

The Dual Task, new mass parties, and the revolutionary party

1. Introduction - Setting up the discussion

This is a contribution to the discussion on the “Dual Task” and the revolutionary party which is part of the Political Review currently taking place in the International Socialist Alternative (ISA). The points put forward are not definitive but aim to stimulate constructive debate and discussion in Ireland and in the ISA. Hopefully, as a result, we will be clearer regarding perspectives and tasks generally, and crucially, that there will be renewed priority and depth to the struggle to build the revolutionary party.

Most in the Irish section and in the ISA were not politically active, or perhaps not even born, when the CWI/ISA first adopted the approach and perspective of the Dual Task in the 1990s. However, reviewing its implementation will help in understanding recent splits in the International, and show how the revolutionary party can be negatively affected when ideas, tasks and tactics become confused and carried out in an imbalanced way.

From Entrism to the Dual Task

Unfortunately the Dual Task was not very clearly defined and over time there was some confusion, misinterpretation and then misrepresentation of it. The most common understanding of the Dual Task is that the revolutionary party, while building its own forces, should also play a role in building new mass parties of the working class, and hence we had a “dual task”.

The idea that new mass parties of the working class should be built emerged after a period of sell-outs by the social democratic and Stalinist parties (which had been the traditional parties of the working class in most countries). After the collapse of the Stalinist regimes, they went even further to the right and this broke the organic connection and affiliation the working class had with these parties. As the 1990s progressed, in country after country, in general these traditional parties underwent a qualitative change in their class character and went over completely to the side of capitalism.

Quantity into quality

This was the sorry culmination of many battles inside social democracy – in many countries the CWI had been witch-hunted and expelled in the years prior – and in general the working class was left without parties to represent their interests.

The CWI recognised that the same process of “bourgeoisification” was taking place in the tops of the unions, as they were likewise impacted by the ideological offensive of capitalism and the ubiquitous notion that there was no alternative to the system. However, breaking the link between the working class and the unions is more difficult than achieving a counter revolution in social democracy. Unions are more based on their worker members and their subs for their existence. On the other hand, when issues emerge in the workplace, many look to their union for assistance. Both these factors mean the connection between the working class and unions is stronger than it ultimately was with social democracy. We should review the situation with these processes today.

While their reformist compromises had already undermined the social democratic parties over the previous years, when they finally went over to capitalism full scale, in an important way, it created a political vacuum — there used to be parties that represented the working class and now there weren't — even though it took some time for this to be recognised or understood in the broad

working class. So building new parties to represent and fight for working class interests clearly had a strong basis.

And so the concept of the “Dual Task” was developed. It came quickly after the Open Turn debate in the CWI, which led in general to the ending of our “entry work” in social democracy. There was little point in staying within social democracy as it was virtually impossible, due to bureaucratic restrictions, to politically intervene around our ideas. In any case, the best elements of the working class had already left these parties due to their decisive shift to the right. This “Open Turn” away from entrism and towards being open and independent revolutionary organisations was the basis for the first major split in the CWI in 1991.

“Against dogmatic methods in thought and action” (Title of vital document from the Open Turn debate)

Historically, a strength in the CWI was its ability to recognise important changes in objective conditions and in turn to appropriately alter its work, orientation and tactics. The “Open Turn” was a good example of this.

Those who opposed the Open Turn, repeating again and again that it was a “threat to 40 years of work”, in reality advocated that we should just stay quietly in the social democratic parties. With such rhetoric, they attempted to strike fear into members to stick with a tactic that was no longer relevant or applicable. They elevated the tactic of entrism to a matter of political principle.

The CWI did operate the ‘entrism’ tactic for a period of decades, but it remained a tactic, not a strategy or point of principle. However, that length of time had an impact on some leading members, and instilled a routinist and conservative approach among the Grant and Woods minority; hence its resistance to the necessary new turn in the work.

Recognising changing circumstances

Another example of recognising changes in conditions and perspectives was actually the political assessment that underpinned our turn to ‘entrism’ in the 1950s/60s.

The perspectives of Trotsky for revolutionary struggles, which he outlined just before World War II in the Transitional Programme, didn't come to fruition in the way he outlined. We don't have the time to go into why, but that would be an interesting discussion for branches or cadre schools.

The unprecedented destruction of the war, and the necessity for the ruling class to make concessions to the working class, particularly in the context that capitalist property relations in half of Europe had been abolished as the Red Army had advanced at the war's end, helped to create the basis for the expansion of the world economy between the late 1940s and the early 1970s. Production and wealth creation in this period were many times greater than previously developed by capitalism. Historic gains like the NHS were achieved and in many countries, these years were characterised by more stable conditions for capitalism, high levels of employment, and developing living standards.

The comrades in The Militant in Britain, who went on to found the CWI, recognised what other Trotskyist forces internationally didn't, that the post war conditions had changed and so revolutionaries needed to reconsider the situation and their strategy.

Militant takes a different course

The comrades concluded that, despite their class collaborationist policies, circumstances had strengthened social democracy, Stalinism, the general labour and trade union movement, and the confidence of the working class. These conditions were potentially a recipe for the potential isolation of Marxism and the resultant danger of adopting a sectarian, ultra-left approach.

So in the post war years, the connection, affiliation and loyalty of the working class to social democracy, including the most advanced layers who had fought to realise the gains and reforms, had actually strengthened. The Militant and later the CWI were unique in understanding that these new relations had developed. This included an understanding that there were reserves of support for these parties that wouldn't be easily emptied by a lack of leadership or a number of sell-outs. It would take a series of major events in society before the broad working class would be open to looking beyond their mass traditional organisations.

While being clear on the necessity of remaining as an independent revolutionary organisation, the CWI engaged very successfully in the tactic of what turned out to be longer term entrism work (different than the entrism advocated by Trotsky in the different conditions of the 1930s which was a more short term tactic) in the labour and social democratic parties. Other Trotskyist organisations in general became more detached from the working class and became infected to different degrees with the twin dangers of ultra-left sectarianism and opportunism.

Fully realising the nature of the new era today

In the last years we have again entered a new world situation, as we did in these two previous periods when our forerunners made alterations to the organisation's perspectives and approach.

In the immediate post-war situation there was a huge economic boom, concessions and reforms were won and the labour parties were strengthened, and the connection to the working class tightened. These developments created the basis for longer-term entrism. Then in the 1990s, there was a political culmination of a process that started in the late 1970s. It was a time of counter-reforms for capitalism which accelerated globally following the collapse of Stalinism. We then correctly took the Open Turn and operated the Dual Task.

The new period we are now in is characterised by a really extreme crisis of capitalism economically, politically and socially, where the material basis for reforms and reformism is limited significantly. This is the opposite of the 1950s/60s, but it also is much more the case than during the 1970s/90s period. In most countries there's been an absence of mass parties of the working class for nearly 30 years, the memory of which has now receded significantly in the collective consciousness.

As well as capitalism, the broad "Left" generally in society has also been wracked by crisis. Disorientated during the neoliberal offensive of the last decades, many who did hang on have, in recent years, been knocked by what they consider to be the negative balance sheet from the resistance to the austerity ushered in with the Great Recession, compared to what they had hoped and expected.

Now again we should consider the political import of the accumulated changes that have taken place since the 1990s and review the perspectives and approaches we advocated then, like the Dual Task.

2. Presentation of the Dual Task – increasingly rigid & imbalanced

The Dual Task was more than just a perspective regarding the workers' movement and in particular the building of new parties for the working class. It reflected a deeper view of how the CWI thought radicalisation and political organisation would generally develop, including views of the stage of the class struggle, its rhythm, how and where it would take place and become concretised and structured.

