

The Independent Labour Party 1932-1939

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Abstract

The Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.) during the nineteen thirties is remembered only for its 'stupid and disastrous' decision to disaffiliate from the Labour Party in 1932 and for its subsequent rapid decline. This 'suicide in a fit of insanity' has been frequently used as a cautionary tale for subsequent left-wing activists. Yet, beyond casual references, the Party during the decade has scarcely been studied. Drawing on a wide range of previously unstudied archival materials this thesis presents the first full-length study of the decline of the I.L.P. It examines the way in which, through the decade, the I.L.P. sought to attract socialists by presenting itself, locally and nationally, as the Party of militant working-class activity as well as advancing an ideology distinct from the Labour and Communist Parties. In some localities such an approach was successful as the I.L.P. carved out a political niche for itself. The focus of the thesis is on examining the reasons why the I.L.P. failed to transform these local political spaces into a national political presence. This discussion is structured around the differing political spaces available for the Party to exploit: in localities, in elections, and in formulating policy. It also examines the I.L.P.'s relationship with the major competitors for this political space, the Labour and Communist Parties. This information is combined with a detailed understanding of the internal politics of the Party, factional and organisational. From this overall picture a contrast is drawn between those areas where the I.L.P. succeeded, and the Party failures. The resulting analysis seems to suggest that the electoral and organisational niches available at the local level where the I.L.P. succeeded, could not be transformed to the national arena. Thus, the concept of political space can give some indication of why the party failed in its attempt to build a significant socialist alternative in Britain.

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Abbreviations

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
ASW	Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers
BLPES	British Library of Political and Economic Science
CMA	Cumberland Miners' Association
CP or CPGB	Communist Party of Great Britain
EC	Executive Committee of the ILP
G&MWU	General and Municipal Workers' Union
IBRSU	International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity
ILP	Independent Labour Party
ISP	Independent Socialist Party
LP	Labour Party
MFGB	Miners' Federation of Great Britain
MRC	Modern Records Centre, Warwick University
NAC	National Administrative Council of the ILP
NAFTA	National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association
NCLC	National Council of Labour Colleges
NEC	National Executive Committee
NLS	National Library of Scotland
NMLH	National Museum of Labour History, Manchester
NUC	National Union of Clerks
NUDAW	National Union of Distributive and Allied Workers
NUJ	National Union of Journalists
NUR	National Union of Railwaymen
NUWM	National Unemployed Workers' Movement
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
POUM	Partido Obrero de Unificacion Marxista
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew
RPC	Revolutionary Policy Committee
SLP	Socialist Labour Party
SPGB	Socialist Party of Great Britain
SSP	Scottish Socialist Party
STUC	Scottish Trades Union Congress
SWMF	South Wales Miners' Federation
T&GWU	Transport and General Workers' Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UCL	University College London
UMS	United Mineworkers of Scotland
UPA	United Patternmakers' Association
WCML	Working Class Movement Library

Preface and Acknowledgements

This thesis attempts to address an argument to an audience with a variety of political positions. Inevitably, the argument, in some places more than others, bears the mark of a 'situated author.' Yet the set of questions and answers with which I began this project have shifted as my knowledge of the I.L.P. and the labour movement developed. I owe a significant debt to those within the Socialist Party of Great Britain, Adam Buick, Dan Greenwood and in particular Toby Crowe, who taught me much about both myself and socialism. With them I spent much time discussing and debating, and acting on, socialist principles. When I went to the University of York to study for a Masters Degree in Political Philosophy it was to develop and defend this position. It was during this year, especially in arguing with Sam Wallinger, that I realised that whilst I knew something about the theory of socialism, outside of the history of the SPGB, I knew little about the history of the working-class movement. I chose to study the I.L.P. during the 1930s, known to me largely through my treasured back copies of the *Socialist Standard*, not to challenge my preconceptions but as a route into a broader understanding of British political history. However, in coming to know more about the I.L.P., I found myself increasingly questioning my own politics. There were differences between the Socialist Party position and the I.L.P., but I found I was arguing that policy was mainly of significance for internal cohesion rather than recruitment. Further, appreciation of the values, motivations, ideas and successes of the I.L.P. led me to revisit long-held doubts about the SPGB's claims to have the answers which had eluded other 'socialist' organisations. At the root of these doubts was the failure of the I.L.P., much better situated than the Socialist Party, to build a democratic socialist party of significant size. Given the reasons I was discovering for its failure, I found I could not give myself a satisfactory affirmative answer to the 'nice idea, but do you really think it'll ever happen?' question I had previously fielded so often. I came to realise that where previously I had had an answer to every question, I now had a series of unanswered questions. These doubts I worked through in long discussions with fellow York graduate student Keith Gildart, as I slowly reached the conclusion that I had become that most hated of individuals, 'a reformist.'

That this personal journal, these doubts and musings, ever became transformed into a thesis is largely due to the help and critical guidance given to me by my supervisor, Professor David Howell. It was he who gave me the confidence to search for evidence,

and to follow the logic of an argument to its conclusion, even if it ran against preconceived ideas. Subsequent discussions with Kevin Morgan, Andrew Flinn, John McIllroy and Alan Campbell, all of whom have provided me with further primary material and ideas about the I.L.P., have reinforced similar points.

Without the grant provided by the British Academy, this research would have been impossible. I have also relied extensively on the hospitality of friends Thomas Schmidt, Marek Dalibor and particularly the unending warmth of Greg Davies and Magdalene Vierra-Marie. I cannot stress too much the debt to my parents who gave me the values, if not the politics, which motivated me. Through both the excitement of discovery and the long trawl of writing up my wife Sarah has been a constant inspiration. She has put up with endless discussion of the niceties of the politics of the 1930s and somehow maintained an interest in my research in both intellectual and practical ways. Yet the final motivation to finish the thesis comes from someone I cannot yet name. It is to Sarah and our unborn child that this thesis is dedicated.

1. Introduction

During the Second World War, MI5 placed a plethora of Trotskyist groups under tight surveillance and attempted to disrupt their activity. As the War drew to a close the Secret Service panicked. Their observations had ignored the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.). The I.L.P. was, they suggested, a group with much firmer roots in the British Socialist tradition than any Trotskyist organisation. They surmised that the Party's history, combined with an anti-war stance, meant that the I.L.P. posed a significant threat to national security. An officer was dispatched to investigate and, in the finest traditions of British intelligence work, returned with a three page summary of Fenner Brockway's then recently published book *Inside the Left*. No significant further action was taken against the party.¹

Whilst this thesis utilises a greater range of sources than the MI5, it is motivated, in part, by a similar question; that of why a party with such extensive roots in the British Labour Movement failed to create a viable socialist alternative during the 1930s. When the I.L.P. disaffiliated from the Labour Party in July 1932 its membership was over five times as great as the membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain. In the 1931 elections the Party had returned more candidates than the Labour Party in Scotland. It had an extensive organisation at both national and local level, a well regarded national journal supplemented by many more local publications. Many I.L.P.ers at the time believed they had prospects of building a powerful and influential movement. Yet subsequent commentators have widely accepted that disaffiliation was a 'stupid and disastrous error' and that the Party rapidly disappeared into immediate 'irreversible decline.'² The I.L.P.'s failure has become the standard cautionary tale for subsequent Labour left-wings presented repeatedly to show that there is no prospect for a non-Communist left-wing outside the Labour Party.³

This thesis seeks to examine the political realities which lie behind this verdict, establishing a nuanced assessment of why the Party actually declined. In doing so it has been necessary to grapple with a number of problems. First, it has been difficult to gauge the exact extent of the Party's decreasing fortunes. The existing literature overplays the speed and extent of the I.L.P.'s decline. In order to obtain a more realistic assessment of the Party during the period it has been necessary to reconstruct the Party's influence at both local and national level. Yet the sources available are limited; it is

perhaps indicative that there is more information on the I.L.P. in this period in the archives of the Communist Party of Great Britain than in the I.L.P.'s own archives. Further, there is the danger of producing a picture which in fact reflects the limited viewpoint of the Party's leadership. This problem is particularly acute given the extent to which Fenner Brockway produced or processed much of the source material.⁴ Such considerations further extend the reasons for looking beyond the national picture to examine regional and local variations. Yet, it is necessary, particularly in these crucial searches for diverse local pictures, to avoid over romanticising these fragments of often mundane and occasionally corrupt political processes.⁵

Beyond these difficulties, one central problem remains. In order to address the question of why the party declined it is necessary to understand why people left the organisation. Some reasons can be deduced from an analysis of high-profile defections or from the party's responses to such problems. Some individuals appear later in the records of Labour or Communist Parties. A little more can be inferred by the tentative application of generalised political reasoning. Yet the majority of those who left the Party did so without trace disappearing permanently from the historical record. Statements about their motivations necessarily remain tentative.

The initial two chapters of the thesis present the necessary background to the more substantive argument. This chapter presents an analysis of the literature, an overview of the period and the organisational and theoretical background to the argument. The second chapter provides the necessary historical background, giving a detailed understanding of the dynamics of the disaffiliation decision. The more substantive analysis of the I.L.P.'s activity during the post-disaffiliation period then takes place in a thematic discussion structured around the concept of political space. Thus, the thesis looks at the differing arenas in which the I.L.P. attempted to create political space - localities and elections, policy and international affairs. The thesis also examines the Party's relationship with major competitors for political space, the Labour and Communist Parties. By a comparison between those areas where the I.L.P. was relatively successful and those where the party most obviously failed it is possible to reach some tentative conclusions about the conditions that facilitated the party obtaining influence and thus gain some indication of why the party failed in its wider goals.

1.1 The I.L.P. in History: A Literature Review

Images of the post-disaffiliation party, whilst often self-contradictory, are almost universally unhelpful in creating a nuanced study of the politics of the I.L.P. during the 1930s. One popular viewpoint suggests the I.L.P., the original 'party within a party', was increasingly of the intransigent left and dominated by the legacy of 'Red Clydeside'.⁶ Another equally popular image is of an organisation which had lost all contact with its old working class roots and became dominated by middle-class eccentrics, the 'bearded fruit juice drinkers', to become the 'happy hunting ground of the crank'.⁷ Still another view suggests the party could be identified solely by its pacifism, which by the later part of the 1930s condemned it to irrelevance.⁸ The cumulative effect of such images is to suggest a party without significance or influence, at the margins of political activity, an organisation scarcely worthy of study.⁹

Whilst each of these images has some basis in fact, such views are seriously misleading, emerging largely from politically motivated commentary. Study of the post-1918 I.L.P. has been affected by a dominant Labour historiography that focuses on the I.L.P. in the pre-war period when it fits most neatly into the picture of a 'forward march of Labour'.¹⁰ In 1918, the Labour Party adopted a 'socialist goal' and allowed individual membership. With the I.L.P.'s two major contributions to the rise of Labour completed, with its 'historical mission' achieved, there has been much less interest in the study of the post-1918 I.L.P.¹¹ The neglect of the party after 1932 has been even greater. The isolation of the I.L.P. from action of importance, as defined by the teleology of the 'forward march' thesis, increased further. Most commentators explicitly or implicitly agree with the verdict of Keith Middlemass that 'because they had very little political power the main history of the I.L.P. should end in 1932'.¹²

Such a characterisation mainly serves as a partial explanation of the absence of a significant body of work dealing with the disaffiliated party. However, the dominant influence of the 'forward march of Labour' on Labour history is also fully consistent with the view of the I.L.P. presented in the most popularly cited work on the post-disaffiliation I.L.P., R.E. Dowse's *Left in the Centre*. His survey of the post-disaffiliation I.L.P., in the last chapter of his book on the I.L.P. from 1893-1940, also presents the I.L.P. as an organisation doomed to failure by the post-First World War reformed structure of the Labour Party. This explanation, presented by Dowse, is seriously flawed. Perhaps most importantly this is because his sympathies clearly lay

with those within the I.L.P. who wished to see it develop into a purely propagandist organisation. There is little attempt to empathise with, or even to explain the attitudes of those with alternative perspectives. These problems become particularly acute in examining the post-disaffiliation party, which precisely refused to define itself in such terms. However, there are further problematic aspects with this study, which this thesis aims to redress. Perhaps most obviously Dowse attempts to work not 'as a local historian but as a social scientist', which seems to require in his view a neglect of the local for the national. This is particularly problematic given that the regional differences, which he resolutely refuses to study, turn out to be one of the major factors which he identifies as explaining the decline of the party.¹³

Alongside this must be placed a number of other works which seek to place the I.L.P. within the wider context of the inter-war left. James Jupp's *The Radical Left in Britain 1931-1941* presents the most significant attempt to place the I.L.P. within the 'left', which he defines in terms of 'an opposition to existing policies and institutions' that 'had come to mean dedication to rapid socialisation of the economy whether through parliament or revolutionary means.'¹⁴ The book presents the best existing analysis of the relationship between the I.L.P. and Communist Party as the latter moved from Class-against-Class through United to Popular Front policies. Nevertheless, it has serious limitations, not least because the book has a strong tendency to depict 'the left' as a constant, its identity agreed upon by all significant political parties. The constant mantle of 'the left' is picked up at one moment by the I.L.P., at the next by the Communist Party and at the next it is shared by the two organisations. This attitude takes for granted that 'the controversy between the Communists and the I.L.P. or Trotskyists was a controversy within narrow limits. Had there been no acceptance of a common fund of ideas and a common field of action there could have been neither discussion nor co-operation.' It was a controversy over agreed territory. However, at no point during the 1930s could such a position be taken for granted within the I.L.P. Co-operation, and even dialogue with the Communist Party remained controversial.¹⁵ In presenting the I.L.P. as one component of the 'left' Jupp places the I.L.P. unquestioningly in a framework which was deeply contested at the time.

Ben Pimlott's *Labour and the Left in the 1930s* presents an alternative conception of 'the left' primarily rooted within the Labour Party. The I.L.P. is rather marginal in his discussion, which is based in his understanding of the behaviour of a 'reasonable left

wing', stemming largely from his understanding of the Constituency Party Movement. His argument revolves around the characterisation of the left's demands as organisational and not political. The I.L.P. and Pimlott's main target, the Socialist League, both intrinsically had political objectives. Thus, the comparison of these organisations with the Constituency Party Movement, and the consequent implied criticism within Pimlott's work is difficult to sustain. Nevertheless, his focus on a quite different left wing to that presented by Jupp serves to highlight the contested nature of the term.¹⁶

The self-assessment of the I.L.P.'s leadership has been central to these traditional verdicts on the Party during the 1930s. Yet received wisdom, from participants in the events has often been shaped to serve later political needs and justify subsequent political choices. Indeed, as political views and priorities change over time, so too do the emphases which participants such as Fenner Brockway and Jennie Lee place on different aspects of their I.L.P. experience.¹⁷ Whilst the accounts of these individuals, and others such as John Paton, provide an invaluable source, the excessive reliance of some later commentators on such accounts has led to the regurgitation of an in-built political slant not necessarily endorsed by a more careful study. The problems of biography of the I.L.P. leadership are even more acute, especially with regard to the contrasting assessments of James Maxton. His iconic status within the British Labour movement and the hagiography of some early commentators has affected subsequent assessment. Even the best of the work on Maxton is unable to engage seriously with the I.L.P.'s post-disaffiliation politics.¹⁸

The major historiographical alternative to the focus on the Labour Party in this period has come from a Communist historiography. The weakness of the Labour Party in the immediate period after 1931 has given many such historians the opportunity to present the 1930s within an alternative version of the teleology of the Labour movement, with its telos in the wartime alliance against fascism.¹⁹ Such discussions place the Communist Party at the centre of every element of the working class struggle. There is little room for discussion of alternative centres of radical thought and action. In addition the harsh opposition between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party following the tragedy of the Spanish Civil War has generated apologetics in some histories of the Communist Party. This further ensures that there is no place for the I.L.P., as an independent, active and dynamic organisation within such a narrative.²⁰

British Trotskyists have developed a narrative account of the British labour movement in direct opposition to the Communist Party's analysis. Their attempts have focused on developing an understanding of the Trotskyist movement as opposed to the Communist Party, which it is contended stands on the 'right' of the labour movement.²¹ The early British Trotskyist movement developed largely within the framework of the I.L.P. in the 1930s and 40s.²² Thus, within such narratives, it is inevitable that the I.L.P. takes on an increased importance. However, the I.L.P. continues to be understood by such authors in terms of Trotsky's own characterisation of the I.L.P., as a centrist party, a party which attempts to stand between 'Marxism and Reformism.'²³ This focus on the followers of Trotsky means that there is little attempt to understand the complexities of the politics of the I.L.P. except as they relate to the development of Trotskyism in Britain. However, the lack of serious consideration of the I.L.P.'s politics has been evident even when those sympathetic to the Trotskyist position choose the I.L.P. as their main focus. This is the major problem with G.N.R. Littlejohns's MPhil thesis *The Decline of the Independent Labour Party*. Littlejohns repeatedly characterises the I.L.P. as 'wholly empirical' in contrast to the Trotskyists' 'struggle for a Marxist programme'. Such a framework assumes, rather than demonstrates that the I.L.P.'s politics were 'unstable, moving towards one pole or the other' of Marxism and Social Democracy.²⁴

The disaffiliated I.L.P., thus, fits uneasily into any of these established strands of labour history. Interest in the Party, has largely been confined to those who have looked to it because of its supposed pacifism and attitude to war. It was such an interest which, apparently, motivated the chronological span of Peter Thwaites's 1976 PhD *The Independent Labour Party 1938-56*, which despite its title is mainly based on the period 1938-45. Thwaites's analysis is generally well-researched, and presents some useful material on the I.L.P. at local level following disaffiliation. It does however, suffer from a failure to deal with the party in a dynamic way. Indeed, policy is treated as a relatively static continuation of *Socialism In Our Time* from 1926-56. Given the importance within the party of developing a new revolutionary policy in the period surrounding disaffiliation such a contention is particularly problematic.

In many ways more significant for the study of the post-1932 I.L.P. has been a changing emphasis within labour history itself. The teleology of the 'forward march' of Labour has increasingly come under explicit attack.²⁵ Alongside this there has been a renewed

emphasis on studies of the I.L.P. which are sensitive to regional variation and a widening of the themes addressed and the chronology studied.²⁶ These trends, amongst other things, have made it possible for some recent authors to begin to address the nature of the I.L.P. in the 1930s in some detail and to analyse the regional variations within the post-disaffiliation party.²⁷ At the same time there has been a renewed emphasis on the I.L.P. in relation to some of the key events of the decade, most notably in its activities during the Spanish Civil War.²⁸

The disaffiliated Party frequently drew analogies between the I.L.P. of the 1930s and the party of the 1890s. In particular, some emphasised^s the similarity between the two attempts to forge an influential organisation against a dominant labour establishment. Whilst the differences between the 1890s and the 1930s are evident, some of the conceptual framework utilised in the most illuminating studies of the early I.L.P. also enlightens the study of the disaffiliated Party. In particular the notion that the party can be seen as struggling for political space, geographically, conceptually, organisationally and electorally in a hostile political environment, used effectively by David Howell in his study of the early I.L.P. can effectively be applied to the Party after 1932.²⁹

Despite these recent trends and renewed emphases on the I.L.P. in general and the Party in the 1930s there remains no serious study of the party nationally during this period which goes beyond the brief and problematic contribution of *Left in the Centre*. This thesis aims to correct this serious gap in the literature by presenting a detailed and nuanced account of the disaffiliated I.L.P.

1.2 Chronological Overview

The new constitution of the Labour Party in 1918 left the I.L.P. with a problematic legacy. Individual membership and an avowedly 'socialist goal' for the larger party meant the I.L.P. had to rethink its position. The resulting shift in the smaller organisation's emphasis, towards becoming a socialist 'think-tank' for the Labour movement, was particularly problematic when the Labour Party ignored its advice. Conflicts between Labour and the I.L.P. grew through the 1920s and came to a head during the 1929-31 Labour Government when the parliamentary I.L.P. came to be seen as a real problem for the minority Labour Government. During this period, the I.L.P. began to seriously consider terminating its affiliation to the Labour Party. There were two major reasons for such a course of action. First, the disputes within parliament,

where the Parliamentary Labour Party's Standing Orders prevented the I.L.P. from opposing the Government, began to have a widespread effect on Party activity. Second, with the deteriorating economic situation many within the I.L.P. felt the Party needed to adopt a 'new revolutionary policy', and to assert its independence from the 'gradualist' Labour Party. Those who focussed on this second point formed themselves into a 'Revolutionary Policy Committee' (R.P.C.) during 1931. At a conference in Bradford in July 1932, primarily because of the Standing Orders dispute, but also influenced by the R.P.C., the I.L.P. famously disaffiliated from the Labour Party.

Disaffiliation had a significant effect on the Party; approximately one-third of the party's membership was lost, with Scotland, where the I.L.P. was particularly strong, worst affected. The Party was actively involved in working-class activities such as the Lancashire cotton strike and the national hunger march during 1932. However, as Hitler came to power in Germany, the Party considered it necessary to attempt to form a United Front with other working-class organisations. When the Labour and Co-operative parties refused the I.L.P.'s invitations the Party found itself working with a Communist Party only just moving out of its hostile Class-against-Class phase, when it had launched vicious attacks on the I.L.P. as a party of 'social-fascism'.

At the same time the I.L.P. was developing its own 'new revolutionary policy', first through the decisions of the Party's 1933 Derby conference and then in a detailed statement by the N.A.C. The policy, which represented a considerable victory for the R.P.C., was based on a neo-syndicalist workers' councils programme. It also endorsed working to form a United Revolutionary Policy with the Communists and approaching the Comintern to enquire about the conditions for sympathetic affiliation. The R.P.C., increasingly dominant within the I.L.P. in London, sought to build on this success and the I.L.P. took a leading role in the organisation of the 1934 national hunger marches. However, the Committee's leadership was not dynamic enough for some C.P.-sympathising R.P.C. members and a Committee for Affiliation to the Comintern was established on the direct orders of the Communist Party. On the other hand, the 'new revolutionary policy' and the activities of the R.P.C. alienated large sections of the Party who were committed to a more parliamentary approach. These members in London, East Anglia and especially Lancashire formed a 'Unity Group' to oppose the R.P.C. and to overturn the 'new revolutionary policy'.

When the Unity Group failed in its bid to overturn party policy in 1934 its leadership decided to resign from the I.L.P. and form a new Independent Socialist Party (I.S.P.), taking the majority of the Lancashire Division with them. However, despite the failure of the Unity Group to get the Party to accept its ethical socialist policy, the R.P.C. was on the retreat. R.P.C. policy including affiliation to the Comintern was firmly rejected at the I.L.P.'s 1934 York Conference. Then, the Comintern Affiliation Committee, its connection to the Communist Party quickly exposed, was wound up. Further opposition to the R.P.C. came from the Trotskyists who joined the I.L.P. from the Communist League and formed themselves into a further faction, the Marxist Group.

By the end of 1934 it was clear the party was in some difficulty. Factional fighting continued and membership was still declining fast. The Party had performed below expectations in three by-elections, in Kilmarnock, Upton and Merthyr. During 1935, despite a further clarification of policy the Party's problems continued. The Party's youth section, the Guild of Youth, voted to affiliate to the Young Communist International, just as the adult party was moving away from such associations. Then the Abyssinian issue further divided the party. Some sought to promote workers' sanctions against Italy, others argued that the workers' should not take sides in 'a struggle between rival imperialisms' whilst a third group, centred on the R.P.C. supported the League of Nations, following the C.P. line after its adoption of a Popular Front line in 1935. However, the R.P.C. was internally split on the issue. Unable to resolve the disputes, and with its authority within even its London stronghold under attack, the R.P.C. voted to join the Communist Party in November 1935, immediately before the 1935 General Election.

The I.L.P. performed well in its strongholds in the 1935 Elections, but was unable to make significant progress elsewhere. This electoral failure combined with the departure of the R.P.C. nudged the I.L.P. back towards the Labour Party. Further, despite active participation in the 1936 national hunger march and Unity campaign, relations with the Communist Party, which was after 1935 pushing a non-class based Popular Front policy, were also becoming increasingly tense. The Spanish Civil War saw active fundraising and campaigning from the I.L.P. The Party also rejected outright pacifism and sent a unit to fight for the Republicans. Following I.L.P. reaction to the Barcelona uprising there came the final break with the Communist Party which resulted from the bitter disputes over the conduct of the struggle. Thus, by the end of the decade the I.L.P.

leadership was largely committed to a return to the Labour Party. However, the outbreak of war saw the likely decision to rejoin the Labour Party postponed until after the Second World War. The I.L.P. during the 1930s had been shaped by the struggle to find electoral, regional, policy and organisational spaces. The decline of the I.L.P. is best explained with reference to the political circumstances of the 1930s and not to the fundamentally different political spaces available during the immediate post-war period.

1.3 Leadership, Organisation and Finance

Studies of the early I.L.P. have begun with an analysis of the basis of I.L.P. support before moving on to look at the national organisation.³⁰ However, there are two compelling reasons for reversing the order of study in the examination of the post-disaffiliation party. First, the surrounding political situation had changed, improved communication and transport and a changing party system meant a much greater nationalisation of politics in the 1930s than in the 1890s. Second the situation of the I.L.P. had fundamentally changed. As the party sought to reconstruct its membership and policy after disaffiliation it was not building an organisation from scratch but rather had the weight of a past organisational and decision making structure to contend with. Only by first outlining the overall national dynamics of leadership, membership, organisation and finance can the more nuanced local and regional battles for political space be understood.

The leadership of the Party took diverse forms, at local level leadership was often removed from national trends and policies. Further, it was possible for those who stood outside the formal leadership structures of the Party to have a significant influence on policy. However, leadership was important. The National Administrative Council (N.A.C.) had a role and responsibility which went well beyond simple administration.³¹ For example, the already wide-ranging powers of the N.A.C. to influence policy through control of the annual conference agenda were enhanced in 1935 when conferences were restructured to revolve around an N.A.C. policy statement. Thus, to understand the trajectory of the Party during the 1930s it is crucial to understand the composition of the N.A.C.

The structure of the N.A.C. remained unchanged through the 1930s and largely based on the decision of the Party's 1905 conference. It consisted of chairman, secretary, treasurer, four national members and members from each of the nine regional

divisions.³² The chairman, treasurer and national members were elected at annual conference. The secretary was a paid party official whilst the divisional members were selected at divisional conference.³³ However, especially with the turmoil caused by splits and factional fighting in the period 1932-5 there was a high turn over of members outside these regular elections. In 1932, E.F. Wise was elected as one of the national members, and Pat Dollan as the Scottish Division's N.A.C. representative. Both left the I.L.P. after disaffiliation to remain with the Labour Party. Wise was replaced on a national poll by C.A. Smith a London supporter of the embryonic 'new revolutionary policy.' The Scottish Division at a special divisional conference selected John McGovern, the controversial Glasgow MP to replace Dollan. Both McGovern and Smith were later to act as Party chairman. Further turmoil ensued as John Paton resigned as General Secretary at the end of 1933 in response to the political line of the party. This prompted a wholesale reorganisation of the N.A.C. leadership, without consultation of conference, as Brockway, previously the Party chairman moved to become secretary and Maxton, previously one of the four national members was elevated to the position of chair. Protests were raised, but if the recipient of the chairman's post had been anyone other than the iconic leader of the Parliamentary group then the discontent would have been greater still. Further changes outside of conference were necessitated by factional resignations. Bob Edwards replaced his father-in-law Elijah Sandham, the Unity Group leader, as the Lancashire representative in 1934. John Aplin, scourge of the R.P.C., replaced Jack Gaster, the R.P.C.'s representative on the N.A.C. after he joined the Communist Party in 1935.³⁴

In other ways there were considerable continuities on the N.A.C. over the period. The position of chairman was held by only two men, Fenner Brockway and James Maxton, who shared much in terms of political outlook. Fred Jowett, remained treasurer for the entire period. Members of the Parliamentary group also played a continuous role, not only Maxton, but also John McGovern and Campbell Stephen were continuously on the N.A.C. until disputes over the Munich agreement came to a head in 1939. Further, Tom Stephenson represented the North-East and Percy Williams represented Yorkshire from 1932. George Johnson sat for East Anglia from 1934 and Kate Spurrell was the South-West representative until 1938.

These continuities in part demonstrated failures in the representative process. Vacancies at divisional level were frequently uncontested even where serious policy issues were at

stake.³⁵ Women were also under-represented on the N.A.C. In the period 1932-9 only three women held seats on the committee: Jennie Lee as one of the national members from 1933-5, Kate Spurell the South-West representative for most of the decade and Dorothy Jewson, the East Anglia member until 1934. Such problems were particularly acute given the decision of the Women's National Advisory Committee to wind itself up shortly after disaffiliation, thereby ending the separate machinery for women's organisation within the I.L.P. These problems combined with the manipulation of senior positions in times of crisis indicate that the N.A.C. was not in any straightforward way reflective of the Party's membership.³⁶

The I.L.P. had deep financial difficulties, which dated from the levels of expenditure established under the Chairmanship of Clifford Allen in the mid-1920s. When middle class support for the I.L.P. had drifted off as the Party moved to the left in the later part of the decade donations had also dropped significantly. The increase in unemployment had also had a major impact in reducing income from affiliation fees. By the time of disaffiliation the financial situation was acute. The Party was making a regular loss of £10-£20 per week on the *New Leader* a figure which was only marginally reduced by the frequent changes of the journal's format over the decade. This short-fall was not covered by affiliation fees, which, according to Party sources, fell even more dramatically than membership. However, the monthly losses, although problematic paled into insignificance compared to the debts of the Party. Fred Jowett, the Treasurer, reported in July 1933 that the Party was insolvent and the *New Leader* 'hopelessly insolvent' with a net liability of £5,356. In such a situation the Party had looked to establishing new ways of collecting money. In 1933 the Party introduced the 'Power for Socialism Fund' normally referred to as the Power fund, an outgrowth of the '1933 special effort fund.' It required the active co-operation of the branches, divisions and federations in collecting money for the central organisation of the party. However, even with the 'Power Fund' the shortfall was growing. As the Treasurer, Jowett commented later in the year, the 'only substantial saving possible lies in reduction of personnel.'³⁷ This created one set of motivations for organisational change.

However, some of the impetus for organisation change came not from the financial incentive but from the new 'revolutionary' role, which the party was developing for itself. The R.P.C. in particular, argued that the structure of the party needed to be moved towards democratic centralism. Their concern was that in an emergency situation the

party would have no decision making structures. By 1935 the combination of political and financial motivation meant that the Party had restructured its organisation.

The changes to the Party organisation had no effect on the election and makeup of the N.A.C.; instead the Party established a separate Executive Committee and Inner Executive, elected from the ranks of the Administrative Council. N.A.C. meetings were made less frequent and were based around an agenda and report decided upon by the Executive. The Inner Executive met even more frequently and was intended to make decisions which were meant to be of limited political importance and restricted to the relatively uncontroversial realm of finance, organisation and in some cases discipline.³⁸ But the impact of these decisions was substantial. The Inner Executive became dominated by the Parliamentary Group and was used to push their own political agenda within the Party, most notably over Abyssinia. If the N.A.C. has been portrayed as an oligarch, the Inner Executive was seen by its opponents as a 'dictatorship'.³⁹

However, the reforms of 1935 were promoted as primarily affecting organisation at branch level. A full consideration was given to the position of the party in terms of branches, federations and divisions. Whilst the divisions were left intact concern was expressed at the fact that only Scotland had a full time paid organiser. At branch level a new set of structures were introduced, larger branches were to establish a greater degree of internal organisation including sets of committees responsible for particular activities and they were asked to establish workplace and residential committees where possible. Federations were requested to increase their input into party organisation and to look for ways to expand co-ordination of activity. A central Industrial Organiser was established and each division was also expected to appoint an Industrial Committee and make moves towards the appointment of a divisional Industrial Organiser.⁴⁰

The changes of central organisation and the new stress on industrial activity had a significant effect on party activity. However, the financial situation continued to deteriorate. In 1934/5 the financial deficit for the year was at the relatively low level of £13. However, in private the assessment of the financial situation was very negative, and the problems of the early 1920s with an excessive reliance on donations were still evident. Each year the party made a desperate appeal for funds to maintain operations. In 1935 the appeal was for £1,000 by the following year the amount requested had risen to £3,000 despite the fact that they had failed to reach their target the year before. In

mid-1937 the Party decided to employ John McNair on a part-time basis to work on trying to improve the financial position of the party especially in regard to affiliation fees. However, by the end of 1937 there was a further deterioration in income, and despite increases in Yorkshire, East Anglia and Lancashire, affiliation fees fell by £14. The annual conference had predicted income of £1,900 and expenditure of £2,040 but the budget committee was forced to concede that the actual figures were more likely to show a shortfall of £1,055. Thus, in order to sustain itself the party was forced to repeatedly borrow money from its Bilbao Fund. Indeed it was not until the outbreak of war that things began to turn round financially. In 1939 the party managed to reach its fund raising target of £1,000 for the first time. Then by the end of 1940 the treasurer was able to declare that Party finances could be 'considered as being very satisfactory.' Indeed the accounts showed an interim surplus of £279. However, those involved in planning for the future of Party finance had always maintained the desire to be able to sustain the party on affiliation fees alone. Even in 1940 such a dream remained as far away as ever. It was renewed donations that made the difference whilst affiliation fees were well down the list of income falling far below even other sources of income from branches such as income from the Power Fund.⁴¹

Additionally, salaries for Party officials were always low and this frequently caused problems. At the beginning of 1936 Brockway felt that his finances were going to force him to resign his post as Party secretary.⁴² However, he changed his mind and withdrew his resignation shortly before the 1936 Keighley conference. Then the following year the National Union of Journalists threatened to remove Brockway's membership as he was not paid for editing the *New Leader*. The problem was solved by transferring his salary to the job of editor and increasing his salary on the understanding that he would pay the party back the increased amount. Nevertheless, there was an acute awareness of the low salary levels paid to party officials and as soon as the finances appeared to be straight the salary of the General Secretary was raised.⁴³

Further to these problems, throughout the period the *New Leader* was making a loss of about £20 per week which forced the N.A.C. to advance the journal £500 per year over the period 1937-9. By the outbreak of war it had become necessary to seriously consider turning the *New Leader* into a monthly magazine. Frequently the editorial board was forced to launch appeals for funds at the expense of other more political appeals. In 1937 the paper had to take on a new format to save £10 per week and the party made

repeated appeals to its membership to increase sales through branches. Indeed league tables and inter-branch competition in sales of the *New Leader* became a regular feature of the Party's paper.⁴⁴

1.4 Membership

The I.L.P.'s membership lies at the heart of any study of the Party, yet it remains the hardest element to determine with any certainty. Central issues remain the composition in terms of class, gender, occupation and location. Before disaffiliation some indication on such matters was given in conference reports. After disaffiliation, perhaps, afraid of revealing the scale of decline, the Party ceased publication of information such as branch affiliation fees and occupational breakdown of conference delegates. Only once, in 1937, was a Trade Union breakdown of conference delegates given. This information indicates a party which valued union membership but also notable is the fact that the largest occupational group was a middle class one, teaching. However, a comparison with the equivalent figures for 1931 shows that delegates from the middle-class occupations had declined more steeply than some skilled working-class trades.

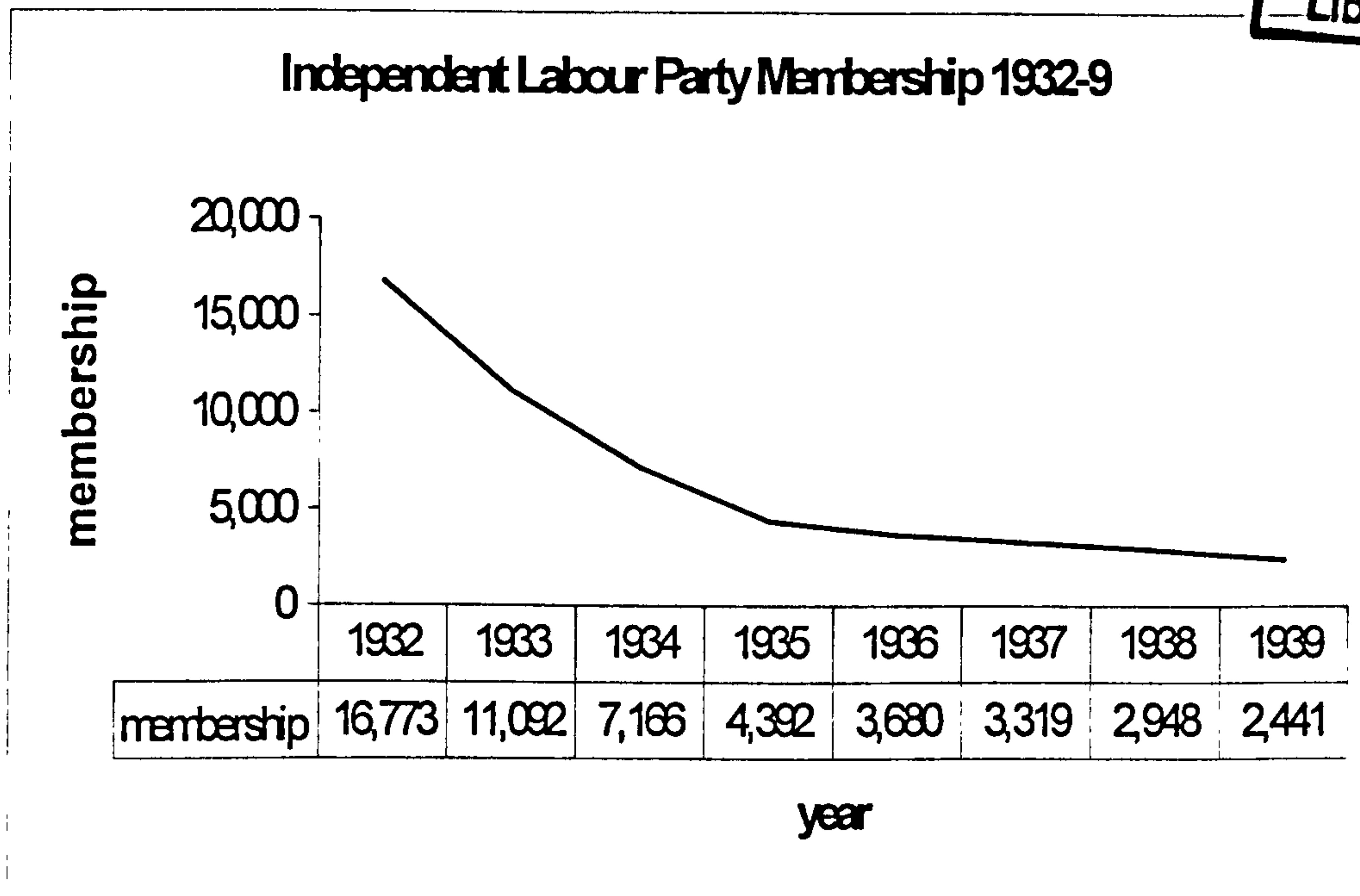
Trade Union/Occupational breakdown of delegates to I.L.P. conferences 1931 and 1937:

Occupational Category	1931	1937
Clerks	27	8
Woodworkers	6	
Building Trade		5
Engineering and Metal	26	8
Teaching	23	12
Miners	9	8
Printing		8
Distributive		8
Housewives (all Co-op members)	17	6
Unemployed		6
Transport		11
Textile	6	5
General Workers		7
Boot and Shoe operatives	4	
Journalists	5	
Artists	4	
Doctors	3	
Labourers	4	
Ineligible for Trade Union membership		6
Total respondents to questionnaire	134	98

Source: Report of 1931 I.L.P. conference (I.L.P. microfilm archive 1931/24); *New Leader*, April 9 1937

More detailed breakdown of trends, occupational and otherwise of Party members are rare. Indeed, the major source of information for commentators on the social make-up of the 1930s Party is the impressionistic and unreliable comments of contemporaries, both Party members and opponents. Non-members and opponents in particular stress the middle-class nature of Party, especially in London. Party members, although not necessarily contradicting this view of the London I.L.P., emphasise the working-class composition of the Party outside of the capital.⁴⁵ Such partial comments often reveal little outside of the immediate circle in which such individuals moved and even then are coloured by the political point being made. Indeed, not only is there no real evidence to assess the social composition of the party during this period, there is considerable uncertainty about more basic questions.

Crucially, there are no readily available membership figures of the party covering the 1930s. All central estimates of party membership were based on affiliation fees paid to head office.⁴⁶ Over the period the party became increasingly aware that fee payment was not a particularly good estimate of membership, and claims of membership from branch and divisional sources are uniformly higher than the level of affiliation fees paid. By 1935 the central party organisation was becoming increasingly aware of the need to have a more realistic and accurate picture of what was going on at branch level within the party. The intended survey was never completed, but from fragmented reports it is possible to reconstruct approximate membership levels in a manner comparable with pre-existing membership estimates and further to gain some insight into how the party operated at divisional and local level.⁴⁷ The results show that the membership of the I.L.P. in the years after disaffiliation appears to have dropped sharply until 1935 and then continued to drop less steeply until 1939. At the outbreak of war the downward trend of the 1930s was overturned due to an influx of members into the party because of its anti-war policy and tradition.



Source: Calculation from based on extrapolation of Francis Johnson's membership calculations and Affiliation fees given in N.A.C. minutes and Francis Johnson papers.⁴⁸

Division	Branches (post-disaffiliation)	Branches (1935)	Loss of Branches 1932-1935
Scotland	122	91	21
North East	36	21	15
Yorkshire	40	24	16
Midlands	37	22	15
East Anglia	8	5	3
London and South	88	56	32
South West	19	15	4
Wales	28	21	7
Lancashire	72	24	48
Total	450	284	166

Source: N.A.C. minutes

Overall the losses in terms of branches were heaviest in Lancashire where the departure of the I.S.P. had had such a major impact. The decline in London was also troubling for the Party and although the departure of the R.P.C. was a factor the longer term problems caused by factional divisions were felt to be a more significant problem. However, there had been a decline in the number of branches across the whole party, no division was immune. The losses were least significant in the smaller divisions and particularly East Anglia, where the growth in the Norwich and Great Yarmouth branches more than offset the loss of small branches with little or no real existence.

However, the biggest problems lay not so much in the loss of membership but in the loss of active membership. Surveys of branch activity in 1935 and 1938 showed that

this was a continuing problem. In 1935 only 100 of the 284 branches performed the three basic functions of party activity; paying fees, operating the Power Fund and selling the *New Leader*. Whilst most branches at least were involved with the selling of the party paper 25 branches had no real contact with head office and performed none of the functions. By the middle of 1938 the situation had deteriorated still further and out of the 220 branches only 124 had bothered to pay any affiliation fees.⁴⁹

Clearly from such evidence it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions. However, tentatively it would seem that the I.L.P.'s social composition was if anything slightly more working-class in the 1930s than the 1920s. Losses in membership were far from uniform across the country, for example the East Anglian Division, despite the fall in branches, was able to actually increase its membership. However, the Party's problems in terms of membership were acute and added to the significant financial and organisational problems. It is against this difficult background that the study of the I.L.P. during the 1930s must take place.

¹ The records of the MI5's observation of the I.L.P. can be found in Public Record Office files previously closed for seventy-five years but released in 1999 for this study. The files show sporadic monitoring of leading I.L.P. figures and more detailed monitoring of the I.L.P. press in the period 1938-45. The records show that Government considered censorship of the I.L.P. press, including local papers such as the *Bradford I.L.P. News*. However, there is no record of any serious observation of I.L.P. activity outside of the press during the War and certainly nothing on the scale of observation mounted on either the Communist Party or the much smaller Trotskyist Groups. PRO HO 144/23003/663001 cf. Fowler, 1999, 288-289

² Brockway, 1977, 107; Milliband, 1972, 195

³ See for example Coates, 1975, 179-85; More recently the example of the disaffiliate I.L.P. had been directly compared to Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party as it left the Labour Party see for example Tony Dale, 'Prisoner of History', *Labour Left Briefing*, April 1996

⁴ He was not only the author of numerous auto-biographies, I.L.P. biographies, party pamphlets, policies, propaganda pieces and other books, he was also, for most of the period under review, editor of the Party's journal the *New Leader*, the major source for any study of the Party. Brockway was also, of course, the Party's chairman and then subsequently general secretary.

⁵ The most famous accusations of corruption within the post-disaffiliation ILP surrounded T. Dan Smith in his role as North East Divisional Organiser in 1942. For a brief account which is rather too sympathetic to Smith see Challinor, 1994, 17.

⁶ For example see Middlemass, 1965, 287

⁷ For example see Dowse, 1966, 193; Orwell, 1975, 143, 153

⁸ For examples see Taylor, 1965, 558-9; Shinwell, 1973, 144

⁹ On images of the I.L.P. within the later Labour Movement and their impact on the development of subsequent left-wings within the Labour Party see Howell, 1991, 204-232

¹⁰ Morris, 1991, 1-3

¹¹ This view is perhaps most influentially expressed in Wertheimer, 1929, 12

¹² Middlemass, 1965, 276; cf Laybourn, 1993

¹³ Dowse, 1966, ix; 204-5

¹⁴ Jupp, 1982, 6

¹⁵ The relationship between the Communist Party and the I.L.P. remained controversial through from 1933 and the resignations of General Secretary, John Paton, and MP Richard Wallhead, to 1939, when despite holding a similar line on the Imperialist nature of war the organisations were viciously fighting one another.

¹⁶ A more explicit attempt to compare the I.L.P. and the Socialist League can be found in Stephen Hornby's snappily titled 1966 MA Thesis *Left Wing Pressure Groups in the British Labour Movement 1930-1940. Some Aspects of the Relations Between Labour Left and the Official Leadership, with special reference to the experiences of the I.L.P. and the Socialist League*. Whilst both the comparison and Hornby's conclusion, which attempts to fit the Labour Party into Michels Iron 'Law of Oligarchy', are interesting, the thesis is hampered by the narrowness of the sources used and a number of basic factual errors which make it difficult to accept his conclusions.

¹⁷ Compare for example differing accounts of disaffiliation in Brockway, 1941, 237 and Brockway, 1977, 107 or Lee, 1939, 174-5 and Lee, 1980, 96-7

¹⁸ There have been four biographies of Maxton published in book form (McAllister, 1935; McNair, 1955; Brown, 1986; Knox, 1987) of which McNair who comments that Maxton 'approached perfection more closely than any other human being I have known' represents the height of hero-worship. Gordon Brown's *Maxton*, despite his subsequent reconsideration of the politics of the third way, represents the most detailed and scrupulous study of Maxton. Nevertheless, Brown remains wedded to the theme of his undergraduate thesis which contends that Maxton's importance as a thinker of the 'third alternative' was exhausted by 1931. Consequently his study of Maxton in the post-disaffiliation period is less than satisfactory.

¹⁹ Morgan, 1989, 8-9

²⁰ See for example Branson, 1985, 235-45

²¹ Bornstein and Richardson, 1982

²² Bornstein and Richardson, 1986a, 127-187; Bornstein and Richardson, 1986b, 5-6

²³ Trotsky, 1974, vol 3, 45-153

²⁴ Littlejohns, 278; Littlejohns only reflects on his unproblematic use of the term 'Marxist' to mean Trotskyist in the two pages that pass as a final chapter to the thesis in which he asserts that 'The revolutionary policies of the N.A.C. and the R.P.C. were never more than phrases. The writer therefore believes that the Marxist Group was justified in using its name.' (277) Such assumptions are particularly problematic in a situation where all parties were concerned to claim the label 'Marxist' for themselves.

²⁵ See for example Howell, 1990

²⁶ Laybourn, 1993, 318-9; cf. Howell, 1983; Howell, 1994

²⁷ Stevens, 1997

²⁸ Buchanan, 1997a, 74-8; Buchanan, 1997b

²⁹ Howell, 1983, 129-32, 277-82

³⁰ Howell, 1983, vii

³¹ For an account of the development of the N.A.C.'s wide-ranging role in the early period see Howell, 1983, 301-326

³² Thoughts of changing the number and geographical coverage of divisions to better reflect membership patterns were frequently expressed through the 1930s. However, action was never taken and there remained the same nine divisions through the decade: 1.Scotland (and Ireland) 2.North-East (Cleveland, Cumberland, Durham, Northumberland) 3. Yorkshire (and North-East Derbyshire) 4.Midlands (Lincs., Notts., S. Derbyshire, S. Staffs., Warwickshire, Northants, Rutland, Leicestershire) 5. East Anglia (Cambridge, Norfolk, Suffolk, and part of Essex) 6. London and South (London, Middlesex, Kent, Surrey, Sussex, Hampshire, Bucks., Berks., Oxon, Beds., Herts., Huntingdonshire, S. Essex and part of Wiltshire) 7.South-West (Gloucestershire, Hereford, Somerset, Devon, Cornwall and part of Wiltshire) 8. Wales (South Wales and Monmouth) 9. Lancashire (Lancs., Cheshire, N. Staffs., N. Derbyshire, Westmorland).

³³ For a full list of N.A.C. membership 1932-9 see Appendix I

³⁴ Not all changes to the N.A.C. were caused by resignations due to political differences. Jim Garton was replaced by Sam Leckie in late-1933 after Garton went to work in the Soviet Union.

³⁵ For example Allen Skinner of the Unity Group gave up his position as London's N.A.C. representative to Jack Gaster in 1933 without a contest.

³⁶ When Paton resigned there was considerable disquiet over the appointment of a new chairman without consultation with the wider party. Further evidence of manipulation was evident in response to the factionalism of the Party at the 1934 conference when Cullen came fourth in ballot for the four national members. Rather than give the R.P.C. a further place on the N.A.C. a run off ballot was held with Alex Smillie, who had come seventh in the original poll, elected. I.L.P. Conference Report 1934

³⁷ The liabilities of the Party were £1770 (excluding the £491 owing to the Labour Party and the LSI in unpaid affiliation fees, which the Party had no intention of paying). Their reliable assets were £898. The *New Leader* owed £6,750 including a debt of £282 to the Union of Post Office Workers'. National Museum of Labour History (NMLH)/I.L.P. Material 1930s (uncatalogued material)

³⁸ Of course, as with many democratic centralist experiments, the reality of the changes was rather different from their intended consequences. It was no part of the explicit changes to the organisation that the Inner Executive would be virtually identical to the parliamentary group but given the power and influence of Maxton and the group, and that the Inner Executive consisted of only three or four individuals it was in many ways inevitable. Similarly the Inner Executive was designed to be, at least whilst the I.L.P. remained legal, a non-controversial body. However, given the divergent political views within the Party in the mid-1930s and the political bias of the parliamentary group the huge disputes over the Abyssinian question which were inflamed by the Inner Executive statements, and ended the appointment of an Inner Executive, were really an accident waiting to happen.

³⁹ For the N.A.C. as oligarch see Howell, 1983, 301-27

⁴⁰ Executive Committee Report August 2 1935; N.A.C. minutes April 14 1936

⁴¹ Francis Johnson to Fred Jowett, February 2 1936 (RP Reel 3); *New Leader*, January 10 1936; *New Leader*, June 18 1937; N.A.C. minutes August 2 1937; N.A.C. minutes October 22 1937; I.L.P. Budget Committee minutes November 27 1937; I.L.P. Budget Committee Report to N.A.C. December 11 1937; *New Leader*, April 21 1939; N.A.C. minutes December 15 1940

⁴² Brockway's salary was £260 per year

⁴³ N.A.C. minutes February 15 1936; April 10 1936; April 30 1937; N.A.C. minutes December 15 1940

⁴⁴ *New Leader*, November 26 1937; *New Leader*, November 20 1936; N.A.C. Report to 1937 Conference; N.A.C. report to 1938 Conference; N.A.C. Report to 1939 Conference.

⁴⁵ See for examples Bornstein and Richardson, 1986a, 128; Brockway, 1938, 244; For an uncritical review of such opinions see Littlejohns, 251-276

⁴⁶ The source for membership figures following disaffiliation is Henry Pelling's *British Communist Party*, 77(fn). All other published figures are drawn from Pelling who in turn obtained the figures from an interview with I.L.P. secretary Francis Johnson. It is clear that Johnson simply applied the same formula to the affiliation fees paid as had been done to pay affiliation to the Labour Party. In internal discussions of the party position at national level there is never any talk of membership figures in the period from disaffiliation to the outbreak of war, all consideration is in terms of number of branches and affiliation fees paid to head office. See for example Brockway, *A Survey of the Party Position*, November 1937

⁴⁷ For example see C.A. Smith and John McNair, 'A Fraternal Grouse', *Between Ourselves*, October 1939

⁴⁸ Francis Johnson's cited membership figures appear to be calculated according to the formula $13.33 \times \text{National Affiliation Fees}$. Although Johnson provided Pelling with no figure after 1935 the same formula has been applied to affiliation fees to give figures for the remainder of the 1930s. Johnson's formula assumes a constant affiliation payment (true throughout the decade) and a consistent portion of unemployed/ineligible/non-paying members. This assumption was particularly problematic in the early 1930s due to high levels of unemployed members (paying at a lesser rate) and during the war years as many members were moving about the country and affiliation fee payment became less regular.

⁴⁹ Executive Committee Report, August 2 1935; N.A.C. minutes July 30 1938

2. Disaffiliation, Revolution and Standing Orders

2.1 Introduction

In July 1932 the Independent Labour Party (I.L.P.) disaffiliated in the most important left-wing split in the history of the Labour Party. However, the characterisation of the I.L.P.'s motives and expectations in this decision remains ambiguous. The failures of the I.L.P. outside Labour have provided a cautionary tale for subsequent left-wing sections within the Labour Party, serving to keep them within the Party.¹ Yet received wisdom, from participants in the events has often been shaped to serve later political needs. Commentators have then used this narrative to substitute caricature for proper analysis. As a result, the most significant reasons for the departure and decline of the I.L.P. have remained largely neglected.²

The I.L.P.'s role in the formation of the Labour Party, and the iconic status of its early leaders, most notably Keir Hardie, gave the smaller organisation enormous prestige within the wider movement. This early image showed great persistence but was modified as the I.L.P. provided a focus for radical and socialist thought in opposition to the First World War.³ During the 1920s the I.L.P. began to define a clear strategy and policy of its own, formulated independently of the official Labour Party. The I.L.P. continued through the decade as by far the largest socialist society within the federal structure of the Labour Party. Moreover, in 1931 the I.L.P. claimed a membership of 16,700, more than five times the size of the Communist Party. Many of those members held a loyalty to the I.L.P. beyond the wider Labour Party. The Party had a national organisation including its own long established journal, a central organisation spreading out at divisional, federation and branch levels. In certain geographical areas the I.L.P. even dominated the local Labour Party organisations and seemed to have the potential to provide the focus for a strong left-wing grouping within the larger Party. However, instead of constructing such a group, during 1932 the I.L.P. departed from the Labour Party and then tore itself apart in bitter factional disputes. By the end of the decade the Party occupied a fringe position on the left outside the Labour Party.

Given the failure of both the I.L.P. and the rest of the left during the 1930s, many who participated in the decision of the I.L.P. to disaffiliate from the Labour Party in 1932 came to regard it as a huge mistake.⁴ Historians have tended to agree with this verdict.

I.L.P. disaffiliation has been characterised as 'suicide in a fit of insanity.'⁵ Such a verdict is misleading. First, 'suicide' makes overly simple connections between the Labour Party and the I.L.P. The larger party pushed the smaller towards its death, and must bear some responsibility for its fate. Thus, the suggestion of suicide provides a misleading explanation of ways in which decline came about. Secondly, the charge of 'insanity' suggests that there is no reasoned way to make sense of the disaffiliation decision. In reality there was more than one way in which disaffiliation made sense. Reconstructing these differing logics of disaffiliation allows an understanding of both the decision itself and of the decline of the I.L.P. because the factional fighting that decimated the Party after 1932 directly resulted from these divergent reasons for disaffiliation.

2.2 A Revolutionary Break?

The decision to end I.L.P. affiliation to the Labour Party was taken at a specially convened conference in Bradford on 30 July 1932. After the conference the I.L.P. chairman Fenner Brockway explained his understanding of the decision. He argued that working-class unity could only be expected behind the 'red banner of revolutionary Socialism,' and thus the I.L.P. needed to break with reformism. Since the Labour Party was neither democratic nor socialist, this demonstrated the need for a truly independent I.L.P. with a new revolutionary policy.⁶ A clear similarity existed between Brockway's position and the line which was currently being developed within the London Division of the I.L.P. by the self-styled 'Revolutionary Policy Committee'. The R.P.C. had been formed under the leadership of Dr Carl Cullen of Poplar and Jack Gaster of Marylebone with the intention of bringing together left-wing I.L.P. members. Initially, however, it had no clear policy or programme. What united its members was a general disgust with the second Labour Government and a commitment to 'revolutionary Marxism' as the way forward for the I.L.P. By January 1932 the R.P.C. had produced a tentative policy statement. However, the main rallying point of the R.P.C. prior to July 1932 was disaffiliation from the larger party. They argued that the basis for the split should be clearly defined as the I.L.P.'s rejection of the Labour Party's gradualist politics.⁷

The similarities between Brockway and the R.P.C. were most apparent at the Special Conference in Bradford where the only issue on the agenda was whether to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. The stage was set for a stark showdown between the Labour Party loyalists, led by Frank Wise, ex-civil servant and former I.L.P. MP, and Pat Dollan, leader of the Glasgow Labour Movement, and the disaffiliationists, including

Brockway, Cullen and Gaster. After a debate, centred on issues such as the nature of revolution, class and party and the historic position of the I.L.P., the disaffiliationists won by a vote of 241-142. At Bradford those who argued for disaffiliation stood together in calling for revolutionary Socialism and in their condemnation of the Labour Party.⁸ The positions of Brockway and Gaster seemed united in their victory over the affiliationist position of Dollan and Wise.

Thus Brockway and the R.P.C. used very similar 'revolutionary' language to justify the disaffiliation decision. This has led some to equate the positions of Brockway and the R.P.C. and to suggest their 'revolutionary fervour' was the primary cause of disaffiliation.⁹ However, such an analysis places too much weight on revolutionary feeling as an explanatory factor. First of all there was not a united body of revolutionary opinion within the I.L.P. Moreover, it is necessary to note that the 'agreement' between Brockway and the R.P.C. in July 1932 was partly an illusion. Differing meanings lay behind the same rhetoric. Further, even as far as there was an overlap in viewpoints it is important to understand that although similar ideological positions might have been occupied, the trajectories by which the positions were reached were very different. It thus becomes problematic to assume that this overlap explains much outside the specific context of the Bradford Special Conference of 1932. Understanding how the ideological stances were reached is as important as recording what the positions were.¹⁰

An analysis of the Bradford Conference shows that revolutionary feeling alone cannot explain the disaffiliation decision. The National Administrative Council (N.A.C.) of the Party supported by Brockway and the majority at the conference, defeated an R.P.C. motion to define the break with the Labour Party in definitely revolutionary terms. At the same time, the affiliationists did not seek to oppose revolutionary Socialism, rather they suggested that a real revolutionary policy should come from within the Labour Party. Indeed, following the split, the members of both the Socialist League and the Scottish Socialist Party (the two organisations formed to accommodate I.L.P. affiliationists within the Labour Party) were prepared to endorse forms of revolutionary Socialism.¹¹ The implication is clearly that 'revolutionary feeling' cannot, by itself, explain why the I.L.P. chose to disaffiliate from the Labour Party. The 'revolutionary' label in fact indicates very little of ideological significance within the context of the 1930s I.L.P.

2.3 Rejection of Gradualism

The widespread use of revolutionary language in the debates of 1932 was unsurprising given the dramatic events of the previous year. Following August 1931 gradualism, the supposed alternative philosophy based on an evolutionary and educational socialism bent on making industry more efficient, had been tainted by its association with Ramsay MacDonald.¹² The crisis of 1931 was as much a crisis for the Labour movement as it was for the national economy. During the 1920s the Labour Party built up an identity largely around the dominant figure of Ramsay MacDonald. In 1931 MacDonald deserted the Party which had idolised him. He not only became head of the National Government but also joined with the Conservatives and many Liberals as they decimated the Labour Party in the general and local elections later that year. The hero of Labour's rise was turned overnight into villain, so that the self-image and official history of the Labour Party were in need of a rapid reconstruction.

The easy answer, taken by many Labour Party members, was to personalise failure. The I.L.P. believed itself to have policies more pertinent than these simplistic suggestions, to the necessary rethink, but its relationship with the larger body was at an all time low. During the term of the Second Labour Government the I.L.P.'s Parliamentary Group had consistently criticised the economic policy of MacDonald and his financially orthodox chancellor Philip Snowden. Under the leadership of James Maxton and, until his death in May 1930, John Wheatley, the Group argued there was an urgent need for the implementation of radical policies, especially on reducing unemployment and the treatment of the unemployed. This had brought the I.L.P. into direct conflict with the Labour Party in a manner that could not be side-stepped. However, the roots of the I.L.P.'s development of a revolutionary policy in 1932 lay earlier than its opposition to the 1929-31 Labour Government.

The relationship between the Labour Party and the I.L.P. had long been problematic. The Labour Party had been founded as a federal organisation, but it had no clear mechanism for resolving disputes between its constituent parts and the central organisation. At times this scarcely mattered to the I.L.P., but after the First World War such considerations became increasingly important. The I.L.P. had opposed the War, which had brought it into conflict with the larger Party. Then the Labour Party's introduction of a 'socialist goal' and individual membership in 1918 had started a small but steady drift of members of the I.L.P. into the Labour Party.¹³ This seemed to rob the

I.L.P. of much of its identity and had sparked the suggestion, that the I.L.P. should wind itself up.¹⁴ Those who felt closest to the Labour Party thus left the I.L.P. leading to an increasing proportion of the smaller party who felt frustrated with the mainstream of the Labour Party. This created an interesting dynamic for as the I.L.P. was moving gradually away from the mainstream, its former leaders such as Philip Snowden and MacDonald took the reins of leadership of the larger organisation. However, it was when Labour was in power that these tensions were most evident.

The first Labour Government of 1924 led to a significant cooling of the relationship between the Labour Party and the I.L.P. There were disputes within the I.L.P. as to whether the larger party should take office whilst not in a majority. The I.L.P.'s then chairman, Clifford Allen, a close friend of MacDonald, formulated the Party's position on this question. He argued that if the Labour Party were forced to form a minority Government they should make a determined effort to push through Socialist legislation. This would force the Liberal Party either to oppose or support the Government on the basis of Socialism, which would clarify political choices for the electorate. In the latter case socialism would be the result, although, the former case was more likely.¹⁵ However, the bold initiative suggested by Allen never happened and within the I.L.P. there was much disappointment with the 1924 Labour Government. Additionally, the smaller party felt vindicated because of their belief that the only real success story of the Government had been a member of the 'left' I.L.P., John Wheatley, at the ministry of health.¹⁶

Thus, 1924 left a legacy of very real tensions between the leadership of the two organisations, as MacDonald communicated to Allen:

What disturbs me most about the [I.L.P.] is a nasty small spirit that seems to be growing up in it. I am constantly coming against vanity and jealousy with not a little malice. On the other hand, I am accused I hear of cutting myself off. Heavens, I wish they would shoulder my burdens. ... Were I to say that from the moment I took office to now I have not had a particle of support from the I.L.P. I should be unfair, but it would only be an exaggeration and not an invention.¹⁷

Under Allen the I.L.P. had developed the role of a Labour Party 'think tank', but the problems arose when the larger party rejected the proposals they produced. The idea had been to strengthen the Party's purpose after 1918, but the effect was to increase the potential for a breach between the two organisations. These problems were to grow in the ensuing period. Whatever their strategic disagreements Clifford Allen as chairman of the I.L.P. had maintained a close personal relationship with Ramsay MacDonald.¹⁸

However, under the pressure of ill-health and due to protracted conflict with James Maxton and others on the N.A.C. Allen resigned as chairman of the I.L.P in September 1925.¹⁹ Fred Jowett temporarily replaced him as chairman, until the Party's Whitely Bay conference in 1926 when James Maxton was elected chairman by a huge majority. The election of the charismatic left-wing leader of the Parliamentary I.L.P., represented a significant moment in the distancing between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party. In accepting the Chairmanship Maxton spelt out some of the ground which was later to prove important in separating the I.L.P. and the Labour Party. For Maxton the Labour Party, in emphasising the need for obtaining power was losing sight of what its real goals should be. The duty of the I.L.P. was thus to make sure that the larger party and the wider working-class did not lose sight of the need for socialism:

The more the Labour Party becomes absorbed in the responsibilities of Parliamentary life and the more the responsibilities the Labour Party has to undertake, either as the official opposition or as the Government, the more will the tendency be for them to be entirely taken up with the immediately practicable which always creates a tendency to lose sight of the ultimate ideal. The I.L.P.'s duty is to keep the ultimate ideal clearly before the working-class movement of the country. Political success for the Labour Party is a certainty, but political success is itself a poor end unless, behind the Parliamentary majority, there is a determined revolutionary Socialist opinion. It will be part of my duty to try to make as far-reaching as possible this feeling which I believe is the feeling of the party.²⁰

The 1926 conference also saw the adoption of the 'Socialism in Our Time' programme, based on Hobsonian under-consumptionist theory. This programme was in part a continuation of the work of Allen in terms of the preparation of a coherent, practical and radical policy, but it, along with the underlying *Living Wage* doctrine, was capable of more than one interpretation. Maxton argued strongly that the programme be interpreted in a left-wing manner as a practical and rapid strategy for socialist transformation and that every effort be made to implement the programme at the earliest opportunity. Thus under Maxton the political programme of the I.L.P. became almost entirely separate from that of the Labour Party.²¹

Over the following two years the potential problems between the two parties were exacerbated still further. First, in 1927 the I.L.P. reconsidered its official attitude towards MacDonald. He held the post of treasurer of the larger Party and his nomination for this position had traditionally come from the I.L.P. Despite the growing breach between them, this practice continued up to the 1927 I.L.P. annual conference. However, the I.L.P. chose that event to make explicit the divisions between the leaderships of the two parties as the delegates decided not to re-nominate him.²² Nevertheless, the debates within the I.L.P. revealed that Maxton did not completely

dominate the party because there were many I.L.P.ers who remained loyal to MacDonald and the Labour Party.

In the following year tensions between the I.L.P. and the wider labour movement were further heightened by the Cook-Maxton manifesto and campaign. The manifesto, initially influenced by leading members of the Communist Party, was a joint effort between Maxton and the controversial miners' leader A. J. Cook. It was a denunciation of the politics of class collaboration that Maxton and Cook saw in both MacDonald's leadership of the Labour Party and the Mond-Turner talks of 1927-9, where the TUC and influential employers considered possibilities for industrial co-operation. The manifesto launch was to be accompanied by a speaking tour and campaign, but despite both men's oratorical reputation it was not a great success, in part perhaps because the strategic significance of the campaign was obscure.²³ However, the open attack on gradualism and the politics of the Labour movement widened the rift between the I.L.P. leaders and the Labour Party. It also created further problems within the I.L.P.

Maxton had not informed the I.L.P. of his intentions with regard to the campaign, an omission that caused ill feeling even where the campaign's aims were not disputed. It was especially difficult for many to understand how Maxton could reconcile his chairmanship of the party with keeping the I.L.P. in the dark over the manifesto. The I.L.P. General Secretary John Paton, broadly a supporter of Maxton's anti-MacDonald line, considered resignation over the matter, but decided against when he 'was satisfied that there was no conscious breach of Party or personal loyalty.'²⁴ Much more aggrieved were those who did not share the sentiments of the manifesto and campaign. At the special N.A.C. meeting called to discuss the manifesto on 30 June 1928, Shinwell, Wise and Dollan were all hostile. Dollan moved a motion that there should be no co-operation with the Cook-Maxton campaign. The motion was only narrowly defeated 7-5 and in the end a relatively weak motion was passed, which urged support for the campaign.²⁵ Thus the campaign received reluctant support from most of the I.L.P. divisions. Significantly the Scottish Divisional Council refused to give any support. They argued instead that the object of increasing working-class backing for the 'Socialism in Our Time' programme 'can best be accomplished by working through the I.L.P. and affiliated organisations.'²⁶ Personal relations between some of the I.L.P. leaders were highly strained and the dispute left Maxton and Scottish I.L.P. chairman Dollan barely speaking to one another.²⁷

The manifesto and the subsequent campaign had two important effects on the relationship between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party. First, it widened the rift between the Labour Party leadership and the I.L.P. Secondly, and perhaps as importantly, it increased the tensions within the I.L.P., cementing the growing division between those whose primary loyalty was to the Labour Party leadership and those who sought to develop an independent role for the I.L.P.

2.4 The Reaction to the Second Labour Government

The potential for a rupture between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party was in place well before the second Labour Government, but it was during the period from 1929 to 1931 that the split became a distinct likelihood. The 1929 election returned the Labour Party to parliament as the single largest party for the first time but without an overall majority. Superficially the I.L.P. appeared strong; the Party had sponsored 37 successful parliamentary candidates and a further 123 MPs were card-carrying members of the I.L.P.²⁸ However, this parliamentary group was politically very diverse, covering almost the entire range of opinion within the labour movement. Thus, there was considerable disagreement about the function of the group and its appropriate relationship to the I.L.P. outside parliament.

The majority of the I.L.P. members of parliament was not active in the I.L.P., either inside or outside parliament, and had therefore a limited interest in the decisions of that body. Nevertheless, some MPs considered that they had an important political affiliation to the I.L.P. These members can broadly be split into two groups. On one side there were those such as Maxton and Wheatley, who held that their affiliation to the I.L.P. took precedence over their attachment to the Labour Party. On the other, those such as Shinwell and Salter, although having an important attachment to the I.L.P. were, nevertheless, 'Labour' before they were 'I.L.P.'²⁹ The conflict between the former group and the Parliamentary Labour Party was to prove the primary reason why the I.L.P. disaffiliated from the Labour Party.

The criticisms of MacDonald by some I.L.P. MPs, and his stinging and often unjustified rebukes in reply to them had created a tense atmosphere within the I.L.P. parliamentary group even before the 1929 election.³⁰ Nevertheless, the Maxton group of MPs was not prepared to stem its criticism of Labour just because they were now the party of

Government. Their attacks began immediately with the criticism of the King's Speech by Wheatley and Maxton. They argued that the Labour Party was not attempting to carry through its election promises, suggesting as the I.L.P. had done in 1924, that a bold policy would bear electoral dividends. These points were amplified through the columns of the I.L.P.'s weekly journal the *New Leader*, where Brockway was editor. Over the course of the Government the main disagreement between this I.L.P. group and the Labour Party continued to be the unemployment benefits insurance system, and the lack of a coherent policy to eradicate unemployment.³¹ Maxton was able to gain the backing of the I.L.P. Parliamentary group for critical amendments to the Government's Unemployment Insurance proposals at an initial meeting on the 21 October. But Maxton's idea of direct criticism was opposed by many who themselves had reservations about the Government. This group largely consisted of Trade Union MPs who regarded the I.L.P. approach as counter productive and preferred a less confrontational approach of 'loyal criticism'. When a further and larger meeting of the I.L.P. Parliamentary Group was called the following week, with about 80 MPs present, Maxton's position was decisively defeated by 41 to 14. During the meeting Maxton pointed to the sovereignty of the I.L.P. conference and refused to accept that he, or others, should be bound by a majority decision of the group. In keeping with this, neither he nor his associates refrained from trying to amend the unemployment legislation. However, the majority of the Parliamentary I.L.P. remained behind MacDonald and opposed to Maxton, with 66 I.L.P. MPs signing a pro-Government, and implicitly anti-Maxton, declaration of support for the Government.³²

Neither Maxton, nor much of the I.L.P. outside parliament, agreed with the legitimacy of MPs who had only nominal connection with the I.L.P. should be able to block the implementation of I.L.P. conference decisions. At the 1929 I.L.P. conference the party decided that proposed candidates supported by the I.L.P. would have to give an undertaking that they accepted I.L.P. policy. The 1930 conference increased the pressure when it passed, by an overwhelming majority, a resolution instructing the N.A.C. 'to reconstruct the I.L.P. parliamentary group on the basis of acceptance of the policy of the I.L.P. as laid down by decision of annual conference, and interpreted by the NAC, and to limit endorsements of future I.L.P. candidates to nominees who accept this basis.'³³ Those who did not accept the official interpretation of the 'Socialism in Our Time' programme were no longer eligible either for membership of the I.L.P.

parliamentary group or for I.L.P. endorsement in future elections. Only eighteen out of the 160 I.L.P. MPs accepted these conditions.³⁴

2.5 The Dispute Over Standing Orders

A large majority of the Parliamentary Labour Party disagreed with the I.L.P. opposition to its policy. They reacted by tightening the Standing Orders that governed the conduct of the P.L.P. The key change was that under no circumstance were members allowed to vote against a decision of the Parliamentary Party, although the longstanding commitment to allow members to abstain on matters of conscience was maintained.³⁵ Clearly this precluded the I.L.P. from tabling regular amendments to Government policy, and frequently voting against the Government. The reformed I.L.P. group, under the leadership of Maxton, was equally determined to ignore the dictates of the Standing Orders.

The issue of Standing Orders has been presented by some commentators as being of relatively minor importance to the disaffiliation of the I.L.P.³⁶ Yet it is clear that to contemporaries within the I.L.P., especially the parliamentary I.L.P., the issue was fundamental. Perhaps the most concerned amongst those members was a former chairman of the Labour Party, the I.L.P. veteran and Labour Party N.E.C. member, Fred Jowett.³⁷ He argued against the requirement that MPs never vote against the Labour Party on the grounds that this was both impractical and unprincipled. That it was impractical was evident from the record of the 'loyal' Labour MPs who opposed the I.L.P.: 126 out of the 287 Labour MPs had voted against the Government on at least one occasion during the Second Labour Government.³⁸ Indeed, as Jowett argued, the freedom of the I.L.P. to vote for socialist policies was a necessary part of the compromise that had enabled the formation of the Labour Party.³⁹ That it was unprincipled came from his understanding of the connection between the responsibilities of representative Government and his idea of political honesty. He argued that individual MPs were responsible to the men and women who elected them. During elections, promises would be made to the electorate and their subsequent votes in Parliament would show whether they were acting as promised. It was up to the MP to recognise that the membership of a political party would restrict the way in which they would be able to vote. Therefore MPs should not *promise* those things which were not part of the Party's programme, although they may suggest that they will try and see

them implemented.⁴⁰ He argued that the PLP Standing Orders illegitimately interfered with this relationship between MP and electorate:

[The Labour Party] insists on every one of its Parliamentary candidates signing a pledge to obey regulations which may penalise a member for seeking to give effect to the decisions of the Annual Conference of the Labour Party; may prevent him from honouring the Socialist principles he professes, and which may restrain him from fulfilling pledges into which he may have entered with his constituents even when those pledges are in conformity with Labour Party Conference decisions. ...That is why [the I.L.P.] cannot agree to obey the present Standing Orders of the Parliamentary Labour Party. The answer to those who demand it must surrender the freedom of its MPs to fulfil their pledges honestly made in accordance with the principles and policy advocated officially by the Labour Party for election purposes is – NO – NO – Never.⁴¹

Jowett's concerns over Standing Orders were reinforced by the nature of the issues, such as unemployment benefit and the Means Test, on which there had been conflict. 'In all instances the [I.L.P. Parliamentary] Group had championed working-class claims ...surely something must be wrong with Standing Orders!'⁴²

This was not just a pedantic point about political theory, rather it affected the way in which the I.L.P. in parliament conducted itself. Given the strategy of the I.L.P., with its history of parliamentary representation, the identity of the I.L.P. was at stake. To accept the Standing Orders of the Labour Party would have been to present great problems in carrying out the wishes of the I.L.P. conferences, especially in the event of another Labour Government. However, the impact of the Standing Orders dispute reached much further than the I.L.P. MPs initially affected. The Labour Party responded to the I.L.P.'s decisions in 1929 and 1930 by tightening its own rules on the selection of parliamentary candidates and decided that in order to be officially endorsed, all prospective parliamentary candidates would have to make a declaration that if elected they would accept the standing orders of the PLP. Such conditions were unacceptable to those who associated themselves with the Maxton group. The issue came to a head when Tom Irwin was selected to fight the marginal Tory seat of East Renfrewshire. Irwin openly declared that he would sign the statement of loyalty required by the 1930 I.L.P. conference, and the Labour Party's executive responded just nine days before the by-election poll with a decision to refuse Irwin Labour Party endorsement.⁴³ The I.L.P., riled by the perceived injustice, made a considerable point of campaigning for Irwin with its leaders all making the trip up to the constituency. Their efforts had little impact as the Tories retained the seat. Considerable resentment on both sides flared over the result and such feelings were increased by the refusal of Labour Party endorsement to a number of other I.L.P. candidates, most notably in Chorley. There were also selection disputes in Clapham, Kelvingrove and Camborne.⁴⁴

It was events such as these that moved Standing Orders from an issue only affecting the I.L.P. MPs to one of real concern to I.L.P. activists around the country. Increasingly, I.L.P. members were prevented from taking the active role in the electoral politics of the Labour Party that they desired and had previously taken. The point was underlined in the 1931 elections where nineteen I.L.P. candidates stood, unendorsed by the official Labour Party. The Labour Party refused to countenance support for the I.L.P.ers in those nineteen seats despite the fact that some unendorsed members fought campaigns that were virtually indistinguishable from the mainstream of the larger Party. This prevented normal working relations between the activists of the two organisations in those areas. In the event five of the I.L.P. candidates were elected, whilst Labour Party representation was reduced from 287 to 46 seats.⁴⁵ Wherever the I.L.P. had a substantial presence the tension between the two parties was evident.

2.6 Regional Attitudes

By the beginning of 1932, the conflict between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party showed little sign of abating. Nevertheless, as the I.L.P. met in its nine divisional conferences in early 1932 a clear majority still preferred continued affiliation to the Labour Party. The debate was impassioned as six of the nine divisions, representing 80 per cent of the party's membership, decided that they wished to remain within the party in whose foundation the I.L.P. had played such a decisive role.

The most organised opposition to disaffiliation came from Scotland, the largest and most important division, containing 250 branches.⁴⁶ In Scotland the I.L.P. was closer to the heart of Labour politics than anywhere else in Britain and dominated the movement in many areas. Disaffiliation would bring about ruptures in local political structures that would destroy the hopes for local political power and influence. These issues were most acute in Glasgow where the I.L.P., with the Labour Party which it dominated, held real hopes of obtaining a majority over the Moderates on the City Council. Their leader was Patrick Dollan, the Scottish representative on the I.L.P. N.A.C. His motivations for remaining within the Labour Party were strong and unequivocal, as were his feelings that those who sought to remove the smaller organisation from the Labour Party simply did not understand the I.L.P.'s history or strategy. As he repeatedly pointed out, the main calls for disaffiliation came from those areas where the I.L.P. played a relatively small role in Labour politics, such as London and the South West.

Dollan's views commanded significant support, especially as he was backed up by many important figures, such as Thomas Johnston, the influential editor of *Forward*, the weekly Scottish Labour newspaper, who was appointed to the cabinet in 1931. The division was, however, far from unanimous in its support of Dollan's position. The I.L.P. dissident group in parliament, although reduced to five, contained four Clydeside MPs: James Maxton, John McGovern, George Buchanan and David Kirkwood. Moreover, Maxton the most charismatic and important, was a personal opponent of Dollan. Maxton's politics required that he be granted the freedom of action in parliament denied to him by the PLP's Standing Orders. Of the remaining Scottish MPs who had refused to sign the PLP's documents, only David Kirkwood regarded disaffiliation as a step too far. Whilst Buchanan followed the lead of Maxton in supporting disaffiliation, McGovern had additional motivations. He had been selected as candidate for the Shettleston seat after the death of I.L.P. leader John Wheatley in May 1930 just as relations between the Labour Party and the I.L.P. were deteriorating. After McGovern had been selected local opponents made allegations of malpractice in his selection, although they accepted that no difference had been made to the end result. There was little indication that McGovern and his supporters had done anything outside of the customary practices in Glasgow Labour politics. Nevertheless, his election caused a serious deterioration in relations between the two organisations. With the heightened tensions inside the Labour Movement, and given McGovern's chequered past in the anarchist and far left socialist movement, his actions were brought to the attention of the Glasgow Borough Labour Party (BLP) and from there to the Labour Party's NEC.⁴⁷ McGovern was declared unfit to be a Labour MP and was expelled, as were the three branches of the Shettleston I.L.P. who later supported him when he was opposed by an official Labour Party candidate in 1931.⁴⁸

The situation in Shettleston meant that an important section of the I.L.P., and one of its MPs already stood irretrievably outside the Labour Party during the disaffiliation debates. Feelings ran high during the Scottish Divisional Conference and both sides had much at stake. However, Dollan's views were ascendant. The conference as a whole voted against disaffiliation by 88-49, giving a clear message of opposition to disaffiliation from the largest I.L.P. division. This was reinforced by convincing majorities in four other divisions: Lancashire, the Northeast, Yorkshire and Wales all of which supported continued affiliation to the Labour Party. The Midlands Divisional

Conference, the only place where the Standing Orders issue was directly considered, voted for continued affiliation on the condition that matter was 'satisfactorily resolved.' These decisions, however, did not necessarily signal a complete gulf between affiliationists and disaffiliationists. Both sides were highly critical of the record of the Labour Party, and were prepared to make declarations which claimed to recognise a 'rapidly approaching revolutionary situation.'⁴⁹

Although the deliberations of the six divisions showed there was a majority for continued affiliation, a changing mood was evolving within the Party. Never before had three divisions voted to leave the Labour Party. However, the reasoning in each case was complex, and the significance of the disaffiliation vote was different in each of the three divisions. Only in the relatively large London and the South division could the vote for disaffiliation be taken to indicate a definite desire to break with the traditional policy of the I.L.P. There, the key factor was the influence of the R.P.C. and the ideas of its leaders Cullen and Gaster. In early 1932 the R.P.C. was still a relatively loose organisation representing a wide spread of opinion drawing on a generation of young London based members who had joined the I.L.P. in the mid to late 1920s having been radicalised by the experiences of the General Strike.⁵⁰ Although many of the ideas of the R.P.C., such as the belief that capitalism was collapsing, could strike a broad resonance with the mainstream of the Party there were other less popular propositions. Most importantly the R.P.C. was committed to abandoning the Party's focus on Parliament and elections, preferring instead to move towards affiliation to the Communist International and working with the Communist Party. On the basis of a platform centred on its disaffiliation position but incorporating these other policies, by the end of 1931 the R.P.C. had gained widespread influence in London and dominated the Divisional Council.⁵¹ The decisions at the London and Southern Counties Divisional Conference for disaffiliation, and for working to join the Comintern thus represented votes for a definite rupture with the traditional position of the I.L.P., for a new revolutionary policy, and for the R.P.C. Nevertheless, there was still a substantial vote for continued affiliation to the Labour Party showing there was a considerable opposition to the R.P.C. even within this most revolutionary of divisions.⁵²

The two other divisions that voted in favour of disaffiliation early in 1932 were the South West and East Anglia. It is notable that these were the two smallest divisions in the I.L.P. East Anglia reported only ten branches to the 1931 I.L.P. conference whilst

the South West had twenty-one.⁵³ The size of those divisions precluded their decisions from having the same importance as the London vote. Yet both votes had significance, although the meaning of the disaffiliation decisions was quite different from that in London. In the South West, despite the fact that the R.P.C. was less evident than in London, the decision to leave the larger Party was a compromise between the R.P.C. and more traditional I.L.P. elements. An R.P.C. member, Robert Rawlings of Taunton seconded the disaffiliation motion which was passed with only three dissidents. The conference also supported, by a smaller margin, the R.P.C. policy of leaving the Labour and Socialist International and joining the Comintern.⁵⁴

The contrast with London was more acute in East Anglia, where the conference was dominated, as always, by the overwhelming size of the Norwich branch, whose membership easily exceeded that of the rest of the division put together. The Norwich I.L.P. had been particularly annoyed by the attitude of the Labour Party towards the I.L.P. over the Standing Orders issue. There was a history of I.L.P. parliamentary candidacies in the dual member seat in Norwich, and the Norwich I.L.P. had put forward Dorothy Jewson as their candidate in 1931. In the campaign Jewson had met with considerable hostility from the endorsed Labour Party candidate, W. R. Smith, as a result of her unendorsed status. Further, the Norwich Labour Party had responded to the crisis which led to the formation of the National Government by announcing an electoral truce with the Liberal and Conservative Parties in the council election of 1931. Such an approach was an anathema to the I.L.P. position and therefore the Norwich I.L.P. argued that membership of the Labour Party was obstructing progress towards socialism. Consequently, they proposed disaffiliation. This was passed at the divisional conference by a vote of 12-8.⁵⁵ However, the division showed no desire to approach the Communist Party and the Third International. Further, whilst the division did vote for a 'revolutionary' policy, this meant something quite different from the suggestions of the R.P.C. in London, being based on the 'ethical Marxism' of influential Norwich I.L.P. member and literary critic John Middleton Murry. These differences were further clarified after disaffiliation when there was considerable hostility and an eventual split between East Anglia and the R.P.C.⁵⁶

A number of points are raised by the decisions of the nine divisional conferences. They highlight the disagreements within the Party over the correct attitude to take towards the Labour Party. These differences did not follow sharp divisional lines, rather each

division contained a significant proportion of its membership on either side. Nevertheless, across all divisions a large majority of the I.L.P. preferred the option of remaining within the Labour Party. It is also evident that this commitment to remain within the larger party did not seem to many to be incompatible with a revolutionary attitude. However, some individuals did oppose disaffiliation on the basis of their hostility to revolutionary politics, or alternatively on the basis of scepticism about the increasingly common view that capitalism was about to collapse. This suggests that the disaffiliation debates were not reducible simply to attitudes towards revolutionary policy. Rather questions of theory, tactics, parliamentary strategy and morality crosscut each other in a complex manner. Further evidence that this was the case was to be found at the 1932 annual conference in Blackpool.

2.7 No Solution to Standing Orders

The Standing Orders question had not only brought about the immediate dispute between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party but it was also the direct cause of the considerable ill-feeling between the two parties in important I.L.P. centres such as Glasgow, Liverpool, Norwich, Nelson and Bradford. The divisional conferences early in 1932 showed that if the issue could be settled, there was no serious chance of the I.L.P. voting for disaffiliation. Most members of the I.L.P., especially those who favoured continued affiliation, believed that it would prove easy to find a compromise acceptable to both sides. In reality things were significantly more complicated, so much so that no realistic solution to the Standing Orders problem was ever feasible.

Extended discussions took place between the two parties through the period from 1930 to 1932. The principal negotiators for the I.L.P., Maxton, Brockway and Paton clashed with successive chairmen of the PLP, first with Arthur Henderson, a long term advocate of 'loyalty', and then with the left-wing pacifist and ex-I.L.P.er George Lansbury.⁵⁷ The Labour Party NEC had established a committee whose prime task was to deal with the crisis with the I.L.P. Its aim was to stamp out the lack of discipline that the NEC considered to have hampered the work of the Parliamentary Party and to have weakened the Party after 1929.⁵⁸ Parallels were drawn with the allegedly corrosive impact of the Minority Movement on the trade unions after 1926 whilst the dissident grouping of the I.L.P., Mosley and eventually MacDonal were brought together under the common anathema of 'intellectuals.' On the other hand the I.L.P.'s primary concern was to allow its MPs to oppose measures that it considered to be anti-working-class. The I.L.P.

wanted to retain its freedom of action and the NEC wanted to take it away. Whilst the discussions addressed the issue of the I.L.P.'s revolutionary position, the central question was to whom an MP was primarily responsible: their sponsoring body, the Labour Party, the Labour Party Conference, the I.L.P. Conference or the electorate. There was no prospect of a settlement. The Labour Party would never accept a formulation that would allow the repeated attacks of a 'party within a party' and the I.L.P. would not be prepared to sign Standing Orders which prevented them from openly expressing their socialist convictions. No formula could be found to mask the differences. This was recognised immediately prior to the Blackpool conference when the Labour Party assistant secretary, J.S. Middleton, sent the I.L.P. General Secretary John Paton, a letter quoting an NEC decision to the effect that the Labour Party was not prepared to reconsider the Standing Orders issue.⁵⁹ By the time of the Blackpool conference it was indeed obvious that there could be no solution to the Standing Orders dispute.

2.8 Blackpool: Postponing The Inevitable

The divisional conferences had demonstrated a feeling that the majority of the I.L.P. wished to remain in the Labour Party, but they only determined the agenda for the annual conference. The actual decision which counted as policy was that of the I.L.P. annual conference, held in March 1932 in Blackpool. The N.A.C. had decided to leave three options open to the conference spanning the range of opinion within the Party: disaffiliation, unconditional affiliation or conditional affiliation. Brockway, the party chairman, began the debate by ensuring that all were aware of the full consequences of each possibility. Disaffiliation would lead to preparations being made for a new constitution, policy and campaign of action outside the Labour Party. Unconditional affiliation would mean that the I.L.P.'s parliamentary candidates would again be entitled to sign PLP Standing Orders. The third alternative of conditional affiliation would mean the I.L.P. attempting to re-open negotiations with the Labour Party N.E.C. and, if no solution could be found, the N.A.C. would report back to a further special conference. Brockway, on behalf of the N.A.C., made clear that the leadership of the I.L.P. considered unconditional affiliation an unacceptable option.⁶⁰

The debate began with a statements proposing resolutions from each of the three points of view. Dr Cullen, the R.P.C. chairman, pushed for disaffiliation. Jim Garton of Rugby, the Midlands Divisional Representative on the N.A.C., argued for conditional

affiliation. Pat Dollan, the Glasgow power-broker, made the case for remaining within the Labour Party without qualifications on the constitutional issue. When Cullen stressed the difference in philosophy between the Labour Party and the I.L.P., the response from Dollan was bitter. He ridiculed the status of the R.P.C. and the London Revolutionaries suggesting their revolution would start from the centres of the disaffiliation resolution (Winchester, Truro, Westminster and Norwich). For them a revolution would involve taking over the cathedrals and appointing the bishops to lead the workers. His argument rested on the suggestion that the I.L.P. could only make a real difference to the working-class by working within the Labour Party.⁶¹ Garton, moving conditional affiliation, had perhaps the hardest job. The correspondence between the ILP and the Labour Party had been presented to the delegates before the disaffiliation debate began. It made clear that there was no prospect of reaching a compromise settlement with the Labour Party. Garton, perhaps expecting a leftward moving Labour Party to become more receptive to the I.L.P.'s ideas, was left to simply express a hope that the delegates would not be moved by the letters, instead suggesting that the important question was whether staying in or leaving the Labour Party would lead to a speedier advance to Socialism. He suggested that if the Labour Party really was wedded to gradualism then the conditional affiliationists would be ready to go outside, but every avenue within the Labour Party must first have been explored.⁶²

A few things were notable about the Blackpool debate. First, there was an overlap of attitudes between the sides in the debate, particularly over the need for the Labour Party to accept well-defined socialist policies. However, there were also differences between the affiliationists and the disaffiliationists. The former were keen to stress the importance of the traditional educational and democratic values of the I.L.P., whilst the disaffiliationists pointed to the need to develop new policies and attitudes given the perceived potential for a total collapse of the capitalist economic system. The arguments for conditional affiliation tended to closely resemble the arguments that could be used in favour of both affiliation and disaffiliation. Perhaps the most notable feature of the debate at the Blackpool conference was the number of leading figures within the I.L.P. who came out openly in favour of disaffiliation, many for the first time. In doing so they were expressing their frustration at the Labour Party and in particular the treatment of the Parliamentary I.L.P. A prominent example was the General Secretary, John Paton. He had long been opposed to disaffiliation but his negotiations with the Labour Party's

N.E.C., combined with the long term problems of the I.L.P., convinced him that an effective future for the I.L.P. could only be secured by disaffiliation.⁶³

The rapidly changing attitude of I.L.P.ers towards the Labour Party following the 1931 election meant that no one could be certain about the result of the voting. Brockway and Paton were hopeful that the Party would accept their disaffiliationist line, whilst Dollan was confident that the party would feel its future lay with the Labour Party. Voting was a tense affair. To the shock and disgust of some, unconditional affiliation was defeated by a resounding vote of 214-98. Following this the motion for immediate disaffiliation was defeated by a relatively small margin of 183-144. Eventually, the conference came to a decision in favour of conditional affiliation. By 250-53 the Blackpool conference voted to reopen negotiations with the Labour Party over Standing Orders.⁶⁴

Attitudes of the two parties and the correspondence between Paton and Middleton had shown that the vote at Blackpool was a vote for an option that had already been closed off. However, the membership of the I.L.P. was reluctant to take the decisive step of leaving the Labour Party, the majority in the divisional conferences had shown a strong desire to remain in the Labour Party. Nevertheless, many of the same individuals resented the way in which the Labour Party had treated the Parliamentary Group of the I.L.P., and the refusal of the Labour Party to endorse the nominations of I.L.P. candidates at elections. These conflicting factors explained support for the position of conditional affiliation at Blackpool. But the Blackpool vote was a temporary victory for the politics of Micawber. Many members of the I.L.P. were hoping against hope that some compromise could be found that would allow their principles to be maintained whilst remaining within the Labour Party. Such hopes were unrealistic, as John Paton retrospectively explained: 'It was obvious enough, however, to those who knew the Labour Party's firmness on the matter in dispute that this was merely postponing the inevitable.'⁶⁵

2.9 Conclusion: Disaffiliation, Revolution and Standing Orders

By the beginning of June 1932 it was evident that there was not going to be an amicable solution to the Standing Orders dispute. Despite the importance of the issue there was really very little left to be said on the matter at the Bradford Special conference in July. Thus, the I.L.P. had effectively decided to disaffiliate from the Labour Party in Blackpool, but at Bradford some tried to give the formal decision to disaffiliate a

revolutionary twist. Support for disaffiliation was for some based solely on 'revolutionary policy'; for others, opposition to disaffiliation was based on an opposition to the same 'revolutionary policy'. Neither group, however, had a clear definition of exactly what a revolutionary policy actually entailed. This left a significant middle ground for whom the commitment to the nebulous idea of a 'revolutionary policy' was more unambiguous. For this group, which probably constituted a majority of the I.L.P., there were questions about how far the party ought to be committed to a revolutionary policy and there were questions about what being a revolutionary party really meant. An answer to these questions would still not have given the I.L.P. a ready-made position on its relationship to the Labour Party. As Brockway pointed out, in his Chairman's address, to the Blackpool conference although he desired a break with the gradualist policy of the Labour Party this did not necessarily imply a break with the machinery of the Labour Party, that was a further, tactical question.⁶⁶

Given the subsequent prominence of the R.P.C. within the I.L.P. it is important not to neglect the impact that the increasingly revolutionary policy of the I.L.P. had on the dispute between the two parties. Further, Henderson had told Brockway that the details could be sorted out if the I.L.P. would commit itself to non-revolutionary methods.⁶⁷ However, it is doubtful that such a commitment would, by itself, really have satisfied the Labour Party's N.E.C. Thus, it was the Standing Orders dispute that played the major role in the decision to disaffiliate. The divisional conferences and the Blackpool vote shows that the majority of the membership would rather have remained within the Labour Party if this issue could be resolved. Further, the support of most leading members of the party for disaffiliation stemmed from their belief that the dispute could not be settled. The clearest example of this position was the veteran Jowett, who supported the moves towards disaffiliation on the basis of maintaining his principles over Standing Orders. However, Jowett was not alone amongst the I.L.P. leadership in making Standing Orders the primary reason for disaffiliation. Both Brockway and Maxton can be placed within this camp.

It is only by understanding the way in which these issues were contested, and appreciating the gulf which lay between the positions of the leadership of the I.L.P. and the R.P.C., that the dynamics of disaffiliation can be understood. It is true that the I.L.P. was seeking a new and more revolutionary outlook in 1932, but Standing Orders lay behind the disaffiliation decision. However, following disaffiliation the differing

reasons sprang to the forefront as they generated contrary expectations of the development for the party. Opposing factions clustered around the differing points of view and each was able to present a coherent account of itself in the post-disaffiliation party in which all sides could gain sizeable followings. Thus, the real problem for the I.L.P. was not its 'insanity'; on the contrary divergent, but reasoned, arguments enable us to make sense of disaffiliation as a reaction to the I.L.P.'s situation in 1932. Rather part of its tragedy lay in the very divergence of those reasons for disaffiliation. Each implied a different course of action for the disaffiliated Party. When these expectations were dashed, factional fighting increased and ripped the party apart. To understand the decline of the I.L.P. it is crucial to realise that disaffiliation was not insane but appeared to many both justified and logical.

