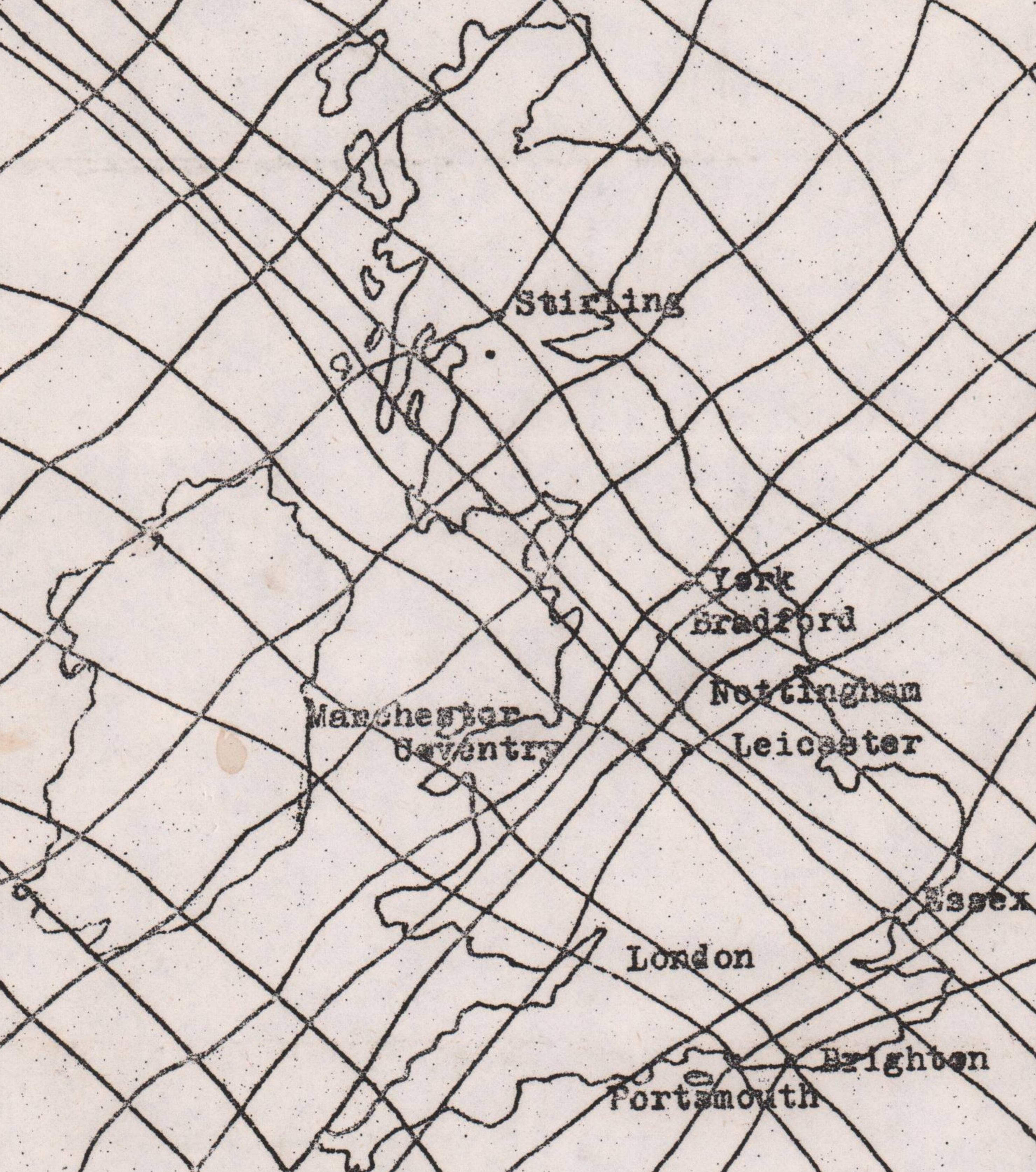


Report on Conference held at Bradford 12-14 November



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November 1976

Libertarian Students Network

Report on Conference held at Bradford 12-14 November



Minutes of 1st Plenary.  
Sat. 10.15 a.m.