One of the earlier expositions of the Dual Task and what it meant was contained in the 1996 draft "Statement on the Name", from the leadership of the organisation in England and Wales. It explained the Dual Task this way:

"We face a somewhat different situation today. We have, we repeat, a dual task: to fight together with others for the formation of a mass socialist party and at the same time to seek on all occasions to strengthen our influence and membership. Arguing for a mass socialist party is not the same as arguing for a mass revolutionary party."

And later, on the role that a mass party would play:

"We advance the idea that it must be specifically socialist in its programme but with a form of organisation, federation, which can allow the participation of all genuine socialist currents and organisations, including our organisation. If it takes off, as it undoubtedly will at a certain stage, this in turn can provide the seed bed for the growth in influence of the revolutionary party and organisation, which in turn can lay the basis for the mass revolutionary party at a later stage."

Before, we were intervening into well-established mass workers' parties as a way of reaching the advanced sections of workers and young people to build the revolutionary party and position ourselves where we felt major developments would take place. Now we had to both strive to build new mass socialist parties as well as the revolutionary party. At the time, there clearly was a basis to this perspective. It was in line with our understanding that the vast majority will need to go through the experience of reformism, and that is overwhelmingly likely to happen in some form of new party.

However, in hindsight and given what has happened, the strength of the assertions that such new parties will definitely develop and further the definitive way it was posed that they can be absolutely vital for the future success of the revolutionary party and in turn in reality on the revolution itself, by being a key stepping stone to building mass revolutionary parties, are noteworthy. Even though this document was produced in one section regarding a specific debate, its comments on the Dual Task were a more general political commentary not just related to Britain.

From the World Congress 1998

In 1998, a World Congress document dealt with these issues and in a section entitled, "Two key tasks", it stated:

"Marxism is faced with two key tasks in the new period that began with the collapse of the former Stalinist regimes. Firstly, to face up to the new features present in the situation and draw the necessary conclusions for the tasks of revolutionary socialists. One crucial task in this period is to assist in the process of the rebuilding the idea of socialism as an alternative

to capitalism. It is important for us today to explain the reasons for the emergence of Stalinism and the collapse of the Stalinist system.”

“Secondly, to defend the method and fundamental ideas of Marxism from the ideological offensive that has been launched against them. A crucial aspect of this is the need to educate and train a new generation of cadres and members in the political and organisational methods of Marxism. This does not mean repeating Marxist ideas as dogmatic formulae but of applying the Marxist method to the new world situation.”

In 1998 the Dual Task was not summed up as it was before – the building of new mass socialist parties – but instead was posed in a more developed way as the redevelopment of a broad class consciousness and understanding of socialism. Also, while socialist or socialism was mentioned in both 1996 and 1998 (which often didn't tend to feature in later summations of the Dual Task), the summation of 1998 had more of a political content, focusing not on the form or mechanism for how mass radicalisation and the undermining of reformist illusions might develop, but more on the substantive point – the actual rebuilding of class and socialist consciousness itself. Unfortunately such an emphasis was relegated as time went on.

It is also noteworthy that emphasis was given in 1998 to the theoretical and political tasks of the International, to affect and educate the working class as well as the comrades, which contrasts with the tendency to dumb down politics, and the general neglect of a theoretical struggle by the latter-day IS.

Of course, the document text does specifically deal with new parties and outlines an essentially medium-term perspective for their development, which I think most comrades would have interpreted as referring to the coming decade, i.e. up to 2010 or so.

Some important developments, but not on a universal trend

There were some important developments in that decade, for example: PSOL was launched in Brazil in 2004 after the PT (the Workers' Party) came to government in 2002 and embraced neoliberal policies; Die Linke was established in Germany following the formation of the WASG in 2004 and its subsequent merger with PDS, the former ruling party in East Germany; Syriza in Greece was formed in 2004 and relaunched in 2007; and then at a later point, Podemos in Spain in early 2014 after the Indignados (M-15 Movement) of 2011/12. The Scottish Socialist Party had also been established in 1998. Some of these newer formations were impacted by the ideological confusion of the post-Stalinist period. Notably, the leaders of Syriza and Podemos were influenced by the “post-Marxist” ideas of Ernesto Laclau, who in essence argued that a class understanding of society was no longer relevant.

These developments were important, particularly for the comrades in the respective countries. However, the Dual Task and the development of new mass parties had clearly been put forward as a more universal perspective/trend and it is important to recognise that this perspective has not been realised in most countries, and so deserves to be reviewed. This reality was actually generally accepted in the CWI and that is confirmed by some of the quotes in the following passages from leading members of the CWI.

Reformism belittles the potential role of NLF's

A particularly important point is that even where new parties were established, they didn't really fulfill the role of being a forum for helping the mass radicalisation and active involvement of the mass of the working class in the way that had been outlined earlier. Developments turned out to be

more complex. In the main, because of the weak reformist character of the leaderships and a hesitant attitude of the masses towards some of these parties.

In the past, we posed and understood that entrism could be the means to a semi-mass or even mass base for Marxism, with our perspective for a mass left to develop inside social democracy. The Dual Task and the development of new mass parties was often posed in similar terms, as the earlier quote indicated. Going forward, we should be careful that overly simplistic political paths and perspectives don't develop in the ISA. We need to be prepared, in the extremely volatile times we live in, that helping to overcome reformist illusions and developing a mass base can involve multiple phases, tactics and interventions of all kinds, and is unlikely to be straightforward. These are important issues which will be returned to later.

Putting developments in their contexts

Just some comments on the circumstances in which some of those parties developed for consideration. This is not an attempt at an overall or balanced assessment of these parties, but instead is consciously a very brief critical overview. The significance and importance of these developments has been quite extensively dealt with in previous CWI / ISA material.

The Communist Refoundation Party (Partito della Rifondazione Comunista, or PRC) was often mentioned regarding the Dual Task. It was a left split from the Italian Communist Party in 1991. The PRC had a semi-mass to mass membership from the start. But political weaknesses which emerged in the mid to late 1990s meant that its potential would ultimately not be realised and would lead to decline. At that point it adopted an on and off support for capitalist governments, eventually joining such a government in 2006. Podemos (2014) was a reflection of the Indignados movement in Spain and clearly had a lot of potential. At its height it had a very large following and over 20% of the vote. Again, reformism meant this was spurned with Podemos undermining itself by joining a capitalist government in 2019.

Working class did not organise inside Syriza

Syriza had a strained relationship with the Greek working class, who used Syriza to try to strike blows against the vicious austerity that was being implemented, but didn't fully trust it. Our section joined Syriza in 2008, but subsequently left as it was clear that, despite electoral support, the working class was not really active in Syriza and the comrades' involvement was complicating their ability to reach the best youth in Greek society. Die Linke has been a more stable NLF and comrades have done important work within it, as have the comrades in Brazil with PSOL. On the other hand, because of its political approach Die Linke hasn't constituted a decisive break-through on the left and there is some discussion among the comrades as to whether the best layers look to Die Linke and if we need to focus more on young people outside of the party.

PSOL was established relatively soon after the PT came to power and has gone through a number of different phases. Our comrades have continued to play an important role and have benefitted from this work, and clearly PSOL has significant potential though undoubtedly there are challenges. The PT itself was formed in the early 1980s and twenty years later was in power. Its emergence in Brazil, and developments over the same timescale in other parts of LA, perhaps means the questions of working class political organisation are fresher in people's consciousness than in the likes of Europe. This might put new formations on the agenda more readily there than may be the case in parts of Europe, where the disappointment and legacy of social democracy's sins and sell-outs may weigh heavier.

Further problems in perspectives/Dual Task - how it was posed & understood

In the following years, the perspectives for the Dual Task and how it was posed and understood in many discussions became progressively less focused and clear. The following paragraphs are an attempt to illustrate this with quotes.