¹ References to the I.L.P. in Party discipline debates were common in the 1930s and were again an important feature in the period 1951-66. For more details on the use of, often fallacious, inherited beliefs about the I.L.P. within both the Labour establishment and Labour Left after 1932 see David Howell, 1991, pp.223-9.

² The standard accounts of disaffiliation are Middlemas, 1965, 259-71 and Dowse, 1966, 152-184.

³ On the image of the early I.L.P. see Howell, 1983, 1-12.

⁴ E.g. Brockway, 1977, 107; Lee, 1980, 80; It is worth noting that both Brockway and Lee changed their view of disaffiliation considerably over time. Each wrote earlier autobiographies in which a rather more sympathetic view of disaffiliation is registered. See Fenner Brockway, 1942, 241 and Lee, 1939, 175-184. The recent attempt to reconsider the politics of Jennie Lee fails properly to come to terms with her relationship with the disaffiliated party, concentrating instead on the politics of the Socialist League and her love life. Hollis, *Jennie Lee*, 1997, 68-91.

⁵ Middlemas, 1965, 259-71; Laybourn, "'Suicide During a Fit of Insanity" or the Defence of Socialism?: The secession of the Independent Labour Party from the Labour Party at the special conference at Bradford, July 1932', *Bradford Antiquary*, 3 (1990), 41-53.

⁶ *New Leader Conference Supplement*, 5 August 1932.

⁷ Carl Cullen was a health inspector from Poplar; Jack Gaster was a solicitor and son of the Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Britain. The evolution of the R.P.C.'s position can be traced through the debates in the dialogue with the Communist Party in *Labour Monthly* and in the *London R.P.C. Bulletin*.

⁸ *New Leader Conference Supplement*, 5 August 1932.

⁹ Dowse, 1966, p.181.

¹⁰ It has been argued that the content of a political theory cannot properly be separated from the history of the debate that generated it: see for example Alasdair MacIntyre, 1988, 13.

¹¹ For example, see Sir Stafford Cripps, *Can Socialism Come by Constitutional Methods?* (n.d.), p.1.

¹² For discussion of the Political Thought of Ramsay MacDonald see Barker (ed), 1972. Of course the perceptions of MacDonald's philosophy within the I.L.P. were not always accurate, and especially after 1931 'gradualism' was dismissed by the smaller organisation without serious consideration of its meaning.

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- ¹³ Arthur Marwick, 'The Independent Labour Party in the Nineteen-Twenties', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, XXXV (1962), 62-74.
- ¹⁴ Philip Snowden, perhaps the most notable advocate of the ending of the I.L.P. at this time made the suggestion whilst sitting on the National Administrative Council of the I.L.P. in 1920. Cross, 1966, 174.
- ¹⁵ Gilbert, 1965, 175.
- ¹⁶ He had formulated the Wheatley Housing Act, subsidising local authorities' housing schemes and providing low rental housing. On Wheatley's response to the experience of Cabinet Office see Howell, 1986, 258-9.
- ¹⁷ Gilbert, 1965, p.180.
- ¹⁸ Marquand, 1977, 277.
- ¹⁹ Gilbert, 1965, 191.
- ²⁰ McNair, 1955, 153-4.
- ²¹ Howell, 'Beyond the Sterotypes: The Independent Labour Party 1922-1932', *Scottish Labour History Society Journal*, 29 (1994), pp.16-49; The differing interpretations of the *Living Wage* policy are looked at from another perspective in Marquand, 1977, pp.451-5.
- ²² The dynamics of that decision are outlined in Marquand, 1977, 455-7.
- ²³ Paton, 1936, 304; Dowse, 1966, p.145; Brown, 1986, 211; Wertheimer, 1929, 165. An unconvincing dissenting voice is found in McNair, 1955, pp.174-5. However Marwick, 1962, 69 gives reasonable, financial, grounds for something of a reassessment.
- ²⁴ Paton, 1936, 299-305.
- ²⁵ Brown, 1986, 210.
- ²⁶ McNair, 1955, 173.
- ²⁷ See for example *Forward*, 4 April 1932. It was not only the relationship between Dollan and Maxton that was soured by the events of the campaign. Dollan also maintained long-term hostile relations with Maxton's leading supporters such as Campbell Stephen. See *Forward*, 11 April 1931.
- ²⁸ Of the 37 I.L.P. sponsored MPs 17 came from Scottish seats. Out of 287 Labour MPs 160 thus carried I.L.P. cards and were entitled to have a voice in the meetings of the I.L.P. Parliamentary group.
- ²⁹ Both Shinwell and Salter fitted neatly into I.L.P. stereotypes. Shinwell shared a Clydeside background in keeping with the image of Maxton, Wheatley, Kirkwood, Buchanan, Stephen and McGovern. Salter fitted a different but equally prevalent I.L.P. stereotype of the ethical purist wing of the I.L.P. as a pacifist and prohibitionist.
- ³⁰ Note of Discussion at Special Meeting of the I.L.P. Parliamentary Group 6 December 1928 resumed on 13 December 1928. Mitchell Library, Glasgow TD956/20/3
- ³¹ Disputes were not confined to unemployment. Other issues such as imperialism, and India in particular, were important sources of disagreements. Indeed one of the most notorious moments in the Parliamentary dispute between the I.L.P. and the Government came in the summer of 1930 when the I.L.P. MP John Beckett was teller in a division, whilst awaiting the results he seized the mace and attempted to leave the House. The debate was on the issue of political prisoners in India.
- ³² I.L.P. Parliamentary Group meeting minutes 21 and 28 October 1929. Mitchell Library, Glasgow TD956/20/1; Paton, *Left Turn*, 318-9.
- ³³ I.L.P. Conference Report 1930.

³⁴ The 18 were J. Maxton (chairman), J. Beckett, F. Brockway, W. J. Brown, R. Forgan, W. Hirst, J. F. Horrabin, F. W. Jowett, David Kirkwood, Jennie Lee, Jack Lees, J. McGovern, E. Sandham, Campbell Stephen, E. J. Strachey, R. C. Wallhead, E. F. Wise, J. Kinley (Secretary). Three of the eighteen, Robert Forgan, John Beckett and W.J. Brown joined Mosley's New Party.

³⁵ In fact the amendments to the Standing Orders of the PLP were passed on 23 Jan 1929, whilst the Labour Party was still in opposition. The main dispute arose over the clause, which stated 'Any Member who has conscientious scruples on any matter of Party policy shall be free to abstain from voting.'

³⁶ For example, Miliband, 1972, 194-5.

³⁷ Jowett, a dominant figure in Bradford Labour politics, was I.L.P. treasurer, an ex-I.L.P. and Labour Party chairman, who sat on both the N.A.C. of the I.L.P. and the NEC of the Labour Party throughout the 1929-31 period. Jowett's planned autobiography was completed by Brockway after Jowett's death. Fenner Brockway, 1946.

³⁸ Brockway, 1946, p.300.

³⁹ Fred Jowett, *The I.L.P. say No the Standing Orders of the Labour Party* (1932), 3-4.

⁴⁰ Jowett, 1932, 13-14.

⁴¹ Jowett, 1932, 16.

⁴² Brockway, 1946, 299. Jowett's views were also affected by the by his earlier writings on the nature of democracy. He argued that for a real democracy power needed to reside with elected representatives rather than Cabinet and Party leaders (See Brockway, 1946, 232-8). Although Jowett does not refer explicitly to his conclusions in these matters in discussion of the Standing Orders dispute they form a crucial part of the understanding as to why Jowett regarded the issue as so important. Indeed without this background his characterisation of the Labour Party Cabinet in the debate seems rather strange and arbitrary (See Jowett, 1932, p.12). Despite criticism of Jowett's position as self-serving he was prepared to maintain his opposition to the Standing Orders at considerable cost to himself. For example, negotiations between the Bradford Labour Party and I.L.P. about contests in the 1935 General Election which could have seen Jowett re-elected to parliament, were terminated after Jowett launched a bitter attack on the dictatorial nature of Standing Orders in a leaflet *Workers' Rights v Party Dictators* (See *Bradford Pioneer*, 11 January 1934; 4 May 1934). In the event he came second to the Conservative in the General Election, as an I.L.P. candidate standing against Labour, Conservative and Liberal opposition.

⁴³ The Labour Party NEC decided to refuse endorsement of Tom Irwin at its meeting on the 19 November and the by-election took place on 28 November 1930.

⁴⁴ I.L.P. Conference Report 1931; Labour Party NEC reports 25 June 1930, 19 November 1930, 17 December 1930, 28 January 1931.

⁴⁵ Maxton (Glasgow, Bridgeton), McGovern (Glasgow, Shettleston), Wallhead (Merthyr) all stood with I.L.P. endorsement and were elected. Further David Kirkwood (Dumbarton Burghs), nominated by the AEU and George Buchanan (Glasgow, Gorbals) nominated by the Patternmakers Association, of which he was president, were also elected and refused to sign the PLP standing orders.

⁴⁶ I.L.P. Conference Report 1932.

⁴⁷ *Forward*, 14 March 1930; Labour Party NEC report 3-4 October 1930.

⁴⁸ Labour Party NEC report 21 April 1931; Labour Party NEC report 23 June 1931; Labour Party Organisation Sub-Committee 17 February 1932.

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- ⁴⁹ *New Leader*, 5 February 1932; *New Leader*, 29 January 1932.
- ⁵⁰ Interview with Jack Gaster (British Library, National Sound Archive C609/06/01-02).
- ⁵¹ The rout of the right wing within the division was demonstrated by the resignation of Allen Skinner from both the Chair of the Division and as their representative on the NAC. The election of C.A. Smith as Divisional Chairman was a victory for the broad left, but when Jack Gaster obtained, unopposed, the position on the NAC it gave the RPC specifically a voice on the central council of the ILP. This position Gaster and the RPC held until the departure of the Committee to the Communist Party in November 1935.
- ⁵² The disaffiliation vote in the London Division was 41-28. See *New Leader*, 29 January 1932.
- ⁵³ I.L.P. Conference Report 1931.
- ⁵⁴ *New Leader*, 22 January 1932; Rawlings joined the I.L.P. in 1928 and became interested in the R.P.C. soon after its formation. His papers, including letters relating his involvement in the R.P.C., are stored in the BLPES Coll. Misc. 496 file 1.
- ⁵⁵ There were only eight branches in the division at the time of disaffiliation. Voting at the conference was allocated to branches according to membership figures. The twelve votes for disaffiliation came primarily from Norwich, whose overwhelming size also gave it an overwhelming vote. However, support for disaffiliation was not confined to that branch, for example the Yarmouth Branch was also strongly in favour of disaffiliation. Division Five Minute Book BLPES Coll Misc 496, January 10 1932.
- ⁵⁶ Division Five Minutes, Minutes of Special Conference, 15 October 1933; Middleton Murry, 1932; Div 5 Minutes, 10 January 1932.
- ⁵⁷ Labour Party NEC Minutes 3 May 1930; Brockway, 1942, p.238; Paton, 1936, p.387.
- ⁵⁸ Labour Party Report of Joint Committee on Party Discipline April 1931.
- ⁵⁹ Labour Party Joint Committee on Party Discipline 18 March 1932.
- ⁶⁰ I.L.P. Conference Report 1932.
- ⁶¹ *New Leader*, 1 April 1932.
- ⁶² *New Leader*, 1 April 1932.
- ⁶³ Paton, 1936, 387; *New Leader*, 1 April 1932.
- ⁶⁴ I.L.P. Conference Report 1932.
- ⁶⁵ Paton, 1936, p.387.
- ⁶⁶ *New Leader*, 1 April 1932.
- ⁶⁷ Brockway, 1942, p.239.

3. On the Ground: Divisional Policy, Membership and Activity

3.1 Introduction

The I.L.P., it is claimed, 'grew from the bottom up: 'its birthplaces were in those shadowy parts known as "the provinces."' ¹ Thus, study of the early I.L.P. has increasingly focused on local and regional initiatives. ² Despite centralisation as the I.L.P. became a national party, study of regional and branch activity also pays significant dividends in the examination of the I.L.P. in the period after disaffiliation. Nine of the sixteen members of the N.A.C. continued to be elected by the divisional conference. Conferences could frequently be swayed by the concerted effort of branches which pushed a policy hard enough. Thus, local opinion continued to be an important force within the I.L.P. even as the party moved, in the mid-1930s, towards a greater degree of democratic centralism. However, even as the policy making culture of the party changed in theory, in practice divisions and branches retained considerable autonomy.

Indeed, for many I.L.P. members it was the local experience of the party and not national policy or profile which provided the primary reason for remain in, or joining, the I.L.P. during the 1930s. The structure of the party, which was incorporated into nine regional divisions with considerable political power, provided space for considerable influence to be exerted at a local level. The majority of this chapter is dedicated to an examination of the politics and activity of each of these nine divisions, with particular emphasis on those divisions which were nationally most important to the Party in terms of membership and policy, especially Scotland, London and Lancashire.

This more localised political picture is important in developing an understanding of the I.L.P. as an organisation and explaining its successes and failures in exploiting available political spaces. However, even such a local focus, which centres on political thought and activity cannot capture the full depth of commitment which people frequently expressed to the Party. E. P. Thompson in his seminal essay 'Homage to Tom Maguire' speaks of the importance of those who had got socialism 'inside of themselves' within the early I.L.P. ³ David Howell similarly suggests the importance of 'living socialism', a 'religion of socialism' which was gradually pushed aside by electoral politics. ⁴ However, even in the later period for many 'the I.L.P. was not so much a party as a way of life.' As

Barry Winter, the secretary of the Independent Labour Publications in 1993, the party centenary year, insisted 'they did not give up because for them the I.L.P. embodied a unique socialist and moral vision which they wanted to see live.'⁵

Such common assessments of the Party necessitate that before studying the politics of the party at local and then national level the culture of the party must be considered. Yet with differing circumstances, the lived experience of being a party member varied enormously. The Hayle branch in Cornwall had nine unemployed and ailing members struggling against the odds to raise money for the cause making blackberry and elderberry wine (picking was free) and hatching a batch of 'I.L.P. chickens'.⁶ In Glasgow exuberant party meetings, addressed by the ever-popular James Maxton, as much for raising members' spirits as 'making socialists', could frequently pack 3,500 into a hall.⁷ Inevitably the culture of the I.L.P. was a much varied thing.

Yet there were certain constants. Everywhere selling (or giving away) the *New Leader* appeared as a central plank of party activity. Frequently members told of how a freezing evening spent chalking the streets with slogans from Friday's issue of the *New Leader* could cement their relationship to the party. In 1936 the party introduced the idea of social and discussion groups, *New Leader* fellowships, centred on subscribers and increased emphasis on membership rather than newsagent sales saw an enthusiastic response to sales competitions.⁸ Indeed, in the tiny fishing village of Ferryden on the East Coast of Scotland just outside Montrose, by 1936 under the leadership of councillor John West the local branch was so focused on the paper that it had ensured that all of the 850 strong population had a copy in their house.⁹ Still the *New Leader* stressed its distance from the populist, capitalist press:

We are not attempting to make the paper worth buying according to the standards set by capitalist newspapers. We shall have no bribes to offer, no competitions and prizes, no insurances, no muck-raking, and no so called spicy news.¹⁰

Party education also remained of central importance. The Party's famous Summer Schools continued to be well-attended and were supplemented by further events of political education organised by both the national party and by divisions and local branches. The emphasis on education was already strong in the early 1930s.¹¹ Then in the later 1930s C.A. Smith, a teacher and an academic, sought to increase the educational focus of the party.¹²

The connection to Socialist Sunday Schools, often a feature of the I.L.P. of the 1890s, remained in some areas through to the 1930s. So too did other, more social aspects of the party's existence. Clubs and party buildings remained an important focus for I.L.P. activity. A good social club could make a branch. This was most obvious in Norwich. The I.L.P. club, had been assessed in a 1910 social survey as the only place in Norwich 'to which a man can take his wife and child and enjoy a sober glass of beer under respectable circumstances.'¹³ The club and the associated Keir Hardie Hall attracted a significant membership to the Norwich branch. After disaffiliation membership was always over 500 and in the immediate post-war period it rose to 900. In 1947 when the club, for apparently political reasons, severed its links with the I.L.P., the membership of the Norwich I.L.P. fell overnight from 700 to 9.¹⁴ However, in many ways the traditional focus of the party on large, independent social clubs was declining. In Nelson, one of the areas of greatest party strength, the I.L.P. club in Vernon Street failed in 1934 after years of losses, and the premises were sold to the Labour Party. The failure of the Nelson I.L.P. club perhaps also represented the dwindling of other I.L.P. traditions. The club, in contrast to Norwich refused to sell drink. Perhaps it is not a coincidence, that the other alcohol free political organisation in Nelson, the Liberal club, was also in trouble.¹⁵

Yet as some traditional forms of Party activity disappeared, others were maintained. Rambling and cycling continued to be mainstays of I.L.P. activity. As Nelson's premises in town disappeared, their countryside 'Clarion House', continued and even now over one hundred years after its foundation remains a centre for walkers and cyclists in the Lancashire hills.¹⁶ Similarly the outdoors gave a focus to much of the Scottish I.L.P.'s activity. The Glasgow Party in the 1930s, under the leadership of Jack Taylor the 1937 Scottish amateur cycling champion, ran a 'Cycling Corps' which cycled out every Saturday to sell the *New Leader* in the areas surrounding Glasgow.¹⁷ Images of health and freedom that came from such outdoor activities also made rambling a central party of the social life of the I.L.P.'s youth section. Most youth camps held by the party, alongside the sense of unity given by the red-shirted uniform of the Guild, placed a heavy stress on sports and rambling.¹⁸

Holidays and outings also played an important role in I.L.P. activity. Some sections of the Party liked to holiday together, perhaps taking up on the regular adverts in the *New Leader* for socialist-vegetarian or food-reform guest houses. Others saw a break at the

sea-side as the ideal opportunity to sell the *New Leader* to a whole new holidaying audience. However, one of the real strengths of the Party was its ability to organise day-breaks for its members who would otherwise rarely be able to escape the hardships of everyday life. But, especially in the poorest working-class districts, opportunities for a break could be an important reason for maintaining or joining the party. Outings were often as simple as a visit to the zoo, but the response of some branches was more innovative.¹⁹ In Glasgow the Party used the space available on the regular sewage boat up the river to enable members and their children to get away from Glasgow for the day on a regular 'Sludge boat outing'.²⁰

I.L.P.ers were also anxious to utilise the increasingly popular form of media. Party members often had a great interest in films. This gave a focus to party activity in some areas where the I.L.P. was instrumental in establishing Workers' Film societies and the *New Leader* regularly advertised Soviet Films. This film-going came together with an abiding political interest in the Soviet Union. The showing of such films could give members an important sense of purpose, as could the organised trips to the theatre to see working-class plays.²¹ Alongside these more unusual events were the staples of I.L.P. activity: the whist drives and the socials with food and a band, the dances and dancing classes, the pageants. Together such a strong social basis made the Party a strong force in many people's lives. Such a community feeling was especially important given the enduring emphasis by much of the Party on an 'ethical socialism' which saw the necessity of creating a party which contained the core of socialism within itself. However, through the 1930s much of this emphasis declined. Many who stressed this ethical socialism were contained within the elements of the Lancashire division who formed the Independent Socialist Party.²² As factional activity removed those who most stressed the community aspects of the I.L.P. it also removed much of the Party's 'inner spirit.' Factionalism at conferences could be met with humour, as the I.L.P.'s satirists at the 1934 conference predicted in a mock weather forecast: 'A large number of disturbances have been moving North from London and the Midlands and are now centred over York. Further outlook - very unsettled.'²³ Yet there is little doubt that factional divisions, expulsions and splits undermined the almost revivalist spirit of some I.L.P. gatherings, as demonstrated by the London Divisional Conferences of 1935 where social events were cancelled to make way for further discussion of policy. Thus, it is necessary to consider the electoral and the political as well as the cultural aspects of the I.L.P. at local and divisional level during the 1930s.

3.2 Local Elections

In terms of national visibility for the I.L.P., Parliamentary representation was of crucial importance. However, traditionally the I.L.P. had seen its role very differently. I.L.P. activity had shown considerable local flexibility, and the local council and municipal elections were as much a focus for I.L.P. activity as parliamentary elections. This form of electoral activity was particularly badly affected by disaffiliation. For example, in Nelson, where in 1932 all of the Labour Party members on the council were I.L.P.ers, and where the I.L.P. branch voted by a substantial majority for disaffiliation, none of the councillors left the Labour Party. Even in the I.L.P. stronghold of Glasgow where 40 of the 44 Labour councillors were I.L.P.ers, only seven could be persuaded to disaffiliate. Overall, the Party lost one third of its membership, but it lost virtually all of its elected representatives.

Whilst disaffiliation removed the vast majority of elected officials from the Party it did not rule out the desire to carve out a local role for the I.L.P., and municipal elections were central to that endeavour for many Party members. I.L.P.ers, especially of the older generation, discussing electoral prospects would frequently make a comparison between the situation of the disaffiliated I.L.P. in the 1930s facing the Labour Party machine at local level, and the I.L.P. in the 'early days' opposing Liberalism. The situation in reality was substantially different. The political space which the early I.L.P. managed to find for itself had largely been filled by the Labour Party. The I.L.P. ran vigorous campaigns at local level, based on but not limited to their national programme of increasing health, housing, unemployment and education spending by means of a municipal income tax.²⁴ Most voters, however, did not appear to distinguish between the Socialism of the I.L.P. and that of the Labour Party. Nevertheless, in some areas I.L.P. candidates did find success in local government elections. However, the meaning and significance of their success depended on the local context, and in particular on the relationship with the Labour Party locally.

In a small number of cases the I.L.P. was able to take on and defeat the Labour Party in a contest for the majority of the working class vote even at local level. This was most notable in Glasgow, where the I.L.P. group on the council grew from the seven who disaffiliated in 1932 to a peak of 13 in 1935. By the middle of the decade the I.L.P. was completely dominant in local politics in some areas of Glasgow. The six local seats in the Shettleston constituency were all held by I.L.P.ers, as were four of the six in the

Bridgeton constituency. These gains, especially in the period 1932-3 were made against Labour Party opposition. However, after 1933 when the Labour Party, with the support of the I.L.P., controlled the council and in the wake of an electoral pact between the Moderates and the Protestant League, the two parties reached an electoral agreement.²⁵ However, the I.L.P./Labour pact only covered seats which were already held by one of the two parties. Where the Moderates were in control the two working-class parties still found themselves in opposition, frequently denying each other of victory.²⁶ During the period up to 1936, and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War the I.L.P. was in places able to out-poll the Labour Party in opposition to the Moderates and to make significant challenges to Moderates.²⁷

During 1936-7 the I.L.P. suffered a number of electoral set-backs. First, the Party's stand on the Spanish Civil War prompted the Catholic elites to withdraw support from I.L.P. candidates in the Glasgow. This was widely accepted as the explanation for the loss of John Heenan's previously safe I.L.P. seat in Shettleston in November 1936. Second, led by Joseph Payne, some of the I.L.P. councillors, to the disgust of the rest, launched a series of attacks on the Glasgow tramwaymen. This alienated a large section of the T&GWU and led to a series of serious internal disputes within the Party. Eventually Payne, whose outspoken criticism of the tramwaymen had led to the one break in the Labour/I.L.P. electoral pact in 1934, was suspended from standing as I.L.P. candidate for the council. With the I.L.P. weakened by the removal of a section of Catholic support and the internal disputes that removed some of its most well known council candidates, the Labour Party saw its chance to destroy the I.L.P. stronghold in Glasgow and withdrew from the 1934 electoral pact. The I.L.P. on Glasgow Council did not immediately disappear, but its ability to stand up to a Labour onslaught had been seriously reduced. The Party lost one seat in 1936, a further two seats in 1937 and another one in the final Glasgow municipal elections before the Second World War. In the early 1930s the I.L.P. in Glasgow had been able to present itself as a viable electoral alternative to the Labour Party. It managed this largely because, in its areas of greatest strength, it was the I.L.P. and not the Labour Party which presented the greatest possibility of defeating incumbent Moderate Councillors.

In Bradford the I.L.P.'s base of support was narrower, confined to a number of wards in East Bradford, but the situation was in some respects comparable to Glasgow. In the early period after disaffiliation, despite considerable bad feeling caused by the

disaffiliation decision the two I.L.P.ers serving on the council chose to sit with the Labour Party in the hope of obtaining positions on committees. The Labour Party initially made no moves to oppose these I.L.P.ers in what were considered 'I.L.P. wards.' However, in 1934 further disputes arose surrounding the question of whether the Labour Party would oppose Jowett in the 1935 election. This resulted in the I.L.P. launching an attack on the Labour Party in a leaflet 'Workers' Rights v. Party Dictators'. The Labour Party used this to justify reopening the assault on I.L.P. As leading Bradford Labour personality, and former MP, William Leach put it 'the I.L.P. as we know it today is a brand-new party with no claim whatever to the forty-year-old name it bears.'²⁸ As a result of this increased tension the Labour Party opposed the I.L.P. in the East Bowling municipal elections, yet the I.L.P. held off the challenge of the Conservatives by 400 votes with Labour coming bottom of the poll.²⁹

This result, showed the difficulties for the Labour Party in contesting 'I.L.P. wards.' In the ensuing period the I.L.P. attempted to negotiate a electoral pact with the Labour Party for both Parliamentary and municipal elections. The Labour Party refused on both counts, but from 1935-7 made no attempt to oppose the I.L.P. candidates in 'I.L.P. wards' which allowed the Party to increase its representation on the council to four.³⁰ The I.L.P. maintained this level of representation until the war. However, the Labour Party continued to refuse I.L.P. requests for an electoral agreement and in 1938 moved to oppose the I.L.P. in the Tong ward.³¹ The I.L.P. thus ran a further seven candidates in addition to its sole realistic electoral chance in Tong Ward. Despite the discontent within the Labour Party at the decision to oppose the I.L.P. the smaller party polled badly everywhere apart from Tong. Nevertheless, in that 'I.L.P. ward' the I.L.P. polled well, although the split cost the I.L.P. the chance to win the seat from the Conservatives, who retained the seat with 1,518 votes against I.L.P.er G.E. Wilson with 1,129 and Labour 748 votes.³² In Bradford, as in Glasgow the I.L.P. retained vitality as an electoral force, which the Labour Party found difficult to destroy.

Outside of the small number of areas where the I.L.P. had a very strong electoral tradition the smaller Party's electoral opportunities were even more dependent on the Labour Party. For example in Derby, where the I.L.P. had maintained a group of three councillors following disaffiliation, the prospects for continued electoral success were almost completely dependent on the Labour Party, two of the I.L.P. group lost their seats as soon as opposed by the larger organisation. Of the original group only Tom

Markland of the NUR seemed to have sufficient support in his ward to fend off a Labour Party assault, although he never had to face the challenge.³³ The group was bolstered when Harry Cheshire, who had been elected as a Labour candidate joined the I.L.P. group in 1934, after being expelled from the larger organisation for working with the I.L.P.³⁴ Thus, whilst the I.L.P. could maintain a group on the council its maintenance was heavily dependent on the lenient attitude of the Labour Party.

Similarly, the fortunes of the I.L.P. in Norwich depended on a complex and changing relationship with the Labour Party. Initially relations between the I.L.P. and Labour in Norwich were extremely hostile. The two parties opposed each other in four wards in the 1932 municipal elections with the intervention letting in the Liberals in Catton ward.³⁵ The smaller party was initially unrepentant, with Alf Nicholls the defeated I.L.P. candidate in that ward arguing that:

He was pleased he had been the instrument by which the Labour candidate was kept out in the Catton ward... [as] he preferred to see a successful Anti-Socialist who in a straightforward fashion declared his position...rather than the underhand tactics of the Labour Party locally and nationally.³⁶

However, after the initial acrimony the two parties came to a working arrangement for conflicting candidatures to be avoided. In 1933 the smaller party won two seats, and the combined forces of the I.L.P. and Labour Party were sufficient to take control of the Council. The smaller organisation added council members in each of the following two years with the co-operation of the Labour Party as part of an attempt to develop the 'best possible working relations'. These cordial relations with the Labour Party continued right up until the war.³⁷ However, there were important differences between the situations in Derby and Norwich. In Derby the I.L.P.'s strength on the council depended largely on the personality of Tom Markland, his ward Labour Party arguing 'that 75 per cent of the people who vote were not interested in the I.L.P., but... would vote Markland as a working-class candidate.' In Norwich the I.L.P. vote, especially in the Catton Ward where by the end of the decade all three councillors were I.L.P.ers, was much less dependent on personality. Instead it reflected the considerable local activity in the ward where the I.L.P. had a considerable following and the Labour Party had no ward organisation at all.

In Glasgow, Norwich and Derby the Labour Party was engaged in a delicate and ongoing battle with the more conservative elements for control of the council. In other places such concerns were irrelevant, either because the Labour Party was completely

dominant or because it had no significant presence at all. The I.L.P. could find something of a niche in either situation. The former case existed in Merthyr, in 1935 for example Labour held 22 of the 34 council seats, with only six 'independents' representing the more conservative elements within the town. Here, as in the 1935 General Election the I.L.P. could oppose the Labour Party without serious fears of handing power to the 'independents'. Within the town the I.L.P. managed to build up an electoral base in the Plymouth Ward, a by-election victory in 1934 adding to the 1932 and 1933 municipal election successes to give the party three of its four councillors, a level which they maintained until the outbreak of the Second World War.³⁸ However, of equal significance was the way in which the Party built up significant opposition to leading Labour figures elsewhere in Merthyr, for example in 1933 they came within 89 votes of defeating the retiring Labour Candidate, a former mayor with twenty-five years of experience as a Councillor.³⁹ The absence of a significant right-wing challenge to the Labour Party left the I.L.P. freer to build up its own political space in the district.⁴⁰

At the other extreme the I.L.P. could also make progress in areas where the Labour Party had virtually no electoral influence. In some such places the I.L.P. could advance by presenting itself as *the* party of working class interests, as in the Maxton's family home of Barrhead, where it was the I.L.P. not the Labour Party which began and maintained the process of winning representation on the council during the 1930s. However, more usually, if the I.L.P. played an active role at all in these 'backward' places it was in tandem with the Labour Party. In such places any electoral competition between the two parties claiming to represent working class interests could be extremely damaging. For example in Great Yarmouth competition and acrimonious relations between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party split the vote and prevented the first Labour gains in the town.⁴¹ By repairing the relations and developing an electoral pact between the two parties both parties were able to maintain a substantial electoral presence. Indeed, by the end of the Second World War the I.L.P. group on the council numbered seven, and combined with a Labour Party group of fifteen was nearly sufficient to gain a majority in the council.⁴²

In diverse ways the I.L.P. during the 1930s managed in some areas to build up its electoral base at local level. As in the early days of the party some Party members found opportunities to find political spaces in which to operate and to rise to positions of local prominence. However, the difficulties the party faced were substantial. First, nowhere

outside Glasgow did the I.L.P. manage to transform this local influence into the credible prospect of a parliamentary seat. The 1935 elections showed that such a transformation would be nearly impossible without some level of support from the Labour Party, but even when the Labour Party locally was amenable to such a relationship, as in Norwich after 1935, the Labour Party nationally refused to countenance such arrangements, threatening to disaffiliate the Norwich Party if it followed this course of action. The increasing nationalisation of politics made it extremely difficult to capitalise on local election success. Second, and perhaps more significant was that the instances of I.L.P. electoral success were few and far between. It normally proved impossible to transform areas with significant levels of Party activism into wards which would vote for an I.L.P. candidate. These two problems combined meant that whilst the I.L.P. could firmly establish itself in some wards for a limited period of time, in the longer run they were always vulnerable to a strong Labour Party challenge during moments of weakness. Once dislodged, and especially if defeated by a Labour Candidate, it was virtually impossible to re-establish a ward as an 'I.L.P. seat.'

3.3 Scotland: Policy

During the immediate period after disaffiliation the Scottish Division was relatively unaffected by the serious debates over the new revolutionary policy of the I.L.P. that occurred in other divisions. In part this was because important elements within the division placed limited emphasis on the new policy and effectively ignored it in their operation and propaganda. Indeed, towards the end of 1934 the I.L.P.'s Executive Committee had to organise a meeting to discuss and encourage the implementation of the new policy in Scotland.⁴³ However, the main question that divided the I.L.P. nationally, working with the Communist Party, also divided the Scottish I.L.P.

The Scottish Divisional Conference of 1934 firmly opposed the activities of the Revolutionary Policy Committee, and was largely uninterested in questions of International Affiliation in the immediate period after disaffiliation. The Conference, however, voted to maintain and extend the United Front, despite problems of operating it in a number of areas.⁴⁴ The Scottish Divisional Council (SDC) and James Carmichael, its Chairman, were opposed to working in a systematic way with the Communist Party and in this they were joined by Jennie Lee, who argued that the United Front had done 'infinitely more harm than disaffiliation' in the mining areas of Scotland, pointing in particular to the dual unionism in Fife which 'allowed the C.P. to use United Front

speakers to draw I.L.P.ers into the C.P. unions.' However, the Scottish N.A.C. representative, John McGovern, previously and subsequently a strong opponent of the Communist Party, was in favour of continued work with the Communist Party. McGovern's active participation in the local Unemployed March movement had by June 1933, at least in the short term, rather changed his attitude towards the Communists as he argued that the Communist Party and the N.U.W.M. were playing 'a straight game.'⁴⁵

None of the factions; Unity Group, R.P.C. or Trotskyist, was able to gain a significant foothold in the Scottish division.⁴⁶ Despite their lack of membership the factions were nevertheless vocal at divisional conferences. At the 1934 and '35 Scottish Divisional Conferences the debate was influenced by substantial elements from both the R.P.C. and the Trotskyists. For both groups international affiliation was the key question. However, R.P.C. and Trotskyist amendments, despite taking up a significant proportion of the agenda received relatively little support. The 1935 Conference reaffirmed by a vote of 67 to 14 the need for continued co-operation with the Left Socialist Parties and this line on International affiliation was maintained through the decade. In 1937, despite widespread objections to the criticism of the Soviet Union, the Division also voted for an independent commission to assess the Moscow Trials. As the Second World War approached some concern was expressed about the role of the Parliamentary Group of the Party. This was centred on their conduct in support of Chamberlain's Munich agreement and a reference back to their activity was moved at the 1939 Divisional Conference only to be defeated 64 votes to 12. However, in 1935 when the MPs had caused outrage in much of the rest of the Party with their declarations refusing to take sides against the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, the Scottish I.L.P. scarcely even found the matter worthy of discussion. The role of the MPs and their iconic status was an important factor within the Scottish Division.

However, the most important issue which was raised at every conference in the latter half of the 1930s and increasingly came to dominate proceedings was the relationship between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party. In 1935, Bridgeton proposed a resolution, that the I.L.P. could not afford to completely isolate itself from the Labour Party whilst, a proposal from Barrhead suggesting electoral pacts with the Labour Party was only defeated by 39 votes to 28. The conference also accepted, by a close vote, the need for I.L.P. members of the Co-op to pursue a common line of action with each other.⁴⁷ However, from 1936-9 the conference rejected moves for closer co-operation with the

Labour Party by large majorities. Thus, in 1936 the Scottish Divisional Conference accepted John Heenan's argument:

Recent experiences have shown us that the [Labour Party] machine has become more refined in its detestation of the I.L.P. The I.L.P. has for its genesis a united working class, and the I.L.P. has striven for a united working class, but the I.L.P. cannot consider merging itself in the Labour Party, since that Party's tendencies are diametrically opposed to what the I.L.P. exists to fight, namely, class collaboration.⁴⁸

Nevertheless both Heenan and the Conference, in preparation for the Unity Campaign made clear that they were prepared to co-operate with all sections of the working-class movement. An amendment from Falkirk for reaffiliation was defeated with only three voting for it. The issue arose again at the following Divisional Conference when in the debate on the Unity Campaign, Govanhill moved that the Party rejoin Labour with a speech which included a vicious attack on the leadership of the I.L.P. who, it was claimed, were undemocratically forcing a united front on the party. This, it was suggested, smacked of fascism 'with Maxton playing the part of Hitler and Fenner Brockway of Goebbels, and the N.A.C. as "yes men".' The motion was decisively rejected and was countered by an equally unpopular resolution from the other extreme from David Gibson's Alexandria branch that the Party should not even co-operate with the Unity campaign. The issue of re-affiliation was again on the agenda at the 1938 Scottish Divisional Conference when Mossbank moved for an immediate approach for re-affiliation to the Labour Party on condition that 'our organisation, our platform and the right to publish our independent literature be maintained.' Again the conference was strongly opposed to any such moves and the motion was defeated by 88 votes to 6. Indeed it was only in January 1939 as the rest of the Party was deciding, albeit somewhat reluctantly, for re-affiliation, that the Scottish Division showed any real support for renewing links with the Labour Party. A motion for re-affiliation obtained 18 votes, including those of I.L.P. MPs Stephen and McGovern. Support for affiliation on the condition that the party retained freedom of action received a further 11. However, unlike the majority of the rest of the Party, the Scottish Division, remained firmly against and the motion proposing the maintenance of independence won a comfortable majority with 60 votes.⁴⁹ Despite the lack of commitment from the Scottish I.L.P. for the new revolutionary policy of the I.L.P. the Division was, more than anywhere else in the country opposed to considering rejoining the Labour Party.

3.4 Scotland: Activity

Prior to disaffiliation the I.L.P. had been the central element in the Labour Party in many areas of Scotland. Consequently disaffiliation had a substantially larger impact on the Labour Party there than anywhere else.⁵⁰ However, the Scottish I.L.P. was worse hit by disaffiliation than the Labour Party, losing 128 of its 250 branches.⁵¹ As Katherine Glasier commented, the I.L.P. split had 'worked a temporary havoc' in the Labour Movement in areas of Scotland 'separating even families with the futile bitterness of its "Wee Free" self-righteousness.'⁵² The Party found it increasingly difficult to compete with the Labour Party for political power. Despite holding rallies and major membership drives in July 1937, February 1938 and June 1939 the party gradually lost support, especially away from its Glasgow base.⁵³ Nevertheless, following disaffiliation the Scottish Division remained, in terms of membership and branches, the most important I.L.P. division.

Glasgow and Clydeside had always been the centre of the I.L.P.'s Scottish operations. The impact of disaffiliation was to further enhance the dominance of the area, as some other areas of I.L.P. significance were massively reduced. In particular the largest and most important I.L.P. branches in Edinburgh voted for continued affiliation to the Labour Party.⁵⁴ Throughout the decade the I.L.P. managed to keep a very high profile within Glasgow politics which allowed the party to present itself in many ways as a viable alternative to the Labour Party. In part this was because from October 1931 the I.L.P. had more Glasgow MPs than the Labour Party. However, I.L.P. activity in municipal politics was also important. Throughout the decade the Party maintained a sizeable group on Glasgow Council, rising from seven in 1932 to a peak of fourteen after a by-election in 1936.

On Glasgow Council in the period from disaffiliation to November 1933, despite electoral opposition, the I.L.P. and the Labour Party had a perhaps surprisingly close relationship, standing together in opposition to the Moderates. After the 1933 Municipal elections, Labour and the I.L.P. combined were able to command a majority on the City Council, and those within both parties who felt they should be working together on the council were in a majority. The smaller party warmly welcomed the result and pledged general support for the Labour Party. Indeed, the Labour Party relied on the I.L.P. for its majority until the outbreak of the Second World War.

However, within the I.L.P. there was also a strong group opposed to this co-operation, who felt the I.L.P. should stand in clear opposition to the Labour Group. Some of this feeling had been evident before November 1933, when I.L.P. Councillor Dr Simon Bennett had joined with John McGovern in repeatedly alleging corruption within the Labour Group on the Council.⁵⁵ After, the Labour Party came to power the feeling of opposition between Labour and I.L.P. on the council grew. In declaring their support for the Labour Party ruling group the I.L.P. had retained the right to oppose them when they believed working class interests to be at stake.⁵⁶ By the end of the decade the two parties were in fierce opposition which on occasion threatened to spill out into violence in the council chamber.⁵⁷

The smaller group relished the major occasions, which would allow them to point out the deviance of the Labour leadership from 'socialist principles.' Disputes arose over the level of relief scale for able-bodied unemployed, over the conditions prevailing at working camps for the unemployed, over the failure to use co-operative workers for council projects, over the wage levels to be paid to council workers, over the accession to the throne and the Coronation, and over the League of Nations.⁵⁸ The accusation, as at the coronation, was that Labour's Council leader, Patrick Dollan, was playing games of electoral politics at the expense of socialism:

Dollan may be convinced that his way of working at a time of manufactured hysteria has big electoral advantages. He may even be right. One thing we do know is that he is not making Socialists.⁵⁹

In 1938 Dollan was appointed the first Catholic Lord Provost of Glasgow, but with the increasing power of the 'Labour fixer' so came increased I.L.P. hostility. They launched increasingly personal assaults on him arguing that he suffered from 'a temperamental weakness of exhibitionism which shows itself in a desire to appear before as many audiences as possible and display himself in the regalia of pomp and influence.' Indeed the I.L.P. group suggested that the Dollan's running of the Glasgow Council could largely be explained as the actions of a frustrated megalomaniac:

The Lord Provost has been engaged so much recently in appearing cap in hand before the powers that be in London that he has had little opportunity for exercising his own power impulse. So like the man who must obey outside his home and then acts like a tyrant to his own family; P. J. Dollan compensates himself for his servility in London by trying to use the mailed fist when dealing with the members of the Council over which he presides.⁶⁰

With this growing enmity between Labour and I.L.P. the smaller party pushed its own agenda. The Scottish Divisional Conferences forbade Party members from accepting positions as magistrates or convenors unless there was an I.L.P. majority on the

Council.⁶¹ With this avenue of influence closed the I.L.P. was reliant on winning support for its proposals in the Council chamber. In order to be successful in this context the I.L.P. had to either win the support of the Labour leadership, of a significant number of dissident Labour Councillors or gain the support of the Moderates.

On occasion the I.L.P. did succeed in getting the support of the Labour Leadership for its proposals. Thus, the Labour leadership and hence the council voted for a municipal bread supply, to reassess the role of Palacerigg work colony, for the recognition of the N.U.W.M., for the occasional free use of public baths, for the building of a new hospital and for detaching Officer Training and Cadet Corps from High Schools.⁶² However, such moments of influence on the Labour leadership were extremely rare.

The I.L.P. could more readily obtain the support of Labour Councillors for procedural points. For example, after Dollan had used Council regulations to prevent instructions to keep council rents low being passed from the Council to the housing committee, the I.L.P. launched a vigorous protest. Dollan achieved the expulsion of David Gibson and William Park, the two leaders of the I.L.P. protest, but the smaller party was able to get considerable sympathy for its right to mount the protests against what the I.L.P. termed Dollan's 'dictatorial methods', and the second expulsion was only carried by 21 votes to 20 with 90 members present. However, the I.L.P. was only occasionally able to obtain the support of even a small number of 'renegade' Labour Councillors for its positive proposals. For example, they persuaded six Labour councillors to vote for increased unemployment allowances during the winter of 1935

The I.L.P.'s other option, working with the Moderates, was even more problematic. There was virtually no shared political ground between the Moderates and the I.L.P. They could only vote together to oppose the Labour Party, as in 1937 when they famously combined to remove Dollan from his post as Treasurer.⁶³ However, the 'success', of as Labour termed it, an 'unholy alliance' was easily used by the larger group to portray the I.L.P. as working in the Moderates interests.

The I.L.P.'s chances of implementing its own legislative programme were thus extremely limited and the Party was largely restricted to blocking some of what it saw as the more 'reactionary' aspects of Labour policies. These tactics were most dramatically seen in November 1936. Then the I.L.P. opposition to new police powers

designed to prevent sectarian activity brought a series of Press articles declaring the ILP group to be 'obstructionists' and labelling them 'ace talkers' and the 'go slow group'. The I.L.P. objected because they felt that the measures against bands, flags and emblems could be used against working class organisation as well as sectarian groups. The Labour Party and Moderates combined to suspend standing orders to prevent the protest so the I.L.P. resorted to moving line by line amendments on every item. This tactic, which the Labour Party had at times used against the Moderates, took the council sitting into a second day and it was only after four hours of further debate that the group decided to suspend its disruption claiming it had demonstrated that the majority 'could not expect to ride rough-shod over small but constitutionally elected minorities.'⁶⁴

Thus, over the decade the I.L.P. was able to see only a small number of its proposals passed through the Council, with most of its suggestions defeated by the Labour leadership. Even when the smaller party did succeed in passing proposals against the Labour leadership the larger party was able to suggest that this was because the I.L.P. was effectively engaging in an anti-Labour alliance with the Moderates.⁶⁵ This weakness on the council was a substantial problem for the I.L.P. in presenting itself as a viable opposition to the Labour Party. However, to this the I.L.P. added further self-made problems.

First, the I.L.P. was divided over the position it should take in exercising political power without a majority. Divisional conference decisions in 1932 and again in 1937 forbade I.L.P. councillors from accepting positions of authority without a majority on the council. However, whilst most councillors were prepared to accept the dangers of taking positions of authority whilst in a minority, it was more difficult for them to accept a Labour controlled authority as hostile. Thus, when the I.L.P. Group on Glasgow Council, following the I.L.P.'s conference decisions, decided not to accept any positions of authority, it cost them two Councillors, Alex Munroe and Kate Beaton.⁶⁶

However, even more serious for the Party's presentation of itself as a viable opposition to the Labour Party in Glasgow, was the bitter factionalism within the Council group which lasted from disaffiliation to 1938. The two groups represented a power struggle between two different parts of the Party's Scottish structure. One group led by Joseph B. Payne, held positions in the Glasgow Federation. The other, largely younger members,

including Tom Taylor, held positions on the executive of the Scottish Divisional Council.

The Executive of the SDC regarded the Management Committee of the Glasgow Federation (MC) with disdain, and considered that they were incompetent and seriously mismanaging the Glasgow I.L.P. As James Carmichael, Secretary of Scottish Divisional Council, wrote to Tom Murry, the secretary of Glasgow Federation of the I.L.P. about their activity 'while we are trying to build a Socialist Movement with a revolutionary purpose we tend to leave the impression that we are village pump parish scale protectors.'⁶⁷ This situation was combined with a further set of problems connected with a leading member of the MC, Councillor J. B. Payne.⁶⁸ It was suggested by those opposed to Payne, that he was not working according to a 'consciously revolutionary' socialist programme. However, in practice the dispute was about the day to day running and control of the Glasgow I.L.P.

Payne had become almost obsessed with the minutiae of the Tramways system and in particular the conduct of the tramwaymen. As far as the Scottish Divisional Council were concerned his attacks on the tramwaymen were in no way connected with a socialist purpose and a number of its members including fellow Councillor Tom Taylor launched a series of public attacks on Payne. Indeed, much to the amusement of the other parties the disputes were often played out inside Glasgow's Council Chamber. Under successive Chairmen of the Council group first one and then the other faction had been in control. In 1937 the situation reached new heights when Payne decided to take Taylor to court. The SDC responded by launching an investigation into the affairs of Payne and the MC. However, the Management Committee did not take kindly to being investigated and systematically blocked the SDC attempts to gather information.⁶⁹

By August 1936 the situation had become so strained, and the SDC investigation so bogged down, that John McGovern drew it to the attention of the N.A.C.⁷⁰ When the situation continued to drag on through 1937 the N.A.C. was forced to take over and launch its own investigation. The inquiry found that the dispute was mainly due to clashing personalities. In so far as there were policy differences it was because the SDC took a more 'consciously revolutionary' view while the MC concentrated on 'the immediate grievances of the working class'. They declared that the situation required the federation to recognise the supervisory rights of the SDC. The N.A.C. laid the main

blame on the Management Committee, declaring that 'The federation has done useful routine work but during the past two years meetings held under its auspices have often been a hindrance rather than a help to the party.' It was decided that the Scottish I.L.P. was in need of a wholesale reorganisation. The main positions in the SDC went to non-Glasgow figures, the leading protagonists, Payne, Taylor and Carmichael were removed from official positions and Payne was barred from holding public office for the party for a year.⁷¹

During the dispute the Labour Party made the most of the situation. The *Daily Herald* lost no opportunity to highlight the problems and to report that Glasgow I.L.P. members were thinking of rejoining the Labour Party. Whilst there was no mass defection, the problems continued. For example, against the recommendations of the enquiry, Payne did stand in the 1937 municipal elections. Although unsupported by the Cowcaddens branch and most of the rest of the Glasgow I.L.P., to their annoyance his candidature accidentally appeared in the *New Leader*.⁷² There can be little doubt that the situation was highly damaging for the Glasgow I.L.P. reducing their efficiency on the council, in electoral terms, especially in the Cowcaddens ward and in terms of their relationship with the unions especially the Transport Workers. Such high profile disputes also affected the party's ability to be seen as a united revolutionary force capable of challenging both Labour and the Communist Party in Glasgow.

However, the limitations of the I.L.P. in municipal politics also reflected a renewed focus on non-electoral politics. Throughout the period from 1932-9 the I.L.P. was particularly active in the organisation of demonstrations and rallies in Glasgow. In the early part of the decade, the organised protests focussed on unemployment. The I.L.P. was active in the organisation of the 1934 Hunger March in Glasgow.⁷³ The Party was also active across Glasgow and the West of Scotland in the organisation of other unemployed activities such as setting up united action and agitation against the Unemployment Relief Cuts.⁷⁴

Later in the 1930s the main subject of protest moved from unemployment to Spain and especially in the early period of Civil War the I.L.P. was active in raising money and organising marches in Glasgow to assist in the struggle.⁷⁵ In addition to these more focussed protests the I.L.P. also participated in the organisation of May Day celebrations. During the early part of the decade the I.L.P., together with the

Communist Party, attempted to organise separate 'Socialist May Day' celebrations.⁷⁶ However, by 1937 the parties were co-operating in a joint May Day demonstration with all working class organisations which it was claimed was the 'largest in Glasgow since the war.'⁷⁷ The 1937 campaign also emphasised that even in Glasgow the I.L.P.'s position was being eroded and the Communist Party appeared to be gaining some ground, as *Forward* noted that for perhaps the first time at a joint event in Glasgow, the Communist Party presence seemed stronger than the I.L.P.'s.⁷⁸

The I.L.P. in Glasgow was also an important focus throughout the period for those who were engaged in disputes with the official Labour movement. Thus, in December 1936 the unofficial dispute of the Glasgow Corporation Bus workers led the strikers to turn to the I.L.P. for support.⁷⁹ Then, early in the following year, many of the men who had been involved in that unofficial action decided because of their dissatisfaction with their union to form a new Transport and Allied Workers' Union in Glasgow based on workers within the Glasgow Corporation. Shortly after the formation the secretary of this new organisation approached the Glasgow Federation of the I.L.P. for assistance. However, the District Council of the T&G.W.U. also approached the I.L.P.'s Glasgow Federation to try to ensure that they did not give support to the breakaway group and after consideration the I.L.P. decided as a matter of principle not to support union breakaways.⁸⁰

The I.L.P. was also involved in supporting the Beardmore Parkhead Forge workers in 1937 over pay and conditions. The strikers made an appeal to the Party for four specific types of help: to make the facts of the strike known, to provide halls and committee rooms for the strikers, for financial support and finally for help to win official trade union support. As the strike committee acknowledged the I.L.P. played its role as requested placing the I.L.P. in a favourable position in the eyes of the men when there were further disputes at the outbreak of war. Indeed when Parkhead AEU called all political organisation to a conference to discuss the formation of a Vigilance Committee on the Emergency Powers Act just after the declaration of war they chose to meet at the I.L.P. Carling Place.⁸¹

The I.L.P. thus retained an important place within the Glasgow Labour Movement through the period after disaffiliation. However, it would be extremely misleading to suggest that within Scotland the I.L.P. was only relevant on Clydeside. Indeed in some

other areas of Scotland the I.L.P. found it was able to consolidate or even improve its position. The focus for the non-Glasgow I.L.P. was Renfrewshire, Ayrshire and Lanarkshire. For example in Maxton's birthplace, Barrhead, the I.L.P. maintained an important presence in the labour movement. The council was dominated by Moderates and in the first half of the 1930s there was no representation from the working-class parties on the council at all. In the second half of the decade it was the I.L.P. and not the Labour Party who launched a concerted electoral assault on the Moderates, winning five seats by 1937. The Barrhead I.L.P., although dealt a serious blow in March 1939 when Councillor Beckett, the branch chairman died, was increasingly at the forefront of Scottish I.L.P. politics as Annie Maxton and McQuarrie respectively took over the roles as chairman and secretary of the Scottish Divisional Council as the result of divisions in Glasgow.⁸²

In Ayrshire the I.L.P. kept a presence on the county council winning seats in 1932 and 1938. In Galston I.L.P.er A. Crosbie defeated Moderate and Labour opposition to win a place on the local council in 1934 and 1937. However, their presence was not restricted to electoral politics and in Catrine David Meikle used his position as chairman of the Ayrshire I.L.P. Federation to attain the chairmanship of the Catrine Tenants' Rights Committee. The situation brought him into public prominence following an extended and acrimonious dispute with the police over their practice of entering homes without a warrants.⁸³

A similar situation prevailed in Lanarkshire where in some areas, such as Dykehead and Carluke East the I.L.P. could regularly poll above the Labour Party. Whilst Moderates took victory over the divided labour movement in the County Council elections the I.L.P. could maintain a significant presence on the Dykehead District Council. Argument and bad feeling within the labour movement were not restricted to electoral politics for example there was a sharp division of opinion in Motherwell over the relationship between I.L.P.ers and the S.S.P. in the NCLC. However, the divisions within the movement were not always the result of local rivalries, often they were due to instructions from the centre. For example in Airdrie where there was a close connection between the I.L.P. and the Tenants' Association, the I.L.P. and local Labour Party came to an electoral agreement before the 1938 municipal elections. However, Arthur Woodburn the Scottish Labour Party organiser intervened and forced the local Labour

Party to oppose the I.L.P. Nevertheless, Tom Connor of the I.L.P. gained First Ward from the Labour Party.⁸⁴

Whilst the bulk of the I.L.P.'s presence in Scotland was in Glasgow and the numerous small branches in the West of Scotland the party did have a number of significant branches in Clackmananshire and along the East Coast. Perhaps most importantly was Perth where through the influence of William Ballantine in the NUR the party was a major force. In the second half of the 1930s the Party in Perth was closely associated with the Labour Party and came to a long term electoral understanding after the I.L.P. agreed to withdraw Ballantine in favour of the Labour candidate in the municipal elections. Indeed the local party came in from some heavy criticism from the Scottish Divisional Council for reaching such an agreement without consultation with the divisional officers.⁸⁵

In Fifeshire the I.L.P. maintained a presence in Cowdenbeath and Lochgelly. In Cowdenbeath following disaffiliation the branch entered into vigorous activity, developing joint activity with Communist Party, holding weekly joint meetings with the C.P. and N.U.W.M. it also began seriously contesting municipal elections which saw the party win two council seats in 1934-5. The results were promising for the branch, which managed to double its membership in the seven months following disaffiliation.⁸⁶ In Lochgelly the party was an important force in the Post Office Workers' Union with Jennie Duncan achieving national prominence. I.L.P.er David Adamson was also elected to the council in November 1937 along with four moderates on a working class ticket consisting of two I.L.P.ers, one Labour and one Communist, of which the two I.L.P.ers polled in the top two places.⁸⁷ In Clackmananshire I.L.P.er T.R. Miller, chairman of the Sauchie Branch, maintained his place as Councillor on Clackmannan County Council. His activities on behalf of the working class were widely acknowledged and the *Alloa Journal* describing him as the 'stormy petrel' of the council, praised his energy, debating power, sense of humour and his championship of the cause of the 'have nots'.⁸⁸

In Dundee the I.L.P. maintained a place within the labour movement working with the Communist Party and N.U.W.M. in the organisation of demonstrations, which led to some conflict with the Labour Party in the period up to 1936.⁸⁹ However, the real conflict between the I.L.P. and the Labour establishment in Dundee took place within

the Dundee Jute and Flax Workers' Union. At the end of 1937 as a result of considerable activity a member of Dundee I.L.P. was elected onto the executive of the Union. However, the agitation, centred on the lack of support that Dundee workers had given to Indian Jute Workers striking for a shorter week, not only brought a scathing attack from John Sime, the secretary of the Union but also resulted in Labour Party membership being made a condition of membership of the Union executive.⁹⁰

In Aberdeen the acrimony between Labour and the I.L.P. prior to the 1935 election was replaced with bitter warfare between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party towards the end of the decade. The I.L.P. had managed to maintain its two members on the council and despite the lack of an official arrangement between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party no conflicting candidatures actually happened.⁹¹ However, in 1938 its attempts at unity with the C.P. were turned down on the basis that the I.L.P. had been inactive in supporting the Spanish Workers and because they had supported the "Trotskyist" POUM. The I.L.P. countered with the accusation that in fact they had done the lion's share of the work in the Aberdeen Spanish Aid Committee and had ensured that the committee was kept open when the C.P. wanted to close it after an ultimatum from the Scottish Labour Party.⁹² Elsewhere on the East Coast the I.L.P. had a presence in some surprising places such as in the small fishing village of Ferryden where the party claimed to have achieved the delivery of the *New Leader* to every worker and were publishing a local news-sheet on a flat duplicator.⁹³

Although badly damaged by disaffiliation the Scottish I.L.P. maintained a significant presence in the Scottish Labour movement through the 1930s. In some places such as Barrhead, the party was able to build up its local profile. However, in its Glasgow stronghold, divided and under attack from the Labour and Communist Parties, the party's membership and influence declined sharply especially during the second half of the decade. The politics of the Scottish division were thus significantly different from the rest of the party. More influential in working class politics than elsewhere there was little concern with the 'new revolutionary policy' of the party and little enthusiasm for the factions which dominated the party's other major centres in Lancashire and London. Nevertheless, the Scottish I.L.P. was the most forceful in declaring the need to maintain an identity separate from the Labour Party.

3.5 London and the Southern Counties: Policy

Although the London Division in the period after disaffiliation was deeply divided by factional disputes, at one level there was much agreement within the division. All discussion of policy could begin from the assumption that the *Socialism In Our Time* policy was outdated and that there was a need to develop a new revolutionary policy. There was also widespread agreement that it was important to develop working relationships on a day to day level with the N.U.W.M. and the Communist Party.⁹⁴ This basic position reflected the line of the R.P.C., under the leadership of Jack Gaster and Dr Carl Cullen, at a time when the Committee was gaining significant levels of influence within the Division. Indeed, in early 1933, when Gaster was selected as divisional N.A.C. representative many saw the R.P.C. and the London Divisional Council as synonymous. However, within the division there were others who stood on the 'left' of the party; who accepted this need for a new revolutionary policy, and argued for stress to be placed on developing Workers' Councils, yet stood apart from the R.P.C. The most notable of these members were C.A. Smith, Divisional Chairman from 1933-5, and John Aplin, Divisional Organiser. Behind the apparent unity of the London Division lay this fault line.

R.P.C. organisation in London became increasingly effective in the twelve months following disaffiliation. Regular R.P.C. organisation conferences were held and a unified line was then presented at divisional meetings. R.P.C. delegate meetings were also increasingly well attended.⁹⁵ By unified voting the R.P.C. was able to effectively control the machinery of the London Division Council. Initial concerns about the committee were raised by John Aplin shortly after the formation of the R.P.C. however, on the instructions of the Party leadership the Committee had been left undisturbed.⁹⁶ Opposition to the R.P.C. had then come largely from outside the London Division. Inside the division the most prominent opposition to the R.P.C. came only from the opponents of the I.L.P.'s 'new revolutionary policy' such as ex-London divisional chairman and N.A.C. representative Allen Skinner. He argued that the organisation of the R.P.C. was destroying the London Division:

Before the London and Southern Counties Divisional Conference a Conference of delegates representing branches in sympathy with the "R.P.C." was called. To this conference proposals for an alternative Party constitution were submitted and amendments invited. The results of the deliberations were placed upon the agenda of the Divisional Conference in the name of the Divisional Council (after possibly some negotiation with the Council following the unofficial Conference). The result was that the proposals so placed on the agenda- covering every paragraph of the constitution were carried without a single amendment. The official Divisional Conference had become a redundancy.

However, the overlap between the R.P.C. and a 'left' outside the R.P.C. including Smith and Aplin had led to an apparent consensus on a range of important issues. Skinner's concerns about the R.P.C. were ignored, as he was part of a marginalised 'right wing' within the division who disagreed with the new revolutionary policy.

The cracks in the Smith-Aplin/R.P.C. 'divisional consensus' were first apparent on the question of International affiliation. The R.P.C. argued that the I.L.P. should approach the Comintern. Smith and Aplin, on the other hand, wished the I.L.P. to maintain its association with the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity (IBRSU). The R.P.C. position won out at the 1933 Divisional conference. However, the concerns raised about R.P.C. activities in the wake of the 1933 National Annual I.L.P. conference weakened the committee's position and at the 1934 divisional conference the IBRSU position triumphed after a lengthy and acrimonious debate.⁹⁷

These political disagreements were further evident at the 1935 divisional conference. This conference had the largest agenda on record for a divisional conference with thirty-three items on it, including a forty-seven-page long policy statement issued by the R.P.C. dominated Divisional Council which included one hundred and fifty five amendments.⁹⁸ At the centre of the debates again was the question of International Affiliation. The Divisional Council and R.P.C. were supporting moves to approach the Comintern, John Aplin was arguing for the IBRSU, whilst the Trotskyists, who were beginning to play a more important role in the division, were arguing for a Fourth International. The weakness of the R.P.C. position was demonstrated by a large majority in favour of Aplin's IBRSU position.

However, on other areas of policy the outcome was less straightforward. The R.P.C./Divisional Council analysis of the political situation, was passed despite being opposed in its totality by the Trotskyists who described it as 'loose phrases strung together; the stock in trade of pseudo-revolutionaries.' The Divisional Council's section on street work, work in Trade Unions and factories was also carried, although against strong opposition. However, the crucial sections of the Council's report on Parliament, elections and the attitude to the Labour Party were not passed whilst all other options were also rejected. The situation which left branches to individually consider this aspect

of their work, clearly went against the aim of the conference which was to present an overall unifying strategy for the party.

The increasing dissatisfaction with the level of factional organisation within the Division, and the R.P.C. control of the Divisional Council, evident through the proceedings of the conference was also raised explicitly. It was only because the Trotskyists and the R.P.C. joined forces that a resolution against allowing members of unofficial groups to hold office within the Party, was defeated by four votes.

The proceedings of the conference showed that factionalism was a major influence on the politics of the London Division. Both the R.P.C. and the Trotskyists could command a considerable degree of support in London. However, perhaps as significant was the growing number of members within the division who were dismayed by the activities of the various organised groups and wanted to see an end to the factional fighting.⁹⁹

These tensions, evident in London at the 1935 divisional conference, were a major part of the I.L.P.'s 1935 Annual Conference in Derby. The national conference expressed disapproval of factional activity and rejected the R.P.C.'s policy proposals. Nevertheless, following the Derby conference the R.P.C. continued to use London Divisional Council machinery to push R.P.C. policy rather than official party policy. In this situation the concerns which Skinner had first raised about the organisation of the R.P.C. in 1932 were raised by opponents of the R.P.C. including C.A. Smith and John Aplin.

The issue of factionalisation came to a head following a speech Jack Gaster gave on Soviet Foreign Policy, as the London Division's fraternal delegate to the London District Congress of the Communist Party. In that speech he set out the perspective on Soviet Foreign Policy that the R.P.C. had had rejected at the Derby Conference.¹⁰⁰ In addition the R.P.C. through the London Divisional Council had started using Communist Party speakers as propaganda and educational instructors for training I.L.P. lecturers. The Committee had also taken to making public its dissatisfaction with Party policy. Thus, the Divisional Council refused to appoint a speaker for a meeting because 'it could not appoint anybody from the London Division who could be expected to speak on behalf of the N.A.C.' In a similar vein the Propaganda and Education Section, which

had been co-operating with C.A. Smith in the preparation of leaflets, refused to continue its assistance because of 'differences of opinion.'¹⁰¹

In this situation leading non-R.P.C. members of the London Division, having seen their policy victories at the Derby conference ignored by the R.P.C., forced a showdown in the division. Following Gaster's speech John Aplin resigned his office as London Divisional Organiser in order, he said, 'to begin the task of organising divisional opinion against the Revolutionary Policy Committee and the group system.' The London Divisional Council, dominated by the R.P.C. denied the charges of acting in 'group interests' and claimed that Aplin's problems were not really with the group system but with his approach to Soviet Foreign Policy.¹⁰²

Nevertheless, the I.L.P.'s Inner Executive agreed with Aplin and ruled that the Divisional Council had failed to accept the Party policy on Soviet Foreign policy laid down at the Derby Conference. The Inner Executive decided that 'the influence of the London leadership is weakening faith in the Party and its policy in the Division.'¹⁰³ However, whilst the 1935 Derby Conference had passed the resolution condemning group activity it had rejected the disciplinary resolution which had been attached to it. The N.A.C. was only able to issue a statement calling on loyal members of the Party to cease participation in unofficial groups.¹⁰⁴

Aplin continued his activities, attempting to mobilise support for the ending of group activity within the division. At a divisional conference held in October a resolution confirming the value of unofficial groups within the party was only carried by the casting vote of the chairman.¹⁰⁵ Opinion was beginning to move against the R.P.C. in the London division. However, the Committee still retained control of the Divisional Council. It was the splits within the R.P.C. and their failures at national level rather than the divisional onslaught which provided the most significant reasons for the group's decision to join the Communist Party in November 1935.

Following the departure of the R.P.C., in February 1936 the Divisional Conference voted to abolish group activity, looking to establish other means of securing internal discussion on theory and policy. The division also voted to maintain association with the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity and urged a concerted effort to build up industrial activity through trades unions and the co-operative movement.

However, the continuing problems of the division were indicated by the existence of a significant Trotskyist minority indicated by one third of the conference voting for a continuation of group activity and one quarter voting for breaking the I.L.P.'s International associations.¹⁰⁶

By the beginning of 1937 the bulk of the Trotskyists had departed the party. However, a small and much less disruptive Trotskyist group remained in the London division and followed the line of opposition to the Unity Campaign at the divisional conference in January. By 1938 the division's agenda had turned towards the question of reaffiliation to the Labour Party, although those proposals were rejected by an overwhelming majority. The division also sought to ensure that a considered position was adopted on the question of Trotskyism and the Communist International, calling for a proper analysis to be made of the question and rejecting a position of unconsidered sympathy to the C.I. However, the most contentious issue at the 1938 divisional conference was the appropriate attitude to take towards Air Raid Precautions with the division equally divided between demanding working class protection and presenting resolute opposition to all precautions as 'a sham and delusion.'¹⁰⁷

The following year, after four years of preoccupation with discipline and factions within the ranks of the London Division, the actions of the Parliamentary Group over Munich were the focus of concern. The calls of Croydon and Clapham branches, both with a history of Trotskyist influence, for the expulsion of the Parliamentary Group were easily defeated. However, the conference refused to endorse the actions of Maxton, McGovern, Buchanan and Stephen and suggested that immediate steps were needed to bring the group within the discipline of the Party. The 1939 conference also dealt with the issues raised the previous year. On the ARP the conference overwhelmingly defeated the view that we should participate 'on the Marxist basis of utilising every situation that arises to arouse the workers effectively against Capitalism,' and endorsed the view that 'the workers while taking advantage of every opportunity afforded them under Capitalism in order to safeguard their interest and lives must whenever possible oppose ARP preparation and under no circumstances must they volunteer for this work.' However, the main question on the National conference agenda, that of reaffiliation to the Labour Party received little attention at the Divisional Conference and when the proposals were considered the reaffiliation motion was heavily defeated.¹⁰⁸

3.6 London and the Southern Counties: Activity

London was one of the Divisions least affected by disaffiliation. At the 1932 annual conference the Division reported 89 Branches. Leaving the Labour Party caused the loss of only one branch, whilst eight new branches were formed.¹⁰⁹ However, during the period of R.P.C. ascendancy within London, from 1933-5, membership fell sharply, indeed affiliation fees declined by one third in the year before the departure of the R.P.C. During this period the focus of I.L.P. activity was on working with the Communist Party, and in particular on the establishment of workers' councils, such as those set up in Camberwell and Wimbledon.¹¹⁰ The Party also undertook a range of other joint activities with the Communist Party. This included not only high profile co-operation as in the Reception Committee for the 1934 Hunger March but also more localised activity such as the Fulham I.L.P.'s organisational work 'against exorbitant rents' in St. Olaf's Road in June 1934.¹¹¹

The departure of the R.P.C. had its greatest effect on the machinery of the London Division which was in need of almost total reconstruction, including the need to replace R.P.C. leader Jack Gaster as N.A.C. representative. Gaster's position on the N.A.C. was filled by the most obvious candidate for the post, John Aplin who was also elected as divisional chairman and leader of the 'anti-group' movement in the division. However, the remaining problems within the division were highlighted by the support given to the two other candidates, R.E. Fitzgerald and the Trotskyist candidate Sid Kemp, which showed the continued strength of group organisation in the London area.¹¹² The divisional reorganisation, included the appointment of a new divisional organiser, 27 year old Frank Gant of Plymouth.¹¹³ Over the first eighteen months of his term Gant made a determined effort to reinvigorate and reorganise the division at local level. He spent his time visiting the branches and composed weekly reports on his findings in each area. His overall impression at the end of this period was hardly encouraging. Branches, he felt, were generally very badly organised, where active they were normally dependent upon one or two individuals. There was, as in areas like Southend, a notable lack of contact with the Trade Unions. He also observed the distinct difficulty in generating activity in dormitory areas like Wimbledon and Sidcup. These problems were exacerbated by the difficulty in persuading members to take an interest in local affairs. This he suggested was probably due to the fact that generally the keenest members were those who were newcomers, with others often disillusioned with working class political apathy.¹¹⁴

As the R.P.C. became more threatened, and eventually left the I.L.P., the Party moved towards organisation independent of the Communist Party in the London area. It was in this vein that the Party mobilised in London against the Unemployment Act in March 1935, with a series of meetings organised by the divisional chairman Bert Hawkins. These meetings brought to London the most prominent I.L.P. leaders of the campaigns from around the country.¹¹⁵ Subsequently the London Division kept planning campaigns within the capital. For example in 1936 they organised a series of concurrent meetings focussing on U.A.B. regulations and the War Danger.¹¹⁶ However, as the Communist Party moved further towards a popular front position the I.L.P. found it harder to get its voice heard and its policy implemented in any joint activity. Thus in the London May Day Campaign conference in January 1937 the I.L.P. found its proposals sidelined.¹¹⁷ Instead the focus of I.L.P. activity in London moved towards the anti-war movement and in September 1938 the I.L.P. called a conference which formed the Socialist Anti-War front which operated from the I.L.P. head office, but nevertheless claimed to represent all sections of the working class movement.¹¹⁸

In some other respects the London I.L.P. did have a degree of success in interactions with the rest of the Labour movement. It was heavily involved with blocking the Mosley marches through the East End of London and in other anti-fascist action. Further the Party had a number of representatives on London Trades Council and, a number of prominent members were also active in the Co-operative movement. Most notable of these was Jack Hammond, a member of the Political Committee of London Co-operative Society and an active anti-fascist who was arrested for his activity. As part of the drive to improve the industrial side of the party in May 1938 the N.A.C. appointed him the National Co-operative Officer of the Party.¹¹⁹

At local level the I.L.P. could only maintain a limited profile in London, although the I.L.P. was instrumental in establishing Finchley Trades Council. Indeed the I.L.P.'s profile was higher in a number of towns within the division outside of the Capital. Some of this activity was based on strength which the Party had built up before disaffiliation which persisted for a time after 1932. This was clearest in Welwyn Garden City.

In Welwyn, disaffiliation robbed the Labour Party of almost all of its most influential members.¹²⁰ The Welwyn I.L.P. was able to outpoll the Labour Party in a number of

UDC elections early in the decade, and secure two councillors. However, the split in votes cost both Labour and I.L.P. electoral victories. After two years of the I.L.P. seeking an agreement the Labour Party agreed to allow one space on its slate for an I.L.P.er in 1936, after the I.L.P./Labour Party combined vote was sufficient to allow the group control of the council.¹²¹ The I.L.P./Labour Group, found it was possible to come to a basic agreement on the council and were essentially able to dominate affairs much to the frustration of the Conservatives who demanded that party politics be kept out of local government affairs.¹²² However, as the I.L.P. found more accommodation with the Labour Party on the council its role seemed increasingly compatible with the membership of the larger Party. The I.L.P. remained locally active, but its contribution was educational and the holding of debates.¹²³

In Welwyn I.L.P. influence had been largely a remnant of pre-disaffiliation strength. In other places, such as Slough and Hastings, the I.L.P. was able to develop a new profile for itself in the later half of the 1930s.¹²⁴ The Communist Party had significant influence within the Slough Labour Party, and the fortunes of the Slough I.L.P. were heavily dependant on their relationship with the C.P. During the mid-1930s the I.L.P. and C.P. in Slough built up a tenants defence league.¹²⁵ Then with the support of the Labour Party the I.L.P. gained a council seat on Slough UDC in April 1937.¹²⁶ The I.L.P. councillor, Ruth Harrison, enabled the I.L.P. to extend its work amongst the unemployed.¹²⁷ However, following the breakdown in relations between the I.L.P. and Communist Party after the Barcelona uprising, the I.L.P. became marginalised. The electoral agreement with the Labour Party broke down.¹²⁸ I.L.P. influence on the Home Counties Federation of Trades Councils and on the Slough Trades Council was also disturbed when the Communist Party's representatives accused an I.L.P. member sitting on the executive of being a 'Trotsky-Fascist.' The Communist vote combined with right wing support removed him from the Home Counties Executive, replacing him with a delegate who supported the 'Black Circular'. A similar manoeuvre on Slough Trades Council was defeated by the combination of I.L.P. and Labour loyalists.¹²⁹

In Hastings, the I.L.P. perceived the Labour Party as organisationally weak and the Communist Party as 'out of the picture'.¹³⁰ The party established an unemployed group which was briefly successful.¹³¹ The Hastings Party also made a failed foray into electoral politics.¹³² However, it was in union activity and particularly within the G&MWU that the Hastings I.L.P. was able to have greatest impact. In 1934 one

Hastings G&MWU branch, under I.L.P. pressure, urged the formation of a United Front and then the branch passed a political resolution calling for opposition to war:

That the Trades Council take immediate steps to organise all organisations with a view to determining what policy shall be pursued in view of European War danger and decide details of the application of that policy.¹³³

The Hastings Trades Council wrote to the TUC declaring that 'an affiliated branch of the G&MWU has an I.L.P. or Communist element.' The influence came under TUC scrutiny but because it was I.L.P. and not Communist it was not affected by the 'black circular.'¹³⁴ Thus it was left to the right wing General and Municipal Workers' Union to take heavy handed action, closing the branch down in an unconstitutional fashion.¹³⁵ The following June the branch was reopened but the closure had done little to dampen the enthusiasm of the 'left' within the organisation and the 'votes of the extreme elements' ensured that Jezard, the former secretary of the Hastings Socialist League was appointed to the Trades Council. By October 1937 the I.L.P. had succeeded in getting the branch to adopt one of their members as delegate to the Trades Council and once the Trades Council had again checked with the TUC on the I.L.P.'s position with respect to the black circular the I.L.P.ers were allowed to maintain their position.¹³⁶

The London division, especially in the period 1932-5, was heavily affected by factional disputes. Policy in these years was influenced, but never completely determined, by the R.P.C. and great stress was placed on the need for working with the Communist Party and organising workers' councils. This focus helped the I.L.P. little. Membership declined quickly. Many left frustrated with factional activity, still more left as first R.P.C. and then the Marxist Group joined their comrades outside the I.L.P. Despite the speedy decline in divisional membership the Division remained one of the largest within the party. Further, because of the strength of factional activity in the area members from London were amongst the main participants in the vigorous policy debates during the decade. However, the relative importance of London within the I.L.P. did not facilitate the effective contesting of local political spaces. The Party had a significant profile in some areas such as Welwyn Garden City. However, within the capital the I.L.P. struggle to establish roots within the working-class movement.

3.7 Lancashire: Policy

Immediately prior to disaffiliation, the Lancashire Division claimed a membership of 5,266. However, the division was seriously affected by disaffiliation, it lost fourteen of its eighty-six branches including key branches such as Manchester Central.¹³⁷ Activity

was initially centred in Manchester and surrounding areas. However, the Division was plagued by factional activity and policy disputes. In 1934 when the majority of the leadership, and much of the membership including sixteen branches, left the I.L.P. either to return to the Labour Party or to the newly formed Independent Socialist Party the focus of the Lancashire I.L.P. moved towards Liverpool.¹³⁸ Shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War the Division had a paying membership of only 256.

Much of the leadership of the Lancashire Division, including important figures such as Tom Abbott, who had joined the I.L.P. in 1894, had played an important part in the Lancashire Labour movement through its early years. Abbott and Lancashire I.L.P. leader Elijah Sandham, one of the rebel I.L.P. MPs who had come up against the PLP's standing orders, had enthusiastically embraced the disaffiliation decision as the 'end of careerism and foolish stunting' within the Party.¹³⁹ Under the leadership of Abbott and Sandham in the period 1933-4 the divisional council allied itself to the anti-R.P.C. Unity Group, and strongly opposed the development of the 'new revolutionary policy.' The Lancashire Council claimed to recognise the 'necessity of a revolutionary policy', however, Sandham argued that joint work with the C.P. did not constitute such a policy. For the him the 'new revolutionary policy', formulated more by the N.A.C. than by conference, was unconstitutional. Further, he argued that it was leading to the disappearance of a distinctive I.L.P. identity. His solution to the problem was to re-emphasise the 'paramount importance of parliamentary democracy' and to end the united front with the C.P.¹⁴⁰ Thus, in July 1933 the Lancashire D.C. announced that, as a council, it was ceasing joint activity with the Communists.¹⁴¹ By the Divisional Conference of 1934 there was open opposition to the 'new revolutionary policy' and the conference passed a motion declaring its ineffectiveness:

The present official policy of the I.L.P. is not a revolutionary Socialist policy for this country, has not been deduced from the facts (historical, political and economic) of this country and has no relevance to the serious revolutionary business of achieving Socialism in Britain.

Lancashire's alternative policy was firmly rooted in a constitutional understanding of revolutionary socialism:

Socialism must be presented as a constitutional end to be sought by constitutional means and enforceable when the people will by the constitutional use of every force by a Socialist Government, against any anti-democratic and unconstitutional opposition by the King, the House of Lords, or by capitalistic or by financial revolutionaries. This conference believes that such an approach is acceptable to the majority of the British people and is therefore a real revolutionary policy.¹⁴²

The division, by a narrow vote also called for a return to the Second International, although maintaining that the I.L.P. should also continue its connections with the group of international "left" socialist parties.¹⁴³

Added to these disputes over the new revolutionary policy were serious questions about the organisation of the Party. The Lancashire Divisional Council was strenuously opposed to the increasing tendencies within the Party towards democratic centralism. They fought against the establishment of an Executive Committee and Inner Executive. They also never fully co-operated with the central allocation of funds through the Power Fund, established in 1932.¹⁴⁴

However, during period 1932-4 the R.P.C. was beginning to gain some strength in Lancashire, especially within the Liverpool federation, which had been relatively unaffected by disaffiliation.¹⁴⁵ The Liverpool federation, arguing that the rest of the Division was stuck in 'pre-Bradford days', continued to engage in united front activity and stressed the successes for the I.L.P. in the meetings on the Anti-fascist day in April and on May Day 1933.¹⁴⁶ The argument from Liverpool was that there was needless fear and suspicion from both sides in the united front, but that such feelings were unnecessary and that the I.L.P. could gain much from united front work without losing its distinctive identity.¹⁴⁷ However, the R.P.C. in Lancashire was not confined to Liverpool. For example the R.P.C.'s Lancashire Divisional chairman was a comrade Wolfenden, from the Moston Branch and the R.P.C. national conference in 1934 was held in Wigan.¹⁴⁸

The increasing disruption caused by Lancashire's non-co-operation with the N.A.C., as in their failure to assist the 1934 Hunger March, led to calls for action against the Divisional Council from the R.P.C. in Lancashire and beyond. The non-co-operation of the Lancashire Division became a major issue for the N.A.C. Jack Gaster led the calls for strong action to be taken against the divisional leadership.¹⁴⁹ John Paton, one of the N.A.C. members most hostile to the R.P.C. was sent to Lancashire to sort things out, but the Divisional Council refused to co-operate even with his modest demands.¹⁵⁰ The N.A.C. was moved to condemn the activity of the Lancashire Division, but refused Gaster's demand to withhold its money.¹⁵¹

By the I.L.P.'s 1934 Annual Conference in York there was a huge rift between the Lancashire Division and the National leadership of the Party. At the conference Sandham stated that he would not leave the Party, but it was clear that others would. Immediately before the York Conference of 1934 the Lancashire Divisional newspaper, *Labour's Northern Voice* warned that if certain of the R.P.C.'s resolutions were passed then many within the Lancashire Division would find it difficult to maintain their membership of the Party. Although the York conference rejected the R.P.C.'s proposals it did accept the necessity of reorganising the Party, establishing an Inner Executive and Executive Committee. The Lancashire Division saw this as moving the Party towards democratic centralism and away from divisional autonomy. The conference had also been heavily critical of the Lancashire divisional attitude towards party discipline and rejected its calls for a restatement of the Party's commitment to a socialism which was not merely economic but also 'idealistic.'¹⁵²

These decisions convinced some of the leading members of the Lancashire Division that they could have no future within the ILP. Led by Tom Abbott, the resignations from the Party began.¹⁵³ The rebels left the I.L.P., but were still frustrated with the attitude of the Labour Party. In May 1934 they established a new party, the Independent Socialist Party. The impact on the Lancashire I.L.P. was enormous, sixteen branches and over half the paying membership, were lost. Added to this the entire divisional apparatus, including the divisional newspaper *Labour's Northern Voice*, was lost to the I.S.P.

Those remaining loyal to the I.L.P. met for a Special Divisional Conference in Pendleton on May 26 1934, with 48 delegates representing 23 branches attending. The elections brought the R.P.C. to the fore in the Divisional Council.¹⁵⁴ The conference also elected R.P.C. member Bob Edwards, as the new N.A.C. representative by a divisional ballot.¹⁵⁵ The new Divisional Council immediately launched a membership campaign using special contributions from the N.A.C. to replace the sixteen branches that had lapsed.¹⁵⁶ Considerable resources from both divisional and national level were poured into the membership campaign meetings were addressed by leading I.L.P.ers. However, the Communist Party quickly targeted the Lancashire I.L.P.'s weakness and upped its efforts against the I.L.P. in the area and the campaign generated few results. The campaign resulted in the formation of only three new branches.¹⁵⁷

The effect of the departure of the Unity Group was to make Liverpool the strongest I.L.P. area in Lancashire, moving the centre of the Lancashire Party from the Manchester area, where the I.S.P. was strongest.¹⁵⁸ At the Divisional Conference at the end of the year the new Council revealed that they had reached agreement with the Communist Party for a united front covering activities surrounding opposition to Fascism and War, work in Trade Unions and the defence of the Soviet Union.¹⁵⁹ However, illness and the poverty of new divisional officials led to quick changes in the Divisional Council. Florence Garner took over as divisional secretary and Tess Hilton took over as treasurer. As both Garner and Hilton were from the Old Trafford branch, the divisional headquarters were transferred from Liverpool to Manchester, a serious consequence because of the weakness of the I.L.P. in Manchester.¹⁶⁰

The Divisional Conference the following year was dominated by discussion of a policy document prepared by the new Council. There were signs that the difficulties of the division were not over, with significant support on the question of international disaffiliation for both the R.P.C. and the Trotskyists.¹⁶¹ Old factional fights were resolved only for new factional splits to begin appearing. However, it was the question of re-affiliation to the Labour Party which dominated divisional conferences after the R.P.C. members joined the Communist Party in November 1935. Reaffiliation was raised at the Divisional Conference in February 1936 but was decisively rejected. However, the issue would not disappear and in 1938 a two-thirds majority approved a resolution from Birkenhead, Todmorden and Gorton branches to make an immediate application to the Labour Party for conditional affiliation to that body leaving the I.L.P. the right to oppose 'rearmament and anti-working class measures.' In 1939 this was taken further when the Division worked out the measures it would need to take on reaffiliation to ensure the I.L.P.'s spirit would be kept alive.' The central proposal was to ensure that Parliamentary careerists should be kept out of the I.L.P. by requiring I.L.P. Members of Parliament to live at a working class standard and to hand the balance of their salaries into the party funds.

In 1936 there was dissent over Industrial policy with a controversial attack on the recent miners' pay settlement, and calling for the socialisation of the cotton industry. In 1938, there was a dispute between those who thought I.L.P.ers should try to work inside the Army (to keep outside of gaol) and those who wanted open and clear opposition to war, with the latter position largely pushed by those who had been pacifists during the First

World War. In 1939 the Division expressed strong concerns over the parliamentary group's line on the Munich settlement, insisting that Socialists must not attempt to choose between a policy of Imperialist War and Churchill, and Imperialist Peace. Nevertheless the overall pattern in the second half of the decade was one of relative unanimity in accepting the party policy laid down by the N.A.C.¹⁶²

3.8 Lancashire: Activity

The activity of the Lancashire I.L.P. at the time of disaffiliation was largely determined by the Lancashire Cotton workers' strike. The Lancashire I.L.P. administered a strike fund nationally and locally establishing a committee which met daily and aimed at assisting the strikers in any way possible. There was particular prominence in areas such as Blackburn and Hyde where regular meetings were held and Nelson, Burnley, Warrington, Chorley and Great Harwood where the Party set up relief committees to distribute cash and food it was received.¹⁶³ The Lancashire I.L.P. supported nationalisation and was opposed to the Communist-backed 'Cotton Workers' Solidarity Movement'. The Solidarity movement's programme was based on a repudiation of the settlement and the dismissal of all officials that had voted for it. The I.L.P. claimed the Solidarity movement was 'leading the workers up the garden', as without socialisation of the industry gains for the workers' would necessarily be extremely limited.¹⁶⁴

In the first half of 1936 the Lancashire Division was again heavily involved in the campaigns within the cotton industry. Early in the year a joint committee was formed consisting of members from I.L.P., the Communist Party and the Independent Socialist Party.¹⁶⁵ However, the agreement quickly floundered with disputes between Lancashire I.L.P. and C.P.¹⁶⁶ The period was also marked by sporadic attempts at co-operation and union with the ex-I.L.P.ers in the I.S.P. The first such attempt came in May 1936 when, following the third I.S.P. annual convention, Sandham and Abbott met with Maxton in order to arrange a united front with the I.L.P. particularly on the question of war. The following June, after the failure of the Unity campaign the I.S.P. made further, eventually aborted attempts to work with the I.L.P.¹⁶⁷ These matters lay until the I.S.P. reconsidered its position at the outbreak of war when they again considered closer co-operation with the I.L.P. and other socialist anti-war groups, and especially in Nelson, even considered rejoining the I.L.P.¹⁶⁸

Aside from these relatively high profile activities and away from the divisional centres of Manchester and Liverpool the I.L.P. was able to forge something of a role for itself in local politics. In some areas this was based largely in the electoral success of one high profile individual. An example was May Sandham in Chorley. In 1929 she and three Labour Party candidates had been elected to the council. However, in 1932 following the I.L.P. split and candidacies from the Chorley Unemployed Workers Rights Committee, whilst Sandham retained her position on the council, all the Labour Candidates were defeated. She fought on the council on a range of issues such as free milk, the means test and use of recreational facilities for the unemployed. However, in a minority, initially of one and later with a small amount of Labour Party support, she was frequently reduced to disruptionist tactics, and thus she gained a certain notoriety in the town. In 1933 she married another leading I.L.P.er Bob Edwards, who, stood as I.L.P. candidate in the 1935 General Election. In 1934, after Elijah Sandham, May's father, joined the I.S.P., Bob became the Lancashire Divisional Representative on the N.A.C.¹⁶⁹ In 1936 May was re-elected and a lasting pact was agreed with the Labour Party to avoid conflicting candidatures.¹⁷⁰

However, in Nelson, a traditional I.L.P. stronghold, the Party had a firmer basis in the union movement. At the time of disaffiliation the I.L.P., in terms of nominal membership was a dominant force within the Nelson Labour Party, which in turn held a majority on the council. Whilst the Nelson I.L.P. accepted the disaffiliation decision no councillors could be persuaded to follow this lead. This failure led the smaller party to decide that it would not contest municipal elections in the town.¹⁷¹ The Party was also marginalised within the dominant Nelson Weavers' Association. I.L.P.ers were removed from all official positions within the Nelson Weavers following their refusal to work for the Labour Party in the 1932 municipal elections.

These actions of the Labour Party and Weavers Association were considered by many to be extremely high handed and a Workers' Defence Group was established to assist the case of the dismissed I.L.P. weavers. Much of the support for the I.L.P. weavers came not from within Weavers Association but from the other workers in the town, primarily in the General and Municipal Workers' Union, who were disgruntled at the way in which the weavers dominated the Labour Party. Indeed only one of the Labour council members was not from the Weavers Association. He was Alderman Charles

Smithson, President of the General and Municipal Workers Union and a leading figure in the Workers' Defence Group.¹⁷²

The dispute between the G&MWU, the second largest workers organisation in Nelson, and the Weavers centred on the distribution of municipal work by the council. This was allocated to unemployed weavers as a distress measure. The G&MWU were clearly upset by this treatment of their work, as the union put it: 'No other group of workers' would be expected to share their work as a kind of distress measure.'¹⁷³ Carradice (the General Secretary of the G&MWU and Secretary of Nelson I.L.P) considered, but then decided against, stressing the opposition to the Weavers Association by running for the council. However, before the end of 1933 the relationship between the G&MWU and the Weavers further deteriorated after Smithson was passed over for the mayoralty. At a special meeting of the G&MWU the Weavers were accused of being 'A Hitler in Nelson' as the 'real test of a majority...is not how they deal with another big power but how they deal with minorities.' Smithson decided to leave the Labour Party and join the I.L.P. as a protest at his treatment by the larger organisation, making both the leading figures in Nelson G&MWU members of the I.L.P. This I.L.P. involvement in the G&MWU was particularly notable given that nationally it was the most anti-left of unions which had, from 1926 taken a strong line against the Communist Party and had no significant left faction at national level. The Labour Party responded to Smithson's new involvement with the I.L.P. by removed him from his post as chairman of the Electricity Committee.¹⁷⁴

Throughout the following year Smithson proposed a series of left wing measures calling for such things as restoration of unemployment cuts, reducing the hours of municipal workers without loss of pay and calling for the Government to raise the Old Age Pension. The Labour Party refused to support any of his proposals arguing that his sole purpose was to embarrass them. In March 1934 Smithson stood as an Independent Labour candidate in the County Council election with the support of the G&MWU without any approach to the Labour Party for endorsement or support. However, by towards the end of the year the situation began to move towards a resolution.¹⁷⁵ The Labour Party on the council began to take a less hostile approach to Smithson's motions and supported him for example in opposition to the Sedition Bill. However, the key to the resolution between the I.L.P. dominated leadership of the G&MWU and the Labour Party lay in the Nelson Anti-War movement. Both Smithson and Carradice were active

in the Nelson Anti-War movement which brought together the different sections of the Nelson Labour movement including the Labour Party, I.L.P. and Communist Party in opposition to the Government's rearmament plans.¹⁷⁶

The development of this new found unity on the left in Nelson was combined with further council decisions of which the I.L.P. wholeheartedly approved, such as the decision to oppose Jubilee celebrations and attack on the new UAB in 1935. Carradice moving towards reconciliation, stated that 'Nelson Town Council has a record for looking after the children of Nelson that could not be beaten in any party of the country.' Whilst tension persisted between the Nelson branch of the union and the local Labour Party, the wholesale opposition between the G&MWU and the Weavers was at an end.¹⁷⁷

At the end of 1934 Smithson decided to give up his position as Secretary of the G&MWU for health reasons. He was replaced by Carradice who was elected by a majority of 223-101 over one of the newly elected Labour Councillors. Smithson, who decided to stay on as a councillor was finally given the position of mayor at the end of 1935. Following his year as mayor Smithson decided not to stand for the council again and the I.L.P.'s connection with local electoral politics was ended. However, the party still remained active in the anti-war movement and within the unions and in 1939 the party was one of the moving forces in the creation of the local section of the No Conscription League.¹⁷⁸

The Lancashire division was weakened by disaffiliation. Then, internally split, but most of all opposed to the Party's 'new revolutionary policy', the Divisional Council broke away from the I.L.P. and formed the I.S.P., removing over half the division's membership. Although the I.L.P. managed to maintain influence in some areas such as Nelson and Chorley, the formation of the I.S.P. removed over half the divisional membership and seriously reduced the Party's role within the Lancashire working-class movement. Increasingly marginalised, and within continuing residual dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of the I.L.P.'s new policy attention began to focus on alternative courses of action. Inevitably it was the idea of re-affiliation to the Labour Party which obtained most support and by the end of the decade divisional opinion was firmly in favour of re-affiliation. However, the division's significance both within the working-class movement and within the I.L.P. was much lower than in 1932. By this time the

division was reduced to a shadow of even the organisation that had disaffiliated from the Labour Party.

3.9 East Anglia

The East Anglian I.L.P. had been one of the first to support disaffiliation. However, their reasons for supporting disaffiliation, based largely on local political considerations and the influence of literary critic John Middleton Murry, had little in common with the R.P.C. Thus, the Division quickly became a focus for anti-R.P.C. activity. Middleton Murry, established connections with the Lancashire Unity Group writing regularly in *Labour's Northern Voice* and used the magazine *Adelphi* to gain support for attacks on the United Front and the R.P.C.¹⁷⁹ Immediately following the adoption of the new revolutionary policy the Norwich branch, under Middleton Murry's influence ceased co-operation with the Communist Party and began working on an alternative manifesto, which stressed the use of constitutional means. Middleton Murry was enthusiastically supported by the divisional chairman George Johnson, also from the Norwich branch, who vacated the chair specifically to oppose the new policy of the party and to support the manifesto. As he later wrote:

We were sick of the wrangling with the C.I. and I am certain there is a real majority who are sick of our futile association with the C.P. and all that it entails.¹⁸⁰

A special divisional conference was called which revealed serious differences within the East Anglian I.L.P. over the Party's new revolutionary policy. The Yarmouth I.L.P. strongly supported the I.L.P.'s new policy and attempted to discipline those who acted against it. Further, the division's N.A.C. representative, Dorothy Jewson, was especially hostile to the activity of the Unity group and the effect it was having on the East Anglian division. She suggested that some good work was resulting out of united front work on specific occasions and singled out the work of Yarmouth I.L.P. with the N.U.W.M. for particular praise and described the hostility to the united front as 'largely that of influential individuals,' foremost amongst whom were Middleton Murry and George Johnson.¹⁸¹ The conference thus rejected the manifesto, but it also rejected co-operation with the Communist Party by an overwhelming vote of twenty to three. The I.L.P.'s new revolutionary policy based on Workers' Councils was also rejected and the N.A.C. report on the place of parliament was thrown out by the slim margin of nine votes to eight.¹⁸²

After the departure of both R.P.C. and Unity Group from the Party during 1934-5 the position within Norwich settled down to increasing support for the national policy of the Party. At the 1936 Divisional Conference George Johnson the Divisional Chairman launched a strong defence of I.L.P. policy which was reiterated at the 1937 and 1938 Divisional Conferences. However, by 1939 conflict between Norwich and Great Yarmouth had broken out again. Johnson and the Norwich Branch had changed, and recognising the difficulties of the National Party, persuaded the conference to vote for re-affiliation to the Labour Party. This was opposed by the leading members of the Yarmouth I.L.P. including Burgess and Stone. However, whilst there were significant policy differences between Yarmouth and Norwich I.L.P. this did not prevent the branches from working together. Neither did the internal disagreements within the division prevent the establishment of the I.L.P. as a significant force in municipal politics. Indeed, whilst the Party nationally was in decline the East Anglian Division managed to hold its position in terms of membership and raise its political profile in local politics. By the end of the Second World War the I.L.P. had five councillors in Great Yarmouth and a membership of over 900 in Norwich. Thus, over the decade the relative importance of the division for the I.L.P. nationally increased.