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- (1) Conference format was approved
- (2) Only one person was present from first L.S.N. conference. He expressed the hope with which the last conference ended that the function and organization of the L.S.N. would be delineated.
- (3) It was agreed that a pooled fair system for the next conference would be implemented.
- (4) It was agreed that first session should consist of individual and group reports of activity and opinion of L.S.N.

(a) Bradford Univ. Lib. Soc. Group.

Student based but hoping to extend participation and activities into community. Successful programme of talks and films. Main activity has been organizing for conference but some work done on Murrays. Ideas on function for network vary from being a purely communicative body to being a more of an organization.

(b) Manchester Univ.

The Libertarian Socialist Soc. has changed its name to Beano Soc. but some people are intending to set up something more serious. Work is being carried out in South African campaign and in community action.

(c) Warwick Univ.

Anarchist group not as strong as last year but 5 members are on Union council. Main work with Murray Defense Group. Involved in occupation of Amnesty International offices. As in Manchester growth of right wing was noted.

(d) N.E. London Poly.

Libertarian group just formed this year largely in response to an occupation of the Poly which occurred last year. Work mainly orientated round Murrays and co-operation with a Womens Group. Feeling was that L.S.N. should play a contact role.

(e) Southampton Univ.

Although 5 libertarians in Union. not enough motivation to form group. Anarchist group starting in town. Work with Trots. on certain issues.

(f) Leicester Poly.

No group at Poly. Town anarchist group working mainly on Murrays: Irish bank occupied: leafleting of town: torchlight procession. Libertarian Education being produced by group of people,

(g) L.S.E.

Anarchist group in Univ. Main activity with fair fight campaign and also work with Fed. of London Anarchist Groups (F.L.A.G.) Union politics avoided.

(h) Essex Univ.

A group formed last year but collapsed due to diversity of political opinion. Active individuals. reformed group. Essay bank proposal passed through Union and now in operation. Anti-exam propaganda work. No discussion of L.S.N.

(i) Huddersfield Poly.

Existing group aligned with Black Flag  
Main work trying to set up a claimants union.

We started the discussion from the basis of some written suggestions made by Neil Carmicheal, from which his basic proposals were that the LSN should have a theoretical base plus effective organisational machinery through which to implement policy, activity, etc. The ideas supporting this were that aims and principles would come from this theoretical base, various issues would be brought up at both National and delegate conferences, and policy and objectives would be decided on through the conferences and also through internal bulletins and newsletters.

A major specific objection to this set of proposals was that it would be very restrictive to minority tendencies within the wider network, as it implied following national decisions and specifically said that those who did not agree with it: a particular line should not work actively against it, thus denying autonomy of individual local groups. It was recognised that such policy could cause splits away from the Network, particularly on what could be a contentious issue such as the violence/non-violence debate.

From here, we moved on to the basic question of 'how much structure do we want', revolving around the issues of whether we should be a policy-making body or more of a communications network.

A number of people felt that the organisational proposals that had been made were too rigid and had tendencies towards centralism, although this was denied by those supporting the original proposals. Suggestions were made that we should be viewing ourselves simply as a group of other groups, that we should be covering a broad spectrum of perspectives, and that the major function of the group should be as a contact and resource body, co-ordinating activity but allowing for autonomy, with the vision that as practical activity emerged so would some form of theoretical base. Many people felt it would be artificial to try and build up a base and policy-line simply from this conference. It was agreed that the internal bulletin would play a role in communicating and debating ideas and activity.

However, other people suggested that a loose network has no political effectiveness, and that similar networks in the past have collapsed. Some felt that by pressing for a communication body rather than a more specifically defined body we would just skirt around issues and try to avoid anything that might be contentious.

Discussion turned at several points towards consideration of the issue of the Murrays. Here was an example where we did come to a consensus on activity to be carried out, whether or not we chose to define it as 'policy'. This may have been a special case, but it is an example of co-ordinating activity of groups all over the country, where in certain respects we could be said to have a 'line' on the issue.

Generally, the whole discussion moved backwards and forwards in different directions. The suggestion was made more than once that as we didn't seem able to come up with anything very complete at this stage, we should start off by acting on the few minimum ideas that we had some form of agreement on - that at the very least we were to be a communicative body, that we wanted to produce a discussion bulletin, and that we wanted to hold another conference to carry on the discussion. The Manchester people offered to organise the next conference.