In 2007 Peter Taaffe wrote a document entitled 'The Problems of Building New Workers' Parties', and it stated (our emphasis in bold):

“A central question for the **worldwide workers' movement** – perhaps the most crucial at this stage – **is the absence in most countries** of an independent political voice in the form of a mass workers' party or parties.”

And later, having given the example of how Engels (in anticipation of the development of the Labour Party) supported the establishment of a broad independent working-class party in Britain in the late nineteenth century, rather than a smaller but explicitly Marxist party, the document states:

“This was a clear recognition, vindicated later by the development of a mass Labour Party itself, that a 'pure', unsullied Marxist organisation in Britain with mass roots would not develop without the mass of the working class first passing through the experience of its 'own' independent party.”

Back to the future

Again, the points above are a change from the 1998 World Congress. Rather than the more general and political posing of the tasks, it is posed again in terms of rebuilding mass parties. The example used to illustrate the point is interesting, as are the conclusions drawn from it.

There is clearly nothing incorrect in the historic example in itself. The question is, is it a pertinent example for today in Britain and generally? In an overall sense, the conditions that existed in 2007, when the document was written, let alone now in 2021, are clearly fundamentally different to the late nineteenth century when the British Labour Party was formed.

As mentioned earlier, that was a time when capitalism was developing and significant reforms were being won by a developing labour and trade union movement, and there was optimism about the ideas of socialism. Capitalism is now at a completely different point, and developments now are likely to be much more unstable. Yet the clear implication in this quote is that broad mass parties will develop in a similar way to how they did in the past.

How will reformist illusions be overcome?

There is a need to separate primary and secondary questions. Notwithstanding the fundamental undermining of the basis for reformism today, what will be necessary is for the majority of the working class, including young people, to pass through a phase in which they lose their reformist illusions. The necessity of this can't be circumvented or skipped over and clearly revolutionaries have to take account of this and intervene into that situation as appropriate. However, understanding that is not the same as saying that in all countries new mass reformist parties are the inevitable vehicle or mechanism through which reformist illusions must be overcome. Of course they are likely in many countries, but it is unlikely they will develop in all. Most crucially we need to consider more the context in which they may emerge and whether the role we envisaged for them in the past remains most likely for the future.

Undoubtedly new formations will develop in some countries and it is possible that political struggles within these could play a crucial role in overcoming reformist illusions. But whether that happens will depend on the concrete circumstances. Just because it happened a certain way in the past, does not answer the question as to how reformist illusions will be overcome in the future. There are different ways this could happen, but we should not be too prescriptive. We have to analyse events as they are, not operate off a preconceived plan.

Developments in real life are always richer

Finally a brief comment on the point, “a 'pure', unsullied Marxist organisation in Britain with mass roots would not develop without the mass of the working class first passing through the experience of its 'own' independent party.” Obviously this is a comment about an historical development, but it's entirely possible the author thought it generally accurate for today. Even though this is generally correct, there are some points that should be raised.

It establishes a prerequisite, the existence of a broad mass party, before a Marxist organisation can develop mass “roots”. Put aside also that “mass roots” is a different idea than a mass membership, on a separate point it could be argued that relatively small Marxist forces have been able to develop significant roots and support, which the above quote may understate.

An important question is - was the Bolshevik and Russian experience richer than these lines allow for? The RSDLP was not a mass force, then when the 1905 Revolution struck, in a sense both it and the Bolsheviks developed a mass base among key sections of the working class essentially at the same time as they were intertwined. Is it not possible that an explosive development or revolutionary outbursts could strike and pose major opportunities for revolutionary forces to develop a significant base if they respond correctly before the existence of new mass parties? This last quote above has a 'stage-ist', evolutionary sense - as opposed to a revolutionary sense to it. We need a dialectical approach to perspectives and tactics now more than ever.

As mentioned, these quotes also confirm that the Dual Task and new left parties was a more universal proposition of the CWI and that as of 2007, the CWI did not think it had been realised.

A price is paid if points are overstated

Later in the same document, having commented on PSOL in Brazil, it says:

“Such new parties are an arena for discussion and debate and the working out of policies that can guarantee success for the working class in the future. The existence of a viable, Marxist-Trotskyist spine within such a party is vital to its success. Without this, these parties, including P-SOL, can stagnate, even decline and disappear from the political stage, even if they have initial successes. That seems unlikely in Brazil, given the influence of marxism within the party...”

“Capitalism is moving into crisis but **this does not automatically mean that the left will gain. To do that, it needs to create new mass workers' parties.** The developments in P-SOL will be eagerly watched and studied by Marxists throughout the world, in order to learn the lessons for similar developments elsewhere.”

These quotes again indicate an imbalanced and simplistic view. Undoubtedly the comrades in Brazil have played a very important role in PSOL generally, but the quotes speak in a way as if the minority influence of our comrades combined with the influence of others from a Marxist/Trotskyist background in PSOL are nearly guarantees of success. The point that is highlighted in bold is again another “stage-ist” point. It isn't saying, before Marxism can attain a mass base, it is talking in terms

of Marxism making gains, and it is inappropriately diminishing the gains that a revolutionary party may be able to achieve. Is it correct to say that a revolutionary party cannot make gains in the context of capitalist crisis until a new mass workers party is created? Again the Dual Task is dealt with in a way that diminishes the building of the revolutionary party, but also underestimates the interventions and successes that a revolutionary party can achieve, the successes at different points in the US and Ireland for example, as well as other sections.

The commentary also implies that such new parties could have an ongoing impact on society and that argumentation was common. Of course that could happen, but this also tended to feed into and reinforce a view that existed among some comrades that new parties would decisively rebalance class forces and open up a more stable space for the working class to operate. Such views, if they still existed, could be a significant understatement of how unstable capitalism and any new parties may actually be in the future.

Too black and white

In his summation of the discussion on the Dual Task and new left formations from the CWI School in 2010, Paul Murphy wrote:

“the question of new workers' parties is rooted in the objective situation, as it is not possible for the working class to give birth to mass revolutionary formations overnight. Generally, given the current level of class consciousness, the development of broad mass workers' parties is a necessary step on the road of development of consciousness and mass revolutionary parties.”

This strongly suggests that new mass parties are again inevitable. It also repeats the idea of rigid stages and barriers, essentially implying there are blocks to mass radicalisation. Obviously there can be barriers and obstacles. But radicalisation flows from class struggle itself which is organic. It is one thing to try to make a positive point regarding perspectives by envisaging the positive effect a new party could have, or if there was a better type of reformist available than there has been generally, how that could move the situation on.

However, the type of commentary above can tend to lead to confusion and raise the question: is the absence of new parties a block on the class struggle itself? In the Transitional Programme Trotsky makes the point that the bureaucratic apparatus cannot hold back the laws of history. Likewise, the absence of new mass parties is not a block on the development of the class struggle.

The significant movements that already have taken place around the globe point away from this kind of negative assessment. In Ireland the water charges and the repeal/abortion movements, and the radicalisation they brought, came from below, there was no mass left party in advance. The Indignados exploded in 2011/2012 in Spain, and likewise there was no mass left or workers' party. Unfortunately, this overly rigid view on perspectives and developments wasn't altered on the basis of the numerous events and shifts in consciousness internationally that took place. We'll come back to these issues later to illustrate where they led in the 2019 dispute in Ireland.

Accurate analysis or wishful thinking?

