIONS
C/° I.S.
BP 243
F- 75564 PARIS CEDEX 12
FRANCE

Paris, June 1989

THE ANARCHIST ORGANIZATION SCARE

As Mike Gunderloy pointed out in Issue 36 of Discussion Bulletin, it is somewhat inappropriate to use a non-anarchist publication to discuss matters solely of interest to anarchists. Yet some of the letters criticizing Michael Kolhoff's call for an "all-inclusive national anarchist organization" deserve a response. I don't support the idea of an "all-inclusive" organization because it is impossible to include everybody who calls themselves an "anarchist" and expect to get anything done. However to accuse Kolhoff and others who support this idea, of wanting to create a "dogmatic Anarchist Church", a "bureaucratic play-pen", or of necessarily being on a "power trip", is ridiculous.

The anarchist movement, with the exception of the ultra-individualists, has always taken it for granted that the cooperative efforts of large numbers of people working together are more productive than the efforts of isolated individuals or small groups. This is the basis for our critique of capitalism, that the fruits created by the efforts of all, should be shared by all, not just a privileged few. Furthermore, we reject the notion of the social democrats and marxists, who believe that large scale social efforts are impossible without someone making all the decisions and giving orders to their subordinates. Therefore why has it become so totally inconceivable that anarchists could work together on a continental basis without turning ourselves into a vanguard party?

The reason why past attempts at creating a North American federation failed, was not because any of them succumbed to dictatorships. Rather the problem has always been a lack of agreement over the goals of these organizations and the way to achieve those goals. This is the cause of all the sectarianism and divisiveness. To get a large number of anarchists working together, they first must agree on a definition of an anarchist society and a program for getting there. As we learned ten years ago in the ACF, it takes more than a treasury, a newspaper, and a few by-laws to hold people together.

My advice to those who want to try building a new federation is to start with those anarchists with whom you clearly have something in common, and hammer out a common course of action. Define what social groups you believe have revolutionary potential and figure out how these groups can replace the old authoritarian system with a self-managed society. Do not make the mistake of trying to include people hostile to your vision just for the sake of numbers, or with the idea that they can be won over by letting them in (because they won't). And above all ignore the jibes of those accusing you of trying to "take over the movement", because you couldn't even if you wanted to.

My response to those old "veterans" and self-styled prophets who say it is better to do nothing than to risk bureaucratic contamination of large organizations, is to turn around and ask "How come if small groups and isolated individuals working in their own areas is the most effective way to build a free society, why is it that our movement which is ideally fragmented

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and atomized never seems to have much impact?" In case you hadn't noticed capitalism has been getting stronger and more exploitive lately. A new anarchist federation may not get anywhere, but I fail to see how it could make things worse. Fraternally, Jeff Stein, Box 2824, Station A, Champaign, IL 61820

An Open Letter to the Editor of the DB:
(PREBLEEPED)

Dear Frank Girard: I recently received the full text of Bob Black's "The Call of the Wild: Revealing (by Reviling) Michael Kolhoff." From my reading of the explanation for BLEEPING, I understand that you BLEEPED Bob Black because he explored the motives, personality, and intelligence of Mike Kolhoff. Yet Mike Kolhoff's attack on the 5th Estate collective was published UNBLEEPED as part of his call for an "American Federation." That's unbleepable, excuse me, unbelievable.

I shouldn't wonder if someone out here in DB readerland wasn't tempted to write exploring your own motives, personality, and intelligence. S/he might well ask why you gave an UNBLEEPED forum to Mike Kolhoff and not to Bob Black. S/he might be tempted to ask what kind of person would so clearly favor one contributor over another. S/he might even be inclined to call your powers of discrimination into question, ie, your ability to draw distinctions accurately.

However, upon comparing the full text of Bob Black's article and Mike Kolhoff's call, I suspect that this hypothetical person will draw his or her own conclusions without asking. Afterall, s/he might very well get BLEEPED for her trouble.

Putting all this hypothetical stuff aside: It's your judgment I question, Frank, your judgment. BLEEPING Bob Black was a mistake.