The membership of the division was dominated by the Norwich Branch. Norwich I.L.P. claimed that disaffiliation had only cost the branch a 'few paper members' and, despite local opposition to the 'new revolutionary policy', grew from 450 in 1932 to 560 in 1936. Indeed, following a membership drive and campaign at the end of 1934 membership of every branch in the division, except Ipswich, was increasing.¹⁸³ The financial position of the Norwich branch was excellent. By the end of 1937 the I.L.P. had wiped out the debt on their premises, the hall held 500 and had a large number of committee rooms largely used by Trade Unions, a club lounge and a bookshop. Membership in Norwich fell off somewhat to 400 in the immediate period before the Second World War. However, the branch experienced an 'influx of membership' at the outbreak of War and maintained its influence in the early post-war period with a peak in membership of 930 in 1947.

The Norwich I.L.P. was active across a range of different activities. In Municipal elections the I.L.P. secured a group of two in 1933 and had increased its representation to four by 1935, which was largely based in the Catton Ward where the Labour Party had no effective party machinery. The Party maintained two members on the Co-op

Board and four members on the Co-op education Committee.¹⁸⁴ The I.L.P. was also active in the local union movement. Although the Party came under attack within the G&MWU, with I.L.P. Councillor Alf Nicholls removed as one of the representatives of the Norwich Branch on the Trades Council in 1935 after instructions from the union's head office, it was able to raise its industrial profile by effectively supporting the local busmen.

In January 1936, without the support of Norwich Trades Council, the busmen went on unofficial strike which the company, under the advice of trade union leaders attempted to break by bringing in strike-breakers from Northampton.¹⁸⁵ A concerted campaign was launched by the I.L.P. and the busmen, organised from the I.L.P.'s Keir Hardie Hall, where the situation was explained to the Northampton men who then refused to break the strike. However, following what was described as intimidation from officials of the Transport and General Worker's Union the men decided to call off the action.¹⁸⁶

The activity of the Party in 1936 left the I.L.P. in an advantageous situation the following year during a second unofficial bus strike, which was again boycotted by the official elements of the Labour and Trades Union movement. The busmen again chose to use the I.L.P.'s headquarters as their central office and made extensive use of both local and national I.L.P. speakers in their cause with the culmination being a meeting at the end of April in the Market Place in Norwich where a crowd of 7,000 were addressed by Brockway, the I.L.P. Councillors and a number of the leaders of the strike.¹⁸⁷ During this period, these close connections between the I.L.P. and the busmen were an important part of George Johnson's arguments for the successes of I.L.P. policy.

Nevertheless, for the Norwich I.L.P. the main questions, driven by municipal and parliamentary election activity, surrounded the relations with the Labour Party. The initial, extremely hostile relations between the two organisations were short-lived. After 1933 the Labour Party was dependent on the I.L.P. for a majority on the Council and the I.L.P. group on the council attempted to develop a close working relationship with the elected representatives of the Labour Party. The local Labour Party was not opposed to such co-operation and moved a resolution to establish a permanent joint committee between the two groups on the council. However the idea was eventually crushed on the advice of the Labour Party's National Executive Committee.¹⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the two groups worked together closely and George Johnson spoke highly of the Norwich

Labour Party leadership. However, the small group was occasionally able to cause a stir as when in 1938 Johnson moved the suspension of standing orders to protest against a banquet given by the electricity committee.¹⁸⁹

Following the failures of the Labour Party and I.L.P. in Norwich in the 1935 General Election the I.L.P. attempted to reopen negotiations with the Labour Party for electoral agreements, concentrating on the Parliamentary seat. There was widespread agreement with this view from within the local working class movement. However, despite repeated approaches from the Norwich Labour Party and Norwich Trades Council to the Labour Party the N.E.C. maintained a decision that both seats were to be fought by official Labour candidates, making clear that any agreement, explicit or tacit with the I.L.P. would mean that no candidate would be endorsed for the city.¹⁹⁰ The only concession was the selection of ex-I.L.P. General Secretary John Paton as one of the parliamentary candidates for the division.

The East Anglian I.L.P. was not, however, confined to Norwich and the Party was able to build considerable strength and influence in Yarmouth during the second half of the 1930s. Membership of the party in Yarmouth was never great. Immediately following disaffiliation membership stood at fifty and paradoxically as influence increased membership fell so by 1936 the total membership of Yarmouth I.L.P. was a mere twenty-three. Membership did pick up somewhat at the outbreak of war but by 1941 it had fallen back to seventeen, the level at which it remained to 1950. However, despite the falling membership, through the war and beyond the number of influential positions which I.L.P.ers found themselves in continued to increase so that by 1950 the Yarmouth Party had five members on the council and three on the executive of the Trades Council.¹⁹¹

Prior to 1935, the acrimonious divisions in the Yarmouth Labour Movement had prevented electoral progress. However, the leftward tilt of the local DLP together with a Liberal/Conservative municipal pact in 1935 moved the I.L.P. and Labour Parties towards an electoral agreement.¹⁹² With this joint understanding in place, the I.L.P. was given a clear run by the Labour Party in two unsuccessful but promising fights in November 1936. By 1937 with the Unity Campaign in full swing there was close co-operation between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party.¹⁹³

In the 1937 municipal elections the I.L.P. made its first gain when L.F. Bunnewell gained a seat from the Conservatives, whilst the Labour Party gained its second council seat on the forty-eight strong council. Bunnewell received an enthusiastic reception at the I.L.P. club, he insisted that the result meant that the people of Yarmouth were condemning the old council and argued that Socialism would get rid of the 'old way of muddle'. The other I.L.P. candidate, Frank Stone, was defeated. He also had stressed the new unity between the two parties insisting that the increased vote for both Labour and the I.L.P. was an encouraging sign.¹⁹⁴ On Yarmouth Council, it was Bunnewell, as the most vocal of the three strong Labour-I.L.P. group who took the effective leadership of the organised opposition on the council.¹⁹⁵ The pact between I.L.P. and Labour continued through to the war enabling two further I.L.P. councillors to be elected, Frank Stone in South Ward and Mrs L. Gilham in St. Peters Wards.¹⁹⁶

However, the primary strength of the Yarmouth I.L.P. was in the Union and Co-operative Movements. By 1937 I.L.P.er Frank Stone was established as chairman and Mrs Gilham as secretary of the Yarmouth Trades Council. Party members occupied a number of other influential positions within the Yarmouth trade union movement, including the chairman of the General and Municipal Workers' Union, the single largest trade union in the town as well as chairman of the Shipwrights and Shipconstructors Union, Chairman of Boilermakers Union, secretary of the Public Employees Union and secretary of Tailors and Garment Workers Union. The I.L.P. also had a number of members on the Trades Council and was influential within the Trades Union Club and Institute where the Chairman and Secretary were both I.L.P.ers. The Secretary of the Yarmouth NCLC was an I.L.P.er as was the Secretary of the Adult School and the I.L.P. also had a member on the Yarmouth Co-operative Education Committee.¹⁹⁷

The East Anglian division, although internally divided, voted against the 'new revolutionary policy' in the immediate period after disaffiliation. However, the departure of rival R.P.C. and Unity Group factions combined with local growth and success to unify the division behind the N.A.C. It was only as national failings became increasingly apparent that the division moved to a position of support for re-affiliation. The East Anglian division was a relatively small division which became more significant within the party due to the declining fortunes of the I.L.P. elsewhere combined with success in developing a presence in particular localities. It is thus an interesting case of I.L.P. progress following disaffiliation.

3.10 Yorkshire

Prior to disaffiliation the Yorkshire division was heavily influenced by its dominant Bradford federation.¹⁹⁸ However, Bradford was badly hit by disaffiliation, losing about half its membership, whilst other branches in the division were not as seriously affected.¹⁹⁹ The loss of many older members, such as John Fraser, the divisional organiser, disillusioned by the Party's United Front with the Communist Party was, largely offset by the recruitment of new members.²⁰⁰ In particular the Sheffield branch, despite losing a large number of members immediately following disaffiliation, was quickly able to regain its previous size.²⁰¹ More significant was the fact that these new Sheffield members, led by R.P.C. member Stuart Friedenson, were young, active, and distinctly 'left'; the Sheffield Guild of Youth alone claimed 40 members in February 1933.²⁰²

In 1933 the Sheffield Branch managed to persuade the divisional conference to pass resolutions calling for the formation of militant workers groups in the wider Trade Union movement.²⁰³ The following year there was a vigorous debate between Bradford and Sheffield members over the new party policy, where the Bradford members succeeded in passing a 'pre-1932' policy document which did 'not relegate Parliament to the background.'²⁰⁴ The conflict between older and younger members, between Bradford and Sheffield, continued through 1935. Sheffield objected to the overwhelming voting power of Bradford at divisional conferences, Bradford complained about R.P.C. and 'group activity' within the Party. However, during 1934-5 the R.P.C. lost much influence in the Yorkshire division. In part this was because of the failures of the R.P.C. nationally. However, the failures of the R.P.C. within the Sheffield branch were a more important cause. The Sheffield branch leadership including Freidenson made a number of false accusations against one of its members, N.A.C. representative, Percy Williams. The resulting high profile dispute which took six months of 1934 to resolve, led to the accusations being withdrawn, the branch leadership resigning and the branch being split into four area groups.²⁰⁵ The way was left open for the Bradford branches to commit the division to the cessation of group activities at the division's 1935 conference.²⁰⁶

Through the second half of the 1930s the Yorkshire Divisional Conference continued to be sharply divided. Having seen off the influence of the R.P.C. Bradford's dominance in divisional policy making, which stressed parliamentary and electoral socialism, came

under threat from a Trotskyist influence in areas such as Sheffield and Dewsbury. Thus, at the 1936 conference the influence of Trotskyists, most notably J. Goffe, within the Sheffield branch ensured that a number of motions were passed which were designed to protect the position of Trotskyists within party. Most notable was an amendment which declared that groups, in themselves, were not harmful. However, Sheffield also succeeded in passing its detailed plan of action and a criticism of the inner executives declaration on war. However, Bradford, along with other branches such as Hull which broadly supported the N.A.C. position, could still wield power within the division. Thus, Bradford blocked Sheffield's attempts to amend the immediate demands of the Party. Bradford was also able to ensure that motions more in line with its political priorities were passed, for example, with its plans to have the N.A.C. investigate the possibility of Regionalism in Local Government.²⁰⁷

The I.L.P.'s main area of strength in Yorkshire, especially if measured in electoral terms remained in Bradford. The I.L.P. maintained an electoral presence in a number of wards in East Bradford, especially in the Tong and East Bowling wards. The Party's relationship with the Labour Party, largely dictated by electoral concerns and council business, at a low after disaffiliation, improved briefly before souring again with the opposition between the two parties in East Bradford during the 1935 General Election. In 1938 the Labour Party began opposing the I.L.P. in its East Bradford strongholds.²⁰⁸ The politics of the Bradford branches were heavily influenced by the character of Fred Jowett, the emphasis he placed on electoral politics and the continuing importance of Standing Orders in justifying continued severance from the Labour Party. However, despite the overwhelming sympathy which Jowett seemed to be able to generate within the Bradford I.L.P., there were nevertheless important dissenting voices from this policy. This was most significant within the Bradford Guild of Youth where the chair was held first by Horace Green, at the time sympathetic to the Communist Party, later C.P. North East Organiser, and then Evelyn Hurp, a Trotskyist and member of the Marxist Group.

Elsewhere in the division the I.L.P. maintained an electoral presence, in Bentley, Darfield, Keighley and South Hemsworth.²⁰⁹ However, despite the difficulties in the area it was in Sheffield that I.L.P. managed to maintain its highest profile outside Bradford. In particular it sustained a significant degree of activity, especially in agitation amongst the unemployed. In Sheffield, at the beginning of 1935, when the

Labour controlled council refused to meet a deputation from the unemployed there was a determined protest from the unemployed organised by the N.U.W.M., I.L.P. and C.P. with the leaders of the Yorkshire I.L.P. at the fore of the demonstration. Percy Williams led the demonstration at which twenty-three were arrested. Of those arrested all were released on bail apart from the I.L.P.'s Sheffield Organiser and R.P.C. member, Stuart Friedenson, who was singled out as a ring-leader. Following the demonstration the council agreed to restore the cuts, although they denied the decision had been influenced by the demonstration.²¹⁰ Nevertheless, the confidence of the demonstrators in Sheffield was increased, and the I.L.P. was involved in the organisation of further demonstrations in the city.²¹¹ At the same time in Sheffield, the I.L.P. had some success recruiting for the trade unions and the General and Municipal Workers Union in particular.²¹²

The Yorkshire division's membership was concentrated in Bradford. Yet, Bradford's strength was mainly based on its pre-disaffiliation position. In the period 1932-3 other areas, most notably Sheffield, were growing while Bradford was losing members. The differing perspectives of Bradford and Sheffield led to substantial conflicts throughout the early years after disaffiliation. However, the internal conflicts within the pro-RPC Sheffield branch followed by the R.P.C.'s decision to join the Communist Party, led to a shift in power back towards the Bradford federation. Although it faced challenges over the second half of the 1930s, Bradford succeeded in again incorporating its pro-parliamentary, anti-group perspective into the division's policy.

3.11 Midlands

In the immediate period after disaffiliation parts of the Midland I.L.P. were associated with the R.P.C. This came from two connected sources. First, the division was influenced by Eric Whalley, the Chairman of the Mansfield branch and leading member of the Comintern Affiliation Committee. Second, support for the R.P.C. came from the Midlands division Guild of Youth, which was both left-wing and highly active.²¹³ By 1934, this section had gained significant influence on the Midlands Divisional Council. The result was that the Divisional Council came to an agreement with the district organisation of the Communist Party. The scope of the deal was much wider than required by the national I.L.P. line, including joint work within the trade unions and factories.²¹⁴

During the latter half of the 1930s, after Whalley and the R.P.C. had joined the Communist Party, the political orientation of the Midlands Division became based on loyalty to the N.A.C. position. At the 1936 Divisional conference the N.A.C.'s basic resolutions were all adopted, the only dissent coming over the question of sanctions against Italy, where the division supported Brockway's line. During the final two years of the decade this line of broad support for the party leadership was combined with an increasing level of pressure for reaffiliation to the Labour Party. In 1938 the Derby I.L.P., which had itself attempted locally to negotiate to rejoin the larger organisation, put a motion to the divisional conference. These initial moves towards rejoining Labour were strongly opposed from the rest of the division and the motion was heavily defeated. The following year amid strong opposition to the popular front being pressed by the Communist Party and opposed by the Labour Party, a Nottingham Branch resolution for conditional affiliation was carried.²¹⁵

The main area of I.L.P. activity in the Midlands was Derby where the I.L.P. had initially been able to retain three Councillors. The I.L.P. group on the council attempted to improve the representation and hearing given to working class organisations, and the unemployed in particular, but the town council refused to listen to the small I.L.P. voice.²¹⁶ However, the real influence of the I.L.P. in Derby came through its work on the Trades Council. Five of the sixteen officials of that Council were definitely members of the I.L.P. and the numbers may have been higher. The vice-president of the Trades Council, Harry Cheshire, the district secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union, and the assistant secretary of the Council, J. F. Rushton of the National Union of Clerks and Administrative Workers Union were members of the I.L.P. Some Labour loyalists were extremely fearful that the Council had been captured by the I.L.P. Whilst such suggestions were exaggerated there was undoubtedly a strong left wing influence on the Trades Council which amongst other policies supported the Hunger Marches, vigorously opposed the means test and other government measures concerning unemployment and condemned collaboration with non-labour-movement personalities. It was the I.L.P., and not the Communist Party, which was the primary mover of such radicalism.²¹⁷

Aside from the Trades Council the Party was particularly influential in the Derby Co-operative Society, the second largest in the East Midlands. I.L.P. influence in the Co-operative grew over the decade and reached its high point after May 1938. In May, as a

result of agitation by ex-I.L.P. councillor Goodwin England's NUDAW branch, the society began electing two employee-directors, and England was elected as one of the two. In addition, Alf Robinson, an I.L.P. member who had been on the board for some years was top of the poll in the ordinary directors election. The results meant that there were three I.L.P. members who were directors of Derby Co-operative Society.²¹⁸

The Derby I.L.P.'s stress through the latter part of the decade was on rebuilding relations with the Labour Party. In 1936 the smaller Party 'refrain[ed] from putting up an I.L.P. candidate in order to secure a working class victory' when J.H. Thomas resigned the parliamentary seat.²¹⁹ However, by the end of the decade the position of the I.L.P. within the Derby Labour Movement was on the wane. In part this was due to the loss of some of the organisation's most influential members, in particular Harry Cheshire, who died from pneumonia.²²⁰ However, other much more systematic reasons played the most important part in the explanation of the decline of the I.L.P. in Derby. First of all whilst the I.L.P. was looking to move towards closer connections with the local Labour Party, the larger organisation was increasingly prepared to use its power against the I.L.P. to ease it away from influential positions. Thus in the lead up to the 1938 municipal elections, the I.L.P. had nominated three candidates. However, as an unreciprocated gesture of unity the party withdrew two of them and tried to open negotiations with the Labour Party. The Labour Party, following N.E.C. advice refused to come to an agreement. The I.L.P. was thus left with its one candidate, John Gill, treasurer of Derby I.L.P., in the Normanton Ward where he had lived since 1916.²²¹ Nevertheless he was heavily defeated coming third and bottom of the poll well behind his victorious Labour opponent. The I.L.P. on the council was thus reduced in the second half of the decade to a single Councillor Tom Markland. As the Labour Party consolidated its majority on the Town Council less room was left for I.L.P. manoeuvre. At the same time the Communist Party began to establish itself more effectively in the town's major industries and the Communist Party influence in Derby rose to equal that of the I.L.P. by the outbreak of war.²²²

Elsewhere in the Midlands Division the I.L.P. could only muster limited influence, presumably based on local personalities. Its only other electoral successes were in Donisthorpe and Alfreton. In Donisthorpe the I.L.P. won a single seat in 1934. In Alfreton the I.L.P. was able to increase its representation from one to two in April 1938 when Fred Lee was elected against Labour opposition. The I.L.P.'s retiring councillor,

was forced to defend his position as his campaign was hampered by an extended struggle with the religious organisations as he stood for Sunday facilities for recreation. Nevertheless, he won comfortably topping the poll with 1,079 votes.²²³ The following year the electoral agreement between the I.L.P and the Labour Party was restored, and Joe Kitts, the I.L.P. candidate, topped the poll with 1009 votes.²²⁴ In other traditional areas of strength in the Midlands the party was crippled by disaffiliation, as in Leicester where the decision removed 600 of the branch's 700 members.²²⁵

The Midland's Division was initially one of the most enthusiastic about the United Front with the Communist Party. Experience of the United Front in practice along with the adoption by the C.P. of Popular Front policies tempered the desire to work with the Communists. These difficulties were combined, especially in Derby with dwindling influence, as the I.L.P. was forced to combat the Labour Party. These factors combined together to swing Divisional opinion in favour of re-affiliation to the Labour Party. Nevertheless, largely through the position of a few influential individuals the I.L.P. was able to maintain a high profile in some parts of the Midlands during the 1930s.

3.12 South Wales

The policy of the Welsh Division evolved as a response to a series of crises and booms in activity and membership through the decade. The Division had been badly affected by disaffiliation. Before disaffiliation the main strength of the Welsh Division had come from Cardiff and Mid-Glamorgan.²²⁶ However, following the 1932 decision the situation in mid-Glamorgan was depressing for the I.L.P.²²⁷ Whilst the main branches from the Cardiff area reported back to the I.L.P. enthusiastically about their support for the Bradford decision, they found it difficult to maintain their activities.²²⁸ Almost the only bright spot for the Party was in Merthyr where the branch achieved a 'fifty percent increase in activity' in the immediate period after disaffiliation.²²⁹

The division initially made a firm stand against the new revolutionary policy of the party and strongly backed the *Socialism in Our Time Policy* at its 1933 Derby conference.²³⁰ When the 'revolutionary' policy was passed it was received badly in Wales, especially as it involved a commitment to work with the Communist Party. The Divisional Council drifted towards inactivity and by the annual conference the

following year had virtually ceased to operate.²³¹ Investigations by the N.A.C. led to the conclusion that it was necessary to reconstruct the divisional machinery completely.²³²

This reconstruction of the central Welsh machinery was complete by August 1934 and the N.A.C. reporters suggested a renewed enthusiasm and efficiency could be detected in the Division.²³³ To consolidate, the Party conducted a ten day campaign across the division with meetings involving all the parties major speakers and meetings in every major city in industrial South Wales.²³⁴ They struggled with a few contacts to try and build up branches in Swansea, Taibach and Barry. In the Cardiff area there was a reliance on a small number of members almost all of whom were unemployed. In the Rhondda area the I.L.P. could only claim one branch, Treorchy, and even that was not functioning. Only in Merthyr could the I.L.P. claim real strength.²³⁵

However, from this weak base the membership drive did see something of a turn around in the fortunes in the Welsh Division. Membership, measured by affiliation fees had risen substantially by the 1935 conference. The debates at that conference reflected the new levels of enthusiasm. The Welsh I.L.P. struck out a position of fierce independence maintaining hostility to working with the Communist Party and equally to any pact with the Labour Party.²³⁶ The stand of the division, especially against working with the Communist Party, was not in line with the new revolutionary policy of the party and at a subsequent divisional conference later in 1935 the R.P.C. leader, Jack Gaster, was sent to Wales as the N.A.C representative. Gaster used the opportunity of his visit to attack the Division for opposing both the national policy of the party and for refusing to work with the Communist Party.²³⁷

Gaster's attacks on the Welsh Division were not heeded. Their impact was no doubt weakened when he joined the Communist Party in November. The Division remained committed to working separately from the C.P., with a particular focus on establishing an industrial profile. Thus, in 1935 an industrial policy was formulated centred on a 'rejection of class collaboration.'²³⁸ The debate at divisional conference the following year focussed on the stay in strikes in the mining industry and calls for the reorganisation of MFGB. This was supplemented with strong demands for control of the unions to be in the hands of the rank and file.²³⁹

With the increase in Welsh radicalism through the second half of 1936 the party's partial recovery in Wales continued. For example, the twenty I.L.P.ers who participated in the 1936 Welsh Hunger March were joined by many more party members along the route who assisted with the march. The I.L.P. was also involved with the action against Industrial Unionism in South Wales, in particular in the famous Nine-Mile Point stay down strike, where I.L.P. leader Jack Marsden, as chairman of the Nine-Mile point lodge was instrumental in both floating the idea of a stay-down strike to the SWMF and in organisation of the strike.²⁴⁰ By the Welsh Division's January 1937 conference, affiliation fees were up a further twenty per cent, where the Welsh Party welcomed the unity proposal agreed to by the Socialist League, the Communist Party and the I.L.P. called for the setting up of a South Wales Unity Committee.²⁴¹ However, the boom in the Welsh I.L.P.'s fortunes was short-lived.

The I.L.P. was marginalised from the growing 'unity' in Wales almost as soon as the increasing radicalism developed. The Unity Campaign was over almost before it started, Marsden's attempts to capitalise on his position in the stay down strikes failed and in the wake of the events in Barcelona in May 1937 relations between the C.P. and the I.L.P. hit new lows. The Party became engaged in long and acrimonious debate with the SWMF over the Bedwas agreement. The I.L.P. accused the SWMF, with the assistance of the Communist Party, of allowing the 'right' to gain the upper hand and accepting a no strike agreement. Will Paynter's reply on behalf of the SWMF Executive Committee, suggested that the I.L.P. position was 'nothing more than unwarranted slander'. However, criticism of Trade union bureaucracy moving 'towards collaboration with the employing class and repressing the fighting spirit of the rank and file' was not restricted to the miners, with the T&GWU also coming in for strong criticism.²⁴² The impact on I.L.P. membership was dramatic, affiliation fees fell by forty per cent in the first half of 1937 and had been reduced from that level a further fifty per cent by mid-way through the following year.²⁴³

The rapid decline in divisional fortunes saw new moves to re-affiliate to the Labour Party. However, the division as a whole was of the view that 'I.L.P. provided the rallying ground for Socialists who were disillusioned with the policies of the Labour Party and the C.P. and would be the standby of the workers when the wider movement failed them.'²⁴⁴ The following year, as many of those who had advocated re-affiliation had rejoined the Labour Party as individuals, discussion again centred on the Labour

Party. However, the Division was now united on the issue. It adopted without opposition a resolution that although endorsing the principle of working class unity insisted that the I.L.P. 'must retain its identity and freedom of expression, that recruits must accept the policy of the Party and that strict discipline must be enjoined on all members.'²⁴⁵

Thus, the position of the I.L.P. across South Wales was, by the later years of the 1930s, significantly weakened.²⁴⁶ However, there were areas where the I.L.P. could maintain sufficient strength not only to hold meetings and recruit but also to hold positions of influence and win electoral struggles. In some such areas, for example Newport, this appears to be largely due to the influence of a single individual.²⁴⁷ Elsewhere, as in Machen, where by the end of the decade the I.L.P.'s two councillors held the balance of power on the UDC, the party's influence was somewhat more durable.²⁴⁸

However, the main area of strength for the Welsh I.L.P. throughout the 1930s was Merthyr. In the immediate period after disaffiliation the party had managed to secure a small group on the town council and they were normally supported by a further independent socialist councillor, Dai Protheroe, who had initially disaffiliated with the I.L.P. Undismayed by the relative failure of the 1934 by-election and buoyed by the reasonable result in the 1935 general election and their continuing success in the Plymouth Ward on the council, the Merthyr I.L.P. continued to fight with some effectiveness against the Labour Party especially in the Penydarren ward long after the I.L.P. in many other areas of Britain had adopted a policy of conciliation towards the larger organisation.²⁴⁹

Despite this failure to increase representation the I.L.P. did maintain its three councillors, Jim Davies, B.H. Davies and Claude Stanfield, who was also the I.L.P. Merthyr General Election candidate in 1935, throughout the period. Once established the group played an increasing role in Merthyr politics. By 1938 the I.L.P. group in the Town Council was able to take the lead in pressure to get increased unemployment allowances. They put forward a number of motions supported by Sam Jennings, a disillusioned senior Labour figure, and secured discussion on a motion examining proposed changes to deduction from the allowances.²⁵⁰ By May 1938 Jim Davies had served on the council long enough to become mayor making him the first mayor in Britain to have been elected as a disaffiliated I.L.P.er.

Davies did not treat his position as mayor in an overly political manner but nevertheless took the initiative in calling a meeting to promote renewed action in Merthyr against the means test. The resulting meeting, later described in the *New Leader* as 'the largest and most militant held in Merthyr for years,' had an all in platform with representatives from Miners' Federation, the Trades Council the I.L.P., the C.P., the Co-operative Society, the Free Church Council and even the Federated Chamber of Trades, in addition to the Mayor and the MP, S.O. Davies. However, at least according to the I.L.P. press, the greatest enthusiasm on the day was reserved for the most popular of the I.L.P.ers Claude Stanfield who as he rose to speak was initially unable to speak for several minutes due to the cheering.²⁵¹

However, the disagreements between the I.L.P. and the Communists which affected the rest of the country also had an impact in Merthyr, deadening attempts at united action and causing public controversy. Bad feeling developed during the opposition of Communist and I.L.P. candidates in the 1934 by-election and the attempts of the Communist Party to use the all-party N.U.W.M. in support of Hannington, which saw some of the younger I.L.P. members join the C.P.²⁵² Later, following the disputes over the Spanish Civil War, relations deteriorated further although the I.L.P. could still command considerable sympathy in Merthyr. For example in July 1938 a protest against the means test was organised by the Trades and Labour Council. One section was led by the most prominent I.L.P.ers, but Stanfield was only allowed to speak after protests from the crowd. The official Labour and Communist representatives both accused the I.L.P. of destroying the unity of the march and did so with considerable aggression in the case of the *Daily Worker*. Horner himself accused the crowd of terrorism and of being 'a sample of Trotskyism', however, from the I.L.P. perspective it was not they who had destroyed the unity of the march it was the organisers who sought to exclude the I.L.P.²⁵³

It was the cry of the people for workers' unity that led the crowd to demand that Stanfield the foremost fighter or the unemployed in Merthyr should not be excluded from the platform.²⁵⁴

Nevertheless, within Merthyr itself the I.L.P. appeared to maintain its level of influence and the three I.L.P. councillors remained in place until the war.²⁵⁵

The images of South Wales in the 1930s conventionally depict radicalism, with an emphasis on the hunger marches, stay down strikes, unemployed demonstrations and

miners acting against fascism. Those who created this history of the 1930s in Wales are conventionally understood to have been in the Communist Party or on the left of the Labour Party. This is both because they organised the events and, as importantly, because it has been Communists and Communist sympathisers who have written most prolifically about such events. A study of the Welsh I.L.P. in the 1930s provides an interesting insight into the realities of left wing politics in South Wales in a period which is often characterised as one of unity. The I.L.P. maintained some areas of strength in the area through the period and saw itself clearly as part of the militant left, but deteriorating relations with the Communists and factional fighting set in almost as soon as any semblance of left unity could be established. Popular Front unity had clear limits, and by the second half of 1937, the I.L.P. to its cost stood without these boundaries.

3.13 North East

In the immediate period after disaffiliation the North East division, especially those branches on the East coast were deeply concerned about the Party's new revolutionary policy, the role of the R.P.C. and the relationship with the Communist Party. The executive of the Divisional Council, led by Mark Simpson²⁵⁶ voted decisively against the I.L.P. position with regard to the Communist Party and wrote to the N.A.C. requesting a discontinuance of all association with that Party.²⁵⁷ However, the North East's Divisional Council disagreed with the actions of its Executive and in this they were backed by N.A.C. representative Tom Stephenson who frequently voted with the R.P.C. on the N.A.C. The issue was taken to a special divisional conference held at the end of October 1933. The meeting supported Stephenson and the Divisional Council in voting overwhelmingly for a continuation of the United Front, in favour of Workers' Councils and for the N.A.C.'s 'place of parliament' report.²⁵⁸ However, the feelings against working with the Communist Party remained, especially amongst the east coast branches. At the Divisional Conference in early 1935 the Gateshead and Sunderland branches succeeded in passing a motion to discontinue joint activity with the C.P. despite opposition from the Cumberland area.²⁵⁹

The 1935 General Election changed the outlook of the division. Defeat in Whitehaven had the effect of convincing Tom Stephenson, that there was little future in I.L.P. electoral contests and moving him towards supporting reaffiliation.²⁶⁰ In 1936

Ashington successfully argued for moves to unify all competing organisations dealing with unemployment, sickness, accident and old age. In the subsequent years the division concentrated on issues such as 'the evils of overtime work' and 'the necessary first steps of social government'. The only hints of later events, when the Division came to be dominated by Trotskyists, came from the newly formed Durham Branch, which did try to push a Trotskyist position but were heavily defeated in 1936 in their attempts to retain organised groups within the party and to push the formation of the Fourth International.²⁶¹ However, the relative divisional consensus of the mid-1930s began to show significant cracks in 1939 over the question of Munich which dominated the conference that year. Steve Wilson in his presidential address strongly supported Maxton's position, arguing, against the mood of many at the conference, that his speech was 'good Socialism.'²⁶²

The North East division, which had been heavily dependent on Yorkshire divisional organisation prior to 1932, was relatively badly affected by disaffiliation, losing thirteen branches and failing to form any replacements. Membership was further cut with the loss of six more branches in the immediate period after disaffiliation during the period of co-operation with the Communist Party, those who opposed such activity claiming membership had been cut in half. However, there was also a considerable refocusing of the strength within the division, with Cumberland playing an increasingly active role. Partly as a result of this renewed activity in Cumberland the Party in the North East was able to grow in the period 1934-6. The growth was particularly rapid during 1934-5 when the North East was the fastest growing area in the country with affiliation fees rising twenty five per cent over the year.²⁶³

The party kept a presence on the East Coast. Gateshead, under the leadership of Fred Tait, remained the strongest branch in the North East following disaffiliation, claiming about 100 members, despite an initial decision to maintain affiliation to the Labour Party.²⁶⁴ The Gateshead branch was active not only in anti-fascist activity and working with the Socialist League, but also in developing its educational role, opening a branch library and in setting up the Gateshead Esperanto society.²⁶⁵ The I.L.P. also maintained a reasonable branch in Ashington and also a branch of about 90 members, centred on a Socialist Café, in Newcastle East, where the disaffiliation decision had been relatively uncontroversial.²⁶⁶ In South Bank on Teeside by 1937 the I.L.P. had five councillors on Eston UDC, two councillors on North Riding County Council, an AEU branch

secretary, and chairman of the PAC amongst their members.²⁶⁷ In Jarrow, the I.L.P., although without any effective organisation in the early years after disaffiliation, had by 1937 managed to secure the election of two councillors.²⁶⁸ The I.L.P. also had some strength in Stockton, Sunderland where they were active in agitating for pensioners, and Rowlands Gill.²⁶⁹

However, following disaffiliation Cumberland, and the West Coast, came to play a much increased role in the North East division. I.L.P.ers achieved posts on the County Council, on Moresby RDC and on the Cleator Moor Co-op Committee of Management in October 1936.²⁷⁰ However, as significant was the leadership role which Tom Stephenson, a prominent member of the Cumberland Miners' Association, and the I.L.P. was able to assume within the wider Labour movement. For example in November 1936, on the first day of operation of the new UAB scales, the I.L.P. took a leading role in the demonstrations. The demonstrations were organised by the West Cumberland Workers Unity Committee.²⁷¹ The march involved approximately two thousand workers from Frizington, Cleator Moor, Cleator, Parton, Egremont and Kells who joined the workers of Whitehaven in protest. The demonstration culminated in a meeting which sent one member from each contingent went on a deputation to the UAB officer with Tom Stephenson as the acknowledged speaker for the entire deputation.²⁷² Following the demonstration the Cumberland PAC decided to pay the arrears of benefit owing to the unemployed.²⁷³ Stephenson was also an integral part, with Comrades Cole and G. Garvil, the Cumberland I.L.P. federation secretary, of the I.L.P. dominated deputation to the council that succeeded in getting feeding for schoolchildren in Whitehaven.²⁷⁴

During the 1930s the I.L.P. maintained a significant presence in the North East despite being badly hit by disaffiliation on the East coast. Most of the I.L.P.'s strength built on the position established in Cumberland under the leadership of Tom Stephenson. Despite disagreements over the effectiveness of working with the Communist Party the North East Division was relatively unaffected by factional conflict during the 1930s. This allowed other areas of strength, such as South Bank, to be established. This proved possible even where, as in Jarrow, there was no post-disaffiliation organisation to build upon. However, disillusionment following the 1935 General Election led the division to increasingly serious consideration of re-affiliation.

3.14 South West

The South West Division of the Party found itself in a difficult position following disaffiliation. The division had significant strength in only a few places, most importantly in Bristol, but the division covered a huge area. With only limited income it was virtually impossible for the Divisional organiser to keep in touch with branches. The problems were especially acute in Cornwall where poverty was widespread, and some branches were 200 miles away from the divisional centre in Bristol.²⁷⁵

In policy terms the dominant Bristol branch managed to pass a resolution opposing the emphasis on workers' councils in the new party policy in 1934. However, following disaffiliation the divisional secretary, Robert Rawlings of Taunton, was an active member of the R.P.C. and his influence went some way to explaining the prominence of support for the Communist Party within the division.²⁷⁶ In early 1935, Bristol branch only narrowly managed to block a move from Clutton calling for a Unity Conference with the Communist Party. With this success for Bristol, and with the departure of the R.P.C. nationally later that year, the views of Bristol became increasingly ascendant within the division.²⁷⁷ Later in the decade, the South West division was largely happy to reiterate the basic policy resolutions suggested by the N.A.C.²⁷⁸

In Bristol the I.L.P. was boosted initially by the defection of a significant number of Labour members to the I.L.P. following disaffiliation.²⁷⁹ The Party maintained two seats on the council with Comrade Scull re-elected in 1935 and Fred Berriman the following year, in an election which saw an electoral agreement between Labour and the I.L.P. which lasted through the 1936 Municipal elections and allowed the I.L.P. to claim its part in the fifteen Bristol Labour gains that year.²⁸⁰ Following the election the Labour Party had a majority on the City Council and it chose to further the extent of the co-operation between the two organisations by asking Berriman to co-operate in administration, without any restriction on his right to speak or vote. Thus he was appointed Chairman of the Small Holdings and Allotments Committee and Vice Chairman of the Mental Hospital and Printing Committees.²⁸¹ Some tensions remained within the Bristol Labour Movement, for example, in August 1937 the Bristol Amalgamated Union of Building Trade Workers refused to allow I.L.P.ers to take office in the branch.²⁸² Nevertheless, it was clear that the Bristol I.L.P. saw its future as working with the Labour Party.

Outside Bristol, the Party in the South West was relatively weak. There was some revival of interest in the I.L.P. in Cornwall where Fred Berriman and Wilfred Young organised a relatively successful campaign in 1934 involving amongst others John McGovern and Kate Spurell.²⁸³ Meetings were held in Truro where the I.L.P. claimed that it was they who organised the unemployed, Delabole, Redruth, Camborne, Pensance and Camelford. The I.L.P. managed to establish a new branch in Redruth and make some contacts in Camelford where the I.L.P. had never even held a meeting before.²⁸⁴ Affiliation fees over the year to 1935 rose about nine per cent.²⁸⁵ However the base of support for the party in the division remained very low, in Camborne, where hopes prior to 1935 had been hopeful of electoral prospects, the branch was reduced to twelve, mostly unemployed, members.²⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the I.L.P. candidates Jack and Arthur Behenna gained two council seats in Truro in 1936-7 despite there being no prior tradition of I.L.P. electoral success.²⁸⁷

The I.L.P. in the South West faced an uphill struggle, a small membership spread over a huge area made organisation difficult, and the Division initially faced divisions along factional lines. Consolidation saw an increased role for the dominant Bristol branches and their policy of support for the N.A.C. accepted as divisional policy. Nevertheless, electoral victories elsewhere demonstrated that despite its weaknesses and isolation in the South West the I.L.P. could develop something of a local profile.

3.15 Conclusion

During the 1930s the I.L.P. was extremely active at local level. Members maintained a vibrant cultural life which, in areas such as rambling and cycling, saw the Party binding together the social with the political. This aspect of the I.L.P.'s activity was one reason why in some areas ~~it~~ was able to sustain high levels of membership and activity through the traumatic period of disaffiliation from the Labour Party. However, local electoral politics, another area of traditional I.L.P. influence, was particularly badly affected by disaffiliation. The overwhelming majority of the Party's elected representatives chose to remain with the Labour Party in 1932, even in areas where the rest of the I.L.P. was solidly behind disaffiliation. Thus, with the exception of Glasgow, if the I.L.P. was to succeed in local electoral politics during the 1930s it had to build up from scratch. In most places the demands of such a task were too great, but in a few places such as Barrhead, Bradford, South Bank, Norwich, Yarmouth, Welwyn Garden City and Merthyr the Party did secure a number of councillors.

As the policy of the party changed and became less focussed on electoral politics, the focus of local activity also shifted somewhat. Other arenas were found for I.L.P. activity; the N.U.W.M., or other unemployment associations, Hunger March committees, the Trade Unions, Trades Council and clubs, anti-fascist and anti-war organisations all had important I.L.P. influences in many places. The overall picture shows considerable diversity and local Party organisations showed considerable ingenuity in finding differing ways of expressing their political identity. Yet some general patterns can be detected. Where the I.L.P. flourished it was either because there was a significant remnant of organisational structure and membership from pre-disaffiliation days, or it was because there was a niche available for the party to exploit- electoral, conceptual or organisational. The Party's greatest successes came where these factors overlapped, as in Norwich, where there were remnants of a strong past, a long established I.L.P. club, rooms and electoral tradition. This was combined with organisational, conceptual and electoral niches- there was no Labour Party Catton Ward organisation, and the Labour Party refused to help with the frequent unofficial industrial disputes in the City. The Labour Party also made relatively few moves against the I.L.P. in Norwich, allowing the favourable situation to persist. Thus, remnants and niches gave an opportunity for the I.L.P. to develop a local political profile. They are central to an understanding of the successes of the I.L.P. during the 1930s. However, particularly as the emphasis moves to Parliamentary elections and national politics, these concepts also help explain the relative failures of the I.L.P. during the decade.

¹ Thompson, 1960, 277

² See for example Howell, 1983, vii and 129-282

³ Thompson, 1960, 315

⁴ Howell, 1983, 327

⁵ Winter, 1993, 366

⁶ *New Leader*, 18 August 1933

⁷ See for example *New Leader*, August 26 1932

⁸ *New Leader*, January 11 1935

⁹ *New Leader*, May 31 1935

¹⁰ *New Leader*, January 19 1934

¹¹ For example see the I.L.P. Guild of Youth one of the organisations signed up so members could receive free NCLC courses in 1932-4 . *New Leader*, February 2 1934

¹² Through 1935 much of the *New Leader* was given over to his detailed articles on working-class history and later to political theory. He also sought to transform the 'summer schools'- both local and national- to make them less like political meetings and more like actual schools.

¹³ C.B. Hawkins, *Norwich: A Social Survey*, p 302 cited in Thwaites, 1976, 220

¹⁴ Elsewhere the party's buildings were also important, the vibrant South Bank branch put considerable efforts in raising the money to buy premises for social and political function, eventually succeeding in early 1937. (Robson to Francis Johnson, February 1 1937, BLPES/I.L.P./Francis Johnson Correspondence 1937) Similarly in 1932 Lochgelly I.L.P. opened their new hall with a social and a dance. *New Leader*, September 9 1932

¹⁵ *Nelson Leader*, February 2 1934; August 3 1934; March 22 1934

¹⁶ For an account of the Clarion House to 1987 see Iveson and Brown, 1987

¹⁷ *New Leader*, June 25 1937 The Glasgow party also attempted to organise cyclist in defence of their rights on the roads. *New Leader*, January 28 1938

¹⁸ For examples see Guild Sports camp *New Leader*, September 9 1932 and Midlands Guild camp involving rambling, tennis and other outdoor sports *New Leader*, May 10 1935

¹⁹ For example in 1932 Leicester I.L.P. visited Whipsnade Zoo for its annual outing *New Leader*, July 15 1932

²⁰ Attendance on the Sludge boat trips varied during the 1930s, normally over 100 members went with the height of 151 on 4 July 1938 but once, in 1937, ticket sales only reached 36. Bridgeton Branch Social Committee Cash Book. Mitchell Library, Glasgow G329.9 SR281TOC For oral testimony as to the importance of the Sludge Boat outings see John Lochore in Macdougall, 1991, 316

²¹ On Soviet films see for example May Edwards to Bob Edwards, February 10 (1937?) NMLH/Bob Edwards Papers/Box 5 for regular theatre trips see regular notes on Branch activity in the *New Leader*. For a more complete breakdown of the I.L.P.'s social side in Glasgow see Bridgeton Branch Social Committee Cash Book. Mitchell Library, Glasgow G329.9 SR 281TOC

²² This ethical socialist tradition was carried on within the I.S.P. and the associated *Adelphi* journal. The I.S.P. argued that 'Men cannot be converted to Socialism by words alone. To create a movement of the quality necessary for this task, its members must know that they are required to be Socialists not only with their lips but in their lives.' The I.S.P. saw itself as the only organisation up to the task of 'regenerating the Labour Movement itself until it becomes an adequate instrument of the regeneration of society as a whole.' I.S.P. General Council, 'What is Socialism?' 1935. For a further account of the practical attempts to realise these ideals see Middleton Murry, 1937, 68-88

²³ 'I.L.P. Conference Spark', Saturday March 31 1934

²⁴ See for example *New Leader*, October 25 1935

²⁵ Just before the close of nominations the agreement was broken when the Scottish Socialist Party nominated a Labour Candidate against Joseph Payne in Cowcaddens ward. However, Glasgow Labour power broker Patrick Dollan immediately disowned this action of the S.S.P. and declared that he was not going to support the Labour Candidate in that ward *New Leader*, November 9 1934

²⁶ For example in 1934 in both Partick East and Whitevale the combined I.L.P./Labour vote was greater than the victorious Moderate total.

²⁷ For example in 1934 the I.L.P. gained Shettleston and Dalmarnock from Moderate and Protestant candidates respectively despite the opposition of Labour Party candidates.

²⁸ *Bradford Pioneer*, May 4 1934

²⁹ *Bradford Pioneer*, February 8 1934; May 4 1934; May 25 1934; June 15 1934; November 9 1934

³⁰ The increase in representation came in 1937 when the existing I.L.P. councillors, Arthur Tetley and James Cariss, were re-elected, in the Tong and East Bowling wards respectively and H. Fotherby also secured election in the Tong Ward. Despite Labour's lack of formal agreement with the I.L.P., all three of the I.L.P.ers were elected without opposition from the Labour Party. Then, following the election Arthur Tetley was elected an alderman and a further I.L.P.er, A.L Brown was elected against a Liberal who had represented the ward for thirty years, in his place. *Manchester Guardian*, 22 2 1937; *New Leader*, September 9 1937; *New Leader*, December 12 1937; *New Leader*, November 19 1937

³¹ The I.L.P.'s proposals were rejected by the casting vote of the chairman of the Labour Party. *New Leader*, October 28 1938

³² *New Leader*, November 4 1938

³³ The I.L.P.'s initial group was Tom Markland, Goodwin England and John Gill. Their victories had been enabled by an unofficial pact with the Labour Party, which had left the I.L.P. candidates as the sole working class representatives in those wards until 1934. As a result of the renewed confidence of the Labour Party and the closer connections between the I.L.P. and the Communists the larger party challenged and defeated Goodwin England, who had been the youngest member of the council, in the local elections in 1934. Then the following year they intervened against John Gill, which allowed the Conservatives to win the seat. Stevens, 1997, 115-117

³⁴ Stevens, 1997, 115-117; *New Leader*, June 22 1934; *New Leader*, November 9 1934

³⁵ Cunningham, 1990, 133-6

³⁶ *Eastern Evening News*, November 1 1933

³⁷ The two victorious I.L.P. candidates in Norwich in 1933 were Dorothy Jewson and George Johnson, the following year A.E. Nicholls defeated his Conservative opponent 1028-591. In 1935 Arthur South, later a leading member of the Norwich Labour Party and chairman of Norwich City Football Club, was elected for the I.L.P. The Party lost one of its four seats after Dorothy Jewson married and left Norwich in 1937. The Labour Party stood aside to allow the I.L.P. Candidate, Miss Utting, a free run and it was widely expected that she would win comfortably but in the event was beaten by a majority of 88 on a 29 per cent poll. The result, which the party blamed on a combination of Yarmouth races, a football match and a Co-op outing, lead to considerable frustration with the working class attitude to politics as the branch put it 'when are the workers going to put their real interests before 'circuses'?' However, I.L.P. strength on the council was returned to four in March 1939 when George Johnson was elevated to the Aldermanic Bench and the subsequent vacancy in the Catton Ward was filled, unopposed, by W. Channell.

³⁸ The by-election was caused by the death of Labour Alderman Enoch Morrell who had represented the ward for thirty years. The I.L.P. put up B .M. Davies against R. J. Jones of the Labour Party and a Fred Ford, a Communist who had been the I.L.P. candidate in the ward in November 1933 but who had gone over to the C.P. during the 1934 by-election. Despite a heavy campaign by the Labour Party, including support for Jones from the new Merthyr MP S. O. Davies, the I.L.P. won the election with 1,551 votes to

the Labour Party's 1,074. Ford had polled 1,369 as the I.L.P. candidate nine months earlier, but as Communist candidate he could only muster 237 votes. *New Leader*, August 3 1934

³⁹ The I.L.P. obtained 3,500 votes in its 1933 contests in Merthyr. *New Leader* December 8 1933

⁴⁰ A similar dynamic could be observed in other places where battlelines were drawn solely between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party. For example in Blaydon for the 1934 Urban District Council elections the I.L.P. candidates, Jim Stephenson and Andy Davidson two Labour Candidates including 'big noise' Kelly in a campaign marked by violence and the support for the Labour men of M.F.G.B. President Peter Lee. Stephenson polled 961 and Davidson 874, winning both seats, ahead of their Labour Party opponents who obtained 581 and 534 votes respectively. *New Leader*, April 6 1934; Similarly in March 1934 in Cumberland local I.L.P. personalities Tom Stephenson and J. Bell, prominent figures in the Union at Moresby Park pit, where Stephenson was checkweighman, beat off a Labour challenge to take the two seats on the Rural District Council. With a 77 per cent turnout Stephenson with 430 votes and Bell with 352 took the two seats ahead of the Labour candidate who polled 168. N.A.C. minutes March 30-April 1 1934; *New Leader*, April 6 1934

⁴¹ For example see *Yarmouth Mercury*, November 9 1935

⁴² The I.L.P. maintained a group of five on the Council until the I.L.P. decided to oppose McGovern and Carmichael in the General Election of 1950, which caused three of the group to rejoin the Labour Party. The remaining two L.F. Bunnell and E. Burgess remained as an I.L.P. group on the council until 1968 when Burgess lost his seat to a Conservative. Bunnell maintained his seat even after the council was reformed in 1973, until the I.L.P. rejoined the Labour Party. Thwaites, 223

⁴³ Executive Committee Report November 16-17 1934

⁴⁴ The 1934 Scottish Divisional Conference voted to leave matters of International Affiliation to the National Conference and also voted to call on the N.A.C. to end R.P.C. activities. *New Leader*, January 1934

⁴⁵ McGovern thought that 'United Front activity had given the feeling that the whole working-class was joining in a common struggle.' Overall, he argued that 'the United Front should be developed and operated throughout the whole country.' I.L.P. N.A.C. minutes June 24-25 1933

⁴⁶ On the lack of R.P.C. influence in Scotland see Jack Gaster, *On Leadership, Controversy*, June 1934

⁴⁷ *New Leader*, January 25 1935; *Forward*, January 26 1935

⁴⁸ Heenan's attacks on the Labour Party are made even more interesting by the fact that he was to rejoin the Labour Party in the following year *New Leader*, February 7 1936

⁴⁹ *Forward*, January 20 1934; *New Leader*, January 25 1935; *Forward*, January 26 1935; *Forward*, February 8 1936; January 30 1937; *Manchester Guardian*, January 19 1937; January 25 1937; *New Leader*, February 7 1936; February 14 1936; January 29 1937; February 11 1938; February 18 1938; February 10 1939; *Glasgow Herald*, February 3 1936; January 25 1937; February 14 1938; February 6 1939

⁵⁰ Disaffiliation and the creation of the S.S.P. also left a long term legacy for the Scottish Labour Party to sort out, with an ongoing conflict between the Scottish Executive of the Labour Party and the S.S.P. See Knox and MacKinlay, 1995

⁵¹ The 128 branches that did not follow the disaffiliation decision in Scotland, although numerically over half, represented about 20 per cent of affiliation fees. The State Of the Party N.A.C. document undated (December 1932?)

⁵² *Labour's Northern Voice*, February 1934

⁵³ For example the Party held a rally at Burntisland in 1937 where thousands of I.L.P. supporters met on a hilltop by the sea singing the International and displaying a large banner with hammer and sickle and initials of POUM. *New Leader*, July 30 1937; February 11 1938; June 16 1939; *New Leader*, August 27 1937

⁵⁴ Leith and Edinburgh Central, which between them dominated the Edinburgh federation, voted for continued affiliation to the Labour Party. *New Leader*, 19 August 1932

⁵⁵ Two leading I.L.P. councillors Joseph Taylor and Joseph Payne in turn were highly critical of McGovern and Bennett, for their criticisms of the Labour Group. *Forward*, September 9 1933

⁵⁶ *Forward*, 18 November 1933

⁵⁷ The threats of violence were strongest when personality and politics became intertwined. For example when Dollan was alleged to have made anti-Semitic remarks to I.L.P.er Myer Glapern after the I.L.P. had engaged in what he considered to be an excessively long examination of the Unemployment Insurance measures to be implemented by the Council. *Forward*, January 13 1934

⁵⁸ On the League of Nations, the I.L.P. group in September 1936, objected to the first Labour Lord Provost of Glasgow John Steart attending the League of Nations. Brussels Peace Congress organised by the International Peace Campaign Committee, widely regarded as a Communist Front organisation, as a delegate. The I.L.P. objected that 'the Brussels gathering will be as futile as all such previous efforts... by taking part at this congress, Socialist Glasgow was taking a leading part in deluding the workers.' On the Lord Provost's return the I.L.P. again attempted to object, this time seeking to debate the report. *Forward*, January 13 1934; *New Leader*, May 4 1934; *New Leader*, June 29 1934; *New Leader*, October 19 1934; *New Leader*, July 5 1935; *New Leader*, January 18 1935; *New Leader*, September 4 1936; *New Leader*, November 20 1936; *New Leader*, February 12 1937

⁵⁹ *New Leader*, January 31 1936

⁶⁰ *Glasgow Herald*, February 14 1938; *New Leader*, January 13 1939

⁶¹ *New Leader*, October 27 1939; This was only reversed in February 1940.

⁶² *New Leader*, December 28 1934; *New Leader*, October 19 1934; *Scots New Leader*, January 3 1936; January 17 1936; *New Leader*, December 16 1938

⁶³ *Glasgow Evening News*, November 5 1937

⁶⁴ *New Leader*, November 27 1936

⁶⁵ For example the Labour Party frequently highlighted the way in which the Moderates had been able to use the I.L.P.'s proposal to pay increased wages to labourers to block a proposed new house building project. *Forward*, February 10 1934; *Forward*, January 27 1934; *Forward*, July 28 1934

⁶⁶ The decision had a similar impact in Greenock where the I.L.P. had two councillors, John Bates and Harry Lyall. After the local elections of 1933 Bates accepted a position of magistrate and Lyall as a committee sub-convenor on the town council. The Greenock Branch endorsed their decision by an overwhelming vote of 53-3. Nevertheless, the S.D.C. brought the actions of the members to the attention

of the N.A.C. and the two were expelled. N.A.C. Minutes February 10 1934; *New Leader*, June 15 1934; *Forward*, November 18 1933; *Forward*, January 20 1934

⁶⁷ Carmichael to Murry, February 12 1936 MLG/TD956/21/6; For example, members of many Glasgow branches had become frustrated over the way in which the Federation MC had handled the 1936 May Day arrangements where they had withdrawn from the organising committee despite I.L.P. members being appointed chair, vice-chair and treasurer of the committee. Shettleston I.L.P. minutes March 5 1936; April 16 1936

⁶⁸ There were a huge number of complaints about the conduct of Payne in June 1936. Many branches were not satisfied with an investigation into his actions on the PAC. In November a series of allegations were made about the way in which he handled Federation meetings of which he was chair and Shettleston sent a resolution demanding his resignation from chair of the MC. Shettleston I.L.P. minutes June 25 1936; November 26 1936; February 4 1937

⁶⁹ Correspondence between James Carmichael and Thomas Murry, February 12 1936 to June 30 1936 MLG/TD956/21/6

⁷⁰ N.A.C. minutes August 1 1936

⁷¹ In addition the federation was reorganised with differential voting for branches based on their size introduced whilst the corporation group rules were changed so that officers to be elected on 'the principle of selecting the ablest man for the job... irrespective of the term he has served.' At the SDC level Annie Maxton became chairman and Lachlan M'Quarrie secretary. Both were from Barrhead and uninvolved in the Glasgow dispute. Report of Glasgow Party Enquiry Committee, submitted to N.A.C. meeting December 11 1937; Executive Committee Report October 22 1937; N.A.C. minutes November 13 1937

⁷² *New Leader*, September 24 1937; N.A.C. minutes December 11 1937

⁷³ The role of John Heenan, a prominent I.L.P. councillor, and John McGovern MP in the leadership of the Scottish deputation is well known. (e.g. John McGovern, *Neither Fear Nor Favour*, 81-2) However, others, such as David Gibson, the I.L.P. councillor who took on the role of joint treasurer of the Campaign Committee with Frank Stevenson of the Communist Party, have remained unacknowledged. *New Leader*, April 5 1935

⁷⁴ For example the Glasgow I.L.P., and James Carmichael in particular, were also involved in organising a deputation of twenty young Scottish Unemployed to cycle from Glasgow to London to present demands to the National Government in mid-1935. N.A.C. report to Conference 1935; *New Leader*, July 12 1935

⁷⁵ For example in September 1936, contrary to earlier decisions by Glasgow Labour magistrates, the I.L.P. was permitted to hold a Flag Day for Spain to raise money to assist the Spanish workers, although three Moderate councillors opposed this. The I.L.P. was forthright in its attack on religious organs for their attacks on Spanish workers and despite the Communist and Labour Party boycott the I.L.P. raised £255 16s 10d. *Manchester Guardian*, August 19 1936; *Scots New Leader*, September 4 1936

⁷⁶ They argued that the day should be celebrated on the First of May rather than the nearest Sunday. Thus the two parties organised a separate demonstration from the Labour and Scottish Socialist Parties. Considering the Labour Party's lack of support, the events were generally relatively well attended. In 1935 for example the attendance was approximately 5,000. In 1935 the I.L.P. claimed that it was by far the best attended of the twelve political platforms in the Park, with its meeting being principally addressed by James Maxton with support from George Buchanan, Campbell Stephen, James Carmichael,

Bob Lean and John Lochore of the I.L.P.'s Guild of Youth. Relations with the Labour Party were further soured by the 1935 event with the I.L.P.'s also feeling that its collectors had been specifically targeted by the police. *New Leader*, May 10 1935

⁷⁷ Despite the participation of all parties in the demonstration there was little real feeling of unity and each party had its own platform on Glasgow Green. *New Leader*, May 7 1937

⁷⁸ *Forward*, February 27 1937

⁷⁹ The I.L.P.'s Glasgow Councillors took highly visible positions in support of the bus workers, especially Joe Taylor and Myer Galpern, with Joe Taylor leading the Busmen to their final mass meeting. *New Leader*, December 4 1936

⁸⁰ The matter was initially handed to the Federation Industrial Committee, who arranged a hearing at which both sides put their case at the end of March. However, after consultation with the federation industrial committee and the N.A.C. the Glasgow I.L.P. decided to issue a statement which stressed that although the party sympathised with the men's case it would only support attempts to change the Union's policy and would not support breakaway unions or attempts to encourage disruption within the Union. A similar general policy arguing against breakaways and for central control of policy on such matters was issued by the N.A.C. in August. *New Leader*, March 23 1937; N.A.C. minutes August 2 1937

⁸¹ *New Leader*, April 2 1937; *New Leader*, April 9 1937; *New Leader*, April 16 1937; Shettleston I.L.P. minutes November 23 1939; On the context and consequences of this apprentices' strike see Croucher, 1982, 47-53; 98-9; On I.L.P. involvement in the war-time militant engineering movement see Croucher, 1982, 176-8

⁸² *The Local Bulletin* (Barrhead I.L.P.), No. 8; *Special Issue of the Local Bulletin*, November 1936 MLG/TD956/23/14-15; *New Leader*, November 6 1936; *New Leader*, November 5 1937; *New Leader*, October 28 1938; *New Leader*, December 12 1937; *New Leader*, March 3 1939

⁸³ *New Leader*, December 16 1938; *New Leader*, November 5 1937; *New Leader*, February 11 1938

⁸⁴ *New Leader*, November 4 1938; *New Leader*, December 16 1938; *New Leader*, December 16 1938; *New Leader*, May 22 1936

⁸⁵ N.A.C. minutes July 4 1936

⁸⁶ *New Leader*, 11 November 1932; *New Leader*, 31 March 1933

⁸⁷ *New Leader*, November 5 1937

⁸⁸ *New Leader*, July 30 1937

⁸⁹ The I.L.P. also attempted to outdo the Labour Party in providing assistance to workers and made a great deal of its ability to win PAC cases which had been abandoned by the Labour Council. *Scots New Leader*, August 28 1936; *New Leader*, May 28 1937

⁹⁰ N.A.C. minutes 13 November 1937; *New Leader*, October 22 1937

⁹¹ *New Leader*, November 18 1938

⁹² *New Leader*, April 1 1938

⁹³ The I.L.P. archives also contain the records of Berryden I.L.P., which is presumably a mis-spelling of Ferryden, and the activities of their Workers' Rights Committee in 1936. The records show a membership of 343, 127 men and 182 women, with an income from fees of £6 16s 2d. The Workers' Rights Committee Report shows 231 cases dealt with, primarily public assistance and rates cases. I.L.P. archive series I 1936/1; *New Leader*, January 10 1936

⁹⁴ *New Leader*, 17 February 1933

⁹⁵ Immediately following the disaffiliation decision, held at the end of August 1932, the R.P.C. conference was able to attract representation from half the branches in London. *New Leader*, 2 September 1932

⁹⁶ Paton and Brockway argued for no action to be taken against factions when Aplin first expressed unease about the activity of the R.P.C. in March 1932, with Paton claiming that 'his experience had taught him that it was in the last degree unwise to deal with such a development by attempting to quash it.' Summary of discussion at meeting of Divisional representatives with N.A.C., 25 March 1932

⁹⁷ Proposals were also on the agenda from the Trotskyists calling for the creation of a Fourth International and from the Comintern Affiliation Committee, calling for immediate affiliation (rather than an approach to) the Comintern. The IBRSU position won out by a vote of 21 to 18.

⁹⁸ The other divisional conferences held in 1935 had between 4 and 6 agenda items. *New Leader*, February 2 1935

⁹⁹ *New Leader*, February 22 1935

¹⁰⁰ N.A.C. minutes, June 29 1935

¹⁰¹ Executive Committee Report, June 29-30 1935

¹⁰² The Divisional Council voted by 10-6 against a motion that Gaster's speech at the London Communist Party Conference had followed an 'anti-Party line.'

¹⁰³ Executive Committee Report, August 2-3 1935

¹⁰⁴ N.A.C. minutes, August 10-12 1935; Extract from N.A.C. Circular Letter (Hull DJH 5/8)

¹⁰⁵ *New Leader*, November 15 1935

¹⁰⁶ *New Leader*, February 7 1936

¹⁰⁷ *New Leader*, January 29 1937; *New Leader*, February 18 1938

¹⁰⁸ *New Leader*, February 10 1939

¹⁰⁹ Of course these figures somewhat underplay the real loss to the division. Not only did a significant number of individuals leave the party without the support of their branches but the one branch which was lost was Alfred Salter's Bermondsey Branch, one of the largest and most active in the division. The State of the Party, N.A.C. document (nd)

¹¹⁰ *Revolt*, Issue 1, March 1933

¹¹¹ *New Leader*, June 22 1934

¹¹² N.A.C. minutes February 15 1936; *New Leader*, January 10 1936; BLPES/Coll Misc 496/File 1; *New Leader*, January 17 1936

¹¹³ Gant was a boilermaker who represented his union on the local trades council and sat on the Trades Council executive. N.A.C. minutes February 15 1936; *New Leader*, January 10 1936; BLPES/Coll Misc 496/File 1; *New Leader*, January 17 1936

¹¹⁴ General Overview of organisations at Branch Level in London and South, London Divisional Organisers Reports BLPES

¹¹⁵ The key speakers were the I.L.P. leaders from those areas, Stuart Friedenson and Tom Stephenson. They were joined by a number of other notable I.L.P. speakers, including Alex Gossip, the General Secretary of the Furniture Trades Associations. *New Leader*, March 8 1935

¹¹⁶ N.A.C. minutes August 1 1936

¹¹⁷ Slogans based on 'United Working-Class Action for Working-Class Power' were rejected by a large majority. Instead the Communist backed slogan advocated by John Strachey 'Peace, Democracy and Social Advance' was easily adopted. The I.L.P. contingent on the actual march was larger than it had been for a number of years and most of the I.L.P. contingent wore POUM militia uniforms and carried posters supporting POUM. It was clear, from both the popular front nature of the slogans and the I.L.P.'s widely derided support of POUM, that the organisation in the Capital was increasingly isolated from its former allies on the left. *New Leader*, January 22 1937; *New Leader*, May 7 1937

¹¹⁸ *New Leader*, September 20 1938

¹¹⁹ Within the Co-operative movement in London Hammond was not alone and Gilbert White, another prominent Co-operator was appointed at the same time as Divisional Co-operative organiser. N.A.C. minutes July 30 1938; *New Leader*, May 13 1938; *New Leader*, August 19 1938

¹²⁰ The disaffiliationists from the Garden City included not only I.L.P. MP Richard Wallhead and General Secretary John Paton but also the Labour Party's chairman, secretary, treasurer, vice-chairman, three of five members on the UDC, two members of the Guardians Committee and the senior Labour Magistrate of the Town. Indeed the Local Labour Party lost their twenty most active members described by the secretary of St. Albans Divisional Labour Party, in a letter to the Labour Party National Agent, as 'the whole of those who carried out the day to day work of the Party.' Added to this was the fact that there was considerable discontent amongst those who remained loyal to the Labour Party about the way in which the Labour Party N.E.C. handled the dispute with the smaller party. Letters George Lindgren to G.R. Shepard September 1 1932; September 10 1932 NMLH/LP/National Agents unsorted material

¹²¹ In 1933 UDC elections I.L.P.er William Hughes, a Fellow of Jesus College Cambridge and largely responsible for the work of the local Educational Association was elected, with 1093 votes, along with three independents and one development candidate. In 1934 one Labour candidate was elected, but the conflict between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party meant that the I.L.P.'s Jane Pinner and one other Labour Candidate failed to be elected. Jane Pinner was elected in 1935 and her husband Ted the following year. *Welwyn Times*, March 16 1933; April 6 1933; *Welwyn Times*, March 22 1934; March 29 1934; April 5 1934

¹²² *Welwyn Times*, March 28 1935; April 4 1935; *Welwyn Times*, April 9 1936

¹²³ For example in 1936 the I.L.P. lead the establishment of the Welwyn Garden City Sunday evening Open Forum supported by local Anti-War Council, Labour Party, T&GWU, Socialist League, C.P., I.L.P. and F.S.U. *New Leader*, May 15 1936. The decline of the Welwyn I.L.P. was also speeded by a series of high profile personality disputes during 1937 and illness of Ted Pinner, which undoubtedly influenced the decision of Ted and Jane to stand down from the council. London Organisers Report June 28-July 4 1937; *Welwyn Times*, February 11 1937; April 1 1937; April 8 1937; August 26 1937; March 10 1938; *New Leader*, August 26 1938

¹²⁴ The I.L.P. was not of course limited to these areas. For example in Hitchin the majority of the T&GWU joined the I.L.P. after the busmen's strike of 1937.

¹²⁵ The tenants defence league was established by the two parties during the early 1930s. In 1936 the I.L.P. and C.P. were able to resurrect it, organising the 600 tenants of the LWS Estates Ltd to resist a rate increase of 2s 6d. *New Leader*, February 14 1936

¹²⁶ The I.L.P.'s first fight in Slough took place in April 1936 when their candidate Ruth Harrison polled 477 against the Ratepayers Association's 544 in a ward from which the Labour Party was prepared to withdraw in favour of the I.L.P. as it had previously fought it on four occasions with disappointing polls. Harrison was elected the following year. *New Leader*, April 16 1937

¹²⁷ For example when I.L.P. member Stan Parker led a deputation of the unemployed to the council Ruth Harrison was able to get a resolution unanimously passed that action should be taken by Bucks County Council. *New Leader*, August 20 1937

¹²⁸ The *Daily Worker* was quick to accuse the I.L.P. of splitting the vote but the I.L.P. claimed that as the Labour Party had refused to enter into negotiations and its victory at the previous election gave it the right to put forward a candidate. The result was a victory for the ratepayers over the split I.L.P./Labour vote. *New Leader*, March 25 1938; *New Leader*, April 1 1938; *New Leader*, April 8 1938

¹²⁹ *New Leader*, March 11 1938

¹³⁰ London Organisers Report Oct 25- Nov 1 1936

¹³¹ The Hastings unemployed group, quickly became defunct because, the party claimed, of the seasonal nature of unemployment. *New Leader*, March 13 1936; London Organisers Report Oct 25-Nov 1 1936

¹³² In June 1936 they attempted to enter a straight fight with the ratepayers after the Labour Party had announced that they would not enter the contest. However, as soon as the I.L.P. announced its intentions the Labour Party also joined in. The I.L.P. came bottom of the three cornered contest with a fairly derisory 67 votes with the ratepayer winning comfortably. This one contest against the Labour Party was sufficient to convince the Hastings Party of their electoral weakness. *New Leader*, June 12 1936; *New Leader*, November 5 1937

¹³³ *New Leader*, May 18 1934

¹³⁴ A number of the I.L.P.ers responsible for the motion attempted to influence the consideration of the motion whilst attending the Trades Council meeting as non-delegates. However, as the TUC pointed out the I.L.P. was not a proscribed organisation thus the Trades Council itself chose not to take any action. TUC-Hastings Trades Council Correspondence 12 December 1935; 12 December 1935 (2); 14 December 1935 MRC/MSS292/79H/20; Industrial Committee Minutes, May 26 1936; N.A.C. minutes February 15 1936; *New Leader*, January 24 1936; TUC-Hastings Trades Council Correspondence June 26 1937 MRC/MSS292/79H/20; TUC Correspondence I.L.P. File A.J. White to E.P. Harries October 4 1936 MRC/MSS922/756.1/1

¹³⁵ The allegation against the branch was that it had appointed I.L.P. members to official positions, after three members of the I.L.P. were elected as a delegation to the Hastings Corporation Staff committee. The Union Head Office ruled that members of the I.L.P. were ineligible for any office in the Union. The branch ignored the ruling and sought a precise statement from an Head Office official. At the adjourned meeting the District Organiser, a paid official, took the chair, in direct contravention of the Union rules, which prohibited paid officials from presiding. The District organiser ruled that all nomination of I.L.P.ers should be barred and secured a majority of 25 to 20 for that decision. The I.L.P.ers then moved a successful resolution to be sent to the District Committee that the Black Circular should be discussed by that body. In response to this apparently constitutional proposal the Union District Committee sent Mr Whiting the G&MWU official who had fought Bob Edwards in the 1935 General Election. He threatened the I.L.P.ers with expulsion and advised the District Committee to close down the branch indefinitely on

the grounds that 'the I.L.P. members were obstructionists and belonged to the Union only to propagate I.L.P. treachery and not to further Trade Union interests.' The Union followed Whitting's advice and the branch was quickly closed down.

¹³⁶ 12 December 1935 (2); 14 December 1935 (MRC/MSS292/79H/20); Industrial Committee Minutes, May 26 1936; N.A.C. minutes February 15 1936; *New Leader*, January 24 1936; TUC-Hastings Trades Council Correspondence June 26 1937 (MRC/MSS292/79H/20); TUC Correspondence I.L.P. File A.J. White to E.P. Harries October 4 1936 (MRC/MSS922/756.1/1)

¹³⁷ Notes on No. 9 NMLH/C.P./IND/MISC/17/09; *New Leader*, 17 February 1933

¹³⁸ Over the year 1934-5 the Lancashire Division saw its affiliation fees drop by 58 per cent. In the first three months of the 1935 financial year the Lancashire Division affiliation fees were £6 10s 4d, down from £15 16s 11d for the same period a year earlier. Executive Committee Report June 29-30 1935

¹³⁹ *Labour's Northern Voice*, May 1934

¹⁴⁰ *Labour's Northern Voice*, February 1933; September 1933

¹⁴¹ Initially the council withdrew its support from such events, subsequently it requested all branches to cease united front activity. *Labour's Northern Voice*, July 1933

¹⁴² *Labour's Northern Voice*, February 1934

¹⁴³ *Labour's Northern Voice*, February 1934

¹⁴⁴ N.A.C. minutes June 24-25 1933

¹⁴⁵ The Liverpool federation had lost only one branch due to disaffiliation.

¹⁴⁶ *Labour's Northern Voice*, August 1933; December 1933

¹⁴⁷ *Labour's Northern Voice*, August 1933

¹⁴⁸ The Wigan R.P.C. was led by Robert Rawlinson and J. Horne. *Labour's Northern Voice*, May 1934; *New Leader*, 4 May 1934 R.P.C. influence also extended elsewhere. In Chorley, R.P.C. member Bob Edwards held a position of such great significance within the Branch that they conceded that without Edwards' activity it was virtually impossible for the Branch to carry on in an effective matter. Executive Committee report for N.A.C. August 11-12 1934 Even in Sandham's Blackpool branch, there was a growing R.P.C. influence stemming from the activity of Comrade Sudlow, a young window cleaner. Letter from Francis Johnson to G.E. Humphries, BLPES/Francis Johnson Papers/1934

¹⁴⁹ N.A.C. minutes August 5-7 1933

¹⁵⁰ The opposition to the united front from the Lancashire Divisional council only intensified with the letter to branches asking them to cease united front activities. The Council refused the N.A.C.'s demands to withdraw the circular by a vote of 10 to 5. Then the Divisional half-yearly conference on 19 August then ratified the Council decision, passing Sandham's resolution against the united front by a vote of 31 to 26. N.A.C. minutes 23-24 September 1933; *Labour's Northern Voice*, September 1933

¹⁵¹ N.A.C. minutes September 23-24 1933

¹⁵² *New Leader*, 6 April 1934 cf. 1934 ILP annual Conference Report, *Labour's Northern Voice*, April 1934

¹⁵³ Immediate resignations included other leading members of the Lancashire Division such as Samuel Higgenbotham, the editor of *Labour's Northern Voice*, Arthur Mostyn, an ex-councillor and the *Labour's Northern Voice* cartoonist from the Manchester Central Branch, and Stephen Shaw and Roger Shakelton of the Nelson Weavers. Sandham's personal position was initially unclear. He had committed himself to

the I.L.P. at York and deliberately refrained from attending the initial meetings of those who were leaving the Party and also attended meetings of those who were trying to reorganise the Lancashire I.L.P. However, his close connection to the Lancashire rebels meant that the pull of the I.S.P. was too much. Sandham eventually made up his mind to resign from the I.L.P. in June over two months after Abbott's resignation. The delay in resignation was too much for the N.A.C., which refused to send out the letter it had written thanking Sandham for his years of service in the I.L.P. *New Leader*, 4 May 1934; *Labour's Northern Voice*, June 1934; Minutes of Special Divisional Conference May 26 1934; *Labour's Northern Voice*, July 1934

¹⁵⁴ Six members of the R.P.C., Bob Edwards (Chorley), Comrade Wolfenden (Moston), the Lancashire Divisional Chair of the R.P.C, Gertie Slater (Moston), Rawlinson (Wigan), J. Horne (Wigan) and Hughes (Liverpool), found themselves elected for the first time onto the Divisional Council.

Minutes of Special Divisional Conference May 26 1934; *Labour's Northern Voice*, June 1934

¹⁵⁵ At the time Edwards was still officially suspended from the Party for his activities in the Comintern Affiliation Committee. Edwards was readmitted to the party at the first N.A.C. meeting he attended. I.L.P. Executive Committee Report November 16-17 1934.

¹⁵⁶ The sixteen branches were Ashton, Burnley, Blackpool, Denton, Irlam, Manchester City, Manchester East, Middleton, Moss Side, New Ferry, New Cross, Rusholme, Rossendale, Heywood, Prescott, and Tintwistle. (Executive Committee Report, August 11-12 1934)

¹⁵⁷ *New Leader*, August 17 1934; I.L.P. Executive Committee Report November 16-17; 1934 I.L.P. Inner Executive 22 September 1934

¹⁵⁸ This was reflected in the choice of new leading officials in the Divisional Council, G.E. Humphreys was secretary and C. H. Cund was the treasurer, both were from the Kirkdale Branch in Liverpool. *New Leader*, September 28 1934

¹⁵⁹ *New Leader*, October 5 1934

¹⁶⁰ I.L.P. Executive Committee Report November 16-17 1934

¹⁶¹ *New Leader*, February 15 1935

¹⁶² *New Leader*, February 7; *New Leader*, January 29 1937; 1936 *New Leader*, February 18 1938; *New Leader*, February 10 1939

¹⁶³ *New Leader*, August 26 1932; *Labour's Northern Voice Cotton Supplement*, November 1932

¹⁶⁴ *Labour's Northern Voice Cotton Supplement*, November 1932

¹⁶⁵ Industrial Committee Minutes, July 16 1936

¹⁶⁶ The Lancashire District Committee of the Communist Party accused Lancashire I.L.P. of breaking the United Front, being isolated from the cotton workers struggle and anyway dead as a political force. The Lancashire I.L.P. replied that it was very much alive and that it was the C.P. who broke the United Front. It also claimed that it was I.L.P. members within the cotton unions, such as Tom Ralphs of Oldham I.L.P. and leader of the spinners union, who were quietly and without fuss fighting for a socialist policy whilst the Communist Party was continually seeking the limelight. Indeed the 1937 Lancashire Divisional Conference insisted that main work of Lancashire I.L.P. during the year had been connected with the cotton campaign while its pamphlet, *The Great Cotton Swindle* written by Bob Edwards, had sold well. *New Leader*, May 15 1936; *New Leader*, June 19 1936

¹⁶⁷ Initially the I.S.P. proposed using the opportunity to engage in joint work with the I.L.P. and a letter was sent from I.S.P. asking for a meeting with I.L.P. representatives. However, whilst the I.L.P. was prepared to send its Chairman, Secretary and a Lancashire representative to a meeting with the I.S.P., the latter was having second thoughts and repeatedly delayed the meeting until the end of the year when an I.S.P. Special Conference finally decided August 1937 that it was 'not an opportune moment to open up another Unity Campaign.' Executive Committee Report May 23 1936; N.A.C. minutes August 2 1937; N.A.C. minutes October 22 1937; N.A.C. minutes December 11 1937

¹⁶⁸ N.A.C. minutes December 1940; *Labour's Northern Voice*, May 1936; October 1936; January 1937; April 1937; August/September 1937; September 1939; October 1939

¹⁶⁹ Bob Edwards, later MP for Bilston, had been chairman of the I.L.P. Guild of Youth and a councillor in Liverpool at the age of 22.. Further details of Bob Edwards Life can be found in his unpublished, and uncompleted autobiography *Revolutionary Adventures*, parts of which are to be found in Box 4 of the Bob Edwards papers at the National Museum of Labour History. An examination of May Edwards' first spell on the council can be found in Pauline L. Budge's unpublished thesis, *May Edwards: Councillor*, a copy of which is deposited in the Bob Edwards Papers.

¹⁷⁰ In 1935 when May's council seat was up for re-election she failed to submit her nomination papers in time after misunderstanding a change in the regulations. *Chorley Guardian*, October 26 1935; *Manchester Guardian*, September 3 1938; *New Leader*, November 13 1936 *New Leader*, October 21 1938; *New Leader*, August 19 1938; *New Leader*, September 9 1938

¹⁷¹ *Nelson Leader*, July 22 1932; August 12 1932; August 26 1932; September 23 1932; 30 September 1932; November 4 1932

¹⁷² *Nelson Leader*, March 3 1933; March 10 1933; March 17 1933

¹⁷³ Smithson as chairman of the Electricity and Gas Committee was determined to give work to non-weavers. Thus, when a position appeared in the Gas department of the corporation Smithson saw to it that Dan Carradice was appointed. The appointment caused an immediate storm of opinion from both Labour supporters and opponents. The anti-socialists were most disturbed by the fact that the appointment was another example of 'political strings' being pulled by Labour men, whilst within the Labour Party the issue was the position of the Weavers Association. *Nelson Leader*, March 24 1933

¹⁷⁴ *Nelson Leader*, September 22 1933; October 13 1933; November 10 1933

¹⁷⁵ *Nelson Leader*, February 9 1934; February 23 1934; March 9 1934; April 13 1934; May 11 1934

¹⁷⁶ For a more detailed if somewhat tentative exploration of the Nelson anti-war movement see Evelyn O'Connor, 'Fighting for Peace, Waiting for War Left Wing Attitudes in Nelson to Europe and Rearmament 1935-39', *North West Labour History*, No. 22, 1997/8, pp48-59

¹⁷⁷ There was still considerable pressure from the membership of the G&MWU to continue acting against the Weavers. Pressure centred on calling for non-weaver councillors. However, the G&MWU was an organisation politically affiliated to the Labour Party and thus would not nominate candidates against official Labour Party candidates. Indeed Carradice himself, despite his position within the I.L.P., was forced to censure a number of G&MWU members for actively opposing Labour Candidates in the run up to the 1935 municipal election. *Nelson Leader*, June 15 1934; August 24 1934; January 25 1935; May 10 1935; June 28 1935; August 10 1935; October 11 1935; October 18 1935; October 25 1935; November 8 1935

¹⁷⁸ Smithson, aged 57 in 1934, was suffering from acute deafness, which was cited as his reason for giving up his union work. Despite his continued formal connection with the I.L.P. he worked throughout his period of office in close collaboration with the Labour majority. He did take the initiative in calling anti-war meetings such as the 1936 May Day Anti-War meeting, which was attended by 2000 and addressed by organisations from across the spectrum including Carradice of the I.L.P., Sidney Silverman the left-wing local MP, representatives of the local Anti-War movement and the ministers of both the Church of England and the Methodists. However, he also was prepared to act in ways contrary to the position of the I.L.P. as when he took the initiative in calling for a civic service to synchronise with the King's funeral. Indeed on the culmination of his service the anti-Socialist *Nelson Leader* felt it possible to commend him on his performance over the course of the year. *Nelson Leader*, November 16 1934; October 4 1935; January 31 1936; May 8 1936; July 24 1936; Executive Committee Report May 23 1936; *New Leader*, March 17 1939

¹⁷⁹ Middleton Murry had started the magazine *the Adelphi* in June 1923. When he joined the I.L.P. in 1931 the magazine, although no longer edited by him reflected this political slant. In October 1932 *the Adelphi* declared it was entering a new phase in its history. The price was reduced in order to attract a larger number of Socialist readers and it was declared that the magazine would carry at least one article each month on the subject of the Independent Labour Party. Most of these articles were written by Middleton Murry himself.

¹⁸⁰ G.F. Johnson, Where Not to Lead, *Controversy*, July/August 1934

¹⁸¹ Although Jewson did not fully agree with the new policy of the I.L.P. she was prepared to accept the basis of it in principle and she supported the new policy rather than the alternative put forward by John Paton. She was also a consistent advocate of the line that strong action must be taken against the Lancashire division and the Unity group. She not only voted for the majority position of censuring the divisional council but also for the much more confrontational minority position of withholding the Lancashire council's divisional grant. I.L.P. N.A.C. minutes June 24-25 1933; September 23-24 1933; January 6-7 1934

¹⁸² The I.L.P. in Yarmouth and Ipswich attempted to work together with the Communist Party and N.U.W.M. For example the working class organisations in Yarmouth, with the exception of the Labour Party agreed to hold a joint meeting in protest against the Unemployment Bill on July 3 1934. The meeting gained widespread support including from many members of the Labour Party, John Lewis the prospective Labour Party candidate for Yarmouth spoke. George Johnson of Norwich spoke on behalf of the I.L.P. Division 5 Council Meeting minutes, June 1 1933; Division 5 Council Meeting minutes, February 3 1934; *New Leader*, May 5 1934; Executive Committee Report, August 11-12 1934 Division 5 Council, 1 June 1933; Minutes of division 5 special conference 15 October 1933 I.L.P. Division 5 Council Meeting minutes, June 1 1933; Division 5 Council Meeting minutes, February 3 1934; *New Leader*, May 5 1934; Executive Committee Report, August 11-12 1934

¹⁸³ Arthur Eaton was brought in to conduct the campaign. He visited Yarmouth, March, Lowestoft, Cambridge, Colchester, Ipswich, Wisbeach, Kings Lynn, East Dereham, Harwich and Norwich. Overall he reported that there was considerable disaffection within the Labour Party organisations in the area and suggested that the I.L.P. in the division could be considerably strengthened with more regular activity in the area. Executive Committee Report, November 16-17 1934; *New Leader*, September 29 1939

¹⁸⁴ BLPES/ Coll Misc 497 (Division 5 minute book) February 2 1936; *New Leader*, January 10 1936; *New Leader*, October 15 1937; *New Leader*, February 2 1936 *New Leader*, March 20 1936; BLPES/Coll Misc 497 (Division 5 minute book) Feb 11 1939; BLPES/Coll Misc 497 (Division 5 minute book) June 29 1941

¹⁸⁵ The Busmen's grievances had built up following the take over of the company by the Eastern Counties, which had led to wage reductions, spread-overs in duty, the Wilbrew ticket system with its stoppages from pay, the frequency of waybill booking and what were described as 'irritating regulations'.

¹⁸⁶ *New Leader*, January 1 1936

¹⁸⁷ Only days later as in so many other places there was a split in the May Day demonstrations between the Labour Party platform and the Unity Campaign platform. On Unity platform Councillor Alf Nicholls presided whilst there were speakers from the Socialist League with ex-I.L.P. activist Alex Rudling, and the Communist Party's Jock Watson along with two I.L.P. Councillors Dorothy Jewson and George Johnson and two busmen Asker and Cubitt. *New Leader*, April 30 1937; *New Leader*, May 7 1937; *New Leader*, May 21 1937

¹⁸⁸ NEC minutes, November 15 1933

¹⁸⁹ *New Leader*, September 24 1937; *New Leader*, November 4 1938; *New Leader*, March 17 1939; George Johnson (1872-1958) file, *Dictionary of Labour Biography* archives

¹⁹⁰ In 1937 when it was made clear that there would be no arrangement between the two parties the I.L.P. selected a second candidate to run alongside Brockway in the event of a General Election. *New Leader*, May 7 1937; Labour Party Organisation Sub-Committee minutes, December 22 1936; Labour Party N.E.C. minutes May 25 1937

¹⁹¹ Division Five Minute Book (BLPES/Coll Misc 497) February 3 1934; June 20 1936; February 9 1941; February 1 1950

¹⁹² In June 1936 Brockway debated Yarmouth Labour's prospective parliamentary candidate John Lewis, ex-ILPer and prominent Socialist Leaguer, on the question of whether Revolutionary Socialists could work through the Labour Party in Yarmouth. Lewis argued for the inclusion of both the I.L.P. and the C.P. into the Labour Party whilst Brockway made the point that the Labour Party constitution did not allow enough freedom to allow the I.L.P. to affiliate at present although this was a matter of revolutionary tactics. Brockway and Lewis took the opportunity of the debate to address large anti-war meeting under the joint auspices of the I.L.P. and the Labour Party in the evening. *New Leader* June 26 1936

¹⁹³ *Yarmouth Mercury*, November 9 1935; October 31 1936; November 7 1936

¹⁹⁴ Lewis was prominent in the calls for left unity and the Yarmouth Labour Party fully endorsed such calls. The May Day Rally, although poorly attended due in part to the cold weather was supported by both Labour and the I.L.P. *Yarmouth Mercury*, November 6 1937

¹⁹⁵ Bunnewell raised issues such as education, poor relief and the lack of democracy in the town. He introduced regular meetings to explain his activities as a councillor to the voters. When at the beginning of 1938 the group, and Bunnewell in particular, launched an attack on the new marina, the local press began to argue that he was overly argumentative and was making council meetings too protracted. Still he continued his argument for 'a more balanced industrial approach, not so geared towards tourism' and then for Socialism. Over the period the alliance between the Labour Party and the I.L.P. was strengthened, the I.L.P. annual dinner was attended by Labour Party and Trades Union officials in the face of a

reinforcement of the anti-socialist alliance. *Yarmouth Mercury*, November 13 1937, November 20 1937; December 8 1937; December 24 1937; January 15 1938; March 12 1938; April 9 1938; April 30 1938

¹⁹⁶ *Yarmouth Mercury*, November 13 1937, November 20 1937; December 8 1937; December 24 1937; January 15 1938; March 12 1938; April 9 1938; April 30 1938; June 4 1938; June 18 1938; September 10 1938; November 5 1938; March 25 1939; April 1 1939; *New Leader*, November 5 1937; November 4 1938; April 7 1939

¹⁹⁷ Gilham used her positions to challenge some of the sexist norms within the Yarmouth Unions as when she was the first female to be admitted to the Yarmouth G&MWU dinner at which both she and Stone spoke. From their position within the Trades Council the I.L.P. acted with the left wing to follow through campaigns which the Party could support. As well as adding Liberal and Conservative Parties to the list of proscribed organisations, Stone was active both in local issues where he joined his role as a Councillor with that on the Trades Council arguing for better treatment of workers in the Marina and also in longer term and more national issues for example attempting to create 'one great union for all workers.' TUC-Yarmouth Correspondence (MRC/MSS292/79G/14); *New Leader*, July 3 1937; *Yarmouth Mercury*, June 26 1937; April 8 1939; September 22 1939

¹⁹⁸ In 1931 Bradford had paid an affiliation fee of £46 13s 4d out of a total divisional affiliation of £191 5s 0d. the second largest branch in the division was Armley, with an affiliation payment of £19 0s 6d. List of Branches and Payments for Affiliation fees for the Financial Year ending 28th February 1931

¹⁹⁹ Laybourn, *cited in* Stevens, footnote 11

²⁰⁰ Over the year 1934-5 the I.L.P. in Yorkshire was growing substantially, if affiliation fees are used as an indicator of membership the increase was about 18 per cent. Executive Committee Report June 29-30 1935; *Forward*, November 11 1933; N.A.C. report to Conference 1934

²⁰¹ *New Leader*, 14 April 1933

²⁰² *New Leader*, 24 March 1933 cf. Report of Yorkshire Divisional Conference, *New Leader*, 10 February 1933

²⁰³ *New Leader*, February 10 1933

²⁰⁴ *New Leader*, February 2 1934

²⁰⁵ N.A.C. minutes February 10-11 1934; N.A.C. minutes March 30- April 1 1934; N.A.C. minutes; N.A.C. minutes August 11 1934; N.A.C. minutes April 3 1934; N.A.C. minutes November 16-17 1934

²⁰⁶ *New Leader*, March 1 1935

²⁰⁷ *New Leader*, February 7 1936; Trotskyist influence in the division did not end with the departure of the Marxist Group from the Party in December 1936. For example at the end of 1937 the divisional organiser reported the Trotskyist influence of P. J. Barclay in organising a series of meetings in Dewsbury Branch and his attempts at spreading this influence wider. (N.A.C. minutes 11 December 1937)

²⁰⁸ For further details on the relationship between I.L.P. and Labour Parties in Bradford and the I.L.P.'s electoral successes and failures in the City see above pages 59-60 and 94-94.

²⁰⁹ For a break down of I.L.P. local election victories see appendix 2. Cf. *New Leader*, April 23 1937; *New Leader*, September 23 1938

²¹⁰ *New Leader*, February 15 1935

²¹¹ *New Leader*, January 25 1935

²¹² *New Leader*, January 25 1935

²¹³ The Guild of Youth within the Midlands division was relatively strong where the membership estimates, based on fees paid, showed the division as having the highest membership. Within the division the Guild showed strong left wing sympathies and a determination to retain its autonomy which was removed after the involvement of the youth organisation with the YCI. *New Leader*, March 22 1935

²¹⁴ N.A.C. minutes August 11-12 1934

²¹⁵ *New Leader*, February 7 1936; *New Leader*, February 18 1938; Stevens, 1997, 117; *New Leader*, February 10 1939

²¹⁶ *New Leader*, July 20 1934

²¹⁷ Stevens, 1997, 120-1

²¹⁸ England, who had been so influential in gaining the positions of employee-director was given a significant level of Trade Union support and was elected along with a 'right wing' candidate more than 300 votes clear of opponents from higher managerial positions who had opposed the appointment of the new directors. Stevens, 1997, 123-4; *New Leader*, May 20 1938

²¹⁹ The I.L.P. put all its resources into supporting the Labour candidate but reminded the Labour Party of its opposition to Thomas whilst 'the Derby Labour Party hero worshipped him.' *New Leader*, June 19 1936

²²⁰ Cheshire had been a figure of some influence as Secretary of the Derbyshire federation of the I.L.P. and a member of the local executive of NUDAW, representing it on the Trades Council. In addition he had also been active in the Co-op. Secretary of Derbyshire I.L.P. federation and had been chairman of the Derby Guild of Youth. *New Leader*, February 12 1937

²²¹ Gill, a prominent Trade Unionist and secretary of the CIS section of the NUDAW, had been defeated in 1935 when forced to defend his seat against Labour Party opposition. He stood on a platform which proposed Free hospital services, cheaper bus services and 'fair play for old-age pensioners' and opposed the means test the cost of ARP falling on the Rates and extending the school leaving age until grants are made. I.L.P. archive local material microfilm Item 7 (Burton on Trent); *New Leader*, October 21 1938; Stevens, 1997, 117

²²² For a more detailed discussion of the influence and decline of the disaffiliated I.L.P. in Derby see Stevens, 1997

²²³ The Labour Party, against the precedent of previous years, decided to field two candidates for the two seats. C.H. Bishop one of the Labour Candidates was also elected with 923 votes. *New Leader*, April 8 1938

²²⁴ The Labour candidate was also elected with 701 votes. *New Leader*, April 7 1939

²²⁵ Minutes of the I.L.P. Women's Group National Advisory Committee 17 September 1932

²²⁶ I.L.P. List of Branches and Payments for Affiliation Fees for the Financial Year ending 28 February 1931

²²⁷ The mid-Glamorgan federation had been largely dominated by the Briton Ferry branch, which was firmly opposed to disaffiliation and decided to maintain its links with the Labour Party, *New Leader*, 9 September 1932

²²⁸ Cardiff City expected to see no loss in membership at all as a result of the decision whilst Splott was able to immediately replace the two members of that branch who resigned. *New Leader*, 26 August 1932

²²⁹ *New Leader*, 4 November 1932

²³⁰ *New Leader*, 10 February 1933

²³¹ Eventually members of the Merthyr federation felt forced to draw the attention of the N.A.C. to this inactivity. N.A.C. minutes March 30-April 1 1934

²³² N.A.C. minutes April 3 1934

²³³ N.A.C. minutes August 11 1934

²³⁴ Speakers included Maxton, McGovern, Jennie Lee, Fenner Brockway, Campbell Stephen, Alex Smillie, Tom Stephenson, George Johnson, Percy Williams, Sam Leckie, E.B. James, Jack Sproud, John Aplin, Jim Garton and Brinley Griffiths. *New Leader*, August 17 1934

²³⁵ Executive Committee report November 16-17 1934

²³⁶ Resolutions for pacts with the Labour Party were defeated by 21 votes to 4 and 22 votes to 2

²³⁷ *New Leader*, July 12 1935

²³⁸ The Welsh I.L.P. in 1935 was one of the few which had succeeded in compiling a relatively complete list of Trade Union, Co-operative Society and N.U.W.M. activity before the conference. However, disputes arose over whether the unemployed should be allowed to maintain membership of particular unions at a nominal fee or whether an all-inclusive unemployed section of the trade union movement should be formed. After contributions from those actively involved in the struggle including employed and unemployed miners, transport workers and railwaymen, the first of the proposals was adopted. *New Leader*, February 8 1935

²³⁹ Calls were also made to reorganise 'the National Health Insurance on a non-contributory basis, benefits to be free, full medical, surgical and hospital treatment and convalescence,' and for the provision of pensions on a non-contributory basis. *New Leader*, February 7 1936

²⁴⁰ *New Leader*, April 3 1936; on the Nine-Mile point dispute see Francis and Smith 279-81 although no mention is made of Marsden's connection with the I.L.P.; For further discussion of the Hunger March see below.; *New Leader*, March 12 1937

²⁴¹ *New Leader*, January 29 1937

²⁴² *New Leader*, April 2 1937; *New Leader*, July 30 1937

²⁴³ The only year after disaffiliation for which there are surviving Welsh Divisional membership figures calculated by the I.L.P. is 1947 when the membership was 37 (Thwaites, 1976, 27) Thus, no exact figures for membership are available for the period 1932-9, but a relatively full set of figure for affiliation fees from the division, were sent from John McNair to Francis Johnson in 1940. In the second half of 1936 with the growing demonstrations and the hunger march to London, affiliation fees paid to head office grew by nearly twenty per cent (£12 11s 11d). But then clear decline set in; the next six months saw affiliation fees fall by nearly forty per cent (£8 11s 2d) and the following year fees had declined even from this level by a further fifty per cent (£4 19s 10d). Finally by the outbreak of war membership in the division was at a further low, with fees falling by a further eighty per cent (£2 1s 11d). A conservative estimate Welsh membership of about 330 at the beginning of 1937 had fallen to somewhere under fifty by the outbreak of war. John McNair to Francis Johnson, July 1940, BLPES/Francis Johnson Papers/1940

²⁴⁴ *New Leader*, February 11 1938

²⁴⁵ *New Leader*, February 10 1939

²⁴⁶ Indeed in some areas of strength for the Labour Movement the I.L.P. was virtually non-existent. When C.L.R. James held an I.L.P. meeting in Trealaw in February 1936 the Party conceded that it was the first I.L.P. meeting in the area for years. *New Leader*, February 21 1936

²⁴⁷ In Newport an I.L.P.er was senior president and then president of Newport Industrial Council. TUC Correspondence I.L.P. File January 29 1937 MRC/MSS922/756.1/1

²⁴⁸ Two I.L.P.ers were re-elected to the Bedwas and Machen UDC in 1933. One of the two, F. H. Davies, a lay preacher at the local Methodist church who had been chairman of council from 1932-3, died in November 1935. Nevertheless, the I.L.P. maintained its representation in 1936 with the support of the Bedwas lodge of the SWMF, and would have increased its representation further in 1938 if it had not been for the intervention of the Labour Party, both of whose candidate polled under half the single I.L.P.ers total. *Merthyr Express*, November 23 1935; *New Leader*, January 24 1936; *New Leader*, March 11 1938; *New Leader*, April 3 1936; April 10 1936; *New Leader*, March 12 1937; *New Leader*, April 15 1938

²⁴⁹ There were two fights in 1937 between the Merthyr I.L.P. and Labour Party, both of which saw the I.L.P. coming off second best by a considerable margin. However, in the Municipal elections of 1938 the I.L.P. again stood in the Penydarren ward and there was a considerable swing to the I.L.P. candidate with the Labour vote, for a man who had represented the ward for 30 years, being down 400 and the I.L.P. vote up 384. The left wing grouping on the council was weakened when Protheroe died in July 1937 and accordingly the *New Leader* carried a tribute to him. N.A.C. minutes 13 November 1937; *New Leader*, July 30 1937; *New Leader*, November 5 1937; *New Leader*, November 11 1938

²⁵⁰ The committee eventually decided to refer the motion to a sub-committee. However, as Stanfield pointed out such a sub-committee was likely never to meet, as he reminded the Labour members that six months earlier he had moved that the SWMF demand for 12.5% increase in the scales should be accepted they had voted against it and referred it to a sub-committee but the sub-committee had never met. *New Leader*, February 18 1938

²⁵¹ *New Leader*, May 6 1938

²⁵² The arguments led leading Merthyr I.L.P.er Melville Rees to close down the Merthyr N.U.W.M. with resulting disputes and threats of legal action between Hannington and Rees. Executive Committee report November 16-17 1934

²⁵³ The section of the march from the bottom end of town was lead by three prominent I.L.P.ers Councillors Stanfield, and B.M. Davies and W. Rowland of the Miners' Unemployed Lodge. The organisers of the march had organised speakers which deliberately excluded the I.L.P. but included Arthur Greenwood, William Mellor, Arthur Horner and MP S.O. Davies. When it was revealed that there would be no I.L.P. speaker the crowd began to demand that Stanfield be allowed on the platform. The demand was eventually acceded to, to the disgust of Greenwood and Davies who left the stand without speaking.