Some more quotes from a major article written by Peter Taaffe in December 2013 entitled, “Another year of mass struggle beckons”, which illustrates the continuation of an imbalanced and undeveloped approach (our emphasis in bold):

“However, a molecular change in the consciousness of the working-class people has begun. True, this is not yet at the level of consciousness that existed in the 1980s, when socialism was widely

perceived as a real alternative. Nor is the working class, **apart from a small advanced layer, fully aware** of what is required in the present situation. For this, they need further experience through the formation of distinctive mass parties, accompanied by the strengthening of Marxism and a farsighted leadership.” And later, when dealing with South Africa, it says, “The movement towards a new mass workers' party **is inexorable.**”

And then more generally:

“Undoubtedly, if capitalism continues on its present course, **as it will**, through the piling on of more and more vicious anti-working class policies, a mass revolt **along the lines of Greece is posed on a European and even world scale.**”

There are some good points in this article, however the way perspectives and ideas are posed is again often sweeping and simplistic. The consciousness of both the mass and the “advance layer” is overstated here, illustrating that the IS never fully recognised how far consciousness had been knocked back as a result of the earlier defeats and collapse of Stalinism. The potential is pre judged to be tending towards the most optimistic end of scale - everywhere to face a Greek scenario - rather than being based on a positive but ongoing accurate analysis of the unfolding situation.

SP E/W – a case in point

Just to focus on a specific and more concrete example of how the Dual Task and a new party was posed in the SP in E/W. The SP in E/W was very important because of the influential role it had in the development of the CWI - a few quotes from their perspectives documents from 2014 and 2015.

The 2014 document, commenting on a specific proposal aimed at ending the political influence of the unions in the Labour Party, stated (our emphasis in bold):

“Regardless of the details of how this plays out, it **marks a major turning point** on the road to independent working-class representation, although this may only become fully clear after the general election...”

“**If a significant number of [union] leaders** clearly opposed Labour leadership's proposals, the very act of fighting to defend the collective political voice of the working class would raise class consciousness and open the road to a continued struggle for working-class political representation...”

“While it is most likely that decisive steps towards a new mass workers' party will take place beyond the general election, we are preparing the ground.”

And then in the 2015 the perspectives document takes up the same theme, it says:

“It is, of course, likely that in the period after the election, even many left union leaders will continue to hesitate about taking decisive steps to build a new party. However, the developments from below, harnessed by TUSC, **will begin to create a new party, which in turn will force them, at a certain stage, to act**”

“**This time next year Rodney...**” (famous line from **Only Fools and Horses**)

The E/W documents for 2014/2015 were not appropriately conditional. These documents were written after a very significant sell-out by the unions on pensions in the Autumn of 2011 and it seems, the E/W and old IS leadership, failed to properly factor in or analyse the effects of that in

terms of judging how open the situation was, and tended to overstate what was happening in the unions and the position of some of the union leaders. The clear impression is given that Britain is very close to a new workers party being established, indeed with the Socialist Party E/W playing a vital role in its formation.

Later, in the discussions at international meetings during the emergence of Corbyn and Corbynism in the Labour Party, the basic analysis of the comrades was that whatever happens - whether Corbyn wins the battle in the Labour Party or is defeated by the Blairites - that a new party for the working class will be the result, either in the form of a reclaimed Labour Party or a major left and youthful split from the Labour Party. This seems more like an assertion of belief or wishful thinking, rather than a developed perspective.

3. The Dual Task in the south of Ireland

Here are a few paragraphs that sketch the mass and electoral work in Ireland which fall under the banner of Dual Task, focusing on the south. Trade union and workplace work has always been important in Ireland, most especially in the north where both sectarianism and the absence of a labour party gave the unions even more importance.

The other mass and electoral work in the south started in the 1990s. Apart from the first victorious anti water charges movement that we led in Dublin for three years, and then later the anti bin tax movement from 2001 to 2004, we made significant electoral challenges in national elections - general, local or European - in 12 separate elections in just over twenty years. But the Dual Task related initiatives that we took in the wake of the Great Recession were even more intense and involved.

The United Left Alliance

We proposed the establishment of the United Left Alliance in late 2010 with lefts and independents and five TDs were elected to the Dail in 2011 under the ULA banner. The ULA was a left/socialist initiative. We argued that it should be explicitly socialist. But the others disagreed and so it was a left entity and implicitly socialist in its programme. Despite efforts, including national speaking tours and activities, it was striking that there was no real involvement of new fresh layers in the ULA. We were surprised by this given the huge anger at austerity and that the ULA had five TDs in parliament, we thought it was likely that the ULA would become something real, but it didn't. We emphasised that the ULA aspired to also be a membership based movement and was not just made up of existing groups, but to no avail in terms of attracting involvement.

Predating the ULA, in February 2010, we initiated a campaign that became the Campaign Against Household and Water Taxes (CAHWT) and it played a very significant role in society in 2012 and 2013. We left the ULA in reality in late 2012, and this allowed us to concentrate on CAHWT which had more potential - 30,000 had attended CAHWT meetings in different counties in the early months of 2012 alone and it achieved 52% non-payment of the household tax nationwide by the end of 2012. This required a huge exertion of effort on behalf of our comrades.

A different approach to the Dual Task

While CAHWT was an issue based fighting campaign, we felt it could over time develop in a left and socialist direction. This represented a different and in a sense more transitional approach by us in terms of the Dual Task. The ULA was established as left/socialist, but that seemed to be beyond where people were at that point. So with CAHWT, which had fresh people involved, we wanted to

try to develop it more organically towards that position through people's experience and a skillful intervention by us pushing them from an issue based consciousness to a more general and political one.

However, the government brought in new powers that - in regard to the new austerity taxes that had been levied up to then - allowed the state to directly take the money from peoples' wages and benefits, making the non-payment tactic obsolete. In the later part of 2013, the CAHWT began to come apart, with a lot of sectarian bickering from elements on the left. In order to try and politically pull together and rescue the best elements from CAHWT, we then established the Anti Austerity Alliance, whose initial aim was to maintain the best layers in activity and politicise them. We also decided to use it as the banner to stand in the local elections in May 2014. However, in general, anti austerity activity was in decline and in 2014 we were preparing the party, after nearly four years of striving to build and lead a national campaign, to rebalance away from such new campaigning and reorganisation and towards party building.

The water charges and the AAA

Just as we were about to do that in late summer and early autumn 2014, a new mass movement exploded from below against a new water charge, and initially it involved much greater numbers than previously. We felt we had no choice but to continue with the mass orientation and with the AAA, and we initiated a new We Won't Pay campaign under the auspices of the AAA, directed towards the new water charges.

There was intense mass activity up to December 2014, but in the new year activity dramatically tailed off, with people's focus shifting to only really turning out for the occasional national demonstration. However, in order to try to develop mass non-payment of the water charges in advance of the general election, which was due soon, we maintained a high level of activity throughout 2015 but without the active response we would have liked from ordinary people. This worked in terms of the water charges, as mass non-payment was maintained and it became the dominant issue in the General Election of February 2016. This in turn led to a very significant victory, with the scrapping of the charges and other austerity measures soon after.

Finally, rebalancing the work

It was only in 2016 that we were able to really begin to rebalance the work towards party building in all its facets in the consistent way necessary, that is, after six years of unbelievably intense national mass campaigning. While rebalancing the work, we did try to politically build the membership of the AAA on a left and socialist basis, later renamed Solidarity. However, the fighting and left leaning sentiment dissipated completely after 2016 and so we weren't able to really establish Solidarity independently, even as an intermediary stepping stone campaign/group, towards a new left formation.

We achieved a huge amount in these years and learned many important lessons. Our attempts through this work to build broader working class political organisations weren't successful, but it was correct to try. This was a comment on the layers that were mobilised, on general consciousness, and people's hesitation to become consistently active at that point. Obviously these factors need to be consciously monitored, as undoubtedly there will be further developments in the years ahead.

4. The Dual Task, an ingredient in the opportunism we suffered?

The years from the World Congress in 1993 to the outbreak of the Great Recession in 2008 are important in trying to understand the opportunism that emerged among leading members in the CWI.