Sincerely, Bill Withers



Bill Withers
1231 - B Church St.
Decatur, GA 30036

An Answer (of Sorts) to the Open Letter

Dear Comrade Withers,

Did you and I read the same unbleeped text? For an example of a civil response to an attack, I'd like to refer you to E.B. Maple's letter in defense of the Fifth Estate in DB36. Maple states the facts as he sees them, returns a few punches to Kolhoff, and closes without leaving the bloody corpse of Michael Kolhoff on the pages of the DB.

I too had serious questions about my judgment in publishing any of Bob Black's letter but did so in a bleeped version for the reasons listed in DB36 and because of the pleasure I take in his writing style.

Frank Girard

[The letter below, written several months ago for DB34, was never published because other more pressing material took precedence. I've resurrected it for DB37 because it strikes me that a defense of the idea of the Discussion Bulletin is particularly appropriate for the issue that begins our seventh year of publication. In his DB33 letter, Comrade Brandon, a veteran DeLeonist and general secretary of the Industrial Union Party, argued that lumping DeLeonists with a "bizarre group" that included anarchists, libertarian socialists, the IWW, the World Socialist party, and others who oppose the DeLeonist program of socialist industrial unionism did a disservice to the movement. He also questioned the concept of "third force" or "non-market" socialism and asserted that the time spent in fruitless discussion might better be used in spreading the word.]

Dear Comrades,

Before responding to the questions Comrade Sam Brandon raised in his DB33 letter, I'd like to point out that the whole political landscape that is conventionally called "socialist" is infinitely more complex than it was in 1919, sixty-nine years ago when Comrade Brandon joined the Socialist Labor Party (SLP). In the U.S. there was a clearly reformist Socialist Party of America (SP) with aspirations toward sharing management of capitalism's political state with the Republicans and Democrats, two or three groupings of leftwing ex-members of the SP, who hoped to gain the Bolshevik franchise in the U.S., and the Chicago Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), whose objectives were identical to those of the DeLeonists in the SLP and the Detroit IWW. There was also a DeLeonist splinter group consisting of Arnold Petersen's antagonists in the 1917-18 disruption including some disaffected members of the Jewish and Scandinavian language federations.

In those days DeLeonists could easily define their differences from the SP and the proto-Communist Party groups on the basis of the explicitly reformist political objectives and pro-AFL trades union programs of the latter two groups. The IWW was a different matter. Its goals were identical to those of DeLeonists and even the differences in tactics were largely a matter of emphasis and rhetoric. The IWW had never officially rejected political action, the SLP's assertions to the contrary notwithstanding. Haywood, for example, remained a member of the SP until 1913 or 14, and IWW members were and still are perfectly free to join political parties and engage in political action. The IWW's suspicion of De Leon's and SLP members' motives were exactly that: suspicions with no basis except the hostility many of them inherited from earlier association with the reformist SP.

The ensuing 69 years have complicated the spectrum of political groups calling themselves socialist or revolutionary. The Russian revolution and subsequent events in the Soviet Union have had political repercussions both here and in Western Europe. Here it displaced the revolutionary industrial unionism of the SLP, IWW, and elements in the leftwing of the SP with the Russian designed political agenda of

Bolshevism. For the SLP this meant a new enemy on the left, the Communist Party, to add to the IWW, the anarchists, and the reformists in the SP. In the words of Arnold Petersen, it was "the SLP against the field."

This attitude was always questionable in the cases of the IWW and the communist anarchists. It became more so with the establishment of the new anti Leninist, anti reformist groups that arose here in response to the growing disillusionment of revolutionaries with the policies of the Soviet controlled Third International. It is this political sector that the Discussion Bulletin was designed to serve.

As to Comrade Brandon's question about first, second, and third force socialists and who are among the elect that deserve inclusion in the last group, the non-market socialists, the answer is on page one of the first issue of the Discussion Bulletin, reproduced below:

NUMBER 1

JUNE 1983

Dear Comrade,

You are receiving this first issue of the Discussion Bulletin because you represent an element of the "left" which differs in many important ways from the conventional idea of "leftwing." If you are typical of this element, you believe that whenever our class decides to, it can abolish the capitalist system with its political state and replace it with a stateless society in which the means of production are socially owned and managed directly and democratically by the workers themselves through their own unions or councils.