This session started with Aims & Principles and went on to organisational details. These notes reverse the order because that way essential information can come first and the reports of specific discussions blend into one another, perhaps.

### 1. Finance

University Unions can use their budgets to finance network activities, but there should be a finance pool to make it possible for other groups without access to money to participate. It was suggested that any group able to should contribute to the fund ... a figure of £20 was mentioned. A collection was made and brought in £11.37½ to start the pool off. A treasurer was appointed: Alyson Learmonth, School of Science and Society, Bradford University BD7 1DP. Tel. 33466 ext.8 302.

### Publications

The post conference bulletin will be circulated by Bradford group about a week after the conference. Next bulletin to be produced by L.S.E. Deadline for copy is 4th December. Contact: Peacock 33 Bromfelde Rd. SW4. Hopefully this will be circulated before the end of term.

The pre-conference bulletin for January will be produced by Manchester people. Deadline 2 weeks before the conference, i.e. either ~~7th or 14th~~ <sup>21st</sup> Jan. Contact: Paul Cassidy 11 Stanley Rd., Whalley Range, Manchester 16.

### 3. Acting Secretary

It was felt it would be useful to have a permanent address for people to direct enquiries to. Pete Baker volunteered. Address: A06 Allesley House, Rootes Residence, Warwick University, Coventry CV4 7AL.

### 4. Next Conference

Will be at Manchester, either weekend ~~Jan 21-23rd or 28-30th.~~ <sup>Feb 4-6.</sup>  
Contact Paul Cassidy, address as above.

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The discussion started with the proposal put forward by Neil Carmichael (see accompanying sheet) and an alternative suggested by Martin (M/C) that the Network accept the following five points:

1. The national network is something for groups to use to propagate their ideas. The aim of the network is to strengthen groups.
3. The majority cannot dictate to the minority. Local groups decide on their own tactics.
4. Action can be invited by anyone (?)
5. The network should inform all local groups of what is going on.
6. The network should have no policy other than the propagation of libertarian

ideas as defined by local groups.

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7. The network should be structured so that points 1 - 6 can not be used against libertarian ideals.

There was general dispute over the meaning of "policy", especially with regard to Neil's point 2d ("There should be no requirement for a minority tendency (i.e. those opposed to an L.S.N. national policy) to implement a policy with which they disagree but they should not actively work against accepted policy"). People agreed that every unit should be autonomous, but no consensus emerged on the structure the network should adopt in order to co-ordinate activities and ensure continuity. Eventually the subject was shelved in favour of sorting out practical details concerning the next conference etc. (as above).

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Discussion on the L.S.N. as of Saturday, I believe it was the evening one

We started from reactions to the proposals in Neil's paper on the function and organisation of the network, a lot of the comments revolving more or less loosely around point 2d (see report above). It was not clearly established whether the general preference was for a co-ordinative network or for a tighter policy-making body type political organisation, and this led to fairly diffuse and centrifugal "discussion" on the purpose of the L.S.N. - as instanced by chronically recurring debate as to whether the concerted activity we had agreed on re. the Murrays constituted policy implementation or whether it was simply a question of us deciding to do something in a united way on one particular issue, i.e. an ad hoc approach.

A suggestion was put forward that we look at the LSN and its role from the basis of what we want to do; that we choose the form it should take from the content (presumably in the sense of "substance", "that which is contained within", rather than "sense of satisfaction" or "contentment"?) we desire. In order to recapture as far as possible the distinctive tone of the discussion from then on, and also because it's a more accurate account of what happened than my personal interpretation would be as a paraphrase, below is reproduced verbatim the notes taken at the time (by a comrade from M/C) as a series of quotes, mostly:

"Any organisation with a theoretical base which is too narrow will fall anyway."

"If information isn't being acted upon any structure will be useless."

"Fucking wishy washy, wants only talking."

"Comrade sees policy-making as centralisation."

"No central body proposed."

"Wants reasons behind different conferences."

"LSN for numbers game?"

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"From base comes Aims and Principles. Change once a year - they should stand that much time. Other conferences are for specific actions and should show how it relates to base. Journal and production and distribution should be rotated. Mutual discussion of rotation order."

"List of those here, LSE want to do next (news)letter, are they (not LSE) democratic centralists, are the bears Jewish." (?)