An important phase in the history of the CWI

The Congress in 1993 was very good, in particular the discussions and documents regarding world economic perspectives. Our general characterisation of the world economy was very significant, namely that capitalism was in a depressionary phase. However, it took fifteen years for the full force of the depressionary phase to decisively impact in the form of the Great Recession of 2008.

In effect the IS had been holding on and holding the line particularly over the latter part of those fifteen years, with the hope and expectation that when serious economic crisis hit, it would overcome the backlog and definitively push forward all political, industrial and social perspectives. This included their perspective that very significant trade union-based struggles would take place and that these would result in the development of the new mass parties.

Reset the class struggle

Obviously at a certain level the IS recognised that there were issues with consciousness and with the organisation of the working class. However, they hoped such would be the extent of the turmoil that would engulf society that these problems would be sorted out by events. It was like the IS comrades thought a reset button would be pushed on the class struggle and that the basic processes that had operated before the collapse of Stalinism, in the 1970s and 1980s, would be reasserted, this time with the addition that events would also result in the establishment of new mass parties of the working class.

An outdated political framework

So, the comrades didn't just have an increasingly crude perspective. Their perspectives were analysed through a wrong framework which was too much rooted in the conditions of 30 or 40 years earlier.

After 2008, as the years went by and as general developments and perspectives didn't work out as expected, the IS repeated a crude perspective but inevitably they had to over-stretch and overstate their arguments beyond the credible, as they tried to force their wishes on to reality.

Notwithstanding what they said publicly, they lost confidence in their perspective and demoralisation, conservatism and a mentality of retreat developed. Later, Brexit was a boost to the IS and E/W leadership as the idea that they had raised regarding the potential for a left, working class and socialist exit from the EU seemed confirmed. But quickly in turn they were flummoxed by Corbynism and were unable to analyse or intervene in the development in the dynamic way necessary.

The connected process in Ireland

There is a link between the quote given earlier from PM on the Dual Task from 2010, what it represented politically, and his stepping away from the building of a revolutionary party a number of years later. There is also clearly a significant crossover in the argumentation of the IS and PM.

Towards the end of the dispute in the Irish section, one of the last documents from the “Transform the Party Faction” entitled “The Dual Task Today” said (our emphasis in bold):

“The 'Dual Task' has been vital in avoiding the danger of sectarianism in the post-Soviet world because we understood that the revolutionary party **could not be built separately** from the rebuilding of workers' consciousness and mass organisations generally.”

And a bit later:

“It will not be possible to develop substantial revolutionary parties without a development of class consciousness **and the development of broader political organisations** of the working class.”

ABCs of building a revolutionary party jettisoned

In reality these quotes show that by then there was little focus on, or commitment to, building the revolutionary party. The quote repeats the same rigid ‘stage-ism,’ in reality putting the building of a revolutionary party off into the future. Again, the implication that without new mass parties, there's nearly a de facto block on developments and radicalisation, hovers over the text like a fog.

These points go directly against some of the ABCs of building a revolutionary party. It is a basic revolutionary materialist understanding that inevitably many people draw political conclusions in advance of the broad mass. These are the layers that the revolutionary party needs to target and recruit, a potential “vanguard” that it tries to forge so its impact can be all the more powerful when the greater and broader movements hit. It is the task of the party to identify such layers and go after them. This is a crucial part of the nuts and bolts of patient party building. These comrades, however, had no focus on the different layers, but increasingly only spoke in terms of the broad or general working class. The faction in Ireland had very little focus on young people and the radicalisation of women for instance. Their broad political orientation just to the mass is apparent in what is written.

Of course the adaptation of PM and the faction in Ireland was primarily connected to the considerable opportunist pressures that have been at play overall in society over an extended period. However, the faction document quoted above essentially links their de facto diminishing of the revolutionary party to their understanding and their interpretation of the Dual Task. This was quite an academic, abstract and negative approach, not connected to the actual reality and therefore underestimated the initiatives that could be undertaken. In this way the Dual Task and their confused understanding of it was an ingredient in their opportunism.

Disappointment that isn't dealt with becomes corrosive

At meetings PM overstated the effects of the anti-water charges movement in Ireland. Referring to it as historic, he clearly expected it to open up the possibility of significant movement towards the establishment of a new party. That didn't happen and the disappointment that followed was also a crucial factor.

When struggles and new parties didn't materialise in the way expected, the political position of the different comrades who had nurtured such a crude view of perspectives – the IS, their supporters, and the likes of PM etc - was undermined. It should also be noted that, ironically, it was the comrades who became the NEC Majority who invariably took the initiative and advocated the numerous twists and turns of tactics, including launching broader banners, to try to create a space for continued working class activism, organisation and development of consciousness flowing from these movements. These were initiatives that ultimately didn't work out as we would have liked, but the general approach was correct, as it will be again.

Instead of actually reviewing why significant new formations or parties had not emerged in a general sense, PM and the comrades in the faction just doubled down on their already imbalanced portrayal of the Dual Task, deciding that the need for a new party was overriding. Their new conclusion was that the party in Ireland hadn't put enough effort in, that we should have worked harder and gone much further with the broad orientation and Dual Task. In reality for them the Dual Task had become the Single (broad) Task. Their subsequent effective dissolution into the left reformist grouping People Before Profit in Ireland is a reflection of this. On the one hand they are now sectarian in their approach and focus on little spats on the far left, but then on the other, diminish what can be achieved until a broad reformist party is established.

PM and others, moving to a broader orientation and opportunism reflected their disappointment but also their impatience. Likewise for the IS, their disappointment combined with their opportunism, but instead they took an inward turn, a dogmatic retreat into old certainties. This was, ironically, the exact approach they had correctly criticised Ted Grant and Alan Woods for 30 years earlier.

Still relevant today

It is important to bring out these issues because inevitably they remain generally relevant for the ISA today. The position and influence of the IS, as well as the status of the British organisation throughout the CWI, were substantial, and therefore everyone was affected to some degree or another by how their ideas and methods evolved over the timeframes mentioned. That's why the Political Review is so important.

The IS and PM tended to be too prescriptive about specific developments and timeframes for perspectives, including regarding new mass parties. Unfulfilled perspectives, particularly if they aren't reviewed in time, create questions and doubts which if unanswered will lead to demoralisation, and demoralisation in turn greases the wheels of opportunism. So if terms, tactics, issues and perspectives are not clarified as much as is possible in the ISA, it is possible that similar processes could develop again.

This is not to say at all that the ISA will only suffer from pressures of opportunism. There are clearly dangers of ultra leftism and sectarianism, and we are discussing these extensively in the organisation in Ireland. The more successful our youth work becomes, the more the need to discuss and educate the organisation and comrades to these dangers through discussion and practical intervention. However, it's not either one or the other. And our very recent past has demonstrated that the CWI/ISA is and will continue to be under serious opportunist pressure, and so it is vital that this danger is fully recognised, particularly if this is actually related to a false understanding of our political approach and perspectives that did exist in the organisation itself.

The Greek section and the Dual Task

In fact, confusion on the issues of new left formations and the Dual Task was also an important element in the outlook that informed the recent split of the Greek section. The Greek comrades at an earlier point had a clearer view as to some complications regarding Syriza, its character and how it was viewed by the best activists, compared to the old IS. The comrades also correctly understood the role that the sell-out of Syriza in 2015 had in undermining the mass opposition to austerity and the defeat of the movement.

In the discussions around the ISA statement on the pandemic in May 2020, Greek comrades outlined a general view that the coming period would be characterised by setbacks and defeats and cited the absence of new left parties as a primary reason. This was a certain reflection of the problematic understanding of the Dual Task, and the supposed role that new left parties would play, that had developed in the CWI. Did the Greek comrades reflect the imbalanced ways in which these questions had been discussed previously? Quite likely. The Greek comrades saw a new left party as being absolutely essential if the situation for the working class is to move forward. Therefore, as it is difficult to see where a new left party will come from in Greece at the moment (as it is in many other countries), this served to bring the comrades to more pessimistic and imbalanced conclusions. The Greek comrades drove themselves into a political cul-de-sac because of an over-focus on new workers' parties which blinded the comrades to the potential emerging.