²⁵⁴ *New Leader*, July 8 1938

²⁵⁵ J. Davies joined the Labour Party at the outbreak of war. The other two I.L.P. councillors continued to be elected until 1950 when the I.L.P branch closed down. For successive years before that Stanfield and then B.M. Davies served their time as mayor. Following the disappearance of the I.L.P. in Merthyr Stanfield in particular went on to play an active part in local politics as part of the Labour Party machine.

He remained on the borough council until 1974 and took over the chairmanship of the Mid Glamorgan County Council at the age of 71. He was also extremely active in his union, the National Amalgamated Union of Life Assurance Workers where he was on the national executive of the union for twenty-five years and national president for six years. *Merthyr Express*, April 1 1976; On the I.L.P. in Merthyr in the war and post-war period see Thwaites, 1976,226-30; On the history of the Plymouth Ward, where the I.L.P. councillors came from see Geraint James (ed.), *Plymouth Ward Scrapbook: The history of the villages of Troedyrhiw, Abercanaid and Pentrebach through the pages of the Merthyr Express 1935-85*.

²⁵⁶ Mark Simpson, an I.L.P member from the pre-first world war period, held the position of North East divisional secretary for sixteen years until his death in February 1941. Simpson was vocal on only very few issues, which made his opposition more telling. However, generally he preferred to let others take the centre stage whilst he worked behind the scenes. *New Leader*, February 22 1941

²⁵⁷ Inner Executive Report, September 22 1934

²⁵⁸ *New Leader*, 15 September 1933; *New Leader*, 6 October 1933; I.L.P. N.A.C. minutes June 24-25 1933; *New Leader*, 3 November 1933

²⁵⁹ *New Leader*, March 1 1935

²⁶⁰ Padley to Littlejohns, November 7 1979 in Tom Stephenson file, *Dictionary of Labour Biography* archive

²⁶¹ *New Leader*, February 14 1936; *New Leader*, January 29 1937

²⁶² *New Leader*, February 24 1939

²⁶³ Executive Committee Report, June 29-30 1935

²⁶⁴ *New Leader*, 19 August 1932; *New Leader*, 30 September 1932; *New Leader*, 24 March 1933 cf. *New Leader*, 3 March 1933

²⁶⁵ Todd, 1995 passim; *New Leader*, May 29 1936; *New Leader*, December 4 1936; *New Leader*, March 19 1937

²⁶⁶ *New Leader*, 2 September 1932; Todd, 12

²⁶⁷ *Scots New Leader*, February 28 1936 Industrial Committee minutes, July 16 1936

²⁶⁸ The Jarrow candidatures were not formally endorsed by the party as they had not fulfilled the constitutional requirement of being members of the Party for over one year. Immediately after the election the group of two were involved in a controversy on the council when it was reported in the December of that year that the two I.L.P.ers on the Jarrow Town Council had voted for the Tory nominee for the Mayoralty against the Labour Party nominee. However, the two were involved in more favourable publicity from the Labour Movement when the I.L.P. councillor Scullion proposed a motion for a march of the unemployed to the PAC and UAB at Newcastle. He was opposed by the Labour Members of the Town Council but the Jarrow Labour Party took the opposite view and supported the I.L.P. line in favour of the march; N.A.C. minutes 13 November 1937; N.A.C. minutes December 11 1937; *New Leader*, February 2 1938; *New Leader*, February 18 1938

²⁶⁹ *New Leader*, March 1 1935

²⁷⁰ *New Leader*, October 23 1936

²⁷¹ This represented the I.L.P., Workington Labour Parties, N.U.W.M., British Legion, Veterans' Club, Unemployed Clubs, but not the Whitehaven Labour Party, which refused to co-operate with organisations banned by the Labour Party. *New Leader*, November 27 1936

²⁷² *New Leader*, November 27 1936

²⁷³ *New Leader*, February 15 1935

²⁷⁴ *New Leader*, August 2 1935

²⁷⁵ The makeup of the Hayle branch in Cornwall was perhaps not atypical: the branch had nine members, only one of whom was in full employment, and that member had a sister and her boy dependent on his earnings. The rest of the branch was composed of: one member on a widow's pension, with an eighty-seven year old mother to support; three on the means test, with one having a daughter with three children and a son on occasional work; one member dependent upon the earnings of her blind husband; whilst the branch secretary was trying to eke out a living doing various bits of casual work despite being lame. The branch claimed exemption from the more standard of the I.L.P.'s claims to money through the branch quota scheme and power for socialism funds. Instead it had devised a number of plans to make money in other ways including making blackberry and elderberry wine (picking was free) and hatching a batch of 'I.L.P. chickens', in both cases income over expenditure was to go to the party. *New Leader*, 14 July 1933; *New Leader*, 18 August 1933

²⁷⁶ Rawlings Papers BLPES Coll. Misc. 496 file 1

²⁷⁷ *New Leader*, January 25 1935

²⁷⁸ *New Leader*, January 29 1937

²⁷⁹ Twenty members of the St. Phillips Ward Labour Party left the larger party to join the I.L.P.

²⁸⁰ Berriman's victory by 2163 votes to 1,673 was I.L.P. claimed 'remarkable', as three working class areas previously included in the ward had been separated into a ward of their own. *New Leader*, November 6 1936; *New Leader*, November 13 1936

²⁸¹ *New Leader*, December 12 1937

²⁸² G.L. Baston To Walter Citrine August 9 1937 (MRC/MSS922/756.1/1)

²⁸³ Executive Committee Report, November 16-17 1934

²⁸⁴ *New Leader*, August 17 1934

²⁸⁵ Executive Committee Report, June 29-30 1935

²⁸⁶ *New Leader*, May 29 1936

²⁸⁷ Arthur Behenna's victory in 1936 deposed the Mayor from top position on the poll. *New Leader*, November 13 1936; *New Leader*, November 5 1937

4. Parliamentary Elections and Political Space

4.1 Introduction

The task which the I.L.P. leadership set itself during the immediate period after disaffiliation was to clearly define the Party's new revolutionary policy. No aspect of this dispute was more controversial than the place of parliament and elections in the Party's strategy. Some within the Party, especially within the R.P.C. believed that elections, parliamentary or local, had no significant part to play in the strategy of a revolutionary party. Others, such as Brockway, saw the new revolutionary policy and its vigorous implementation as itself a means of achieving electoral success. At the same time most of those who remained unconvinced by the way in which party policy was developing, including the Lancashire based Unity Group, and others such as Jowett in Bradford, were convinced that the Party needed to refocus its activity and prioritise the electoral arena.

These disputes over the correct attitude to take towards the electoral struggle did not, of course, remain entirely theoretical. During the 1930s the Party engaged in a series of electoral battles which altered the Party's understanding of its own position and the place of electoral struggle in the I.L.P.'s strategy. The most high profile of these electoral battles were the three by-elections and seventeen General Election Seats contested by the Party in the period 1933-5. The analysis presented here highlights some of the problems inherent in the I.L.P.'s attitudes towards parliamentary elections. First, it shows the effort and emphasis which many I.L.P. activists put into electoral activity. This makes it difficult to believe that the I.L.P. could easily have been transformed into the kind of revolutionary party which neglected elections completely, as desired by the Revolutionary Policy Committee. Second, the chapter argues that the detail of the Party's policy was not a major issue for the electorate. I.L.P. candidates were in many cases reluctant to follow the national Party line in their electoral contests, but it is difficult to accept, with Brockway, that had the Party line been correctly applied the result would have been substantially different. Finally, an examination of the limitations of the I.L.P.'s electoral successes suggests that the prospects for a party seeking to build a substantial electoral presence were limited in the context of the 1930s

given the resources available to the I.L.P. Thus, the possibilities of building the type of party envisioned by the Unity Group were extremely limited.

4.2 Kilmarnock

The first by-election that the I.L.P. stood for in the new parliament was in Kilmarnock, an area of considerable I.L.P. strength. The by-election, caused by the appointment of National Labour MP Cragie Aitcheson as a Judge of the Realm, gave an opportunity to consider the nature and extent of the breach between the two parties. In the 1931 General Election only John Pollock of the I.L.P., unendorsed by the Labour Party, had opposed Aitcheson, who had won comfortably, polling 21,803 to Pollock's 14,767. In 1933 both I.L.P. and Labour claimed the right to contest the seat each arguing the other was splitting the anti-Government vote. In justification of this position the I.L.P. pointed to Pollock's record as previous candidate in the constituency.¹ However, in 1933 the Labour candidate, Rev. James Barr, was a popular choice, he was a native of the district and had considerable personal support.²

All the parties campaigned actively and utilised their most attractive speakers for the campaign. For the I.L.P. this meant Maxton, McGovern and Buchanan were regular speakers with Jennie Lee, who attacked Barr as part of 'the Labour Party machine,' joining them the night before the election.³ However, with a National Labour candidate, Lindsay, joining the fray three of the four candidates were claiming to be the authentic voice of labour, and both Barr and Pollock claimed to represent the real voice of the I.L.P. However, the I.L.P. campaign highlighted the tensions within the I.L.P. over the new revolutionary policy and the complex relationship between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party. Pollock had no desire to associate himself with the new revolutionary policy of the I.L.P. Indeed Pollock distanced himself much more from the Labour Party machine than from the larger organisations policies. Further it was the Labour Party, acutely aware of the tensions within the Kilmarnock I.L.P. over the United Front, which stressed the smaller organisation's new 'revolutionary policy' labelling Pollock the 'I.L.P.-C.P. candidate.'⁴ The National Government campaign also placed great emphasis on the I.L.P.-Labour split. Lindsay on the eve of the poll, in an attempt to discredit the Labour Party challenge, made a point of claiming that the real fight in the constituency was between himself and Pollock.⁵ Only Alexander MacEwen, the Scottish nationalist stood apart from what appeared to some to be a fraternal dispute.⁶

The poll took place on the 2 November and Lindsay, the National Government candidate won the seat with 12,577 votes. However, the combined votes of the I.L.P. and the Labour Party would have been sufficient to overtake Lindsay with Barr polling 9,924 votes and Pollock 7,575. This result caused considerable concern to both sides. The Labour Party NEC received a number of letters from divisional Labour Parties urging a settlement be found with the I.L.P. in the light of the Kilmarnock result.⁷ At the same time Pollock's own branch of the I.L.P. approached the Labour Party, enquiring about re-affiliation, immediately after the contest.⁸ The Labour Party's official report on the by-election put the blame for the defeat squarely on poor organisation which resulted from the split, which 'not only divided Labour People, but created divisions in many Labour families.'⁹

From the I.L.P. point of view two things about the Scottish situation were made clear by the by-election result. First, that the dispute with the Labour Party was, in the short term, more likely to cause disruption of both parties' activity than to result in an increase in loyal support for either party. Second, it was evident that the high profile dispute raging between Lancashire and London over the new party policy was largely irrelevant to the bulk of I.L.P.ers in Scotland.

4.3 Merthyr

The I.L.P. had a considerable tradition of Parliamentary representation in Merthyr. It was the constituency where Hardie had first been elected and later Richard Wallhead had carried the I.L.P. banner as a rebel against the Labour leadership. Wallhead had left the Labour Party in 1932 with the I.L.P. but had rejoined the Labour Party as the smaller party developed its new revolutionary policy. After being reluctantly welcomed back into the P.L.P. he made a point of campaigning for the Labour Party against the I.L.P. in the local elections in Merthyr late in 1933.¹⁰

This relationship with the past dominated the I.L.P.'s campaign in the Merthyr by-election caused by Wallhead's death. After Jennie Lee declined the nomination the I.L.P. selected the former MP for Glasgow Camlachie, Campbell Stephen, a known opponent of the new revolutionary policy, as their candidate.¹¹ His campaign was one based on attacking the Labour Party for its conduct over the Means Test and the Anomalies Act.¹² Although Stephen, buoyed by the Party's performance in the Merthyr municipal elections, pointed to the threat of fascism, and suggested the Labour Party

would prove no barrier to its progress, there was little mention of the I.L.P.'s changed policy after disaffiliation.

The I.L.P.'s claim to the constituency's radical tradition was challenged by all three of the other candidates. The Liberal Candidate, Victor Evans, was a radical Liberal. The Communist Party, despite an earlier electoral agreement with the I.L.P. selected N.U.W.M. leader Wal Hannington to fight the seat. However, the biggest problem for Stephen lay in the choice of Labour candidate- S.O. Davies had been a long-serving member of the I.L.P. and a critic of the Labour establishment. In his role as vice-president of the South Wales Miners Federation he had been on the Advisory Committee of the Left Wing Movement in the late 1920s, he had also been a prominent member of the Miners Minority Movement. In the by-election his platform was that the I.L.P. had abandoned its historic task and all it was able to achieve in Merthyr was a splitting of the vote.¹³ The Labour Party's strong candidate was backed by an effective campaign and support from all the major unions.¹⁴

I.L.P. hopes for Merthyr were clearly misplaced. The poll, which took place on June 5, placed Davies as the clear winner with 18,645 votes over the Liberal's 10,376. Stephen ended up a poor third for the I.L.P. with 3,508, less than 100 votes ahead of Hannington who polled 3,409. The Party made little attempt to hide its disappointment, its high expectations for Merthyr had been dashed. The I.L.P. tradition in the area had been insufficient to present a serious challenge to the Labour Party.

4.4 Upton

The Upton by-election took place just three weeks before the Merthyr poll, with I.L.P. General Secretary Fenner Brockway, the former MP for the neighbouring division of East Leyton, as the Party's candidate. In contrast to both Kilmarnock and Merthyr, Brockway was a keen advocate, and a principal author, of the I.L.P.'s new revolutionary policy. His campaign was thus based around this policy. His election address, which attacked the Labour Party as having 'feeble leadership' and 'flabby policies', began by stressing that he stood for a policy 'distinct from the policy of both the Conservative and Labour candidates.' In line with the new revolutionary policy he spoke of the non-parliamentary 'organisations for the coming struggle' that formed part of the I.L.P.'s new revolutionary policy.¹⁵ The London Party also made considerable effort to get the support of the Communist Party and industrial organisations. With Brockway able to

agree with most aspects of C.P. policy apart from Soviet Foreign Policy, the Communists agreed to back him.¹⁶ He also managed to get the support, by a unanimous vote of the West Ham branch of the Chemical Worker's Union and also from a number of railwaymen and transport workers.¹⁷

As in Merthyr and Kilmarnock, an opponent with I.L.P. credentials stood against the disaffiliated Party. Ben Gardner, the Labour Candidate who been elected for Upton in 1923 and 1929, was a foundation member of the I.L.P. and had remained a member of that organisation for the thirty-nine years up to disaffiliation. Gardner was also able to use the difference within the I.L.P. to his advantage, using the Lancashire division's suggestions that Brockway was going to lose his deposit to claim that any vote for the I.L.P. would be a wasted vote.¹⁸ Even taking this set back into account the result at Upton on 14 May was a disappointment. The Labour Candidate was a clear winner polling 11,998 with a majority of nearly 3,500 over the Conservative candidate who received 8,534 votes. Brockway trailed behind a poor third with 748 votes, a mere 3.5 per cent of the poll.

The 1935 General Election

4.5 Candidates

The I.L.P. initially indicated that it was going to fight fifty seats in the general election. However, in the event it only contested seventeen. Part of the reason for this reduction in numbers was financial, the burden of contesting such a large number of seats would have been far too much for such a small party with such meagre financial resources. However, there was much more to the decision to reduce the number of electoral fights.¹⁹ The Party attempted to be much more selective about the seats it contested, deciding to fight only those seats in which it believed that it had a realistic chance of doing well. Further the I.L.P. attempted to choose candidates which it believed it could 'demonstrate genuinely had a claim to represent that division.'²⁰

For James Maxton in Bridgeton, George Buchanan in Gorbals and John McGovern in Shettleston, the three I.L.P. Glasgow MPs, the connections with their seats needed no further demonstration. Campbell Stephen in Camlachie, Fred Jowett in Bradford East and Jennie Lee in North Lanark had all previously sat as MPs for the seats they fought in 1935. Campbell Stephen, first a United Free Church Minister then a barrister, had

been one of the group of Glasgow MPs elected for the first time in 1922. He continued to represent Camlachie until his defeat in 1931.²¹ Fred Jowett had been elected to Parliament for the West Bradford constituency as Labour and I.L.P. candidate in 1906. Defeated in the victory election after the war he had been Chairman of the Labour Party in 1922 and that year was returned to Parliament for East Bradford. In 1924, despite his constant criticism of the Cabinet system of Government, he became a Cabinet Minister serving as First Commissioner of Works in the First Labour Government. After his election defeat in 1924 he was re-elected as East Bradford MP from 1929 to 1931 when he was defeated standing as an I.L.P. candidate unendorsed by the Labour Party.²² Jennie Lee had been elected for North Lanark in the famous 1929 by-election. She was defeated, polling just under 45 percent of the vote, in 1931 when she stood as an I.L.P. candidate unendorsed by the Labour Party. However, she had refused the opportunity to stand as I.L.P. candidate in other areas.²³

Elsewhere the candidates selected were all supposed to be significant figures who combined a connection to the seat with high profile personalities. Thus, in Norwich the I.L.P. nominated Fenner Brockway—aside from Maxton probably the I.L.P.'s leading personality—to try and capitalise on the I.L.P. tradition of putting forward electoral candidates in the dual member seat. In Kilmarnock the Party nominated John Pollock, chairman of the Scottish Area Council of NUDAW, who had stood for the constituency in both 1931 and in the 1933 by-election. In the areas surrounding Glasgow, apart from the three MPs and Campbell Stephen the I.L.P. nominated three of its most active and well-known councillors. In Tradeston the leader of the I.L.P.'s council group, James Carmichael, stood. In Govan the I.L.P. candidate was councillor Tom Taylor, later Lord Taylor of Gryfe, and in Clackmannan and Eastern Stirlingshire it was Councillor David Gibson.²⁴ In Merthyr the I.L.P. Candidate was Claude Stanfield, local councillor from Troedyrhiw, who was well known in the area both for his work on the council, having recently defeated a Labour challenge in the municipal election, and with the N.U.W.M., having been one of the Merthyr leaders of the 1934 National Hunger March.²⁵ In Whitehaven the I.L.P. candidate, Tom Stephenson, was not only the leading member of the I.L.P.'s North East Division and of numerous radical and socialist organisations in the area, he was a County Councillor, and a prominent member of the Cumberland Miners' Association.²⁶ In Aberdeen their candidate was Fraser MacIntosh, local councillor and SCWS Northern Area chairman.²⁷ In Camborne the I.L.P. candidate was Kate Spurrell who had stood unendorsed but with the support of the local Labour Party

in 1931 as an I.L.P. candidate.²⁸ In Chorley Bob Edwards, one of the leaders of the 1934 Hunger March and wife of May Edwards, prominent I.L.P. local councillor was the candidate.²⁹ Only in Lanark South did the I.L.P. candidate, William Carlin, who was chairman of the South Lanark Federation of the I.L.P. and had sat on the Scottish Divisional Council of the Party for four years and spent a year on its Executive Committee lack a significant local presence. Still the I.L.P. campaign there was closely connected with Jennie Lee's high profile campaign in the adjacent constituency.³⁰

4.6 Campaign

The Abyssinian crisis was a major part of the reason for the timing of the 1935 General Election. Yet, despite major divisions within each of the parties about the solution to the crisis it was not, overall, a major campaigning issue. The official position of the major parties, including the Communists, involved support for sanctions through the League of Nations. Given this widespread agreement over Abyssinia the election campaign was quickly drawn away from the international situation and towards consideration of other issues. The Labour Party largely succeeded in setting this alternative agenda concentrating on the issues of unemployment, the Means Test, housing and social services.³¹

The I.L.P.'s national campaign, began in July when Maxton wrote a series of articles for *New Leader* which emphasised the need for the I.L.P. Parliamentary Group to increase in size, suggesting that it might be possible to win as many as fifteen seats.³² As the election drew nearer the national party campaign began in earnest. The I.L.P. case, publicised in the *New Leader* and in a series of leaflets produced for distribution during the election, focussed heavily on the Abyssinian crisis. I.L.P. candidates were described as 'Socialist and No More War Candidates' standing for 'no war, no rearmament, workers' rights and socialism.'³³ Such International issues were placed to the forefront in the campaigns of several of the I.L.P. candidates, most notably by Fenner Brockway, the I.L.P. candidate in Norwich and a main author of the I.L.P. policy on Abyssinia. He spent much of his time arguing that war was a direct result of the operation of capitalism and the struggle between competing capitalist groups for markets and economic resources.³⁴ Claude Stanfield in Merthyr also made the I.L.P.'s statements on Abyssinia the main plank of most of his election addresses and choose to differentiate himself from his left-wing Labour opponent primarily on this issue.³⁵ Tom Taylor and James Carmichael in Glasgow both ran campaigns in a similar vein, with Taylor

declaring he was 'against all capitalist war' and Carmichael arguing the money spent on rearmament should be spent on pensions.³⁶ Similarly Tom Stephenson, the I.L.P.'s 'Socialist and no more war candidate' in Whitehaven, whilst putting forward a similar programme of mines nationalisation to his Labour opponent, focussed his campaign on the Abyssinian crisis, stressing throughout that capitalism was the real cause of war.³⁷ John Pollock in Kilmarnock, also emphasised the International situation holding a 'Great Peace Meeting', with AEU district secretary William Cowan in the chair to get his campaign started, and arguing against rearmament and capitalist wars throughout.³⁸

However, for most of the I.L.P. candidates the national line and focus of the Party was of secondary importance. The energy and enthusiasm for campaigns came from the local organisation. Jennie Lee's campaign for example, organised by the North Lanark I.L.P., was a frantic affair which involved arranging an average of six meetings every day and producing a daily 'Jennie Lee Newspaper' for the duration of the campaign.³⁹ Further, most of the I.L.P.'s more senior figures chose to ignore the International focus of the election campaign suggested by Brockway and the *New Leader*. This was true of all the I.L.P. MPs in Glasgow, Campbell Stephen in Camlachie and Fred Jowett in Bradford who all emphasised domestic issues. Thus, Maxton, who was absent from Bridgeton for most of the campaign, stressed the need for higher pensions and argued for 'rebels in parliament,' stating that 'there never was a Government that did not require to be kicked' and the 'I.L.P. intended to carry on that tradition.'⁴⁰ Buchanan, scarcely mentioned the international situation, instead campaigning for plans to raise National Health Insurance benefits and widows pension and old age pensions, and the repeal of the Sedition Act. McGovern pointed to his own achievements with the Hunger Marchers and placed this alongside demands for increased unemployment benefit and pensions, reduced rents, higher school leaving age and maintenance grants. Campbell Stephen, untroubled by his failure to distinguish himself from his Labour opponent on the Abyssinian question, instead stressed his opposition to the means test and on demands that money be spent on children, pensions and the unemployed. Similarly in Bradford, Fred Jowett, or Percy Williams (who, because of illness, deputised for Jowett for most of the campaign) stressed that despite the party's peace position, home issues needed to take priority over Abyssinia.⁴¹

4.7 Labour and the I.L.P.

The Scottish executive of the Labour Party was acutely aware that the I.L.P. posed a potential danger to the Labour Party in Scotland. The smaller party had stood ten unendorsed candidates in Scotland in the 1931 election of whom Maxton, McGovern and Buchanan had been elected. Of the ten who had stood in 1931, these three and Campbell Stephen, Jennie Lee and John Pollock were standing again for the I.L.P. However, Jean Mann and Jack Gibson, unendorsed I.L.P.ers in 1931, stood in 1935 for the Labour Party with Gibson facing I.L.P. opposition. In addition, Tom Irwin, who had fought the famous East Renfrew by-election for the I.L.P., also stood as the endorsed Labour Party candidate for Greenock in 1935.

In March 1933, the executive of the Scottish Labour Party had discussed the 'tremendous organisational difficulties' that they faced in Glasgow, the subsequent Kilmarnock result had stressed to them the importance of organising effectively against the I.L.P. The executive thus attempted to ensure that 'people of public standing' would oppose the most prominent I.L.P. candidates in Glasgow. They also tried to ensure that candidates in I.L.P. areas were put in place at an early date. Thus, the Glasgow BLP appointed a special committee for organisation and planning elections in I.L.P. strongholds and the Labour Party's Scottish Executive gave an additional grant to the Glasgow BLP to help it with a membership campaign to dent the I.L.P. These activities were strongly supported, morally and financially, by the Labour Party's N.E.C. and National Agent.⁴²

The Labour Party machine also clamped down hard on any section which even considered giving support to the I.L.P. The considerations of the United Patternmakers Association over whether to give financial support to Buchanan, their President, resulted in defeat for the proposals, which although receiving a majority, did not obtain the required two-thirds margin. Nevertheless, the Gorbals DLP requested the N.E.C. declare the Patternmakers ballot 'an action inconsistent with the position of an affiliated organisation.' Similarly, moves by the West of Scotland Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions to promote negotiations to avoid conflicting candidatures between Labour and the I.L.P., although unsuccessful, were condemned in the strongest terms by both the N.E.C. and the Scottish Executive.⁴³ The claim to 'the I.L.P. tradition' was to be an important part of the 1935 election campaign in Scotland and the Labour Party was not prepared to cede it to the smaller party without a fight. The I.L.P. decided to offer

support to Labour candidates if they broadly agreed with the I.L.P. position on peace, unemployment and the socialisation of industry.⁴⁴ The Labour Party machine, on the other hand was determined to destroy the I.L.P. challenge, whatever the cost.

Despite the desire of the Labour Party's Executive and Scottish Executive to produce a strong fight against the I.L.P. in its heartland they had great difficulty in finding suitable candidates. In Gorbals the Labour Party candidate, Alexander Burnett, had no connection with the constituency. He entered the campaign late, and despite the extra funding from the Scottish Executive of the Labour Party and the N.E.C., the Labour Party's attempt to displace Buchanan was described by the *Glasgow Herald* as 'extremely lack-lustre.'⁴⁵ In Shettleston the Labour Party candidate, George Beggs, a Glaswegian native and NCLC lecturer, was faced with a Labour Party machine which had been effectively destroyed by a consistent I.L.P. campaign dating back to the Shettleston I.L.P.'s expulsion from Labour in 1931.⁴⁶ In Bridgeton, Maxton's Labour opponent Samuel McLaren, chairman of Greenock Trades and Labour Council had great difficulty in generating any enthusiasm for his campaign. Only in Camlachie did the Labour Party find a popular candidate to fight a losing battle against the I.L.P. There the Labour Party, candidate, Ballie William Reid, a 'popular Sandyhills man who by 1935 had represented Mile-end on the Council for many years', was much better known than those who fought the sitting I.L.P. MPs.⁴⁷ A key factor in the I.L.P. success against the Labour Party in these seats was the perception, which extended even to many Labour Party activists, that it was the I.L.P. which held the legitimate right to fight the seat on behalf of the working-class.

Much of this I.L.P. legitimacy applied to the two other I.L.P. candidates who had been successfully elected in 1929, Jennie Lee and Fred Jowett. Jennie Lee later recalled that 'all through the campaign came the cry, sometimes wistfully, sometimes angrily, from rank and file workers for working class unity.' However, during the campaign both the I.L.P. and the Labour party spent much of their effort suggesting that the other side was facing a losing battle. Nevertheless, the Labour Party in North Lanark was clearly divided about running a candidate and placed considerable effort into attempting to persuade Lee to run as official Labour Candidate.⁴⁸

Similarly, in Bradford there was considerable internal pressure from sections of the Bradford Labour Party membership not to oppose the popular figure of Jowett, and the

question had been left open until late in 1934. However, after further disputes between the two organisations which culminated in the Labour Party fielding an unsuccessful candidate for the I.L.P. traditional stronghold of East Bowling in the 1934 municipal election, it became clear that Jowett would face Labour opposition.⁴⁹ Thus, in 1935 Jowett faced the opposition of the Labour Party and their candidate Wilf Heywood, a Trade Union organiser from the Textile Workers' Union. The question which dogged the Labour Party throughout its East Bradford campaign was why they were opposing Jowett. They attempted to deal with this issue in an article in the *Bradford Pioneer* entitled 'Why Labour fights East Bradford,' which suggested that Jowett could never form part of a Labour team in the House of Commons and questioning Jowett's commitment to the I.L.P. given his well-known criticisms of the party's new revolutionary policy. In particular they pushed him on the question of whether there should be a united front with the Communist Party.⁵⁰ Jowett's reply to the Labour Party, which frustrated his opponents by side-stepping their main question, was published in the Bradford I.L.P.'s weekly Newsheet the *I.L.P. News*. Jowett was prepared to make some concessions to the new policy of the I.L.P., but the thrust of his reply was that he had always been a revolutionary socialist, and he remained committed to those ideals.⁵¹ However, despite the attacks of the Bradford Labour Party machine many of the larger party's supporters, including three councillors and a number of trade unionists, declared their support for Jowett.⁵²

In these six seats there was a clear perception that the I.L.P. fight was legitimated by the connections of the candidate and the I.L.P. to the seat. Elsewhere, despite the Party's best efforts to secure attractive candidates, the Labour Party was able to successfully argue that either that they were 'Labour' seats or that the Labour candidate was the true inheritor of the 'I.L.P. tradition.'

This question as to who truly inherited the 'I.L.P. tradition' after 1932 was an important issue in a number of constituencies, especially in Scotland. These issues were most clearly raised in Lanark South. The I.L.P. was clearly strong in the area and from 1918-29 all nominees of the Labour Party had been I.L.P. sponsored. Then in 1931 the I.L.P. candidate had been unendorsed by the Labour Party because of his refusal to sign standing orders. Many, including the *Glasgow Herald*, looked at the situation and concluded that the 'major anti-Government forces will favour the I.L.P.'⁵³ However, the I.L.P. faced a much harder task in claiming I.L.P. continuity and identity for the Lanark

constituency than for North Lanark. This was not just because of the high level of personal support for Jennie Lee but also because the Labour Party candidate, Jack Gibson, had fought the Lanark seat as an I.L.P. candidate unendorsed by the Labour Party in 1931. Gibson also made extensive use of the support he obtained from the Communist Party to stress his left-wing credentials.⁵⁴ The failure in Lanark South, especially when compared to Lanark North indicated just how fragile an apparent electoral tradition could be.

A similar interpretation can be applied to Kilmarnock, where the I.L.P. tradition had been an issue in the 1933 by-election. The issue was raised again in 1935, with the I.L.P. buoyed by the relative obscurity of the Labour candidate James Crawford, compared with the Rev. James Barr, the candidate in the by-election. However, two factors combined to reduce the impact of the I.L.P. challenge. First the by-election result had seen Labour come narrowly ahead of the I.L.P., thus appearing in the eyes of many to legitimate their candidacy. Second, Crawford himself had considerable I.L.P. credentials and had been a member of the Party until 1932.⁵⁵

Elsewhere the key issue between Labour and I.L.P. was not so much the I.L.P. tradition as the 'legitimacy' of the Labour Party candidate. Even in Glasgow, aside from the four seats which the I.L.P. won, the Labour Party was able to claim 'legitimacy'. Tom Taylor's opponent in Govan, Neil MacLean, was one of only two non-I.L.P. Labour candidates who had won Glasgow seats in the 1931 election.⁵⁶ James Carmichael's opponent in Tradeston, Tom Henderson, had held the seat prior to 1931. Thus, in Govan the most important aspect of the Labour campaign against the I.L.P. was the claim that this was a 'Labour' seat.

The I.L.P. had something of a tradition in nominating candidates in Norwich, with their candidate, Dorothy Jewson, taking one of the places in this two member seat in the 1923 Election and standing in subsequent elections as an I.L.P. Candidate.⁵⁷ Following disaffiliation an initially strained relationship with the Labour Party had improved somewhat, especially on the council where Labour relied on the I.L.P. for its majority. In 1935 the I.L.P. tried strenuously to persuade the Labour Party to only put forward one candidate in the two member seat.⁵⁸ The Norwich Labour Party, under pressure from the N.E.C., had no intention of pulling one of its candidates out arguing that the national dimension was crucial in understanding why it was important to have an all-

Labour ticket.⁵⁹ The Labour campaign attempted to leave the I.L.P. unmentioned until the days immediately before polling when, probably as a response to the National Government Candidates' focus on the I.L.P./Labour split, the Labour Party suddenly issued a leaflet with a scathing personal attack on Brockway.⁶⁰

It was thus the question of the split vote which dominated I.L.P.'s fortunes in the 1935 General Election almost everywhere. Only in Merthyr, where the I.L.P. alone stood against Labour, were the dynamics significantly different. The Labour Party and their candidate S.O. Davies dismissed the I.L.P. campaign as 'a childish attempt at disruption in the working class movement.' Although the I.L.P. candidate had to cope with accusations that he was attracting the support of anti-socialists he was able to gain the support of some significant local Labour figures, most notably, Alderman Sam Jennings who had been passed over the previous year for the Labour nomination.⁶¹ The I.L.P. was also able to obtain the support of the Communist Party in three boroughs despite the national line of the C.P.⁶²

4.8 Religion

Questions of religion were never a defining part of the I.L.P.'s politics in the 1930s. However, in the context of Glasgow, where an uneasy peace between rival religious factions was only beginning to be established, religious matters remained relevant to the Party's leading Glasgow figures. The I.L.P. still benefited from being part of the 'Labour-Catholic alliance' after 1922 and even after 1932 Catholic elites had chosen, so far as possible, not to take sides in the dispute between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party.⁶³ In 1935 even McGovern, who was well known for his outspoken attacks on Church interference in politics, was not directly opposed by the Catholic Church. Despite continuing tensions with the Catholic elites, in 1935 the Catholic Union did not directly oppose him leaving it up to individual branches to decide their own policy.⁶⁴

The significance of religion for the I.L.P. was enhanced by the fact that the chief opposition to each of the successful I.L.P. candidates came from the Unionist camp. This was particularly true for Maxton, as Bridgeton was probably the seat in Glasgow where Orange sympathies amongst the Protestant working class were strongest and his Unionist opponent, Lt. Col. McInnes Shaw, was a leading figure in Orange circles. The Unionists were initially hopeful that the divided Labour/I.L.P. vote would allow them to defeat Maxton. There were however, serious divisions within the Bridgeton Protestant

camp and McInnes Shaw had to dedicate much of his campaign to attacking Unionist complacency and arguing for a continuous effort to 'make sure that the bad housing conditions on which Socialism flourishes are removed.'⁶⁵ Whilst the I.L.P.'s Glasgow candidates could not completely ignore the question of religion none made any effort to deal with such questions directly.

4.9 Results

The outcome of the 1935 General Election was another large victory by the National Government. The National Government returned 431 seats, Labour 154, the Liberals 19, the I.L.P. 4, the Irish Nationalists 2, the Communists 1 and other parties 5. This success has been described by some commentators as being as dramatic as the Liberal landslide of 1906 or the Labour victory of 1945.⁶⁶ However, the Labour Party did make some progress in 1935. Overall they made net gain of 94 seats, with a swing to Labour of about 9.4%. Whilst the swing did not show the very marked regional variations of some elections it was above average in north-east Scotland, London, Lancashire, East Midlands, West Riding of Yorkshire, Durham, Northumberland and southern Scotland. The swing was lower than 9.4% in the West Midlands, south-west England, parts of the Clyde Valley, and some parts of north-east England.⁶⁷

The I.L.P. saw four candidates elected. Its three sitting MPs were returned along with Campbell Stephen in Camlachie. In all four cases the Labour Party candidate lost his deposit. There was some surprise expressed in Glasgow at the size of the I.L.P. majorities and that even the relatively uncharismatic figure of Campbell Stephen had performed so well.⁶⁸ However, Stephen's performance showed up the significant weaknesses in their position as well. Stephen's victory was a statement of support for an I.L.P. candidate whose policy was not significantly different from his Labour opponents. The vote for Stephen showed a widespread acceptance that Camlachie was an 'I.L.P. seat', it was a condition that could not be readily used elsewhere.

Elsewhere, only in Bradford and North Lanark was there a widely accepted argument that the I.L.P. was the 'legitimate' working class party to contest the seat. In both cases the result saw the Labour party take enough votes from the second placed I.L.P. to prevent the smaller party from winning the seat, and to hand victory to the National Government. The I.L.P. had polled above the Labour Party, it was now necessary for the Party to ensure that this result translated into future legitimacy for the Party, to

ensure that workers who had voted loyally for the Labour Party would in future vote I.L.P. As the Bradford I.L.P. commented on the result

The figures prove that our party had the confidence of more workers than any other working class party in the division. It is obvious that a large number of workers have put their trade union loyalty before their own political interests.⁶⁹

Everywhere else, with the exception of Merthyr, the I.L.P. had performed badly. Except in the two other Glasgow seats the Party had lost its deposit, and even in Tradeston and Govan it had come bottom of the poll. In Kilmarnock, where the Party had received a reasonable poll in 1933 the I.L.P. had been squeezed out, as Crawford, the Labour candidate, suggested the 1935 result, effectively buried the I.L.P. as an electoral force in Kilmarnock.⁷⁰ In Norwich where the I.L.P. was building up its electoral presence at local level and with Brockway as candidate the Party had performed badly. Yet in areas such as Norwich and Kilmarnock where the Labour Party was itself struggling to recover from 1931 the I.L.P. vote was still important.⁷¹ The initial anger the Labour Party directed against the I.L.P. on occasion, as in Norwich, developed into a desire for a more positive alliance.⁷²

In other places there was less consolation for the small defeated party. With convincing electoral defeats the only rewards were personal. In Whitehaven Tom Stephenson came out of events significantly better than the I.L.P.

Actually the I.L.P. challenge proved a fiasco. Mr Stephenson won his spurs as a speaker who can grip and hold a crowd, but he had no organisation behind him, and the man in the street could not detect anything more attractive in the I.L.P. brand of socialism than that which he usually supported.⁷³

Whilst in Camborne all Kate Spurrell was left with apart from hope for the future was a strong sense of personal pride:

I am bottom of the poll. I have lost my deposit but I am a proud woman... I never tried to get your votes; I have fought a clean fight... I built a party machine at the last election which turned its guns upon me. I don't mind that. I am glad to be losing behind James Maxton rather than win as the official Labour candidate as I might have done... When the breakdown comes, and it will come, the workers will turn to leaders who have never betrayed them.⁷⁴

The British electoral system leaves scant room for smaller parties, and the I.L.P., despite bucking this trend in Glasgow, and coming close in North Lanark and Bradford found its vote squeezed everywhere by accusations of 'splitting the vote.' Only in Merthyr where this logic did not apply did the an I.L.P. candidate who had never represented the division perform surprisingly well. The crucial factor undoubtedly lay in

the fact that the logic which was so often used against the I.L.P.- that splitting the vote would let in a Tory- was irrelevant in the Merthyr campaign.

4.10 Conclusion

The performance of the I.L.P. in the three by-elections and the 1935 General Election contests suggests that the party's achievements were affected by a wide range of factors. These included the levels of campaigning, the candidates selected and the attitude of religious organisations and other political parties. However, the impact of most of these factors appears relatively small. In the 1935 General Election, for example, there is little evidence that the least well-known of the I.L.P. candidates performed significantly worse than the better respected when standing in similar seats. There is even less evidence that exact detail of the policy they were putting forward systematically affected the poll of I.L.P. candidates. Indeed, in so far as the Party was able to get the majority, and in some cases the overwhelming majority, of the Labour/I.L.P. combined vote one factor stands ahead of all others: the perception, or not, of a seat as an 'I.L.P. seat.' The exact candidate, for example, was important largely in so far as they connected to a tradition of contesting a seat, as Campbell Stephen did in Camlachie, or Fred Jowett did in Bradford, rather than through charisma, activism or public speaking expertise.

Following disaffiliation the role of contesting parliamentary elections in the Party's strategy had been seriously questioned. The N.A.C., with the R.P.C. campaigning for further reform, had reduced the emphasis given to electoral struggles. However, the I.L.P. through Maxton and the parliamentary group maintained a Parliamentary and electoral presence which gave the Party considerable prestige. The R.P.C.'s proposal for complete rejection of electoral activity would have been folly in a situation where electoral success was one of the Party's greatest strengths. However, by the end of 1935 the two rival conceptions of the role of parliamentary activity in the Party's strategy seemed no more attractive. Brockway's idea that the I.L.P.'s 'new revolutionary policy' would prove a significant electoral asset appeared discredited by his own result in Upton, and this idea was rarely mentioned after 1934. Similarly the thought, expressed by Maxton in 1935, and the Unity Group before then, that the I.L.P. could build itself up into a significant national electoral force appeared discredited by the failure of the I.L.P. to make an impact outside its traditional areas of strength.

Thus, the Parliamentary arena posed the I.L.P. with great difficulties. The pre-disaffiliation strength of the Party meant that it was too strong to ignore the electoral and parliamentary activities. The pre-disaffiliation traditions and strategy of the Party, which saw Parliamentary legitimacy as one of the great strengths of the I.L.P., continued to inform the thinking of large sections of the organisation. Yet these aims, although not formally inconsistent with a revolutionary policy sat uneasily alongside the new outlook the I.L.P. was seeking to adopt. These strategic difficulties were made worse by the performance of the Party candidates in parliamentary elections. Whilst influence was maintained, there was no obvious strategy available to increase the I.L.P.'s parliamentary presence. In terms of Parliamentary elections the Party was only able to exploit existing areas of strength rather than develop new possibilities. The concerted efforts of the Labour Party to destroy the I.L.P. in electoral terms, combined with an electorate which did not make a significant distinction between I.L.P. and Labour programmes, removed any serious possibility of transforming local influence into a Parliamentary seat. In this situation there was no obviously effective strategy that the I.L.P. could have developed towards Parliament and elections.

¹ The I.L.P. also pointed out that, when the previous Labour candidate died in 1929 the local Labour Party had selected Pollock to stand for the seat but the central Labour Party imposed Aitcheson. *New Leader*, November 11 1933

² He was also something of an authority on Robert Burns, a connection which would have won him some support in the town from which the famous Scot published the first edition of his poems *New Leader*, October 13 1933

³ Lindsay was supported by both MacDonald and ex-I.L.P. chairman Clifford Allen whilst Barr had Cripps, Greenwood, Morrison and Labour leader Lansbury speaking on his behalf.; *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, July 20 1933 *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, October 26 1933; *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, September 7 1933; *New Leader*, October 27 1933; Labour Party NEC minutes 25 October 1933; *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, September 28 1933; *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, August 3 1933; *New Leader*, October 27 1933; *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, November 2 1933

⁴ *Forward*, 7 October 1933; *New Leader*, October 13 1933; *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, November 2 1933; *Forward*, October 28 1933; Labour Party NEC report 25 October 1933

⁵ *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, November 2 1933

⁶ *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, October 26 1933; *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, August 24 1933; *Kilmarnock Herald and Ayrshire Gazette*, October 19 1933

⁷ Labour Party NEC report November 15 1933; Labour Party NEC report January 5 1934

⁸ *Forward*, November 25 1933

⁹ Labour Party NEC report November 22 1933

¹⁰ Labour Party NEC report May 31 1933; *New Leader*, December 8 1933

¹¹ When Jennie Lee declined to allow her name to go forward Claude Stansfield, a local councillor from Merthyr, was suggested, it was he who suggested extending the invitation to Campbell Stephen. Inner Executive minutes, May 8 1934

¹² Campbell Stephen, Election Address, June 1934

¹³ Griffiths, 1983, 95; *New Leader*, June 6 1934

¹⁴ For the first time in the constituency they established a methodical canvass and opened Committee rooms in every polling area, each with a working committee attached. Leading Union members also weighed in with attacks on the I.L.P. For example NUR General Secretary, Marchbanks, charged the smaller party with having secret funds to conduct the Merthyr by-election.; Labour Party NEC report June 27 1934; *New Leader*, June 1 1934

¹⁵ Fenner Brockway, Election Address to the Electors of the Upton Division of West Ham

¹⁶ *New Leader*, May 11 1934

¹⁷ *New Leader*, May 4 1934

¹⁸ *Forward*, May 19 1934; The increasing tensions within the I.L.P. assisted the Labour Party allowing the argument that even the I.L.P. itself believed that it would lose its deposit. The Lancashire Division was opposed to the new policy on which Brockway's campaign was based and their paper *Labour's Northern Voice* carried the prediction that Brockway would lose his deposit. Two days before polling the Labour Party election propaganda gave the Lancashire Division's prediction the central place. The impression was given that the I.L.P. itself regarded the fight in Upton as hopeless. *New Leader*, May 5 1934; *Labour's Northern Voice* May 1934

¹⁹ The Party had produced a list of seats which it believed it would be impossible to contest because of finance: Derby, Chorley, Merthyr, Whitehaven, Camborne and North Aberdeen. Of these the money was found to contest all except Derby.

²⁰ For example this point was forcefully made by Maxton in a speech during the election campaign in support of Jowett in Bradford. *Telegraph and Argus*, November 11 1935

²¹ For further information on Stephen see Knox and Saville in Knox (ed), 1984, 253-5

²² For further information on Jowett see Brockway, 1946

²³ The Labour Party in North Lanark, anxious at the level of support Lee was attracting tried to lure her with the offer of withdrawing their candidate if she would accept the Labour Nomination. With her view that she could win the seat as I.L.P. nominee and with the threat of disloyalty to her I.L.P. colleges weighing heavily on her, she refused the offer retorting that the Labour Party was a 'soulless machine.'; *Glasgow Herald*, November 7 1935; November 11 1935; There is very little information on the 1935 election either in Lee's autobiographies or in the recent biography of her Hollis, 1987, 66-7

²⁴ *Glasgow Herald*, November 12 1935; *Govan Press*, November 8 1935

²⁵ *Merthyr Express*, November 2 1935; November 9 1935; For an account of Stanfield's achievements up to 1976 when he became chairman of Mid-Glamorgan County Council see the *Merthyr Express*, April 1 1976

²⁶ Stephenson was slightly better known in the Workington Division but given the incumbent M.F.G.B. nominee there it was felt that 'in that Division it would be impolite to thrust his claim, for miners' leader does not eat miners' leader.' His Labour Party opponent made sure to obtain the support of leading MFGB figure such as Ebby Edwards, James Griffiths and Will Lawther; *Whitehaven News*, July 25 1935;

Whitehaven News, September 5 1935; *Whitehaven News*, September 26 1935; *New Leader*, November 1 1935; November 14 1935; *Whitehaven News*, October 10; *Whitehaven News*, October 31 1935; *Whitehaven News*, November 7 1935

²⁷ MacIntosh had previously fought Central Aberdeen and Montrose Burgh for the I.L.P. He made an issue of the fact that neither of his barrister opponents were 'working class.' He further made an issue of the selection of the London-based Labour candidate, Garro-Jones, pointing out that the Trades Council and Labour Party had initially selected an N.U.R. man, M.M. Hetherington, as their candidate. When Garro-Jones had been imposed, the railwaymen had left the Trades and Labour Council in protest. However, Garro-Jones challenged the I.L.P.'s left-wing credentials by making extensive use of the Communist Party's support *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, November 7 1935; November 13 1935; *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, November 7 1935; *Scottish Co-operator*, May 4 1935; *Scots New Leader*, October 2 1935; *New Leader*, November 1 1935; *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, November 14 1935; *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, November 13 1935

²⁸ *Cornish Post and Mining News*, November 2 1935; November 16 1935

²⁹ The I.L.P.'s Chorley campaign was late in starting and described as rather lacklustre throughout *Chorley Guardian*, October 12 1935

³⁰ *New Leader*, November 1 1935 *Carlisle and Lanark Gazette*, June 21 1935; September 13 1935

³¹ Stannage, 137; Robertson, 163; On divisions within the Labour Party between those who supported military sanctions, and the two differing groups behind Lansbury and Cripps respectively see Postgate, 293-304; Schneer, 166; Bryant, 122; Bullock, 567-9; Williams 191-6; On the Communist Party's position see Branson, 137-141; On the move from international to domestic affairs during the election see Stannage, 142-51; For a summary of frequency of different issues in the various parties election addresses see Stannage, 172.

³² *New Leader*, July 5 1935

³³ The Party in 1935 was in serious financial trouble and the campaigns in *New Leader* centred on money raising activities *New Leader*, October 11 1935

³⁴ *Norwich Mercury*, November 2 1935

³⁵ Stanfield's choice to stress Abyssinia did attract the support of some local Labour figures, most notably Alderman Sam Jennings, who chose to support Stanfield after losing out to Labour's S.O. Davies the previous year in an acrimonious selection dispute. In his account of the 1935 election in Merthyr Robert Griffiths, biographer of S.O. Davies, misleadingly suggests that Davies was following Trotsky's position in supporting the League of Nations, including support for military sanctions. However, his position was the same as the Communist Party line and at odds with Trotsky's position of support for Abyssinia through Workers' Sanctions. This lack of understanding of the issues which were at dispute on the left over Abyssinia means that little understanding can be obtained from his account. Especially in view of his further suggestion that Stanfield was engaged in duplicity in claiming to be the only 'No War' candidate whilst Davies was offering support for military sanctions, the mid-1930s euphemism for war. Griffiths, 1983, 107-9; *Merthyr Express*, November 9 1935

³⁶ *Govan Press*, November 8 1935; *Glasgow Herald*, November 12 1935; *Govan Press*, November 8 1935

³⁷ *Whitehaven News*, October 31 1935; November 7 1935

³⁸ *Kilmarnock Standard*, November 2 1935

³⁹ I.L.P. campaigns in most areas were enthusiastically prepared and executed, even when the reception from the public was not great, as in Whitehaven. Chorley was the main exception to this.

⁴⁰ *Glasgow Herald*, November 8 1935; November 9 1935

⁴¹ *Telegraph and Argus*, November 5 1935; Brockway, 1946, 316-7

⁴² Minutes of the Scottish Executive of the Labour Party March 20 1933; November 16 1933; March 11 1935, October 21 1935; When the National Agent toured Scotland, his report back to the N.E.C. stressed the need to concentrate on opposing the I.L.P. He suggested preparing special literature for that purpose and concentrating Labour Party speakers in I.L.P. divisions. (Labour Party National Agents Scottish Tour Report, March 27 1935); The N.E.C. approved a special grant of £420 to boost the election funds in I.L.P. strongholds in Glasgow. The grant was aimed at Bridgeton, Shettleston, Gorbals and Camlachie. Labour Party N.E.C. minutes October 22 1935

⁴³ On conflicts between the U.P.A. and the Labour Party in Glasgow see Glasgow BLP minutes December 13 1932; Glasgow Trades Council Minutes August 1933, December 19 1933, October 23 1934; Labour Party N.E.C. minutes March 27 1935; On the attempts to secure an accommodation between Labour and I.L.P. candidates see *New Leader*, October 18 1935; Labour Party N.E.C. minutes October 22 1935; Minutes of the Scottish Executive of the Labour Party October 21 1935

⁴⁴ However, as Philip Noel Baker found in Coventry giving what appeared satisfactory answers to the I.L.P.'s questions did not guarantee the support of the local I.L.P. branch. *New Leader*, October 15 1935; N.A.C. Minutes November 30 1935

⁴⁵ *Glasgow Herald*, November 7 1935

⁴⁶ *Glasgow Evening Standard*, 2 November 1935; *Glasgow Herald*, November 5 1935; *Glasgow Herald*, November 12 1935

⁴⁷ *Glasgow Evening Standard*, 2 November 1935

⁴⁸ Lee, 1939, 193-4; Hollis, 1997, 66

⁴⁹ The disputes, appear to have followed the publication of an I.L.P. attack on the Labour Party entitled 'Workers' Rights versus Party Dictators'. The I.L.P. successfully held off the challenge of Conservative and Labour challengers in East Bowling with the Labour Party coming bottom of the poll. *Bradford Pioneer*, January 1934 *Bradford Pioneer*, May 4 1934; *Bradford Pioneer*, February 8 1934; May 4 1934; May 25 1934; June 15 1934; November 9 1934

⁵⁰ This came after a series of attacks on Jowett in the weekly newspaper the *Bradford Pioneer* comparing the actions of Jowett and Maxton with MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas. The *Pioneer* moved from weekly to monthly format in June 1935 and ceased publication altogether in 1936. *Bradford Pioneer*, April 5 1935; *Bradford Pioneer*, May 24 1935

⁵¹ *Bradford Pioneer*, June 7 1935

⁵² The three renegade Labour Councillors were: J. W. Flanagan, J. Harrison and Michael Cooney. The Labour Party acted quickly against them with reprimands and threats of disciplinary action not only from the local Labour Party but also from the N.E.C. Harrison also had to face the wrath of the Amalgamated Society of Dyers, where he was an executive member. Jowett also received support from Mr F. Ratcliffe and Mr R. F. Smith the organiser and secretary respectively of the National Woolcombers Society who

were both were regular speakers on Jowett's platform. *New Leader*, November 15 1935; Labour Party N.E.C. minutes 22 Jan 1936; *Telegraph and Argus*, November 12 1935

⁵³ *Glasgow Herald*, November 8 1935

⁵⁴ *Carlisle and Lanark Gazette*, September 13 1935; November 8 1935

⁵⁵ *Kilmarnock Standard*, October 19 1935; November 2 1935

⁵⁶ *Govan Press*, November 8 1935

⁵⁷ Through the 1920s Jewson supported the leftward movement of the Party and in 1931 she stood as an I.L.P. candidate, unendorsed by the Labour Party, and against considerable opposition from her Labour colleague W. R. Smith. For further information on the conflict between Labour and I.L.P. in Norwich in 1931 see Cunningham, 1990, 139

⁵⁸ The I.L.P. put out publicity stating that they were willing to recommend support for one of the Labour Party candidates, Captain Hall, on two conditions. First he was required to give satisfactory responses on peace and unemployment. Second the I.L.P. demanded the withdrawal of Kelly's candidature. The I.L.P. suggested that if the Labour Party refused then the larger organisation would be responsible for splitting the vote. *New Leader*, October 25 1935

⁵⁹ *Norwich Mercury*, November 9 1935

⁶⁰ The National Liberal candidate Geoffrey Shakespeare, at a joint meeting with National Conservative candidate W.G. Strauss, claimed that the divisions in the opposition would make the National task that much easier. The leaflet accused Brockway and the I.L.P. of deserting the unemployed, based on his failure to vote in a division in the 1929-31 election. The leaflet contained a number of inaccuracies and Brockway, deeply hurt by such an attack from someone he regarded as an old friend, claimed it was well known that he had been absent from the House because of an injury which required him to go to hospital. *Norwich Mercury*, November 2 1935; November 9 1935

⁶¹ The suggestions that Stanfield was being supported by anti-socialists was backed up by a letter to the *Merthyr Express* signed by 'eight Conservatives.' The letter suggested that Conservatives should consider voting for Stanfield on the basis that it would get rid of the Labour Candidate, and Stanfield 'could not do less for the distressed areas than S.O. Davies.' Whether real, or designed to damage the image of the I.L.P. campaign, the letter re-enforced the fears of those who suspected the nature of I.L.P. support. *Merthyr Express* November 9 1935; *Merthyr Express*, November 16 1935

⁶² The Communist Party had initially entered into a reciprocal agreement with the I.L.P. to support each other's candidates. However, as the C.P. moved to a Popular Front line and pulled out all but two of its candidates in favour of the Labour Party, so they withdrew support for all I.L.P.ers apart from the three MPs.

⁶³ Gallagher, 1987, 182-223; Commentators have suggested that Catholic support for the I.L.P. applied not only to the 'respectable' Catholic elites, such as the Catholic Union, but also to less respectable forces such as the rival gangs in Bridgeton. As one of Maxton's biographers observed about a slightly earlier period the Protestant gang in Bridgeton 'The Billy Boys' were 'staunch supporters of the Unionist cause at election times, whereas the 'Norman Conqs.', 'a Catholic hybrid-Irish gang which hails from Norman street' were 'in the main, devoted followers of Maxton.' McAllister, 1935, 94-5; Gallagher, 1987, 196-199 presents a more detailed consideration of the relationship between Catholicism and Maxton's political career, arguing for the formative influence of elections for the education authority in which Maxton

trailed behind Catholic priest. Rather surprisingly Gallagher makes almost no mention of the close relationship between Maxton and Wheatley.

⁶⁴ In 1931 the Catholic establishment had opposed him with the *Glasgow Observer* had taking the extreme step of recommending that Catholic voters support the Tory candidate who was not at all sympathetic to Catholic interests. Gallagher, 1987, 194, 210

⁶⁵ For example the Scottish Protestant League newspaper *The Vanguard* ran a series of attacks on McInnes Shaw for moving away from Orangeism. See for example *The Vanguard*, November 13 1935; *Glasgow Evening Standard*, November 8; 16 November 1935

⁶⁶ Fry, 1991, 43

⁶⁷ Stannage, 1980, 229-30

⁶⁸ *Glasgow Herald*, November 16 1935

⁶⁹ *Telegraph and Argus*, November 15 1935

⁷⁰ *Kilmarnock Standard*, November 16 1935

⁷¹ One of the Norwich Labour candidates, Kelly, argued that 'the I.L.P. intervention altered the result more seriously than it appeared on the surface.' The turnout was 11,000 lower than in 1931 and 2,266 electors had voted for Brockway alone without casting a second vote, far more than had voted for any other single candidate The full breakdown of the voting was as follows: Hall 207; Kelly 150; Shakespeare 790; Strauss 530; Brockway 2266; Hall and Kelly 20749; Shakespeare and Strauss 33458; Brockway and Hall 2835; Brockway and Kelly 843; Brockway and Strauss 105; Brockway and Shakespeare 688; Hall and Strauss 50; Kelly and Shakespeare 274; Kelly and Strauss 39; spoilt 27. *Norwich Mercury*, November 23 1935

⁷² Herbert Frazer, president of the Norwich Labour Party initially declared that the 'time was coming when the Norwich Labour Party must make up its mind that this faction must be broken.' Later it was hoped on both sides that an agreement would be reached which would allow the parties to share the nominations at any forthcoming election. The Norwich Labour Party looked to place proposals for such an agreement to the Labour Party conference in 1937. However, the N.E.C. refused to allow such matters to be considered, just as the Organising Sub-Committee of the N.E.C. had earlier threatened the Norwich Labour Party with a refusal to endorse their candidate if they ran jointly with the I.L.P. Cunningham, 1990, 238-9; *Norwich Mercury*, November 23 1935; N.E.C. Organisation Sub-Committee December 22 1936; N.E.C. May 25 1937

⁷³ *Whitehaven News*, November 21 1935

⁷⁴ *Cornish Post and Mining News*, November 16 1935

5. Factions

5.1 Introduction

In the immediate period after disaffiliation most political debate within the I.L.P. was conducted against a backdrop of extreme factionalism, described by Fenner Brockway in 1977 as 'an appalling experience of sectarian controversy about revolutionary theory.'¹ This chapter deals with the three major factional groups within the I.L.P.: the R.P.C., the Unity Group and the Trotskyists. Each of the factions had a different vision of the political possibilities for the disaffiliated I.L.P. The Revolutionary Policy Committee saw the party as a component of a dynamic United Revolutionary Party with the Communist Party, the Unity Group envisaged an independent ethical socialist party and the Trotskyists saw the possibilities of a more extensive British section of the Fourth International. Understanding the detail of these factional conflicts is central to understanding why the I.L.P.'s strategy developed as it did. However, the study of intra-party disputes also provides an explanation of why the Party's membership and fortunes declined so sharply.

5.2 The Revolutionary Policy Committee

The Revolutionary Policy Committee (R.P.C.) was founded before disaffiliation by I.L.P.ers who were especially frustrated with the gradualist policies of the second Labour Government. In 1935 the R.P.C. decided to join the Communist Party en masse, and this decision has generally conditioned subsequent commentators' assessment of the Committee. The general suggestion has been that the R.P.C. was a Communist entryist group 'faithful to every twist of C.P. policy.'² In fact the R.P.C. was no simple Communist front; rather it displayed considerable independence of thought and organisation. The Committee was particularly influential in the immediate period after disaffiliation. However, its very independence of thought caused considerable problems and, divided amongst themselves, the Committee opted to join the Communist Party to the surprise of even the Communist Party's leadership.

The R.P.C. was initially formed by Carl Cullen, a Party member who had come to Poplar in 1923 to take up work as a Health Inspector concentrating on tuberculosis. By the late 1920s he had become chairman of the Poplar I.L.P. and had been elected as an I.L.P. candidate onto London County Council. When a committee for disaffiliation from

the Labour Party was set up in 1930 Dr Cullen used it to circulate the wider I.L.P. with a call to form a Revolutionary Policy Committee based on Marxist ideas. A large number of London members were quickly attracted to the R.P.C. Some such as Dudley Edwards, the R.P.C.'s first secretary and Clive Branson, the editor of local I.L.P. paper *Revolt*, briefly joined before being drawn into the Communist Party.³ However, the committee included many with an important attachment to the I.L.P. including Cullen and, following 1931, his close colleague Jack Gaster.

Although not directly involved in the formation of the R.P.C., Gaster soon rose to become the R.P.C.'s leading spokesman. He was born in 1907, the son of Moses Gaster, the Haham (Chief Rabbi) of the Sephardi section of the English Jewish Community, and joined the I.L.P. in November 1926 as a result of the General Strike, under the influence of his friend Peter Mannheim, an antique dealer.⁴ Gaster, who in January 1931 was a newly qualified lawyer setting out to establish his own practice in the City of London, was widely acknowledged as the R.P.C.'s most able speaker and as its leading theorist. Within the I.L.P., the R.P.C. was frequently referred to as 'the Gaster-Cullen group'. Together, he, Cullen and the rest of the Committee took their first task as persuading the party to disaffiliate from the Labour Party not on the 'superficial' ground of standing orders but on the 'fundamental' issue of 'revolutionary policy.' Despite extensive canvassing, the Bradford Conference rejected the R.P.C.'s suggestion to define the break with Labour in 'revolutionary' terms. However, the conference enthusiastically accepted the R.P.C.'s proposal that the conditions of disaffiliation be made a compulsory condition of I.L.P. membership.

The R.P.C. and associated members of the disaffiliation committee quickly came to play an important part in the machinery of the London Divisional Council of the I.L.P., where the Committee was increasingly well organised. It held regular meetings, especially before the I.L.P.'s national and divisional conferences to decide votes on resolutions, which even before disaffiliation were able to attract representation from half the branches in the London Division.⁵ The Committee also began to appeal for funds to keep up its activity and it started publishing its own monthly journal: *The London R.P.C. Bulletin*.⁶ In early 1932 Cullen launched a bid for the position of London representative on the ILP's National Administrative Committee. He was nearly successful, losing only narrowly to Guild Socialist and Post Office Workers' Union employee, J. Allen Skinner, with both leading candidates advocating disaffiliation from

the Labour Party. The nine members of the Divisional Executive included three R.P.C. members Cullen, C. Hanson and Bert Matlow, an R.P.C. member with Trotskyist sympathies. The wider Divisional Council included other R.P.C.ers such as Jack Huntz from the Party's youth section and Reg Bower the North London Federation Secretary. In September 1932, Gaster was elected onto both the London Divisional Council and its executive. Then at the Divisional Conference the following February, in a conference dominated by the R.P.C. and ex-members of the disaffiliation committee he was elected as the London Divisional Representative on the ILP's N.A.C. where he effectively acted as the R.P.C.'s spokesman until November 1935.⁷

The R.P.C. was also able to geographically expand its influence. By 1933 the Committee claimed to exert significant influence in the Midlands and North-East divisions.⁸ However, Lancashire was the R.P.C.'s main centre outside of London. There the R.P.C. had a large representation in the Liverpool area, but it also had made some inroads in other areas.⁹ There was, for example, significant R.P.C. activity in Wigan, Chorley and Blackpool.¹⁰

From 1931 the R.P.C., as its name suggested, had been attempting to develop a revolutionary policy for the I.L.P. to follow. Some elements of this policy remained with the Committee from its formation to November 1935 when it joined the Communist Party. Most notably, the R.P.C. remained attached to the proposal that I.L.P. and Communist Party should be working together. The Committee also constantly suggested that the I.L.P. should be approaching the Comintern to enquire about the conditions for sympathetic affiliation. However, in other respects R.P.C. policy underwent considerable evolution in the period up to 1935.

The R.P.C. released its first detailed policy statement before disaffiliation, in January 1932. The statement was critical of the Communist Party for its sectarianism and of the I.L.P. for its reformist past. Nevertheless, the statement set out the long-term aim of uniting I.L.P. and Communist Parties into a single United Revolutionary Party. The memorandum presented the R.P.C.'s basic understanding of the economic and political situation from the starting point that Capitalism was about to collapse, a crash was expected within one or two years. Thus, the Committee argued, there was no time to win control of the Parliamentary machinery, which was anyway weighted in favour of the capitalists. Instead they suggested, peoples' minds would only be shaken from their

capitalist prejudices during a revolutionary crisis. The implication, according to the R.P.C., was that Parliament should cease to be the primary focus of the I.L.P.¹¹ The Committee proposed industrial activity as an alternative, arguing that the route to socialism was likely to be through a general strike. Given its analysis of the failure of leadership during the General Strike, a formative political experience for many of the younger members, the R.P.C. emphasised the need for a structure of Workers' Councils. In practical terms the R.P.C. suggested the need for a new revolutionary policy for the I.L.P. and a new constitution. This, they argued, should positively exclude 'gradualists' from the Party and recognise the necessity of a period of dictatorship of the Proletariat.

Following disaffiliation, with the I.L.P. as a whole convinced of the need to develop a 'new revolutionary policy', the Committee continued the development of its position. By 1933 talk of economic crisis remained, but the idea of immanent economic collapse had receded. The Committee instead focused on attempting to change the constitution of the I.L.P., trying to get the Party to accept their suggestions for the objective, method and development of the party. The R.P.C. proposed an entirely new constitution at the London and Southern Counties divisional conference early in 1933, and after being accepted there it was submitted to the I.L.P.'s annual conference at Derby in 1933. The proposed party objective, as it was laid down by the R.P.C., corresponded, more or less, to a standard Marxist conception of Socialism:

The Socialist Commonwealth is a classless society in which land and capital and all economic resources are communally owned and controlled; the power to live by rent, interest or profit is ended; all perform work of social value according to their ability and share in the common resources according to their need; and willingness to perform work of social value is the basis of citizenship.¹²

However, more controversial were the R.P.C.'s ideas on the methods of achieving socialism. Alongside continued proposals for regular work with the Communist Party, there was a commitment to a class-based struggle which carried with it the strong implication of the use of force. However, the most contested element of the programme was that the I.L.P. should abandon Parliamentary and electoral struggle and look to establish a 'Worker's Dictatorship' through the development of Workers' Councils.¹³

The existing organs of national and local government being part of the machinery of Capitalism, such organs can not be employed as the main instrument for the capture of power by the working class, and the I.L.P. will work alternatively for the creation of direct Workers' Councils.¹⁴

The voting on the R.P.C.'s new constitutional proposals by the Derby conference was taken in parts. The definition of socialism proposed by the R.P.C. was just accepted by a vote of 80 to 87. However, the longest and most crucial section of the R.P.C.'s

proposal was defeated by a narrow margin, on a vote of 86 to 90.¹⁵ Rather than accept the R.P.C. constitution a slim majority of the I.L.P. chose to accept a policy which gave greater emphasis to the role of parliament and less to Workers' Councils which were used only as an example of possible forms of non-parliamentary activity rather than as *the* route to socialism.¹⁶ However, the Derby conference did accept as Party policy the R.P.C.'s proposal, moved by William Warbey, later a Labour MP, to require the N.A.C. to investigate the possibility of affiliating to the Communist International. The result, despite the opposition of the N.A.C., was a victory for the R.P.C. with the conference narrowly passing the motion on a vote of 83-79.¹⁷

In the period up to 1933 the Communist Party showed no support for the R.P.C. In 1931 the C.P. was still firmly holding to its Class against Class line. Under this policy left-wing groups were seen as a block to the movement of the working-class into the Communist Party.¹⁸ In some respects the R.P.C. could have been understood to have been an example of a group of leftward moving workers, blocked by the I.L.P. Instead of trying to attract the R.P.C. to the Communist Party, the C.P. instead attacked the Committee as itself a further block on the left-ward moving workers. Harry Pollitt, the Communist Party's General Secretary, rejected any thoughts of working with the R.P.C. naming its leadership amongst those with whom the C.P. was 'not interested in any false and unprincipled unity.'¹⁹ The leading members of the R.P.C. were lumped together with the mainstream leaders of the I.L.P. as the Communist Party claimed that the leftward moving 'rank-and-file of the I.L.P. must look past Maxton and Gaster if they wish to find the true path, the path indicated long since by Marx and Lenin...'²⁰ The *Daily Worker* continually misreported R.P.C. support for the leadership of the I.L.P. and claimed the committee was failing to give leadership to the left within the Party. As Cullen commented 'I understand the tactics of the *D[aily] W[orker]* quite well, including their desire to smash our group in the hope of pulling people over to the C.P.'²¹

During this 'Class-against-Class' period the R.P.C. also showed considerable hostility to the Communists. The R.P.C.'s 'Memorandum on the present political and economic situation and the I.L.P.' released in January of 1932 was heavily critical of the tactics and unsound psychology of the Communist Party. Nevertheless, R.P.C.ers began attending *Labour Monthly* readers' conferences during 1931 and the Committee was committed to the formation of a United Revolutionary Party.²²

Although Pollitt was meeting with the leadership of the R.P.C. from the end of 1932, it was not until the Communist Party change in line on the desirability of a united front with the I.L.P. in March 1933 that cordial relations were really established. As soon as that decision was taken, Dutt, through the medium of *Labour Monthly*, increased the journal's coverage of the debates within the I.L.P. and announced a discussion conference on I.L.P. 'Revolutionary Policy'. Dutt was still careful to distinguish the 'left centrist line' of the R.P.C. from the revolutionary Marxist line. However, for the first time he began to speak of attaining agreement on 'the basic political platform' and to suggest that 'secondary differences should not be allowed to stand in the way of the great objective union of the revolutionary forces in Britain.'²³ The resulting conference on 11 March, attended by around two hundred I.L.P.ers and C.P. members, represented the beginnings of serious attempts by the Communist Party to influence the R.P.C.'s strategy and policy.²⁴

Despite this increasing connection between the R.P.C. and the Communist Party, there remained significant policy differences between the two organisations. In particular the R.P.C. placed a much greater emphasis on Workers' Councils than the C.P. would accept. The Communist Party claimed the R.P.C. was seeking to displace the central role of the Party in Leninist theory. Leading Communist figure, and founding editor of the Communist daily newspaper *The Daily Worker*, William Rust, summed up the Communist attitude to the R.P.C.'s 'sheer drivel,' when in the July 1933 issue of *Labour Monthly* he argued that R.P.C. propaganda 'distorts the meaning of Workers' Councils as forms of united front organisation and presents them as panaceas for all evils, as embracing bodies capable of doing all jobs from fighting wage cuts to running Parliamentary candidates and leading the revolution.'²⁵ As Rust put it, 'in short, Workers' Councils have been put forward as a substitute for the revolutionary party of the working class.'²⁶

However, in practice the Workers' Councils proved one important framework for increasing I.L.P. co-operation with the Communist Party, especially in the London area. When Workers' Councils were set up they were viewed as an important and natural extension of existing co-operation between the C.P. and the I.L.P. For example the first issue of the London and Southern Counties divisional paper, *Revolt*, reported that the first Workers' Council in South London, at Camberwell, at the end of January 1933 was

'built on the solid foundations of united activity.' The report was keen to stress that organisational and party identities were not important in the selection of officers, and the executive were elected because they 'were the best men for the job.'²⁷ In practical terms Workers' Councils formed a significant link between the R.P.C. and the C.P.

From its formation in 1931 to 1933 the R.P.C. had made considerable progress. It had developed a policy framework based on Workers' Councils, a United Revolutionary Party and I.L.P. sympathetic affiliation to the Comintern. The Committee had obtained considerable influence within the London Division, and it largely controlled the machinery of the London Divisional Council. Within the National Party the R.P.C. had only a limited basis of organisation outside of London and the Committee was not able to push its policy through the national conference in the same way as it could through the London Divisional conferences. Nevertheless, the results of the 1933 Derby conference indicated that the R.P.C. could gain considerable support, even against the leadership of the Party. However, R.P.C.'s successes of 1933 represented the highpoint of both committee influence within the Party and R.P.C. independence of the Communist Party.

5.3 The R.P.C. Divided: The Comintern Affiliation Committee

The R.P.C. leadership under Cullen and Gaster wished to push their successes at the 1933 Derby conference, especially with regard to sympathetic affiliation to the Comintern. In this respect their immediate aims were to publicise the Comintern's condition for I.L.P. sympathetic affiliation, and ensure that N.A.C. negotiators would include R.P.C. representatives.²⁸ However, for some within the R.P.C., including Bob Edwards of Chorley I.L.P., this approach was far too slow. They wanted a definite stand to be taken for the I.L.P. immediately joining the Third International, without further delays or conditions. Edwards, a leading member of the left wing within the Lancashire I.L.P., criticised the timidity of the R.P.C. leadership in an article in the August 1933 issue of *Labour Monthly*. He argued that the Derby decisions implied the I.L.P. had already endorsed sympathetic affiliation to the Comintern.²⁹ Whilst the R.P.C. accepted this was what the Party should be doing they suggested that the Party still needed to be persuaded to take the decisions that Edwards believed had already been taken. For Edwards, under Gaster and Cullen's leadership, the R.P.C. was trying to push the I.L.P. to a position that they had already reached. Instead, he suggested they should have been

looking to move the Party to a new and higher level of co-operation with the Communists both nationally and internationally.

At the same time the Communist Party leadership were looking to extend their influence within the R.P.C. Dutt in particular, had never been satisfied with the leadership of the R.P.C., characterising Gaster and Cullen in late 1933 as 'ambiguous evasive left types' who should be instructed to form 'a committee for affiliation' to the Comintern.³⁰ Gaster and Cullen would not countenance such an undercover organisation. However, two members of the I.L.P., Hanson and Morgan, were persuaded to join the Communist Party and retain their I.L.P. cards. They immediately complied with Dutt's orders and building on the dissatisfaction which Edwards had expressed with the leadership of the I.L.P., the Comintern Affiliation Committee was born.

The Affiliation Committee was significantly smaller than the R.P.C. but it was geographically more evenly distributed. At the 1934 York Conference whilst the R.P.C. motions were proposed almost without exception by London Branches, the Affiliation Committee resolutions originated from Dumfries, Nottingham and East Liverpool. Despite Hanson's role in the formation of the Committee and his role as first secretary, the highest profile members were the Chairman Eric Whalley, also the Chairman of the Mansfield I.L.P. and Bob Edwards, the leading opponent of the Unity Group in Lancashire.³¹

The Affiliation Committee maintained its assault on the ineffectiveness of the R.P.C. leadership for being 'silent' and making 'no attempt to organise the revolutionaries against the reactionaries.'³² From the other side the R.P.C. was anxious to note the differences between itself and the Affiliation Committee. Not only did it point out that that Committee was much smaller than the R.P.C., but also that the R.P.C. did not stand for the policy of immediate unconditional sympathetic affiliation to the Communist International. The Affiliation Committee was not, they claimed, a faction of the R.P.C., but a separate group who had formed their own faction and then invited the R.P.C. to join. This offer the R.P.C. had quickly declined.³³ The Affiliation Committee thus stood outside the R.P.C. attempting to push it further in its attempts to promote co-operation with and affiliation to the National and International Communist movement.

The 1934 York Conference saw R.P.C. proposals for a more democratic centralist structure accepted by the N.A.C. and the rest of the Party, largely because of the party's financial situation. However, the Affiliation Committee line that the I.L.P. had already accepted the principle of sympathetic affiliation was made to look a little ridiculous when not only their amendment, but also the R.P.C. amendment on international affiliation was lost at the York conference.³⁴ After this defeat the Affiliation Committee experienced two separate conflicts with the wider Party, which led to its winding up. The first involved the two London members who had worked to establish the committee. The second set of problems centred on their two most prominent members of the Committee, Eric Whalley and Bob Edwards.

J. Hanson, the secretary of the Affiliation Committee, was the London Division's propaganda secretary and Chairman of the Islington I.L.P.³⁵ As a prominent R.P.C. supporter in London he was disgusted by the behaviour of the Party's leadership over their attempts to contact the Comintern following the Derby decision, comparing their failure to the betrayal of 1931.³⁶ When the fact that both he and fellow Affiliation Committee founder Morgan were actually members of the Communist Party became known early in 1934, it sent ripples through the Party and shockwaves through the Revolutionary Policy Committee. For many critics this situation was the logical result of the R.P.C.'s position, which they argued, justified taking strong action against that Committee. The R.P.C., in their dominant position on the London Divisional Council, was left with little choice but to come down strongly on the two individuals concerned. Hanson was immediately suspended from his position on the Divisional Council, and after an inquiry and consultation with the N.A.C. the two were expelled from the Party.³⁷

Hanson was also involved the events that led to the suspension of Whalley and Edwards from the Party. The key aim of the Comintern Affiliation Committee's activity was to push for I.L.P. affiliation to the Third International. In order to facilitate this it decided to send Whalley and Edwards as a delegation to the Soviet Union to try and clarify the twenty-one conditions and alleviate the fears of some I.L.P.ers about what fulfilling those conditions would really mean. In order to facilitate this the Committee got Hanson to make an appeal for money to fund the delegation by sending a circular to I.L.P. branches. It was exactly this kind of money raising which the initial discussions between the N.A.C. and the R.P.C. had ruled out as a legitimate part of I.L.P. activity.

At least as serious was the worry that the funding for the trip may also have been coming from Communist sources.³⁸

However, the main purpose of the visit was to clarify the basis for the I.L.P. to sympathetically affiliate to the Comintern. Edwards and Whalley published a pamphlet on their return, entitled *Revolutionary Unity* which gave the official C.I. answers to fifteen questions that Whalley and Edwards had asked. Perhaps the most significant question was the thirteenth, which asked 'what does affiliation of the I.L.P. to the Comintern, as a sympathising party, presuppose?' The Comintern reply allowed the I.L.P. to retain its name, organisation and officials. However, one single stringent condition would be applied, that the policy of the party be in line with that of the Comintern:

The only demand the Comintern will make of your Party and your policy is that your activity, and that of your officials, should be in line with the policy of the Comintern and that they should not be in opposition to its fundamental principles.³⁹

The links of the Comintern Affiliation Committee with Morgan, Hanson and the Communist Party, were added to the doubts about fund-raising for the trip. The N.A.C. suspended Edwards and Whalley from the I.L.P. and sought assurances that their primary loyalty was not to the Communist Party. The impact of Edwards's suspension on the Chorley Party were particularly harsh in the wake of the resignation of the Unity Group in Lancashire, and the local federation wrote to the N.A.C. requesting them to deal with the matter quickly, especially in view of Edwards's claim that he had a 'record of Party loyalty comparable with that of any member of the Inner Executive.' After considerable equivocation and dispute both men made statements which were considered satisfactory and their suspension was lifted.⁴⁰

However, after the trouble caused by Hanson's and Morgan's association with the Communist Party and Whalley's and Edwards's trip to the Soviet Union it was clear that there was no future for the Affiliation Committee. With Hanson and Morgan outside the Party and the R.P.C. a decreasing influence Whalley moved back into the R.P.C. fold, working within it until the Committee departed the Party in November 1935. He then became an active member of the Communist Party and was appointed by that organisation as a political commissar in Spain during the Civil War only to be killed three days after his arrival. Hanson became an active member of the Communist Party and in September 1935 used his experiences within the Party to write an article heavily

criticising the International position of the I.L.P. and paving the way for the R.P.C. to join the Communist Party.⁴¹ However, Edwards, appointed to the N.A.C. after the resignation of Sandham in 1934, although initially sympathetic to the R.P.C. position moved quickly to the mainstream of the Party. He remained active within the Party until well after the Second World War, serving as Party Chairman after the War.

5.4 Aplin, The R.P.C. and The Battle for Control in London

The difficulties and divisions within the R.P.C. during 1934 had been partially solved after the Comintern Affiliation Committee had been dissolved. However, the R.P.C. remained in a difficult position and the 1935 Derby conference was a crucial opportunity for the Committee to reassert itself within the Party. Thus in the period before the conference the R.P.C. sought once again to step up its activity and profile within the Party.

The R.P.C. began complaining formally about the attitude taken by the *New Leader* on the question of Soviet Foreign Policy. Tensions escalated in March 1935 when, in a move calculated to anger Brockway and bring to a head the question of the I.L.P. attitude towards the Soviet Union, Jack Gaster wrote an article putting the R.P.C. view on the subject. The I.L.P.'s London Divisional Chairman, A. H. Hawkins, previously the editor of the Communist journal *Workers' Weekly*, then submitted Gaster's article to *New Leader* requesting that it should be published. Brockway was forced to return the article and to remind Gaster and Hawkins that the principle had been accepted that inner-party controversy should be excluded from the columns of the Party's national journal.⁴² Brockway's refusal to publish Gaster's article was endorsed by the Inner Executive but Gaster was determined to make an issue of the decision. At the next meeting of the full N.A.C. he moved that the Inner Executive Minutes be referenced back, claiming that his article was an elaboration of Party policy and was not controversial. He lost the motion, but only by a narrow 8-5 margin as Tom Stephenson, Sam Leckie, Bob Edwards and Lewis Povey supported him.⁴³

Gaster also had serious disagreements with parts of the N.A.C. policy statement for the 1935 Derby Conference. He refused to present the N.A.C. case on a number of issues and alerted the N.A.C. to the possibility of some N.A.C. members presenting a line that was not in step with the agreed position. These fears were fully justified by the conduct of John McGovern and Campbell Stephen in their attacks on the Comintern.⁴⁴ However,

the eventual conference decisions represented a series of blows to the R.P.C. Criticism of the Soviet Union's foreign policy, proposed by the N.A.C. and opposed by the R.P.C., was endorsed by the Party. The R.P.C.'s call for affiliation to the Comintern and definite rejection of a Fourth International were defeated and unofficial groups within the Party, focussing on the R.P.C., were declared 'bad in principle.'⁴⁵ The 1935 Conference had been seen by the R.P.C. as an opportunity to reassert its position and prominence within the Party. However, the conference had established the opposite, the R.P.C. was increasingly marginalised in I.L.P. decision making and there was an growing feeling that the Committee was simply damaging the Party's activity.

The impact of the 1935 conference decisions was especially acute in the London Division where the committee had maintained a significant majority on the London Divisional Council from the period immediately following disaffiliation. Tensions had been rising between John Aplin, the London Divisional organiser, and the R.P.C. over a long period. Following the 1935 Derby conference the R.P.C. adopted a series of more confrontational stances which brought tensions to a head. These tactics included the use of Communist Party instructors and speakers and the refusal of the R.P.C. dominated London Divisional Council to appoint speakers on behalf of the I.L.P. or to co-operate in the production of party propaganda.⁴⁶ A speech given by Jack Gaster as the Divisional fraternal delegate to the C.P.'s London District Congress in June 1935, where he set out a non-party line on Soviet Foreign Policy, brought matters to a head.⁴⁷ Aplin had been a long term opponent of the R.P.C. and, in 1935, was in no mood to avert a confrontation. He believed that the time had come to make a definite stand against the R.P.C. He resigned his office as London Divisional Organiser in order to begin the task of organising divisional opinion against the Revolutionary Policy Committee and the group system.

The London Divisional Council denied that they were being used for group purposes by the R.P.C. and claimed that Aplin's problems were not really with the group system but with his approach to Soviet Foreign Policy. The Divisional Council rejected by 10-6 a motion that Gaster's speech at the London Communist Party Conference had followed an 'anti-Party line.' However, the I.L.P.'s Inner Executive ruled that the Divisional Council itself had failed to accept the Party policy on Soviet Foreign policy and decided that 'the influence of the London leadership [was] weakening faith in the Party and its policy in the Division.'⁴⁸ This Inner Executive decision taken together with the

conference attitude towards group activities within the Party meant that the N.A.C. needed to act. However, whilst the conference had passed the condemnation of group activity it had rejected the disciplinary resolution which had been attached to it. The N.A.C. was only able to issue a statement calling on loyal members of the Party to cease participation in unofficial groups.⁴⁹

5.5 Goodbye to the R.P.C.

Following the 1935 Derby Conference tensions between the I.L.P. and the R.P.C. grew, and by the end of the year the R.P.C. had joined the Communist Party *en masse*. However, the route of the R.P.C. to Communist Party membership, even during 1935 was not straightforward. Tensions with the Communist Party remained. For example during the summer of 1935 the R.P.C. strongly backed the N.A.C.'s removal of autonomy from the Guild of Youth as it tried to affiliate to the Y.C.I., preferring to defend the principle of democratic centralism over the support of the Communist line.⁵⁰ However, the situation was especially complicated during the Abyssinian crisis, as leading members of the Committee, including Gaster, appeared to be distanced from the Communist position and in agreement with Brockway. Indeed, it was internal division, split and failure as well as political conviction which pushed the R.P.C. into the Communist Party.

The I.L.P. as a whole was split over the correct response to the Abyssinian crisis. Dispute centred on the question of whether the I.L.P. should seek to aid the Abyssinians against the Italians or should accept, as Maxton and the Inner Executive suggested, that there was nothing to choose between the two 'rival dictators'. Within those who wanted to follow the Communist line and support Abyssinia there were further splits over whether to support workers' sanction or to accept the sanctions of the League of Nations. The London Division Emergency Committee, whose composition transcended factional divisions, strongly supported workers' sanctions. Their position was put by R.P.C. leader, Jack Gaster in the Party's internal discussion bulletin *Controversy*. Gaster's position, for the primacy of class struggle, supported by Hilda Vernon another of the leaders of the R.P.C. was further outlined in the *R.P.C. Bulletin*.

The problem then presents itself as a conflict between the classes - each attempting to utilise the interests of the other for its own aims.... Working class interests are served by the defeat of both imperialisms, and it has therefore to oppose and frustrate Mussolini's aggression and at the same time oppose the Government which represents the equally oppressive interests of British imperialism... It must also be obvious that effective direct working class action against Italy's war plans would entirely alter the relation of forces internationally.⁵¹

Thus a substantial element of the long term leadership of the R.P.C. was arguing for a policy that was more in line with Brockway's position than with that of the Communist Party.

However, a note appended to Gaster's *Controversy* article stated that it had been unanimously approved at a meeting of the Emergency Committee at which all members 'except Dr Cullen were present.' Behind this seemingly innocuous statement lay a crisis in the Revolutionary Policy Committee.⁵² Whilst Gaster supported the class-based line of Brockway and many Trotskyists for workers' sanctions, Cullen, with the backing of the majority of the R.P.C., supported the Communist Party's line of League of Nations sanctions. He argued that the Soviet Union had transformed the League of Nations when it joined in 1934. In this new situation the League was capable of 'postponing war while [the working class builds] up their own forces.'

In 1935 we have the existence of the League, set up by the capitalists as a Golden Calf for the workers to worship but capable of being used as a stalking horse by the workers in the fight for their own objectives; and in that League we have our own powerful representative leading and consolidating the opposition to the designs of the Imperialist Powers.

Indeed Cullen went along with the logic of the Communist Party's Popular Front policy change presenting an argument which suggested the need for an anti-war anti-fascist alliance with as broad a base as possible, rejecting notions of purely working class action:

Not only the workers desire peace. The petit bourgeoisie want peace. The smaller capitalists, insecure already, are made more insecure by war. The smaller countries want peace... Even the capitalist parties have to pose as the friends of peace or the guardians of security. We see therefore a real community of interests amongst the workers and a limited and temporary community of interests amongst the general mass of the population including the middle classes.⁵³

The result, as the *R.P.C. Bulletin* conceded, was a crisis which went to the very heart of the Committee:

Yes, there was a crisis in the R.P.C.... There was a sharp cleavage of opinion on the Abyssinian question and the line we should take on Sanctions and on our attitude to the broad peace movement. There were several conference of R.P.C. supporters, a few "personalities" exchanged together with some real straight from the shoulder hitting, a general election of the committee resulting in one or two changes in personnel, a great deal of heart burning and a devil of a lot of hard thinking, a determination to maintain revolutionary unity, - and the R.P.C. proceeds with its work.⁵⁴

Within the wider I.L.P. it was considered acceptable to debate the question of whether assistance should be rendered to Abyssinia. But Cullen had gone beyond the bounds of this controversy. That he suggested that assistance could be given to Abyssinia through the League of Nations was bad enough, but he went further, arguing that if necessary

the issue could involve the use of military sanctions. All of this went beyond what the majority of the leaders of the I.L.P. considered acceptable. The Inner Executive, dominated by those who were most opposed to supporting Abyssinia, decided that Cullen, together with other leading R.P.C.ers who followed his line, should be deleted from the National Speakers list.⁵⁵

These issues exploded at the Summer Divisional Conference of the London and Southern Counties I.L.P. The regular agenda was suspended for three weeks so the complete weekend could be devoted to the Abyssinian crisis. The scene was set for a showdown between the two factions within the R.P.C., in a situation complicated by the significant Trotskyist presence as well as those opposed to any form of factional organisation. Jack Gaster moved a motion stressing the necessity of working-class organisation against Italian Fascism and all imperialist oppression. He found his motion supported by the Trotskyists and John Aplin, whilst he met opposition from his colleagues in the R.P.C. who moved amendments suggesting the use of the League of Nations machinery. However, it quickly became clear that the combined forces of the dissidents within the R.P.C., the Trotskyists and those centred on Aplin who opposed group organisation held a large majority at the conference. No amendments were carried to a statement supporting workers' sanctions which was passed by a five to one majority. The days of automatic R.P.C. success at the London Divisional Conference were over.⁵⁶

When the division met again to discuss the adjourned business, there were again sharp divisions over electoral policy and sanctions. However, by this time, at the end of October, it had become clear to the leadership of the R.P.C. that the Committee could not expect to have its policy accepted by the Division. This was partly because of the anti-group feeling at the conference; a resolution affirming the positive role of groups within the I.L.P. was only carried by the casting vote of the Chairman, R.P.C. member Bert Hawkins. The R.P.C.'s failure was also partly due to the opposition of the Trotskyists to their policy, and their support for Aplin against the R.P.C. However, perhaps the most significant reason the R.P.C. was defeated was because for the first time their leaders could not agree amongst themselves as to the correct policy to push.⁵⁷

As a response the Committee staged a dramatic walkout from the conference over its failure to accept the R.P.C. line. This was despite the R.P.C.'s own failure to agree on

the correct line to adopt. The sensational exit from the conference on the 27 October then led to a special R.P.C. conference two days later. This conference decided with only six dissidents to dissolve the Committee. The final issue of *The R.P.C. Bulletin* available after the decision, called on 'all revolutionary socialists in the party to follow their example and make application to the Communist Party for membership.'⁵⁸

After leaving the I.L.P. the leading members of the R.P.C. sought to emphasise the effect which their departure had on the Party. Claims were made about the scale of the defections. Frequently it was suggested that hundreds of members had joined the R.P.C. moves towards the Communist Party, and in a recent interview Jack Gaster suggested that one third of the I.L.P. had left the Party as a consequence.⁵⁹ The I.L.P. on the other hand sought to suggest the impact was minimal. In public it stated '55 members have resigned altogether, of these, less than half were active members and only about half of them are joining the C.P.'⁶⁰ In the private of the N.A.C., reports were only slightly more serious where it was conceded that sixty members in London and three outside London had left the Party.⁶¹

The departure of the R.P.C. marked a significant change in the politics of the I.L.P. A number of important members were lost to the Party; in particular Jack Gaster had played an important role on the N.A.C., as a speaker and also as one of the few left-wing lawyers of the period. In an example of the sectarianism of the Communist Party in this period, the C.P. passed up much of the publicity to be gained by the defection of a leading member of the I.L.P. when Dave Springhall refused him entry to the Communist Party because of his stance on Abyssinia. Eventually Gaster was allowed to join the Party after making a direct appeal to Pollitt.⁶² He went on to play an important role in the Communist Party, which he remained a member of until the late 1980s. He was elected as a Communist Councillor for Mile End onto London County Council in March 1946 and served as chair of the National Jewish Committee shortly after the War.⁶³ Others were also to play a significant role in the Communist Party after leaving the I.L.P., such as Hilda Vernon who played an active part in the Communist Party women's movement.⁶⁴ However, it was the internal politics of the I.L.P. that were most affected by the departure of the Revolutionary Policy Committee. Despite their failure to be widely accepted, their language and ideas had come to represent a significant force within the Party. The style of internal politics of the I.L.P., described later by Brockway as 'an appalling experience of sectarian controversy about revolutionary theory', were

heavily dominated by the differing factional groupings, especially the R.P.C.⁶⁵ The departure of the R.P.C. did not represent the end of explicit factions within the I.L.P. The Marxist Group was still in existence and a minority within the R.P.C. had decided to carry on calling itself the 'Communist Unity Group.'⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the departure of the R.P.C. meant a very significant change to both the style and the content of the politics of the I.L.P. In particular there was a definite movement away from factional politics; even those who were involved in the remaining factions had increasingly to stress their loyalty to the Party.