"Will LSN demand policy which comes from false needs?"

"Will turnover of students be a grave danger...?"

"Do we need a common theoretical base, if so structure will follow. Terry thinks that practical basis comes first."

"CBA as example of a loose one which has degenerated."

"Structure from needs, not hastily thrown up structure."

"Worry that it's a first step on a nasty road."

"Primary purpose not to pass motions but to stimulate thought, which must be met with."

"Are people who don't call themselves libertarians excluded?"

"Theoretical base used as definition, not labels."

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Discussion on Revolutionary Strategy. Sunday Morning.

This session plunged straight into the "violence v. non-violence" thing, with someone expressing faith in non-violence as a strategy for change. It was argued in reply that it was impossible to oppose, for example, the N.F. without using (counter)violence, and from then on most of the time was taken up with talking around ways to deal with the Front, which gives the whole discussion a defensive, even negative air. The counterproductive nature of opposing the N.F. on the streets was brought up, since it's almost invariably the lefties who get beaten up by police and hauled up in court and the Front who receive favourable publicity which can only serve to recruit for them.

It was suggested that one useful tactic is to campaign (by selling socialist papers, holding discussions, distributing information) in areas from which the N.F. draws a lot of support.

Violence and non-violence again - the Front is a violent, attacking body - as in their breaking up of the N.C.C.L. meeting in M/C - what do we do if we don't want them to rule the streets?

Possibility was mentioned of opposing them by tactics such as an informative carnival (Manningham extended into a People's Anti-Fascist Festival), as well as

having a long term strategy to subvert and destroy their organisational base (people's repressed and fucked-over lives, which will merge with our overall strategy for overthrowing capitalism).

We came back to violence and non-violence in a wider context - the problem of more subtle, structural violence - can a genuine non-violent response emerge in the initial stage to counter ongoing structural violence? The point was re-emphasised that we revolutionaries do not initiate violence in any form - we live in a society that is consistently violently oppressive of us all - sometimes we are driven to respond with defensive or counter-violence.

Getting away from the N.F. briefly, there was an exchange on the primacy of the class struggle and the interconnectedness and revolutionary authenticity of all forms of resistance to oppression. Is a special emphasis on the class struggle in danger of encouraging people to involve themselves in an alienated form of "politics" and ignore their most immediately experienced oppression as a gay, woman, kid, black, old person? Or is there a danger of losing a revolutionary perspective on the need for economic and social revolution once one's own sectional struggle has been co-opted and to some degree accomodated within capitalism?

This workshop raised a lot of questions but in that space of time it was not possible to arrive at any consensus as to the answers.



### Introduction.

If the L.S.N. is to rise above the level of being a purely communicative entity for small politically diverse and isolated groupings then we must recognize the need for the following:

- (a) A theoretical base the minimum for which should be the necessity for a revolutionary confrontation with and overthrow of capitalism and its replacement by a libertarian communist order. This theoretical base should be developed and refined through a theoretical and discussion journal and modified by feedback from our practice. From this theoretical base will arise a set of aims and principles which should be modified only by proposals at a National Conference. The need to develop such a base is obvious for it is from this base that our revolutionary strategy will be formulated.
- (b) The organizational machinery which will make possible the formulation and implementation of L.S.N. policies at a national level.

### The Theoretical Base

1. This should be the embodiment of our revolutionary theory. It should contain (a) our analysis of contemporary society (B) the society we would like to see formed and (c) an explanation of the process by which we see such a society being achieved.

2. The theoretical base should be developed through a theoretical and discussion journal which should appear once a term and contain articles from individuals and groups. The responsibility for production should be rotated.

3. It should also be developed through conferences on specific issues such as facism. The topic and organization for such conferences should be left to the individual initiative of the groups.

### The Organizational Machinery

#### I. Composition.

The L.S.N. will consist of university and/or community based groups the internal organization of which is entirely at the discretion of each group.

#### 2. National Policies

These will be formulated and proposed by individuals and/or groups and submitted for consideration and discussion to an internal bulletin which should appear once a term before a delegate conference.

(a) Policies will be voted on at delegate conferences which will take place once a term and after the issue of that term's internal bulletin. Production of the internal bulletin should be rotated.