For all of the comrades' rejection of the old CWI, it seems the Greek comrades were affected by the outdated and rigid political framework through which the old IS presented perspectives. This tended to straitjacket thought along the lines that radicalisation and consciousness can only really move forward through the medium of a new mass party. The Greek comrades, like the IS before them, didn't fully see the real significance or the import of the international movements of women and young people that have hit the world in the last years.

So an outdated political framework, imbalanced perspectives, and confusion on the Dual Task have been important in the developments in the CWI and ISA in recent months, not just recent years. These can be ongoing challenges for the ISA and this is the reason for this material and why the Dual Task is one of the topics in the Political Review.

5. Can Dual Task/mass work undermine the revolutionary party?

Confusion over the role of new left formations and a view that without them we cannot move forward can help create a 'two stages' mentality regarding party building. If recruitment isn't easy and if a comrade struggles with it, it is very easy to lapse from that task and do other work that may seem easier. If such a shift becomes a general feature, the building of the revolutionary party can unconsciously become relegated behind the need to be active on issues or in "the movement" or building a new broad party.

Two stages?

Were there elements of such a two-stages approach in the old IS and International? Did comrades mark time, waiting for future developments (which of course is a recipe for withering on the vine and for decline)? "Yes" is the answer, and in fact we can all be guilty of this approach from time to time. Certainly this is absolutely relevant to the Irish section where there is still a residue of such a mentality; building the party is still seen too much as a task for the future like we are in a revolutionary "waiting room."

This was also undoubtedly the case with the IS. There was not a developed focus on building the International or of trying to systematically drive recruitment or cadre development in the sections for a considerable time. The discussions on building at IEC meetings and the occasional commissions - the grouping of different sections together in workshops - reflected that there was little consideration of party building, and a stale and 'routinist' approach predominated, reflecting the fact that the IS comrades were increasingly divorced from this task.

Routinism in "building" is the kiss of death

While they may have had hopes for what may develop after the 2008 crisis, in truth the IS had become worn down and tended to have a lax or negative mindset on party building. There may have been one or two exceptions to this but this is the general record of the IS in the latter years of the CWI. At the same time, the IS didn't rate or were suspicious of the radicalisation that was taking place, particularly among women and young people, ironically the layers that were and are the most open to joining a revolutionary struggle and could have made an important difference to the CWI.

Confusion on the Dual Task and perspectives helped create a fog which blunted the focus on party building and the drive to recruit. It is illustrative that PM and others internationally became dismissive of "linear" growth in the revolutionary party, for example, recruitment that mainly flows from the subjective efforts of current members, etc. In the past, but also in recent years sections have been transformed with such recruitment playing an important part in this.

Of course the revolutionary party will also grow substantially through events and interventions, and we will recruit large groups of people and even bring in whole groups and organisations, etc, at some points. And we will never adopt the approach of the SWP in the 1990s whose answer to the question "how can socialism be achieved" was just to say "sell papers and recruit" to the SWP, implying that it is only a straight line of subjective effort that is necessary to achieving socialism. However, the importance of recruitment as a task and responsibility for all comrades should be elevated, not diminished.

Dual Task - a confusing term?

The term Dual Task itself is a confusing term. The word dual places the task of building the revolutionary party on a par with the task of rebuilding the labour and trade union movement, in

particular of building new mass parties. However, they are not equal in priority for us; the building of the revolutionary party is our primary task. So this term in effect downgrades the importance of the party. At this point we constitute small forces and the task of rebuilding the working class movement, including new parties/movements, is not just a task on our shoulders but will be embraced by working class people and new activists themselves. So that aspect of the “dual” is not just a task for us but for workers, women and youth activists.

The existence or involvement of a revolutionary party is not a prerequisite, without which new parties cannot come into existence. To illustrate, we don't have a basis in many countries but no one would argue that new parties couldn't emerge in such countries as a result of the events and conditions and the broader forces at work on the ground.

This is similar to our understanding that the revolutionary party doesn't create revolutions; they flow from the class struggle and the contradictions within capitalism itself. While of course we should help in rebuilding the workers movement and new parties, and like in revolutions, our intervention at certain points in such parties could be decisive in pushing the situation on. However, it is also important we understand the primary role of objective developments in creating the conditions and potential for new broad parties to emerge.

Perspective and judgment essential

Perspective, a sense of proportion and judgment are very important. If comrades are overly focused on us being essential for the emergence of new formations/parties and underestimate the necessity of broader factors like the stage of the class struggle, consciousness and the preparedness of working class to be active (can't really have a new workers' formation without workers), then the comrades can put themselves in a constant anxious state - should we initiate something, is an opportunity being lost etc. Such a situation of being in near constant standby can distort the work and be very disorientating.

Obviously it can be important to be part of the start of a new development as that may give us a better basis to influence it. However, taking such responsibility and leading from above can be difficult and can even be politically limiting if we don't have enough comrades intervening from below into the ranks of a new party. Intervening from below into new formations/parties will be decisive and that again brings us back to the same fundamental point, the importance of building the membership and cadre capacity of the revolutionary party.

Of course, building the revolutionary party can't be achieved without interventions into working class struggles and all the movements that will emerge. Are there comrades who are activists in the broad movement, including the unions, but who could or should be more conscious about building the party? The importance of specifically strengthening the revolutionary party should be the key goal for all comrades in all our work and the term “dual task” can confuse the primacy of this.

More confusing as time passes

This wasn't a difficulty when the Dual Task was first raised in the first part of the 1990s as many sections had just undergone profound recruitment and development in the period before and so consciousness was relatively high. Likewise, the unprecedented attacks and ideological offensive against the concept of a revolutionary party were only beginning at that point, in comparison to the deluge since. In addition, important initiatives aimed at building among radicalised youth were also taken around those times - the YRE 1992-1995 and then later the ISR and G8 intervention.

However, twenty-five years have passed since then and the conditions and consciousness of today are different. It would be best to avoid any potential confusion by finding other ways of describing

the importance of helping to redevelop the working class movement in all its aspects, something that is more dialectical or nuanced than what's implied in the "dual task," while always striving to build the revolutionary party as our primary task.

Mass work and the Dual Task

The Dual Task obviously overlaps with mass work. When comrades from Ireland refer to mass work and the need for a better balance between it and the internal building of the party in Ireland, we are not referring to having less public activities like stalls, or tabling, or paper sales. Nor are we arguing that we don't intervene into struggles or take initiatives, nor act to cohere radicalised layers around us in struggle, from which we try to build, etc. This kind of approach has been illustrated by the essential role we played in the recent Debenhams Strike and for example in the Debenhams Workers' Declaration that has been launched on our initiative. We are not in any way advocating that the party becomes a study circle, though of course we all would benefit from more political study.

By mass work we are referring to consistent work that is geared to the broad mass of the working class. Some examples to illustrate:

- A serious challenge in elections is mass work, as you are trying to cover and affect the whole of the working class in a given area or nationally.
- The work we did in Ireland on the household tax and water charges in 2011-2016 (which was linked with the local, general and European elections we stood in, between 2011 and 2016) was mass work, where we actually tried and were successful in reaching the whole of the population of the country in order to build and sustain mass non-payment of unjust austerity taxes.
- Consistent interventions into the workplaces and trade unions also should be considered important mass work.