5.6 From Unity Group to Independent Socialist Party

As R.P.C. influence grew within the Party, a Unity Group faction, based in Lancashire, was established to combat it. In 1934 the Unity Group split from the I.L.P. and established the Independent Socialist Party, taking over half the membership of the division with it. Those opposed to the R.P.C. had two basic concerns, first the Committee's policy worried those who stressed the role of Parliament in their strategy for the Party. Secondly, there were concerns about the organisational form of the R.P.C.; about the ways in which the committee met, was funded and attempted to influence the wider party. Both sets of concerns were raised in the period before disaffiliation. For example, at a meeting between the N.A.C. and Divisional representatives in March 1932 the question of how to deal with such unofficial groups came up. The N.A.C. at this point had no representatives who were sympathetic to the R.P.C.; nevertheless, the decision was not to act. Even those who would later be amongst the most vocal opponents of the R.P.C. accepted, and even supported, this verdict, with John Paton arguing that attempts to quash such groups were likely to be counter-productive.⁶⁷

In 1931 Allen Skinner was re-elected chairman of the London and South Division and that Division's N.A.C. representative. Skinner moved the successful motion for disaffiliation from the Labour Party at the Special Conference in Bradford.⁶⁸ However, following disaffiliation and the loss of a number of many 'traditional' members of the party Skinner felt under considerable threat. He began raising concerns about the working of the R.P.C. and spoke at the I.L.P. summer school about the dangers of organised groups within the party. On the NAC, he raised similar questions about the organisational form of the R.P.C. and its appeals for money. Brockway, typically, hoped

that the situation could be resolved in a friendly manner and reported that he had already had a number of informal meetings with leading members of the R.P.C.⁶⁹ However, in Skinner's view the situation was getting worse not better. Probably aware that he would be defeated by the R.P.C., he stood down as both chairman and N.A.C. representative at the September 1932 London Divisional Conference.⁷⁰

The 1933 Derby conference was a considerable success for the R.P.C. over its opponents. Dick Wallhead, one of the group of only four I.L.P. MPs, resigned immediately after Derby because the decisions relegated 'the use of parliament to a minor place and substituting for it a physical force revolutionary thought Workers' Councils.'⁷¹ Of even greater significance was the resignation of right winger John Paton as General Secretary of the Party. Paton maintained his membership of the Party and held back his resignation of the post until the end of the year to allow the Party to make adequate preparations. Skinner argued that if action was not taken then the R.P.C. would 'win by default', as its leading opponents were leaving the party. Thus, Skinner wrote an extended letter to the *New Leader* arguing that the R.P.C. represented a real danger to the 'traditional, democratic' structures of the I.L.P. Skinner ended his letter with a suggestion that the opposition to the R.P.C. needed to form itself into an equally organised faction.

Discussion- so far as the accepted party machinery for discussion is concerned- is already deteriorating into a faction fight, and when those who are not associated with the R.P.C. decide to organise on similar lines it will do so completely.⁷²

The Committee itself realised it was still far from dominant outside the London area.⁷³ Skinner's opposition to the R.P.C. found little support within the London Division but frustrations were growing elsewhere. The Welsh Divisional Conference in September of 1933 passed resolutions, which not only criticised tactics based on co-operation with the Communist Party but also called for the suppression of group organisation such as the R.P.C.⁷⁴ In East Anglia the Norwich branch unsuccessfully moved an alternative policy statement to the new revolutionary policy. However, the strongest area of opposition to the R.P.C. was the Lancashire Division, which also coincided with the R.P.C.'s second largest area of influence within the I.L.P.

In Lancashire it was widely argued that the problem of the R.P.C. was closely connected with the new policy of the I.L.P. as the main problems had emerged in the pursuance of joint activity with the Communist Party. The R.P.C. and others in

Liverpool were in favour of maintaining and increasing work with the Communist Party. Like John Paton, the Lancashire Divisional leadership, led by Elijah Sandham and Tom Abbott, the Divisional chairman and organiser respectively were initially prepared to accept a very loose united front with the Communists. However, when it became clear that there was little hope of pulling the Labour or Co-operative Parties into united front activity the Lancashire leadership moved to a policy of complete hostility to working with the C.P.⁷⁵

Following the Derby conference and the unwillingness of Brockway and the N.A.C. to take action against the R.P.C. Skinner wrote to the Lancashire Division newspaper *Labour's Northern Voice* to begin the task of organising an anti-R.P.C. faction:

I am writing to the No. 9 Division organ as representing the area from which the R.P.C. is likely to draw its main strength after London, and whose Divisional Council is probably next in order to be captured. I suggest that, regrettable as is the necessity, the members of the Party who have no intention of being associated with the R.P.C. should form their own protective caucus.⁷⁶

Skinner suggested that the main activity of the faction should be focused on elections to official positions within the Party. On the one hand they would point out which candidates supported the R.P.C. and on the other they would create a list of candidates opposed to that Committee. There were some differences between Skinner's arguments, based on internal democracy, and those of the Lancashire Divisional leadership, based on policy disagreements with the R.P.C. Nevertheless, Skinner was able to obtain the backing of a large number of members within the Lancashire Division and on this basis the 'Unity group', a new anti-R.P.C. faction, was created.

The Unity group, despite its London origins, was overwhelmingly based in Lancashire.⁷⁷ The new group established its own bulletin but the focus for the Unity Group remained the Lancashire Division's official monthly newspaper *Labour's Northern Voice*. Immediately following the formation of the Unity Group, the Lancashire D.C. announced that, as a council it was ceasing joint activity with the Communists and declining to support United Front activities for branches.⁷⁸ The Liverpool federation, continued to engage in united front activity and argued that the I.L.P. could work with the Communist Party without losing its distinctive identity.⁷⁹ However, the Unity Group assault on the united front increased and on the 20 June, the Divisional Council sent a letter to each branch suggesting that joint activities with the Communist Party should stop.

Added to this the Lancashire Divisional Council was deeply concerned about the moves made to introduce elements of democratic centralism to the party. Although Lancashire opposed all aspects of the R.P.C.'s democratic centralist proposals disputes centred on the question of funding. They argued that the required contributions from the divisions to the centre for the Power Fund, and for the *New Leader*, would be at the expense of local initiative.⁸⁰ The combination of the Lancashire Divisional Council's refusal to cooperate with the United Front and their boycott of the Power Fund gave the R.P.C. the opportunity to attack their opponents using I.L.P. apparatus. The matter was referred to the I.L.P.'s Organisation Committee and from there to the N.A.C. where Gaster, supported by C.A. Smith and Jim Garton, called for immediate action to be taken against the Lancashire Division.⁸¹ The N.A.C. sent John Paton, who had considerable personal sympathy with the Lancashire position, to try to sort matters out. However, his trip to the Lancashire division was unsuccessful and the Divisional Council refused to withdraw its anti-United Front circular.⁸² Further, the Divisional half-yearly conference on 19 August then ratified the Council decision, passing Sandham's resolution against the united front by a vote of 31 to 26.⁸³

These decisions of the Lancashire Divisional Council forced the N.A.C. to take action. Moves by Gaster first to expel the Divisional Council and then to withhold its grant were rejected; a further controversial proposal to censure the Council was passed, against the wishes of those who wished to test the party's opinion of the United Front by a plebiscite.⁸⁴

The censure of the N.A.C. was rejected in Lancashire as the Unity group dismissed any suggestions of disloyalty to the party. First, they argued that they were not acting against the policy of the party, they claimed to act according to the constitution of the Party, which contained specific reference to the importance of parliamentary activity. They also claimed that only conference and not the N.A.C. had the power to override the constitution. Thus, they suggested that the interpretation of the Derby decisions by the N.A.C. was invalid because in effect, it was unconstitutional. Instead they believed it was the R.P.C. which was disloyal, as it was destroying the Party.⁸⁵

The Liverpool federation reacted by seeking to further separate itself from the Divisional Council. It withdrew its endorsement of Sandham as the prospective I.L.P. candidate for the Liverpool constituency of Kirkdale, where Sandham had previously

been an MP and they accused the rest of the division of being stuck 'in the reformism of pre-Bradford days.' Liverpool threatened the rest of the Division suggesting that whilst they would accept disagreement with the policy, they could not accept the flouting of the policy.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, by the beginning of 1934, the Unity group's opposition to the R.P.C. in Lancashire had crystallised into complete and open opposition to the I.L.P.'s national policy. The report of Lancashire's January divisional conference in *Labour's Northern Voice* was entitled 'Lancashire Again says no', they saw themselves as rejecting the Communist inspired politics that had been adopted nationally and arguing for a return to the earlier constitutional policy of the I.L.P.

"No" to the wrecking policy of the Communist Party

"No" to the advocates of working-class insurrection and violence

"No" to the abandonment of legality that is strength

"Yes" to the policy of constitutional advance to working class power and the Social Revolution.⁸⁷

The Lancashire conference passed a motion, by a vote of 29-16, calling to the party to revert immediately to the policy subscribed to before the 1933 Derby Conference. A further motion, passed by 29-14, criticised the new I.L.P. policy and called for a constitutional approach:

The present official policy of the I.L.P. is not a revolutionary Socialist policy for this country, has not been deduced from the facts (historical, political and economic) of this country and has no relevance to the serious revolutionary business of achieving Socialism in Britain...

Socialism must be presented as a constitutional end to be sought by constitutional means and enforceable by a majority when the people will by the constitutional use of every force by a Socialist Government, against any anti-democratic and unconstitutional opposition by the King, the House of Lords, or by capitalistic or by financial revolutionaries. This conference believes that such an approach is acceptable to the majority of the British people and is therefore real revolutionary policy.⁸⁸

Finally by a vote of 21 to 16 the conference called for a return to the second international, on the basis that the I.L.P. should be aiming for an inclusive International and that the second international had the closest connections to the organised working class. The motion did however, maintain that the I.L.P. should continue its connections with the group of international "left" socialist parties.⁸⁹

Even before the I.L.P.'s 1934 York Conference, within the Unity group there was a strong difference of opinion about whether to continue in the I.L.P. or not. Some, including Elijah Sandham remained committed to a future inside the I.L.P.⁹⁰ Others argued that the Socialist League was doing good work within the Labour Party and the Unity group should be looking to support them. Considerable space in *Labour's Northern Voice* was dedicated to explaining and supporting the views of the Socialist

League chairman Stafford Cripps.⁹¹ Prior to the conference, *Labour's Northern Voice* warned that if certain of the RPC resolutions were passed then many within the Lancashire Division would find it difficult to maintain their membership of the Party.

By the end of the York conference it was clear that the R.P.C. was on the retreat within the I.L.P. The R.P.C. itself accepted that the 'lead of the left-wing' had been 'rejected'.⁹² However, this defeat of the RPC was not sufficient for some members of the Unity group. Despite Tom Abbott's objections, the conference followed the NAC report in accepting criticism of the Lancashire divisional council's attitude to the united front, *Labour's Northern Voice*, the Power fund, the *New Leader* and the Hunger march, by a vote of 135-31. However, there were two more serious problems. First of all the Unity Group's ethical socialist policy was rejected by a vote of 101-61. This policy moved was on behalf of Manchester City branch by Norwich's John Middleton Murry the motion emphasised the ethical basis and parliamentary traditions of the Party:

In a country where the industrial working-class is in a majority, a socialist regime can only be firmly based on the enlightened democratic assent of the majority of people. It is therefore an essential part of the work of a Socialist organisation to propagate not merely "Collectivist" as an economic necessity (for in this the "National Socialists" and Fascists will be equally successful), but Socialism as an ethically superior social system. Thus the ILP's propaganda must not be merely economic and addressed to the political intelligence of workers', but also idealistic and addressed to their humane intelligence, as was the practice of Keir Hardie and the pioneers of the ILP.⁹³

Second a set of proposals to transform the organisation of the Party to a more democratic centralist organisation were passed with 'overwhelming support.'⁹⁴

These two decisions convinced some of the leading members of the Lancashire Division that they could have no future within the ILP. The Lancashire Divisional organiser, Tom Abbott, wrote a letter to his branch resigning his membership of the Party. Abbott had joined the ILP in 1894 at the age of 21. He had been a leading member of the ILP in Lancashire and the resignation of someone with his ILP tradition and seniority was seen by others within the division as definitely marking the 'end of an epoch.' Abbott's complaint was that the conference decisions removed 'every bit of autonomous freedom which members and branches have enjoyed since the party came to life in 1893.' He was equally critical of the policy of the party arguing that 'Workers' Councils as outlined by the ILP, will, in effect, if operated sabotage the trade union and other working-class instruments of struggle with capitalism.' Overall he blamed the R.P.C. for changing the I.L.P. into a 'fundamentally different' Party from even the one which had disaffiliated from the Labour Party less than two years earlier.

Abbott's resignation, and his ensuing decision to form a new Independent Socialist Party caused a wave of other resignations from the I.L.P. Other leading members of the Lancashire Division to quit included such as Samuel Higgenbotham, the editor of *Labour's Northern Voice*, Arthur Mostyn, an ex-councillor and the *Labour's Northern Voice* cartoonist from the Manchester Central Branch, and Stephen Shaw and Roger Shackleton of the Nelson Weavers. However some, including Sandham, equivocated. He did not attend the initial meetings of the Independent Socialist Party and turned up at the meetings of those 'Revolutionary I.L.P.ers' who were planning to reconstitute the Lancashire Division.⁹⁵ However, it eventually became clear to him that his position within the I.L.P. was hopeless and he joined with the I.S.P. two months after its foundation.⁹⁶

Those who left the I.L.P. with Abbott were undecided about what their future held. There were two major opinions. One group, led by Abbott and Arthur Mostyn, favoured forming a new party. The others, led by Samuel Higgenbotham, the editor of *Labour's Northern Voice*, supported the idea of joining with the work of the Socialist League.⁹⁷ At the conference, called by Abbott on May 13 1934, they chose to follow the first option, and to form themselves into the Independent Socialist Party. However, the I.S.P. was formed with the Socialist League firmly in mind. The view of the conference was that the Socialist League would be forced out of the anti-socialist Labour Party. In the view of the I.S.P., not being organised as a political party would badly affect the Socialist League once they left the Labour Party. The decision not to join with the Socialist League was so that, when the Labour Party forced the Socialist League out, there would be 'a live Independent Socialist Party to which they can turn.'⁹⁸

The conference accepted a commitment to an 'understanding that the change from Capitalism to Socialism involves a revolution' and affirmed that this transition 'can only be accomplished by the enlightened democratic assent of the majority of the people.' The I.S.P. also maintained that Socialism should be presented not only as an economic necessity but also 'as an ethically superior social system.'⁹⁹ Comrade Picken was appointed the provisional secretary of the new Party. *Labour's Northern Voice* insisted that its status, due to being owned by the Workers' Northern Publishing Society Ltd., was independent of any political party.¹⁰⁰ However, in effect the newspaper along with its editor Samuel Higgenbotham came over to the I.S.P.

When Sandham resigned from the I.L.P. the month after the I.S.P. was formed he explained his reasons. Of course he complained about the 'irresponsible' elements in the Party, by which he meant the R.P.C., who had turned the I.L.P. into a 'pale shadow of the Communist Party.' However, far more revealing was Sandham's disappointment with the leadership of the Party, especially Maxton, whom he argued had unexpectedly sided with the 'Communistically minded.' Sandham also pointed to the new centralised organisation of the I.L.P., with an Executive Committee and an Inner Executive, which Sandham termed an 'inner dictatorship', as important reasons, necessitating the formation of the Independent Socialist Party. He suggested that as democracy had left the I.L.P. so it had 'become a sectarian backwater stuck in stultified truths of half a century before.' On the other hand, he suggested that, the I.S.P. would 'appeal to man's reason.' By utilising the higher level of education of British workers, it would recognise that revolutionary tactics appropriate to Britain would be very different from those in Russia, Germany or Austria. Overall, he argued that the job of the I.S.P. was to keep alive the spirit of the I.L.P.; despite his resignation from the party to join the I.S.P. he did not really feel he had deserted the I.L.P.¹⁰¹ Sandham was appointed as the first official chairman of the I.S.P. at its first annual convention held in Manchester on 29-30 September 1934, with Tom Abbott as the General Secretary.¹⁰² The convention voted in favour of the socialisation of the cotton industry and to work closely with the Labour Party as well as adopting the I.L.P.'s 1922 constitution as its own.

On the basis of these decisions many members of the I.S.P. attempted to rejoin the Labour Party. Initially some were successful. The Altrincham Branch even nominated an I.S.P. member, Arthur Mostyn, for its Parliamentary seat in the early months of 1935. However, the National Labour Party decided that it would not allow I.S.P. members to be Labour Party Parliamentary candidates. Then, a few months later in October 1935 it declared on undisclosed grounds that membership of the I.S.P. itself was incompatible with membership of the Labour Party, a decision which also saw the I.L.P. added to the proscribed list.¹⁰³

In 1936, the I.S.P.'s London Branch, based around the *Adelphi* magazine and John Middleton Murry, proposed seeking affiliation to the Labour Party but the rest of the Party, increasingly opposed to the London intellectuals, refused. Murry responded by resigning from the I.S.P.'s General Council.¹⁰⁴ In 1939, after Sandham had been too ill

to attend conference for two consecutive years he stood down as chairman. In March 1939 the I.S.P. joined with the I.L.P., the Society of Friends and some members of the Labour Party in setting up the 'Manchester No Conscription Fellowship.'¹⁰⁵ When war broke out the party came down firmly against the war.¹⁰⁶ They named themselves the I.L.P., the Socialist Party of Great Britain and the Socialist Labour Party as the only socialist parties opposed to war and called on all to join one of the parties.¹⁰⁷

Only during the formation of the anti-war movement in Manchester did any of the other parties ever really acknowledge their existence and by 1941, the financial situation in the Party was so bad that they were reduced to selling off back copies of *Labour's Northern Voice* to chip shops in order to keep afloat.¹⁰⁸ On December 3 1950, after years of self-confessed 'technical existence' and the death of General Secretary Tom Abbot in September 1949, the I.S.P. was formally wound up.¹⁰⁹

However, the formation of the I.S.P. had led to the decimation of one of the two largest and most influential English divisions of the I.L.P. Sixteen of the party's fifty-three Lancashire Branches were lost totally and the disruption in other areas was significant. There was also the old spectre of property disputes between the I.L.P. and those who had ceded.¹¹⁰ The effect of the formation of the I.S.P. on the I.L.P. in Lancashire cannot have been anything but disheartening to those who were trying to develop and maintain the prospects of the I.L.P. in the area. As Maxton had pointed out at the end of 1933, whilst trying to push his traditional position of wide tolerance in all matters, 'it was obvious folly to attempt to chop away a whole division and add to their present troubles the task of having to form a new one.'¹¹¹ Events had proved him correct.

5.7 Trotskyism and the Marxist Group

In 1932 the newly disaffiliated I.L.P. seemed to some Trotskyists to potentially offer an attractive alternative focus for Trotskyist activity after expulsion from the Communist Party. The Balham Group had had contact with members of the I.L.P. in the South-West London Anti-War Committee and there were a number of I.L.P.ers in the London area who were sympathetic to Trotsky's ideas. Indeed, the early R.P.C., contained a number of Trotskyist sympathisers including Bert and May Matlow, Ernie Patterson and Sid Kemp.¹¹² The leaders of the Trotskyist Communist League thus looked to the I.L.P. to find a new focus for their political activity and Reg Groves devised a plan for the group

to form an organised faction within the I.L.P.'s R.P.C.¹¹³ By July 1933 the group had established a committee to develop and co-ordinate its I.L.P. work.¹¹⁴

Trotsky devoted considerable time to considering and analysing the British political situation and held two separate meetings with leading members of the I.L.P., first with John Paton and then in August 1933 with C. A. Smith.¹¹⁵ Trotsky, who had impressed Paton with his detailed knowledge 'of even the by-paths of the English political situation', was firmly of the opinion that the I.L.P. was an appropriate home for the British Trotskyists.¹¹⁶ Of course he was aware of the distance between the political reality of the I.L.P. and his conception of a revolutionary party.

A revolutionary proletarian party must be welded together by a clear understanding of its historic task ... [and] a revolutionary party must know how to establish correct relations with the working class... From the point of view of both these criteria innerly connected, the I.L.P. should review its relation to the Comintern as well as to all other organisations and tendencies within the working class.¹¹⁷

Nevertheless Trotsky believed that the I.L.P. could play an important part in revolutionary Socialist politics. In arguing for the importance of the I.L.P. in presenting a clear opposition to Stalinism in British politics he suggested that if the 'party should ingloriously disappear from the scene Socialism would suffer a new blow.' Thus, Trotsky urged his followers to enter the I.L.P. wholeheartedly and not to join the Party to split it and win over some of its members.¹¹⁸

Despite Trotsky's opinion in favour of joining the I.L.P., the majority of the Communist League in Britain opposed entering the Party.¹¹⁹ Whilst they accepted that the I.L.P. could become involved in the work of winning the working class to a correct revolutionary policy they claimed that the I.L.P. was a centrist organisation which made it 'politically shapeless and lacking any clear political position on the problems confronting the revolutionary movement.'¹²⁰

Within the I.L.P. there was also considerable opposition to the Trotskyists joining the Party. The R.P.C. was at its strongest, the 1933 Derby Conference had passed resolutions supporting much of the Committee's programme and seeking to further relations with the Comintern. There was thus a considerable movement against Trotskyism, and its emphasis on a new Fourth International. Indeed Trotsky's contribution to the I.L.P.'s internal discussion journal *Controversy* drew a strong rebuke from those who were opposed to the Fourth International. The burden of their response

in the following edition of the journal was to suggest that such proposals would cause the victory of the right wing both within the I.L.P. and elsewhere:

The nature of the fourth international would defy rational definition. It is to be composed of all parties that for diverse reasons are tired of lax reformism and uneasy about disciplined revolutionism. It will say Socialism in one country is impossible but will hesitate to recommend that Russia go back to capitalism - it will have the same effect on the world population ranks as it is having on the I.L.P. today: chaos, futility and (quite regrettable and unintentional!) a masking of the advance of the right wing.¹²¹

Following the fierce discussions and consultations with the International Communist League Trotsky's proposal for the group to join the I.L.P. was put to a vote at a meeting on December 17 1933. The majority of the group, led by Reg Groves, voted to maintain their organisation, separate political identity and paper. They argued that the best way to win over sympathetic I.L.P.ers was to debate with the I.L.P., where possible, speaking as an organisation to branches of the Party, but to work with it only on definite proposals. This they argued would also have the advantage of being an appealing strategy to militants who were not members of the I.L.P.¹²²

The minority, including Denzil Harber, Stewart Kirby, Wally Graham, Dr. Worrall, Max Nicholls and Margaret Johns, who favoured Trotsky's proposal, were dismayed at the decision of the group. They believed that an opportunity was being missed to create a significant Party that would support the Fourth International. However, their requests that the International Secretariat issue Groves's group with an ultimatum to join the I.L.P. had been turned down, despite the International Secretariat strongly disagreeing with the British majority opinion.¹²³ With the British Trotskyist movement unable to agree on its future and the International Secretariat unwilling to force a decision either way, the Communist League decided to split, with the minority group joining the I.L.P.

The division of the small British Trotskyist movement into two sections was endorsed by the International Secretariat, which gave them equal status internationally, and the minority finally joined the I.L.P. in February 1934. On their entry they wrote to the I.L.P.'s N.A.C. declaring their 'sincere intention of participating in all possible Party activities.' However, they sought to maintain the right to criticise the Party line:

We wish to retain the right of comradely criticism and the right to fight and propagate (within the limits of the Party Constitution and discipline) our opinions, in particular the necessity for the I.L.P. helping to build the Fourth International.¹²⁴

The I.L.P. inevitably refused the group entry as 'an organised group... advocating a particular policy.' However, the individual members of the minority within the old Communist League were permitted to join the party.¹²⁵

There had been a small number of Trotskyists in the I.L.P. before February 1934. This group had been active within the R.P.C., attempting to alter its outlook rather than to directly change the policy of the wider Party. The entry of the minority from the Communist League into the I.L.P. changed this situation. Before the Trotskyists were able to efficiently oppose the R.P.C. they had to overcome the tensions which this situation created. Members entering from the Communist League, members already inside the I.L.P. and potentially new members needed to mould themselves into a united group.

When the minority of the Communist League disbanded to join the I.L.P. they still understood themselves to be strict adherents of the Bolshevik-Leninist position. When they joined the I.L.P. they organised themselves into a secret fraction within the Party. The I.L.P.ers who had moved towards a Trotskyist position as Party members had arrived at similar conclusions by a quite different route, they were excluded from this covert organisational arrangement. The old Communist Leaguers clearly regarded their views as being somewhat in advance of the I.L.P.ers who maintained a Trotskyist position. In such a situation there were considerable tensions and the Trotskyists were not immediately able to operate successfully as a united faction.¹²⁶

The I.L.P.'s 1934 York conference took place before many of the ex-Communist Leaguers had had a chance to join the Party and, more significantly, the wider I.L.P. was preoccupied with the dispute between the R.P.C. and the Unity Group. These factors meant that there was little opportunity for the Trotskyists to have an impact on the I.L.P. at the conference. However, in June 1934 the ex-Communist Leaguers, still acting somewhat separately from the other Trotskyists within the I.L.P., called for the formation of a Fourth International and for the I.L.P. to adopt a Democratic Centralist structure.¹²⁷ The call received little response and the need for the Trotskyists to unite was emphasised. Thus in the autumn of 1934 the small group of Bolshevik-Leninists from out of the Communist League joined together with those individual I.L.P.ers who had chosen to identify themselves as Trotskyist in a new organisation: the Marxist Group.¹²⁸

However, forging a united identity for the Trotskyists within the Party was a far from simple task; organisational unity was no guarantee of common purpose. Indeed it was after the ex-Communist Leaguers had joined together with the I.L.P. Trotskyists in the Marxist Group that frustrations grew to new levels. By early 1935 some of the Bolshevik-Leninists who had come out of the Communist League had grown so frustrated with the functioning of the Marxist Group that a number of them had left the I.L.P.¹²⁹ Some of the remaining old Communist Leaguers felt compelled to write to the International Secretariat to complain:

With regard to the internal position of the group of Bolshevik-Leninists, the position is far worse today than it was a year ago. A dangerous spread of centrist tendencies is to be observed within the group itself. This is of course due to the centrist environment, and has been accentuated by the fact that many of the old I.L.P. comrades who have linked up with the Minority of the old Communist League since the latter entered the I.L.P. have never been more than left centrists, who set a sentimental loyalty to the I.L.P. 'their' party above the principles of B.L.ism.

This danger of 'making a fetish of doing I.L.P. work and of "loyalty" to the I.L.P. leadership and constitution' was illustrated by the case of a comrade Johns who had placed loyalty to the I.L.P. above the principles of Bolshevik-Leninism:

Recently two South African comrades said in private discussion with comrade Johns, a member of the committee of the Marxist Grp., that they thought that under certain circumstances the Labour League of Youth (Youth organisation of the Labour Party) might be found to be a better field for our work than the I.L.P. At the next meeting of the Holborn Branch of the I.L.P. (of which both comrade Johns and the S. African cdes. are members), cde Johns, in the absence of the S. African cdes. accused them of disloyalty to the I.L.P., in as much as they thought the Labour League of Youth a better organisation than the I.L.P., and on these grounds moved their expulsion from the branch and party.¹³⁰

These problems were then exacerbated early in 1935 when a decision was made to try to operate an inner fraction within the Marxist Group. This inner group was set up with the intention of controlling policy and discussing the correspondence from the International Secretariat, but according to some ex-Communist League members 'there were invited a number of members of the Marxist Grp who were by no means yet fully won over to our principled position.' The result was the initial meeting had to be aborted because a number of people walked out, some, 'the unreliable elements', because they were opposed in principle to relations with any body outside the I.L.P. A second meeting was called which did set up such an inner fraction. However, the inner fraction did not involve many of the prominent members of the ex-Communist League causing much resentment.¹³¹

The Marxist Group came to have some influence within debates at I.L.P. conferences. For example, at the 1935 Derby conference the Trotskyists played an important role in

determining the course of the debate. They presented amendments and resolutions to the entire policy of the N.A.C., and the description that the conference turned into a 'three-sided battle' between R.P.C., Trotskyists and the N.A.C.¹³² is not entirely inappropriate. However, it is much more problematic to use the such public arenas as an indicator of a 'new balance of forces' within the I.L.P.¹³³ The Marxist Group never managed to obtain a significant membership. When the Group had been formed it claimed a membership of sixty. One year later its membership in London was seventy, of whom between thirty and forty were active. Added to this were a small number of sympathisers outside London. Based on this membership, the Group managed to win control over six branches of the Party: Islington, Holborn and Finsbury, South Norwood, Finchley, Hendon and East Liverpool. Beyond this their influence was minimal in the period before the Abyssinian crisis. Their resolutions, especially where advancing a distinctively Trotskyist resolution such as a proposal for a Fourth International, received very small votes at most conferences whether Divisional or National. However, more worrying for the Trotskyists was their lack of success in winning recruits. In 1935 members of the Group were forced to concede that 'since the entry of the Minority of the old Communist League into the I.L.P. not one old member of the party has been won over to our position in the London Division.' Numbers were increasing only because of new members whom they 'had converted to Bolshevik-Leninism before they joined the I.L.P.'¹³⁴

Nevertheless, the Marxist Group did become influential within the I.L.P. in some localities. For example in Liverpool, Keighley and Sheffield I.L.P. all had more than one member of the Group on their respective executive committees. This was in addition to the Trotskyists greatest base, which was within the London I.L.P. Further the Group did a large amount of active propaganda work through the I.L.P., with most notable success when performed by C.L.R. James. For example the group undertook a propaganda tour of Wales in February 1936, which galvanised the I.L.P. in many areas where it had some strength as well as taking the organisation to areas which had long been weak. The tour, despite the vicious weather, took in Cardiff, Neath, Merthyr, Troedyrhiw, Treharris, Abadare, Seven Sisters, Blackwood, Tre-Alan, Newport and Machen often reaching audiences of over 100 frequently against the hostility of the highly organised Communist Party. It was notable that reports of the meetings suggested the meeting in the CP stronghold Tre-Alan in the Rhondda was reasonably

attended and that in Cardiff C.L.R. James was able to strike up something of a relationship with 'five coloured men who were members of the CP.'¹³⁵

Despite this activity the tensions between the Marxist Group and the I.L.P. were growing. The Marxist Group was at the forefront of those who supported the line of workers' sanctions in Abyssinia against the I.L.P.'s parliamentary group, with CLR James writing a number of influential articles in the *New Leader*. This was followed by a series of attacks by Trotsky on the parliamentary group's conduct on the Abyssinian question.¹³⁶ This feeling of antagonism from Marxist Group towards the ILP was matched in the other direction with an increasing frustration within the ILP towards the Marxist Group as the whole question of group organisation was raised.¹³⁷

Whilst many within the Marxist Group were frustrated some continued to feel a deeper degree of loyalty to the I.L.P. than many of the London based organisers of the group. This loyalty became another of the stock defences of the Marxist Groupers who sought to differentiate themselves from the R.P.C. A resolution on Groups adopted by Liverpool Marxist Group argued the difference between the R.P.C. and the Marxist Group was that the former attempted to win a few over the C.P. and to smash the I.L.P. whilst the latter 'strives to win the ILP to a new ILP.'¹³⁸ A letter from seven members of the Marxist Group to members of the ILP in March 1936 contained the claim that 'A Marxist Grouper is first and foremost a loyal and hardworking I.L.P.er' but nevertheless stressed that the I.L.P.'s problem was its lack of 'a clear revolutionary policy based on a Marxian analysis of the world situation.'¹³⁹

By the beginning of 1936 the Marxist Group's position within the I.L.P. was precarious. The tensions within the Group added to the anti-factional feeling within the wider party and the anger felt by the Marxist Group over the Parliamentary Group's conduct during the early months of the Abyssinian crisis. The 1936 Keighley conference was thus a crucial testing point for two reasons. First the conference provided the first opportunity for the party as a whole to discuss Abyssinia and the Parliamentary Group's conduct. Second, the N.A.C. proposals for the banning of internal factions were discussed. On the first issue there was considerable pressure from the Trotskyists and others for the party to take a definite line supporting workers' sanctions, and C.L.R. James proposed a motion which was initially accepted, dissociating the Party from the Inner Executive. However, the Parliamentary Group, which dominated the Inner Executive, and Maxton

in particular then pushed the conference to withdraw its decision by threatening to resign. Instead, they pressurised the conference into delaying their decision and holding a full plebiscite of party members on the issue. The conference also debated the question of Group activity and gave overwhelming support to the idea that groups within the party be banned despite the Marxist Group case being put by John Goffe and Bert Matlow. Trotsky then accused the Parliamentary Group of 'operating as a fraction,' and he dismissed the importance of the I.L.P.¹⁴⁰

The Marxist Group was seriously damaged by the Keighley decisions. In the six months following the conference the Group lost half its membership of just over fifty as it split into three factions. One group had found a political home within the I.L.P. and, aware of the allegations of disloyalty that would follow defection, argued for continuing membership of the party. A second grouping led by Bert Matlow argued for entry into the Labour Party as suggested by Trotsky, another was led by C.L.R. James who wanted to form an independent organisation. In the period up to October there was a gradual haemorrhaging of members. As the pressures on the Group increased so those who had been prepared to remain in the I.L.P. accepted that they would have to leave. On October 10 a meeting was held of the Marxist Group at which there was strong pressure from Liverpool, London and Glasgow to leave the I.L.P. The following day a conference was held of the three major Trotskyist organisations with thirty-nine delegates from the Marxist Group, twenty-six from the Trotskyists in the Labour Party and three Marxist League delegates. A number of members including Cooper, Pawsey, Ballard and Mazillier decided to stay on within the I.L.P. with the aim of 'splitting off the best elements from the I.L.P. leadership.' However, the bulk of the Group and most importantly the London Marxist Group passed a resolution moved by C.L.R. James to leave the I.L.P. and establish an independent organisation as quickly as possible. The departure of the main group of Trotskyists from the I.L.P. was announced in the *New Leader* with the larger organisation estimating that about thirty members were involved. However, those Trotskyists who remained in the I.L.P. were to maintain a vocal importance throughout the remainder of the decade.¹⁴¹

In the immediate aftermath of the departure of the Marxist Group, the relationship between the I.L.P. and the Trotskyist movement was strained. Brockway, although maintaining some sympathies with their analysis was heavily critical of their conduct

within the working class movement. As he put it during the Unity Campaign negotiations:

Take the Trotskyists. I believe they hold a truth... yet the Trotskyists are everywhere a source of mischief in the working-class movement. They remain conspiratorial cliques in what ever Party they attach themselves to, disintegrating it, making it less effective in the class struggle, antagonising other sections of the working class.¹⁴²

This tension further developed when the I.L.P. refused to take a strong line against the Moscow trials. In February 1937 the N.A.C. adopted a resolution on the Trials instructing the party to 'make no declarations on the matter until a full investigation has been carried out.'¹⁴³ This attitude angered Trotsky. He was further frustrated with the attempts, by the I.L.P. and the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity, to form a committee of independent socialists to look into the Stalin's allegations against Trotsky, rather than accepting the findings of the Trotsky Defence Committee. Together with the I.L.P.'s moves against the Marxist Group and policy change on Abyssinia this led to a series of angry exchanges between Trotsky and Brockway in which Trotsky accused Brockway of being a 'Pritt No. Two', and suggested that Brockway could not be considered in any way a neutral arbiter. Indeed Trotsky argued Brockway was proposing 'a partisan political trial against his ideological adversary.' Brockway's responded that 'no "Committee for the *Defence* of Trotsky" could be regarded as fulfilling the necessary conditions of impartiality.'¹⁴⁴

Despite the increasing distance between the I.L.P. and Trotsky the I.L.P. did maintain something of a relationship with many of the remaining British Trotskyists and the Party's leadership was always reasonably receptive to Trotskyist arguments. However, the links which were maintained between Trotskyists and the I.L.P. were more significant at local level.¹⁴⁵ Thus, even after 1936 when the bulk of the Marxist Group left the I.L.P. important connections remained. Some Trotskyists, such as Ben Elsbury, joined the party in the period 1936-9 and the small number of Trotskyists within the party after 1936 played a highly vocal if not particularly effective role at conferences. Some worked their way through to positions of significance, within the party organisation, most notably Ernie Patterson's activities on the I.L.P.'s Industrial Committee of which he was a member by 1938.

Nevertheless, even those Trotskyists who stayed in the I.L.P. after 1936 experienced a definite tension between their commitment to the I.L.P. and to Trotskyism, which frequently sometimes resulted in the Party taking disciplinary action. Thus, in 1939,

after Ernie Patterson found his attitude towards the I.L.P. changed by the pacifist response of the I.L.P. MPs to Chamberlain's Munich agreement, he began to work actively to split the party.¹⁴⁶ C.A. Smith, the new national chairman, was determined to assert his authority on the situation, which served to antagonise Patterson further. Smith announced his determination to stamp out the 'deplorable lack of discipline' which he pointed out had characterised the party since 1934 and thus moved against Patterson. Patterson then ignored two letters from the Executive Committee requesting an explanation of his conduct so the EC then suspended him from membership. However, the dispute threatened to erupt into a serious and widespread situation when seven members of the London Divisional Council broke the N.A.C.'s version of Party discipline by declining to operate the expulsion decision. The Executive Committee had little choice but to summon a Special Divisional Conference 'to thrash out the whole matter', with the inevitable consequence that an entirely new Divisional Council was elected.¹⁴⁷ Thus, it was clear that even when the number of Trotskyists in the organisation was small they could obtain positions of influence and, albeit largely in a disruptive way, have an important influence on the wider party.

5.8 Conclusion

Each of the factions examined had a significant impact on the membership and activity of the I.L.P. At national level controversies over international affiliation, working with the Communist Party, internal organisation and the Party's constitution were heavily influenced by factional activity. At divisional level, factional organisation particularly affected London and Lancashire. There is little doubt that the I.L.P. of this period was especially badly affected by factional disputes, yet it is far from clear why the party should have been so damaged. Whilst no conclusive points are evident, the analysis of such factional activity points does suggest a number of possibilities.

Certainly the Party's leadership was extremely tolerant of dissent, and this contributed to the creation of an environment in which factionalism could rapidly expand. Additionally, decentralised organisation and the relatively autonomy of divisional machinery gave factions space to develop. Further, the widespread acceptance that there was a need for policy to be redefined in revolutionary terms added to the problem. As there was no consensus on the meaning of 'revolutionary policy' there was little way of providing 'ideological regulation' of the acceptable limits of debate.¹⁴⁸ Thus, the internal

culture, organisation and ideology of the party would seem to be partially responsible for the extent of factional activity.

Further, the R.P.C. was based in London, and was able to have a significant policy impact at national level. Both the division, one of the I.L.P.'s largest, and the R.P.C. were perceived, even internally, as predominantly middle-class. The responding faction came from Lancashire, a division of roughly equivalent size but very different social composition. Some statements, in particular from the leading members of the Lancashire division, appear to combine class and geographical opposition. Thus, the geographical and social composition of the groups may also have been a factor in determining the extent of factional disputes.

Whatever the reasons for the extent of factional activity in the I.L.P. during the 1930s, the existence and activity of the major groupings indicates much about the possibilities and prospects for the party. Factional activity caused much disillusionment within the party. Whilst most of the rest of the party was able to experience a brief period of growth in the period from 1933-4, London and Lancashire, the two divisions worst hit by factionalism, saw sharp declines. In addition, the departure of the factions from the party further reduced I.L.P. membership, in the case of the Unity Group, cutting the Lancashire division's membership in half.

Factional policy also marks out some of the limits of the political space occupied by the I.L.P., from ethical socialism to Communist and Trotskyist sympathy, giving an, albeit unrepresentative, insight into I.L.P. political opinions at local and regional level. The confrontational and occasionally violent responses of the factions to each other's policy proposals indicates the ambiguities inherent in the commitment to a revolutionary policy. Whilst each of the factional groupings claimed to accept the need for a 'revolutionary policy', there was little agreement about the meaning of such a policy. Such disputes clearly indicate the difficulties the I.L.P. faced in using its 'new revolutionary policy' to carve out distinctive political space which it could use to build a viable party.

¹ Brockway, 1977, 109

² Dowse, 1966, 195

³ Clive Ali Chimmo Branson, husband of Communist historian Noreen Branson, secretary of the Chelsea I.L.P., later a member of the International Brigade, established *Revolt* as a weekly paper distributed free

to local working class houses, stressing issues such as 'playgrounds for the children' and 'stop war'. A. Branson, "'Revolt' Shows the way to Successful Street Papers', *The Party Organiser*, C.P.G.B. October-November 1932, 12-17.; *Dictionary of Labour Biography* volume II; Dudley Edwards joined the Guild of Youth in 1924 but soon drifted out of political activity. He did not consider himself politically aware until 1930 when he joined the N.U.W.M. There he came into contact with I.L.P.ers and joined the Party. Shortly afterwards he came into close contact with a number of Communists and considered himself 'half way in between' for a while. In 1931 he became the R.P.C.'s first secretary but immediately after disaffiliation joined the Communist Party largely due to the leadership it gave to the N.U.W.M. Interview with Dudley Edwards, 1978 Littlejohns, 1979, 307-323

⁴ In particular he was repelled by the actions of one of his brothers, who had volunteered as a blackleg. Weinbren, 227

⁵ Letter C.K. Cullen to Bellamy 5 August 1932 NMLH CPGB/IND/MISC/16/2; *New Leader*, 2 September 1932

⁶ Appealing for funds was a major source of concern for those opposed to the R.P.C. It was this that motivated John Aplin to raise the issue of what to do with 'unofficial movements' at a meeting between divisional representatives and the N.A.C. in March 1932. John Paton and Fenner Brockway, who were representing the N.A.C., were both in favour of not taking any definite action. Brockway suggested that he would look to see if 'it could not be made possible in some way to provide for the full expression of such views through the ordinary party organisation.' Paton, agreeing with a line of inactivity, argued that 'his experience had taught him that it was in the last degree unwise to deal with such a development by attempting to quash it.' Summary of discussion at meeting of Divisional representatives with N.A.C. 25 March 1932

⁷ London & South Agenda 20/9/1932 C.P./IND/MISC/16/1; Kevin Morgan, Interview with Reg and Hettie Bower 1999; *New Leader*, February 17 1933

⁸ *R.P.C. monthly bulletin*, May 1933

⁹ The R.P.C. Lancashire Divisional chairman was Wolfenden, from the Moston Branch in Manchester. *Labour's Northern Voice*, May 1934

¹⁰ In Wigan, under the leadership of Robert Rawlinson and J. Horne, R.P.C. presence was significant enough to justify holding the R.P.C. conference there in 1934. *New Leader*, 4 May 1934 In Chorley, R.P.C. member Bob Edwards held a position of such great significance within the Branch, that they conceded, that without his activity it was virtually impossible to for them to carry on in an effective manner. Executive Committee report for N.A.C. August 11-12 1934 In Blackpool, despite the presence of right-wing stalwart, Elijah Sandham, there was a growing R.P.C. influence stemming from the activity of Comrade Sudlow, a young window cleaner who had initially resigned his office in the branch as a protest over its right-wing tendencies. Letter from Francis Johnson to G.E. Humphries (no date.)

¹¹ Memorandum on the present political and economic situation and the I.L.P.

¹² Report of Annual Conference, 1933

¹³ The issue of the R.P.C.'s monthly bulletin early in 1933, before the Conference, had dedicated its lead article to the discussion of Workers' Councils. It explained what the R.P.C. understood by Workers' Councils, 'the consciously, built up, permanent form of the old time Councils of Action with their spontaneous appearances and periodic need.' The article also attempted to clarify their place in the

R.P.C.'s strategy, suggesting they could form the basis of 'the mighty movement of Workers linked in struggle'. R.P.C. Monthly Bulletin, Number 7, Jan-Feb 1933, page 1

¹⁴ Report of Annual Conference, 1933; See also below pages 94-94.

¹⁵ Report of Annual Conference, 1933

¹⁶ *New Leader*, 4 August 1933

¹⁷ I.L.P. conference report 1933

¹⁸ For an example of this line at the time of I.L.P. disaffiliation see R. Palme Dutt, Notes of the Month, *Labour Monthly*, July 1932

¹⁹ Harry Pollitt, 'The Bradford I.L.P. Conference and After', *Labour Monthly*, August 1932; Pollitt made the same comments in his debate with Brockway

²⁰ Bob McIlhone, 'The Marxism of the I.L.P.', *Labour Monthly*, March 1933

²¹ Letter from C.K. Cullen to Bellamy, 5 August 1932 NMLH CPGB/IND/MISC/16/2

²² 'Conference of Labour Monthly Readers- December 13 1931', *Labour Monthly*, January 1932

²³ 'Editorial Statement and 'Labour Monthly' Conference Announcement', *Labour Monthly*, March 1933

²⁴ "'Labour Monthly" Conference on Revolutionary Policy', *Labour Monthly*, April 1933

²⁵ William Rust, 'Towards a United Revolutionary Party', *Labour Monthly*, July 1933, 429

²⁶ William Rust, 'Towards a United Revolutionary Party', *Labour Monthly*, July 1933, 429

²⁷ *Revolt*, Issue 1, March 1933. It should be noted that the I.L.P. also participated in the formation of Workers' Councils in other areas, for example in Johnstone, Scotland (*New Leader*, 17 March 1933)

²⁸ *R.P.C. Monthly Bulletin*, May 1933

²⁹ Bob Edwards, 'The I.L.P. and the Comintern', *Labour Monthly*, August 1933, 495

³⁰ Callaghan, 1993, 143

³¹ For Edwards' retrospective assessment of Whalley see his letter to Don Bateman November 24 1974 (National Museum of Labour History/Bob Edwards' Papers/Box 6/I.L.P.)

³² Eric Whalley, 'Towards the I.L.P. Easter Conference', *Labour Monthly*, February 1934, 92 (emphasis in original)

³³ *R.P.C. Monthly Bulletin*, March 1934

³⁴ The Affiliation Committee amendment simply called for sympathetic affiliation, the R.P.C. amendment called for a delegation to be sent to meet with the Comintern to resolve 'outstanding difficulties.' *New Leader*, April 6 1934

³⁵ Hanson had earlier been involved in disputes within the Party when following the disaffiliation decision he had been accused, together with the branch secretary, of amending the records of branch discussions. London Divisional Council Organisation Committee Minutes, October 5 1932 NMLH/C.P./IND/MISC/18

³⁶ 'East London "Labour Monthly" Conference on the Future of Revolutionary Policy', *Labour Monthly*, September 1933, 591

³⁷ Interview with Jack Gaster (NSA C609/06/01-02); N.A.C. minutes, February 11-12 1934; N.A.C. minutes, June 9-10 1934

³⁸ It was for these initial financial reasons that Whalley and Edwards were initially called before the N.A.C. Edwards later suggested that sufficient money for the two to travel third class to the Soviet Union, came from the Chorley and Wigan I.L.P. Branches. The trip lasted for ten days, with the Comintern

paying for the return trip and upgrading them to first class. During the trip the two I.L.P.ers had an opportunity to meet with every department of the Communist International, including Dimitrov the then Chairman of that body. Edwards later recalled that he had 'personally quarrelled with the Russians, particularly Stalin, over international people who disappeared from Moscow without trace.' N.A.C. minutes, June 9-10 1934; Bob Edwards to Don Bateman, November 25 1974 NMLH/Bob Edwards Papers/Box 6/I.L.P.

³⁹ Edwards and Whalley, *Revolutionary Unity*, 18

⁴⁰ On July 10 Whalley attended a meeting of the Inner Executive and after discussion it was agreed that he should submit a written statement. However, the written statement that Whalley submitted made matters worse as he charged the N.A.C. with a 'misuse of authority'. The N.A.C. responded on the 24 July that unless Whalley was prepared to give a full undertaking that he would accept his disciplinary obligation the Inner Executive would be forced to recommend that the N.A.C. expel him. Meanwhile Edwards had failed to make any assurance of loyalty to the Party. However, the Chorley Branch decided to reaccept Edwards as a full member. The Chorley decision to reaccept Edwards brought matters nearer to resolution. Three days after this decision was communicated to the central I.L.P., on August 10, some members of the E.C. moved that both Edwards and Whalley be expelled. By the narrow margin of 3-2 the two members of the Comintern Affiliation Committee were given a further two weeks to give an adequate assurance of their loyalty. A month later, Whalley, on the very brink of being expelled after further vacillation finally gave the necessary undertaking of loyalty and on September 22 Mansfield Branch and the Midland Division were informed of the withdrawal of his suspension of membership. Edwards pushed the N.A.C. even further and it was not until after he himself had been elected to that body as the Lancashire Division's replacement for Elijah Sandham, in the middle of November, that his suspension was formally lifted Executive Committee Report, August 11-12 1934; Executive Committee Minutes, August 10 1934; Inner Executive minutes (non-quorate), September 22 1934; N.A.C. minutes, November 16-17 1934

⁴¹ J. Hanson, 'The I.L.P. and International Socialist Unity', *Labour Monthly*, September 1935

⁴² Inner Executive Minutes, April 15 1935

⁴³ N.A.C. Minutes, April 19 1935

⁴⁴ N.A.C. minutes, April 22 1935

⁴⁵ *New Leader*, March 26 1935; May 3 1935

⁴⁶ Executive Committee Report, June 29-30 1935

⁴⁷ N.A.C. minutes, June 29 1935

⁴⁸ Executive Committee Report, August 2-3 1935

⁴⁹ N.A.C. minutes, August 10-12 1935; Extract from N.A.C. Circular Letter (Hull DJH 5/8)

⁵⁰ 'The Guild, The Party and the R.P.C.', *R.P.C. Monthly Bulletin*, July 31 1935

⁵¹ Jack Gaster and Hilda Vernon, 'The War Situation - And The League', *The R.P.C. Bulletin*, October 1935

⁵² Jack Gaster and the London Emergency Committee, 'Abyssinia - Where Does the I.L.P. Stand', *Controversy*, October 1935

⁵³ C.K.C., 'The War Crisis', *The R.P.C. Bulletin*, October 1935

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- ⁵⁴ 'Foreword - Crisis in the R.P.C.?', *The R.P.C. Bulletin*, October 1935
- ⁵⁵ Inner Executive Minutes, October 24 1935
- ⁵⁶ *New Leader*, October 4 1935; M. Upham, *The History of British Trotskyism to 1949*, 103-4
- ⁵⁷ *New Leader*, November 1 1935
- ⁵⁸ Upham, *The History of British Trotskyism to 1949*, 104; *The R.P.C. Bulletin*, November 1935
- ⁵⁹ *The R.P.C. Bulletin*, November 1935; Interview with Jack Gaster
- ⁶⁰ *New Leader*, November 15 1935
- ⁶¹ N.A.C. minutes November 30- December 1 1935
- ⁶² Interview with Jack Gaster
- ⁶³ Piratin, 1978, 86
- ⁶⁴ Bruely, 1985
- ⁶⁵ Brockway, 1977, 109
- ⁶⁶ N.A.C. minutes November 30- December 1 1935
- ⁶⁷ Meeting of Divisional Representatives with the N.A.C. March 25 1932
- ⁶⁸ *New Leader*, 5 August 1932
- ⁶⁹ N.A.C. minutes October 7-8 1932
- ⁷⁰ For example in his speech to the I.L.P. summer school in 1932 see *New Leader*, 19 August 1932; *New Leader*, 30 September 1932; 1933 I.L.P. annual conference report
- ⁷¹ *New Leader*, 5 May 1933
- ⁷² *New Leader*, 5 May 1933
- ⁷³ R.P.C. Bulletin, May 1933
- ⁷⁴ *New Leader*, 29 September 1933
- ⁷⁵ *Labour's Northern Voice*, February 1933
- ⁷⁶ *Labour's Northern Voice*, June 1933
- ⁷⁷ For the difference between Sandham and Skinner's perspectives on the R.P.C. see *Labour's Northern Voice*, July 1933 and *Labour's Northern Voice*, August 1933
- ⁷⁸ *Labour's Northern Voice*, July 1933
- ⁷⁹ The Liverpool federation also pointed to the successes for the I.L.P. in the meetings on the Anti-fascist day in April and on May Day, with leading I.L.P.er G.E. Humphries acting as secretary of the united front. *Labour's Northern Voice*, August 1933
- ⁸⁰ For example on the N.A.C. Sandham argued that 'it was the feeling in his division that the importance of divisional organisation was not fully appreciated and did not occupy its rightful place in the deliberations of the N.A.C.' There was particular resentment at the different funding regimes operating for *Labour's Northern Voice* and the *New Leader*. In June, Smith went to Lancashire to attempt to sort out the differences, and obtained an agreement from the divisional council to co-operate with the Power fund on condition that the N.A.C. reconsidered the funding of *New Leader*. N.A.C. minutes May 13-14 1933; N.A.C. minutes June 24-25 1933
- ⁸¹ N.A.C. minutes August 5-7 1933
- ⁸² The circular was maintained by a vote of 10 to 5. N.A.C. minutes 23-24 September 1933
- ⁸³ *Labour's Northern Voice*, September 1933
- ⁸⁴ N.A.C. minutes September 23-24 1933

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- ⁸⁵ *Labour's Northern Voice*, December 1933; *Labour's Northern Voice*, August 1934
- ⁸⁶ *Labour's Northern Voice*, December 1933; N.A.C. minutes Jan 6-7 1934
- ⁸⁷ *Labour's Northern Voice*, February 1934
- ⁸⁸ *Labour's Northern Voice*, February 1934
- ⁸⁹ *Labour's Northern Voice*, February 1934
- ⁹⁰ At the 1934 York Conference Sandham made a definite statement that he would remain a member of the Party. 1934 ILP Conference Report
- ⁹¹ For example, the lead article in the February 1934 edition of *Labour's Northern Voice* was dedicated to supporting Cripp's ideas about the Monarchy cf. Middleton Murry's views in favour of Cripps in *L.N.V.* October 1933.
- ⁹² *London RPC Bulletin*, June 1934
- ⁹³ 1934 ILP Annual Conference report
- ⁹⁴ In fact there were two distinct organisational proposals which troubled the Unity Group. First, a London Divisional Council motion called for more co-ordination of activity and greater discipline in the execution of agreed policy. Second, proposals moved by Jack Gaster on behalf of the NAC ended divisional financial autonomy, forcing divisional councils to apply for funding for specific schemes. They also argued for a complete restructuring of the central organisation of the Party. The Committee system of the Party was to be overhauled with NAC meetings to be made much less frequent, from monthly to quarterly, and instead an Executive Committee would be appointed by the NAC, with six or seven members it would meet much more frequently. In addition an inner executive would be appointed with full powers to be called when time did not permit the calling of a full E.C. *New Leader*, 6 April 1934 cf. 1934 ILP annual Conference Report, *Labour's Northern Voice*, April 1934
- ⁹⁵ *New Leader*, 4 May 1934; *Labour's Northern Voice*, June 1934; Minutes of Special Divisional Conference May 26 1934; *Labour's Northern Voice*, July 1934
- ⁹⁶ The delay in resignation was too much for the N.A.C., which refused to send out the letter it had written thanking Sandham for his years of service in the I.L.P. N.A.C. minutes June 9-10 1934
- ⁹⁷ *New Leader*, 18 May 1934
- ⁹⁸ *Labour's Northern Voice*, June 1934
- ⁹⁹ *Labour's Northern Voice*, June 1934
- ¹⁰⁰ See for example *Labour's Northern Voice*, September 1935 for a declaration of the independence of the paper from the I.S.P. The reality of this independence grew somewhat overtime.
- ¹⁰¹ *Labour's Northern Voice*, July 1934; cf. *Labour's Northern Voice*, August 1934
- ¹⁰² *New Leader*, 7 September 1934
- ¹⁰³ *Labour's Northern Voice*, January 1935; *Labour's Northern Voice*, July 1935; *Labour's Northern Voice*, October 1935
- ¹⁰⁴ John Middleton Murry to Richard Rees, March 1 1936 University College London, Rees Papers, Box 12
- ¹⁰⁵ *Labour's Northern Voice*, April 1939
- ¹⁰⁶ *Labour's Northern Voice*, October 1939
- ¹⁰⁷ *Labour's Northern Voice*, September 1939
- ¹⁰⁸ *Labour's Northern Voice*, September 1941

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- ¹⁰⁹ F Meade to Morgan Phillips January 5 1951 NMLH/GS/I.S.P./1
- ¹¹⁰ Executive Committee Report for N.A.C. meeting 11-12 1934
- ¹¹¹ N.A.C. minutes September 23-24 1933
- ¹¹² Bornstein and Richardson, 131; Upham, 58
- ¹¹³ Upham, 65
- ¹¹⁴ Bornstein and Richardson, 139
- ¹¹⁵ Paton, *Left Turn*, 416-23; 'An Interview with C.A. Smith' in *New Leader*, 13 October 1933
- ¹¹⁶ Paton, 420
- ¹¹⁷ L. Trotsky, 'Trotsky to the I.L.P.', *Controversy* November 1933
- ¹¹⁸ Some leading members of the International Left Opposition had suggested that one or two individuals should remain outside the I.L.P. to maintain the group's press. Trotsky, 'How to influence the I.L.P.' cited in Bornstein and Richardson, 141-2
- ¹¹⁹ This group was led by Reg Groves, who despite his early experiences in the I.L.P. and his work in co-ordinating joint activities with them, felt the Party was not viable. He argued that the Party had no future, that it was a relic of the past, and that to correctly criticise the I.L.P. was to leave the Party. The place of primary work for Trotskyists according to Groves was the Communist Party, which despite its problems was the home of most revolutionary workers. Bornstein and Richardson, 140
- ¹²⁰ *The Red Flag*, September 1933
- ¹²¹ C.F. Mottram, 'Criticising Trotsky', *Controversy* December 1933
- ¹²² When the matter came to a vote Grove's strategy was endorsed 26 to 11. *For Discussion: Internal Bulletin of the Communist League*, No. 14-15 October 24 1933 (MRC MSS 115 File 2); Resolution to be submitted to members meeting December 17 1933 (DDH/1932-8); Bornstein and Richardson, 150
- ¹²³ International Secretariat to British Section of the International Communist League, (DDH/1932-8); Bornstein and Richardson, 147
- ¹²⁴ *New Leader*, 16 February 1934
- ¹²⁵ *New Leader*, 16 February 1934; N.A.C. minutes February 10-11 1934
- ¹²⁶ Upham, 89; undated letter to International Secretariat signed by 7 I.L.P. members (Hull DJH 5/2)
- ¹²⁷ Former members of the British Section of the International Communist League, 'Declaration on Joining the I.L.P.', *Controversy* June 1934
- ¹²⁸ Upham, 89
- ¹²⁹ Letter to the International Secretariat signed by 7 I.L.P. members (DJH 5/2) The letter was actually signed by A.B Doncaster, E. Grant, R. Porteous, S. Hirst and W.G. Bryce of the I.L.P. and D.D. Harber and Stuart Kirby both of whom had left the Marxist League and the I.L.P. for the Labour Party by the time the letter was sent.
- ¹³⁰ Letter to the International Secretariat signed by 7 I.L.P. members (DJH 5/2)
- ¹³¹ Letter to the International Secretariat signed by 7 I.L.P. members (DJH 5/2)
- ¹³² Bornstein and Richardson, 171
- ¹³³ Bornstein and Richardson, 170
- ¹³⁴ Letter to the International Secretariat signed by 7 I.L.P. members (DJH 5/2)
- ¹³⁵ Don James to London Marxist Group, July 1936 Reports 1, 2 and 3 (Documents copied from John McIllroy)

¹³⁶ MRC/MSS151/File 1

¹³⁷ For example, *New Leader* moved against the Trotskyists when in February 1936 a decision was made not to print in the paper articles 'critical of internal developments in Russia from a particular theoretical angle not endorsed by the Party.' N.A.C. minutes February 15 1936

¹³⁸ September 10 1935, B JL/DJH 5/9

¹³⁹ signed by Harry Kilminster (secretary of Keithley ILP), CA Lockwood (Sheffield ILP, Secretary ILP Research Bureau, Evelyn M Hurp (National Organiser Guild of Youth, Chairman Bradford Guild of Youth), John Goffe (Chairman of Yorkshire Division Guild of Youth, Joint Secretary Sheffield ILP), F. Warwick (Huddersfield ILP), W.H. Wilson (Keighley ILP), P.J. Barclay (Lancashire Divisional Council, East Liverpool ILP) (B JL/DJH5/10)

¹⁴⁰ In a short pamphlet *On Dictators and the Heights of Oslo* Trotsky argued that 'A party that dissolves oppositional groups but allows ruling cliques to manipulate as they wish is not a revolutionary party.' MRC/MSS151/File 1

¹⁴¹ Upham, 107-126; Resolution Passed by London Marxist Group, B JL/DJH5/4; *New Leader*, December 12 1936; cf. Bornstein and Richardson, 186 who appear to have mistaken the departure of Bert and May Matlow in May 1936 and the claims that surrounded their leaving for the disbanding of the Marxist Group.

¹⁴² *New Leader*, December 4 1936

¹⁴³ N.A.C. Report to 1937 Conference.

¹⁴⁴ *New Leader*, September 3 1937

¹⁴⁵ Thus, in 1937 Glasgow where the Marxist Group believed the I.L.P. to be behind increasing industrial militancy, the I.L.P. bookshop was claimed to be actively pushing Militant Group material, despite the reduction in size of the Militant branch there from twelve to four. In Norwich the I.L.P. and the Trotskyists worked together in defence of POUM whilst in Liverpool, despite the inactivity of the I.L.P. the Militant Group maintained one leading member of the branch inside the I.L.P. Nevertheless, this pattern of mutual support was not uniformly maintained. In many areas the organisations recruited largely at the expense of one another. Thus, when the five members of the Marxist Group left the I.L.P. and joined the Militant Group the I.L.P. branch collapsed. Conversely, in Leeds the I.L.P. recruited four members from the Militant Group. Militant Group National Conference August 1-2 1937, MRC/MSS151/File 1; The prominent Liverpool ILPer referred to in this document is a 'Comrade C', probably Harry Cund.

¹⁴⁶ At a divisional aggregate in July 1939, after forthright expressions of his views at a number of conferences both local and national he finally announced that the I.L.P. was neither a revolutionary Socialist Party nor capable of becoming one, and that groups of revolutionaries should be formed having their own discipline and extended to include non-I.L.P.ers. He stated that these groups were to be the 'cadres' of a new Party. On leaving the meeting members were handed leaflets declaring that the I.L.P. was 'broken and bankrupt' and could only hinder the building of the revolutionary party. C.A. Smith, 'Re-establishing Party Discipline', *Between Ourselves*, July 1939

¹⁴⁷ C.A. Smith, 'Re-establishing Party Discipline', *Between Ourselves*, July 1939

¹⁴⁸ On the importance of ideological regulation in containing factional activity in the Labour Party see Shaw, 1988, 127-9

6. Towards a Revolutionary Policy

6.1 Introduction

With I.L.P. policy described as 'revolutionary posturing' and 'quotation mongering' and the policy makers as 'cranks' and 'ideologues' there has been little serious analysis of the I.L.P.'s political development during the 1930s.¹ However, it is impossible to understand the activity and decline of the Party without an understanding of party policy and the dynamics of policy making within the organisation. This chapter explains the development of I.L.P. policy. It traces the pressures that led to the rejection of the 'Socialism in Our Time' policy and the adoption of a 'new revolutionary policy' in 1933. The changes to that policy in the period up to 1935, as the party claimed to be in the process of 'clarifying' its 'new revolutionary policy' are examined. Finally despite the Party's claims to have established a consensus based on the 1935 policy declaration, the remaining ambiguities and policy problems that the Party faced during the latter half of the decade are examined. This understanding reveals not only the political and strategic development of the 1930s I.L.P. but also indicates some of the reasons for the Party's decline.

6.2 The End of 'Socialism in Our Time'

The 'Socialism in Our Time' policy, the self-described 'militant and constructive' moves to establish socialism 'for this generation', was adopted by the Party at its 1926 Whitely Bay conference. 'Socialism In Our Time', developed on the insistence of then I.L.P. chairman Clifford Allen, had at its heart the doctrine of the 'Living Wage', which 'represented the minimum standard of civilised existence which should be tolerated.' This idea of a 'Living Wage', developed with the assistance of the noted economist J.A. Hobson, was presented as an under-consumptionist solution to the pressing problem of unemployment. The suggestions, famously dismissed by MacDonald as 'flashy futilities', were forcefully debated at the 1927 Labour Party conference, but implementation was never likely and the proposals became lost in a joint Labour Party/TUC committee which focused rapidly on the divisive issue of Family Allowances.²

Despite its development under the Chairmanship of Allen, the I.L.P. soon found that 'Socialism in Our Time' and its underlying 'Living Wage' doctrine were capable of more

than one interpretation. Maxton was elected Party chairman by an overwhelming majority at the 1926 conference. He had sat on the policy committee during 1925-6 and together with his close collaborator John Wheatley, interpreted 'Socialism in Our Time' as part of a 'third alternative' or 'middle way' between Communism and 'MacDonaldism'. They stressed the national regulation of income and prices and a minimum income of about £40 per week as the first steps to socialism. Nationalisation would, they argued, be necessary to ensure the payment of this level of living wage.³ Such arguments from the Party chairman made the left-wing interpretation of 'Socialism in Our Time' into I.L.P. orthodoxy.

However, by the time of disaffiliation political and economic crisis had convinced the party that it needed a new political outlook. In his speech at the Bradford Conference Brockway suggested that Socialism was at a crossroads. He reminded the conference that the I.L.P. had led the way in establishing the Labour Party at the beginning of the century, and then he called for a new effort to lead the way again, this time in creating a *revolutionary* working class movement.

In Britain we can be proud that the I.L.P. was a pioneer in the creation of the modern working-class political movement. We have come to a new period, and it is our duty once more to be pioneers – pioneers in the creation of a new revolutionary spirit in the working class, so that it may be ready for the approaching situation.⁴

However, the exact content of such a revolutionary policy was to be one of the most hotly debated subjects within the Party in the post-disaffiliation period. For John Paton, the Party's General Secretary it implied 'the need for central control of the Party's parliamentary contests and for an immense intensification of activity by our members within the trades unions.'⁵ However, for others, including Brockway, the implications went much wider. According to this view an entirely new constitutional framework was needed. The disaffiliation decision at Bradford in July 1932 did not immediately declare on the detail of this new revolutionary policy, but it did go much further than Paton had hoped in breaking with the Labour Party. Indeed, the N.A.C. recommended to conference a seven point plan which included resigning individual membership of the Labour Party and ceasing to pay the political levy in Trade Unions:

- 1) The I.L.P. should proceed to select, where desirable, I.L.P. candidates for suitable constituencies on a basis planned and definitely controlled by the N.A.C. and the Divisional Councils.
- 2) Local branches of the I.L.P. should disaffiliate from Borough, Divisional and Local Labour Parties.
- 3) Members of the I.L.P. should resign from membership of the Labour Party after stating to the Labour Party organisations of which they are members, their reasons for so doing.
- 4) I.L.P. members on all governing bodies should resign from Labour groups and act as I.L.P. representatives. They should stand in future as I.L.P. candidates.

- 5) I.L.P. members should not continue to act as representatives of other working-class bodies on Borough, Divisional or Local Labour Parties.
- 6) I.L.P. members should maintain their membership and activity within the Trades Unions, Trades Councils and Co-operative movements.
- 7) I.L.P. members of Trades Unions should cease to contribute a political levy to the Labour Party and should seek to allocate it to the I.L.P.⁶

The Conference was not content with simply accepting the N.A.C. recommendation. Rather, on the initiation of the R.P.C. the delegates insisted that each 'should' in the resolution was to be changed to a 'must.'⁷ The declaration became a clear statement of incompatibility with the Labour Party and its philosophy. The need to develop a new policy for the party had become accepted by almost all those who were in favour of disaffiliation.

6.3 Workers' Councils and a 'New Revolutionary Policy'

The question of what was meant by a 'new revolutionary policy' was the main subject of debate during 1933. By the end of the year the party had agreed upon an official 'new revolutionary policy' which was to remain the basis of the party's programme until the outbreak of war. This policy was made in two phases. First the decisions of the 1933 annual conference in Derby outlined the foundations of the policy. Second the N.A.C. drew up the detail of the 'new revolutionary policy', basing its policy on its understanding of the Derby decisions.

At the 1933 I.L.P. conference, conflicting opinions were evident. The N.A.C. was proposing a new policy framework. The Revolutionary Policy Committee, dominant in London, was proposing a new constitution as a complete alternative to the N.A.C. vision whilst the opponents of the R.P.C. in Lancashire and elsewhere were attempting to locate the party's new revolutionary policy within an ethical socialist tradition. Three questions were central to the debates: first the place of Parliamentary versus non-Parliamentary activity, second the question of joint work with the Communist Party and finally, the question of international affiliation.

The N.A.C. report, moved by Maxton, the I.L.P.'s Parliamentary icon, gave Parliament and electoral struggle a much smaller emphasis than had been present in the 'Socialism in Our Time' programme. The thrust of the report was the need to consider the use of non-Parliamentary tactics in general and of Workers' Councils in particular. He argued that the Party needed 'to disabuse the minds of the workers that parliament alone could

bring about the establishment of a Socialist State.' However, he did allow that the House of Commons was one instrument in a possible Socialist transformation and 'should not be thrown away.' The N.A.C. position allowed for joint work with the Communist Party whilst suggesting that these policies were best pursued through contact with the international 'Left' socialist parties. Even the stated disagreements of the N.A.C. to working with the Comintern were in terms of tactics and organisation rather than fundamental policy.

The R.P.C. although accepting much of the N.A.C.'s argument proposed a wholesale alternative. They proposed a Marxian socialist objective for the Party, opposition to Imperialism and to Imperialist war, support for the USSR, a united front with the Communist Party, reduced emphasis on parliament and use of Workers' Councils. All of this was broadly acceptable to the majority on the N.A.C. However, parts of the R.P.C. proposals were more controversial. First there was an obvious difference with the N.A.C. over International affiliation. The R.P.C. suggested moves to affiliate to the Comintern, rather than focus on the international 'Left' socialists. They proposed that the N.A.C. should

Approach the Secretariat of the Comintern with a view to ascertaining in what way the I.L.P. may assist in the work of the International.

Further the R.P.C. wanted a definite commitment to the Party working for the creation of a workers' dictatorship:

The I.L.P. will thus endeavour to plan and to pave the way for the setting up of a Workers' Dictatorship upon the attainment of power for the carrying out of working class measures necessary in the transition period.

These differences between the R.P.C. and the N.A.C. were clear from even a cursory glance at the agenda. However, there were more subtle differences evident between the two positions, especially on the place of parliament and Workers' Councils. The R.P.C. wanted a definite statement that parliament was inadequate and that Workers' Councils would be the focus of I.L.P. activity.

The existing organs of national and local government being part of the machinery of Capitalism, such organs can not be employed as the main instrument for the capture of power by the working class, and the I.L.P. will work alternatively for the creation of direct Workers' Councils.

The N.A.C. alternative, although less definitely worded than the R.P.C.'s statement, also conceded that Socialism would not come through voting alone. It further accepted that the main area of working-class struggle would be outside of parliament. However, whilst the R.P.C. named Workers' Councils as *the* alternative to Parliament, the N.A.C. simply named them as one possible alternative arena of struggle.

In the struggle for Socialism the working-class will find its main strength in its industrial and class organisations. Its power to defeat the capitalist class and overthrow Capitalism will depend finally on its capacity to develop effective industrial and class organisations for the successful conduct of the class-struggle outside Parliament (e.g. Workers' Councils)

Further, the R.P.C. was proposing to make the rejection of Parliament, and the acceptance of Workers' Council, part of the Party's constitution. The N.A.C. was simply proposing a set of policy proposals which would not have constitutional status.

These differences were to play an important role in working out exactly what the I.L.P.'s policy was to mean in the longer term. However, to many of the R.P.C.'s strongest opponents at the conference it was simply splitting hairs. They believed that the N.A.C. had conceded the whole of the R.P.C. case. Voices protesting against the N.A.C. and R.P.C. line on the rejection of parliamentary activity and work with the Communist Party, largely from Lancashire and East Anglia, were a major feature of the conference. Norwich's John Middleton Murry, the noted literary critic, argued that the report was 'unbalanced, wrong in theory, and not Marxist.' He also suggested that it ignored the psychology of the British working class. The overall feeling of this group was expressed by the recently deposed chair of the London Division, Allen Skinner, who claimed that the proposals were essentially just a set of Communist Party tactics. Similarly concerned was Fred Jowett, the veteran treasurer of the party, who argued against both N.A.C. and R.P.C. as a pacifist and a parliamentarian.

However, the majority of conference votes were split between support for the N.A.C. and R.P.C. Parts of the R.P.C. constitution were accepted.⁸ However, the crucial section of the R.P.C.'s proposed constitution, relating to parliament and workers' councils was rejected by a narrow margin, 86 votes to 90.⁹ Thus, in this respect, the constitution remained as at Bradford, with some emphasis given to the role of parliament. It made no specific mention of Workers' Councils, although it maintained the central importance of lines of struggle outside parliament:

The Independent Labour Party believes that electoral activity for the capture of all the organs of Government, national and local, is essential, recognising that such control would be of the greatest importance in the change from Capitalism to Socialism. Nevertheless, it regards this as only one aspect of the general struggle. It realises that the interests behind Capitalism are likely to offer to resistance by any and every means, to any attempt to dispossess them of the economic and political power on which their privileges depend and, particularly in the circumstances of a complete economic breakdown, to resort to some form of dictatorship in opposition to economic and social changes. The minds of the workers must be prepared for such a situation and they must be made ready to meet it and overcome it by the use of their mass strength for the capture of power.¹⁰

This was accepted along with the N.A.C. report on the place of parliament which, although less forceful than the R.P.C. position, did give a specific mention to workers' councils.

The discussions at the Derby Conference gave the I.L.P. a slightly altered constitution, and they agreed on the place of parliament within Party activity. However, the conference, in rejecting the R.P.C.'s comprehensive proposals had not set out a new policy framework for the party to replace 'Socialism In Our Time.' Some, especially within the Lancashire division were happy with this vacuum, fearful of the party moving too far from the 'left' interpretation of 'Socialism in Our Time' which they favoured. However, the N.A.C. decided that they would take on the job of formulating the detail of the party's 'new revolutionary policy' on the principles which had been laid down in Derby.

Meeting in August, at one of the longest N.A.C. meetings in the Party's history the N.A.C. discussed a policy report from a specially appointed sub-committee. The new policy statement set out a comprehensive vision, which stretched from an analysis of the political and economic situation to a detailed prescription for the organisation of the I.L.P. The report was based on the economic decline of capitalism, and the expected fascist response to this decline from the capitalist class, with the likely result being the outbreak of imperialist or nationalist war. The report took an extremely positive view of the Soviet Union, and committed the Party to the defence of Russia.¹¹ The new policy of the I.L.P. made the claim that it would take account of these factors in outlining a plan for action.

In line with the Derby decisions the new policy gave a limited role for Parliament and elections in I.L.P. activity. Whilst the Party remained committed to attempting to 'occasionally wringing concessions from Parliamentary Capitalism' the main use of Parliament according to the new policy statement was to disseminate propaganda and gather information. It was acknowledged that 'If it were possible to secure a majority of revolutionary Socialists in Parliament this would be important in initiating a revolutionary change.' However, the report stressed that this was extremely unlikely and in any case argued that a majority in Parliament would not be enough to generate revolutionary change, all that would happen is that this would 'create a crisis which would require action by the working-class.' Given this it is clear that the role of

Parliament was to be substantially reduced in the activity of the I.L.P. Instead 'the most important task of the Socialist Movement' was to 'mobilise all the forces of the working-class for agitation and action.'

The policy statement also addressed the issue of co-operation with other working-class organisations. The goal was to encourage united action by 'all sections of the working class in the immediate struggle' However, the first step along these lines was to secure co-operation with other organisations who shared the I.L.P.'s 'revolutionary outlook;' in other words, to reach agreement with the Communist Party. The aim of united action with these other organisations was to build local 'united effort organisations' such as Anti-War Councils or Tenants' Defence Committees. In the longer term the aim was then to build these local organisations into 'definite Workers' Councils, representing all sections of the working class and acting as the instrument of the immediate struggle and of revolutionary action.'

Despite the emphasis on Workers' Councils, they were seen within the new policy as a long-term rather than a short-term aim. It was recognised, for example, that there was little point in trying to build Workers' Councils except on the basis of some already existing local organisation engaged in agitation related to grievances that are felt in the area. In this way the policy saw three stages of united action starting with co-operation between the C.P. and the I.L.P. and then building up into some local organisation such as a Tenants' Defence Committee, culminating in a Workers' Council.

Co-operation with all working-class organisations was seen as a route to building for Workers' Councils. However, joint action with the Communist Party was seen as of additional importance for the I.L.P. The key point was that the new policy recognised both the I.L.P. and the C.P. as revolutionary Socialist parties, the possibility was foreseen that the two parties might, at some point, merge:

The co-operation of the I.L.P. and the C.P. is beginning to unify the revolutionary activity and may well facilitate the creation of a united revolutionary movement.

It was not however possible to argue for increasing, or even continuing, co-operation with the Communist Party without addressing the very real problems that the I.L.P. had experienced in previous joint activity with the C.P.

Whilst the Communists had been operating its 'united front from below' policy the C.P. had used united front activity to disrupt the I.L.P. and to draw I.L.P.ers into the Communist Party. The new I.L.P. policy stressed the need to maintain a distinctive I.L.P. identity whilst working with the Communist Party and other organisations. It stated that 'our members must be conscious of belonging to "THE" Party which will be the spear-head of the united revolutionary movement in this country.' The problem which this identified was real enough, the attempt to develop and maintain a separate identity for the I.L.P., a combination of policy and activity distinctive from the Communist Party on the one hand and the mainstream labour movement including the Labour Party on the other. The solution suggested by the new policy was that 'I.L.P. literature should always be kept to the front. Distinctive propaganda meetings must be maintained ...and branch personnel must be used so as to retain efficient officials for the branch itself.'¹²

The N.A.C., like the wider party, was split in its attitude towards the new policy. Those who supported the policy saw it as a necessary step towards becoming a clearly defined, theoretically sophisticated revolutionary Socialist party. Those who opposed the policy were convinced that the policy was abandoning the practical basis upon which the party's existence was built. With the nine divisional members split the N.A.C. accepted the policy by a vote of nine to five on the votes of the national members and party officials.¹³

Reaction to the new policy focused on the stress given to workers' councils as an alternative to parliament. The R.P.C. and a number of others including the non-R.P.C. leadership of the London Division, John Aplin and C.A. Smith continued to argue for greater emphasis on workers' councils. As Smith argued that there was an urgent need to build Workers' Councils. More significantly he was also prepared to phrase his argument so that it would seem as though Workers' Councils were *the* way to Socialism.

Just as the capitalists devised their own instrument for the conquest of power, so the workers must devise their alternative instrument now that the time has come for them to rise to the position of ruling class. That instrument is not new; but it must now take on a new and more permanent form. It is the instrument to which the workers have naturally turned on every occasion when they have been faced with a sudden intensification of capitalist attacks. It is the democratically elected Workers' Committee, the Council of Action, the Workers' Council.¹⁴

Sympathy for Workers' Councils however extended well beyond the R.P.C. and the associated 'left-wing' in London. Indeed, there was support in some form or another for the idea of Workers' Councils from most sections of the Party. Active encouragement

came from the Party's leading officials including James Maxton. He had frequently expressed his dissatisfaction with industry-based organisation of workers and had even suggested that there was no reason for the I.L.P. to have friendly contact with non-socialist organisations including trade unions.¹⁵ Maxton's attitude to Workers' Councils was, partly, based on this attitude. He argued that it was not possible to use trade unions for revolutionary purposes because 'in their essence they were completely reactionary' so he preferred the idea of 'local geographical organisations' to 'narrowly industrial organisations.'¹⁶ However, at the base of his views lay his own recollections of radical movements in Britain, and especially his own experiences of the Clyde Workers' Committee:

In the two circumstances in which there has been something akin to conditions of revolution in this country- during the war and at the general strike- I saw how the workers' Councils came into being. In the war on the Clyde, in the form of the Clyde Workers' Committee, in the general strike in the form of the Strike Committee.¹⁷

Maxton's expectation was that were a revolutionary situation to occur in Britain one manifestation would likely take the form of Workers' Councils. He did not wish to preclude other possibilities, including Parliament, but he thought it probable that Workers' Councils would be an important component of any potential revolutionary movement.¹⁸

In addition to Maxton, some of those who most vigorously opposed the new policy of the I.L.P., including one of the national members of the N.A.C., Campbell Stephen, were prepared to give limited support to the idea of Workers' Councils. Stephen's criticisms of the new policy statements were of the scope given to Workers' Councils, not of Workers' Councils themselves. He sought in his criticisms of the new policy to join together a Parliamentary strategy with the idea of Workers' Councils, arguing that by capturing Parliament, and changing its procedure, that institution itself could be transformed into a Workers' Council.¹⁹ Indeed, well before Workers' Councils had become a major policy issue on the N.A.C., Stephen had stressed their importance within Socialist strategy. For example, whilst the I.L.P. was still affiliated to the Labour Party, Stephen had written an article for *New Leader* together with George Buchanan calling for increased emphasis on Workers' Councils in the working class movement:

Is it too much to hope that in every district there can be created the local machinery for Workers' Councils, which will rule out no section of the working-class movement, in an endeavour to fashion an instrument to secure victory in the struggle for a new Social Order.²⁰

Thus, it is clear that there was considerable support for the idea of Workers' Councils even from some of those who were strongly opposed to the emphasis of I.L.P. policy

being placed on them rather than Parliament. It is, thus, evident that there was some sympathy for the idea of Workers' Councils across the spectrum of views on the N.A.C., including some use of the idea from those who were most strongly opposed to the R.P.C.

Thus, the widespread acceptance of the discourse of workers' council resonated with the lasting historical interest in syndicalist ideas within the Party. However, the prevalence of support for the idea also lay in a widespread dissatisfaction with the existing trade union structures and industrial organisation. The trade unions were, in the minds of many I.L.P.ers at root connected with the politics of gradualism, and the failures of 1929-31. Indeed during that period and following disaffiliation Trade Union leaders made some of the most vicious attacks on the I.L.P. On the other side the I.L.P. had not spared the union leaders from their strong criticism. As Maxton had said, he did not see any reason for the I.L.P. to keep friendly connections with anti-socialist organisations such the trade unions.²¹ Another of the national members on the N.A.C., Jennie Lee, argued that 'trade unions are becoming more and more obsolete.'²² In such a situation, the Party needed to find a replacement for the unions in order that the I.L.P. would not be solely concerned with political matters. For many, the suggestion of Workers' Councils was attractive because they avoided the alleged narrow focus of the unions on questions relating to particular sectional or industry problems. Further, they held out the promise of a more open and democratic instrument.

Such ideas were quickly rejected by those with a keener sense of the importance of the Trade Unions in working class activity, most notably Fred Jowett and in particular, Tom Stephenson. Stephenson was an official with the Cumberland Miners' Association and he later became Cumberland's representative on the MFGB executive and subsequently the NUM executive. He criticised Workers' Councils as a scheme that would sound 'quite unreal' to the working class. Instead, he argued that the I.L.P. should focus on the existing unions, and whilst pointing out the failings of the policies of the contemporary Trade Unions, they should work to increase their contact with the industrial worker.²³ Similarly, Jowett argued that in a crisis advanced forms of 'Councils of Actions' would probably function, but they would be built on Trade Unions and would develop from an extension of normal Trade Union activity.²⁴ Thus, there was no need for the I.L.P. to work to build any new form of organisation, such as Workers' Councils, until such a

situation arose. Instead, I.L.P. work should be concentrated on working for an effective policy within and towards the Unions.²⁵

By the end of 1933 the I.L.P. had defined for itself a 'new revolutionary policy', which was to form the basis for its activity until the war. The policy reduced the emphasis on electoral struggle and introduced a role for Workers' Councils. Whilst the Party had rejected the detail of the R.P.C.'s policy suggestions at its Derby conference it had accepted the broad outlines of the Committee's perspective. However, when the N.A.C. came to define the party's 'new revolutionary policy' it went beyond what the national conference had agreed. For example, there was a greater and more definite role for Workers' Councils in the 'new revolutionary policy' than had been implied in the brief mention accepted by the 1933 conference. However, the greatest shock to those who opposed the R.P.C. was the acceptance of a long-term aim of forming a United Revolutionary Party with the Communists. The decision at the annual conference had been problematic enough for opponents of the R.P.C., but the 'new revolutionary policy' appeared to give even further ground.

6.4 'Refining' Policy

Following the introduction of the Party's 'new revolutionary policy' those most opposed to the R.P.C. felt that 'undercover Communists' were taking over the Party. They began organising their own 'Unity Group' faction to oppose the R.P.C. and to present an organised alternative policy. The policy proposals of the 'Unity Group' came from the Lancashire division in association with others, most notably from Norwich. Indeed, at the end of 1933 the Norwich branch, led by John Middleton Murry and A.W. Votier, presented a special divisional conference with an entire manifesto attacking the 'new revolutionary policy' and stressing the importance of constitutional means.²⁶

From the other side, the R.P.C. looked to build on its success at the I.L.P.'s 1933 conference. The Committee stated its aims to further clarify the Party's revolutionary policy, specifically to introduce elements of democratic centralism to the I.L.P.'s organisation and to prepare for a period of illegality.²⁷ Thus, the Party's 'new revolutionary policy' came under careful scrutiny at the I.L.P.'s York conference in 1934.

The 'Unity Group' proposals were moved for Manchester City branch by Norwich's Middleton Murry. They attempted to reassert the ethical socialist and constitutionalist traditions of the Party, but were rejected by a substantial majority. The conference also rejected the advances of the R.P.C. In particular the I.L.P. voted to move away from continuing communication with the Comintern over sympathetic affiliation. However, the suggestions, endorsed by the N.A.C., for a more centralised organisational structure and disciplinary system were accepted. If the 'Unity Group' were understood as representing the 'right wing' of the party and the R.P.C. the 'left wing', then the R.P.C.'s summary of the conference was apposite. 'The right wing has been soundly defeated but the lead of the left was also rejected.'²⁸

The decisions of the York conference led to the immediate departure of the 'Unity Group' from the Party and other problems of factional organisation began to mount. Increasingly sections of the Party were convinced of the need to act against the policy of the R.P.C. By the time of the I.L.P.'s 1935 conference, again held in Derby, the N.A.C. was able to use its new policy guiding powers to further remove the R.P.C. from influence over policy. The N.A.C. had worked out a policy statement, which it claimed was a slight clarification of the 1933 'new revolutionary policy.' The basic commitments of the 1935 document appeared, to the uninformed outsider, essentially the same as the Party had made two years earlier. Workers' Councils maintained their central role and the close relationship with the Communist Party and the Third International remained an important theme. However, in reality these apparent continuities masked small but significant changes in the Party's political stance.

In 1933, there had been a commitment to work for unity with the Communist Party, as the only named organisation of 'revolutionary socialists', and to look for sympathetic affiliation with the Comintern. In 1935, the stress had shifted to a search for unity with *all* revolutionary socialists including those who remained in reformist organisations such as the Labour Party and the Labour and Socialist International. This change in emphasis was clearly designed to move the Party away from the C.P. and R.P.C. proposals for unity with the Communists at an early date. Instead, it gave those opposed to such a course of action the conference backing that justified demanding significant changes in the Communist outlook before any unity proposals would be considered.

In 1933, the policy of Workers' Councils had been introduced by the R.P.C. with the intention of moving the Party away from its focus on Parliamentary activity. At that time the line agreed had remained ambiguous between the interpretation desired by the R.P.C. and one which was more sympathetic to electoral activity. The 1935 statement declared that existing governmental institutions would be used to their utmost together and announced that the I.L.P. planned extensive fights in the 1935 general election. Workers' Councils maintained their theoretical centrality, but the policy declared that their relevance would be primarily in 'actual revolutionary crisis.' The commitment to 'consistently prepare for their organisation' fell far short of the practical emphasis required to compete with a Parliamentary conception of the I.L.P.'s primary function. The R.P.C.'s interpretation of Workers' Councils as a replacement for Parliament, accepted in so much of the 1933 policy statement, was thus absent from the 1935 declaration.

Additionally many of the commitments made in the 1933 'new revolutionary policy' whilst still present in 1935 were made with qualifications that had not been present in the earlier statement. There were several of these small changes, such as the increasing emphasis on electoral work and the acceptance of a role for non-N.U.W.M. unemployment organisations. Each change moved the Party towards a slightly more flexible outlook, accepting the view that somewhat different practical considerations applied in different areas. The changes also tended to move the Party back towards a view of continuity with the I.L.P.'s past. They stressed the evolution of its 'revolutionary policy' since 1925, rather than the view that post-1932 policy was a radical break with the earlier period.²⁹

All these changes pointed in the same direction. Whilst far from hegemonic, in 1933 the R.P.C. had been a significant force in generating the I.L.P. policy statement, with their influence extending to detailed wording as well as general principle. By 1935, this situation had changed; the R.P.C. was a far less important organisation within the Party. By removing certain ambiguities, and making slight changes in emphasis, those opposed to the R.P.C. position had used the 1935 conference, to close off some interpretations of I.L.P. policy favoured by the Revolutionary Policy Committee.

6.5 Consensus?

The first three years of disaffiliation saw massive internal factional fighting and the partial disintegration of the Party. The hope which leading members of the Party expressed was that policy had been fully clarified at the 1935 conference; however the disappointing performance of the ILP outside of Glasgow in the 1935 General Election further changed the focus of the Party's activity. There was a new determination from the centre to reconsider the way in which the Party operated, to force unity on the membership to try to cut down on extended policy disagreements and rid the Party of damaging factional organisations. In part these moves towards centralisation and conformity were successful. At the 1936 Keighley Conference in the wake of the departure of the R.P.C. and continuing agitation by the Marxist Group, John Aplin, who had led the struggle against the factions in the London Division, had little difficulty in persuading the conference to outlaw group organisation within the Party. Further from 1935, the structure of the Party conferences had been changed, debate was tightly structured around a programme of high profile policy issues decided on by the NAC with the hope of preventing the kind of wide ranging disagreements that had plagued the Party in the years from disaffiliation to 1935.

These attempts at control were partially successful, in 1936 Brockway argued from the proceedings of the conference that it was clear that 'the I.L.P. is developing a clear and consistent line of Revolutionary Socialist Policy and action.' He felt able to make similar assessments of the conferences from 1937-9. Indeed his view of the 1938 Manchester Conference was unequivocal:

A feature of the conference was the unanimity of the delegates on basic principles. During the last four years the policy of the Party has been so clarified that the whole membership now starts all its thinking with a common attitude of mind.³⁰

According to Brockway this common ground came from the shared understanding of all Party members as to the nature and consequences of the Capitalist system. This generated a set of 'basic principles' which he suggested could be put into a single sentence:

War, Fascism, Imperialism and Poverty- all are the result of Capitalism; Capitalism can only be fought by the method of the class struggle; therefore the results of Capitalism can only be resisted by intensifying the class struggle.³¹

Indeed the I.L.P.'s policy was showing considerable development. The initial 'new revolutionary policy' formulated in 1933 and modified in 1934-5, formed the basis of

the Party's official line until after the Second World War. However, events forced significant changes in the I.L.P.'s policy. These changes were, as in the 1935 case, largely cast as restatements or clarifications of the earlier policy.

In these terms the Party's policy did see a degree of definite evolution in the period 1935-9. Perhaps most significant was a reconsideration of the relationship between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party with re-affiliation emerging as a serious possibility. Connected with this was the development of the initial United Front with the Communist Party into the distinctive Workers' Front policy. The Workers' Front, as a development of the party's United Front attitude of the early 1930s, was first introduced to the Party's 1937 conference in Glasgow. The policy, developed in the wake of the Unity Campaign, sought to develop the ideas of working-class unity in concrete terms. In particular, the policy which was elaborated in Brockway's 1938 book *Workers' Front*, attempted to renegotiate the terms on which the I.L.P. could rejoin the Labour Party. As in its United Front policy, despite maintaining a stringent criticism of the Labour Party especially on foreign policy issues, the need for unity on class terms with working class organisations, was stressed. However, the Workers' Front, much more explicitly than the United Front, saw a federation of working class organisations coming together under the framework of a Labour Party with centralised discipline relaxed.³² Further, the deterioration of the relationship between the I.L.P. and the Communists in both international and domestic politics led to changes in the I.L.P. position with regard to international affiliation and a major theoretical re-evaluation of the Soviet Union and its importance for the working class movement.³³

In part this process of policy development was the relatively non-contentious process that Brockway suggested. There was an appearance of unanimity and agreement particularly at the 1938 Manchester Conference and to a lesser extent at the 1937 Glasgow Conference. However, this lack of conflict cannot be taken to demonstrate fundamental agreement across the Party. The structuring of the main debates around issues on which there were no major conflicts, such as the condemnation of Imperialism, expressions of support for the Spanish Republic and attacks on the Means Test, represented as much a conscious attempt to foster unity within the Party as an indication that there were no important issues on which the Party was fundamentally divided. Indeed as the conferences at Keighley in 1936 with divisions over Abyssinia and Scarborough in 1939 where the parliamentary group support for Chamberlain split

the party, demonstrated, such issues did exist. Indeed, the differing interpretations of the party's anti-war position were sufficient to cause some of the most acrimonious debates in the ILP's history.

6.6 Conclusion

By the second half of the decade, Brockway portrayed the I.L.P. policy consensus as its greatest strength. Other noted commentators have been equally convinced that the I.L.P.'s policy remained 'indefinite and hazy', vacillating between incompatible poles.³⁴ The implication in either case is that policy is crucial to understanding the prospects and potential for the Party. The I.L.P.'s 1933 'new revolutionary policy' represented a significant break from its earlier 'Socialism in Our Time' stance. This policy represented a rupture with parts of the I.L.P.'s traditional position and was a significant victory for the Revolutionary Policy Committee. However, the policy also linked with the ongoing syndicalist sympathies of many other party members. This 'new revolutionary policy' remained central to I.L.P.'s political outlook until the outbreak of the Second World War. However, by redefining terms and removing ambiguities significant changes were made, which represented the changing balance of power within the Party. The detailed analysis of the changing policy of the I.L.P. indicates the part which the Party's political theory had in the struggle between competing factions. Such a study also shows the way in which, at times, such as during the Abyssinian crisis, the Party leadership could manipulate contested elements of policy to suit their own needs. Those who disagreed strongly with policy would leave the Party, in the case of the I.S.P. and the R.P.C., taking significant sections of the organisation with them. In these ways the detailed policy of the party was crucial to retaining members of the Party. A different policy for the I.L.P. could perhaps have helped the Party lose less of its members. However, there is little indication, particularly when policy is considered alongside electoral and local activity, that a changed political philosophy could have provided the I.L.P. with a significant tool for recruitment during the 1930s. A study of the Party's policy reveals much about the disputes within the I.L.P., but tells us little about how the Party could have recruited more effectively.

¹ Dowse, 1966, 185-202

² On 'Socialism in Our Time' see Dowse, 1966, 130-136; Townshend, 1990, 7; The full text of the 'Socialism in Our Time' resolution to the 1926 I.L.P. conference can be found in Dowse, 1966, Appendix 2, 212-5

³ On Maxton and Wheatley's interpretation of 'Socialism in Our Time' and the 'Living Wage' see Brown, 1986, 192-207; Wood, 1990, 165-7

⁴ *New Leader*, 5 August 1932

⁵ Paton, 397

⁶ *New Leader*, 5 August 1932

⁷ Report of Special National Conference I.L.P. archive microfilm series II 1932/27

⁸ A section on the responsibilities of membership had a relatively smooth passage, being accepted by a vote of 142 to 37. A further section on the development of world socialism was passed by a vote of 91 to 68, whilst the proposed objective just scraped through by a vote of 80 to 87.