(b) A policy should contain the following: (A) An analysis relating the issue in question to our revolutionary theory. (B) Arising from which should be a set of conclusions and objectives. (C) A set of practical proposals designed to achieve the stated objectives.

(c) If a policy is passed at a delegate conference then it becomes accepted L.S.N. policy on the matter and subject only to revision by a replacement policy submitted to delegate conference.

(d). There should be no requirement for a minority tendency (ie those opposed to a L.S.N. national policy) to implement a policy with which they disagree but they should not actively work against accepted policy.

#### 3. Conferences.

(a). Delegate conferences should meet once a term to discuss and vote on policy proposals and motions raised in the previous internal bulletin. Each group should send at least one representative who will carry the votes of their group.

(B) A National conference should be held once a year at which all members should attend. This conference only should have the power to modify the aims and principles.

(c) Conferences on specific issues should be organized in order to develop our knowledge and theory.

#### 4. Publications.

(a). The internal bulletin should appear once a term before a delegate conference containing policy proposals and motions. Theoretical and discussion journal should appear once a term and contain articles submitted by groups and individuals.

## Education Workshops

### Group 1 (meeting room 3)

The discussion started with the National Union of School Students and how we can offer support. Affiliating with them for the cost of £20 is one way of offering financial support, but also contacting local groups (which can be done through the N.U.S. and offering the use of duplicating machines, meeting places etc would be very helpful.

It went on to the nature of education in capitalist society as a means of producing workers. The present depression reduces the need for workers and also means money is hard to get, hence the cuts in education. We should not just fight economic battles but also challenge the whole concept of education today.

One immediate way of doing this is to attack the exam system, which is of personal concern to most students. Two suggested methods were by boycotting exams, and by producing answer sheets from previous years which can then just be copied.

However we must also put forward a real alternative and explore how it would work. Counter courses in the broadest sense can provide new situations in which to teach and learn from each other. Although instigating full scale counter courses is probably beyond our resources at present, it was suggested that even one lecture in each University or College could make people aware of the possibilities. The LSN should also aim at producing a pamphlet, after discussion of ideas through the internal bulletin.

Free schools carry this process of creating alternatives a step earlier and should also be a focus of LSN activity.

(from notes by Alyson Learmonth)

### Group 2 (meeting room 4)

The group discussed various aspects of education in this society and in the future. Education today is a tool of the state, training people to integrate with capitalist society, as well as to perform particular tasks within it.

The function of education in any society is to transfer knowledge from one generation to the next. However facts are never transferred without values and ideologies. Levels of understanding only develop through personal contact. Education needs not just teachers, books, but some structure for learning, but also an atmosphere of experiment and discussion. Education should not be divorced from work as it is at present.

Two views were expressed on the relationship of education to society's needs: one that it should be completely voluntary and up to the individual; the other that some planning to ensure enough doctors, scientists etc would have to be done by worker/community councils.

(from notes by Pete Baker)

## Sexual Politics Workshop

We discussed firstly why there were so conspicuously few women at the conference, especially in contrast to the York Potlatch conference. It was suggested that people there were practicing their politics, rather than talking about them as students tend to. Another suggestion was that women tend to become involved in the women's movement if they are politically aware, though in Manchester women are active in both. We discussed the need for and problems associated with, separate men's and women's groups, rather than people against sexism groups, or as well as them, on the basis of experiences in Leeds Brighton and Manchester.

it is

### Sexual politics workshop continued

It was agreed that once a men's or women's group has become established, it is very difficult to integrate it with a women's or men's group as the case may be.

It was felt that politics is still regarded as mainly a male sphere of activity, even in libertarian socialist politics, and this can only be changed when women challenge men conforming to the male stereotype. We could not pinpoint anything inherently sexist in the structure of libertarian socialist groups.

Some campaigns in colleges against sexist manifestations such as strippers, sexist literature in union shops, cattle market discos etc were mentioned, as well as the general reinforcing of stereotypes on many levels, including language.

It was suggested that we need to look at the patriarchal nature of society as part of the discussion on revolutionary strategy, since changing that is fundamental to changing society. However it also needs to be discussed at the next conference, perhaps even made the theme of, and to become a major concern of the LSN.

### Murrays discussion

It was agreed to co-ordinate a national day of action on the Murrays on Wed 24th November. The following information was prepared by a group of people at the conference to help groups to produce a leaflet. Petitions and motions in the Union General meeting are other useful forms of activity on this issue.