Mass work and interventions – a tradition we must defend

Mass work and interventions are key, and our ability to engage the working class - using a transitional approach without diluting the fundamentals of our programme or the character of the party - will make the difference between whether we can build a real mass base for Marxism which ultimately will determine whether society is changed or not. There is little point having a Marxist organisation that is 'pure' and principled but doesn't have the capacity to develop a mass base when revolutionary potential is posed. On the other hand, there is little point in having a mass base if in achieving that the politics and the revolutionary character of the party has been compromised. Steering the correct course between these is vital and it is on this aspect of revolutionary struggle that many organisations historically have broken their backs.

On some occasions spectacular gains can be made from interventions, particularly among young people. Factors in determining how successful or otherwise our mass work may be include on the one hand the level of consciousness in society and if conditions are favourable, and then on the other, the cadre level and capability of the party itself.

It can be posed that doing mass work not only brings contacts and potential recruits but is the revolutionary party in its most natural state; that mass work is also the essential stepping stone to educating comrades and building the cadre of the party. Mass work and the experience gained from

interventions are important aspects of what is necessary, but building a strong cadre requires a lot more than that. This includes the need for a systematic approach to developing the political level of comrades and the party; the need for conscious reviewing of all aspects of the work not only nationally but internationally, particularly the lessons from party building. Given that we are inheriting a legacy from the last couple of decades of the IS diminishing and undermining the theoretical/political approach in the International, as well as of a neglect of reviewing our positions and work, it is very important that the ISA overcome these deficits as a means of developing a strong and rounded cadre.

But there are also dangers from mass work

However, mass work sustained over a long time, particularly if the conditions in society are complicated and there are weaknesses in the political cadre in the party, inevitably carries with it overheads that can negatively affect the political consciousness of comrades and impact on party building.

It is a basic position of Marxism that when you step into mass work and the kinds of work mentioned above, you are immediately coming under increased political pressure because bourgeois ideology is dominant in society, including among the working class and in the trade unions. So whenever comrades engage in mass work over an extended period we need to be mindful of this reality and the party needs to put in place the necessary political supports to counteract the dangers.

Previously we have dealt with the effects of the mass work on the Irish section, positive but also negative. It is easy to understate the impacts as they can enter into the deep consciousness of comrades and the fibre of the party itself and so aren't obvious on the surface. The Irish section has felt it necessary to try to register these points because of our developed experiences of some of the negatives. We do this because they are relevant to other sections too and we want to help save the comrades some time and toil.

The primary negative impact was not in the amount of time that mass work can take up, but it was the diminishing of consciousness and level of comrades politically and in regard to party building. We have documented how this happened and how we have tried to overcome it and we aren't in a position to repeat the points here. However, we would suggest comrades read the relevant sections of our document from the International dispute, **Setting the Record Straight Part 2**, for a fuller explanation as it is very relevant on these issues.

The ongoing battle for a revolutionary approach to trade union work

The Dual Task was also a key aspect in the document written by Ciaran Mulholland towards the end of the dispute in Ireland. Ciaran initially had been part of the NEC Majority until the middle of 2019, then broke and with a layer of trade union members in the north formed the Militant Group. A significant number of these comrades were not in a real sense active in the political life of the party. The Militant Group left the party in October 2019.

In his document entitled, "The Party at the Crossroads", CM wrote:

"The Party is a collective enterprise. Each member should strive to be a politically confident Marxist and to engage with working class people through activity in the wider movement. It is the case however that not every comrade is necessarily, or even usually, this rounded out combination in themselves. Rather there is a partial division of labour in the Party, with some comrades more focused on party work, and some on trade union work or other arenas of activity. Personal

circumstances are not an insignificant factor: family commitments, work pressures, age, health and geographical locations restrict the ability of many comrades to engage fully in the internal life of the Party.”

The point about a “collective” is in reality contradicted by the rest of what is said, which points to a separation of comrades and of the work itself, and a certain individualism. The actual content of this quote is that the revolutionary party has to accept and should gear or fit its work around the personal circumstances of its members. In fact, the very idea of being able to develop rounded out comrades who are active in the trade union - a cadre - is not only questioned but is posed as being unlikely because people aren't usually capable of such!

What is a member, what is a cadre?

Rather, it is actually particularly important that the party makes special efforts to assist members who are active in unions and workplaces to engage in a struggle to develop themselves as rounded-out revolutionaries, as part of an overall party that has the goal of, and is capable of, achieving socialist change. Of course flexibility and understanding are necessary, but what was in effect raised in this document was a separation of the trade union work from the revolutionary party and giving up on the idea of developing a cadre organisation.

CM's text also raises a basic point – echoing the issues in dispute in the RSDLP in 1903 – around the question of what is a member. Famously in that debate, the leader of what became the Mensheviks, Martov, said that every striker could be considered a member of the party with no regard for the understanding of its programme and politics.

Comrades who are involved in trade union work are pursuing a strategically crucial arena of work and they can come under huge pressure. Rather than being blind to that, or giving in to it as was suggested above, it is necessary to take special measures to politically assist the comrades so that their intervention in the union or the workplace is as effective as possible, but also to try to ensure active involvement in the party is maintained. The unions and workplaces can be a key source of influence and of new members for the revolutionary party, but we will only be able to realise such gains if we fight to develop our comrades who are at this front line as a strong political cadre. The complications and challenges of this work should be discussed further in the ISA.

The role and nature of the revolutionary party needs to be defended

The basic concept of the revolutionary party, and the conclusion of Trotsky in his classic pamphlet, “The Class, the Party and the Leadership,” is that the revolutionary party not only can, but it must be built with urgency day in, day out, in advance of the broader struggles and revolutionary opportunities. Such a fighting approach is completely absent in the quotes above. Yet it is an integral part of our approach that patient and consistent recruitment over time can result in major and qualitative breakthroughs. In fact, the revolutionary party, if it has a strong enough cadre, can even move forward against the trend of general developments.

At recent party events, we have raised some more general targets to try to help comrades conceive better the struggle to build the party over the next years. We raised about fighting to get to 500 members; but then also the goal of having 1,000 to 1,500 members in the party as major events develop as the 2020s unfold. We outlined that in Ireland an organisation of that size with a strong cadre could have a powerful impact and could be a real and general factor in developments. With the restrictions of the pandemic about to ease, it is vital we all set about the task of constructing such a party in the next months and years.

This is not at all to imply that the achievement of such numerical development guarantees our position or the role we want to play in organising socialist change. Clearly we would need to have a record of struggle and the trust of the working class, as well as the most vital elements of the working class in our ranks and the proven political ability of withstanding the pressure and being able to maintain our revolutionary character and programme. But such targets are very helpful in pointing a way forward for comrades.

6. In conclusion - some issues and questions

The basic ideas of the Dual Task – helping to build the working class movement, in particular new parties of the working class - clearly have an important basis. However, there are issues with the way the Dual Task was posed in the past and how it came to be understood over time by some. Crude and prescriptive presentations of the perspectives and the role new parties may play can be very debilitating. As mentioned, there are also specific problems with the term “dual task.”

Be wary of blueprints

Part of the problem was that the old IS presented these issues in an overly definitive and simplistic way in order “to rally the troops.” The problem with that approach is, if reality does not match the definitive pronouncements, there is a real price paid in the loss of confidence in the ideas and the International, and in comrades’ morale, which clearly were key issues in the CWI. The ISA should always try to optimistically point a way forward, but to be as balanced and as accurate as possible.

New mass parties are not an “absolute truth.” They will emerge, there is little doubt about that, but any idea that they will inevitably develop everywhere and that they are a necessity, without which the class struggle and the development of consciousness are blocked, is not connected to the dialectical reality that is unfolding.

Historical examples can be very useful, but we can also get imprisoned by them, with expectations that things will happen just as before. Let's learn from history, but there is no substitute for correctly analysing the actual situation that is developing concretely.