⁹ Report of Annual Conference, 1933

¹⁰ *New Leader*, August 4 1933

¹¹ The report suggested that the 'development of Russian agriculture and industry on a Socialist basis will considerably influence capitalist conditions. Its success will serve as an example of Socialist construction to the working class of other countries... The policy of a revolutionary Socialist Party must be consciously related to the probable developments of capitalist decline, the extension of capitalist dictatorship, and the danger of war and of capitalist combination against Russia...' 'The Policy of the I.L.P.', *New Leader*, 11 August 1933

¹² 'The Policy of the I.L.P.', *New Leader*, 11 August 1933

¹³ Dorothy Jewson had been forced to leave the meeting before the final vote. Those for the new policy were: Brockway, Maxton, Smith, Lee, Stephenson, Garton, Gaster, Spurrell, Huntz. Those against were: Jowett, Stephen, Williams, James, Sandham *New Leader*, 11 August 1933

¹⁴ C.A. Smith, 'Workers' Councils- the workers' way out', *Revolt*, No. 1, March 1933, 7

¹⁵ *New Leader*, 12 February 1932

¹⁶ N.A.C. minutes June 24-25

¹⁷ *New Leader*, 7 July 1933

¹⁸ *New Leader*, 7 July 1933

¹⁹ N.A.C. minutes August 5-7 1933

²⁰ *New Leader*, 29 April 1932

²¹ *New Leader*, 12 February 1932

²² N.A.C. minutes June 24-25 1933 For Jennie Lee's attitude to the TUC conference of 1932 see *New Leader*, 9 September 1932

²³ N.A.C. minutes, June 24-25 1933; N.A.C. minutes, August 5-7 1933

²⁴ *Labour's Northern Voice*, September 1933

²⁵ *Labour's Northern Voice*, September 1933 cf. *New Leader*, 16 June 1933

²⁶ The conference rejected the manifesto 14-5 but also accepted proposals against co-operation with the C.P. in day to day activities (20-3) and against workers' councils (14-5) Minutes of special conference, Norwich October 15 1933 Division Five Minute Book BLPES Coll. Misc. 497

²⁷ *R.P.C. Bulletin*, January 1934

²⁸ *R.P.C. Bulletin*, June 1934

²⁹ This line was particularly evident in Brockway's *Reflection After the I.L.P. Annual Conference* which was published in *New Leader* two weeks after the conference (May 3 1935). In this piece Brockway stressed the development rather than the sudden creation of revolutionary policy and attitude within the Party.

³⁰ *New Leader*, Conference 1938

³¹ *New Leader*, Conference 1938

³² I.L.P. Conference Report 1937; Brockway, 1938, 208-54

³³ See below pages 94-94

³⁴ Trotsky, 1974, vol. 3, 130, 99-115

7. Communism and the N.U.W.M.

7.1 Introduction

The I.L.P. successfully found political spaces in some localities. However, in order to succeed and expand it needed to develop its national position. There were a number of possible routes to developing a national profile, the three most obvious of which were: first to become an independent political force, the second to work with the Communist Party and the third to work with the Labour Party. In the initial period after disaffiliation the Party chose, controversially, the second of the options. This chapter will attempt to explain the reasons why this decision was taken and to examine its consequences, suggesting that the I.L.P.'s failure to find political space through working with the Communist Party during the crucial period after disaffiliation played a significant role in the decline of the I.L.P. It drove large number of members out of the party without many of the hoped for compensating benefits, especially as relations with the Communist Party again turned bitter in the latter part of the decade.

7.2 From 'Class-Against-Class' to 'United Front'

At the time of disaffiliation relations between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party were at a low point. The Communist Party's 'Class-against-Class' policy, introduced during 1928, attacked left-wing 'social democratic' organisations such as the I.L.P. for blocking the progress of an 'increasingly revolutionary' working class to the Communist Party. As time passed the Communist attacks on the Labour Party and the I.L.P. became more vicious and the accusations made against them became more outrageous. Thus, by 1932 the Communist Party claimed the I.L.P.'s declarations of left-wing intent were the 'greatest crime ever committed against the working class', ignoring examples such as the Great War and child labour. As Harry Pollitt, the C.P. General Secretary, suggested in a debate with the then I.L.P. chairman, Fenner Brockway, on 18 April 1932, there could be no unity between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party, only a war to the death.¹

Comrades, [the I.L.P.'s] confusion is not accidental, not a result of stupidity, not a mistake. It is the deliberate policy of the I.L.P. It is consciously thought out, fostered and stimulated in order to confuse the struggle, to create doubt and hesitation in the minds of the workers, and it is the greatest crime ever committed against the working class movement that week by week this confusion can pour out its poison when one considers the situation with which the working class is faced today; wage cuts, the Means Test, tariffs, and now the entry of capitalism on its war period. Therefore, comrades, with such a party there can be no talk of unity, no talk of anything in common, and there can only be a war to the death.²

The I.L.P. had been an important voice arguing for allowing Communist affiliation to the Labour Party through the 1920s. However, for some I.L.P.ers such as General Secretary John Paton, feelings against the Communist Party were nearly as extreme as the vitriolic rhetoric flowing the other way. Paton, viewed the Communist Party as practically useless as a force, with its only strength coming from its association with Soviet Russia:

[I]t must be remembered that the history of the Communist Party up to this point had been one of consistent and gross failure. It had proved completely incompetent to turn to account in any effective way a situation of economic and political crisis which seemed made for it. Every single policy and tactic to which it had put its had had ended in futility and frustration. For all practical purposes it had ceased to count as a force and merely living on the reflected glory of the immense Socialist achievements in Soviet Russia.³

Nevertheless, from other quarters there was a growing feeling within the I.L.P. that it should look to work with the Communist Party and, as Pollitt viciously attacked the I.L.P., Brockway responded with a call for unity. Others within the I.L.P., mostly centred on the R.P.C., were even keener to advocate joint work with the C.P.

At the end of the 1932 the Communist Party line began, slowly, to soften. In November, a Communist Party conference made a decision to abandon part of the basis of its class-verses-class line and to work with the I.L.P. The decision was taken to extend a 'united front from below' that is to work with the I.L.P. rank-and-file but not with the leadership.⁴ The C.P. argued that this would allow joint activity against fascism and war without the party becoming tainted by its connection to the social fascist I.L.P. leadership. This I.L.P. perception of Communist aims in this joint activity made it difficult for the I.L.P. to support fully the conduct of the united front at this time. Nevertheless it signalled a change in C.P. tactics from the times when Communists had been expelled as 'Trotskyists' for working with I.L.P. members.

The tentative 'unity from below' policy was radically transformed into a real 'united front' policy following the rise of Hitler to power early in 1933. On 4 March the I.L.P.'s N.A.C. wrote to the other 'working class' organisations to suggest common action.⁵ The following day the Communist Party issued a similar invitation. John Paton, I.L.P. General Secretary, stressed that the aim of the proposals for joint activity was to get action with *all* other working class groups, primarily the Labour Party and the T.U.C.

Hitler's stride to power in Germany and the collapse before him, without even an attempt at effective resistance, of both Social Democrats and Communists alike, shook the workers' organisations of the world to their foundations.... It seemed here was an issue on which it should be possible to get common action by all workers' organisations in Britain, and on my suggestion, the I.L.P. National Council agreed to make an immediate approach to the other parties for the

purpose. There was no intention of course, of proposing any kind of alliance, but of getting the Labour Party in concert with the T.U.C., to take a lead in organising great united front demonstrations against Fascism in which every working-class organisation from the Co-operative party on the right to the Communist Party on the left, could, combine on the same platform.⁶

Paton's motivations and expectations for the I.L.P. proposals of common action were that some of the local links with the Labour Party could be maintained by the I.L.P., even after its 'clean break' with the larger organisation. However, Paton's hopes were not delivered; the Labour Party executive, the T.U.C. General Council and the Co-operative Party all declined the invitations to meetings to discuss joint activity.⁷ The result was a significant victory for the R.P.C. as only the Communist Party responded positively.

The invitations of the I.L.P. and the C.P. to talks over joint activity led to a series of meetings between the two parties beginning on 17 March 1933. At the first meeting, the parties came to a broad agreement to pursue joint action, which should ideally include other working class organisations. Particular emphasis was placed on the need for the co-operation in local activity. As important however was the agreement reached suggesting an end to inter-party hostility:

There must be a complete abandonment in any joint activities of the inter-party attacks and criticisms, and a sincere concentration on the common objectives.⁸

This led directly to joint organisation of a mass demonstration against Fascism on 2 April and work towards building a demonstration on the International Labour Day, 1 May.⁹

When the I.L.P. came to consider relations with the Communist Party at its 1933 Conference in Derby, the R.P.C. was at the high point of its influence. There was widespread support for a policy of joint activity with the Communist Party. However, there was also considerable discontent at these proposals. Three influential Scottish members, the MP McGovern, and Councillors Carmichael and Lyall, led the arguments against continued co-operation on the basis that 'experience has shown that common action with the Communist Party is impossible.'¹⁰ Thus, Maxton's argument, on behalf of the N.A.C. that the I.L.P. could engage with the C.P. without subordinating their identity, was crucial in securing continued support for the proposed joint activity.¹¹ The subsequent discussions within the N.A.C. which defined the party's 'new revolutionary policy' went even further. The proposal to form a united revolutionary party with the

C.P., which had originated from within the R.P.C., was accepted as party of the official policy of the I.L.P.:

The ultimate formation of one revolutionary movement is desirable and, if practicable, one revolutionary party developing from the I.L.P., the revolutionary elements which are arising within the Trades Unions and the Labour Party and the C.P.¹²

However, this decision to increase co-operation with the C.P. caused considerable tension and loss of membership within the I.L.P., not only of leading members such as MP Richard Wallhead and General Secretary John Paton, but also of many local activists. A survey of branch opinion by the N.A.C. showed that a majority was against co-operation between the two parties in general activities.¹³ Those such as McGovern who were keen to reduce connections with the C.P. argued 'that in all parts of the country members are "fed up" with the behaviour of the Communists.'¹⁴ The behaviour of the C.P. often reinforced these fears. For example, in what appeared to be a continuation of its 'united front from below' policy, the C.P. sent out invitations to individual branches and divisions of the I.L.P. to the aborted 1934 congress of the C.I. without inviting the I.L.P. nationally.¹⁵

In light of such problems the 1934 I.L.P. Conference, with the R.P.C. on the defensive, decided to limit co-operation to specific matters. However, this did not go far enough for many within the I.L.P. including the majority of the Lancashire division who resigned in protest. Further, future co-operative ventures between the two parties, such as at the Congress and Hunger March council meeting in May 1934 were marred by disagreements. Nevertheless, the leaderships of both parties stated a desire to continue working together and agreed to maintain the 'united struggle against Fascism, War and Unemployment'.¹⁶ The Communist Party at its thirteenth congress in 1935 proposed an immediate meeting with the I.L.P. for the formation of a United Communist Party. When Harry Pollitt brought the fraternal greetings to the I.L.P. conference later that year he stressed the hope for 'the complete unification of our two parties' within a short space of time.¹⁷ However, the I.L.P., although until 1936, officially committed to the formation of a united revolutionary party was increasingly unprepared to take any practical steps towards achieving such a goal.

7.3 Popular Front

In 1935 the Communist Party changed its policy from United to Popular Front, and its attitude towards the I.L.P. changed. Its official position during the United Front period had been to work with the I.L.P. for the creation of a United Communist Party, during

the Popular Front period attention moved away from the I.L.P. towards Labour and eventually the other mainstream parties. At the same time the I.L.P. was becoming increasingly wary of the Communist Party, it was widely felt that co-operation was harming rather than helping the I.L.P. and the activities of the R.P.C., which culminated in its departure to join the C.P. led to an increase in tension.

By the beginning of 1935, both parties were aware of the serious difficulties that existed on the ground in implementing a policy of co-operation, and initially determined to engage in a dialogue to sort out the differences. Pollitt attempted to blame the difficulties on the lack of lead given by the N.A.C. and the attacks on Soviet Foreign Policy in the *New Leader* along with a 'bias against those proposing united front activity.' However, Brockway who saw things rather differently argued that the problems stemmed from the actual experience of I.L.P. branches in co-operation with the Communist Party. This he suggested largely emanated from three common factors: First, the sectarianism of the Communist Party, 'which saw a C.P. faction formed in every committee.' Second, 'that appointments to positions on committees were generally on party lines rather than on the suitability of the person for the job.' Finally he argued that the C.P. 'over summoned committees' leading to excessive amounts of work for very little return. In addition to this Brockway noted there were often specific local factors.¹⁸ By the end of the exchange of letters it was clear that neither side possessed the will to sort the problems out. Indeed, much of Pollitt's final response to Brockway was dedicated to launching an attack on the 'Independent Revolutionary Parties' as a block to a United Communist party.¹⁹

By the middle of 1935 blunt criticism between the two organisations became increasingly frequent in their respective propaganda papers. Thus, for example, Harry Pollitt attacked the I.L.P.'s 1935 conference in the *Daily Worker* for its criticism of the Communist Party and the Communist International whilst stressing the importance of divisions in the I.L.P. He also accused the I.L.P. of trying to find 'the impossible ground between the Communist Party and the Labour Party.' The I.L.P. in return accused the Communist Party criticism of the I.L.P. of being 'repetitive propaganda speeches.'²⁰

Within the I.L.P., with the R.P.C. an active if decreasing force, there was much internal conflict over the line to take towards the Communist Party and the Soviet Union. In April 1935 the London Divisional Council, under the influence of the R.P.C., attempted

to prevent Brockway from attacking the diplomacy of the Soviet Union in the *New Leader*.²¹ However, the leadership of the London Division was itself not united in support of the changing policies of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party. Thus, R.P.C. leader Jack Gaster caused something of a storm when he attended the London District Congress of the Communist Party as a fraternal delegate from the London I.L.P. He stressed the importance of creating 'one united revolutionary party' but he also launched an attack on the C.P.'s attitude towards the Soviet Union's foreign policy

I ask you therefore if you wish to assist closer unity not to repeat just the phrase that Soviet Union foreign policy is a weapon in the hands of the workers for the preservation of peace for the time being. ... [It is] difficult for ordinary workers to understand when they have drummed into them from a hundred and one sources that this shows growing unity between the Soviet Union and Capitalist countries in contradistinction to the growing unity between the Soviet Union and working class forces.²²

Relations between the two parties took a further downward turn when in November 1935, despite his personal reservations about Soviet Foreign Policy, Gaster led the majority of the R.P.C. into the Communist Party. Thus, despite a number of R.P.C.ers choosing to remain in the I.L.P., most of the strongly pro-C.P. I.L.P.ers had left the Party. With this vocal and internally significant group removed from party discussions in a way which further tarnished the image of the C.P. within the I.L.P., it became increasingly clear that there was little prospect of the unification that remained the official policy of both organisations. Following the 1935 general election, when the Communist Party withdrew its support at the last minute from I.L.P. candidates, the frequent meetings between the leaderships of the two parties ceased.²³

These tensions were exemplified in the House of Commons, where from the 1935 election the Communist Party was represented by William Gallacher. The support given by Gallacher to the Labour Party, often felt by the I.L.P. MPs to be unquestioning, became another source of conflict between the two parties. Shortly after the election, in December 1935, John McGovern addressed these points and the Communist Party's policy change in an open letter to Harry Pollitt.²⁴ The Communist Party in response openly accepted that it had reversed its policy: 'so far from the Communist Party denying this, it is anxious to let every worker know about this change and why it was necessary.' The I.L.P. again called for unity without surrendering a revolutionary position.²⁵ However, the issue was as much about the internal democracy of the C.P. as its policy:

I would like to ask [Campbell] by whom this decision was reached. Was it decided by a conference of the C.P.? If so, when and where was the conference held?²⁶

The Communist Party response was to attack the I.L.P.'s record in the House, suggesting that disaffiliation had left the I.L.P. MPs with a closer relationship with the Tory Party than with working class MPs.²⁷

At the I.L.P.'s 1936 conference in Keighley the N.A.C. indicated that, despite continuing activity at local level, co-operation with the Communist Party was declining.²⁸ The conference took the inevitable decision to reverse the 1933 policy statement and declare that the Party was no longer working to form a united organisation with the Communist Party.²⁹ This, combined with the I.L.P.'s firm opposition to the C.P.'s Popular Front policy, suggested little possibility of reconciliation and the frequency of denunciations of the two parties increased still further. The I.L.P. focussed its attack on the Popular Front policy of the C.P. calling for wider consideration and of exactly what alternatives were being defended.

C.P. policy is to build up the widest possible front for the maintenance of the "status quo" both by independent working-class action and by support of any Capitalist government which will take a sufficiently resolute line of opposition to Fascist countries... Before we are taken in by talk of "collective security" let us ask ourselves "collective security of what?"³⁰

By the end of 1936 the C.P. was increasingly using its influence against the I.L.P. and the Party found itself frequently excluded from events and meetings at which they had previously been invited to speak.³¹ However, some joint activity remained, most notably the I.L.P. was heavily involved in the anti-fascist struggles even in the Communist strongholds in the East End of London. For example the party played an important role, along with the Communist Party and the Ex-Servicemen's association, in mobilising support against the Mosely marches through Jewish areas of the East End in 1936-7. The most notable of these occasions was the famous 'battle of Cable Street' in October 1936 when it was the I.L.P.'s propaganda which was picked up by the national press and Brockway's call to the government which led to the Commissioner of Police refusing the fascists further permission to march.³² Further, whilst the tensions in no way disappeared, the negotiations and the apparent potential of the Unity Campaign temporarily appeared to resurrect the prospects of useful co-operation between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party.

7.4 The Unity Campaign

The Socialist League was formed in 1932 by an amalgamation of ILP affiliationists and a small number of Labour Party intellectuals. Members of Socialist League, by refusing to split from the Labour Party were denying the validity of the disaffiliated I.L.P.'s

political project. Thus, it was inevitable that initial relations between the League and the I.L.P. would be antagonistic.³³ However, by the middle of the decade, with many of the immediate disputes that surrounded disaffiliation settled, contacts between the two organisations began to increase. Before the 1935 I.L.P. conference Brockway and Maxton engaged in talks with the Socialist League in order to try to achieve some basis for united action.³⁴ However, the central Labour Party quickly heard about the meeting and challenged the executive of the Socialist League on their relationship with the I.L.P. J.T. Murphy, the League's General Secretary, was quick to strip the meeting and agreement of any significance.

The members of the Socialist League who were present... were there in their personal capacity and in no way representing the Socialist League.³⁵

When the 1935 Socialist League annual conference turned down the suggestion for a united front with the I.L.P. and the Communist Party it seemed as though possibilities for joint action were limited. However, as the Communist Party began its Popular Front period, so reviled by many within the I.L.P., connections with the Socialist League began to take on an increased significance.

In June 1936 Brockway suggested that there was a growing dialogue between the Party and those within the Labour Party who felt that the I.L.P. and not the Communist Party, following its Popular Front turn, represented the best hope for a real revolutionary socialist party.³⁶ Further, the I.L.P.'s attitude towards the 1936 Socialist League Conference was markedly different in tone from the I.L.P.'s earlier comments about the League. Nevertheless, despite some increasing optimism the I.L.P. maintained its scepticism about the League's position within the Labour Party, including predictions of exclusion from the Labour Party:

There was ability and the revolutionary spirit among many of the delegates. There was less evidence of the 'careerist' elements. But one had the feeling of a small group of intellectual leaders without followers, and one saw, inevitably, exclusion from the Labour Party if the ideas of the resolutions and speeches are carried out. It all seemed depressingly futile.³⁷

Despite the improving relationship between the I.L.P. and the Socialist League and the deteriorating relationship with the Communist Party the I.L.P. focused on approaches to the C.P., Labour and Co-operative Parties rather than the Socialist League.³⁸

The real initiative for the Unity Campaign thus came not from the I.L.P. but from the Socialist League. Following the Labour Party's 1936 Conference H. N. Brailsford and a number of others led a call for a united campaign by the Socialist League, the I.L.P. and the Communist Party. Following this the Socialist League organised a series of

meetings between themselves, the I.L.P. and Communist Party.³⁹ These meetings led to the endorsement in principle of a joint campaign of the three organisations. The meetings also allowed Maxton, Brockway, Cripps, Mellor, Pollitt and Gallacher to agree to a number of joint demands such as those expressed in a joint letter to the National Council of Labour urging a Campaign to demand facilities for the provision of arms to the Spanish Government.⁴⁰

In the negotiations that surrounded the Unity Campaign both the C.P. and to a lesser extent the Socialist League looked to support a programme based on the Popular Front. However, the I.L.P. would not accept such proposals based on attempts to unite all 'democratic' forces regardless of their class position:

We must be quite clear, however, about the basis of unity. We do not want a unity so wide that it would involve giving up the fight against Capitalism. We do not want a unity which means the surrender of the class struggle.

For this reason the I.L.P. rejects unity on the basis of the Popular Front. We are not prepared to become allies with the Liberal Party, Tory "democrats," or other sections of the Capitalist class.

The Party was also sceptical about the Unity Campaign proposal that all the three organisations should be seeking to work for immediate affiliation to the Labour Party. The I.L.P. declared that there would need to be significant changes to the structure of the Labour Party before reaffiliation was a serious consideration. In particular they focussed on the need for 'democratisation of its structure' and the adoption of 'an uncompromising Working-class and Socialist policy.'⁴¹ Thus, the I.L.P. negotiators, under instruction from the I.L.P. Executive Committee, agreed to sign up to the Unity Campaign, but only on the condition, opposed by the Communist Party, that they could express their reservations with the manifesto when it was published.⁴²

The Unity Manifesto was launched at the beginning of January 1937 and the campaign began with a 'vast and overflowing' meeting in Manchester's Free Trade Hall. The initial meetings of the Unity Campaign certainly seemed to many within all three organisations, and beyond, to be a huge success and apparently indicated the possibility of building a huge mass movement. That the three organisations which constituted the majority of the self-consciously socialist 'left' in Britain could come together so publicly seemed to give a signal of hope, and the follow up meetings around the country were enthusiastically attended, as one supporter later put it:

The greatest meetings were addressed by Maxton, Cripps and Pollitt. Each of the speakers had his own personal following and together they were irresistible. The first two or three months of the campaign proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that the mass of the British workers were ready for unity. They were prepared to forget bygone differences and misunderstandings and go forward

under the inspiration which the campaign gave. It is probable that we shall never see such great public meetings again in this country.⁴³

However, from the beginning the Unity campaign was troubled. From the I.L.P. point of view unity was only worth achieving on a basis that did not require the sacrifice of principle. The primary principle at issue was the centrality of working class activity. As Maxton wrote in *Controversy*:

Mere unity is barren and futile. Even unity of working class organisations is futile. The only unity that is fruitful is unity in working-class struggle. If the theoretical teachings of Marx had not in themselves been sufficiently convincing the actual experiences of the last twenty years would have proved that truth.⁴⁴

That the Unity campaign really offered 'unity in working class struggle' was seriously questioned by many within the I.L.P. Indeed, the party had agreed to the Unity Manifesto only by distancing itself from the Popular Front basis and calls for immediate affiliation to the Labour Party. Nevertheless the Party was prepared to stand relatively united behind the decision of the leadership to endorse the Unity campaign and at the I.L.P.'s 1937 conference the campaign was adopted with only four (Trotskyist) dissidents.⁴⁵ Tribune claimed that the vote 'scotched' the rumours of a split in the I.L.P.⁴⁶ However, the conference clearly underlined the overwhelming sentiment of the Party against the Popular Front.⁴⁷ The I.L.P.'s position towards the Popular Front and the consequential criticism of the Comintern and the Soviet Union drew the inevitable criticism from the Communist Party. These Communist critics were joined by some from within the Socialist League who attacked the I.L.P. for its 'pure romanticism.'⁴⁸

Thus, even during the most enthusiastic points of the Unity campaign the I.L.P. saw a need to maintain a principled stand against the Popular Front, and the relationship which the Unity campaign suggested towards the Labour Party was far from being accepted by the party. This, combined with a reluctance from many Socialist Leaguers to enter into the Unity campaign at all, and existing tensions between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party in any event would have put a severe strain on the Unity Campaign. However, such dynamics had no time to work. The Labour Party N.E.C. intervened and as soon as the campaign began they decided that the Socialist League should be disaffiliated from the Labour Party. They followed this two months later with a further decision, operational from June 1, that membership of the Socialist League would be made incompatible with membership of the Labour Party. The Socialist League, influenced, many have suggested, by Pollitt, decided to dissolve itself before the June deadline as a 'conscious political tactic.'⁴⁹ The I.L.P. was sceptical about the decision to

disband the Socialist League. Whilst the Party recognised the pressures that had led to the decision and saw organisational advantages it stressed the 'two disadvantages in the decision of the Socialist League,' one connected with the psychology of the Labour movement and the other with the organisation of the Left:

The psychological effect of the dissolution of the League is undoubtedly to encourage the view that those within the Labour Party who support unity are on the retreat. It suggests to the average Labour member that the Socialist League did not dare to stand up to the Labour Party because it feared that the majority of the Labour Party would not come to its support when the Party Conference is held in the autumn.

The organisational disadvantage of the Socialist League decision is that it will make any future affiliation of the I.L.P. or the Communist Party to the Labour Party more difficult.⁵⁰

Within the Socialist League there was also considerable disquiet at the decision to disband. Some suggested, perhaps with some foundation that the 'dissolution of the League was foisted on [them] by the Communist Party.' In this situation a group led by D. Baker and M. McCarthy, argued the need for 'a new organisation of militant Socialists within the Labour Party.' The policy of the new organisation with its anti-Popular Front, anti-League of Nations line, was similar to that of the I.L.P., especially as the latter had modified its attitude in relation to the Labour Party during preparations for the Unity Campaign. The policy of the proposed new group was set out in an eight point programme, mostly in line with I.L.P. policy.⁵¹

Nevertheless, at least in public the I.L.P. indicated that the Unity Campaign without the Socialist League could still expect to gain significant support, enough to influence the Labour Party conference:

The movement is bigger than the official prestige of the Labour leaders or their ideas of policy. It is a force which will gather strength to sweep away Capitalism.... They are likely to be surprised by the result of their action. At the last Labour Party Conference nearly one-third of the vote was given for unity. It is well within the reach of possibility that, at this year's Conference, a majority vote will be secured.⁵²

The Unity Campaign carried on with support of the National Labour Unity Committee. However, the N.E.C. quickly stamped down on this initiative. Members of the Labour Party were forbidden from appearing on platforms with members of the I.L.P. or Communist Party and the campaign had to be relaunched with separate meetings for Labour Party speakers and C.P./I.L.P. speakers.⁵³ From the Labour Party side the Unity campaign had first been organisationally destroyed and then outlawed.

The I.L.P. decided to maintain its support of the emasculated Unity Campaign. Branches were circularised with a petition in favour of unity within the Labour Party

and Trade Unions by the Labour Unity Committee. However, with the campaign largely dependant on co-operation between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party it was effectively over. Indeed the I.L.P. went so far as to decide that its Branches should be instructed not to act on any Unity Committees with members of the Communist Party only.⁵⁴ The Labour Party supporters of Unity hoped to make a significant impact at the Labour Party conference to rejuvenate the campaign. Instead they were heavily defeated in an atmosphere where they made little impression. However, by this stage, as Brockway put it, 'the inner spirit of Unity was dead.'⁵⁵ The situation in Spain had led to such a deterioration in relations between the C.P. and the I.L.P. that there could be no prolonged hope of united action between the two parties.

7.5 Relations with the Communist Party 1937-9

The opening of the Unity Campaign had led to a temporary thaw in relations between the I.L.P. and Communist Party, but the improvement was extremely short-lived. The breaking point came over the situation in Spain, and the May uprising in Barcelona in particular. Fears for the position of POUM members, and the I.L.P.ers associated with them in Spain had been rising following the sacking of POUM leader Andres Nin from the Catalan Government in December 1936. Early in 1937 the I.L.P. sent a circular letter to Communist Party branches raising concerns about the positions of Bob Smillie and John McNair along with Nin and Gorkin. The circular challenged C.P.ers to consider the role of the Communist Party in supporting the increasingly right-wing Government and called the C.P. to a debate.⁵⁶

However, it was the events in Barcelona in May which were primarily responsible for the irreversible decline of the relationship between the two parties. The Communist Party denounced POUM for its supposed part in the Barcelona uprising which the C.P. declared to be a 'fascist plot.' The presence of the I.L.P. battalion in Barcelona along with its connection with POUM meant that denunciations of the I.L.P. soon followed in the Communist Press. The I.L.P. responded by declaring the Communists to be involved in a 'Counter-Revolution in Spain' in which 'the Communists were on the wrong side of the Barricades.' John McNair, the I.L.P. representative in Spain challenged Palme Dutt in an open letter about his 'slanders' against the I.L.P. and POUM.⁵⁷

It was quickly evident that there was little prospect of the spirit of the Unity Campaign being continued in an atmosphere where one of the three participating organisations had

been disbanded and the other two were viciously attacking each other. When Brockway visited Spain in July as part of the French Committee for the Defence of the Spanish Revolution he returned talking of strong reactions against Communism and of disillusionment in the International Brigade.⁵⁸ When Bob Smillie died of appendicitis in a Spanish Gaol, probably due to the neglect of his Republican captors, the I.L.P. emphatically did not attempt to turn the situation into a political issue. This refusal would seem to stem largely from concern about the impact on the Spanish situation, rather than a desire to prevent open warfare with the C.P.G.B., with whom there was already considerable conflict, as the Party put it in *New Leader*

The Communist Party not only in Spain, but everywhere has ceased to be revolutionary. Its Socialism is as unreal as that of the Labour Party. The object, the concern, the anxiety of the Communist Party is not Socialism but capitalist democracy.⁵⁹

The disputes over the Spanish Civil War continued to dominate the relationship between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party, especially after the suppression of POUM which followed the Barcelona uprising. The I.L.P. continued its support of its brother-party in Spain and its conduct in the Spanish Civil War. The Communists continued to attack the I.L.P. as Trotskyists and fascist agents. The *Daily Worker* refused to print adverts for the I.L.P. pamphlet *The Truth About Barcelona* in June and then refused to advertise any I.L.P. material at all.⁶⁰ As the year wore on relations became even worse. I.L.P. members began to talk of the 'murderous foulness of the Communist Party' and *New Leader* felt it was appropriate to carry a sarcastic article about Communist icon Harry Pollitt.⁶¹ Debates between the two organisations were increasingly vitriolic, with the question of Spain at the centre of immediate disagreements.⁶² Those most closely associated with the I.L.P. in Spain were given short shrift by the Communist Party. Stafford Cottman the one member of the I.L.P. unit in Spain who had left for Spain a member of the Y.C.L. was immediately expelled on his return to Bristol for 'taking part in a fascist uprising.'⁶³ By the end of the Year, with the I.L.P. completely hostile to Popular Front concepts and the Communist Party convinced that the I.L.P. was aiding fascism, it was absolutely clear that no reconciliation could be expected.

These developments in the relationship between the Communist Party and the I.L.P. were combined with a reanalysis of the nature of the Soviet Union from within the I.L.P. The Party had begun the decade with an official position which was strongly favourable to the Soviet Union. Significant portions of the *New Leader* were devoted to portraying an extremely favourable picture of life in the Soviet Union, and these views

persisted for some time. For example, in August 1934 Jim Garton, the former N.A.C. representative for the Midlands who had found employment in Moscow returned to give a talk at the I.L.P. Summer School devoted to praising the Soviet Union and expressing his confidence in 'the capacity of the Russian Communist Party to continue the rapid progress in the USSR.'⁶⁴ However, the combined effect of the departure of the R.P.C. and the Soviet decision to join the League of Nations led the party towards a serious reevaluation of its attitude towards Russia.

This situation was given further impetus by the situation in Spain and then crucially by the 'Moscow trials.' The I.L.P. first debated the trials at its the 1937 conference where there was some support for Moscow, led by Jack Huntz and Bill Jones (a Scottish Welshman from Glasgow). Leading the opposition to the trials were the Trotskyists. Patterson of Clapham and Cund of Liverpool argued the trials were 'frame-ups'. The N.A.C. position at the conference was rather equivocal. Carmichael, speaking for the N.A.C., declared that it was not prepared to declare either way, and that further evidence and an international inquiry by 'representative Socialists' was needed. However, by the Party's 1938 conference the position was more definite and the N.A.C. decided that the issue of the Soviet Union should form the central debate with the argument focussing of the trials and their implications. The N.A.C. position, made by Brockway, now sought to reconcile condemnation of the internal politics of the Soviet Union with a continued defence against aggression of what was still perceived to be the world's only Workers' State.

The I.L.P. declares it to be the duty of the working class to defend against Imperialist aggression the USSR as a Workers' State in which the foundations of a Socialist Society have been laid.

It deplores the continued political persecution in Soviet Russia which is undermining faith in the Socialist Regime among workers all over the world and which is being extended by the Communist International to other countries.

It urges that there should be a return to proletarian democracy in Soviet Russia, so that the danger of bureaucratic oppression may be overcome.⁶⁵

The N.A.C. defence of this position placed great stress on the 'conflict between the bureaucracy and the remnants of Socialist principles' whilst suggesting three areas where some vestiges of socialism remained:

- (1) Industries are still nationalised
- (2) New types of collectivised peasantry exist
- (3) No economic exploiting class remains in the Soviet Union.

Thus, the N.A.C. contended, 'the basis of the Workers' State remains.' However, on the other side the N.A.C. resolution listed a number of 'developments of a reactionary nature,' which it summarised through four points:

- (1) Soviet organs of the working class have been destroyed
- (2) The Trades Unions have lost their independence to fight for the working class
- (3) Inner democracy of the C.P. has been destroyed
- (4) State bureaucracy is now in control.

The overall vote of the 1938 conference was overwhelmingly in favour of the N.A.C. line, condemning the internal developments in the Soviet Union, but maintaining support for it against 'capitalist aggression.'⁶⁶

As a result of these decisions the I.L.P. Parliamentary Group was instructed to write to Stalin protesting at the developments. Thus, in March 1938 I.L.P. MPs sent a well publicised letter to the Soviet Embassy to pass on to Stalin. The letter contained 'a clear message to Stalin' calling on him to end his 'savage terror and the 'regime of blood' associated with the show trials. Perhaps wisely the Soviet Ambassador returned the letter to the Parliamentary Group undelivered stating he 'did not feel inclined to pass it on to Stalin.'⁶⁷ There was a considerable period of time in which the I.L.P.'s position on the internal politics of the Soviet Union had been rather unclear, but by the end of the 1938 I.L.P. conference their condemnation of Stalin was unequivocal.

This new line on the Soviet Union was, as would be expected, accompanied by a further deterioration in the already frosty relations between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party. Communist Party attacks on I.L.P.ers in positions within the Labour movement became more explicit.⁶⁸ At the same time the I.L.P. attacks on the C.P. also became clearer. Prior to the 1938 National Conference, at the Scottish I.L.P. Conference, Maxton argued that the C.P. was not a revolutionary party

It is difficult because of its traditions to convince the ordinary man that the Communist Party is not a revolutionary party. Yet such is the case. The policy of the Communist Party to-day is not the policy of a revolutionary working class party.⁶⁹

Brockway and C A Smith echoed the same line of criticism in the run up to the I.L.P. conference when they had argued that 'the only party for revolutionary Socialists is the I.L.P. It alone rejects class-collaboration and raises the slogan of Independent Working Class Action.'⁷⁰ The I.L.P. position prior to the 1938 conference was critical of the Communist Party for betraying its revolutionary ideals. Nevertheless, the tone of the criticism was rather moderate. The 1938 conference decisions saw a significant change in this tone and a move towards much more aggressive attacks on the Communist Party. Thus, in commenting on the C.P.'s 1938 conference the I.L.P. was prepared to strongly attack not only the policy of the Communists, but also to compare their action with that of the fascists:

The C.P. is evidently as much an automaton as any Nazi party. The delegates acted as one man sang the "Internationale," clapped, shouted "Hurrah," stood up in respectful show of admiration waiting for signals to cheer or sing, just as you would expect a trained corps of Nazis to do. There can be no hope that a Party of this kind can bring human liberty.⁷¹

Thus, by the beginning of 1938 relations between the parties had reached a new low. This mutual contempt between the two parties inevitably spilt over, preventing even the limited levels of joint activity which had previously been possible. At demonstrations and conferences I.L.P. and C.P. delegations found themselves attacking one another. For example, in July 1938 there was a significant dispute between I.L.P. and Communist delegations at the Conference on 'Peace and Empire' organised by the India League in conjunction with the London Federation of Peace Councils. The Communist Party line sought to fight against Imperialism to strengthen 'collective security.'

The major issue in the world today is the menace of the Fascist Powers to peace and liberty. How can the colonial people be assisted in their struggle against Imperialism so that they can be won to participate with the 'democratic' Governments of Europe in collective security?

But the I.L.P. argued that Imperialism was as great a threat as fascism and thus saw the immediate struggle for Socialism as a crucial part of the struggle against Imperialism:

Imperialism is as much a menace to peace and liberty as are the Fascist Powers. The Collective Security of the Imperialist Governments of Europe is an instrument to maintain Imperialism. How can European workers, whilst carrying on their struggle against Fascism assist the colonial workers to overthrow Imperialism, so that they may unite in establishing a world order of freedom and co-operation in which alone collective security can function for peace.

The *Daily Worker* commenting on the conference referred to 'a tiny minority of disrupters', according to the I.L.P. its delegation consisted of 45 out of six hundred delegates. The I.L.P. delegation also obtained support from Jawaharlal Nehru in the opening speech and from 'most of the delegates from the colonial workers' organisations. Indeed, about one quarter of the delegates voted with the I.L.P., nevertheless it was increasingly clear that the Communist Party had little interest in the I.L.P. except in so far as it could belittle it in order to destroy it.⁷²

There was little to change these hostile relations between the two parties as the tensions which led to the Second World War developed. In 1939 the Communist Party was still angering the I.L.P., suggesting that the I.L.P. was a Trotskyist organisation and that Franco was giving special favours to Trotskyist organisations. The Communist Party's pro-war line, which was not reversed until the end of September, led to considerable hostility between the two organisations as leading members of the C.P. launched attacks on organisations such as the No Conscription League in which the I.L.P. was playing a leading role. For example the opposition to the Glasgow Trades Council receiving a deputation from the No Conscription League was led by Communist Party 'democrats'

George Middleton and Peter Kerrigan. However, it was the contribution of one C.P. member which really angered the I.L.P., arguing that:

'The No Conscription League is not a new organisation- it is an organisation formed during the last war by those people who were of military age but were too afraid to fight.'

The Communist dominated executive also ensured that Maxton was excluded from the speakers in all demonstrations despite, the I.L.P. claimed, the wishes of the wider Trades Council.⁷³ Despite the fraternal gestures of the period 1933-5, by the end of the 1930's relations between the I.L.P. and Communist Party were even worse than during the hostility of the Class-against-Class period.

7.6 N.U.W.M. and the Hunger Marches

In 1932 the N.U.W.M. was aligned to the Communist Party in its class-against-class period. This meant that the organisation was prepared to accept some help and assistance from the I.L.P. and other parts of the Labour Movement, it was reluctant to give any credit to other organisations. Thus, it was virtually impossible for any members of the I.L.P. to participate in a way that would force them to be acknowledged as leaders of the organisation in any area.⁷⁴ With the exception of the Lancashire I.L.P. where anti-Communist Party feeling was especially strong and the Hunger March was not supported, the Party was willing to offer much often unrecognised assistance to the marchers. However, the conflict between John McGovern and the leaders of the 1932 Hunger March, expressed the broader conflict between the I.L.P. and the N.U.W.M..

Shortly after the marchers arrived in London, McGovern met with their leaders, Hannington, Sid Elias and Harry McShane, to discuss the idea of him presenting their petition of over one million signatures to parliament. However, as a result of bad feeling between McGovern and the N.U.W.M. and because of the anti-I.L.P. line of the N.U.W.M. at that time the march leaders refused to allow McGovern to present the petition. McGovern was furious with the decision and returned to Parliament to give the infamous speech in which he denounced the leaders of the Hunger March for refusing to accept constitutional techniques claiming, they were going to rely on 'their massed strength to force Parliament to allow their deputation to appear.' McGovern's speech was widely cited by the press as proof of the intentions of the marchers. The events only served to extend the bad feeling on both sides.⁷⁵

During 1933, as relations between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party relaxed, so the I.L.P. took a more favourable view of the N.U.W.M. The Party's 1933 Derby Conference made the important decision to support a motion from the London Division declaring the N.U.W.M. as the only genuine movement of the Unemployed.⁷⁶ Thus, by the time of the 1934 Hunger March, the situation had radically changed. The I.L.P. was able to take a leading role in organisation of the Hunger Marches in 1934 at both central and regional levels.

The I.L.P. was instrumental in calling the meeting that led to the 1934 Hunger March..⁷⁷ The Party was also active in the organisation that allowed the March to run smoothly. John Aplin, the I.L.P. London Divisional Organiser took on the role as joint secretary of the March and Alex Gossip sat on the Council as well. Of the nineteen signatures to the manifesto presented to the meeting at the end of the march, five were from I.L.P.ers.⁷⁸ The I.L.P. was also influential in a number of local areas.

The I.L.P. presence was most keenly felt in Scotland where I.L.P.ers John McGovern and John Heenan were amongst the leaders of the Scottish contingent along with Harry McShane, Peter Kerrigan and George Middleton of the Communist Party. However, there was still considerable bad feeling particularly between McGovern and the leaders of the Communist Party. In his recollections of the Hunger March written in 1978 Harry McShane made a point of playing down the influence of McGovern and the I.L.P. in organising the unemployed.⁷⁹ However, it is clear that even if McGovern was not deeply involved in the organisation of the 1934 Hunger Marches other members of the I.L.P. were. In particular three of the I.L.P.'s Glasgow Councillors put a considerable amount of effort into the organisation of the march. John Heenan, Joseph Taylor and David Gibson all used their positions as councillors to work for the march. Gibson was particularly active and also took on the role of joint treasurer of the Campaign Committee. Despite disagreements over the role of the I.L.P. in the 1934 Hunger March, both I.L.P. and C.P. accounts suggest that the co-operation between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party made the conduct of the march much easier than in the sectarian conditions of 1932.⁸⁰

Outside Scotland I.L.P.ers also played a role in the Lancashire, South Wales and East Anglian contingents of the 1934 Hunger March. In Lancashire this was largely through the influence of Bob Edwards. Although Edwards did not begin the march as the official

leader of the contingent by the end of the march Edwards felt himself to be the 'real leader' of the Lancashire contingent. By this stage he was doing most of the actual planning and was elected the chairman of the Lancashire contingent's Marchers Control Council.⁸¹ In the South Wales contingent the I.L.P. had some influence through Claude Stanfield one of the Party's Merthyr councillors and W.E. Rowlands, the chair of the Merthyr Unemployed Miners' lodge who was active in organising the Merthyr section of the march Stanfield was eventually elected one of the leaders of the contingent.⁸² In Norwich, where the N.U.W.M. was very weak, and the Communist Party had little influence the I.L.P. played a crucial role in the organisation of the 1934 Norwich contingent.⁸³

The 1934 Hunger March thus represented the highpoint of I.L.P. involvement in organisation of the unemployed and Hunger Marchers during the 1930s. However, even at this time the relationship between the I.L.P. and the N.U.W.M. remained rather strained. The 1933 decision to recognise the N.U.W.M. as the only legitimate organisation of the unemployed had brought dissent which was centred on a number of important I.L.P. centres, including Glasgow, Norwich, Bristol and of course much of the Lancashire division. These opponents were looking to support 'all organisations that fight the cause of the unemployed.'⁸⁴ Many of these organisations had been set up by the TUC to oppose the Communist dominated N.U.W.M. and in some places, such as Norwich, were supported by the I.L.P.⁸⁵ However, across the country there were also a series of unemployed organisations set up and run by the I.L.P. These included the Chorley Unemployed Workers' Rights Committee set up by the I.L.P. in June 1932,⁸⁶ and the Ferryden Workers' Rights Committee, the only two for which any extensive records appear to remain.⁸⁷ As Scottish Hunger March leader and Communist Harry McShane noted the I.L.P. attitude towards the N.U.W.M. was far from consistent:

The I.L.P. seemed to do strange things at times. Sometimes they would support us. Then they tried to form separate Unemployed Committees, separate entirely from us. They and the British T.U.C. were doing the same thing, forming rival bodies.⁸⁸

Thus, whilst the I.L.P. at national level gave its unconditional support to the N.U.W.M. the extent to which this support was realised on the ground is debatable.

In 1936 following the adoption of the Popular Front line the I.L.P.'s importance for the Communist Party had diminished enormously. The latter's focus was then on the Labour Party and the non-working class parties beyond. Yet I.L.P.ers across the country

attempted to give all the assistance they could to the 1936 march. In London John Aplin was picked out by the Police Special Branch as one of the main activists on the London Reception Committee.⁸⁹ In Wales thirty of the marchers were members of the I.L.P. Assistance to the marchers was frequently provided with the I.L.P.'s assistance. For example in Bristol, I.L.P. councillor Fred Berriman was joint secretary of local Hunger March reception committee for the Welsh marchers, with E. H. Parker, the Trades Council Secretary.⁹⁰ Similarly the I.L.P. also assisted with the Scottish and Northern Contingent, for example Tom Stephenson organised accommodation and a meeting for the marchers at Carlisle and the Edinburgh section of the march were housed by Armley I.L.P. on their way south.⁹¹ There was an overall feeling within the ILP that the march had been a success; as the London Divisional Council put it, it had

Struck a resounding blow against the means test and marchers played a 'decisive role' in breaking the reaction decision of the TUC and the Labour Party against the United Front.⁹²

However, the C.P.'s decreasing interest in the Party led to an increasing marginalisation of the I.L.P. This was reflected in the makeup of the organisation committee. There were no I.L.P.ers on the Marchers Council in 1936 whilst the thirty members of the London Reception Committee included only three I.L.P. members, John Aplin, Jennie Lee and Alex Gossip whose relationship with the party was increasingly strained. This was in sharp contrast to the situation in 1934 when there had been eight I.L.P. members on the Committee.⁹³

This marginalisation was also reflected in the official organisation of the speakers for the marchers. Since the I.L.P. had no representation on the Marchers Council who organised the speakers in London, consequently no ILP members were asked to officially speak to greet the marchers. When this news was conveyed to the I.L.P.'ers in the contingents this caused considerable bad feeling which was exacerbated by the fact that all of the speakers were from the official leadership of the labour movement, rather than rank-and-file militants.⁹⁴ This frustration with the 'petty sectarian attitude of the Labour and Communist elements of the Reception Committee' was communicated to the I.L.P. leadership who then organised its own reception addressed by Maxton, Campbell Stephen and Frank Gant.⁹⁵ Further this exclusion of the I.L.P. was not confined to London, with I.L.P. public speakers being ignored even in the Party's Glasgow stronghold.⁹⁶ The increasingly troubled relationship between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party that lay behind the exclusion of the I.L.P. from much of the

organisational and speaking work was clearest where the I.L.P. presence in the marches was most obvious, in the South Wales contingent.

The Welsh contingent contained over thirty I.L.P. members, including Trevor Williams and W.J. Powell of the I.L.P.'s Welsh Divisional Committee, P. Gunter, Secretary of Neath I.L.P. and Tom Nicholls another member of Neath I.L.P. and an unemployed miner. The famous image of one of the marchers carrying a red flag past Windsor Castle was an image of a Merthyr I.L.P.er. Further, Doris Young, wife of the I.L.P.'s South West Organiser Wilfred Young, kept with the march from Bristol becoming known as the 'General Secretary to the march', producing the Welsh marchers' Bulletin from I.L.P. head-office and typing 'innumerable' letters every day.⁹⁷

The ILPers in the Welsh contingent were frustrated when the news came through of the ways in which their party had been excluded from the official side of the hunger march reception. They were even more frustrated when they heard that they would be expected to pay tribute to the Cenotaph war memorial. They approached the ILP leadership to consult on what they should do to register their protest at the decision, they were advised to maintain solidarity but to sign a letter of protest.⁹⁸ However, the marchers led by the I.L.P.ers, but supported by other marchers including five Communists, refused to participate in the ceremony.

However, the I.L.P.-led protest within the Welsh contingent was seized upon by the official sections of the march, especially the Communist elements, to attack the Party. It was suggested that the I.L.P. leadership had organised the protest in order to disrupt the arrival in London.⁹⁹ The Welsh marchers objected:

It cannot be too plainly stated that the protest was purely spontaneous from rank-and-file and did not come as a suggestion from any 'I.L.P. leader.' Only after we had reported our opposition did the I.L.P. leaders intervene. Then the national Council of the party whilst endorsing our protest instructed us to take part in the ceremony.¹⁰⁰

Contrary to the suggestions of leading Communists the ILP had no representation on the Marchers Council, which had decided to march past the cenotaph, and there had been no ILP presence in the majority of the official organisation and speaking arrangements. In contrast to 1934, despite the attempts of party members to take an active role in the organisation and conduct of the march, the I.L.P. was more than ever marginalised from major parts of the militant working class movement.

7.7 The Guild of Youth and the Y.C.L.

The I.L.P.'s youth organisation, the Guild of Youth, established in 1924, had always been relatively weak. This weakness was further exacerbated by disaffiliation, although the youth organisation was less affected than its adult party.¹⁰¹ This weakness made the Guild of Youth an important target for the Communist Party which in turn led to a further deterioration in the Guild's standing and relationship to its adult party. By October 1933 the Guild barely existed across many parts of the country. Only in Scotland, London and the Midlands was there a real network of Guilds although there were active but isolated Guilds in Wales and Yorkshire. The work of the Guild nationally was hampered not only by lack of numbers but also by its weak financial position. This was not helped by the failure of some divisions, most notably London, to return affiliation fees.¹⁰² The I.L.P. allowed its youth organisation to decide its own policy supposedly free from any interference. Before disaffiliation the policy of the Guild had been to the 'left' of its adult party. The Guild had withdrawn from the Second International before the I.L.P. and its acceptance of a revolutionary policy had been much more enthusiastic. Soon after disaffiliation it established a close relationship with the Young Communist International (Y.C.I.). By the end of 1933 the N.E.C. of the Guild found it could agree with the majority of the statements of the Y.C.I. The only substantial disagreement came over the Y.C.I.'s Social Fascist discourse.¹⁰³ These sympathies for the Y.C.I. were especially strong in the Scottish Division, where the Guild had grown from 3 to 20 Branches following disaffiliation. In February 1934 the Scottish Divisional Guild of Youth Conference decided, after a heated debate, to accept Bridgeton's argument for conditional affiliation to the Y.C.I.¹⁰⁴ By March 1934 the Guild had decided to approach the Y.C.I. to consider affiliation.

The increasing likelihood of a close relationship between the Guild of Youth and the Y.C.I. whilst the I.L.P. was moving away from the Comintern, was a matter of major concern at the I.L.P.'s annual conference at York in 1934. The N.A.C. report to the conference noted not only that there had been a slight decrease in numbers in the Guild but also that there had been an increasingly close working relationship developing between the I.L.P.'s youth organisation and the Y.C.L., the possibility of conditional affiliation to the Y.C.I. was also raised.¹⁰⁵ The conference debate over the Guild of Youth indicated discontent with the Guild's position. The Guild acknowledged that to completely ignore the I.L.P.'s wishes would be 'a fatal thing to do' whilst stressing that 'the Guild is autonomous and not bound by the decisions of this conference.' Brockway

and Maxton aimed to calm the situation confirming that the Guild was within its rights and that it had 'expressed its desire to keep in line with the adult party.'¹⁰⁶ An initial motion criticising the Guild was thus defeated..¹⁰⁷

In May 1934 three representatives of the I.L.P. Guild of Youth, Lewis Povey the National Secretary of the Guild, Jack Huntz of London and Comrade McFarlane of Bridgeton attended a meeting with the Y.C.I. representatives in Paris. The Guild group were accompanied and overseen by John McGovern who had been appointed by the N.A.C.¹⁰⁸ The aim of the meeting was to obtain information to enable the national conference of the Guild to better decide on whether to affiliate to the Y.C.I. The three came to no immediate conclusions but declared instead that they would report in detail to the Guild's annual conference adding that they hoped 'that, as a result, revolutionary proletarian unity will be furthered and a real advance made against Capitalism, Fascism and War, and for the defence of the Soviet Socialist Republic.'¹⁰⁹ In fact the report, which recommended the Guild sympathetically affiliate to the Y.C.I. was not prepared in time to be properly considered by the annual conference, which was held only three weeks later.¹¹⁰

Thus, the crucial 1934 Guild of Youth annual conference in Norwich was held without prior consideration of the delegation's report. The conference, held 20-21 May, was attended by only 28 Guilds, with 30 votes between them. Debate centred on the question of whether to affiliate to the Y.C.I. to the exclusion of almost everything else. The delegation members who had visited the Y.C.I. recommended affiliation, a suggestion that was opposed by the Guild's National Committee but inevitably supported by Alex Massie, a representative from the Y.C.I., present to answer questions from Guild members. The most significant opposition to the Guild's decision came from Brockway who was present to make a statement on behalf of the N.A.C. He pointed to the differences between the way in which the Y.C.I. had treated the Guild and the way in which the Comintern had treated the I.L.P. The favourable conditions that the Guild had managed to obtain, he suggested could only be explained because the Communists wanted to use the Guild of Youth 'to strike a blow' against its adult party. He also told the Guild that if it made decisions which were incompatible with the policy of the I.L.P. their whole relationship would have to be reconsidered. Thus, his speech contained the thinly veiled threat of removing the Guild's autonomy or even cutting the Guild off from

the adult party. Nevertheless, the vote finally saw the Guild decide to affiliate to the Y.C.I. by 18-12.¹¹¹

As Brockway's warning failed to deter the Norwich Guild Conference from its affiliation plans so the N.A.C. was forced to act. Lewis Povey, the Guild's representative on the N.A.C. was initially refused entry to its meeting. Even his later presence could not prevent the N.A.C. declaring that it considered the sympathetic affiliation to the Y.C.I. to be incompatible with the Guild remaining the youth section of the Party.¹¹² The Guild's National Committee was reluctant to accept the N.A.C.'s decision, despite a majority opposed to Y.C.I. affiliation.¹¹³ They pointed to the fact that they had no powers to overturn the conference decision and asked for time to show that the decision would not be disruptive to I.L.P. activity. However, the N.A.C. was in no mood for compromise and the General Secretary sent a letter to the National Guilds Council that was also distributed to each branch of the Guild of Youth stating that the Guild had to choose between the I.L.P. and the Young Communist International:

As an autonomous organisation the Guild must choose between its connection with the I.L.P. and the Y.C.I. If it decides in favour of the Y.C.I., the I.L.P., as an equally autonomous organisation, will then be at liberty to reconstruct its Youth section.¹¹⁴

This made clear the crisis in the youth organisation and after meeting with the N.A.C. the Guild National Committee narrowly accepted, by a vote of 3-2, the need to call a special conference, recommending the termination of sympathetic affiliation.¹¹⁵ However, concern at the decision was not restricted to the adult party and a number of Guilds began to organise to reverse the decision. Indeed, despite the support for affiliation from the Derby Branch at Norwich the majority of the Midlands Division Guild of Youth were strongly opposed to the Norwich Conference decision.¹¹⁶ The threat to the relationship with the I.L.P. led to a Special Conference of the I.L.P.'s youth organisation, which was called in Derby on Sunday November 18.

When the Guild met for its special conference in Derby there was little doubt about the seriousness of the situation. There was no possibility of the Guild maintaining its affiliation to the Y.C.I. and keeping its position as the Youth section of the I.L.P. The Guild N.E.C. proposed a motion stating a desire to 'act in harmony with the I.L.P. in national and international policy.' However, the conference, frustrated by their treatment by the adult party rejected this compromise. Instead the conference opted for resolutions that, whilst maintaining the connection to the adult party, expressed

discontent with the situation. The resolution, passed by 22 votes to 11, suspended the sympathetic affiliation to the Y.C.I. but maintained the principle of sympathetic affiliation and condemned the attitude of the N.A.C. It also made explicit that it agreed to the suspension of affiliation 'only to prevent the N.A.C. splitting the I.L.P. and the Guild.' The conference had preserved the connection between the I.L.P. and Guild, but it opened up another set of issues.

Prior to the Guild's Derby Conference the I.L.P.'s N.A.C. had made explicit its intention 'to review the powers of autonomy of the Guild so as to restrict that autonomy to organisational matters only, and subject to the policy, constitution and rules of the I.L.P.' The Guild encouraged by the Communist Party, was clearly unhappy with these proposals passing a resolution pledging resistance to any encroachment on the 'full organisational and political autonomy of the Guild.'¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, the N.A.C. persuaded the 1935 I.L.P. national conference to remove the Guild's political autonomy.¹¹⁸

The National Executive of the Guild, reconstructed to give a majority of those loyal to the adult party, made a statement welcoming the decision.¹¹⁹ The N.A.C. appointed Jennie Lee as its representative on the National Committee of the Guild of Youth, giving a new focus to her activity within the Party, and called a special Guild conference in Leeds at the beginning of June.¹²⁰ However, this reconstruction did not ensure the end of the conflict. The pro-Communist minority on the Guild's Committee, which included the Guild's N.A.C. representative Lewis Povey, was vocal, well organised and resourced by the Communist Party. On finding that the majority planned to support the N.A.C. the minority planned to launch what Jennie Lee described as a 'vicious attack on the I.L.P.'¹²¹ Thus, the N.A.C. decided that it would allow only those Guild members who supported the reconstruction of the I.L.P.'s youth organisation to the Leeds conference.¹²²

Thus, the Guild of Youth held its Special Conference in Armley without those who had long supported Y.C.I. affiliation in June 1935. The main thrust of the conference was to reassert links with the I.L.P., and to set out an agenda of work consistent with the wider Party Programme. First, the principle of closer connection with the I.L.P. was endorsed. Second, the international question was resolved with the Guild accepting a policy of aiming for a united International drawing together the revolutionary elements of the

Young Socialist International, the Y.C.I. and the independent Revolutionary Socialist Youth. A resolution of protest against the decision to call the special meeting of the Guild was defeated by a two to one majority. The Guild of Youth had been dragged back into line by the I.L.P.¹²³

The leadership of the Guild was largely reconstructed with Bob Smillie, son of the Scottish I.L.P. Chairman, as Chairman and the Guild started a new loyal journal *Rebel Youth* which was edited by General Secretary Fenner Brockway's daughter, Audrey Brockway. At the same time it was able to report a little success with the formation of a few new branches of the Guild including those in Stockton, Middlesbrough, Welwyn, Parkhead and Cardiff. However, the support of the Guild at the Leeds conference was bought at a significant price. The decision to exclude those who supported the Y.C.I. meant shedding a large number of members in some of the Guild's most significant areas including Bridgeton, Derby and Govan. Despite the decision to exclude them, eight disgruntled members had nevertheless attempted to attend the conference as a 'militant' delegation. When they were refused admission they attempted to force their way in and had to be physically excluded. During the scuffles, windows were broken and the doorman called the police.¹²⁴ The excluded Guilds had then held their own meeting, giving another significant opportunity for Communist propaganda at the expense of the I.L.P.

Following the reorganisation of the Guild at the Leeds conference a number of branches were lost to the Communist Party. There were majorities against the decision in Aberdeen, Bridgeton, Rutherglen, Derby, Leicester and Portsmouth and overall 25 per cent of the Guild membership refused to accept the new basis of the youth organisation.¹²⁵ In the major centres of dissent such as Bridgeton and Derby, the Guilds managed to carry on despite the loss of membership.¹²⁶ With the Guild weakened by these disputes over the relationship with the Y.C.L. and the Y.C.I. it was susceptible to further difficulties. The Guild as a whole expressed discontent with the N.A.C. reversal of line on the workers' boycott of war materials to Italy.¹²⁷ Thus, the 1936 Guild sent a letter to the adult party which expressed a 'unanimous decision that no policy other than that of independent working class action in relation to the Italo-Abyssinian war should be advocated publicly by any member of the guild or by any party speaker from a Guild platform.' The Committee aggravated matters further by protest against the manner in which the Annual Conference decision on policy had been subsequently dealt with at

the Leeds conference.¹²⁸ These continuing divisions with the adult party led to a deteriorating internal situation in the Guild. By the end of 1936 there was a permanent division into groups on the National Guild Committee, over these question of loyalty to the adult party. The N.A.C. was once again compelled to intervene in the activity of the Guild, planning further controls on its activity and increasing levels of supervision.¹²⁹

These further restrictions placed the appointment of the Guild's officials in the hands of an I.L.P committee and they predictably decided to appoint known supporters of the Party line to these positions. Most notably Bob Smillie, who was at that time already in the Spanish Prison he was to die in, was re-appointed chairman with Kathleen Ellis of Leeds as treasurer. The new mandate for the Guild stressed a breadth of non-political activities in addition to 'putting the socialist case,' including encouraging the organisation of sport, the development of craftsmanship and the stimulation of speaking choirs and Socialist drama. Despite these overarching changes, which in effect meant the closing down of the Guild of Youth as it had previously existed, it was decided to maintain the name 'I.L.P. Guild of Youth'. However, other activities which the Guild wished to continue such as the production of *Rebel Youth*, the London Guild of Youth newspaper which had been causing so much of the trouble, were discontinued by the N.A.C. to lessen any further disruptive powers operating through the Guild.¹³⁰

Following the reconstruction of the Guild a major effort was made to build up the youth section. A speaking tour had been planned for Bob Smillie on his return from Spain. Of course when he died in infamous circumstances in Spain the campaign had to be rearranged and was eventually conducted by Dan McArthur, the National Guilds Organiser.¹³¹ Nevertheless, the results appeared impressive enough. The Guild reported rapid growth.¹³² By the I.L.P.'s Manchester Conference in 1938 the N.A.C. described the Guild's membership as being 'of the reliable type,' a significant contrast to the situation in any other period following disaffiliation.¹³³ However, during the 1930s the I.L.P.'s youth section found its activities dominated by the relationship between it and the Y.C.L./Y.C.I. As a result the Guild's membership and influence declined even faster than the adult party.

7.8 Conclusion

The events of the 1930s saw a huge change in the relationship between the Communist Party and the I.L.P. The beginning of the decade had seen the I.L.P. inside the Labour

Party, critical of the Communist Party, but moving towards a more revolutionary position. Prior to 1933 the Class-Against-Class line of the Communist Party saw them arguing for a 'war to the death' with the I.L.P. The change to a United Front line in 1933 had led to much closer relations and the development of an official policy on both side for an eventual unification of the organisations. During 1933-4 in many parts of the country the two parties had made serious attempts to work together. However, operational difficulties, the departure of the R.P.C. and most importantly the adoption of the Popular Front line by the Communist Party in 1935 signalled the end of realistic possibilities of working together in the longer term. Despite the apparent promise of the Unity Campaign, the period from 1935-9 was characterised by increasing hostility between the two organisations. By the outbreak of war, following the arguments over Spain and the Moscow show trials relations reached a new low. In 1932 the I.L.P. had been accused by the Communist Party of 'social fascism.' By 1937 the Party was accused of straightforward 'fascism.' Whatever political overlap might occur during the war, there was no real possibility of the parties working together.

Thus, relations with the Communist Party played an important part in the struggle of the I.L.P. to find political space during the 1930s. Initially it faced the question of whether to engage in joint activity with the C.P. The heavily contested decision to engage in such activity was entered into as much by those who saw the I.L.P.'s closest ally as the Labour Party as by those who wanted to join with the Communist Party. However, the impact was to drive out of the Party a large section of the membership who defined themselves as Socialists who were against the Communist Party. The possibility of forming a United Revolutionary Party with a high level of I.L.P. input would have been significant compensation to the I.L.P. for such a loss. However, despite the acceptance of this as an official position by both Parties it was never a likely outcome. Instead, Communist policy changes increasingly marginalised the I.L.P. from arenas in which the Communists were strongest. The party failed in the early 1930s to find a significant niche with the Communist Party and in the latter part of the decade instead looked towards the larger working-class bodies, the Labour Party and the Trade Unions.

¹ *New Leader*, 22 April 1932

² The pamphlet of the debate had to be withdrawn the following year as the Communist Party's attitude towards the I.L.P. changed. *Which Way for the Workers? Harry Pollitt (C.P.) versus Fenner Brockway (I.L.P.) debate 18 April 1932 Forward by William Rust, C.P.G.B. 1932.*

³ Paton, 394

⁴ *New Leader*, 18 November 1932

⁵ NAC report to conference 1933

⁶ Paton, 400-401

⁷ NAC report to 1933 conference

⁸ Call to members of the I.L.P. (Brockway (Chairman) & Paton(Secretary)) 24 March 1933

⁹ The demonstration on 2 April represented a new level in the relations between the I.L.P. and the C.P. it was the first nationally organised joint activity between the two parties. The demonstration which finished in Hyde Park had attracted the support of 40,000 people and was accompanied by other local demonstrations in Poplar, Portsmouth, Battersea, Bermondsey, Liverpool, Glasgow, Newcastle, Manchester, Sheffield, Plymouth and Nottingham. Call to members of the I.L.P. (Brockway (Chairman) & Paton(Secretary)) 24 March 1933; *New Leader*, 7 April 1933

¹⁰ *New Leader*, 21 April 1933

¹¹ *New Leader*, 21 April 1933

¹² *New Leader*, August 11 1933

¹³ The survey was sent to 353 branches, 137 responded. Some of the results were surprising. 45 of the branches were engaged in general co-operation with the Communist Party, but a greater proportion were engaged in such activity in Lancashire (4 yes 13 no) than London and the South (5 yes 21 no). Scotland had the greatest proportion of branches engaged in general co-operation (20 yes 15 no). 58 branches, including 6 in Lancashire were for continued co-operation of general activities, 63 were against. 66 branches were for limiting future co-operation with the C.P. to specific issues, 44 were against such a limitation. 30 branches including 7 in Lancashire were for complete discontinuation of co-operation with the C.P. N.A.C. minutes February 10 1934.

¹⁴ *New Leader*, August 17 1934

¹⁵ The N.A.C. decided to order the other sections of the Party to also decline their invitations. N.A.C. minutes August 11 1934

¹⁶ In concrete terms the meeting, between the two parties in May 1934, decided to concentrate on strengthening the Congress and March Council, building May Day demonstrations and the British Anti-war and Anti-fascist movement, fighting the Sedition Bill, building the Meerut Prisoners Committee (with the I.L.P. to tabulate proposals for the broadening of activities), developing Trade Union activity. They also agreed to focus on regional struggles especially the miners in Wales and Durham and the Textile situation in Lancashire, with the two London parties examining the possibility of common action in connection with the Anti-fascist conference called by London Trades Council. However, there was clearly concern at the deteriorating relationship between the organisations and it was agreed to try to work this out by suggesting that the two parties should communicate when one had a grievance against an article published by the other. (*New Leader*, May 4 1934)

¹⁷ Harry Pollitt's Speech as Fraternal Delegate to the I.L.P. Conference, C.P./IND/POLL/14/10; *New Leader*, April 26 1935

¹⁸ As an example of specific local difficulties Brockway cited the example of Merthyr where the C.P.'s attempts to use the N.U.W.M. to support Hannington against Campbell Stephen in the 1934 by-election, had led to considerable local resentment and the eventual closing down of the Merthyr N.U.W.M.

Brockway, Review of United Front activity between the C.P. and the I.L.P., February 1935
MLG/TD956/7/25

¹⁹ Pollitt, *Draft Review of experiences in carrying out United Front activity between the Communist Party and the I.L.P., February 1935* MLG/TD956/7/25; Brockway, *Review of United Front activity between the I.L.P. and C.P., March 1935* MLG/TD956/7/26; Pollitt, *Reply to Brockway* MLG/TD956/7/27

²⁰ *Daily Worker*, April 24 1935; *New Leader*, May 3 1935

²¹ Inner Executive Minutes April 10 1935

²² *New Leader*, June 21 1935

²³ N.A.C. Report to Conference, 1936

²⁴ *New Leader*, December 13 1935

²⁵ *New Leader*, December 20 1935

²⁶ *New Leader*, January 1 1936

Nevertheless, in the early part of 1936 the two Parties maintained a written dialogue which attempted to secure some level of continued relationship between the two organisations. 'Joint Activities With the Communist Party' NMLH/IND/POLL/14/14; *New Leader*, February 14 1936

²⁸ N.A.C. Report to 1936 Conference.

²⁹ *New Leader*, March 6 1936; April 17 1936; Annual Conference Report 1936

³⁰ *New Leader*, May 29 1936

³¹ *New Leader*, November 20 1936

³² Independent Labour Party, *They Did NOT Pass*, London 1937; N.A.C. minutes November 7 1936; *New Leader*, October 9 1936 A similar example of I.L.P. influence in blocking the fascists in the East End could be seen the following October in Long Lane. Prominent amongst the over 100 anti-fascists arrested then were William Woodward of S.W. Ham Guild of Youth who was fined 30s for striking a fascist and W. Wigham who refused to remove a barricade from the road and was sentenced to £5 or six weeks, the fine was eventually paid against his wishes. *New Leader*, October 8 1937

³³ For example the *New Leader*, commenting on the League's first conference in London argued the delegates did not represent the 'militant Socialists in London and the South' because the latter were 'working within the ranks of the I.L.P.' *New Leader*, 23 September 1932

³⁴ The pair met specifically with Mellor, Elvin and Mitchison and they agreed that both executives would consider proposals for continuing discussion with the I.L.P. with a 'view to defining a common policy on specific issues' and initiating 'a united platform of the I.L.P. and S.L. on specific occasions.' Brockway to N.A.C. April 12 1935 NMLH/LP/SL/35/1

³⁵ J.T. Murphy to J. Middleton August 2 1935 NMLH/LP/SL/35/11

³⁶ Fenner Brockway, 'A New United Front', *Controversy*, December 1936; *New Leader*, June 5 1936

³⁷ *New Leader*, June 1936

³⁸ N.A.C. minutes August 1 1936; *New Leader*, August 7 1936; N.A.C. Report to 1937 Conference

³⁹ The I.L.P. was represented by Maxton, Stephen, Aplin and Brockway

⁴⁰ Fenner Brockway, 'A New United Front', *Controversy*, December 1936; N.A.C. minutes November 7 1936; N.A.C. report to 1937 Conference; Executive Committee Report November 24 1936

⁴¹ *New Leader*, January 15 1937

⁴² Letter Brockway to Cripps December 3 1937 NMLH/C.P./IND/POLL/14/15 The Unity Campaign Negotiations: Decisions of the I.L.P. Executive Committee November 24 1936 NMLH/C.P./IND/POLL/14/14

⁴³ McNair, 263 (cited); cf Brown, 281-4; Mahon, 232-4; Morgan, 91-2; Bryant, 138-9

⁴⁴ James Maxton, 'The Unity Campaign', *Controversy*, February 1937

⁴⁵ Patterson (Clapham) and Cund (Kirkdale) led the opposition to the Unity campaign. One of the three amendments they proposed to strengthen opposition to the Popular Front, included an attack on the Unity Campaign which they complained was inconsistent with an anti-Popular Front policy.

⁴⁶ *Tribune*, May 2 1937

⁴⁷ Indeed, when Jennie Lee suggested to the conference that there might come a time when we would be glad even for the existence of a Popular Front Government she was met by heckling and Loud cries of 'No' from the floor. This roused her to a slashing attack on those 'whose only care was the saving of their own souls and who preferred to keep themselves without sin whatever the cost.' Despite this her point was not to recommend a Popular Front tactic, she allowed that the immediate task was the building up a federation of working class parties, but rather it was simply that the Popular Front might be an alternative in the future. Clearly there was little room for any form of compromise with Popular Front politics within the I.L.P. even during the Unity Campaign.

⁴⁸ *Tribune*, May 2 1937

⁴⁹ Seyd, 219-21

⁵⁰ *New Leader*, May 21 1937; The dissolution of the Socialist League also led to the opening up of a number of property disputes which had been held over from disaffiliation. For example in Gateshead the Socialist League and the I.L.P. had in 1932 agreed to divide rights between them. N.A.C. minutes June 12 1937

⁵¹ (1) Militant Class struggle by the Labour Movement: Workers' Front, not Lib-Lab coalition nor Popular Front: no class collaboration. (2) Working class resistance to imperialist war and to preparations for imperialist war: no truce with capitalist parties: workers international action against war and in defence of the Soviet Union: no reliance on or support for alliances between imperialist powers, whether "democratic" or Fascist, nor for the capitalist League of Nations (3) Support for the Indian and Colonial peoples' struggle for freedom against British Imperialism (4) The establishment of fraternal relationships with revolutionary Socialist organisations in other countries, with the aim of furthering concerted international labour action and Socialist internationalism. (5) Full aid to Spanish workers in their fight for the defeat of Fascism, for a workers' and peasants' Spain. (6) To work within the Labour Movement for a united front of all workers' parties, based on the specific issues of immediate struggle. (7) To further all efforts for more democracy within the Labour Party, in order to secure democratically-governed Party Conferences and Executives. (8) To play an active part in the fight for the workers' immediate demands, relating them to the struggle for Socialist Power. A Call to the Socialist Left NMLH/LP/SL/35/60

⁵² *New Leader*, April 2 1937

⁵³ The first such meeting was held in Hull on June 1. The advertised speakers were Maxton, Pollitt and Strauss, but because of the decision of the Labour Party N.E.C. to forbid the appearance of L.P. speakers with C.P or I.L.P. speakers, Cripps and Mellor took the place of Pollitt and Maxton at the actual meeting and messages were read from the two absent speakers. (*New Leader*, June 11 1937)

⁵⁴ N.A.C. minutes June 12 1937

⁵⁵ Brockway, 1942, 268

⁵⁶ Undated circular letter included on industrial Committee microfilms; For a more general analysis of the I.L.P. and the Spanish Civil War see below pages 94-94

⁵⁷ *New Leader*, May 21 1937; May 28 1937; June 4 1937

⁵⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, July 14 1937

⁵⁹ *New Leader*, May 28 1937; The death of Bob Smillie is dealt with in some detail in Buchanan, 'The Death of Bob Smillie, The Spanish Civil War and the Eclipse of the Independent Labour Party.' Buchanan suggests that there were three major reasons why the I.L.P. did not present Smillie's death as a political cause: the protection of Republican Spain, the maintenance of relations with the Communist Party and the possibility of helping other Spanish prisoners. Whilst the first of these considerations was certainly crucial and the third also played an important role in restricting the I.L.P.'s actions, the second factor seems to be of limited relevance. Given the continually strained relationship between the I.L.P. and the C.P., which the I.L.P. was not afraid of expressing on other issues, it would be surprising indeed if its concern about the impact on the C.P. had formed a major part of the Party's thinking in Bob Smillie's case, independent of the need to defend Republican Spain.

⁶⁰ *New Leader*, June 6 1937

⁶¹ Kenneth Lee, 'Independent Working Class Action', *Controversy*, November 1937; *New Leader*, August 13 1937

⁶² See for example the debate between John Lochore (Y.C.L.) and Dan McArthur (Guild of Youth) *New Leader*, August 27 1937; Lochore had previously been an important figure in the Guild of Youth, especially in the immediate post-disaffiliation period when he had attempted to move it towards the Communist Party and the C.I. He joined the Y.C.L. after careful consideration in 1934. An account of Lochore's experiences, with a focus on the Hunger Marches, can be read in MacDougall, 1991, 306-327.

⁶³ *New Leader*, July 19 1937

⁶⁴ *New Leader*, August 17 1934

⁶⁵ N.A.C. Report to 1938 Conference.

⁶⁶ *New Leader*, April 22 1938

⁶⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, March 10 1938; March 17 1938; *New Leader*, March 11 1938

⁶⁸ It was at this time that the Communist Party was attempting to remove I.L.P.ers from Trades Council Executives in Slough and Home Counties even at the expense of putting right-wingers *New Leader*, March 11 1938 See above pages 83-83

⁶⁹ *New Leader*, February 18 1938

⁷⁰ *New Leader*, February 25 1938

⁷¹ *New Leader*, September 23 1938

⁷² *New Leader*, July 22 1938

⁷³ *New Leader*, June 30 1939

⁷⁴ The problems were greatest where the I.L.P. was much stronger than the Communist Party and N.U.W.M. as in Norwich. Yet despite the willingness of the I.L.P. to play a role in organisation of the March the Norwich contingent in 1932 was organised without any noticeable I.L.P. input. For an account of the Norwich Contingent of the 1932 Hunger March see Cunningham, 1990, Appendix 1.

⁷⁵ Accounts of these events can be found in McShane and Smith, 1978, 192 and Hannington, 1936, 252-3. McGovern's autobiography only obliquely refers to these events McGovern, 1960, 85

⁷⁶ 1933 Conference Report, *New Leader* 21 April 1933

⁷⁷ Of the 554 signatures to the 33 District Conference Appeals at the end of 1933 the I.L.P. Labour Party, and Communist Party were all reasonably equally represented There were 22 secretaries and members of Executive Committees of Labour Parties, 23 secretaries and organisers of I.L.P. branches and 29 secretaries and organisers of Communist Party Branches. National Congress and March Council Bulletin No. 1 NMLH/C.P./IND/HANN/06/16

⁷⁸ The signatories were: Aneurin Bevan, James Carmichael (I.L.P.), J. B. Figgins, Alex Gossip (I.L.P.), Wal Hannington, Ted Hill, John Jagger, James Lee, W. J. Brown, W. C. Loeber, Tom Mann, James Maxton (I.L.P.), John McGovern (I.L.P.), Harry Pollitt, Frank Rowlands, Ellen Wilkinson, Dorothy Woodman, John Aplin (I.L.P.) and Maud Brown. *The Workers' United Front: A Challenge to the Ruling Class*, 1934, 1

⁷⁹ McShane and Smith, 1978, 200, 208

⁸⁰ McShane and Smith, 1978, 207; McGovern, 1960, 80-5

⁸¹ Bob Edwards to May Edwards, Southall Labour Club Uxbridge (n.d. but written from on the Hunger March); enclosure with letter Bob Edwards to Leslie Jones February 24 1982 NMLH/Bob Edwards Papers/Box 4

⁸² Francis and Smith, 1980, 252; *Merthyr Express*, April 1 1976

⁸³ The task of this organisation was placed in the hands of a joint 'Unity Committee', which was made up of the I.L.P. and N.U.W.M. leadership and the resultant march was quite pacifistic, dubbing the rather more aggressive and militant Tyneside Contingent they met up with along the route 'the vulgarians'. Cunningham, 1990, 251

⁸⁴ 1933 Conference Report, *New Leader* 21 April 1933

⁸⁵ For an account of these TUC unemployed associations see Croucher, 1995, 25-43. Despite his comments on working class movements and non-N.U.W.M. organisations there is no mention of I.L.P. organisations. There had long been reservations in the Norwich Branch's support of the N.U.W.M. Middleton Murry, a key member of the Unity Group had been highly influential in the Norwich Branch and there had been many reservations in 1933 about working with the Movement. George Johnson had put the Norwich position at that conference, pointing to the weakness of the N.U.W.M. in the East Anglian region. It was thus unsurprising that Wal Hannington found grounds for complaint in May 1934 about the attitude of the Norwich I.L.P. and Johnson in particular. Johnson denied the accuracy of Hannington's report, but there was undoubtedly some truth in the accusation that the I.L.P. had been working with non-N.U.W.M. unemployed organisations. In the early months of 1935 many of the most prominent members of the N.U.W.M. split off to form the 'Norwich Unemployed Workers' Non-Party Movement'. The essence of the new organisation was a rejection of Communist control and greater sympathy for the wider labour movement. Amongst the leaders of this new organisation was A. W. Votier, who had joined and left the I.L.P. with Middleton Murry. The ambiguity of the I.L.P.'s position was expressed in the fact that whilst they kept up support for the much diminished Norwich N.U.W.M. they also supported the new Unemployed organisation, sending R. Spraggins as a fraternal delegate to the

foundation meeting of the organisation. Inner Executive minutes, May 15 1934; Cunningham, 1990, 229-30

⁸⁶ *Labour's Northern Voice*, July 1932; *Labour's Northern Voice*, September 1933

⁸⁷ In 1935 the Workers' Rights Committee of Ferryden I.L.P. submitted its record for the year. 419 cases dealt were dealt with. 151 cases had been won and 133 cases part won. Assistance was given in 52 cases and advice given in 16 cases. The 1935-6 Ferryden (misspelled Berryden) I.L.P. annual report also detailed its Workers' Rights Committee: 231 cases dealt with, 84 won, 32 part-won 80 assisted 4 advised and 31 lost. The focus of both organisations was primarily on public assistance and rates appeal. *New Leader*, April 19 1935; Berryden I.L.P. annual report 1935-6 I.L.P. archive 1936/1

⁸⁸ McShane in MacDougall, 22

⁸⁹ The other three other committee members singled out by the police were J. Mahon (C.P.) Pat Devine (N.U.W.M.) and H. Beakon (Bethnal Green Trades Council) PRO/MEPO2/3091/150 1936 Hunger March

⁹⁰ *New Leader*, October 2 1936

⁹¹ *New Leader*, November 13 1936 *New Leader*, October 23 1936

⁹² *Controversy*, December 1936

⁹³ PRO/MEPO2/3053/17-28

⁹⁴ *Controversy*, January 1937; *New Leader*, November 6 1936

⁹⁵ However, further negotiations did secure the ILP some involvement in the official demonstration and the end of week meeting in Trafalgar Square was addressed by Jennie Lee (I.L.P.), William Mellor (Socialist League), Harry Pollitt (Communist Party) and Aneurin Bevan (Labour Party) as well as representatives of the marchers including Trevor Williams of the Welsh I.L.P.N.A.C. minutes November 7 1936, *New Leader*, November 20 1936

⁹⁶ *New Leader*, November 20 1936

⁹⁷ The I.L.P. was also prominent in helping the South Wales marchers en route. At Cardiff the I.L.P. branch put at the disposal of the Marchers two halls for sleeping. At Newport it was Albert Richards, an I.L.P. stalwart who was responsible for raising the money to make them comfortable. At Bristol, where Fred Berriman, was joint secretary of the Reception Committee, the I.L.P. branch accommodated 85 marchers and Kingsley Hall, the I.L.P. headquarters, acted as the marchers' headquarters. In Swindon the marchers stated that if it had not been for the I.L.P. they would have been left stranded. Whilst in the final stages of the hunger march for Welsh Marchers Slough and Staines the organising secretary of the Reception Committee was T.S. Porter, secretary of Slough I.L.P. NMLH/C.P./HANN/06/14 Welsh Marchers Newsletter November 3 1936; *New Leader*, November 6 1936; *New Leader*, November 13 1936

⁹⁸ N.A.C. minutes November 7 1936

⁹⁹ *New Leader*, November 27 1936

¹⁰⁰ *New Leader*, November 20 1936

¹⁰¹ In 1932 the Guild had 64 active branches, with 36 sending frequent reports of their activities to head office. Two Guilds were lost through disaffiliation but in London a number of London League members came over to the I.L.P. Guild of Youth Annual Report 1932; Guild of Youth Annual Report 1933 NMLH/C.P./Y.C.L./18/3

¹⁰² *New Leader*, October 6 1933

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- ¹⁰³ *New Leader*, October 6 1933
- ¹⁰⁴ *New Leader*, February 23 1934
- ¹⁰⁵ N.A.C. Conference Report 1934
- ¹⁰⁶ 1934 I.L.P. Conference Report
- ¹⁰⁷ *New Leader*, April 6 1934
- ¹⁰⁸ N.A.C. minutes, March 30-April 1 1934
- ¹⁰⁹ *New Leader*, May 11 1934
- ¹¹⁰ *New Leader*, May 25 1934
- ¹¹¹ Alex Massie, 'Guild Norwich Conference', NMLH/C.P./YCL/18/1; *New Leader*, May 25 1934; *Controversy*, June 1934
- ¹¹² N.A.C. minutes, June 9-10 1934
- ¹¹³ The National Guild Council had five members of whom only two, Sam McAskie and Lewis Povey, were in favour of affiliation to the Y.C.I. McAskie and Povey who were described by Y.C.L. executive member Alex Massie not only as being 'wholly and firmly in favour of conditional affiliation' but also of being 'head and shoulders above the others in ability and personality.' Of the other members Evelyn Hurp of Bradford, despite connections to the Trotskyist Marxist Group, was described by Massie as 'colourless and under the influence of Jowett', Chamberlain of Leicester, the Treasurer of the Guild was labelled as 'definitely hostile and uses Trotskyist arguments'. The final member Bromley of London was less well known to the Y.C.L. but definitely not sympathetic. NMLH/C.P./YCL/18/1
- ¹¹⁴ The N.A.C. voted to give the Guild time to hold a special meeting in order to reverse its decision, although Campbell Stephen, John McGovern, Sam Leckie and George Johnson were all in favour of an immediate reconstruction of the Guild of Youth. Executive Committee Report, August 11-12 1934; N.A.C. minutes, August 11-12 1934
- ¹¹⁵ Executive Committee Report, November 16-17 1934
- ¹¹⁶ *New Leader*, June 22 1934
- ¹¹⁷ *New Leader*, November 23 1934
- ¹¹⁸ N.A.C. Conference Report 1935 The N.A.C. also proposed changing the age of membership of its youth organisation; those under 18 to be members of the Guild only, those between 18 and 21 to have the option of joint membership and those over 21 to be members of only the I.L.P.; *New Leader*, March 8 1935; The conference in fact accepted only the majority of the N.A.C. proposal, rejecting the sections dealing with dual membership of the I.L.P. and Guild. *New Leader*, April 24 1935
- ¹¹⁹ By a vote of 5 to 2 the N.E.C. called on the I.L.P. to move quickly towards reorganising the Guild. They called on them to organise a conference of the Guild branches that accepted the conference decision 'with a view to reorganising the Guild as a loyal Youth section of the I.L.P.' *New Leader*, April 26 1935
- ¹²⁰ *New Leader*, May 5 1935
- ¹²¹ N.A.C. minutes, April 22 1935
- ¹²² After Povey had indicated that he could not give an assurance that the minority statement would be withdrawn he was told that it would be better if he left the N.A.C., and he accepted that decision. N.A.C. report, April 22 1935; N.A.C. minutes, April 23-24 1935
- ¹²³ The conference accepted that all members of the Guild over 21 were to be joint members of the I.L.P. whilst I.L.P.ers under 25 were to be members of the Youth Section. Jon Kimche of London and Peter

Wilson of Glasgow were entrusted with the task of making contact with the International Bureau of Revolutionary Socialist Youth. *New Leader*, June 14 1935

¹²⁴ *New Leader*, June 14 1935; N.A.C. minutes, June 29-30 1935

¹²⁵ Inner Executive minutes, June 19 1935; N.A.C. minutes, June 29-30 1935

¹²⁶ *New Leader*, September 27 1935

¹²⁷ *New Leader*, February 14 1936

¹²⁸ N.A.C. minutes April 14 1936

¹²⁹ The autonomy of the Guild was further removed as the National Youth Committee was appointed at the conference with both members of the Guild of Youth and I.L.P.ers who were under twenty-five eligible to vote for divisional representatives, with two additional members, the I.L.P.'s youth secretary and a representative of the N.A.C. The resulting committee consisted of: Scotland: Betty Murphy (Glasgow), North and Midlands: Norman Fortune (Bradford), South and Wales: Tom Thomas (Abedare) together with Audrey Brockway the I.L.P.'s youth secretary and Bob Edwards as N.A.C. representative. N.A.C. minutes June 12 1937; N.A.C. minutes November 7 1936; The Guild of Youth Decisions by the N.A.C. distributed with Industrial Committee Minutes (71)

¹³⁰ N.A.C. minutes June 12 1937; *New Leader*, June 4 1937

¹³¹ N.A.C. minutes August 2 1937

¹³² By the middle of 1938 new branches in had been formed in Leeds, South Norwood, S.W. Ham, N.W. Ham, Norwich, Dewsbury and Bexleyheath. Abadare, Bethnal Green, Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Gorton, Lochgelly, Merthyr, Montrose, Newport, Perth, Pontypool, St. Pancras, Slough and Willesden, Leicester, Stepney, Portsmouth and Hammersmith, *New Leader*, August 20 1937; *New Leader*, December 17 1937; *New Leader*, June 17 1938; *New Leader*, April 1 1938

¹³³ By the outbreak of War the Guild, although far from a strong organisation, was developing some degree of support. Its growth had been particularly rapid in London and it was felt that useful co-operation was being built up there between the Guild and the Socialist Sunday Schools. By their 1939 conference the I.L.P.'s youth section was much more in line with the adult party. Major resolutions were passed without dissent. Although there was some discussion of the International questions which had been the cause of so much trouble in the earlier party of the 1930s, the Guild remained behind the adult party's line. This analysis contrasts with the claim of Bornstein and Richardson, 1986 who claim that the Trotskyists were gaining ground within the Guild of Youth in this period. The 1939 Guild Conference explicitly rejected calls for a Fourth International. N.A.C. minutes July 30 1938; *New Leader*, February 24 1939

8. Labour and the Unions

8.1 Introduction

In July 1932 the I.L.P. had declared its politics incompatible with membership of the Labour Party. However, the relationship between the I.L.P. and the main institutions of the British Labour movement, the Labour Party and the Trade Unions, remained a subject of intense dispute throughout the 1930s. As all other independent left initiatives had and would find, these institutions simply could not be ignored. This chapter examines the I.L.P.'s changing relationship with the Labour Party, moving from initial extreme hostility, through campaigns for joint activity to attempts to re-affiliate. It also looks at the I.L.P.'s relationship with the Co-operative Movement before looking at the Party's activity and strategy towards the Trade Union Movement. The analysis finds considerable development of I.L.P. policy towards Labour Party, Co-operative Movement and Unions. It also suggests that I.L.P. activity in all these areas was of much greater significance than that indicated in most literature on the Party during the 1930s.

8.2 The Labour Party

In the immediate period after disaffiliation the I.L.P. adopted an extremely hostile position towards the Labour Party, arguing that it could aim to replace Labour as the Party of the working class. They refused to accept the easy answers proposed by most Labour Party members that the problems of the Labour Party had been caused by the personal defects of MacDonald. Instead, they argued it was the absence of a revolutionary policy which condemned the Labour Party to pursuing futile activity. With the I.L.P. claiming that the block vote and attitude of the leadership gave no opportunity for real democracy the party argued that there was no alternative but a 'clean break.'¹ However, with Hitler's rise to power in Germany the I.L.P. changed line and began approaching the Labour Party, and other working-class organisations, to get them to engage in joint activities. The N.E.C. rejected these approaches, and 'try-on by the I.L.P. flea.'² Only Stafford Cripps was in any way supportive of the idea of working with the I.L.P. However, within the leadership the attitude towards the I.L.P. was significantly different from that taken towards the Communist Party. Thus at the Labour Party's 1935 conference after the vote which proscribed the I.L.P., the National Agent, George Shepard, speaking for the N.E.C., stressed that they would be prepared to accept

the I.L.P. back into the Labour Party.³ The response from local and constituency organisations could be significantly more positive and a number sought to persuade the N.E.C. to further soften its line.⁴

However, the I.L.P. maintained its position of determined independence through to the failure of the Unity Campaign. The 1936 Keighley conference decisions, for example, although indicating a 'need for both unity and revolutionary policy' stressed that the party 'cannot consider reaffiliation to the Labour Party whilst restrictions remain forcing I.L.P. members of parliament to advocate a reactionary policy.'⁵ However, during 1936 the Party's justifications of its position outside the Labour Party became increasingly focussed on practical objections concerning the structure of the Labour Party rather than objections to reformism. The claim was that the I.L.P. was outside the Labour Party

... not so much because of its reformist policy as because its bureaucratic machine does not give a reasonable hope of changing that policy and because it places unacceptable restrictions on revolutionary advocacy and action... We can only enter the Labour Party by surrendering our revolutionary attitude, by standing at elections on a reformist programme and by promising obedience to the Labour Party Whip in the House of Commons. For a revolutionary Socialist that means surrender.⁶

The I.L.P. thus maintained the need for its independence and called on Socialists who remained within the Labour Party for 'tactical' reasons to join the I.L.P. and help with its work. Nevertheless, with an emphasis placed on these organisational questions the possibilities of a return were greatly increased.

Within the Labour Party the moderate wing continued its successful containment of the left and at the 1936 Edinburgh Labour Party conference the left suffered significant defeats over the United Front and on the Labour Party's non-intervention policy for Spain. Following the disillusionment of the conference, proposals began to be floated from within the Labour Party that Constituency Labour Parties, the Socialist League, S.S.P. and I.L.P. should unite.⁷ During this period the I.L.P. leadership stressed their perception of the policy inadequacies and lack of 'fighting spirit' within the Labour Party.⁸

However, a significant change in the I.L.P.'s attitude towards the Labour Party was beginning to develop. In part this stemmed from the Workers' Front policy.⁹ The issues of the appropriate relationship to the Labour Party came to the fore during the debates which surrounded the Unity Campaign in 1936, where the I.L.P. had to seriously consider reaffiliation for the first time since 1932. The question was opened by

Brockway who, in reflecting on the question 'How can we get unity?' in the I.L.P. discussion journal *Controversy*, took as his starting point the proposition that 'We want it at all costs, except sacrifice of Principle.' He suggested, contrary to the party's position in 1932, that the I.L.P. would not be able to replace the Labour Party as the mass party of the working class and thus accepted that it was likely that at some point in the future the I.L.P. would have to consider reaffiliation. However, the condition he suggested for reaffiliation was that the Labour Party be ripe for conversion to revolutionary socialism. This condition in his view had not been fulfilled:

The moment for the I.L.P. to consider the question of affiliation to the Labour Party is not when the Labour Party has been made the finished instrument for Revolutionary Socialism, but when it becomes evident that the Labour Party can be made such. I do not think that moment has come and it is still uncertain whether it will ever come.¹⁰

In significant ways, this represented a shift towards those, most notably Fred Jowett, who had advocated disaffiliation for precisely these organisational reasons, and away from those who thought that independence was required on the grounds of policy disagreements. This change in attitude manifested itself in many different ways. Within the Scottish I.L.P. there was a widespread negative reaction to the Divisional Council's decision not to give support to the Labour Party in the 1937 Springburn by-election.¹¹ Jennie Lee, who changed her assessment from the year before, gave a notably upbeat assessment of the 1937 Labour Conference, with its moves towards rejection of non-intervention in Spain, arguing that it was:

vastly different from the unrelieved gloom at the Edinburgh Conference a year ago. Rank-and-file delegates feel that in the opening debates they have made notable successes.¹²

However, the most important development in this direction came at the end of 1937 when Brockway conducted a detailed review of the Party's position and concluded in terms favourable to reaffiliation. He mentioned the disadvantages of reaffiliation, that the I.L.P. would become identified with the reactionary views of the Labour Party. However, his focus was on the advantages. Thus, Brockway's conclusion was clear; reaffiliation was 'now a tactic.' What was most important was to consider how to rejoin the Labour Party. He realised that in order for any of the I.L.P.'s aims to be achieved once back within the Labour Party it would need to be united. Thus, he stressed the main aim of any moves towards reaffiliation must be to ensure that there was no split within the Party. At the same time in order for the Party to influence the Labour leadership there was a need to persuade the Labour Party to accept the I.L.P. back by making the I.L.P. strong. In addition, he argued the need for the conditions of affiliation to be correct, including the right for the I.L.P. to voice its own view and publish its own

material including a voice in Parliament. However, crucially he accepted that this would not necessarily give the I.L.P. the right to vote against PLP decisions.

As far as Brockway was concerned there were a number of possible routes for building up a relationship that could lead towards reaffiliation. In terms of the National Labour Party the I.L.P. was keen to develop its electoral prospects suggesting the Party could seek to add to its existing seats with an agreement with the Labour Party, particularly looking at East Bradford, North Lanark and, if only one Labour candidate was standing, Norwich. However, the main line of approach to ^{the} Labour Party was to proceed by building up contacts of 'lefts' within the Labour Party sympathetic to the I.L.P. position through networks in Unions, Co-operatives, the NCLC, Trades Councils, together with gatherings like the I.L.P. summer school, and *Controversy* and social events. Within both these networks and any discussions with the National Labour Party over any possible future for affiliation Brockway argued the need to stress the concept of a federal basis for I.L.P. affiliation to the Labour Party.¹³ The fact that such a document was produced and became the basis of discussion about the future of the Party was an indication of how far the mood within the party had changed since 1932.

At least in public Maxton appeared to maintain his hostility to the Labour Party. In his speech to 1938 Scottish I.L.P. conference he declared:

The Labour Party is indistinguishable from the National Government in outlook and political action on the major issues of the time. Yet because of its name and structure it is able to maintain itself in the minds of the workers as being the working class party.¹⁴

However, behind the scenes his view was changing substantially and at the 1937 conference he made an important concession accepting that the Labour Party was moving towards a more acceptable politics.