#### The Trial of Noel and Marie Murray

In October 1975 Noel and Marie Murray were arrested at their home by 20 armed policemen. They were then taken to the police station and interrogated for 17 hours. During the time Noel Murray was seriously mistreated. He was beaten in the arms, legs, stomach and head, and then hung upside down in a used toilet. The police demanded that he 'confess' that he had been involved in a bank robbery several weeks earlier in which an off duty, out of uniform policeman died. Noel Murray maintained, in spite of his torture, that he was innocent.

Marie Murray was kept in the next cell and could hear Noel's screams as he was being beaten up. She was told that she had been involved in the robbery or Noel, her husband, would be killed. Under the threat she signed a statement which she later refuted.

Noel and Marie Murray were tried by the Special Criminal Court in Dublin. This is a court set up by the Irish Government to deal with political crime where such groups as the I.R.A. might intimidate a jury. It has NO JURY, just a bench of 3 judges. A bank robbery is not a political crime, the Murrays are not members of a political organisation.

A third person, Ronan Stenson, was also arrested by the police. He was beaten with a hammer and whipped with a knotted nylon rope. in an attempt to make him confess. Now, over a year later, Ronan Stenson is still in hospital, unfit to plead either guilty or not guilty.

The special criminal court has sentenced Noel and Marie Murray to death by hanging for a crime they claim they did not commit, and for which no jury found them guilty. They had no fair trial.

We are asking for : A retrial (by jury )  
no hangings  
an enquiry into allegations of torture'.

Murrays continued

The address of the Murray Defence Group is:

Box 2  
Rising Free  
142 Drummond St.,  
London NW1.

The contact number to give information on local activity on the national day of action is Leeds 446093 during the day, Leeds 757961 during the evening.

'Free Assembly' is a bunch of discussion sheets mailed out to anyone who contributes articles or money. It is urgently in need of both. The address is Free Assembly, Dave Carter, 85 Wyoming Rd., W9, phone 01 289 1645 for more details. The deadline for the next issue is 27th November. Short articles can be sent in hand written, long ones typed on stencils.

List of people at the conference

Brian Light 20 Brook St., Colchester, Essex 2 copies  
J. Paton Alt 3 pigeon holes, University of Stirling 6 copies  
Terry Buchan Libertarian Socialist Group, University Union, Bradford  
W. Yorks .6 copies  
Michael Waite Flat 4, room 29, Aberdeen House, Grove House, University  
of Manchester, 316 Oxford Rd., Manchester M13 9NG  
Marek Kohn 34 East Slope, Sussex University, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9RP  
Keith Nathan, c/o 136 Burley Rd., Leeds 4  
Jon Cheshire E17 Cryfield Flats, Warwick University, Coventry 6 copies  
Peacock, 33 Bromfelde Rd., SW4  
H.Y. Wong 76 Monega Rd., London E7  
Paul Carey 98 Dannett St., Leicester  
Martin Nethercott 47 Cromwell Grove, Manchester 19 6 copies  
Paul Cassidy 11 Stanley rd., Whalley Range, M/C 16  
Danny Golding 24 Ambrose St., York  
Anthony, 56 Woodville Drive, Portsmouth, Hants PO1 2TG

The full mailing list has about 50 addresses in it. Copies at present are at Bradford and Manchester.

Revolutionary Strategies Workshop Report

Violence is necessary during the revolution and in its defence, as the State holds all means of communication and force, although it is not tactically appropriate now. Minority violent acts of terrorism are irrelevant in the stable state of capitalism that exists at present (e.g. Bader-Meinhof gang). On the other hand subversion of the military could make even eventual violence unnecessary. Historically, violent revolutions have produced totalitarian regimes e.g. Russia, though this could be due to other political causes. But military organisation tends to produce elite leadership. In a mass-based revolution the need for violence should be diminished.

It was suggested that the non-violent reformism/ violent revolution dichotomy is not valid and that subversion, for example by establishing alternative lifestyles, could be equally revolutionary to confrontation and demands. Practising alternative lifestyles, for example in urban communes can be consciousness raising, although some people felt it was escapist, and that such communes tend to become very introverted.

(from notes by Brian Light)