Changed conditions need to be factored in

The conditions that existed when the traditional mass parties initially developed, or when they were renewed post World War II, were times when capitalism was moving forward economically and in many countries hard-fought gains were won for working-class people via trade unions and labour and socialist parties. The CWI was formed in the conditions that developed after WWII, where economic growth stabilised conditions in society and this had an effect on the political character and outlook of the CWI.

However, the conditions today are different:

- Capitalism is facing deep crises economically, politically and socially and this is leading to turmoil and instability on an unprecedented level.
- Environmental disaster is a more and more dominant aspect of people's lives and will be a key factor provoking action.
- The depth of the economic crisis facing capitalism, and its inability to find a real way out,

also undermine the basis for reformist ideas compared to the earlier times mentioned.

- The authority of the capitalist establishment and the ex-labour and social democratic parties is at an all-time low.
- The levels of alienation from official society and official politics are also unprecedented, particularly among the young, but also more generally.
- The passage of time means that the prospect of new significant left formations emanating from splits from ex-social democratic parties, etc, is diminished compared to before.
- Trade unions have enormous potential and could play a decisive role politically. However, in some countries they are declining and there is a question over whether they will be forced to fight in a serious way.

Reformism as a factor

The economic basis for reformism is undermined. Clearly this is a major difference to the previous periods mentioned in the paragraphs above. We need to develop further a fragment from the previous 1990s perspectives, that was, that new mass parties will be less stable than the former traditional parties. If that was the case in the mid-1990s, how much more so it will be now and in the future. The import of this point should be developed.

Could the changed conditions and extent of instability be such that, not only will new parties be prone to instability and crisis, but the space doesn't open for new parties to emerge; or the different necessary conditions don't come together or don't come together at the right time when the potential is highest and so opportunities pass?

However, the crucial question is: where new parties and formations do develop, are they likely to decisively impact the class struggle and be the forum for mass radicalisation where Marxism can develop a semi-mass and mass basis as was outlined previously? Or is it also possible that the stripping of illusions in reformism and mass radicalisation can take place and be reflected in more varied ways? There can be multiple events and incidents. There can be as well at different times, different formations of different types, including ones that reflect the emergence of reformist trends and changing aspirations and consciousness, only to recede again as things move on. Many different elements collectively can play the role of undermining reformism.

Preparing for new explosions and where they may lead

In the context of the depth of the capitalist crisis and of the absence of organisations that really reflect the opposition and aspirations of the working class and young people in the majority of countries, the conditions and the political situation on the surface can be difficult or complex. However, it is precisely such conditions that mean explosions from below are absolutely inevitable in the years ahead, and the ISA preparing politically and organisationally for these is now vital.

As mentioned, an important factor in why new parties haven't emerged, or where they have emerged, haven't played the role previously outlined, was the particularly weak nature of their reformist leaderships who reflected the previous period of setbacks, defeats and ideological retreat, and so were incapable of resisting the pressure and making a stand against capitalism.

However, by their nature, explosions from below can bring forward politically fresher and harder layers, more hostile to capitalism and therefore potentially more capable of contributing more

significantly to the class struggle. Of course such formations, even if hostile to capitalism, will still be politically broad in character and the question is still: will they go forward by moving more consciously towards a thoroughly anti-capitalist and revolutionary standpoint or not? The strength of Marxism in the different situations and countries prior to these developments can turn out to be decisive in how such situations work out.

Explosions and the revolutionary party

Explosive developments are inherent and while they could lead to new formations, they can also create exceptional potential for a time for the growth, numerically and in influence, of our own forces. So we have to judge situations concretely in regard to the balance of the approach we take in such situations. Crucially, we need to try to envision what such explosions may be like, what layers may be involved and how the explosion could be channeled. We also need to envision the types of approaches we could take in response to mass activity and potential, as this can help us to move swiftly, which will be necessary. Advance preparation and consideration of explosions and revolts, including having reserves of finance so our ability to decisively intervene and grab the potential isn't compromised, are important tasks for now.

Events in a particular country can have international consequences

A new mass party or movement, particularly coming from explosive developments, could be of a different character than those that emerged in the 2000s, and their impact could be more direct and positive internationally. In such a way, the perspective for new left parties/movements could become a material force internationally and could be very important to our work and future.

However, it is also possible that new formations/parties, because of the conditions of capitalist crisis and their reformism, could buckle and fail quickly. That can have a negative impact on this process internationally, just as the sell-out of Syriza had a material effect in a number of countries and on those on the left more generally.

New mass parties – part of our programme

Clearly the building of new mass parties for the working class would represent important steps forward and this should be part of our general programme and can help point a way forward for the working class. And clearly in some situations and occasions it will be elevated and pursued very strongly by sections in an intense way, and if successful can then open up new and expanding scenarios.

This undoubtedly can be very relevant to the Irish section, both north and south. In fact, in Northern Ireland long before the 1990s, we called and worked for the establishment of a trade union-based party of Labour to fight on the issues and help unite workers from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds against capitalism and sectarian division. This remains a vital part of our approach and programme, though of course we need to discuss how best to put this position forward and campaign for it concretely.

Processes of the Russian Revolution

We should be open but more careful and conditional than the IS/CWI regarding perspectives for new mass parties, as we don't want to misdirect comrades or weaken the consciousness about the need to fight all the time to build the revolutionary party, which was an issue in the past.

As well as the other aspects mentioned above, we should re-examine some issues at a deeper level. For example, what was the actual experience of the Russian Revolution? It seems the Russian working class had a broad, mass-based party to represent and organise it for two relatively brief periods. The first was during the 1905 Revolution and the immediate period afterwards, and the second was during 1917 itself. But obviously the general absence of a mass party didn't cut across the development of consciousness and radicalisation or the mole of revolution from burrowing away and exploding forth. The conditions emerging today can actually mean those experiences are even more relevant for us today than thirty years ago.

Preparing for the future

Yes to a perspective for new mass parties, but we need to ensure it is not crudely or rigidly understood that they will inevitably exist everywhere, and certainly not an understanding that they will be a prerequisite for developments in the class struggle or radicalisation of consciousness. We already have countless examples of where workers, women and particularly young people are being radicalised and resisting capitalism without the existence of such parties. In these we see the potential for new struggles and new movements, which can also affect how and where the radicalisation and the class struggle will develop and how these are reflected organisationally. The development of the consciousness of women and young people has already had major impacts on the general situation, and further developments among these will need to be considered and fully factored into this discussion.

What the potential may be in the trade unions for struggle, and in particular for a momentum towards political representation, also needs to be discussed. Clearly there can be important developments there which could have huge implications. On the other hand in many countries the bureaucracy for different reasons will resist such political pressure, and a question is: could the bureaucracy be successful? Linked to that, there is also the potential in many countries that workers' struggle could explode from below, and in some instances could result in ad hoc class organisations. Could such developments also find important political reflections?

It is appropriate to outline that revolutionary parties could win a semi-mass or mass base via their intervention and involvement in new mass parties that become established (just as we outlined that our entrust tactic was linked to the perspective of the potential to develop a semi- and mass basis through our work in social democracy). However, the situation can be different in different countries and different in different continents. Within that the perspective put forward was crude and imbalanced and underestimated the problems in new parties emerging. One of the factors is the sell-outs of social democracy in Europe over many decades; the disgust and the alienation they caused negatively affected the potential. But the situation in other areas, Latin America for instance, may be fresher.

Review discussions are vital

We also need to be prepared that in many countries it may not happen like that. Events usually turn out to be much richer than we can anticipate, so we need to be as prepared as possible. The Review of the Dual Task, and perspectives for new left formation and how these relate to the revolutionary party, can not only be very interesting but can really help all of the sections be clearer, stronger and better prepared for the turbulent times ahead. Undoubtedly the contributions from comrades on these questions from all around the world will really help us have a very constructive and fruitful discussion which will benefit all ISA comrades.