The I.L.P. alone has consistently opposed the means test, but the Labour Party has now taken up complete opposition to it.¹⁵

Whilst he was far from convinced of the complete wisdom of a return to the Labour Party he was, in 1938, more receptive to the suggestion than at any time previously.¹⁶

The I.L.P.'s 1938 Manchester Conference, with two local DLP's sending fraternal greetings, was held in the wake of such policy developments and changing opinion. The N.A.C. submitted a resolution to the conference calling for working-class unity and the need for a 'permanent structure for common action on a federal basis.' A composite

amendment was considered, instructing the N.A.C. to 'approach the Labour Party for the purpose of securing the maximum common action against the National Government, united action on class issues and an electoral understanding.' Crucially, any proposals involving change in the organisational relationship of the Party were to be submitted to a special conference.

The conference was split between those who supported continued complete independence for the party and those who sought a federal arrangement, with the N.A.C. backing the latter. Carmichael moved the N.A.C. position of a federal arrangement condemning both 'those who would rush back into the Labour Party' and the 'splendid isolationists.' Others, such as Glasgow Councillor Tom Taylor argued for a return to the Labour Party because it 'would give added strength to the I.L.P. to press its policy.' However, there was still much opposition to any idea of reaffiliation. Some such as the future Party Chairman C.A. Smith opposed reaffiliation largely because of the question of 'international relations.' He also feared that if reaffiliation were rejected by the Labour Party it would discredit the I.L.P. Others were even stronger in their condemnation of reaffiliation, most notably the Trotskyist Ernie Patterson who heaped scorn and 'deplored' any talk at all of reaffiliation. The conference was keenly divided and the voting was close but eventually the amended motion, which effectively gave the N.A.C. the right to discuss reaffiliation with the Labour Party but which required a special conference decision before any agreement was reached, was carried by 55 votes to 49.

As a result of the 1938 decisions the I.L.P. announced that it had 'decided to approach the Labour Party Executive for common action on class issues against the National Government and the Capitalist Parties.' It proposed an electoral agreement to avoid conflicting candidatures and a discussion of the general relationship between the two parties.¹⁷ When the Communist Party approached the N.E.C. for such talks it was not dignified with a response and even the I.S.P. had been summarily dismissed without its request being passed to the N.E.C. Thus, the N.E.C. 13 to 4 decision to meet with the I.L.P. was not without significance.¹⁸

The content of the talks made clear that there was ground on which an agreement could be reached between the two parties. Essentially the I.L.P. was prepared to concede every point that the Labour Party demanded. Maxton pressed his and the parliamentary

group's views, which made clear his hope for reaffiliation, arguing that the 'isolation of the I.L.P. is no longer defensible' and that 'some members of the Labour Party were at greater variance with its principle and policy than were the I.L.P.' Maxton also outlined one major concession to appease the larger organisation, suggesting that the smaller party was 'principally concerned with spreading Socialist propaganda.' The N.E.C. pushed the question of whether the I.L.P. would accept PLP standing orders. McGovern showed some reticence pointing to the 'anti-working class' uses to which they had been put. However, Maxton effectively cleared the obstacle which had seemed insuperable seven years earlier stating clearly:

The signing of the Standing Orders of the Parliamentary Party were not such an important matter now for the I.L.P. as in 1931. It was in fact of quite small importance to-day.

Other possible sticking points were also quickly cleared. Brockway noted that it was unlikely that I.L.P. work with the Communist Party would lead to any problems as the relations with the C.P. were now 'extremely bitter.' Further whilst the I.L.P. contingent did suggest that they would desire electoral adjustments to be made in North Lanark, East Bradford and Norwich, Maxton said that he did not think that the 'inability to secure such adjustments would prevent agreement.'¹⁹

One does not have to read far between the lines to see the basis of an affiliation agreement being forged, indeed it seemed that only two obstacles stood in the way of affiliation. First, the Labour Party N.E.C. expressed some concerns as to the possible damage 'to the Party machine due to the establishment of ad hoc committees for propaganda which ought to be done by the Labour Party itself.' Second the I.L.P. had no formal conference decisions to allow them to pursue such a course of action.

The N.A.C. and the Labour Party continued a dialogue but little further progress was made beyond the discussions at the initial meeting. The Labour Party was prepared to co-operate with the I.L.P. by allowing reaffiliation on conditions identical to those in existence before disaffiliation, but in no other way.

...after consideration it takes the view that the affiliation of the I.L.P. to the Labour Party would be the satisfactory way of bringing about co-operation between the two parties.

The I.L.P. negotiators had no mandate to re-affiliate on these or any other terms.²⁰ To try and clarify the course of action that the Party should take the N.A.C. thus established a sub-committee to consider the alternatives, composed of Percy Williams, John Aplin,

Emrys Thomas and Bob Edwards with John McNair as secretary and James Carmichael.²¹

Whilst the committee was considering matters the party was actively debating the re-affiliation question. However, the conduct of the debate was very different to the disaffiliation debates in 1932. In part, this was because the party was much smaller and of course there were significant differences in what was at stake in 1938/9.²² In addition the party leadership consciously decided to try to calm discussion. After a strongly worded letter against re-affiliation in *New Leader* from the Birmingham Quaker Joseph Southall, one of the leading advocates of disaffiliation in 1932, it was decided not to print any correspondence about the issue in the Party's weekly journal. Instead debate was restricted to the lower circulation and less frequently published discussion magazine *Controversy*. Extended debates with long and heated exchanges across the country were not possible in such a format, making the tone of the printed debate considerably less sharp than had been the case six years earlier.²³

There were certain common premises, which were held across the re-affiliation debate divide. Most importantly there was widespread agreement about the need for 'class' based, 'revolutionary' politics. However, as Brockway had pointed out in 1938, as in the 1932 debates, the mere adoption of a 'revolutionary line' did not immediately decide the correct attitude to take towards the Labour Party. The case for re-affiliation, in its most elemental form, was that with the rise of fascism a united working class movement was essential:

In the existing world situation- with the dangers we all know- can we afford the I.L.P.- except as independent fighting socialists in the Labour Party- now?²⁴

In other words in the late 1930s there was little choice but to affiliate to the Labour Party to help promote a Workers' Front from within the larger party:

A few thousand disciplined clear Socialists can exert a world of influence, can popularise the Workers' Front against the Eden Front. *That is the job of a revolutionary party inside the Labour Party...*The essential conclusion remains inescapable: the I.L.P. must re-affiliate to the Labour Party.²⁵

However, as both sides of the dispute were committed to the Workers' Front the real crux of the re-affiliation case was that the I.L.P. was isolated outside the Labour Party.²⁶

After the 1931 catastrophe we made the mistake of leaving the Labour Party voluntarily. So naturally the workers concluded we were people who liked to be isolated. We should have stayed inside until we were chucked out- then it would have been clear where the responsibility lay.... The result of our isolation will be- a Popular Front.²⁷

Those opposed to re-affiliation suggested it was futile to look only at the current situation to guide their attitude towards the Labour Party. Instead they suggested that, as a revolutionary party, it was necessary to consider the future:

A revolutionary party can never hope to obtain a party of a broad, *popular* mass character in a pre-revolutionary period... we should be equally isolated inside the Labour Party as we are outside it.²⁸

In addition they argued, from the experience of the Socialist League, that they would not be able to operate effectively inside the Labour Party. Further, it was suggested, recalling the struggles of the early Labour movement, that the experience of isolation was far from unique to the I.L.P.:

Keir Hardie spent his entire political life "splitting the workers' vote," trying to wean the workers from faith in "the mass workers' party" He did not always secure one-eighth of the total poll when he contested elections. Staunch Radical-Socialists hated him bitterly. And he died with the workers still strongly loyal to the massive Liberal Party.... Patience is the first virtue of a revolutionary. We are rather impatient if we are disappointed to find "the masses" have not yet decided to follow us.²⁹

Further, not all members had the same assessment of the party's 'isolation' from the Labour movement. Indeed, James Carmichael, chairman of the Scottish Division, argued that the experience of disaffiliation had allowed the I.L.P. to develop its political position to such an extent that in terms of its policy and potential position within the Labour Movement, it was in a much stronger position in 1937 than it had been in at the point of disaffiliation:

Before the I.L.P. disaffiliated in 1932 it was being slowly but surely crushed within an organisation that was limited politically to a very indifferent and indecisive struggle for Parliamentarism... The I.L.P. today occupies a stronger position than when it left the Labour Party. In 1932 it was wedged between the reformism of the Labour Party and the ultra-revolutionary policy of the Communist Party. It survived largely on tradition... To-day it stands out as the only truly revolutionary party.³⁰

Concerns over standing orders and the dictatorial machinery of the Labour Party were also prevalent in the debate. Fred Jowett, who had stressed the importance of standing orders both in 1932 and in the intervening period, was the most vocal of those who placed stress on the structure of the Labour Party in arguing for continued independence. However, Jowett was not alone and talk of the Labour Party dictatorship was a frequent refrain during the disaffiliation debates.³¹ That such a position was held consistently by a significant number of I.L.P. activists through the period from 1932 is testimony to the importance of the disciplinary structure of the Labour Party as a factor in the separation of the two bodies. However, there was a suspicion from those who did not follow this logic that the standing orders argument was held to by those who were

not afraid of a 'pure but impotent' stance. Such fears were heightened by the contributions of some leading advocates of independence, whose evangelical zeal for purity outside the Labour Party outweighed any practical argument:

No, the true object of disaffiliation was to preserve the life of the one Socialist party which although small in numbers, should be strong in thought and steadfast in principle. Our aim now must be to keep out of the strangling tentacles of the Labour-Imperialist octopus, and to maintain the democratic influence of the branches over our Annual Conference. Our strength is not in numbers, but in mind and heart.³²

Thus, there was a divide between those who saw a future for the I.L.P. as a coherent left wing force within the Labour Party and those who argued that the party would be most effective, perhaps in the longer term, by continuing outside the larger organisation. In the aftermath of the 1938 conference and the ensuing negotiations, although the standing orders question was frequently raised, none of the four I.L.P. MPs whom it would directly affect took up the cause and without their backing the anti-reaffiliation argument appeared rather marginal. The central issue was the question of the best tactic for a party which, in contrast to the earlier years of the decade, believed itself to be an organised, disciplined, revolutionary organisation.

After looking at the various possibilities the N.A.C.-appointed committee on reaffiliation reported their conclusions to conference. They suggested that the I.L.P. as an organisation should continue its independent existence, but that individual members should be encouraged to join the Labour Party. Bob Edwards presented this idea to the I.L.P.'s 1939 conference, suggesting that it was the only real possibility. The committee, he pointed out, had representatives of both those who suggested continued independence and those who wanted reaffiliation. Yet they had, he claimed, reached unanimity 'because they were practical men who faced the issues squarely.'

The main issue for the workers of this country was to get rid of the National Government and substitute for it a Labour Government. How could the ILP assist in that process The unanimous opinion of the committee was that the best assistance would be through work within the Labour Party. It was time the membership was sent into the Labour Party to fulfil its revolutionary destiny.

Brockway wound up the debate with a considered, but far from stirring defence of the Committee report, arguing that its suggestion would allow I.L.P.ers to work within the 'mass movement' if affiliation were not possible. However, despite Edwards's confidence, support from the majority of the N.A.C. and Maxton's assertion that the Party was equally divided on the report, few were prepared to speak in favour of its conclusions.

Indeed, even John Aplin, a member of the committee chaired by Edwards, by the time of the conference had changed his mind to oppose the committee report. He had been prepared to sign the report, believing that the I.L.P. could act 'effectively as a united revolutionary force within the Labour Party.' However, the Parliamentary Group's actions over Munich, which Aplin had been extremely forthright in criticising, had 'disillusioned him as to the ILP's ability to act as a revolutionary party united on principle.' Further, the committee made no attempt to deal with the fact that their suggestion of dual membership had been ruled out by the Labour Party when they had decided in 1935 to proscribe the I.L.P.

These arguments for continued independence received a large measure of support, in particular from Scotland, the largest division. For example Lachlan McQuarrie of the Scottish Divisional Council vehemently urged independence whilst David Gibson, the newly elected N.A.C. representative for Scotland, speaking for the Alexandria Branch called for the termination of negotiations with the Labour Party. Gibson ridiculed the idea that going back into the Labour Party would bring an influx of new members into the I.L.P., maintaining that the failures of the party were due to the lack of activity by the party during the seven years since disaffiliation. Those who desired reaffiliation, he suggested 'were prepared to let the I.L.P. fail the working class by lining them up behind National Unity' with the Labour Party 'more bureaucratic and reactionary than ever.'

In this attack on the Labour Party he was joined by Jennie Lee, who argued that the Labour Party was on the point of disintegration, 'lining the workers up behind the Government for War.' Thus, she suggested it was exactly the wrong moment to 'consider going inside.' Further she pointed out that 'once inside the bloc vote will ensure defeat for whatever we say.' She concluded with a strident defence of continued independence for the Party:

We don't accept their policy, we don't respect their leadership and if we can hold out a little longer we shall find our allies coming to us from many quarters.

However, Brockway later suggested that it was the veteran Fred Jowett, 'old and frail after years of struggle in the working-class movement', who made the most influential argument for continued independence. Building on the general warmth with which he

was greeted he maintained that the I.L.P. needed the freedom to pursue its own policy, especially during War:

Then the I.L.P. was able to propagate and stand by its point of view. That is all changed and every candidate for Parliament is required to promise on the dotted line that he will never vote against the Labour Party. The ILP would be hampering itself at the outset of a world crisis if it allows itself to be associated with the reactionary policies of Transport House.

Despite this considerable support for maintaining the independence of the I.L.P. the majority of contributions came from those who were advocating a return to the Labour Party. The driving force of the affiliationist case was the isolation of the Party; outside the Labour Party, they suggested, the I.L.P. had limited influence, inside, the Party would have a chance to give a definite lead to the working class. As Tom Taylor, the former Glasgow Councillor and Co-operative activist put it:

the justification of the existence of the ILP was its ability to retard the steady progress towards war in the country. In his opinion it had no influence in that direction. While he agreed that the Labour Party was more reactionary than ever there was no guarantee that the workers would swing towards the ILP in any crisis. The fate of the workers was bound up with the fate of the Labour Party and the tendency if the ILP remained outside was for it to become a second SPGB.

The attack on the isolation of the I.L.P. was continued by another of the Glasgow Councillors, James Carmichael, who had changed his position from the previous year, two leading members of the Norwich Branch, Reg Spraggins and Arthur South, and Maurice Lechstein of the Welsh Divisional Council. In addition a number of other arguments were advanced for re-affiliation. Members from Wales and Derby, both areas where the Party had suffered considerable setbacks, argued that their local experience was sufficient to suggest re-affiliation, although this was countered by Frank Stone, chairman of Yarmouth Trades Council, where the Party was making progress at municipal level, who suggested that his local experience pointed to continued independence. Further, the Trotskyist E. Patterson gave a spirited pro-affiliationist speech, directly contrary to his equally fervent position the year before. He attributed his change in line to the Parliamentary Group's actions over Munich, sharing Aplin's view that it demonstrated that the I.L.P. did not have the potential to develop into a revolutionary party, but drew the opposite, affiliationist, conclusion.

The voting was close, reflecting the deep divisions within the party over its relationship with the Labour Party. The possibility of attempting affiliation without any conditions was considered first, but was defeated by a vote of 63 to 45. Then the committee report was considered and rejected by 68 to 42. This left a simple decision between seeking

affiliation to the Labour Party if suitable conditions could be agreed upon as against retaining the party as a completely independent body. In moves reminiscent of the decision at the Blackpool conference seven years earlier the vote, by 69-40, went in favour of conditional affiliation.³³

Superficially the I.L.P.'s position with respect to the Labour Party in April 1939 was identical to the position seven years earlier. The challenge for those I.L.P.ers who sought to be affiliated to the Labour Party was to find 'conditions' which both organisations would find acceptable. However, the attitude of the leadership of the party had changed significantly between 1932 and 1939. The Parliamentary Group was in favour of re-affiliation; Campbell Stephen and John McGovern had been outspoken in their support of re-affiliation whilst George Buchanan decided unilaterally to rejoin the Labour Party following the Scarborough Conference's equivocation on re-affiliation.³⁴ Even Maxton, who often appeared the most strident of isolationists, supported moves towards re-affiliation.³⁵

On the N.A.C. opposition to re-affiliation was led by Fred Jowett and C.A. Smith, who became party chairman in 1939. Initially Bob Edwards supported Jowett and Smith. However, following Edwards's involvement in the committee reporting to the Scarborough Conference he became increasingly a supporter of re-affiliation. Against this, in 1939 the strongly anti-affiliationist David Gibson replaced the pro-affiliationist John McGovern as the Scottish representative on the N.A.C. to bring the number of those arguing for continued independence back up to three. Nevertheless, the N.A.C. did move towards a position of support for re-affiliation as Brockway led those who had been ambivalent about the proposition towards more explicit support for rejoining the Labour Party. It was this increasing support for re-affiliation from the N.A.C. that meant the prospects for finding a settlement in 1939 were much greater than in 1932.

Following the 1939 conference the N.A.C. attempted to gain further clarification from the Labour Party N.E.C. on the questions of organisational independence, Standing Orders and International Affiliation. The I.L.P. was seeking some reassurance from the Labour Party that it would be able to retain its own propaganda and organisational machine that its MPs would have the right to abstain in Parliament if they opposed the official Labour Party line and that they would be able to maintain their affiliation to the International Bureau.³⁶ This was clearly a much less demanding set of conditions than

the I.L.P. had insisted upon in 1932, in particular the MPs were asking for the right to abstain in votes, which was in any case allowed by the standing orders of the PLP. On the organisational issues the I.L.P. requirements were no more liberal than they had always been allowed. The question of international affiliation held the most potential for disruption of the re-affiliation process. However, the Labour Party had stated during the 1938 negotiations that it would allow re-affiliation on the same terms which the I.L.P. had previously been affiliated and the Party's connection with the International Bureau predated disaffiliation. The Labour Party had no interest in further negotiations. It felt that its conditions had been laid out clearly the year before. The I.L.P. would have to accept the conditions obtaining prior to its disaffiliation if it wanted to return to the Labour Party. The only further comment was on the thorny question of international affiliation where the larger organisation expressed its scepticism over the I.L.P.'s desire to maintain affiliation to the International Bureau, although it stressed that 'there is no intention or disposition to create or encourage difficulties in this direction'³⁷ The N.A.C. faced a stark choice: there was no possibility of moving the Labour Party towards a more sympathetic position. The choice was between accepting a set of conditions which the N.E.C. had placed on the table in 1938 and rejecting re-affiliation.

The Party was relatively evenly split over the question of re-affiliation; although Scotland and London both supported continued independence, there was strong support for re-affiliation from Lancashire, South Wales, the Midlands, and the increasingly important East Anglian division. The N.A.C. met on 5 August and decided to give a lead to the Party recommending re-affiliation and calling a special conference for 17 September. With the party so divided an N.A.C. lead would likely have been decisive in convincing the vast majority of those who had supported conditional affiliation at Scarborough to vote for re-affiliation. The decision seemed to make re-affiliation inevitable. It was not. War was declared on 3 September and the N.A.C. suspended the conference, taking the view that 'under present War circumstances it is not desirable that the Party should apply for re-affiliation to the Labour Party.'³⁸

8.3 Relations with the Co-operative Movement

The I.L.P. had a long history of relations with the co-operative movement.³⁹ However, the disaffiliation decision required party members to refrain from activity within the co-operative movement where this involved any level of support for the Co-operative Party. This caused problems, especially in London and Scotland, the two areas of

greatest I.L.P. strength within the co-operative movement. These could only be resolved by an I.L.P. retreat.

As a result of the hostility between the Co-operative movement and the I.L.P. in the wake of the disaffiliation decision, in December 1934 the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society (SCWS) changed its rules to restrict time off with pay to those on public duties who accepted the policy of the Co-operative Political Party. The move was explicitly to prevent pay being given to I.L.P.er Tom Taylor, later President of the SCWS, who in November had been elected as councillor in the Glasgow City Council seat of Dalmarnock.⁴⁰ The I.L.P. complained that this action of the Co-operative Society was more punitive than even that of the capitalists, pointing to the example of A.E. Nicholls in Norwich. When he had been elected as the third I.L.P. member of the Norwich Council his employers, Colman's, the mustard manufacturer, had decided to maintain their practice of paying full wages to employees elected to a public body.⁴¹ This strengthened the Party's resolve to sort matters out with a decision in their favour.

Thus, in June 1935 an I.L.P. delegation consisting of Maxton, Buchanan, Heenan and Carmichael met with Neil Beaton, Davidson and Cameron of the SCWS to discuss the situation. The I.L.P. felt the results of the meeting were promising as they understood the motivation behind the SCWS policy to be that candidates who would damage the Society should not be paid to act in this way. In order to remove any such doubts about himself, Taylor sent a letter to the board of the SCWS. The intention was to make clear that as long as he was serving on the Glasgow Corporation he would uphold the principles of the Co-operative Movement. However, the directors rejected his letter and made it clear that they would not consider anything other than a signed acceptance of the policy and programme of the Co-operative Party. This was a blow to the I.L.P., but it was even more annoying given the fact that such a document was virtually worthless. One of the directors, who was a Liberal, had signed the document and therefore was allowed to remain a member of his local authority whilst being paid for his time off.⁴² After considerations, which revolved around Taylor's case, the Party decided to make further concessions to the demands of the Co-operative movement and permit the signing of a declaration of loyalty to the Co-operative Party and an acceptance of its constitution.⁴³

A similar dynamic was visible in London where after disaffiliation the Co-operative Society decided that all the Co-operative Political councils would expel all members who opposed the Labour Party.⁴⁴ This decision had an impact on a number of I.L.P.ers including Jack Alderson, who lost his place on the London Co-operative Society Political Committee in 1933.⁴⁵ However, after the situation in Scotland had been resolved and after C.A. Smith had raised the issue in 1935, Jack Hammond, the London ILP industrial organiser, was elected on to the London Co-operative Political Committee after accepting the Co-operative Party's conditions.⁴⁶

Outside of London and Scotland there was a weaker, but often less troubled connection between the I.L.P. and the Co-operative movement. For example Marjorie Plumb of Eastbourne was also involved at national level with the women's co-operative movement.⁴⁷ In Cleator Moor J. R. Pritt, the secretary of Arlecdon I.L.P., was elected to the management committee of Cleator Moor Co-operative Society ahead of three failed Labour Party nominees.⁴⁸ Similarly in Nottingham and Derby the I.L.P. had an important presence within the Co-operative Movement. In Southampton Gilbert White had obtained a very high profile in the Co-operative movement.⁴⁹ The July 1938 meeting on the Peace Alliance in Scarborough was attended by six members of the I.L.P. who were organised prior to the conference through the Industrial committee and, it was claimed, worked as an effective team as a result.⁵⁰

Thus, the ILP had an ongoing if troubled relationship with the Co-operative movement. The conflicts of the early years after disaffiliation in the centres of London and Glasgow were ironed out largely by the Party's retreat from its earlier more confrontational position. However, the problematic relationship in these areas was not repeated everywhere and the Party could frequently obtain considerable influence within individual co-operative societies. However, the message from the troubles was clear, conflict between the co-operative movement and the ILP would only be resolved by the Party changing to a more compliant strategy.

8.4 The I.L.P. and the Trade Unions

The relationship between the I.L.P. and the Trade Unions during the 1920s and even more during the 1930s remains little studied. In part this stems from the troubled nature of the relationship, yet a systematic examination of the role of the Party in the Trade

Union movement reveals much about both the I.L.P. and the Industrial wing of the Labour movement.

In the years before disaffiliation the I.L.P. had relatively limited influence within the Unions. Disaffiliation had worsened the situation in three main ways. First, as with local councillors and those in other positions of authority, trade union officials were far more likely to remain with the Labour Party than the rank-and-file membership. Second, the massive disruption of losing so many influential members left I.L.P. leaders with relatively little co-ordination of its industrial activity. Finally, the Party had very little in the way of a considered policy towards trade unionism. On top of these, perhaps inevitable, problems of disaffiliation the Party chose to add another. The Bradford Conference voted that I.L.P. members within Trade Unions 'must cease to contribute a political levy to the Labour Party and should seek to allocate it to the I.L.P.'⁵¹ To extricate itself from this difficult position the party needed to develop its industrial policy, increase its co-ordination of industrial activity and to make sure that party members were much more involved in industrial activity. Developments over the period to 1939 showed progress in each of these areas and by the end of the decade the Party had a considerable industrial profile including members on the executives of twelve unions, a more considered industrial policy and a developing industrial strategy and organisation.

8.5 Industrial Policy

At the time of disaffiliation the I.L.P. had little in the way of a considered industrial policy. Indeed, some leading members including Maxton were completely disillusioned with the whole operation of the Trade Union movement. The 'new revolutionary policy' of 1933, with its stress on Workers' Councils, did little to clarify the Party's position in the industrial sphere. Some interpreted Workers' Councils as a completely alternative focus for industrial activity, whilst others simply saw Workers' Councils as a minor adjunct to the Unions. There was little within the detail of the new revolutionary policy statement that would allow a decision between interpretations.⁵² Indeed what little emphasis there was on industrial policy in the immediate period after disaffiliation came in the consideration of the practical problems of the Trade Union movement, most notably on the question of dual unionism in the Lanarkshire coalfield⁵³

However, as the gaps in the Party's industrial policy became increasingly evident the I.L.P. made a conscious effort to clarify its thinking. The leading figure in these considerations was Tom Stephenson, whose prominence in the Cumberland Miners' Association meant he was the only N.A.C. member with significant union connections. In an effort to redirect the party's thinking on Trade Union questions away from a focus on Workers' Councils he presented his detailed thoughts on industrial policy at the I.L.P. summer school in August 1934. He drew a contrast between his view of the reality of the working class movement, which was strongest in the industrial sphere, and the concentration of the I.L.P. on electoral work. He argued that the I.L.P.'s role was to transform the Unions from mere bargaining organisations into democratic revolutionary organisations. This, he suggested, would require Party members to attempt to destroy the Union's sectional basis, making them into class organisations. The short term priority would thus be to amalgamate unions within industries and to provide better union based support for the unemployed. In the longer term the aim should be to establish factory organisations on the lines of building up Workers' Committees in each factory in preparation for a general strike.⁵⁴

A number of similar points were made by young Perth I.L.P.er, William Ballantine, who was elected onto the NUR executive in 1937. His analysis of the situation accepted much of the I.L.P. criticism of Trade Unions. He was happy with the idea that 'Trade Union theory needs to be worked out anew following 1926 and 1929-31' and argued that the 'Trade Union movement is still marching under the banner of planned capitalism,' which 'despite Socialist phrases is more likely to lead to the Corporate State than Socialism.' He also re-enforced the Party's opposition to unofficial and minority movements as 'the average Trade Unionist has this sense of loyalty strongly developed and resents group organisation.' Thus, he argued that 'unofficial movements cannot retain the necessary atmosphere of loyalty to the organisation.' However, his main point was to stress the need for the left to make progress at local level not so much by criticism of leadership but by demonstration 'of Trade Union enthusiasm by slogging work.' He also pointed to the need for militants to 'select "men of character" as a rank-and-file member elected to the executive begins to move in different circles and often succumbs to temptation.' Thus, the method of progress for 'the left', which Ballantine attempted to institute in his own activity in the NUR in the 1930s was to 'work through the Constitution of the Union and demand democracy within it.'⁵⁵

At National level the Party was highly critical of the Union movement. The 1937 I.L.P. conference strongly attacked the 'class collaboration' of the TUC's 'Peace in Industry' policy, arguing that:

In the present critical situation only uncompromising working-class solidarity against the ruling and employing class can be effective in carrying forward the demands and policy of the working class.⁵⁶

Indeed, in January 1938 John Aplin, the I.L.P.'s National Industrial Officer felt the conduct of Union leaders compelled him to address the question 'Should Workers Join a Trade Union?'⁵⁷ Despite answering in the affirmative it was clear that there was considerable tension between the Party and the Union movement. This was further exemplified by the Industrial Policy agreed at the 1938 I.L.P. annual conference. The policy stressed the importance of the 1937 bus strikes, engineering struggles and railway crisis and developed an overall theme of 'class struggle,' emphasising 'the inescapable fact that militant working-class organisation is the only reply that the workers possess to ruling-class exploitation.' Thus, the Party called for Trade Unions to 'terminate all undertakings and agreements with the employers which prevent effective and speedy action by the workers.'⁵⁸ The conference also saw the Party reaffirm its support for industrial against craft unions, which was supplemented by an amendment arguing for the necessity of shop stewards and Workers' Councils as a first step from craft Unions to Industrial Unions. Thus, the stress throughout the I.L.P.'s Trade Union policy was on the failings and limitations of the trade union structures and leadership.

The I.L.P.'s industrial policy which had been virtually non-existent in 1932 saw significant developments over the period to 1939. The 'new revolutionary policy' of 1933 had potentially posed a considerable threat to an emphasis on Trade Union work. The criticisms of the Trade Union leadership implicit in this interpretation of the new policy were widely accepted. However, those most committed to Trade Union activism were able to present influential arguments in favour of developing the party's union profile. By 1937-9 trade union activities were again a regular feature of the I.L.P.'s political agenda, with discussion largely driven by influential union activists such as Tom Stephenson and William Ballantine. However, the I.L.P.'s problems could not be solved by policy changes alone.

8.6 Industrial Co-ordination

The initial industrial problems of the disaffiliated I.L.P. were exacerbated by the fact that the I.L.P.'s national leadership had virtually no detailed information about I.L.P.

activity in the Trade Unions. It thus became a priority for the Party to obtain such information. Towards the end of 1934 the N.A.C. began attempts to obtain information regarding the Trade Union and Co-operative membership of Party members. Events surrounding the 'Black Circular' brought a wave of increased uncertainty concerning Union activity which the N.A.C. conceded that the Party machinery was inadequate to deal with. One aim of the I.L.P.'s 1935 conference was to rectify this situation.⁵⁹ The Party appointed a National Co-ordinator of Industrial Activity, Trevor Davies of the Welsh I.L.P., and attempted to establish an Industrial Committee and an Industrial Officer in every division.⁶⁰

By August 1935 the process of organising Industrial Committees was underway in most divisions. London, which had been arranged prior to the 1935 conference, was the most orderly having a full Industrial Organiser and Secretary in place and a provisional register of union membership. In the North-East, Yorkshire and the South-West structures were being put in place whilst in Trevor Davies' own Welsh Division a register of Union members had been obtained prior to the 1935 Conference. Elsewhere progress was slow, particularly in the I.L.P.'s largest area Scotland where the Party lagged behind every other division and had not even begun the process of determining its Union and Co-operative membership.⁶¹

By the 1936 Annual Conference, despite the fact that only about 10 per cent of branches had sent in any information on trade union membership, some progress had been made. For example, there had been a definite increase in the industrial coverage within *New Leader*.⁶² The register of Trade Union membership, although limited in coverage, was well advanced in some divisions and the I.L.P. had been actively seeking to work with other 'left' delegates at Trade Union Congress and the National Conference of Trades Councils. In particular they claimed to have worked together with the Communist Party against the 'Black Circular'.⁶³ However, I.L.P. influence within the Union movement remained limited. The Party received only one positive response to a request for information about I.L.P. delegates to the 1935 TUC.⁶⁴

These points were reaffirmed at the Keighley conference where further decisions were taken to assist with systematising the Party's industrial activity.⁶⁵ As a result of the 1936 decisions the Party's National Industrial Committee was established on May 2 1936 initially comprising Tom Stephenson, Jim Davies, Wilfred Young, John Aplin, Trevor

Davies (*New Leader's* Industrial Editor), and Jack Hammond.⁶⁶ By November of that year the committee claimed to have stimulated co-ordinated industrial activity, and with the assistance of Ernie Patterson, had initiated a regular industrial feature in the *New Leader*.⁶⁷ By July 1938 industrial organisation committees had been set in Glasgow and Manchester and Divisional industrial officers had been nominated in Yorkshire, South Wales and London.⁶⁸ Also the Party succeeded in giving some degree of organisation to its members in a range of unions. The Industrial Committee was especially optimistic about the Party position in the Transport and Engineering industries but Party groups were established in a number of unions that went beyond these sectors.⁶⁹ Although the situation was still far from perfect at the end of the 1930s there had been a definite increase in co-ordination and organisation of I.L.P. industrial activity by the outbreak of the Second World War.⁷⁰ Yet the most important question remained the level of actual I.L.P. influence within the Trade Unions.

8.7 Industrial Activity

At national level the I.L.P.'s industrial influence remained limited throughout the 1930s. In 1935 the party was aware of only one delegate to the TUC and the following year this had only increased to two, although one of the I.L.P.ers came from the Litho Workers' Union where the left wing faction was largely under I.L.P. control. In 1936 the I.L.P.ers were, according to Party sources, 'lost in a sea of reaction'.⁷¹ In 1938 the situation was only slightly improved, according to Bob Edwards's report of the 1938 TUC 'The decisions of this Congress were tragically reactionary and completely bankrupt of leadership on all the major issues affecting the working class movement.' With the Communist Party supporting a Popular Front, pro-League of Nations line the I.L.P., led by the 22 year old NUDAW delegate Walter Padley, was isolated in its opposition to the 1935 policy of collective security and military action against aggression. The complaint of the I.L.P. was the lack of real democracy at the TUC. As Edwards put it 'the voice of the rank and file, in the workshop and in the branches, is buried under the weight of a steam roller that grinds out mechanical decisions.'⁷²

At the Scottish TUC, where there were a few more I.L.P. delegates, the party had greater input. I.L.P. activity at the STUC was led by Tom Taylor, the young Glasgow councillor and representative of the National Union of Clerks. At the 1935 Scottish TUC, Taylor moved a resolution on war based on I.L.P. policy. The motion was defeated by 103 votes to 22, but it was significant that the I.L.P., under the leadership of

Tom Taylor, were advancing their own policy and not simply backing the Communist line. This point was not lost on Arthur Woodburn, who in his fraternal greetings to the congress on behalf of the Scottish Labour Party, strongly attacked the I.L.P.⁷³ The I.L.P.'s prominence within the left wing of the Scottish T.U.C. was re-enforced at the 1936 St. Andrews Scottish T.U.C. The left wing was led by the I.L.P. in the debate on the Abyssinian War, in opposition to the TUC's support for rearmament, and calling for an end to class collaboration.⁷⁴ The I.L.P. found itself in a similar minority with its anti-class collaboration line at other Scottish TUC conferences. For example in 1938 at the STUC, where there were seven I.L.P.ers acting as delegates, after the T&GWU withdrew their resolution in favour of Independent Working Class action against war it was left to the I.L.P., again led by Tom Taylor, to present such a case whilst the STUC establishment, supported by Communist representatives argued for the League of Nations line.⁷⁵ Despite vocal opposition the I.L.P. was able to have little influence within either the TUC or the STUC.

Despite this isolation at national level in both England and Wales and Scotland, the Party continued its work within individual unions and at local level, and over the 1930s managed to obtain some influence. The Party made advances within three of the largest unions, the MFGB, the NUR and NUDAW, and also managed to advance its position within a number of medium sized and smaller unions such as the National Union of Clerks and the Chemical Workers Union. However, the Party had to contend with waning influence within both the Patternmakers and NAFTA and with sustained hostility from some unions, most notably the General and Municipal Workers Union.⁷⁶

N.U.D.A.W. was the largest union with branches directly represented at its annual delegate meeting. Perhaps as a result it had a reputation for a wide diversity of views being expressed at conferences. One important component of the opinions which made an impact at the Union was the I.L.P.⁷⁷ From the 1933 N.U.D.A.W. conference Fernyhough, then secretary of the Audley (North Stafford) I.L.P. and later full time N.U.D.A.W. official in Norwich and subsequently a Labour MP, had put the I.L.P. case. In 1933 he had succeeded in ensuring the passing of a resolution against the injustices of the Anomalies Act, which had come to symbolise the I.L.P.-Labour split pre-1931.⁷⁸ In 1935, as secretary of the Butt Lane (Stoke-on-Trent) N.U.D.A.W. he had again represented the changing policy of the I.L.P., this time working in tandem with Communists and other left wingers.⁷⁹ The union leadership was clearly worried about

this I.L.P. influence; the N.U.D.A.W. executive used part of its annual report to launch an attack on the Party.⁸⁰

After 1937, Walter Padley, later general secretary of USDAW, was sent as one of the Union's delegates to the TUC. However, the influence of the Party went deeper in the union and a number of other NUDAW members were able to obtain influential positions. Others also increased their influence such as Gilbert Hunter of Dartford I.L.P., who became an increasingly important speaker at NUDAW conferences, perhaps most importantly at the 1938 conference where he led the significant anti-Peace Alliance minority.⁸¹ However, there was still considerable hostility towards the I.L.P. within the Union leadership. Allegations about the financial irregularities between the I.L.P. and the Labour Party in the final years of affiliation continued to be made by leading members of the union in order to weaken the position of the I.L.P. in NUDAW.⁸² At the same time in some localities the union was attempting to crack down on the influence of the I.L.P., for example preventing those who refused to accept the Labour Party Constitution from taking on official posts in Aberdeen.⁸³

The National Union of Railwaymen, despite a significant militant section within its membership, had a right-wing leadership complemented by some tradition of C.P. initiatives.⁸⁴ The I.L.P. established an industrial group with David Gibson, the Glasgow Councillor acting as group secretary. However, despite efforts in January 1937 the group was forced to concede that it was disappointed with the response received from members within the NUR and admitted that only a small number had signed up.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the group continued to operate and in September 1937, supported by the N.A.C., it held a fairly well attended meeting at which members were circulated with programme adopted by the NUR group. The programme analysed the negotiations between the different unions and railway companies and called for 'One Programme for All Railway Workers'. The outcome of the group's discussion was endorsed by the N.A.C. and released as a leaflet by the Industrial Committee.⁸⁶ This leaflet was then followed up by further activity by the group which resulted in the release of a pamphlet *Railwaymen Unite!* which, by the I.L.P. conference of the following year, had sold over 4000 copies.⁸⁷

The activity on the ground was accompanied by the election of I.L.P.er William Ballantine to the executive of the NUR. Ballantine, originally of Perth No. 2

NUR, worked his way up within his locality and in October 1936 was elected to the Executive Committee of NUR representing the Loco. Group, Area No. 1.⁸⁸ Within the Union he represented an important section of the left which was militant but clearly not under the direct influence of the Communist Party. On the executive he formed an important part of a strong left wing, and was influential on a number of issues as when he moved a resolution against the handling of Japanese Goods in February 1938, which resulted in an equally split vote.⁸⁹ Ballantine remained committed to the I.L.P. and a militant left-wing agenda including promoting strikes over issues such as minimum wages and holiday deals.⁹⁰

Whilst Ballantine was the most influential I.L.P.er within the NUR during his time on the executive, his influence did not end when he retired after his three years of service in 1940. He remained an active member of the union; in the short term he was elected as one of the NUR delegation to the Scottish TUC in 1941, whilst in the longer term he rose to become Assistant General Secretary of the Union in October 1958. Further, other I.L.P.ers were capable of being elected to official positions even if they were not on the executive committee. For example James Barrie of Govanhill I.L.P. was elected to the executive of the approved section of the NUR just as Ballantine was stepping down.⁹¹

The Miners' Federation of Great Britain had a militant reputation especially in some coalfields. Although severely weakened in the aftermath of the General Strike, the second half of the 1930s saw a significant rise in militant activity with the stay-down strikes and the struggle against company unionism. The federal structure of the union further gave the space in which diverse and frequently militant political agendas could develop.⁹² Within the MFGB I.L.P. influence was more limited than in either the NUR or NUDAW. In South Wales there were pockets where I.L.P.ers had managed to obtain significant influence. In Merthyr there was a significant I.L.P. input, especially in the unemployed miners lodge where I.L.P.er W.E. Rowlands was chairman and was able to obtain the support of the executive of the SWMF after being excluded from the Merthyr Trades and Labour Council in the wake of the 'Black Circular.'⁹³ The I.L.P. was also influential within the Nine Mile Point lodge, where Jack Marsden, with support from a number of other I.L.P.ers had become chairman. However, I.L.P. influence within the wider SWMF was severely limited. Marsden was easily defeated when he stood as Vice-President of the SWMF and when relations between the I.L.P. and the Communist

Party deteriorated during the Spanish Civil War and the I.L.P. criticised the Federation for its Popular Front line the I.L.P. found itself further marginalised from the mainstream of the Federation.⁹⁴

Only in Cumberland, under the leadership of Tom Stephenson, did the I.L.P. achieve a really high profile within the MFGB. There the I.L.P. had built up a significant base initially within the Walkmill Colliery at Morseby, where I.L.P.er John Carvill was secretary of the miners' lodge and Stephenson was checkweighman and union delegate. In March 1934 Stephenson and fellow I.L.P.er and Walkmill MFGB activist J. Bell were elected to two seats on the RDC against Labour opposition.⁹⁵ During the mid-1930s Stephenson had been heavily involved in organising the unemployed in action against the Government. Although performing poorly as I.L.P. candidate in the 1935 General Election his personal credibility appears not to have been damaged and in May 1937 he was elected as Financial Secretary of the Cumberland Miners' Association.⁹⁶ Subsequently he was active along with other I.L.P.ers in connection with a strike affecting over 800 miners at the Walkmill Colliery.⁹⁷ He also organised the major victory of the CMA during the 1930s when they obtained holidays with pay in 1938.⁹⁸

Within other large unions I.L.P.ers attempted to put across the Party's position at both national and local level. For example the I.L.P. was active in calling factional meetings at AEU conferences and moving resolutions against both the leadership and the Communist Party. However, despite the work of members such as J.C. Clockey of Glasgow, A. Messnan of Kirkdale and W. Wilkinson of Derby at the AEU national committee, their attempts to be elected to national positions or have their resolutions accepted by the committee were always thwarted.⁹⁹ Outside of NUDAW, NUR and the MFGB the I.L.P. had relatively little direct impact on national policy of the large unions.

I.L.P.ers were more frequently able to obtain positions of influence within medium and smaller unions, such as the NUC, the Post Office Workers, N.A.F.T.A. and the Patternmakers. For example, within Glasgow and the wider Scottish N.U.C. there was significant support for the I.L.P. Thus the Glasgow food branch of the N.U.C., the largest branch in Scotland, had passed a resolution urging the support of all Trade Unionists for the I.L.P. candidate at the 1934 Pollockshaws by-election in Glasgow. That decision aroused considerable opposition from the Glasgow BLP, who referred it

to the Scottish N.U.C. General Council. The latter body, despite the appeal of Scottish TUC General Secretary, refused to disassociate itself from the actions of the branch.¹⁰⁰

This I.L.P. influence within the Scottish N.U.C. was an important element within the left wing of the National Union of Clerks, which was increasingly evident at its 1934 conference. That event held in Buxton saw an unsuccessful but significant left wing, which represented roughly one third of the conference votes, for such measures as affiliation to the British Anti-War movement and opposition to the Sedition Bill.¹⁰¹ The following year the militant section of the union made further significant strides forward. The conference voted to condemn the black circular and elected a member of its left wing, as a delegate to the TUC along with the General Secretary. Hardcastle of Bristol I.L.P. stood against Elger of the Scottish TUC for the post of General Secretary and was defeated by a margin of 4,202 to 3,321.¹⁰² By 1937 two I.L.P.ers were able to obtain positions on the executive of the National Union of Clerks, Harry Nutt and Comrade Hardcastle, a position which reflected considerable strength within the Union. In particular there was considerable support for the I.L.P. from within the NUC based on sections of the co-operative society in Scotland.¹⁰³

I.L.P.ers were also gaining some prominence within other unions, for example within the Post Office Workers' Union I.L.P.ers remained active through the decade and were influential in presenting Guild Socialist and workers' control ideas in the union context. J. Allen Skinner, the I.L.P.'s London N.A.C. representative and chairman of the London Divisional Council had been a leading figure in the union. He was full-time assistant to the mainstream Labour MP George Middleton, a deeply religious man, during the latter's editorship of the union's journal, the *Post*. Then in 1931 when Middleton resigned there was considerable support from Union branches for Skinner to take over, but it was decided that as an employee of the Union he could not stand. Instead the job was given to Francis Andrew, a Birmingham telegraphist and poet, who also remained with the I.L.P. through disaffiliation and who used the *Post*, which he edited for fifteen years, as a vehicle for Guild Socialist writing and thought.¹⁰⁴ Then in 1935 Majorie Peake of Preston I.L.P. was elected to the executive committee of the Post Office Workers' Union.¹⁰⁵ During the 1930s the Union had been antagonised by the Clause 5 of the Trades Disputes Act which forbade them from affiliating with other Trade Unions or with any political party and which made it a technical offence for individual post office workers to take a prominent part in any political organisation. The leadership invited Sir

Walter Citrine to give fraternal greeting to the May 1936 Brighton conference shortly after he had been knighted by a Government led by Baldwin who had earlier passed the Trades Disputes Act. Sections of the conference, led by some rank-and-file I.L.P.ers, were extremely angry. Moves to disallow the fraternal speech were only defeated on a card vote of 1,081 to 910. However, a significant number of the delegates were not prepared to accept the decision and Jenny Duncan of Lochgelly I.L.P. and secretary of the I.L.P. group in the union led a walkout of more than 200 delegates during his speech.¹⁰⁶ Duncan, who was also influential in pushing for an increasing recognition of female rights within the profession, was subsequently elected onto the Executive along with Peake, who by 1944 although dying of cancer had become assistant secretary of the union.¹⁰⁷

Within the small craft union, the United Patternmakers' Association, where George Buchanan was President, there had been serious tensions with the Labour Party at the time of I.L.P. disaffiliation.¹⁰⁸ One branch of the Glasgow Patternmakers withdrew its affiliation from the BLP and subsequently branches of the Patternmakers had been at the forefront of calls for anti-fascist action and for extensive support for the Hunger Marchers. Then in January 1934 the Clyde District Committee of the Patternmakers found itself in further conflict with Glasgow Trades Council. The Trades Council considered that the Patternmakers, in calling political meetings, addressed by Buchanan, to which non-U.P.A. members were being invited, were usurping the functions of the Trades Council. As selections approached for the 1935 election the union's executive was aware that they could not maintain both their affiliation to the Labour Party and their financial support of Buchanan. Thus, they decided to only go ahead with the nomination of Ellis Smith, the left wing candidate for Stoke.¹⁰⁹ As Smith showed there was a left wing within the Union which was attracted to the Labour Party. However, Buchanan was popular within the Union, in 1934 he had polled 200 votes more than the combined total of his two opponents for the position of President of the U.P.A. In this situation it was a difficult decision for the union executive to remove U.P.A. support completely.¹¹⁰ The union decided to hold a ballot of its membership on the possibility of raising a voluntary fund for Buchanan's election. Gorbals DLP were dismayed at this U.P.A. proposal, as their own plans to place an official Labour candidate against Buchanan were well advanced and supported by the national Labour Party. The Labour Party's N.E.C. thus decided that the U.P.A. proposal to even consider the question of raising a voluntary fund for Buchanan was inconsistent with the position of an affiliated

organisation.¹¹¹ However, the union ignored these threats and informed the N.E.C. of its intention to go ahead with the ballot.¹¹² The General Secretary of the union appealed to the membership to vote against giving assistance for Buchanan's electoral expenses. Whilst a majority of 180 voted against the wishes of the executive and in support of Buchanan, he did not achieve the necessary two-thirds verdict that would have seen the decision enacted. Buchanan was thus deprived of the financial support of the union, instead he had to fall back on the financial support of the I.L.P.¹¹³ However, by 1939 he was no longer so sure of his electoral future unendorsed by the union. His decision to rejoin the Labour Party was symptomatic of the declining relevance of the I.L.P. in the Union. However, many other I.L.P.ers within the Patternmakers' had over the period made the same political journey as Buchanan. Further, and especially in Scotland where the I.L.P.'s presence had been greatest, influential I.L.P.ers of an older generation either retired or died.¹¹⁴

Within another small union, N.A.F.T.A. the General Secretary, Alex Gossip, was a member of the I.L.P.¹¹⁵ After the disaffiliation decision Alex Gossip found his position increasingly difficult. The I.L.P.'s N.A.C. agreed that whilst he should fulfil the conditions agreed at the Bradford Conference, including contracting out, he should take steps in doing so to safeguard his official position.¹¹⁶ Gossip's affiliation to the I.L.P. thus played a minor role in his union activity. However, he maintained a close interest in the political activity of the Party. Gossip's politics were heavily influenced by support for the Soviet Union and a belief in united action by the I.L.P. and the Communist Party. This, combined with his membership of the Fulham I.L.P. brought him into close contact with the R.P.C. He chaired the *Labour Monthly* Revolutionary Policy Conference, in March 1933 and argued that it was likely that 'circumstances would force the advanced parties in this country together whether they liked it or not.'¹¹⁷ His work to promote unity also saw him involved in the organisation of the 1934 Hunger March sitting as a representative of N.A.F.T.A. and the I.L.P. on the March and Congress Council in 1934.¹¹⁸ Through these roles and writing in the columns of *New Leader* Gossip gave his unequivocal support to United Front work outside the Labour Party. He stressed the need to keep up opposition to the Labour Party and the TUC, which he argued could not be trusted.¹¹⁹ The I.L.P. played a prominent party in organising an all-in meeting to celebrate Alex Gossip's 75th Birthday.¹²⁰ However, Gossip's attitude towards the Soviet Union did not change in the same way as the I.L.P.s and by the outbreak of war serious differences had arisen between the Party and Gossip.

He began calling for an immediate alliance with Russia against Germany.¹²¹ Although Maxton volunteered to see Gossip as 'an old personal friend' it was clear that, despite Gossip's continuing membership of the I.L.P., there was considerable political difference between himself and the party.¹²²

In both the Patternmakers and N.A.F.T.A. I.L.P. influence diminished as leading members chose to increasingly distance themselves from the Party. I.L.P. influence was threatened in other areas by more direct and explicit assaults from Trade Union establishments. The Party was affected by the TUC's so-called 'Black Circular' in 1934, which sought to exclude 'members of disruptive organisations' from holding positions within Trade Unions. The 'Black Circular' did not affect the I.L.P. directly, because the circular was directed against the Communist Party as a 'disruptive organisation', and the I.L.P. was not considered by the TUC to be a disruptive organisation. However, I.L.P. members had, since disaffiliation, not been eligible to sit on joint Trades and Labour Councils and the circular brought the situation of some I.L.P.ers who were 'illegitimately' sitting on such joint councils to light.¹²³ In other places, despite the separation of Industrial and Political sections the Trades Council used the circular to exclude I.L.P.ers.¹²⁴ This was most significant in Yarmouth where tensions between the Labour Party and the I.L.P. were running high in 1935, and the I.L.P. had come to dominate the Trade Union club. Despite the decision to exclude the Party from the Trades Council in 1935, within two years, with improved relations with the Yarmouth Labour Party, the Trades Council had a Chair and Secretary from the I.L.P.

However, the problems for the I.L.P. were greatest with respect to the G&MWU. They had an active, if unthinking, anti-left wing policy and during the 1920s had led the attacks on Communism in the Trade Union movement. The Union decided to extend the general TUC ban on 'disruptive organisations' to exclude I.L.P.ers from holding official positions within the union.¹²⁵ The widespread repercussions led to the closure of one of the Unions branches in Hastings¹²⁶ and the exclusion of Councillor A. E. Nicholls from being nominated as representative of the G&M.W.U. on the local Trades Council in Norwich.¹²⁷ However, I.L.P. influence within the G&MWU was not completely wiped out. The Party, led by Albert Richards, the I.L.P.'s Welsh Industrial Secretary, was able to organise a fractional meeting at the union's Bi-ennial conference in Swansea in June 1936. In Nelson and Merthyr I.L.P.ers were sufficiently secure in their posts to be

unaffected by the Union's decision and even attended the Union's national conference to put the I.L.P. case on League of Nations sanctions against Italy.¹²⁸

Over the course of the 1930s the I.L.P. had many problems in its relationship with the trade unions. Its weaknesses were obvious to all the party members who seriously analysed the position of the party, and it was through such considerations that the Party came to reform its industrial policy and structures. However, later commentators have overplayed these weaknesses; contrary to the position suggested by R. E. Dowse the Party did have 'contacts worth maintaining in the trade unions.'¹²⁹ Indeed, through the changes which came about in the later part of the decade the Party was able to achieve a number of things. First, it was able to come to a more carefully considered policy with respect to the trade unions, stressing the need to build loyalty and trust through hard work combined with a critical position towards 'class collaboration.' Second, and perhaps more importantly, it was able to increase the number of members in influential positions within the union movement. Thus, by the 1939 Conference, Party members held executive positions in twelve unions. Far more held positions on District Committees (or their equivalent) whilst fifty-two Trades Councils had two or more sitting I.L.P.ers. Indeed the description given by the N.A.C. to the I.L.P.'s 1939 conference is apposite:

The general position of the I.L.P. industrial activity may be described as patchy, both in activity and organisation but with distinct signs of rapid improvement so far as activities are concerned.¹³⁰

8.8 Conclusion

Disaffiliation injected considerable hostility into the relations between the I.L.P. and the rest of the Labour Movement. However, as the I.L.P.'s close co-operation with the Communist Party broke down, and the rise of fascism convinced the I.L.P. of the need to work with other working-class organisations, so the Party's attention turned back towards the 'official' organisations of the Labour Movement. The initial hostility towards the Labour Party, Co-operative Movement and Trade Unions from many I.L.P.ers was tempered in 1933 and eased even further during the rest of the decade. The Party remained convinced that it had a 'revolutionary' policy distinct from the Labour Party. Many believed that this distinctive policy justified organisational independence. However, an increasingly significant section of the Party argued that the I.L.P.'s socialist goals would be better pursued within the larger organisation, and that disaffiliation had been required only as a temporary measure to allow policy

clarification. By 1939 those advocating re-affiliation probably formed a majority of the Party. Within the Unions the I.L.P. met with a little more success and from 1935-9 the I.L.P.'s industrial activity increased substantially. Its policy was increasingly directed by industrial activists and much more effectively centrally co-ordinated and it was accompanied by a larger number of Party members achieving positions of prominence within the Unions. Nevertheless, the success of those advocating re-affiliation has implications for the definition of the I.L.P.'s 'political space'. In particular it seems that despite the political space available at local level, within the unions, and the development of a distinctive 'revolutionary policy,' the party at national level found it difficult to carve out any significant niche of activity. The prospects for the development of the I.L.P. without such a national role were limited.

¹ *New Leader*, August 5 1932

² Hugh Dalton to Jim Middleton 8/2/35; Stafford Cripps to Jim Middleton 8/2/35 (NMLH/LP/JSM/Box 6/I.L.P.)

³ Shepard stated that I.L.P. could be readmitted on the same basis as existed when they left. *Labour Party Conference Report 1935*, 139-40

⁴ For example in February 1936 the Home Counties Labour Association, by a substantial majority carried a resolution to the N.E.C. 'to accept the proposal of the I.L.P. to hold a joint conference in order to reach maximum agreement of policy upon a common front against the capitalist parties.' (*New Leader*, February 7 1936)

⁵ I.L.P. Conference Report 1936

⁶ *New Leader*, June 5 1936

⁷ *New Leader*, October 23 1936

⁸ *New Leader*, May 7 1937; *Glasgow Herald*, March 29 1937

⁹ Although this was essentially similar to the United Front, in that it proposed an alliance of only working class organisations, it had the significant difference of called for federal organisation, rather than the complete organisational independence envisaged in the United Front. *New Leader*, June 26 1936. For a fuller discussion of Workers' Front policy see above page 94-94

¹⁰ *New Leader*, December 4 1936

¹¹ N.A.C. minutes November 13 1937

¹² *New Leader*, October 8 1937

¹³ Brockway, A Survey of the Party Position, November 13 1937

¹⁴ *New Leader*, February 18 1938

¹⁵ Conference Report 1937

¹⁶ For a detailed analysis of Maxton's position see below 282-3 fn.34

¹⁷ *Manchester Guardian* May 26 1938; *New Leader*, May 27 1938

¹⁸ NMLH/JSM/I.L.P./27; Labour Party N.E.C. minutes 25 May 1938; For the refusal to meet with the I.S.P. see Finance and General Purposes Sub-Committee April 22 1937; The attitude of the N.E.C. towards the Communist Party can be seen clearly from their decision in 1936 that communications from

the Communist Party 'be not acknowledged or brought to the attention of the National Executive Committee.' (N.E.C. minutes September 5 1936) The meeting with Labour Party represented by Mrs Aryton Gould, James Middleton, George Dallas, Hugh Dalton, J. Walker, G. Lathan, Harold Laski, and George Shepherd and the I.L.P. by James Maxton, John Aplin, Campbell Stephen, John McGovern and Fenner Brockway was held on the 14 June.

¹⁹ Notes on an interview between representatives of the Labour Party and Representatives of the I.L.P. held on 14 June 1938 (NMLH/JSM/I.L.P./31)

²⁰ *New Leader*, July 15 1938; N.A.C. minutes July 30 1938; *New Leader*, August 5 1938; Brockway to Middleton November 24 1938 (NMLH/JSM/I.L.P./33); *Manchester Guardian*, November 28 1938

²¹ N.A.C. Report to 1939 Conference.

²² For example the proportion of local government representatives in the Party was much smaller in 1938/9.

²³ *New Leader*, September 2 1938 *New Leader*, September 2 1938; In April 1939 *Controversy* was replaced by the journal *Left* which had less of a focus on internal, organisational I.L.P. debates and more on broader theoretical issues. In July 1939 a new internal discussion journal *Between Ourselves* was launched.

²⁴ Ernest Walters, Letter to *Controversy*, January 1938

²⁵ Mabel Forbes, 'Revolutionary Hermits', *Controversy*, April 1938

²⁶ Walter Padley, 'Close The Ranks!', *Between Ourselves*, December 1939/January 1940

²⁷ Walter Sawyer, Letter to *Controversy*, February 1938

²⁸ Trevor Williams, Letter to *Controversy*, February 1938

²⁹ James Stirling, 'Can the I.L.P. Affiliate', *Controversy*, April 1938

³⁰ James Carmichael, 'The Question of Re-Affiliation', *Controversy*, August 1937

³¹ For Jowett's position see Brockway, 1946, 325-6; for examples of similar concerns from other individuals see Wilfred Sharples, Letter to *Controversy*, January 1938

³² Joseph Southall, 'Our Strength is Not in Numbers', *Controversy*, September 1937

³³ I.L.P. Final Agenda of Resolutions and Amendments, 47th Annual Conference; *New Leader*, April 14 1937

³⁴ The I.L.P. claimed that Buchanan, although favouring re-affiliation, had not wished to take action independently of the rest of the Party but 'his hand had been forced by the Patternmakers' Union' and his desire to be on its panel of candidates. He was promptly accepted into the PLP and selected by the larger party as their candidate for his Gorbals seat, Labour Party N.E.C. April 26 1939; June 28 1939; *New Leader*, April 28 1939

³⁵ Recent commentators have disagreed about the attitude of Maxton to re-affiliation in 1938/9. Many have followed Brockway (1942, 275) in supposing that Maxton supported re-affiliation in 1939. However, McNair (1955, 268) argues that Maxton 'had no intention of going back to the Labour Party himself unless he had complete freedom to express his socialist and anti-war convictions.' (Bizarrely Dowse, 1966, 198-9, references McNair as his sole evidence that Maxton was willing to rejoin the Labour Party.) Similarly, Knox (1987, 134-6) argues strongly that Maxton's attitude towards re-affiliation remained consistently hostile throughout the period from 1932 to his death. Knox's evidence rests on three points: Maxton's attitude to Labour in 1945, his feelings in 1938 that re-affiliation would impose

restrictions on his anti-war activities and the actions of his sisters and son who remained in the I.L.P. after his death. However, a closer analysis of the evidence indicates that Brockway's comments on Maxton's position were correct. The first and third points of Knox's case rely entirely on inference, rather than direct evidence. Maxton's attitude towards re-affiliation was complex, influenced by a variety of factors, including such things as his own state of health, his understanding of the possibilities for the I.L.P., the attitude of his family and friends and the state of international affairs. With such factors changing rapidly it was quite possible for Maxton's attitude in 1945 to be different to that in 1938. The tactic of inferring Maxton's attitude from the rest of his family is even more dubious. In particular Maxton's sister Annie Maxton had her own forthright opinions on re-affiliation and as the sometime chair of the Scottish Divisional Council was capable of developing thoughts about the I.L.P. independently of her brother. Indeed evidence suggests that her attitudes towards disaffiliation were much stronger than James' and it was in part her influence along with his declining health and the weakness of the Party, which made James so hostile to re-affiliation after the war. Such indirect inferences would only be an appropriate method for attempting to ascertain Maxton's views if there were no more direct evidence of his attitude at the time. This raises the possibility of inferring Maxton's attitude to re-affiliation in 1938/9 from later recollections by those who knew him. However, such attempts are hampered by Maxton's position within the Party and the high regard in which he was held. The temptation has been for individuals to rewrite Maxton's attitudes in their own image. The result is that those who favoured re-affiliation such as Brockway 'recall' Maxton's support for such a line, whilst those who favoured continued I.L.P. independence such as McNair argue that Maxton agreed with this line. Given these limitations the only reliable evidence comes from contemporary documents which give Maxton's opinion. However, during 1938/9 Maxton was reluctant to explicitly state his view on the re-affiliation question. For example Maxton did not speak in the re-affiliation debates at either divisional or national level. However, a number of pieces of evidence indicate that Maxton changed his mind to give qualified support to re-affiliation in the second half of 1938. Maxton's attitude at the beginning of 1938 was to oppose re-affiliation, and he voted in accordance with this view at the 1938 Scottish Divisional Conference. However, under pressure from his parliamentary colleagues, he appears to have changed his mind and in negotiations with the Labour Party it was Maxton who led the way to settlement on the question of Standing Orders (see above pages 94-94). In these negotiations Maxton was clearest about his acceptance of a return to the Labour Party when he stated 'the isolation of the I.L.P. is no longer defensible' adding that 'there had been no great clashes in parliament since 1935' and accepting that standing orders 'were of quite small importance today'. His explicit statements in late 1938 that he would likely accept standing orders is not only contrary to McNair's assertions but also is a strong indication of his changing attitude towards re-affiliation. There are no surviving copies of N.A.C. minutes relating to the period from the middle of 1938 to the outbreak of war, but there are a number of contemporary comments on the discussion which took place in that forum. C.A. Smith, a consistent opponent of re-affiliation, in particular is explicit about the disagreements between himself and Maxton on this point and on Maxton's (not necessarily enthusiastic) support for re-affiliation (see for example C.A. Smith, 'Rejoinder by C.A. Smith', *Between Ourselves*, April 1940). Thus, whilst later recollections are frequently confused and certainly contradict one another contemporary evidence points in the direction of Maxton being a support of re-affiliation in 1938/9, albeit a reluctant convert to this position.

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- ³⁶ Brockway to Middleton 24 April 1939 (NMLH/JSM/I.L.P./34); *New Leader*, April 28 1939
- ³⁷ Middleton to Brockway July 3 1939 (NMLH/JSM/I.L.P./37)
- ³⁸ Annual Report of the N.A.C. to Nottingham Conference, 1940
- ³⁹ See for example McKinlay, 1991, 15-16
- ⁴⁰ The decision also affected William Fitzimmons a member of the Barrhead Society, an employee of SCWS and an I.L.P. member of Town Council, who had considerable difficulty getting paid time off for public duties. However, before the rules were changed it had been possible for him to resolve the matter in his favour. *New Leader*, September 14 1934
- ⁴¹ *New Leader*, December 14 1934
- ⁴² Alex Smillie, son of Robert Smillie the famous miners' leader, of the Larkhall Co-operative Society raised the matter again at the 1935 SCWS conference. However, the SCWS resolved to maintain its position, that no member should be allowed to be paid by the Society on public duty whilst not signing up to Co-operative programme; the Larkhall resolution was defeated 342 to 171. *New Leader*, June 7 1935; *New Leader*, June 21 1935
- ⁴³ *Forward*, November 21 1936; N.A.C. Report to 1937 Conference. Tom Taylor became President of SCWS in 1965 and was made a life peer in 1968.
- ⁴⁴ John Aplin to W. Harnwell, October 26 1933; W. Harnwell to John Aplin, October 27 1933
- ⁴⁵ Alderson stood as an I.L.P. candidate against an official Labour Candidate in a by-election for the Hounslow Heath ward of the Borough Council and was duly expelled from the Political Committee. Jack Alderson to John Aplin, December 1 1933
- ⁴⁶ C. A. Smith approached the N.A.C. to ask whether he should accept a nomination to the Political Committee of the LCS. The N.A.C. was unclear itself about the correct stance, as they did not know the exact nature of the relationship between the LCS and the Labour Party. N.A.C. minutes, June 29 1935
- ⁴⁷ Industrial Committee Minutes, June 5 1936
- ⁴⁸ *New Leader*, September 28 1934
- ⁴⁹ Industrial Committee Minutes, May 2 1936
- ⁵⁰ N.A.C. minutes July 30 1938
- ⁵¹ Special National Conference Report, July 1932
- ⁵² Nevertheless, it was noticeable that Tom Stephenson, the only Trade Union activist on the N.A.C., despite his position on the left wing of the party, was one of the most vocal critics of the Workers' Council policy.
- ⁵³ For example, a sub-committee consisting of Tom Stephenson, Jennie Lee and Alex Smillie was set up to deal with the the UMS and dual unionism. The committee's report was largely in agreement with the initial position of the N.A.C.; the I.L.P. understood the frustrations caused by the ban on non-Labour Party members holding office within the Union but it was firmly opposed to the principle of dual unionism. N.A.C. minutes, November 16-17 1934; 1935 Conference Report Appendix 4
- ⁵⁴ His proposals for his own union, the MFGB were in line with these prescriptions. He criticised the union for being too sectional and regional and argued that its policy was based on lines of class collaboration without an attempt to form a common plan of strategy, co-operation or cohesion across the coal-field struggles. In particular he was looking for the conference to make concrete proposals and a

minimum programme on the question of hours and wages. *New Leader*, August 17 1935; *New Leader*, July 12 1935

⁵⁵ *New Leader*, August 12 1938

⁵⁶ *New Leader*, April 9 1937

⁵⁷ *New Leader*, January 7 1938

⁵⁸ *New Leader*, February 25 1938

⁵⁹ N.A.C. minutes, March 2-3 1935

⁶⁰ N.A.C. minutes, 23-24 April; Inner Executive Minutes, June 19 1935

⁶¹ N.A.C. Minutes, June 29 1935; Executive Committee Report, August 2-3 1935 However, Scotland had complied with the decision requiring industrial committees to be set up. N.A.C. minutes, June 29-30 1935

⁶² Littlejohns, 268

⁶³ N.A.C. report to 1936 Conference

⁶⁴ Inner Executive Minutes, May 15 1935; Executive Committee Report, September 13 1935

⁶⁵ N.A.C. report to 1936 Conference; 1936 Conference Report

⁶⁶ Industrial Committee Minutes, May 2 1936

⁶⁷ N.A.C. minutes November 7 1936; N.A.C. minutes August 1 1936

⁶⁸ N.A.C. minutes July 30 1938

⁶⁹ Industrial Committee Minutes, June 23 1937; The following Nine Unions were named as having organised I.L.P. groups (with organising secretaries where named): Railways (David Gibson, Glasgow), N.U.C., Building Trades, Engineering (Jim Davies, Llanelly), Distributive (E. Fernyhough, Norwich), Printing and Allied Trades (L. Knapp), Mining (Tom Stephenson), Textiles, Post Office Workers (Cyples, London and Jennie Duncan, Lochgelly)

⁷⁰ Industrial committee Minutes, September 21 1936

⁷¹ Industrial Committee Minutes, September 21 1936

⁷² *New Leader*, September 16 1938

⁷³ *New Leader*, May 3 1935

⁷⁴ The I.L.P. group was led by Tom Taylor of the Glasgow NUC and John Pollock of the Ayr Distributive Workers. Tuckett, 1986, 259-62; *New Leader*, May 1 1936

⁷⁵ *New Leader*, May 6 1938

⁷⁶ However, the attacks on the I.L.P. did not come only from traditionally right wing unions, but also from those with an active militant section in which the I.L.P. was active. The leadership of the NUR was amongst the most vocal in criticising the I.L.P. with successive General Secretaries of the Union outspoken in attacking the Party. *New Leader*, June 1 1934

⁷⁷ For an institutional history of U.S.D.A.W see Richardson (n.d.) see also Harrison, 152-3

⁷⁸ *Labour's Northern Voice*, June 1933

⁷⁹ *New Leader*, May 5 1935; *New Leader*, February 2 1936

⁸⁰ ^{NUDAW} Executive Committee Report, May 23 1935

⁸¹ Industrial Committee Minutes, December 21 1936; Industrial Committee Minutes, January 1937; *New Leader*, May 6 1938

⁸² For example these allegations were made by W. C. Robinson MP whilst opposing the resolution for unity at the 1937 NUDAW conference. *New Leader*, April 16 1937.

⁸³ Inner Executive Report, June 19 1935

⁸⁴ For a detailed study of the NUR during the 1930s see Bagwell, 499-570; For a recent re-evaluation of the politics and culture of railway trade unions see Howell, 1999

⁸⁵ Industrial Committee Minutes, January 6 1937

⁸⁶ The leaflet entitled 'One Programme for All Railway Workers' pointed out that despite the fact that the three Railway Unions had submitted jointly to the Railway Companies, they agree on only two points (1) 12 days holiday with pay (2) abolition of the extended roster. The I.L.P. suggested demands based on:

(1) Minimum wage of 50s per week for all adults employed on the railways.

(2) Twelve days holiday with pay per year

(3) Forty-hour week without reduction of pay

(4) Abolition of the extended roster

(5) Adequate stagnation allowances

(I.L.P. Industrial Committee, *Rail-Workers Unite! One Programme for all railwaymen*, London 1938)

⁸⁷ N.A.C. minutes August 2 1937; October 22 1937; N.A.C. Report to Conference 1939

⁸⁸ Industrial Committee Minutes, December 21 1936

⁸⁹ Those voting for the resolution were: Colter, W. Watson, Lemmon, W.C. Watson, Robson, Potts, Lane, Pearce, Ballantine, Campbell and Perrins (*New Leader*, February 4 1938)

⁹⁰ *New Leader*, January 27 1939; *New Leader*, February 2 1940

⁹¹ Bagwell, 665; *New Leader*, February 2 1940

⁹² For the standard institutional description of the MFGB during the 1930s see Page Arnot, 1961. Arnot however, tends to interpret local struggles as merely part of the national dispute between moderates and progressives. It has been the rediscovery of local diversity and a deconstruction of the overarching framework of class struggle and betrayal which has been the focus of much recent writing on the MFGB and NUM.

⁹³ *New Leader*, May 31 1935; *New Leader*, August 8 1935; On the tension between the South Wales Miners' Federation and the Unemployed Miners' lodges see Francis and Smith, 1980, 186-9

⁹⁴ Industrial Committee Minutes, May 2 1936; *New Leader*, May 27 1938

⁹⁵ In the election with a 77 per cent turnout Stephenson obtained 430 votes and Bell 352. N.A.C. minutes March 30-April 1 1934; *New Leader*, April 6 1934; *New Leader*, December 27 1935

⁹⁶ The voting was Tom Stephenson 2,616 Sam McFarland 1,185. *New Leader*, May 7 1937

⁹⁷ The trailers employed at the pit had struck in support of a demand for a wage increase and caused a complete stoppage. Amendments in the trailing scale of pay were secured as a result of Tom Stephenson's efforts and the men *New Leader*, January 7 1938

⁹⁸ For a summary of the history of the Cumberland Miners' Association in the 1930s see *Whitehaven News*, June 13 1972; Wood, 1988 For further details on Stephenson's activities see above pages 94-94

⁹⁹ *New Leader*, June 12 1936; Industrial Committee Minutes May 2 1936; Inner Executive Minutes March 1936; Industrial Committee to members, July 10 1936; Industrial Committee Minutes, June 5 1936

¹⁰⁰ *New Leader*, June 15 1934

¹⁰¹ *New Leader*, May 25 1934

¹⁰² *New Leader*, June 14 1935

¹⁰³ Industrial Committee letter to members, July 16 1936; January 1937

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- ¹⁰⁴ Clinton, 1984, 328, 391-4
- ¹⁰⁵ *New Leader*, May 24 1935
- ¹⁰⁶ *New Leader*, May 15 1936; Clinton, 1984, 413
- ¹⁰⁷ She was particularly active in attempting to obtain a policy against the systematic exclusion of women from writing duties within the post offices at the 1939 Post Office Workers' Conference. Elected onto the executive during the 1940s she worked in close co-operation with Winifred Rowe in order to increase the recognition of women's rights. Clinton, 1984, 429-31, 340
- ¹⁰⁸ On the U.P.A. see Bell, 1953, 137
- ¹⁰⁹ Labour Party Organisation Committee Minutes, February 14 1934; Ellis Smith was elected MP for Stoke at the 1935 General Election.
- ¹¹⁰ *New Leader*, August 24 1934
- ¹¹¹ Glasgow BLP minutes December 13 1932; Glasgow Trades Council Minutes August 1933, December 19 1933, October 23 1934; Labour Party N.E.C. minutes March 27 1935; Labour Party N.E.C. Minutes March 27 1935; *New Leader*, June 7 1935
- ¹¹² Labour Party N.E.C. Minutes July 24 1935
- ¹¹³ *New Leader*, October 18 1935
- ¹¹⁴ For example James Richmond of Clydebank I.L.P. and Scottish Organising Secretary of the Patternmakers' Association died at the end of 1936. *New Leader*, January 8 1937
- ¹¹⁵ The two biographers of Gossip do not make any mention of his association with the I.L.P. in the period after disaffiliation. Discussion of Gossip's I.L.P. membership here clarifies the question, raised by Saville, of whether Gossip was actually ever an individual member of the Labour Party. Martin Harrison, *Alex Gossip*, 1962 and John Saville, 'Alex Gossip', in Knox (ed), 1984, pp121-6
- ¹¹⁶ N.A.C. minutes, October 8-9 1932; Minutes of Meeting of Sub-Committee appointed to deal with special difficulties arising in Trade Unions and Co-operative relationships from the Bradford Decision, December 9 1932
- ¹¹⁷ "'Labour Monthly" Conference on Revolutionary Policy', *Labour Monthly*, April 1933
- ¹¹⁸ National Congress and March Council Congress Bulletin No. 1 NMLH/C.P./IND/HANN/06/16
- ¹¹⁹ *New Leader*, February 15 1935
- ¹²⁰ N.A.C. minutes June 12 1937; *New Leader*, September 24 1937
- ¹²¹ *New Leader*, June 30 1939
- ¹²² N.A.C. minutes March 26 1940
- ¹²³ For example John Steen representative of AEU no 2 branch in Paisley and W.E. Rowlands representative of the Unemployed Miners' Lodge in Merthyr. *New Leader*, May 3 1935
- ¹²⁴ In some places the decision to exclude I.L.P.ers appears to have been based on a misunderstanding of the terms of the TUC circular. The file of I.L.P. correspondence in the TUC archive contains a large number of letters on the question of the I.L.P.'s status with regard to the circular. For example, in Gorton, where Ernest Beesley, secretary of Gorton I.L.P., was T&GWU delegate to the Trades Council he was readmitted after clarification from the TUC. MRC MSS 292/756.1/1 TUC I.L.P. correspondence; *New Leader*, March 29 1935; N.A.C. minutes, April 22-23; 1935 N.A.C. minutes, June 29 1935
- ¹²⁵ N.A.C. minutes, June 29-30 1935; On the relationship between Yarmouth I.L.P. and Labour Party see above pages 94-94

¹²⁶ On the situation in Hastings see above page 83-84

¹²⁷ *New Leader*, July 12 1935

¹²⁸ The I.L.P.ers acting as representative at G&MWU conference were Hywel James from Merthyr and Dan Carradice from Nelson. Industrial Committee Minutes, May 2 1936; *New Leader*, May 22 1936 Industrial Committee Minutes, June 5 1936; *New Leader*, June 12 1936; *New Leader*, June 26 1936 On the I.L.P. and the G&MWU in Nelson see above page 90-92

¹²⁹ Dowse, 191

¹³⁰ N.A.C. Report to Conference 1939.

9. Pacifism, Wars and the Internationals

9.1 Introduction

The image of the I.L.P. as a pacifist party is common.¹ Indeed some commentators have argued that the development of I.L.P. policy during the 1930s was marked by the victory of pacifism over revolutionary politics.² In fact, although the I.L.P. opposed the Second World War, it did not have a pacifist policy; rather it endorsed the possibility of using violence in a Socialist revolution. This chapter traces the development of the I.L.P.'s new revolutionary attitude in the international arena. It begins with the question of international affiliation and associations and moves through the crises of the second half of the 1930s which so shaped I.L.P. policy. It is argued that the Party rejected pacifism because of its international associations and the Abyssinian Crisis and the Spanish Civil War. This rejection of pacifism did not come easily to the Party with its considerable tradition of opposition to militarism in all forms, and with a large pacifist section of its membership. There was throughout the decade considerable resistance to the rejection of pacifism. The result was that the I.L.P.'s response to the outbreak of the Second World War, although apparently founded on the party's revolutionary attitude, was in fact based on an uneasy compromise with the pacifist sections of the party membership.

9.2 A Question of Internationals

Through the 1920s the I.L.P. found itself consistently located somewhere between Labour and Communist Internationals. This was the case, most famously, with the I.L.P. involvement with the Vienna Union, derisively known as the Two-and-a-Half International, formed in 1921 with the express purpose of bringing the 2nd and 3rd Internationals together and wound up two years later. By the end of the 1920s I.L.P. was an increasingly unhappy member of the Labour and Socialist International. The Party was dependent upon the Labour Party for its representation. The I.L.P.'s leftward move meant that its delegates to L.S.I. Congresses were increasingly unhappy with what they saw as 'the practice of using revolutionary rhetoric to cover up motions with no content relating to positive Socialist action.'³ By 1931 the I.L.P. adopted a similar role within the L.S.I. to the one it had chosen within the Labour Party, as self-appointed conscience of the organisation.⁴

The I.L.P. leadership almost welcomed this alienation from the mainstream of the L.S.I. for two reasons. First of all it felt that it was at odds with the basic policy of the parties that made up the L.S.I.; the rise of fascism and the desperate world-wide economic situation called for urgent Socialist action. Second, it had become involved in the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity (IBRSU), at that time known as the Left International Committee.

During the disaffiliation debates the R.P.C. had increasingly connected the demand for disaffiliation with calls to approach the Communist International to enquire about affiliation. During 1932, with the disaffiliation issue to the fore the question of internationals had not been raised. However, the following year the R.P.C. case, argued by William Warbey, was for disaffiliation from the second international and for approaching the Communist International. There was scarcely any disagreement with the first of these suggestions. The L.S.I. had strongly attacked the I.L.P. when it left the Labour Party, and the N.A.C. had already agreed to withdraw the Party from the LSI. The alternative supported by the N.A.C. was that the I.L.P. should maintain its position with the international "left" parties. However, given the failure of the Vienna International, and that the Bureau was new and its status as an international was unclear, it is perhaps not surprising that the R.P.C. case for approaching the Comintern was able to gain significant support. The 1933 Derby Conference, against the wishes of the N.A.C. voted with the R.P.C. to approach the Third International to investigate the possibility of affiliation.⁵

Following the Derby conference, there were important differences in interpretation of the decision to approach the Third International. The R.P.C. saw the vote for sympathetic affiliation to the Comintern, as more important than the I.L.P. connections to the group of 'left' socialists.⁶ However, whilst Brockway and other members of the Party leadership made enquiries of the Comintern, their primary commitment was to the International 'Left' Bureau. Indeed they argued the I.L.P. could not determine its attitude to the C.I. independently from the other parties of the International Bureau.⁷ After extended but fruitless correspondence with the Communist International the N.A.C. took the view that, although opposed to the formation of a new international, it would work with the Independent Revolutionary Parties towards the formation of an inclusive revolutionary international.⁸ It was this line that was submitted to the 1934 annual conference in York.⁹

At York, the R.P.C. proposed further enquires to the third international to clear up the difficulties in moving the I.L.P. towards sympathetic affiliation. However, the mood of the party had moved against the R.P.C. and the motion was lost 98-51. Instead, the N.A.C. line of working with both internationals in united action against fascism and war, with the aim of creating a unification of 'all genuinely revolutionary sections of the working class' was passed by a vote of 102-64.¹⁰ The following year the I.L.P.'s relationship with the renamed International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity (IBRSU) was firmly cemented. The N.A.C. statement accepted by the conference, argued that the IBRSU should be striving to bring the Internationals closer together. The statement also called for sympathetic affiliation to the Communist International and opposed the formation of a new International.¹¹ This opposition to a Fourth International brought inevitable resistance from the Trotskyists within the Party, who objected to the idea of attempting to bring together 'two bankrupt internationals.' The R.P.C. was represented by Jack Gaster, who on this occasion had proposed an amendment that the N.A.C. line would lead to Fourth International, bankrupt of any principles. The already heated debate was wound up by Campbell Stephen, who joined John McGovern in attacking 'Moscow Gold', a move that caused howls of protest from the floor. Maxton in the chair was forced to state that whilst Stephen was speaking at the request of the N.A.C. it could not take responsibility for the speech. In the event all the amendments were defeated, and a resolution to continue co-operation with the C.I. but not to affiliate was carried along with the N.A.C. statement.¹²

In 1936 the issue of Internationals was again raised by the conference, but with the R.P.C. out of the I.L.P. the issue was raised by Trotskyists aiming to push for a Fourth International. Their motion was overwhelmingly defeated and the conference also passed an amendment stating resolute opposition to the formation of such an International.¹³ The Trotskyist demands, despite the departure of the majority of the Marxist Group in 1936, were again raised in 1938 and again overwhelmingly defeated. The battles of the first half of the 1930s, when it was unclear which International Affiliation I.L.P. conferences would vote for, were over. The I.L.P., by 1935 was firmly connected to the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity.

9.3 The International Bureau

The Left International Committee, never intended as an alternative International, was made up of a number of Socialist groups who found themselves uncomfortable with both the L.S.I. and the Comintern. The Committee, formed in 1931, initially had seven affiliated parties. Apart from the I.L.P. only two of these seven had, in 1931, an affiliation to the L.S.I., the Polish I.L.P. and the Polish Bund. The two Polish parties worked in difficult conditions, which meant that it was impossible for the Bund, a Jewish Socialist organisation, to get a representative to the 1932 foundation conference, and it was represented by the representative from the Polish I.L.P., which had a membership of approximately 3,000.¹⁴ Of the four other parties the Norwegian Labour Party was by far the largest, with a membership of 80,000 as well as considerable influence within the Norwegian Trade Union movement.¹⁵ The Norwegian Party was unique at the conference in being the largest party representing labour interests in its own country. However, by 1935 the Norwegian Labour Party had dropped out of the Bureau to support League of Nations sanctions against Abyssinia. They then concentrated their international efforts on moves to establish a United Scandinavian Front with the Social Democratic Parties of Sweden and Denmark.¹⁶

Of the remaining three parties the Bulgarian left was the smallest, and whilst it remained within the Bulgarian Social Democratic Party publishing a paper with a circulation of about two and half thousand, it felt restricted by the larger organisation.¹⁷ In Holland the 'Left' of the Socialist Party, led by P. J. Schmidt, found itself in increasing conflict with the wider party over the unemployment question. After the 'left's' paper was suppressed by the party it decided to found a new Independent Socialist Party. In the month that the party had been in existence before the 1932 conference it had established 78 branches and claimed over 6,000 members. In addition the circulation of the weekly paper, *De Fakkkel*, had risen from 5,000 to 15,000.¹⁸ The Dutch Trotskyist organisation, the R.S.P., was also briefly a member of the bureau. However, by 1935 the R.S.P. and I.S.P. had amalgamated to form the Dutch Revolutionary Socialist Workers Party, which left the Bureau in order to support Trotsky's moves to create a Fourth International.¹⁹ In Germany the S.A.P. had been formed out of the SPD for similar reasons. The strength of fascism and the German Communist Party's vicious attacks on the S.A.P. led to a temporary return to the S.P.D.²⁰ The S.A.P. remained in the International Bureau until 1938 when it left in support of the Popular Front line.

By 1935 the Bureau had settled on the name 'the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity.' They declared that it was an association of 'Revolutionary Socialist Parties' unaffiliated to either the Second or Third International who had joined together with the purpose of 'developing common international action between its own sections and with other revolutionary sections of the Working-class movement; with the object of preparing the formation of a reconstituted International on a Revolutionary Socialist basis.' This they suggested was in opposition to 'the reformist and compromising policies of the Second and Third Internationals.' The Bureau stood on a Class based programme which opposed 'collaboration with the Capitalist Class, Capitalist Governments, or Capitalist Parties in time of either war or peace.' This they took to include revolutionary resistance to any war conducted by a Capitalist Government whether through the League of Nations or not. Their position against the Third International and against the League of Nations and an insistence on the need to maintain freedom of criticism of Soviet Russia placed them firmly in opposition to the Soviet Union despite their recognition of it as the first Workers' State.²¹

The development of the Bureau was speeded up in 1935 when, with many of the IBRSU operating in illegal conditions, the I.L.P. took responsibility for the Secretariat of the Bureau. Its headquarters were moved to London where they remained until January 1939 when the headquarters were transferred to Paris.²² A new stress was placed on the development of contacts with 'lefts' in the Second International and on collaboration with socialist organisations in colonial countries, especially in India, Egypt and Palestine, whilst it was claimed that constant contact was maintained with 'lefts' in the Dominions and South America. The formal organisation of the Bureau was tightened and from November 1935 it published a bi-monthly *Revolutionary Socialist Bulletin*.²³ The Bulletin drew together reports of independent left wing activity from about eighteen countries including Spain, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Poland, Romania, USA, Ceylon, India and Egypt.²⁴

In October 1936 the Bureau arranged an International Revolutionary Socialist Congress. The congress was the first large scale delegate congress which the Bureau had organised, and inevitably the issue of Spain dominated the agenda.²⁵ The congress agreed that the issue was not 'Capitalist democracy versus Fascism, but of Workers' Power versus Fascism.' Thus, they argued 'it is the duty of the whole working-class

movement and each working-class Government to go to the active aid of the Spanish workers and their Government by the provision of arms.' Julián Gorkin obtained the support of the Congress for POUM's actions in joining the Government by stressing the anti-Popular Front line, that it had only 'agreed to go into the Government because it had accepted the socialisation of land and of industry as its immediate programme.'²⁶ A further large conference was scheduled for Barcelona the following January.

The situation in Barcelona, and the increasing pressure on POUM led to delays in the scheduling of the conference but it was eventually and unfortunately agreed that the conference should be scheduled in that city in the early weeks of May. Despite the presence of the Bureau Office in Barcelona, given the events of that time in Barcelona the Congress was postponed and took place in Paris the following February.²⁷ Although the I.L.P. delegation was broadly satisfied with the conference there were two important exceptions. First, the conference was influenced by the International Communist Opposition, suggesting that revolutionary socialist parties should under *no* circumstances take part in a Popular Front. Second, the conference rejected the I.L.P. suggestion of a universal condemnation of alliances between Workers' States and Capitalist States.²⁸

Nevertheless there appeared to be an increasing level of co-operation with elements of the working-class movement as the conference was attended by members of the International Communist Opposition and some workers' organisations in colonial countries. George Padmore, representing the African Negro Workers' Movement declared that 'it has been a splendid conference.' The Bureau also welcomed new affiliation from the Palestine Workers Party, the Archo-Marxist [sic] Party of Greece, and the "Alarm" Group of Czechoslovakia whilst the Dutch Revolutionary Socialist League renewed its affiliation to the Bureau. At the same time it was able to agree a broad set of seven principles to which all affiliated organisations were expected to subscribe in a disciplined fashion. Nevertheless problems of co-operation and unity remained, with the Bureau rejecting the Trotskyist pressure for a fourth International.²⁹

Further within the Bureau itself there was a developing tension between the SAP and the other parties over the opposition to Popular Front politics. This disagreement was contained at the 1938 conference with a compromise statement which accepted the correctness of the Workers' Front line but allowed for temporary agreements with petty

bourgeois organisations providing the scope for independent revolutionary class action was not limited. However, within the year the SAP had left the Bureau over the issue.³⁰ Over the following year the departure of the SAP was offset for the Bureau when the International Communist Opposition applied for affiliation. Further a number of other organisations signed up to the principles of the bureau but were unprepared to apply the IBRSU's discipline to themselves.³¹

During the final period of 1938 the operations of the Bureau were further consolidated. During the September crisis an International Workers' Front against war was established on the initiative of the Bureau, the French PSOP, the Dutch RSAP and the ICO, an appeal to 'Workers of the world' was released and a detailed statement on war was adopted. This was followed at the beginning of 1939, by a proposal from the American Independent Labour League (until shortly before the American section of the ICO) for the establishment of an International Revolutionary Centre. The same discussions also saw the I.L.P. relinquish the Secretariat which it had held since 1935, with the position initially transferred to Paris.³² However, with the outbreak of war in May 1939 the International Bureau's name changed to International Revolutionary Marxist Centre and its headquarters moved first to New York and then following the dissolution of Independent Labour League, was moved again to Mexico, with Julián Gorkin of POUM as Secretary.³³

The I.L.P.'s relationship with the International Bureau was increasingly close. The Party's policy of maintaining association with the International Bureau was increasingly firm. These close ties with the Parties of the International Bureau provide an important context for understanding the I.L.P.'s response to the international events of the 1930s; in particular the crises in Abyssinia and Spain.

9.4 Abyssinia

At the end of 1934 fighting had broken out on the ill-defined border between Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland and Italian troops began mobilisation. The League of Nations led by Britain, attempted to place pressure on the Italians not to open hostilities in Ethiopia, but despite this the Italians invaded Abyssinia in October 1935. Within each of the major parties in Britain there was support for League of Nations sanctions against Italy. However, there were also divisions within each of the major parties, which in Labour's case led to the resignation of Lansbury as leader.³⁴ The Communist Party, with the

Soviet Union having joined the League of Nations in 1934, argued in support of League of Nations sanctions against Italy.³⁵

The I.L.P., in the *New Leader*, quickly identified the cause of the dispute as the rival Imperialist interests of the different countries, with the focus firmly on their economic interests.³⁶ As the crisis accelerated the I.L.P. began mobilisation against what it had declared to be another 'Capitalist and Imperialist war' which it stood uncompromisingly against 'whether sanctioned by the League of Nations or not.' The Inner Executive of the Party, controlled by the Parliamentary Group, immediately issued an anti-war declaration signed by Maxton, McGovern and Stephen:

The Independent Labour Party views with abhorrence the threat to world peace by the clash of capitalist interests in Abyssinia, but urges the people of Britain to show the National Government that they are determined that no British lives shall be placed at the disposal of either side.... In our estimation the difference between the two rival dictators and the interests behind them are not worth the loss of a single British life. Peace can only be guaranteed by the workers in each country refusing to fight for these powerful interests and struggling for workers' control in each nation. The Independent Labour Party calls upon its members and the working class of Britain to offer the maximum opposition by holding mass demonstrations in their area, by refusing to bear arms, and in very other way possible to show the Government their determination that they are not going into another blood bath under the false cry of a small defenceless nation.³⁷

The N.A.C. released a further manifesto, which stressed that the real issue was 'not between Italy and Abyssinia but between Italian and British Imperialism.' Unlike the Communist Party line, there was no support for League Sanctions, whether economic or military. Instead, the N.A.C. made a call for working class action against the National Government:

Refuse to support the National Government in imposing sanctions or waging War for British Capitalism and Imperialism!
Carry on the struggle against the National Government, Capitalism, Imperialism and War!
Carry on the struggle for Workers' Power and Socialism!³⁸

Across the country the I.L.P. launched itself enthusiastically into a 'Resist the War' campaign and thousands of working class organisations were circularised with an anti-war letter signed by Maxton and Brockway.³⁹ The London I.L.P. organised a committee which appeared to unite the different branches of the membership with participation from Jack Gaster, Hilda Vernon⁴⁰ and Carl Cullen of the R.P.C., Bert Matlow of the Marxist Group and John Aplin who had campaigned so stridently against the factional organisation of the party.⁴¹ The committee declared for a policy of Workers' sanctions without supporting the League of Nations:

War cannot be stopped by pious resolutions. Of what use is it presenting a petition to a prowling tiger? Words are only of consequence if followed by deeds. The forces of the workers must at once be asserted. Without waiting for the League of Nations or the national Government we must follow the magnificent example of the Trade Unions in South Africa who by refusing to handle goods, already have stopped supplies destined for Italy.⁴²

In Scotland the I.L.P. was also active in promoting its own line against the League of Nations sanctions, the TUC and Communist Party line, holding mass demonstrations in the centre of Glasgow addressed by the Party's MPs.⁴³ Similar meetings although on a smaller scale were organised in every division.⁴⁴

New Leader carried articles written by cricketer, Finchley I.L.P. chairman and Marxist Group leader C.L.R. James on the crisis. James stressed the continuities between the Imperialism of Mussolini and the League of Nations plan for Abyssinia, concluding in favour of working class action against both Italy and other forms of Imperialism:

Workers of Britain, peasants and workers of Africa, get closer together for this and for other fights. But keep far from the Imperialists and their Leagues and covenants and sanctions. Do not play the fly to their spider.

Now as always, let us stand for independent organisation and independent action. We have to break our own chains. Who is the fool that expects our gaolers to break them?⁴⁵

The I.L.P.'s initial response to the Abyssinian crisis thus appeared to be principled and united. A workers' sanctions line also appeared to set the party apart from all the major parties including the Communist Party. Even in London, the division where factional fighting was at its strongest, the different groups had united with those in support of the majority on the N.A.C. in order to present a single policy. This had then allowed the I.L.P. to begin mobilisation of support through mass meetings and demonstrations at which the I.L.P. point of view appeared distinctive. For a time, it appeared as though the issue could be used to gain support for the Party as individuals attracted to the line with even some prominent Labour Party members drawn into support. For example, Thomas Johnson used the front page of *Forward* to announce his support for 'Brockway's line of Workers' sanctions.'⁴⁶ However, behind this success the reality of the Party's position was very different. The issue, which had seemed to some as though it could unite the divided party, instead led to open conflict.

The Workers' sanctions line of Gaster of the R.P.C., James of the Marxist Group and Brockway from the I.L.P. leadership, which had been implicit in the original *New Leader* article presupposed a level of support for the Abyssinians. The Inner Executive line, expressed in their manifesto and supported by the N.A.C. manifesto, assumed neither side should be supported. Further, a majority of members of the R.P.C., including leader Dr Cullen, argued, in line with the Communist Party for support for the

League of Nations. The result of these different positions within the Party was open conflict and frustration.

In the October 1935 issue of *Controversy* the London Divisional Council Emergency Committee which had united the warring factions in that area wrote with disgust at the policy adopted by first the Inner Executive and subsequently by the N.A.C. They complained at the flaws in the N.A.C.'s analysis which classified Italy and Abyssinia together. The N.A.C. position suggested an opposition to War and the National Government. The London Committee wanted to actively oppose not only British but also Italian Imperialism:

Abyssinia and Italy cannot be classed together. The N.A.C. analysis is wrong. ... The defence of Abyssinia at this particular time is our responsibility. The defeat of British Imperialism is also our responsibility. We cannot divorce these two tasks, and act as though our responsibilities began and ended in this country though our actions must necessarily begin at home.

For the London Committee it was thus crucial to find a way of opposing Italian aggression without falling into the 'wrong' line of the Communist Party and supporting the League of Nations and British Imperialism. The solution was to be found in the active policy of pure Workers' Sanctions, advocated unhesitatingly by so many within the Party.