Unlike the Leninist-Stalinist-Trotskyist-Maoists you reject the idea that a transition period to such a society is necessary under the guidance of a "workers'" party, and unlike the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) and other social democrats, you do not believe that such a society can be achieved gradually through political action within the present social system.

As a result, you constitute what might be called a "third force," as opposed to the Leninists and social democrats, in what popular wisdom lumps together as "the left." As you know, both the "first and second forces" are badly splintered into competing denominations --a condition about which we can take some comfort since they aim to do no more than reconstitute many of capitalism's characteristics under a new name and a more enlightened management.

But if they are splintered, our "force" is atomized, consisting of small groups and grouplets each with its own publication and small circle of members and sympathizers. Except for the Socialist Labor Party (SLP) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) historically mortal enemies although they share an identical view of socialism, the groups are local, isolated, and like the IWW and SLP, often mutually hostile or at least suspicious.

Unlike the Leninists and social democrats each with a relatively neutral publication--The Guardian and In These Times respectively--which serves in part as a sounding board and an arena for debate and discussion of their political persuasion, we have no such publication. This Discussion Bulletin is intended to serve that limited purpose, providing a forum for exchanging ideas, challenging assumptions, presenting theories, and perhaps resolving differences and beginning the first stages of limited cooperation.

Any person or group whose views coincide with those described above, it seems to me, is a potential participant in the DB. If Comrade Brandon read my letter in DB 31, he will see that on the basis of the ICC's published views, I question whether it can properly be included in this political grouping because of its dictatorship-of-the-proletariat proclivities. I know almost nothing about the RSL, and I regard the Schactmanite remnant as reformist, with an agenda for improving capitalism and making it endurable for our class.

I agree with Comrade Brandon that "the majority of DeLeonists do not want to be included as part of that 'bizarre group'". But of course the majority of DeLeonists are in groups whose DeLeonism consists of maintaining pure and undefiled the 1905 harvest of Daniel De Leon's wisdom. I might add that the "being included" among nonmarket socialists, as far as the DB is concerned, involves only participation in discussion, not the sacrifice of a person's or group's principles.

Comrade Brandon asks why his exchange with the Socialist Party of Great Britain, which was published in the Socialist Standard about a year ago, wasn't published in the DB. The answer is that he didn't request that it be published and I didn't think of doing so, probably because the narrow-column format of the Socialist Standard doesn't lend itself to the DB. But there is no reason that the exchange can't be published. It's interesting and to the point of the DB's purpose. He also accuses the DB of publishing Internationalism's (ICC) leaflet, "No, to Elections!" without comment. First of all, I had no negative comment about the leaflet; so far as I can see, the only good thing about the 1988 election is that the majority of our class stayed away from the polls, as the leaflet urged. But why didn't Comrade Brandon write a letter for publication in the DB expressing his disagreement with the leaflet? The assumption is that discussion will be carried on by the DB's readers.

Fraternally,
Frank Girard

DISCUSSION BULLETIN
IUCE, P.O. Box 1564
Grand Rapids, MI 49501

Address Correction
Requested



AIR MAIL

Adam Buick R36
40 Granville Gardens
London W5 3PA
England

Cont'd from p.2

publication Interrogations on recent events in China. Jeff Stein writes what strikes me as a sensible letter on anarchist unity, while Bill Withers responds negatively to "bleeping." And once more I defend the existence of the DB, this time in a rather delayed answer to Sam Brandon's letter in DB33.

And finally we wish to thank you subscribers, whose donations and encouragement have been the most important factor in keeping the DB going for over six years. Remember, keep those letters and articles coming. They are the lifeblood of this forum -- And once more: to conserve space, use narrow--3/4 inch--margins, single-space, and use a dark ribbon.

Frank Girard
for the DB Committee