[The N.A.C. line] confuses the Imperialist line of the TUC with the wrong but completely different line of the C.P. It sees nothing but the necessity to resist our Home Government, with no concrete proposals for the period before the outbreak of war, and only the pure pacifist line if war should come. We must not think, as the N.A.C. is doing, in terms of rallying those only who are with us now- they are too few. We must think and plan in terms of winning over those who are not yet with us... We must raise the call for workers' action under workers' control.⁴⁷

This frustration with the N.A.C. line was not restricted to the London Division. The N.A.C. received a number of complaints about its lack of support for Workers' Sanctions including those from the Party's Divisional Councils in Scotland, Lancashire and Yorkshire. Further the N.A.C. could do little to resolve the conflict as it found itself increasingly split. Indeed, when they met to discuss the issue in October a stalemate had been reached.⁴⁸

In this initial period of the Abyssinian crisis, divisions had emerged within the I.L.P. based on three opposing viewpoints. However, virtually all those who supported the imposing sanctions on Italy through the League of Nations had left the party with the R.P.C. Following this, the Party was able to agree on the negative aspects of a policy on the conflict; opposition to the League of Nations and its sanctions, and opposition to

War.⁴⁹ However, there remained two strongly opposed viewpoints on Abyssinia. One, the position championed by the Parliamentary Group, was that the working-class should refuse to take sides in the conflict. The second, advanced by the International Bureau, Brockway and the Marxist Group, proposed a policy of Workers' Sanctions against Italian Imperialist designs on Abyssinia. Whilst the N.A.C. stressed the consensual line of opposition to War, many of the most active groups within the party continued to press for Workers' Sanctions, angry at the way in which the Parliamentary Group, through control of the Inner Executive, appeared to be able to steamroller the rest of the Party.⁵⁰ These frustrations were intensified by the conduct of a particular section of the Party during the 1936 Keighley Conference.

The debate on the Abyssinian question at Keighley centred on the change in the initial line of the *New Leader*, which had supported the Abyssinians and its reversal by the Inner Executive which had later been endorsed by the N.A.C. The opposition to these changes was led by C.L.R. James who started by trying to refer back the N.A.C. report, arguing for the centrality of struggle against Imperialism and the need to assist colonial peoples. The argument received support from around the country, and from all sections of the Party. Brockway was the leading member of the N.A.C. to lend his weight to the position, making use of the similar line taken by Fred Jowett in the *Bradford I.L.P. News*. The reference back was also supported by a number of divisional councils, most notably London with C.A. Smith, and Lancashire, whose representative accused the Inner Executive of basing their line on political expediency in the light of the election.

The Parliamentary Group received support from some in Scotland, including James Carmichael, the Scottish organiser, who argued that Workers' Sanctions against Italy had no chance of success. But in the main the members of the Parliamentary Group were left to speak for themselves with Buchanan strongly refusing to accept 'the verdict of the League of Nations that Italy was the aggressor nation.' He also ridiculed the idea that propaganda for working-class action could be got over to the masses organised in the trade union movement arguing that 'the reformist leaders were the obstacle to such a method.' However, the most consistent line of defence, which was used by all members of the Parliamentary Group was to argue that 'the only way to fight Imperialism was to smash Imperialist Britain.'

When it came to voting, James' reference back of the N.A.C. report was joined by a resolution from Lancashire Division Council backing the early *New Leader* line and stating that the action of the National Council was 'in direct conflict with declared Party policy and a contradiction of Party discipline.' The Lancashire resolution was carried by a substantial majority on a vote of 70 to 57. The reference back was carried but by a margin of only one vote. It appeared that a considerable victory had been won against the Parliamentary Group.

However, this appearance was quickly reversed. Following the day's proceedings the Parliamentary Group met and decided to continue its opposition to the Workers' Sanction line despite the conference decision. The following day (Monday), Maxton presented the conference with a set of options which many considered unpalatable. Either the conference reverse its earlier decision, putting the policy to a plebiscite, or face an open revolt from the Parliamentary Group:

This conference is absolutely united in its opposition to capitalism and imperialist war in its view that the Abyssinian war is a struggle between British and Italian imperialism, both of which would sacrifice Abyssinia, and in its opposition to Government or League action against Italy, including the use of military or economic sanctions.

There is a difference in the party on the issue of working-class action against Italy. The Chairman of the Party, the three members of the Inner Executive, the Parliamentary Group, and other members of the National Council are unable conscientiously to operate the decision reached yesterday.

The National Council therefore asks, having regard to the narrowness of the majority, that the matter at issue be referred back to the Party for decision in three months time by a ballot vote of the membership and that in the mean time the conference should express its confidence in the National Council and allow liberty for the expression of differing views within the Party.

Inevitably the position of the Parliamentary Group caused fierce anger from some of those, most notably the Marxist Group, who felt that they had won a legitimate victory the previous day. However, many of those who had supported the sanctions line the previous day, led by Brockway, were not prepared to lose the Parliamentary Group. Brockway stated that though he supported the decision of the conference he felt it would be 'a bad blow for the Party' if the decision taken the day before involved the loss particularly of the chairman. He urged the delegates to accept the proposal for a plebiscite of the membership for 'the sake of the maintenance of the I.L.P. and its work and after a heated debate the proposal was carried by 93 votes to 39.

Following the conference, and after extended discussions the N.A.C. decided the plebiscite should be split into two questions. The first asked whether the I.L.P. should have 'declared against Italy and in favour of Abyssinia by the refusal of war materials to

Italy.' The second reversed the question and asked whether the party should 'have refused to back either Italy or Abyssinia and opposed the sending of war materials to either side.'

The issues were debated in a special issue of *Controversy* devoted to the question of whether workers should take sides in the struggle between Italy and Abyssinia. Two members of the Parliamentary Group, Maxton and McGovern argued the case against along with the Birmingham Quaker Joseph Southall. The contrary position was put by Brockway, Bob Edwards the Lancashire N.A.C. member and West Indian Marxist Grouper CLR James.

Those who opposed taking sides in the dispute stressed two points. First they emphasised the need to postpone war for as long as possible which appealed to the strongly anti-war and pacifist tradition within the Party. As Maxton argued this would assist the Soviet Union to get 'her social and economic machinery in full working order' thus 'demonstrating its superiority over capitalism in a manner so clear as to be beyond argument and denial' and at the same time the delay would allow 'the working-class movements in capitalist countries should have time to rally themselves, reorganise themselves, and get united on a real policy of struggle.' Second, they gave central place to the need to oppose *British* Imperialism suggesting that supporting Abyssinia was to aid British Imperialism:

If I believed in Machiavellian tactics I could easily argue that to those who wish British Imperialism weakened a pro-Italian policy was the correct line. To take a pro-Abyssinian line was to aid British Imperialism. That was the popular line in this country.

On the other hand, those who supported workers' sanctions, apart from pointing the recruitment possibilities of such a line, stressed the need to move beyond the Party's traditional views adopted during the Great War. C.L.R. James angrily argued that Italian aggression was the issue:

Is there any child of five who does not know that first and foremost in this question is the fact that the Italian army are using every means at their disposal to destroy the Abyssinian army in order to make Abyssinia a colony ... No interest of British Imperialism in Abyssinia can obscure this plain and simple fact. It is waste of ink and paper to have to write it.

Brockway in a similar vein suggested that the I.L.P. could only succeed by challenging all forms of Imperialism, whether British or not.

We must find a policy that strikes at both Italian and British Imperialism. This means supporting Workers sanctions and not Imperialist sanctions. *The strongest case for independent working-class action is that it challenges Imperialism abroad and Capitalism at home at one and the same time.*

Despite these arguments two factors combined in favour of the Parliamentary Group position. First, by the time of the plebiscite, the immediacy of the crisis had passed. The policy of workers' sanctions had seemed most plausible at the outbreak of the crisis almost a year before the plebiscite. By the Keighley conference, in March, much of its relevance was diminished although anger against the Parliamentary Group was still clearly widespread. However, by the time of the actual plebiscite in May Haile Salassie, the Emperor of Abyssinia, had been forced to leave Abyssinia and Mussolini had proclaimed the foundation of a new Roman Empire. It was no longer so clear what positive impact an I.L.P. declaration for workers' sanctions could have had. Second, a declaration for workers' sanctions would split the Parliamentary Group from the Party, a consequence which many of those who might otherwise have supported workers' sanctions found unpalatable. In such circumstances it was not surprising that the results of the Ballot supported the Parliamentary Group's position by the considerable majority of 809 to 554.⁵¹

The plebiscite was a defeat for those who sought a more interventionist opposition to Imperialism across the world, and it appeared to represent a victory for the more pacifist line of the Parliamentary Group. It also, in terms reminiscent of the debates over fusion with the SDF in 1898, indicated much about the real distribution of power within the I.L.P. However, in reality the compromise that the plebiscite represented gave only very tenuous support to the Parliamentary Group position.

The N.A.C. immediately stressed that the result of the plebiscite did not lay 'down a policy to be applied under all circumstances.' The Executive Committee was thus given the task of examining the question of how the I.L.P. should react in situations where the British Government was not involved.⁵² The policy which the N.A.C. produced and was passed at the 1937 Glasgow conference was a defeat for the policy of the Parliamentary Group. The decisions supported the initial decisions of the 1936 conference and opposed the result of the plebiscite in backing workers' sanctions.

In the event of an attack by an Imperialist Government on a subject people, it will be the duty of the British working class to take all possible action in support of the subject people, including organised action to refuse war materials to the Imperialist Government.⁵³

There were a number of conditions which made the resulting policy slightly more palatable to those who had been victorious in the plebiscite. The N.A.C. was given

discretion to allow for alteration to this policy if British (or other) Imperialism would be assisted by this action or if the leadership of the subject people were not of a 'character which will eventually make for the emancipation of the working and peasant populations.' Nevertheless, the temperament of the decision was clearly in line with those who had supported a policy of workers' sanctions. The plebiscite was a short-term measure to keep the Parliamentary Group within the Party. The tensions were evident, but by the time they were exposed the situation had changed substantially; not only because of the rapidly changing situation in Abyssinia, but more importantly, because of the civil war in Spain.

9.5 Spain

The I.L.P. has taken an important place in commentary on Britain and the Spanish Civil War. George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, one of the most widely read interpretations on the war, is based on his time with the I.L.P. unit. This impression was further strengthened by Ken Loach's recent film *Land and Freedom*, inspired at least in part by the recollections and instructions of Stafford Cottmann, another of the members of the I.L.P. unit. Thus, images of the I.L.P. contingent have formed an important part of the story of the British contribution to the Spanish Civil War. Still, such images represent a counterpoint to the dominant narrative which continues to be underwritten by major historians, especially those with former C.P. links, one consequence of which has been the tendency to simplify the I.L.P. line as the alternative to Stalinism ⁵⁴

These images, Orwell's more than Loach's, tell an important part of the truth of the impact of the Spanish Civil War on the I.L.P. The suppression of POUM and the event in Barcelona in May 1937 transformed the war for the I.L.P. An enthusiastic response and initial period of activity was frustrated by the impact of these events. However, the reality of the I.L.P.'s position was more ambiguous. Even in the initial phase of the war there were serious concerns from many leading I.L.P. members. Either because of concern about the Catholic reaction to this position or because of pacifist feelings they felt unable to fully support the Party's position on the war.

I.L.P. support in Glasgow was closely related to the Catholic community and the leaders of the Glasgow I.L.P. had an acute awareness of the risk of alienating that support. Support for the Nationalists in the Civil War dominated the leadership of the Catholic

community throughout Britain, and even most of those who opposed this view argued for neutrality. These views were largely shared by much of the Catholic working class, as one recent commentator has argued 'hostility to the Republic was, therefore, widespread amongst working class Catholics.'⁵⁵ This dilemma was particularly acute for the I.L.P., all of whose representatives in Glasgow considered themselves dependent on Catholic support. This problem was emphasised by the defeat of Catholic Glasgow I.L.P. leader John Heenan in the 1936 local elections. Members of the Catholic community saw Heenan's defeat as an expression of the power of the Catholic vote to dislodge those who were not sufficiently sympathetic to their case. The other I.L.P. leaders were threatened by hecklers with a similar fate.⁵⁶

The response of the I.L.P. leadership in Glasgow varied. Buchanan, for example, remained silent on the issues surrounding the conflict and it was later suggested that he refused to accept the party line of support for the Republican Government.⁵⁷ In contrast McGovern was one of the labour movement's most combative speakers on behalf of the Republican cause. In November 1936, McGovern accompanied John McNair, the I.L.P.'s international representative, to Barcelona with the purpose of investigating the Catholic position in Spain.⁵⁸ On his return he published his views in the pamphlet *Why Bishops Back Franco* which obtained a circulation of 28,000. In the pamphlet, based on 'interviews and observation', he argued that Franco was using Churches as fortresses whilst claiming that Catholics were not being treated harshly. He also argued that the Spanish Church had 'become a thoroughly Capitalist Institution.'⁵⁹

McGovern also embroiled himself in a number of large set piece debates in Glasgow against prominent Catholics such as his June 1937 debates with Glasgow Catholic journalist Douglas Jerrold at St. Andrew's Hall which attracted three pages of coverage in *Forward*. Whilst Jerrold based his defence in religious terms, McGovern countered with a class-based argument.⁶⁰ Some members of the I.L.P. in Glasgow such as Buchanan and Heenan, who rejoined the Labour Party after complaining that the I.L.P. did not recognise the importance of attending Mass for Catholics fighting Franco, were reluctant to oppose the leadership of the Catholic community. However, these concerns within the Party over the treatment of Catholics by the Republicans appear only to have been expressed by the relatively small number of individuals concerned about the electoral position in strongly Catholic areas.

The argument for participation was further reinforced because the revolt against the Spanish Government, on July 18 1936, came immediately after the internal party disputes over the correct policy to take during the Abyssinian crisis. As part of the compromise that had seen that dispute resolved it had been agreed to give support in the case of 'a civil war against the Capitalist class in another country.' With this agreement so recently reached along with the Party's increasing widely accepted commitment to a 'Revolutionary Socialist' policy the pacifist elements within the party were unable to mount any serious opposition to support for the Spanish Civil War.

Thus, a number of leading members of the party including Brockway and Maxton came to support the struggle. Their support was, however, conditional on the fact that the 'struggle was a working class struggle against the capitalist class.' Thus, the Workers' Front line, which suggested that united working class action independent of other classes, was the only policy which could defeat fascism in Spain, was undoubtedly believed by the leading members of the I.L.P. However, it was also the basis of an uneasy compromise which allowed those with pacifist leanings to support the Spanish Civil War whilst not feeling as though they were compromising their general anti-militarism.

Thus, the most important constant in the official analysis of the Spanish situation by the I.L.P. was the stressing of working class activity and the Workers' Front policy. Thus, the Party stressed the role of the working class in the short term process of preventing the immediate victory of the fascist revolt. As John McNair wrote in the I.L.P.'s 1936 pamphlet *In Spain Now!*:

It must never be forgotten that Spain was not saved by the Government in Madrid, by loyal elements in the Army or even by the loyalty of the larger part of the fleet. Spain was saved by the spontaneous and united efforts of the workers and in the beginning they were not even armed.

This analysis allowed McNair to unite anti-fascist and revolutionary socialist sentiment to declare complete and unflinching support from the I.L.P. for the Republican side.

We say to our Spanish comrades quite simply: "We are with you in every fibre of our bodies and minds right up to the end. Your sufferings are our sufferings because your fight is ours, and when victory finally comes to you it will be to us a source of happiness to realise that we at least have not hindered, but, to all the extent of our powers have tried to help you towards that triumph."⁶¹

The 1937 I.L.P. annual conference stood entirely behind McNair's sentiments. It declared the party in

complete solidarity with the Spanish workers in their war against Fascism and in their use of Workers' Power for the Social Revolution in Catalonia and other territories of Spain freed from Fascism.

In these initial stages of the conflict the Party's support for the Republican side was demonstrated in a number of practical ways.

In the first place the I.L.P. arranged for an envoy, John McNair, to be sent to Barcelona. McNair, up to that point had been acting as assistant secretary of the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity. He arrived in Barcelona in August 1936 taking with him the first £100 that the party had raised to assist the Republicans.⁶² McNair then worked to establish an international committee of the Bureau in Barcelona with him acting as chairman, and Bob Smillie as International representative.⁶³

The I.L.P. also set out plans for an exhibition on the subject of the Spanish Civil War. Initially it planned to try to co-ordinate the exhibition with the Spanish Medical Aid Committee, the London Trades Council, the London Labour Party and the Communist Party. For the I.L.P. Edward Fletcher of Birmingham, later Labour MP for Darlington, went out to Barcelona with Bob Smillie. He was joined by Roland Penrose to collect material for the exhibition. The other organisations declined to participate and the Spanish Exhibition, which opened 20 February 1937 at 36 Ludgate Hill, London, consisted entirely of I.L.P. material. The exhibition was arranged by Penrose and Thomas Grey as Fletcher stayed in Barcelona to help McNair and the international committee.⁶⁴

The initial wave of I.L.P. activity also saw a large amount of fund raising. For example the Party bought and equipped an Ambulance, which they named after Joaquin Maurin, the POUM leader who was widely believed to be dead. The ambulance was driven to Spain by W.B. Martin, described as an 'artillery expert', who then volunteered on the Huesca Front.⁶⁵ The I.L.P. also aimed to raise clothing and food through a series of appeals in the initial phase of the conflict. Brockway outlined the chief aims of the I.L.P.'s fundraising strategy in the *New Leader* stressing in addition to obtaining medical supplies and medical units the necessity of raising money for weapons, getting relief to the victims of the war and of stopping transports getting through to the Nationalists.⁶⁶ The Party was able to act effectively on only some of these points but it intervened in a variety of ways. These methods ranged from political lobbying to personal appeals. On

the political side the I.L.P. was active in the successful efforts to persuade the Co-operative movement to revise its attitude and send food and medical supplies to Spain, canvassing support at both national and local levels.⁶⁷ On the personal side the Party held a Socialist self-denial week which raised £144 for Spain and directed an appeal specifically to its women readers to knit clothing to help the Spanish workers:⁶⁸

To Women Readers- Are you knitting those sweaters and socks for the Spanish Workers? They are needing them very badly - both for adults and children.⁶⁹

In addition to these attempts to aid the Republican side from a distance the Party also attempted to help in more direct ways. Most importantly, it decided to send a group of fighters out to Spain to demonstrate in the most practical way possible their support for the cause.

The police, aware of the Party's attempts to recruit fighters had been keeping a close eye on the Party. Special Branch's botched attempts to keep a surreptitious watch on the Party's headquarters, which resulted in them being forced to decline the offer of a cup of tea from staff inside, made the national news, whilst Brockway later claimed that three members of the police also failed in their attempts to be recruited to the I.L.P. contingent. Nevertheless, with this and other police attention and the awareness of impending Government legislation to prevent further military aid to Spain, the contingent had every reason to be careful. Thus, the march to the train at Victoria Station on 1 January 1937 of the group of about twenty-five soldiers-to-be, singing the International, under the charge of Bob Edwards, was seen by only a few trusted members of the Party who were informed of the departure details. The press were informed only later along with a claim that the Party intended to send a further one hundred or so men out to Spain.⁷⁰

The war, for the contingent, famously described by George Orwell in his *Homage to Catalonia*, was after this evasion of police attention in Britain, a relatively quiet affair. The initial group of twenty-five was joined in Spain by a number of others, including Eric Blair, then not using his pen name George Orwell. Along with Blair, came Bob Williams, a Welshman married to a Spanish girl who joined up with his brother-in-law, Ramon.⁷¹ The contingent was also joined at this stage by Bob Smillie, the grandson of the famous Scottish miners leader Bob Smillie. Smillie had been working with John McNair as the representative Youth section of the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity. However, he quickly became convinced that he would be

of most service at the front and persuaded McNair to agree to him signing up when the I.L.P. contingent came over. With these, and other, additions the I.L.P. contingent numbered somewhere between thirty and thirty-five.⁷²

Eric Blair's childhood experiences in India, at prep school and at Eton are well known. The backgrounds of the other members of the contingent were diverse. Members were recorded as coming from Belfast, Chorley, Larkhall, Glasgow, Anglesey, Manchester, Bristol, Dartford, Bingley, Twickenham and Golders Green. Three had fought in the First World War: Charles Doran of Glasgow, Harry Thomas of London and Arthur Chambers, who died in 1938 after transferring to a CNT unit. Few others, apart from Harry Webb the stretcher-bearer and Paddy O'Hara, from Belfast, who had some training in first aid, had either military or medical experience.

The journey to Spain was relatively uneventful, with the group claiming widespread support from those they met:

From Perpignan right to the Spanish frontier the clenched fist was our welcome, and garage-workers, mechanics, small shopkeepers, agricultural workers in the fields, the women-folk and all the kiddies, there is not the slightest doubt are solid for the workers' cause.

On arrival on 10 January at the Lenin Barracks in Barcelona, where they were initially stationed, a discussion circle was formed. Whilst the discussion group centred on political issues the group was not solely concerned with such topics. A social secretary was also appointed to 'arrange concerts and entertainments' and a sports secretary was elected with a hasty football match organised between the I.L.P.ers and a team of Spanish militia-men. Orwell later described the barracks in bleak manner.

The whole barracks was in a state of filth and chaos... We ate at long trestle-tables out of permanently greasy tin pannikins, and drank out of a dreadful thing called a *porrón*.

The contemporary descriptions of meal times which appeared in the *New Leader* was altogether more favourable:

The food is good but it will take the lads a week to get used to the drinking of wine at practically every meal. A packet of cigarettes is supplied to each man per day, and the pay is 10 pesetas.⁷³

The training received at the Barracks was notoriously short and at the end of January the I.L.P. contingent, as the British section of the POUM militia, began their journey, stopping off at Lerida, where they were visited by John McNair before leaving for the area surrounding Huesca on the Aragon Front on 2 February.⁷⁴ At the front the contingent took over three advanced posts, about 100 yards distant from the others,

joined by communication trenches. The outposts, on the slope of the hills looking west, were about two hundred yards from the nearest Fascist lines on the opposite slopes looking east.⁷⁵

Bob Edwards, the brigade commander, reporting in the *New Leader*, was keen to stress the most exciting aspects of the unit's work. He wrote about scouting within hearing distance along the fascist lines with Blair, of holding their position and dealing with the desertion of fascists. The reality of the contingent's activity was much more mundane. It largely consisted of building roads from their dug-out to the nearest Spanish position and creating a dug-out for community purposes where they could meet to talk and receive instructions.⁷⁶ In terms of fighting the fascists the contingent saw relatively little action. As Orwell later put it:

Meanwhile nothing happened, nothing ever happened. The English had got into the habit of saying that this wasn't a war it was a bloody pantomime.

Indeed, the main descriptions of fighting against the fascists which appears both in *Homage to Catalonia* and in the *New Leader*, concerned a night attack in which some of the contingent took part. The plan initiated by the position captain, Benjamin, a French speaking Polish Jew, involved fifteen English volunteers in a plan to storm a fascist parapet and seize the machine gun which dominated the POUM line. The attack, with Paddy Donovan second in command to Benjamin, initially went according to plan. The men crawled across the mud of no man's land and captured the parapet. However, the machine gun had been removed and the co-ordinated manoeuvres to capture other necessary strategic positions failed. The group soon found themselves under attack from all sides and retreated with only a small quantity of fascist bombs and injuries to, amongst others, Reg Hiddlestone, Paddy Thomas and Douglas Thompson, to show for their efforts.⁷⁷

The contrast between this brief moment of close combat and the everyday experience of the trenches was summarised, in Orwell's recollection, by someone shouting 'This is war! Isn't it bloody?' Nevertheless injuries to the contingent were not restricted to that 'dirty' April night. Arthur 'Lanky' Clinton, from Lancashire and the humorist of the contingent, was injured in the shoulder during shelling at the end of March. Philip Hunter, of Dartford I.L.P., and Buck Parker both sustained leg injuries shortly before the night attack. Bob Williams broke his ankle during shelling in February 1937 and Eric Blair was shot through the throat by a sniper. Alongside these injuries Stafford

Cottmann, the youngest member of the contingent at only eighteen years old, was hospitalised with suspected TB.⁷⁸ Thus, despite the limited military role of the contingent, a number of its members were injured during the Spanish Civil war. This effort signified for many the attitude of complete and unqualified commitment of the I.L.P. towards the War during its early phase. However, whilst the I.L.P. contingent may not have played a major part in the military side of the Spanish Civil War it was nevertheless involved in the events in May in Barcelona that were to transform the I.L.P. attitude to the Spanish Civil War.

In these events, influentially described in Orwell's *Homage To Catalonia*, the I.L.P. contingent, on leave in Barcelona from the end of April, became involved in the fighting between the rival anti-fascist groups. During the initial fighting the I.L.P. contingent was split into four separate groups, with eight members in Hotel Falcon, the main residence for POUM militia men in Barcelona, six across the road in the Comité Local of POUM at the Plaza del Terato, four in the barracks and one or two with John McNair at the Executive Committee's head-quarters at 10 Ramblas de los Estudios. The members of the I.L.P. contingent between them had very little idea of exactly what was happening. Nevertheless, most of the contingent managed to congregate at the Hotel Falcon and Comité Local and kept up their spirits in the following days by singing reading and talking whilst those who had been on night duty slept. None of the I.L.P. contingent were drawn into the fighting in any extended way.⁷⁹

However, the significance of the Barcelona for the I.L.P. lay not so much in the events themselves as in the reaction to the situation. Immediately after the events the Communist press began to attack POUM, claiming they were solely responsible for the fighting and were in league with the fascists in doing so. These accusations were quickly published in the *Daily Worker*, appearing in the 11 May issue. However, there was no immediate attack on the I.L.P. itself and the *New Leader* of the 14 May was surprisingly quiet on the issue. However, the *New Leader* of 21 May carried extensive comment on the 'Counter-Revolution in Spain'. Brockway argued that the Communists were on the wrong side of the barricades and were now 'committed to the defence of property', suggesting that the Communist Parties not only in Spain, but everywhere, had ceased to be revolutionary parties.

Sincere revolutionary Socialists will increasingly turn to the Parties in each country which carry on the revolutionary tradition. In Spain that party is the POUM. In this country that Party is the I.L.P.

The articles also gave the first account of the I.L.P. contingent's presence and activities during the events. The response from the Communist press was immediate. J. R. Campbell wrote an article asking 'Is the I.L.P. for winning the war or aiding Franco?' for the following day's *Daily Worker*. In the same issue Palme Dutt accused the I.L.P. of having involved itself in 'the criminal armed attempt against the Spanish Peoples Front.' Following this, the accusations from the Communist Party against the I.L.P. flowed thick and fast, with considerable attention being given to the subject at the 14th National Communist Congress later that month. Gallacher and Campbell in particular were vitriolic in their attacks whilst Pollitt's speech signalled the effective end of the Unity Campaign. Stafford Cottmann found himself expelled from Bristol YCL for 'taking part in the fascist rising in Barcelona.'⁸⁰

These problems were exacerbated later in the year by the reporting of statements alleged to have been made by Frank Frankford, an I.L.P. contingent member. Frankford was arrested by the police and held for some time whilst the police investigated the theft of some paintings about which it was suggested that he had evidence. He was eventually released, he believed because of the influence of Sam Lesser, a member of the International Brigade and then a *Daily Worker* journalist. Frankford gave an interview to Lesser which was transformed into a statement which appeared in the *Daily Worker* on 14 September. The statement accused the POUM contingent of working for the fascists and contained specific allegations that there had been collaboration between the fascists and the POUM. The allegations were attacked in the *New Leader* first by John McNair and then in detail by Orwell who answered the allegations individually. Orwell's article was signed by the fourteen members of the contingent who could be contacted at short notice.⁸¹ Brockway later wrote that Frankford came to the I.L.P. and withdrew the allegations:

A few days later the boy arrived in London and came at once to McNair at the I.L.P. Head Office. He broke down crying and begged forgiveness. He had been imprisoned in Barcelona and had been presented with the document to sign as a condition of freedom.⁸²

The *Daily Worker* undoubtedly distorted the facts of Frankford's interview with Lesser, it was forced to correct certain points of the interview two days after it was published. The allegations themselves were clearly without substance. However, it appears that Frankford himself was not necessarily opposed to the gist, that there was a certain fascist outlook amongst the POUM. In an interview with Bernard Crick on 22 December 1979 Frankford maintained that 'there are things still to be explained' and stated that the *Daily Worker* article, which he agreed he had never signed, was 'quite

legitimate in politics' as he was 'a realist'. Indeed, during the interview he went on to state that he felt that Orwell was basically a fascist:

Basically his attitude was Fascist, he didn't like the workers... I don't care what he says and what he's written, when you spoke to him he didn't like them, he despised them. That was why I could never understand what he was doing there. In fact we said to him that he was a man of the right and not of the left and that he had never thrown off his Burma police attitude. I'm sure he despised us all, which was why we disliked him.⁸³

The relationship between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party continued to deteriorate from this point on, and was never to recover from this blow. By the end of the year all cordial relations between the Parties had broken down with the Communists, with attitudes reminiscent of the class-against-class phase, treating the I.L.P. as in some ways more dangerous than the fascists themselves.⁸⁴ Thus, the response of the Communist International to the events in Barcelona in May 1937 had a profound impact on the relationship between the I.L.P. and the Communist Party, removing permanently the idea of united left wing action between the two parties. However, the impact of the events on the I.L.P. went far beyond the relationship with the Communist Party.

Not all of the I.L.P. contingent returned home immediately, Arthur Chambers, Bob Williams and Reg Hiddlestone all stayed on to fight in Spain. Williams returned home in December 1938 after being injured three times, Hiddlestone was the final member of the contingent left in Spain, returning home in February 1939, leaving Barcelona only hours before the fascists entered. However, Chambers was not so lucky, being the only member of the I.L.P. contingent to be killed in combat in Spain when he was shot by a fascist sniper in August 1938 after transferring to a CNT unit.⁸⁵

Nevertheless, the situation for the members of the I.L.P. contingent in Spain was made extremely uncomfortable by the attacks on POUM and it became more so as moves were made to ban the I.L.P.'s Spanish 'brother party'. The Party made considerable efforts to get its members home safely and several of the I.L.P. contingent made furtive returns home escaping police arrest.⁸⁶ For example Cottmann, McNair, Blair and his wife Eileen O'Shaughnessy made an escape across the border by train after posing as wealthy English businessmen.⁸⁷ Other were not so lucky, many members of POUM were arrested and some assassinated. Of those closely associated with the I.L.P. brigade the arrest of George Kopp, the unit commander, and Harry Milton, one of the American members of the contingent, were of particular concern. However, both were eventually released. Milton did not spend long in gaol, as McNair ensured his release. Kopp on the

other hand, despite attempted intervention on his behalf by the I.L.P., remained in prison for a further eighteen months. However, most attention both at the time and since, has focused on the case of Bob Smillie who died in gaol in Valencia.

The disputes and difficulties within the I.L.P. Guild of Youth had been extensively dealt with by the Party's 1937 Easter Conference. There it had been decided that Smillie, as both a hero of the Spanish Civil War and supporter of the party leadership, should lead a campaign to reinvigorate the I.L.P.'s youth section. He set out to return home on 10 May and was arrested the following day. Initially Spanish Government authorities told the I.L.P.'s representatives that the arrest was 'merely a technical matter.' Nevertheless, as he continued to be held both Brockway and Maxton wrote to the Spanish Ambassador. Maxton was further assured by the Ambassador that the matter would be investigated.⁸⁸ However, at the beginning of June, Smillie's case was transferred to the Secret Police as investigations started into his role in 'rebellion against the authorities' in the events in Barcelona. As these investigations began, the authorities reported that Smillie had been taken ill and on Friday 11 June shortly after he had been transferred to Provincial hospital they claimed he had died of peritonitis.

Smillie's death has been surrounded in mystery, and has been the subject of much speculation. The official I.L.P. report into the investigation, conducted by David Murray of Motherwell I.L.P., found that the authorities were guilty of carelessness rather than violence or direct malice:⁸⁹

We consider that Bob Smillie's death was due to great carelessness on the part of the responsible authorities, which amounted to criminal negligence.

Against this position it has frequently been asserted that Smillie was 'done to death' by the Communist authorities. Recent analysis by Tom Buchanan, of the evidence surrounding Smillie's death, focusing on that collected by David Murray, suggests that the full facts will probably never be known. However, he makes clear that there are good reasons to believe that Smillie did indeed die of appendicitis. In fact one focus of Buchanan's argument is to stress the restraint of the I.L.P. leadership and the lack of political use made of Smillie's death. He concludes that

[T]he events surrounding his death suggest a degree of neglect for which the official I.L.P. formula of 'criminal negligence' barely appears adequate.⁹⁰

However, John Newsinger has presented a letter from Georges Kopp to the I.L.P., which seems to indicate that the appendicitis was imaginary and that Smillie was in fact kicked to death by his Communist interrogators. The letter is based upon Kopp's

claimed recollections of a dossier which he claimed to have had in his possession which he had stolen from the Secret Police headquarters whilst imprisoned. In an unpublished response, Buchanan convincingly questions many of the facts which Kopp claims to have established from his reading of the dossier. Most importantly it is clear from a range of sources that Smillie had been unwell for a long period of time with symptoms consistent with appendicitis. Given this it is unlikely that the appendicitis was 'imaginary', simply a 'cover story' invented by the authorities. Buchanan also questions Kopp's integrity as an historical witness, although relying on the viewpoint of Orwell's biographers to establish these points.⁹¹ This negative view of Kopp's reliability was shared by many of those who fought alongside, and even considered themselves friends of Kopp. For example Bob Edwards knew and admired Georges Kopp, but nevertheless considered him an unreliable witness, and one who was prone to extreme exaggeration:

I suppose I knew Georges Kopp better than any other person. We lived and worked together during the Spanish Civil War on the Aragon Front for three months.... Georges Kopp was one of many courageous men who came to Spain to fight because fighting was a kind of career for them....He was inclined to exaggerate. For example, he told me he was a friend of Henry Spaark, ^{Chief} the Socialist Foreign Minister of Belgium. I met Spaark [sic] and discussed the plight of Georges Kopp with him and indeed it was Spaark's [sic] intervention that had Georges Kopp released from prison. But Spaark ^{'denied'} denied any knowledge of Georges Kopp, and as far as I am aware, he had no background of activity in the Labour Movement of Belgium.⁹²

Given these considerations it seems reasonable to adopt an attitude of some scepticism to Kopp's letter and to suppose that the findings of the initial I.L.P. report were largely accurate if somewhat underplayed. Smillie died of appendicitis, but he would never have done so if he had not been a political prisoner and suffered from 'criminal neglect'.

The Party's reaction to Smillie's death was an illuminating indication of their political position. Inevitably tributes to Smillie flowed in. Stress was placed on his personal qualities: his enthusiasm, friendliness, and repeatedly on his love of singing. Emphasis was also placed on his political heritage, as Maxton wrote in tribute:

We knew the stock from which he came. We saw his father and mother living a strenuous existence on their little farm in Lanarkshire, toiling early and late on the soil, but still with surplus energy to devote to the Socialist Movement, to the unemployed, to the improvement of the conditions of the miners living around them.

We knew his grandfather- that strong leader of the miners, who pioneered their organisation first in Lanarkshire, then in Scotland and Great Britain, finally to become a great International working-class figure. We knew his grandmother, a great woman who to this day at advanced years maintains a spirit of sturdy independence, and staunch adherence to the workers' cause.⁹³

His own political activity and role in the working class movement also played a major part in the tributes to Smillie: his participation in the Lanarkshire section of the 1935

Scottish Hunger March, his role within the Guild of Youth and the International Youth Bureau, and of course, his activity with the I.L.P. contingent in the Spanish Civil War.⁹⁴

Despite all of this, and the growing antagonism with the Communist movement, there was no attempt to make Smillie into a heroic victim of Stalinist oppression in Spain. Indeed mention of the way in which he died was almost absent from the Party literature dealing with the incident. For example, the official tribute to him *We Carry On* carefully avoided mentioning the issues which surrounded his illness and death. It simply recorded that Smillie had 'died in a hospital in Valencia.' There was not hint of any controversy about the way in which he was treated. His arrest received only a quick mention: 'It was while he was on his way home to undertake a national campaign for the Guild of Youth and the Spanish workers that he was detained by the authorities.' There was a stark contrast between this, and the way the Communist Party used the reporting of deaths for political purposes.

The events in Barcelona and the resulting suppression of POUM changed the I.L.P.'s outlook and activity with respect to Spain. The I.L.P. had, of course, always supported POUM. The ejection of Andrés Nin from the Catalan Government in December 1936 for example had brought a series of letters of 'wholehearted support' from the I.L.P. expressing support for the POUM line, and calls from the Party for an international investigation into the charges against the Spanish Party.⁹⁵

However, support for POUM against the Communists and Socialists in Spain, once seen as a relatively small part of the Party's Spanish concerns after the suppression of POUM soon became the major focus of their activity. By July the Party had decided to express a policy pointing to the overriding importance of tolerance, to secure unity for the defeat of the Fascists.⁹⁶ The I.L.P. leadership became increasingly involved in attempts to secure this tolerance on the ground in Spain. Brockway, for example, visited Spain in July as part of the French Committee for the Defence of the Spanish Revolution. Then two months later, following the assassination of Nin, Maxton went to Spain as part of a deputation from the International Bureau for Revolutionary Socialist Unity. Both Brockway and Maxton returned further disillusioned about the role which the Communists were playing in the Civil War.

Maxton, for example, met both the five leading POUM figures who were being held and with a number of leading figures in the Republican Government including the Prime Minister, the minister of justice, the minister of the interior and the attorney-general. He reported back an overall feeling that the Government 'intends to see that they have a fair trial' and that 'no one takes seriously the charge of espionage and that there is no desire to pass vindictive sentence for the May events in Barcelona.' However, he noted that this did not match the attitude of the Communist Party:

Against this I have to say, and I say it with regret, that the Communist Party in Spain carry on a day-to-day campaign in their Press, calling for the most drastic action.... If it is strong enough to secure the death penalty on our POUM comrades, against the better judgement and understanding of the members of the Government cause in Spain, it will be a very bad day's work for the Government's cause in Spain.⁹⁷

The Party press increasingly focused on attacking the Communist Party in Spain, with articles on these matters by ex-members of its Spanish contingent, on supporting POUM and carrying articles written by the Spanish Party's leadership.⁹⁸ Behind the scenes the Party was working, trying to raise money to support POUM and establishing contacts with the Spanish Republican Government to secure the release of the POUM prisoners, and attempting to win support for POUM within the British working class movement.⁹⁹

The only relief activity which the Party was directly involved after May 1937 came through their assistance in arranging a Basque Children's home in Somerset. The forty-one children the I.L.P. made itself responsible for arrived at the Grange in Street, Somerset on 7 June 1937. The Grange, an old country house with large gardens which had previously been used as a home for mentally deficient children, was offered to the Party for use in housing the Basque children by Mr and Mrs Clark, of the shoe family, in Street.¹⁰⁰ The home stayed open for exactly two years, until June 7 1939, at which time twenty six of the children returned to their families. The fifteen remaining children were found temporary or permanent adoption places in Britain by the combined efforts of the Street Committee and the I.L.P. During its time of operation the home was mainly administered by the residents of Street. The Party's input was however significant with large sums of money being raised, with John MacCallum Scott chiefly responsible for organising the Party's work in Street, assisted by Brockway and McNair.¹⁰¹

In 1936 the I.L.P. had understood the Spanish Civil War as a revolutionary struggle against fascism and capitalism. By the middle of the following year the Party accepted

that serious revolutionary hopes had disappeared. The changing situation lead to changing attitudes. The I.L.P. maintained its overall support for the war, whilst increasingly attacking the role of Communists in Spain. After the May 1937 it would no longer be possible to argue, as Jennie Lee did at the 1937 Easter Conference that 'differences with the Communist Party should not blind us to the great work that the Communists are doing in Spain.' Neither was it possible for Spain to be the great rallying cry within the I.L.P. that it was in both within much of the left in Britain and within the Party in the early period of the War. Indeed by the end of the war the focus of the I.L.P.'s activity was on trying to secure safety for its Spanish comrades from both Republican and Nationalist goals.¹⁰²

9.6 Munich

Perhaps the most public controversy within the I.L.P. during the 1930s came over the Munich Crisis. In September 1938, the N.A.C. issued a manifesto in which the Party declared 'unconditional opposition to any form of support to the Government for war,' and drew explicit comparison with its position on the 1914-18 War.¹⁰³ The Manifesto was referred to in a BBC News Bulletin and in the press and a further pamphlet was published dealing with the political issues involved in the crisis. The N.A.C. Report of the following year declared that these declarations had brought much good publicity for the Party. However, the same could not be said for the controversial statements of Maxton and McGovern in the House of Commons, and the response that these brought from both Party and Press.

Concerns within the I.L.P. were raised when Maxton in the House of Commons wished Chamberlain well before he departed for Munich. Things got worse following Maxton's speech during the Commons debate on the Munich agreement. Speaking to a crowded House on 4 October Maxton announced his opposition to War as 'the one great overriding evil of humanity' claiming 'nothing could justify it.' He was sceptical of the Munich agreement.¹⁰⁴ However, he suggested that the agreement represented 'breathing space' and, whilst distancing himself from Chamberlain's social and political philosophy, he went so far as to 'congratulate the Prime Minister on his work'.¹⁰⁵

Maxton's comments were sufficient to attract the attention of the press gallery and a number of London members of the Party appealed to the Parliamentary Group to

explicitly distance themselves from Chamberlain. However, John McGovern, who never let slip an opportunity to amplify his colleague's most controversial statements, made a speech which added to the problems. Although he reiterated much of what Maxton had said, much of the nuanced wording of Maxton's declaration was missing. Indeed McGovern's speech contained almost none of the condemnation of British Imperialism that was central to both I.L.P. policy and Maxton's speech. The only part of the statement which related to Imperialism sounded almost apologetic:

I recognise that the country does not want war. Britain has a great colonial empire, and wants to pursue a policy which would ensure its continuation in an orderly way. But Germany and Italy are bound to challenge the supremacy of the older empire.

However, the most challenging aspect of his speech for other members of the I.L.P. was his almost unequivocal support of Chamberlain:

If he averted war and gave a breathing space to the world for reason to operate- they were entitled to say to him generously "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."¹⁰⁶

The BBC and National Newspapers picked up on the statements of first Maxton and then McGovern, predictably highlighting the support that the two I.L.P.ers appeared to have given to the Prime Minister.

Groups within the I.L.P. were furious at the action which they perceived Maxton to have taken, and at the association of the I.L.P. with support for the Munich agreement. A number of I.L.P. branches and federations immediately issued statements distancing themselves from the Commons speeches of the MPs.¹⁰⁷ However, the greatest controversy came over the reaction of the N.A.C. Two members of the N.A.C., Fenner Brockway and John Aplin, the N.A.C. member for London, were particularly frustrated. Brockway later stated that he felt the 'speech was regrettable from a revolutionary socialist point of view.' He gave two reasons:

First for the praise of Chamberlain and, second, for its omission of any denunciation of the terms of the Munich pact.¹⁰⁸

Brockway requested an emergency meeting of the Inner Executive at which he and Aplin raised their objections to the impression that had been given of the Party's policy by the Parliamentary speeches. Feelings were running high, but it appeared something of a stand-off had been reached when the Executive agreed to 'put no obstacle in the way' of Brockway and Aplin if they distanced themselves from Maxton and McGovern. Maxton also asked that Brockway delay twenty-four hours to think over his position before issuing any statement. However, Brockway, to his later regret, was not prepared to wait the twenty-four hours and released a statement the following morning publicly

dissenting from what he described as 'the unreserved praise given to Mr Chamberlain's actions' by members of the Parliamentary Group.¹⁰⁹

The Party press attempted to play down the divisions over the Munich Crisis. The *New Leader* editorial on the 14 October briefly acknowledged the disagreements over 'the Prime Minister's role in the recent war crisis.' It stressed that there was no disagreement about the Party's attitude towards war nor to the policy to now be pursued:

We are unanimous in our view that the present Imperialist Peace will lead to war unless the workers are mobilised, first in resistance to the War Danger and then in the supreme task of overthrowing Capitalist Imperialism.

Behind these claims to unity there was deep division which fundamentally altered the way in which a number of I.L.P.ers saw the future. There is little doubt that Maxton himself was deeply affected by the way in which he felt treated by Brockway and Aplin, especially the fact that Brockway had not waited the twenty-four hours he had requested.¹¹⁰ The feelings of the other members of the Parliamentary Group, largely out of sympathy for Maxton, were almost as strong. John McGovern in his autobiography suggested that the events persuaded him that there was no future for the I.L.P. outside the Labour Party. Other leading figures within the Party felt strongly that Maxton's speech was not only correct in line and temper but was a fine piece of propaganda stating the Party case. John McNair, who witnessed it, later described Maxton's speech as 'probably his greatest speech during this period' and at the time he was no less convinced, as he wrote in that weekend's issue of the *New Leader*:

When James Maxton sat down the vast majority of the House realised that "common folk" had been heard, and in no uncertain manner. A journalist sitting near to me said: "At last the people have spoken." As a member of the I.L.P., I felt immeasurably strengthened and inspired by a clear, courageous and unequivocal exposition of the Socialist message across the bleak wastes of Capitalist rivalries.¹¹¹

However, feelings on the other side were equally as strong. At the 1939 I.L.P. annual conference the Parliamentary Group faced motions for its expulsion from Croydon and Southend branches and motions that it should be brought under strict party discipline from Greenwich, Clapham, and Birmingham City branches. The Munich speeches also marked a distinct turning point for a number of individuals in their relationship with the Party, not only for John Aplin, but other such as Ernie Patterson, who following the Munich Crisis declared that the Parliamentary Group were not 'revolutionary Socialists but social reformers,' who had become socialised into Commons culture:

Gone were the days of Keir Hardie when he shocked the House of Commons by his burning hatred. Now the struggle in the House was conducted on the hail-fellow-well-met principle.

Patterson declared the events had changed his mind about the possibility of transforming the I.L.P. into an effective revolutionary organisation.¹¹²

With the threat of expulsion at the 1939 conference the debate over the Parliamentary Group's position intensified through the early months of 1939. A significant amount of space in the Party's discussion journal *Left* was given over to the matter. A defence of Maxton was published in the April 1939 issue, immediately prior to the conference, which asked 'what then has Maxton done wrong?.. What more and what better could any Socialist have done?'¹¹³ The same issue featured a strongly worded attack on Maxton which argued that the impact of the speech had been extremely damaging, 'the less intelligent workers misled, the more intelligent at first incredulous then angry or scornful, and the I.L.P.ers resentful and dismayed.' The anonymous author went on to argue that Maxton had accepted a false capitalist dilemma, rather than sticking to Socialist analysis:

Maxton accepted the dilemma alleged to be facing Chamberlain. At a particular moment he had to decide for war or peace- there was no third way. But why should Socialists accept the dilemma created by the capitalists?¹¹⁴

The dispute came to a climax with the debate that surrounded the action of the Parliamentary Group at the I.L.P.'s 1939 annual conference in Scarborough. The Parliamentary Group were accused by a range of influential members from C. A. Smith, the new I.L.P. Chairman, to Joseph Southall of not understanding the Party's analysis of Capitalism. Maxton responded by expressing his hurt at the actions of Brockway and Aplin, but finished by tactfully distancing himself from much of the controversy insisting that 'if he had thought that five words of his speech would have caused so much controversy then he would not have used them.' McGovern, on the other hand, responded in typically angry fashion, first asking 'if the Party didn't want a Capitalist war or a Capitalist Peace what the hell did it want.' The question did little to meet the main point of the objectors who had suggested that Revolutionary Socialism provided the alternative. He then went on to restate the point which Maxton carefully avoided emphasising when he reiterated the statement that he 'genuinely believe Neville Chamberlain had secured peace.' Having aggressively argued his point he then moved on to attacking Aplin and Brockway at a personal level, suggesting that they had acted in a 'scurrilous manner' and accusing Brockway of being a 'double crosser' before writing off the London Division as 'fireside theoreticians and middle class dilettantes with no contact with the working class.'

With the tone of debate angrily raised by McGovern, Brockway was forced to respond in part with a detailed personal defence. However, he attempted to focus on the political argument suggesting that there were three alternative policies: firstly, appeasement, secondly, lining up behind the democratic powers and finally the option he supported, opposition to both a bad war and a bad peace. However, questions to be voted surrounded the conduct of the Parliamentary Group and not the correct policy of the Party with respect to the Munich settlement. All the critical resolutions were defeated, the move to expel the Group was defeated by a large majority and the repudiation of the MPs was also defeated. However, the referencing back of the Parliamentary Group report was only narrowly defeated 65 to 43 and the Bradford amendment which would have congratulated the MPs was defeated. The conference was prepared to back its MPs, but it was a very uneasy vote of confidence.

9.7 Pacifism?

Throughout the 1930s the Party stressed its historical, and ongoing opposition to war.

As the 1936 conference declared:

The I.L.P. has in the past a sound record in its opposition to war and we need have no doubts that confronted with any war the I.L.P. will again play an honourable and courageous part. It is distressing to find at this stage that we are almost as solitary as we were at the time of the Boer War in 1900 and the World War in 1914.¹¹⁵

There was significant pacifist sentiment within the I.L.P. which argued it was the closest of the then existing left-wing parties in Britain to the pacifist position.¹¹⁶ The Party opposed the Second World War from its outbreak and was involved in organising resistance to war preparations. The Party was, for example, at the forefront of the formation of the No Conscription Fellowship in January 1939. There were two I.L.P. members on the provisional committee of the Fellowship, with William Ballantine acting as chairman of the committee.¹¹⁷ The *New Leader* gave prominence to the Party's strongly worded statement against conscription in May 1939.¹¹⁸ Then at the National Convention of the No Conscription Fellowship, presumably under the influence of Alfred Salter, held in Bermondsey Town Hall in June 1939, with Ballantine in the Chair, the I.L.P. had a strong presence, with 91 I.L.P. organisations represented.¹¹⁹ Importantly there was also a significant I.L.P. dimension to many of the trade union delegations to the convention including those from the NUR, Building Trades, NUDAW, Life Assurance Agents, Chemical Workers and the Litho Workers.¹²⁰ In this

situation the I.L.P. was able to significantly influence the course of debate and one of the two I.L.P. amendments, which called for the conference to support those who became conscripted unwillingly or without realising its implications, was passed after being moved by the I.L.P. team of Jack Hammond and Walter Padley.

Nevertheless, the I.L.P. was not a pacifist party. This much was apparent even at that National Convention of the No Conscription Fellowship. A second I.L.P. motion, which was defeated 198-178, suggested that whilst it would not be acceptable to fight for capitalism it might be necessary to fight for socialism.¹²¹ Thus, according to the official party position pacifism had to be rejected and replaced by a revolutionary socialist outlook. As Brockway wrote on leading pacifist Dick Sheppard's death:

The Pacifist Movement of which he was the leader has both its advantages and disadvantages. It is dangerous when it encourages non-resistance to War, Fascism and Capitalism; but the thinking Pacifist rarely remains in that position- he is driven on to opposition to Capitalism to a recognition of the reality of the class struggle, and finally to the revolutionary Socialist view.¹²²

In 1939, the Party argued that in practical terms there was every reason, from a revolutionary socialist point of view, to oppose the war. By the outbreak of war there was an uneasy compromise within the Party, and indeed within many individuals' own thoughts, between revolutionary socialism and opposition to all wars.

The Party's official argument was that Capitalism was the cause of both war and fascism. War, the Party argued, was 'due to the fight between the Capitalist classes of the Imperialist Powers for raw materials and markets.'¹²³ Whilst Fascism, they argued, was also an 'inevitable development of Capitalism in crisis.'¹²⁴ In this situation, the Party suggested that the Capitalist Class in Britain would never be able to defeat Nazism as they 'have more sympathy with Nazism than with real democracy.' Thus, they suggested only the working class and the establishment of socialism could really defeat Nazism. According to the I.L.P. this could best be achieved by the British workers seeking to oppose British Capitalism, both in terms of wealth distribution within Britain and crucially in opposing British Imperialism.

Thus, I.L.P. Policy at the outbreak of war proposed an anti-imperialist and revolutionary socialist alternative to war and there was nowhere within such a position for support for an anti-fascist war conducted by Britain and her allies. In other words, there was an agreement between many pacifists and the I.L.P. about what should be done. Nevertheless, the I.L.P.'s position on war fell apart dramatically during 1940 as its

chairman CA Smith began attacking the Party line, and eventually resigned from the Party. These disputes which disrupted the Party during the war graphically demonstrated that disputes between 'pacifist' and 'revolutionary socialist' sentiment had only partially been resolved.

9.8 Conclusion

In 1936 Brockway claimed that the I.L.P. had developed a unity of purpose and understanding based on its new revolutionary policy. His assessment could not be applied to international affairs. Having apparently sorted out its International affiliations in the fierce internal battles during the immediate period after disaffiliation, from 1935 to the outbreak of war the party stumbled from one argument to the next on questions relating to war. The difficulties faced by the I.L.P. stemmed from pacifist sentiment within the party, and an apparently growing incompatibility of this position with a developing revolutionary socialist policy. These conflicts were dramatically played out when the Parliamentary Group refused to support the workers' sanctions line during the Abyssinia crisis, largely because of the implication that it may lead to the support of war. The short-term solution was a compromise; to accept the need for revolutionary violence under certain conditions, but to deny those conditions obtained. However, the resolution of that dispute, although giving way to a near pacifist attitude on the immediate issue saw the acceptance of the principle that the Party should take sides in certain types of dispute. With the Spanish Civil War following so closely on the back of these decisions the pacifists had little choice but to accept the results of their recent 'victory'. However, the I.L.P.'s first foray into supporting war was scarcely a conspicuous success. The Spanish Civil War saw the party increasingly ostracised within the British 'Left' and unable to effectively pursue its aims of supporting revolutionary elements within the Republican forces.

At the outbreak of the Second World War support from Capitalist Governments in the struggle against fascism prevent the I.L.P. from applying the logic that had led to their support for the Spanish Civil War. It was difficult to conceive of such a war as an immediately revolutionary struggle. As the war continued tensions between the pacifists and others within the I.L.P. grew and there were a number of very public disagreements between leading figures, centred on the position of the then Party chairman C.A. Smith. Such continuing difficulties indicate the strains and unresolved tensions inherent in the I.L.P.'s new revolutionary policy. They also show the enduring importance of support

for the Soviet Union, internationalism and pacifism to the I.L.P. in the 1930s. Thus, international events, more than domestic politics, show up the continuing political tensions and difficulties for the I.L.P. during the 1930s.

¹ See for example Taylor, 1965, 558-9; Dowse, 201-2

² Littlejohns, 149-176

³ Paton, 362 cf. Paton, 330

⁴ This process came to a head at the L.S.I. Vienna Congress in the summer of 1931. The I.L.P. joined together with two other left parties, both from Poland, The Bund and the Independent Labour Party (Poland). The Left groups tactic was to put down a 'left amendment' to every single declaration. They insisted on debating every amendment and pushing it to a public vote. In each case the left amendments were defeated by about three hundred to five. Paton, 363

⁵ The R.P.C. resolution was carried by 83 votes to 79. Report of Annual Conference, 1933

⁶ N.A.C. minutes December 17-18 1932, the actual action of resignation was not taken until after the Derby Conference, N.A.C. minutes May 13-14 1933; N.A.C. minutes June 24-25 1933

⁷ For example attendance at the Communist International's Copenhagen conference was made conditional on the executives of the other left socialist parties being invited to attend. N.A.C. minutes May 13-14 1933

⁸ I.L.P. and the Communist International (Full Text of the Correspondence) was published by the I.L.P. prior to the York Conference in 1934.; N.A.C. minutes March 30- April 1 1934

⁹ *New Leader*, 6 April 1934

¹⁰ 1934 ILP Conference Report

¹¹ *New Leader*, March 22 1935

¹² *New Leader*, April 26 1935

¹³ Bornstein and Richardson, 183

¹⁴ Minutes of Conference of 'left-wing' parties (I.L.P. archive series II 1932/68)

¹⁵ The Norwegian Labour Party had in 1921 opted to affiliate to the 3rd International but it had broken that affiliation in 1923, in 1932, it still remained undecided in whether to affiliate to the 2nd or 3rd International. Minutes of Conference of 'left-wing' parties I.L.P. archive series II 1932/68

¹⁶ The IBRSU could still count on the support of a significant portion of the youth section of the Norwegian Party. Minutes of Conference of 'left-wing' parties I.L.P. archive series II 1932/68; Revolutionary Socialist Bulletin, No. 3 March 1936

¹⁷ Minutes of Conference of 'left-wing' parties I.L.P. archive series II 1932/68

¹⁸ Minutes of Conference of 'left-wing' parties I.L.P. archive series II 1932/68

¹⁹ The Bureau still claimed some support within a large section of the original Dutch members of the Bureau. Revolutionary Socialist Bulletin, No. 3 March 1936; Minutes of Conference of 'left-wing' parties I.L.P. archive series II 1932/68

²⁰ Minutes of Conference of 'left-wing' parties I.L.P. archive series II 1932/68

²¹ Revolutionary Socialist Bulletin, No. 3 March 1936

²² Added to this, as Fascism increased its influence across Europe a large number of the affiliated parties found themselves operating in illegal or semi-legal conditions: The German SAP, the Italian Socialist

Party (Maximalist) and the Bulgarian Left Socialist Movement were all illegal with their leadership imprisoned. The Polish Independent Socialist Labour Party was semi-legal whilst the Romanian United Socialist Party was severely repressed with its paper suppressed.

²³ N.A.C. minutes November 30- December 1 1935

²⁴ Revolutionary Socialist Bulletin, January 1936; *New Leader*, January 31 1936; N.A.C. Report 1940

²⁵ The Spanish delegation numbered twenty-two, the second largest delegation, and contained representatives from POUM, UGT, CNT, Workers' Culture Movement, Communist Youth Federation, Clothing Workers, Assurance Workers, Barcelona Section Air Force and Militia Delegates from the main fronts. *New Leader*, November 6 1936

²⁶ Despite agreement on Spain there was considerable dissent at the conference over the correct attitude to be taken towards the Soviet Union. Although the official Trotskyist group boycotted the conference a number of neo-Trotskyist organisations were present and pushed hard for the adoption of a series of resolutions which centred on criticising Stalinism. As the dispute developed about the extent to which it was necessary to defend the Soviet Union or attack Stalinism the tempers of the I.L.P. leadership became frayed and Bob Edwards accused these groups of making criticism of Stalinism 'more prominent than solidarity with workers of Spain' and if claimed that if anything the neo-Trotskyists were 'worse than the orthodox originals.' Bob Edwards, 'The Revolutionary Socialist Congress', *Controversy*, December 1936; *New Leader*, November 13 1936

²⁷ The British delegation, under the control of the I.L.P., had initially been proposed as three members including one member of the Labour Party. However, eventually an all I.L.P. delegation was sent out including Fenner Brockway, Jack Huntz, John McNair, Bob Edwards, John Aplin, and Audrey Brockway. N.A.C. minutes, June 12-13 1937; N.A.C. Report 1938; *New Leader*, February 18 1938

²⁸ N.A.C. Report 1938

²⁹ *New Leader*, March 4 1938

³⁰ N.A.C. report 1938; N.A.C. minutes August 2 1937

³¹ These further organisation, associated themselves with the International Workers' Front Against War, considered 'an enlargement of the Bureau which included those organisations who broadly agreed with its principles but were unprepared to apply discipline on certain points. The Front included the International African Service Bureau, the newly formed French Socialist Party of Workers and Peasants, the Dutch Revolutionary Socialist Workers' Party, the Indo-Chinese Workers' and Peasants Party, the Indo-Chinese Workers' and Peasants Party, Palestine Federation of Socialist Communes, the German Neue Weg Group and the Austrian Funke Group associated themselves with the International Workers' Front Against War, N.A.C. Report 1939; Brockway, 1942, 323-37

³² N.A.C. Report 1939

³³ N.A.C. report 1940; N.A.C. report 1941; When the International Marxist Centre was established the affiliating organisations were the Swedish Socialist Party, British I.L.P., Dutch Revolutionary Socialist League, POUM, the Italian Socialist Party, Palestine Workers Party, Greek Archo-Marxist Party, French Socialist Party of Workers and Peasants, International Labour League of America and the International African Service Bureau

³⁴ Bullock, 567-9; cf. Williams 191-6

³⁵ Branson, 137-141

³⁶ *New Leader*, February 15 1935

³⁷ *New Leader*, September 13 1935

³⁸ *New Leader*, October 18 1935

³⁹ *New Leader*, October 11 1935

⁴⁰ Hilda Vernon was one of the leading members of the R.P.C. and had been central in building up relations between the Committee and the Communist Party. In 1932 she had been working in the offices of the N.U.W.M. and then following the 1934 World Congress of Women Against War and Fascism she took on the role of full-time organising secretary of British Section of the Women's Committee Against War and Fascism. Bruely, 1985, 134, 142

⁴¹ *Controversy*, October 1935

⁴² *New Leader*, September 13 1935

⁴³ *New Leader*, September 13 1935

⁴⁴ *New Leader*, September 9 1935, September 20 1935, September 27 1935

⁴⁵ *New Leader*, October 4 1935

⁴⁶ *Forward*, September 21 1935

⁴⁷ Jack Gaster and the London Emergency Committee, 'Abyssinia - Where Does the I.L.P. Stand', *Controversy*, October 1935

⁴⁸ Jack Gaster, supported by Brockway, Tom Stephenson and Bob Edwards was unable to get the N.A.C. to support, in principle, 'Abyssinian opposition to Italian aggression and British Imperialist designs.' Whist at the same time Campbell Stephen's amendment, supported by Maxton and E.B. James, for an insular policy of acting in the crisis only 'by fighting our own Imperialism at home' was also defeated. N.A.C. minutes, October 9 1935; *New Leader*, November 15 1935

⁴⁹ Prior to the I.L.P.'s 1936 Keighley conference, 48,000 leaflets to this effect signed by Chairman and Secretary. I.L.P. were distributed to branches and the general public. (N.A.C. report 1936)

⁵⁰ For example the London Division issued a leaflet calling for 'Workers' sanctions to stop Fascist aggression in Abyssinia. *Workers' Action Can Stop WAR*, London Division I.L.P.

⁵¹ 3,751 papers ballot papers were sent out, 1442 were returned (38%), of which eighteen were spoiled. To the first question, 'should the I.L.P. have taken sides with Abyssinia by refusing war materials to Italy' the results were Yes- 576 (40%) No- 734 (51%). To the second question, should the I.L.P. have remained neutral the results were Yes- 809 (56%) No 554 (38%). 660 (46%) of the papers answered yes to question two and no to question one (consistent support for the neutrality position). 462 (32%) of the papers answered yes to question one and no to question two (consistent support for the workers' sanctions position). Executive Committee Minutes, May 23 1936

⁵² *United Policy against War: Important N.A.C. Decision Following Plebiscite*, n.d.; N.A.C. Report 1937

⁵³ *Through the Class Struggle to Socialism*, I.L.P., 1937

⁵⁴ A recent study of Britons in the Spanish Civil War places greater emphasis on the I.L.P. although it still relies heavily on the experiences of Orwell. Hopkins, 1998, xi, 203-232

⁵⁵ Buchanan, 1997, 184

⁵⁶ *Forward*, January 2 1937

⁵⁷ McGovern, 1960,171

⁵⁸ N.A.C. minutes November 7-8 1936

⁵⁹ John McGovern, *Why Bishops Back Franco*, 11

⁶⁰ *Forward*, June 12 1937; *New Leader*, June 11 1937

⁶¹ John McNair, *In Spain Now!*

⁶² *New Leader*, August 28 1936

⁶³ The committee included Diessel and Wolfe of the German SAP, Balduli of the Italian Socialist Party, Max Petel of the French Revolutionary Left, Julien Gorkin of the POUM, and Hans Petersen and Bob Smillie of the Revolutionary Youth Bureau. *New Leader*, December 4 1936

⁶⁴ N.A.C. minutes November 7-8 1936; *New Leader*, October 23 1936; *New Leader*, February 12 1937

⁶⁵ After his arrival at the front Martin found himself in command of an artillery section comprising sixty men including thirty-five POUM and fifteen syndicalists. *New Leader*, October 2 1936; November 13 1936; January 1 1937

⁶⁶ Fenner Brockway in McNair, *In Spain Now!*

⁶⁷ *New Leader*, August 28 1936

⁶⁸ In Socialist Self Denial week I.L.P. members and sympathisers were encouraged to give a luxury for one week and to contribute the money saved to the I.L.P. *New Leader*, May 7 1937; N.A.C. minutes August 2 1937

⁶⁹ *New Leader*, October 16 1936

⁷⁰ *Manchester Guardian*, January 7 1937; *New Leader*, January 1 1937; *Manchester Guardian*, January 12 1937; *New Leader*, January 15 1937; *Manchester Guardian*, January 13 1937

⁷¹ Orwell, 23, 39; Crick, 215

⁷² There is no exact list of the members of the I.L.P. contingent. The closest thing this is the list of those members which Stafford Cottmann remembered when asked by Peter Thwaites which appears in his article 'The Independent Labour Party Contingent in the Spanish Civil War', *Imperial War Museum Review*, p60 fn49. This list contains thirty names, including two Americans who served with the contingent, Archie Buttonshaw and Harry Milton. There are a number of conflicts between this list and the contemporary sources, most significantly there is no mention of Paddy Thomas, from Caregleft, Anglesey who is reported as being wounded in a night attack in *New Leader*, April 30 1937. Other differences could be due to differing first names referring to the same people for example Buck Parker, referred to in Cottmann's list and the *New Leader* could be the Thomas Parker referred to in Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* (81), both were wounded shortly before the night attack and similar transpositions certainly happened in other places, for example Arthur Chambers later killed whilst fighting with the CNT, in Cottmann's list is called Bill Chambers in the *New Leader*. It is worth noting that these slight changes in name cannot explain the absence of Paddy Thomas from Cottmann's list, despite the presence of Harry Thomas on that list. Harry Thomas was from London, Paddy Thomas, as mentioned above, was from Anglesey. It is possible that Paddy Thomas was also known as the otherwise unidentified 'Tanky' in Cottmann's list. Whatever the case it would appear that the size of the contingent was somewhere between 30 and 35.

⁷³ *New Leader*, January 22 1937

⁷⁴ *New Leader*, January 1 1937

⁷⁵ *New Leader*, February 12 1937

⁷⁶ *New Leader*, February 19 1937

⁷⁷ Orwell, 84-99; *New Leader*, April 30 1937

⁷⁸ *New Leader*, February 26 1937; March 26 1937; April 16 1937; April 30 1937; July 9 1937; Orwell, 71, 81, 93, 179-82

⁷⁹ *New Leader*, May 21 1937; Orwell, 117-172

⁸⁰ *Daily Worker*, May 11; May 22; May 31 1937; *New Leader*, July 9 1937; *New Leader*, July 16 1937

⁸¹ *Daily Worker*, September 14; September 16 1937; *New Leader*, 17 September; 24 September 1937

⁸² Brockway, 1942, 317

⁸³ Crick 439 fn63; Frankford was also interviewed by Thwaites in 1986 for his article on the I.L.P. contingent. No quotations are given but Thwaites writes that the interview repudiated the allegations in 'almost all their detail' 'he saw one copy of a fascist newspaper in the POUM trenches and heard what he believed was a cart passing between the lines at night. But he attributes nothing sinister to this because he says it's the kind of thing that happens in a civil war when members of the same family get trapped on the different sides of the front line. He certainly doesn't believe that it indicates any links between the POUM and the Nationalists. He says that his interview with Sam Lesser which was originally picked up by the *Daily Worker* in London and then edited until it became the version which was published and caused the controversy was aimed at discrediting the I.L.P. He is philosophical about the distortion of his words saying that that is the kind of thing that happens in politics.' (Thwaites, 1987, 58, 61fn144)

⁸⁴ For example the *Daily Worker* refused to publish adverts for I.L.P. publications "Socialist Bookshop", *Controversy* and other publications. Nevertheless, it did carry an advert for *Secrets and Secret Societies* by Graham Seton the founder in 1933 of the Fascist and anti-Jewish "National Socialist Workers' Party. *New Leader*, June 4 1937; November 26 1937

⁸⁵ N.A.C. Report 1938; *New Leader*, August 6 1937; *New Leader*, December 2 1938; *New Leader*, February 10 1939

⁸⁶ In June the N.A.C. decided to allocate £150 of the remaining £180 in the Spanish fund to repatriate the Spanish contingent. N.A.C. Minutes June 11-12 1937

⁸⁷ Hall, 108-9; Orwell, 203-21

⁸⁸ *New Leader*, June 18 1937; Buchanan, 1997, 445

⁸⁹ David Murray was a freelance journalist and businessman who had gone to Spain for a combination of business and holiday. He later stood unsuccessfully for parliament in Western Isles (1950-1), Kelvingrove (1958) and Motherwell (1959) as an Independent Liberal, Liberal and Independent Home Rule candidate. Buchanan, 1997, 461; Murry's papers are deposited in the National Library of Scotland (NLS/Acc 7914-5) Acc 7915 contains much material on his work as a journalist and businessman and his political activity after leaving the I.L.P. Acc 7914 contains much material on the Spanish Civil War and also detailed material on the I.L.P. at local level in Scotland.

⁹⁰ Buchanan, 1997, 461

⁹¹ Tom Buchanan, *The Death of Bob Smillie: A Reply*, unpublished manuscript

⁹² Bob Edwards, August 1974 (NMLH/Bob Edwards Papers/Box 6/I.L.P.)

⁹³ Maxton, 'Forward', *We Carry On: Our Tribute to Bob Smillie*

⁹⁴ *New Leader*, August 27; 1937 *New Leader*, July 9 1937; *New Leader*, June 25 1937

⁹⁵ *New Leader*, January 22 1937; *New Leader*, February 12 1937

⁹⁶ N.A.C. minutes July 17 1937

⁹⁷ *New Leader*, August 13 1937; *New Leader*, September 3 1937; For Brockway's similar attitude see his diary of his visit to Spain MRC 15/3/8/245 and for his public condemnation of the Communists see the *Manchester Guardian*, July 14 1937

⁹⁸ e.g. *New Leader*, July 9 1937; *New Leader*, November 5 1937

⁹⁹ N.A.C. minutes July 17 1937; N.A.C. minutes October 22 1937; *New Leader*, July 1 1938. The Party was in these efforts careful to avoid liaison with the Trotskyist movement which they felt would have, however unjustifiably, lent support to the charges against POUM. Thus, for example the Party turned down the invitation of the Marxist Group to jointly campaign for POUM in July 1937 N.A.C. minutes July 17 1937

¹⁰⁰ *New Leader*, June 4 1937

¹⁰¹ N.A.C. minutes, July 17 1937; N.A.C. minutes November 13 1937; *New Leader*, June 2 1939

¹⁰² For an example of the early enthusiastic I.L.P. attitude to the struggle see Jack Huntz, *Spotlight on Spain*, London Divisional Council of the I.L.P., 1937; N.A.C. Report 1938; *New Leader*, April 22 1938

¹⁰³ Manifesto issued by the N.A.C. during the September Crisis, Appendix 1 to the N.A.C. Report 1939

¹⁰⁴ Maxton argued that he 'did not believe that we've got World Peace.' Indeed he did not even believe that the foundations of peace had been created. He argued that to get World Peace you needed to abolish Imperialism and Capitalism, in other words a Socialist Revolution was required.

¹⁰⁵ A full verbatim report of the speech is printed in McNair, 1955, 273-6

¹⁰⁶ *New Leader*, October 14 1938

¹⁰⁷ *Manchester Guardian*, October 7 1938

¹⁰⁸ Brockway, 1942, 332

¹⁰⁹ *New Leader*, October 14 1938

¹¹⁰ John McNair attributed Maxton's subsequent breakdown in health to the affair. McNair, 1955, 277. Whilst McGovern recalls Maxton breaking down in tears and crying 'like a child' at the N.A.C. meeting where the issue was discussed. McGovern also recalls Campbell Stephen's reaction to this, accusing Brockway and his daughter of being 'a lot of bloody hounds.' McGovern, 1960, 129

¹¹¹ McNair was not alone in his defence of Maxton, George Johnson for example declared that his speech was a 'fine socialist utterance' whilst the Bradford branch passed a motion congratulating Maxton. *New Leader*, October 7 1938; *New Leader*, April 14 1939

¹¹² *New Leader*, April 14 1939

¹¹³ 'The Revolutionary Attitude to Imperialist Peace', *Left*, April 1939

¹¹⁴ 'The Revolutionary Attitude to Imperialist Peace', *Left*, April 1939

¹¹⁵ *New Leader*, April 17 1936

¹¹⁶ Brockway, *Pacifism and the Left Wing*, London, 1938

¹¹⁷ The provisional committee included: W. Ballantine (chairman), James H. Hudson (secretary of Parliamentary Pacifist group, secretary), Rose Simpson (secretary of Women's Co-operative Guild, treasurer), Fenner Brockway, Donald Fraser (Fabian Society Executive), David Freeman (NCCL Executive). *New Leader*, January 13 1939

¹¹⁸ *New Leader*, May 5 1939

¹¹⁹ At the Convention representative were present from: 95 Co-operative Organisations, 84 Trades Councils and Trades Unions, 78 Labour Party Organisations, 91 I.L.P. Organisations, 83 Pacifist Organisations, 84 NCL Councils and Branches and 59 Individuals and Misc. Organisations.

¹²⁰ *New Leader*, June 2 1939

¹²¹ *No Conscription*, June 1939

¹²² *New Leader*, November 5 1937

¹²³ Brockway and McNair, *Socialism can defeat Nazism*, 3

¹²⁴ *Socialist Policy for 1938, Resolutions adopted by the Annual Conference of the I.L.P. April 16th to 18th 1938*, 10

10. Conclusion: Explanations and Alternatives

The Second World War fundamentally changed the environment in which the I.L.P. operated. The Party's size and tradition allowed it to play a major part in the anti-war movement in Britain. The Party saw some growth in membership and an increase in middle-class financial support.¹ During the War, especially after 1941, the Party performed well in a series of by-elections.² However, the legacy of the 1930s remained. The ambiguities of Party policy on war, evident in the Abyssinian and Munich crises, were still unresolved at the outbreak of war. These tensions exploded in an extended, heated and highly theoretical debate, which led to the eventual resignation of the party chairman, C.A. Smith.³ The 1945 General Election result saw Labour returned with a huge majority and confirmed as the 'party of the working class'. In contrast to the First World War, this, combined with the images of a 'people's war', meant the I.L.P. received little retrospective credit for having opposed the war. Its votes outside of its Glasgow strongholds were minimal. The Party failed in its approach to re-affiliate to the Labour Party which led to a further decline in membership. With the death of James Maxton on 22 July 1946 many others who had retained party membership out of personal loyalty to their 'beloved rebel' finally left the party. The I.L.P. was reduced to a shell of its former existence.⁴ This decline, finalised in the years after the Second World War, had its roots firmly in the 1930s and the failures of the I.L.P. in the years after disaffiliation.

The disaffiliation decision was made in the light of the continuing disputes between the Labour Party and the I.L.P. in parliament and the developing arguments for a revolutionary policy within the smaller organisation. These differing reasons for disaffiliation led to contrasting assessments of the I.L.P.'s past and conflicting expectations for the party's political trajectory. Whilst all accepted a commitment to a 'revolutionary policy' in name, for some this implied an endorsement and elaboration of the party's 'ethical socialist' past, for others it entailed a rejection of the I.L.P.'s 'reformist' legacy. From these diverse components, the I.L.P. attempted to forge its 'new revolutionary policy.'

The I.L.P. held out great hope for this policy. It was expected first, to distinguish the I.L.P. from the Labour Party, second, to act as a rallying point for the working class, and finally, to provide the party with an effective guide to action. The struggle to create

this policy was far from bloodless as it was moulded against a backdrop of regional and factional disputes with the resultant loss of a large section of the Party's membership including the majority of the Lancashire Division. Then, in a process most obvious in the period 1933-5, but lasting throughout the 1930s, as policy was 'clarified' in the wake of these factional disputes so it was subtly changed. These slight but noticeable policy adjustments led to further disagreements and losses in membership. Yet by the later 1930s the I.L.P. could claim to have a well defined 'revolutionary policy', based on a Workers' Front.

The impact of the 'new revolutionary policy' was crucial for the internal dynamics of the party and for the loss or retention of some sections of the membership. However, the wider impact of the new policy was not obvious. Large sections of the membership, especially in Scotland, were ambivalent towards the new policy of the party. This was especially evident in electoral struggles where the detailed policy statements of the party were never a major feature of the I.L.P.'s Scottish campaigns. The wider voting public appeared even less enthusiastic about the I.L.P.'s policy. Indeed when other factors are considered there is no evidence that the focus placed on the 'new revolutionary policy' during election campaigns had any influence on the party's electoral results. Thus, whilst policy was an important factor in the internal instability of the party, there is little indication that differing policy proposals could have led to substantially differing outcomes for the I.L.P. during the 1930s.

Where the I.L.P. was successful in securing political space for itself during the 1930s it was for reasons other than formal policy. In some localities the I.L.P. became an important part of the local political map. Most notably this was the case in Glasgow where the I.L.P. group of councillors held the balance of power on the council for most of the decade. There the Party's MPs and established role in local politics gave the I.L.P. an important presence. This was combined with the lack of a strong local Labour Party, which particularly in Shettleston, had been decimated by the losses to the Independent Labour Party at the time of disaffiliation. This gave the strong remnants of the I.L.P.'s pre-disaffiliation organisation the opportunity to exploit an organisational niche. Similar, if smaller, organisational niches in other areas where the Labour Party was ravaged by disaffiliation gave strong pre-existing I.L.P. branches opportunities to thrive, as in the Tong and East Bowling wards in Bradford. Elsewhere, absences of a strong Labour organisation gave the I.L.P. further opportunities for electoral success, as in

Barrhead or the Catton Ward in Norwich. Where the Labour Party was dominant political space could be found in other ways, as in Merthyr, where by 1947 the I.L.P. formed the only opposition to Labour on the Town Council.

Political space was not restricted to the electoral sphere, it could also be found in other organisations. As in Yarmouth, where the I.L.P. was a dominant influence in first the Labour club and later the Trades Council, this could sometimes be transformed into an electoral presence. In a related way the I.L.P. could find some political space within the Trade Unions where the diversity of organisational arrangements gave opportunities for the party to exploit. Indeed, the I.L.P. had considerably more influence within and contact with the Trade Unions than has been presented by the conventional historiography. Nevertheless, the Party was much less effective at exploiting these political spaces than the Communist Party. Part of the explanation for this failure probably rests with the focus of the I.L.P. away from the Unions during the 1920s and before. However, the continuing antipathy from the Party towards the Trade Unions combined with the lack of an effective party trade union organisation for most of the 1930s also hampered the I.L.P.'s ability to exploit these opportunities.

Thus, a detailed study of the I.L.P. in the localities and trade unions shows a party which was more influential than allowed by the conventional historiography. However, at national level the party failed to make a substantial impact. Such an impact could have been obtained either by co-operation or competition with the other major parties on the left, the Labour and Communist Parties. An initial strategy of aiming to immediately replace both and to be seen as the party of the working class was wildly over-optimistic and was quickly replaced. The ensuing strategy of a United Front with the Communist Party led to both parties briefly aiming to create a 'United Revolutionary Party.' However, conflict at local level, historical mistrust, changing Comintern policy and eventually disputes over the Spanish Civil War led to a breakdown in relations between the two organisations. As relations with the Communist Party deteriorated the I.L.P. felt increasingly isolated. As memories of the acute parliamentary conflicts during the Second Labour Government receded into the past so the I.L.P.'s leadership replaced its initial hostility to the Labour Party with a more sympathetic attitude. By the end of the decade the terms and conditions for I.L.P. re-affiliation to the Labour Party had been agreed by the larger party's N.E.C. and the smaller organisation had arranged a special conference to consider rejoining the Labour Party. However, in its relationship with the

Labour and Communist Parties the I.L.P. never succeeded in carving out a significant political space. The Communist Party was at times anxious to cash in on the I.L.P.'s name, organisation and considerable prestige but its international connections would never permit a real alliance with the I.L.P. The Labour Party was more receptive to I.L.P. requests for joint activity than to Communist approaches. However, in some ways it was equally determined to prevent the I.L.P. from carving out a national niche for itself. Where the I.L.P. was strong the Labour Party, both in Scotland and elsewhere, was prepared to undertake considerable efforts to prevent the I.L.P. from transforming local success into national representation. Where, as in Norwich, local co-operation with the I.L.P. was suggested it was firmly stamped out by the leadership of the Labour Party.

This national picture can be combined with an understanding of the I.L.P. at local level to contribute to an understanding of why, unlike the I.L.P. of the 1890s, the local and trade union spaces could not be transformed into a national presence. At local level the I.L.P. could be successful where it could find a niche for its activity or build on an organisational remnant of previous strength. However, in contrast to the earlier period the I.L.P. was not able to forge alliances with other organisations, most notably the trade unions and the Labour Party. Further, the nature of politics and political parties had changed over the first three decades of the twentieth century. By the 1930s the Labour Party in particular operated as a national political party with a national focus which had sufficient resources to override local initiative. In such an environment it was difficult for the I.L.P. to develop the limited political space it had found. However, the party itself did little to assist itself in these respects. Torn apart by factional fighting the party was reluctant to develop a coherent and national strategy to develop the opportunities it found, especially within the unions.

The party remained attractive to some because of its cultural activities, its distinctive 'ethical socialist' tradition, and in some areas because of its enduring local significance. However, the party had failed to realise its own expectations at the time of disaffiliation. In part, this was because the expectations were unrealistic, the political space did not exist to create a national party to supersede the Labour Party. In part, the I.L.P. failed to fully exploit the opportunities which did exist. The lessons drawn from the I.L.P.'s failure have been remarkably consistent:

From 1932 onwards the Left *had* to be in the Labour Party, if it was to avoid total annihilation, and if it was to have any influence at all.⁵

This study of the I.L.P. certainly suggests that the difficulties of working outside the Labour Party were substantial. However, a realisation that the I.L.P.s' time outside the Labour Party was not a disaster in every respect, raises the prospect of alternative interpretations of the significance of the experience.

The difficulties of socialist activity outside the dominant party of the working class are substantial but different strategies and circumstances would permit different outcomes. A party less divided over policy would have seen a less dramatic decline in membership, the problems of retaining membership would have been less acute. In a political space less crowded with left alternatives, without a Communist Party with the backing of the Soviet Union, greater prospects of independent socialist activity exist. A Labour Party less committed to crushing left alternatives would also give rise to the possibility of developing political niches. The combined effect of the attitudes of Labour and Communist Parties was a considerable block on the development of other traditions. However, whilst there may be no simple lesson to be drawn from the experience of the I.L.P. about the impossibility of independent socialist activity the case does illustrate many of the problems. The creation of a party unified on policy is far from straightforward. The possibilities for splits and divisions over differing interpretations and priorities are ever present in socialist politics. Such problems are particularly acute when an attempt is made, as in the I.L.P., to combine theoretical clarity with the apparently attractive virtue of political tolerance. Further difficulties are evident when one considers the importance for the disaffiliated party of organisational remnants and political goodwill built up during the early years of the development of the Labour Party. Few other organisations could ever hope to operate with such a favourable legacy, yet much of this legacy militated against the I.L.P.'s post-1932 project. Such considerations suggest that, whilst there are no simple lessons to draw from the experience of the disaffiliated I.L.P., a study of the Party provides an insight into the plight of a socialist organisation attempting to develop independently of the mass party of the working class. The I.L.P. retained and even created some vibrant socialist communities throughout the 1930s, but it was unable to translate these achievements to effectiveness on a national level. That the Party failed is not in dispute, but it is crucial to understand the manner of its decline.

¹ Thwaites, 1976, 154

² Although the I.L.P. performed well their performance was not as striking as some other Independents. The party's best result was probably that of Arthur Eaton in Bilston where the Party came within 349 votes of winning the seat. For a review of the I.L.P.'s performance in wartime by-elections see Thwaites 128-152

³ Initially Smith came into conflict with parts of the I.L.P. over the Soviet invasion of Finland, stating that he would have been prepared to go and fight against 'Stalin's latest crime' on the proviso that he was not under control of 'British Imperialism.' These concerns developed into a much more expansive criticism of the I.L.P.'s anti-war position based on a firm opposition to both Nazism and Stalinism. Smith argued his case without obvious support from others, under the pseudonym Philo in the columns of the *New Leader* and using his own name in the internal discussion bulletin *Between Ourselves*. However, his concerns about the nature of the war were shared by some other leading figures including Jennie Lee, John Aplin and even Fenner Brockway.

⁴ Even its campaigns were relieved of much of their political content. For example, the 1950 General Election in Glasgow saw the I.L.P. making extensive use of the iconography of James Maxton, calling on workers to 'be faithful to old faithful.' Thwaites, 197

⁵ Coates, 1975, 185

Appendix I: NAC Membership 1932-9

1932

Chairman:	Fenner Brockway
General Secretary:	John Paton
Treasurer:	Fred Jowett
National Members	James Maxton Campbell Stephen Richard Wallhead E.F. Wise
Scotland:	P.J. Dollan
North East:	Tom Stephenson
Yorkshire:	Percy Williams
Midlands:	Jim Garton
East Anglia:	Dorothy Jewson
London:	Allen Skinner
South West:	Kate Spurell
Wales:	Dai Jones
Lancashire:	Elijah Sandham

Changes during year:

National Member - C.A. Smith (replaces Wise)

Scotland - John McGovern

1933

Chairman:	Fenner Brockway
General Secretary:	John Paton
Treasurer:	Fred Jowett
National Members	James Maxton C.A. Smith Jennie Lee Campbell Stephen
Scotland:	John McGovern
North East:	Tom Stephenson
Yorkshire:	Percy Williams
Midlands:	Jim Garton
East Anglia:	Dorothy Jewson
London:	Jack Gaster
South West:	Kate Spurell
Wales:	E. B. James
Lancashire:	Elijah Sandham

Changes during year:

Chairman - James Maxton

General Secretary - Fenner Brockway

Midlands - Sam Leckie

1934

Chairman:	James Maxton
General Secretary:	Fenner Brockway
Treasurer:	Fred Jowett
National Members	Jennie Lee Campbell Stephen C.A. Smith Alex Smillie
Scotland:	John McGovern
North East:	Tom Stephenson
Yorkshire:	Percy Williams
Midlands:	Sam Leckie
East Anglia:	George Johnson
London:	Jack Gaster
South West:	Kate Spurell
Wales:	E.B. James
Lancashire:	Elijah Sandham

Changes during year:

Lancashire- Bob Edwards

1935

Chairman:	James Maxton
General Secretary:	Fenner Brockway
Treasurer:	Fred Jowett
National Members	Jennie Lee Campbell Stephen James Carmichael Fenner Brockway
Scotland:	John McGovern
North East:	Tom Stephenson
Yorkshire:	Percy Williams
Midlands:	Sam Leckie
East Anglia:	George Johnson
London:	Jack Gaster
South West:	Kate Spurell
Wales:	E. B. James
Lancashire:	Bob Edwards

Changes during year:

London - John Aplin.

1936

Chairman: James Maxton
General Secretary: Fenner Brockway
Treasurer: Fred Jowett

National Members Fenner Brockway
James Carmichael
Campbell Stephen
Wilfred Young

Scotland: John McGovern
North East: Tom Stephenson
Yorkshire: Percy Williams
Midlands: Sam Leckie
East Anglia: George Johnson
London: John Aplin
South West: Kate Spurell
Wales: Jim Davies
Lancashire: Bob Edwards

1937

Chairman: James Maxton
General Secretary: Fenner Brockway
Treasurer: Fred Jowett

National Members Campbell Stephen
Fenner Brockway
Sam Leckie
Wilfred Young

Scotland: John McGovern
North East: Tom Stephenson
Yorkshire: Percy Williams
Midlands: Tom Reed
East Anglia: George Johnson
London: John Aplin
South West: Kate Spurell
Wales: Jim Davies
Lancashire: Bob Edwards

1938

Chairman: James Maxton
General Secretary: Fenner Brockway
Treasurer: Fred Jowett

National Members James Carmichael
Fenner Brockway
John Aplin
Campbell Stephen

Scotland: John McGovern
North East: Tom Stephenson
Yorkshire: Percy Williams
Midlands: Tom Reed
East Anglia: George Johnson
London: Jack Hammond
South West: Kate Spurell
Wales: Emrys Thomas
Lancashire: Bob Edwards

1939

Chairman: C.A. Smith
General Secretary: John McNair
Treasurer: Fred Jowett

National Members James Maxton
Fenner Brockway
William Ballantine
James Carmichael

Scotland: David Gibson
North East: Tom Stephenson
Yorkshire: Percy Williams
Midlands: Tom Reed
East Anglia: George Johnson
London: Jack Hammond
South West: Fred Berriman
Wales: Emrys Thomas
Lancashire: Bob Edwards

Appendix II: Parliamentary Election Results 1932-5

By-elections

Kilmarnock		
Kenneth Lindsay	(National Labour)	12,577
Rev. James Barr	(Labour)	9,924
John Pollock	(I.L.P.)	7,575
Sir Alexander MacEwen	(Scot. Nat)	6,095
	National majority	2,653
Upton		
Ben Gardner	(Labour)	11,998
Macnamara	(National)	8,534
A. Fenner Brockway	(I.L.P.)	748
	Labour majority	3,464
Merthyr		
S.O. Davies	(Labour)	18,645
Victor Evans	(Liberal)	10,376
Campbell Stephen	(I.L.P.)	3,508
W. Hannington	(Communist)	3,409
	Labour majority	8,269

1935 General Election

Glasgow Bridgeton		
James Maxton	(I.L.P.)	17,691
Col. MacInnes Shaw	(Unionist)	8,951
Samuel McLaren	(Labour)	594
	I.L.P. majority	8,740
Glasgow Gorbals		
George Buchanan	(I.L.P.)	22,860
Maurice Bloch	(Unionist)	5,824
Alexander Burnett	(Labour)	1,786
	I.L.P. majority	17,036
Glasgow Shettleston		
John McGovern	(I.L.P.)	18,377
Ronald Russell	(Unionist)	13,802
George Beggs	(Labour)	2,610
	I.L.P. majority	4,575
Glasgow Camlachie		
Campbell Stephen	(I.L.P.)	15,070
James Stephenson	(Unionist)	14,186
William Reid	(Labour)	2,732
	I.L.P. majority	884
Glasgow Govan		
Neil MacLean	(Labour)	15,791
A. M'Clure	(Unionist)	10,221
Tom Taylor	(I.L.P.)	4,959
	Labour majority	5,570
Glasgow Tradeston		
Tom Henderson	(Labour)	12,253
Dr. W.H. McLean	(Unionist)	10,354
James Carmichael	(I.L.P.)	3,423
	Labour majority	1,899
North Lanark		
W.J. Anstruther-Gray	(Unionist)	22,301
Jennie Lee	(I.L.P.)	17,267
William Reid	(Labour)	6,763
	Unionist majority	5,034
East Bradford		
J.Hepworth	(Conservative)	11,131
F.W. Jowett	(I.L.P.)	8,983

W.L. Heywood	(Labour)	7,329
T.D. Fenby	(Liberal)	6,312
	Conservative majority	2,148
Merthyr		
S. O. Davies	(Labour)	20,530
Claude Stanfield	(I.L.P.)	9,640
	Labour majority	10,890
Kilmarnock		
Kenneth Lindsay	(National Labour)	19,115
J. Crawford	(Labour)	12,558
John Pollock	(I.L.P.)	3,582
T.W. Campbell	(S.N.P.)	2,346
	National majority	6,557
Lanark Central		
Lord Dunglass	(National Conservative)	17,759
J. Gibson	(Labour)	10,950
William Carlin	(I.L.P.)	2,583
	National majority	6,809
Norwich		
G.H. Shakespeare	(National Liberal)	36,039
H.G. Strauss	(National Conservaitve)	34,182
W.G. Hall	(Labour)	24,670
C.J. Kelly	(Labour)	22,055
Fenner Brockway	(I.L.P.)	6,737
Camborne		
Commander P.G. Agnew	(National Conservative)	14,826
Sir Walter Peacock	(Liberal)	7,921
H. R. Greaves	(Labour)	7,375
Kate Spurrell	(I.L.P.)	592
	Conservative majority	6,905
Whitehaven		
F. Anderson	(Labour)	14,794
W. Nunn	(Conservative)	14,442
Tom Stephenson	(I.L.P.)	1,004
	Labour majority	352
Aberdeen		
G.M.Garro-Jones	(Labour)	16,952
J.G. Burnett	(National)	13,990
A. Fraser Macintosh	(I.L.P.)	3,871
	Labour majority	2,962
Chorley		
D. H. Hacking	(Conservative)	23,061
A. Whitting	(Labour)	17,286
Robert Edwards	(I.L.P.)	1,365
	Conservative Majority	5,775
Clackmannan and Eastern Stirlingshire		
L. MacNeill Weir	(Labour)	14,881
J.W. Johnson	(Unionist)	13,738
G.G. Honeyman	(Liberal)	5,062
D.W. Gibson	(I.L.P.)	1,513
	Labour majority	1,143

Appendix III: I.L.P. Local Election Victories 1932-8

Division	Place	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938
Scotland	Aberdeen			1	1			1
	Airdrie							1
	Ayrshire	1						1
	Barrhead			1	1	2	2	
	Clackmannan and Eastern	1						
	Cowdenbeath			1	1			
	Crossford	1						
	Galston			1			1	
	Glasgow	4	3	5	5	2	3	4
	Greenock	1						
	Kirkmuir Hill	1						
	Lochgelly				1		1	
	Neilston	1						
	Shotts	2						
	Stevenston	1						
North-East	Blaydon			2				
	Cumberland (County Coucil)			1				
	Eston			4	1			
	Jarrow					2		
	Moresby			2				
	North Riding (County Council)			1			2	
Yorkshire	Bentley		1					
	Bradford	1		1	1		3	
	Darfield			1			1	
	Keighley			1			1	
	South Hemsworth			1				
Midlands	Alfreton				1			1
	Derby			1			1	
	Donisthorpe			1				
East Anglia	Norwich		2	1	1	2	1	1
	Yarmouth						1	1
London and the South	Slough						1	
	Welwyn		1		1	1		
South-West	Bristol				1	1		
	Truro					1	1	
Wales	Bedwas & Machen		2			1		
	Merthyr	1	1	1	1	1		1
	Monmouthshire (County Council)		1					
	Pontypool			1				
Lancashire	Chorley	1				1		
	Manchester	1						
	Swinton					1		
	Total	17	11	28	16	15	19	11

Note: These results are compiled from a range of sources, primarily the *New Leader*, annual conference reports, N.A.C. minutes and local newspaper reports. It is clear from comparison of these sources that the ILP centrally was unaware of all the candidates put forward under the Party label. It is thus inevitable that a number of ILP local election victories, especially in RDC and UDC contests are omitted from the above table. Nevertheless, the above figures are a useful indicator of general trends. 1932 results only include post-disaffiliation victories. Results have been classified by the divisional affiliations of the members who won the seats. Thus, Eston and North Riding County Council are listed as part of the North East division and not the Yorkshire division.

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The most important archival source for the I.L.P. during the 1930s is the I.L.P. Archive, now located in the British Library of Political and Economic Science. Most of this material has been microfilmed. However, the nearly complete collection of NAC, EC and Inner Executive minutes from 1932-37, which provides much detailed material about Party activity and policy was not microfilmed. The Maxton Archives in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow are a little disappointing on the 1930s, although there is some useful correspondence relating to the Glasgow I.L.P. Further significant material is stored in the Communist Party and Labour Party archives and in the Bob Edwards Papers at the National Museum of Labour History in Manchester. The CP archives in particular have much detailed material on the London Division and the Revolutionary Policy Committee (in the Cullen Papers) and on the I.L.P.'s Guild of Youth (CP/YCL/18).

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British Library	National Sound Archive
Brynmor-Jones Library	Haston Papers (DJH)
Glasgow University Library	Broadly-Dollan-Gibson Collection Bissett Collection
Imperial War Museum	Bunnewell Papers Gibson Papers I.L.P. unit in Spanish Civil War material
Research Publications (Microfilm)	Labour Party Archives Glasgow Trades and Labour Council Minutes I.L.P. Archives
Mitchell Library, Glasgow	Maxton Papers (TD 956) Glasgow Federation I.L.P. Collection

Modern Records Centre	General and Municipal Workers Union Papers Harber Papers (MSS 151) Groves Papers (MSS 172) TUC I.L.P. Correspondence Correspondence with Trades Councils MSS 922/756.1/1, MSS292/79
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