The twentieth century has witnessed a dazzling display of political convulsions. It has reached a point where there is no political position which is too ridiculous for some gang of idiots to hold - and this has generally been in the name of socialism! Since the defeat of the revolutionary wave in the period immediately following the first world war - a defeat engendered by the social-democrats (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy) and the Bolsheviks (Russia, China) - the left has been reduced to a decomposing heap of shit.

The weakness of the proletarian struggle is shown by the fact that it has only surpassed this heap of shit in an isolated way (Poland 1970, France 1968, Italy 1969, various strike waves in Latin America and more recently the wave of strikes in Poland). The present conference has been called in the face of the critical state of decomposition that the left has reached. Its purpose is to lash together some series of compromises so that we may witness the pitiful spectacle of the left limping harmoniously along for a few more years. To this we unashamedly oppose our purpose in coming here - to frustrate any attempts to breathe life into some kind frankenstein monster constructed out of the decaying remains of the political movements of the last two decades. Secondly, we to pose the question of proletarian autonomy in opposition to all the permutations of reformism, from the labour party to the more exotic trotskyist sects, in opposition to all bureaucracies whether entrenched in power or merely serving some apprenticeship in grassroots campaigns or an obscure party. All these are parts of the old order, obstacles in the way of the revolutionary struggle to put an end to wage labour once and for all.

The History of the Left

Ever since the working class appeared on the historical stage as the proletariat - as a class specifically exploited through the wages system - it has had to struggle for its own interests against the bourgeoisie and the petit bourgeoisie. In the nineteenth century capital had not developed its real domination over society and for the most part had barely established its formal domination. The working class was only capable of conducting its struggle as a class amongst...
all the others. It pursued its interests within capitalism through unions and political parties. Even then they had to struggle against those elements of the bourgeoisie and the petit bourgeoisie who always attempted to submit the working classes to the interests of their social strata.

Following the Paris Commune, this struggle was lost with the collapse of the first International. The second International was fundamentally based on appeasement with the capitalist system. Marx and Engels put aside the "Critique of the Gotha Programme" in favour of unity (it was not published for sixteen years!!). From that moment any revolutionaries who remained within Social-Democracy remained submerged below the bureaucrats and reformists. Any who showed their heads (e.g. "The Young People" - Die Junge - expelled in 1891) were soon kicked out.

The "great debates" of social-democracy (revisionism vs orthodoxy, the contributions of Rosa Luxemburg, the split between the bolsheviks and the mensheviks) remained with in the framework of social-democracy (particularly in Germany) in the framework of Social-Democracy and therefore failed to confront the fact that Social-Democracy (particularly in Germany) was committed to the preservation of capitalism but in a more statified form. The debates failed to shake the grip of reformism, and any attempts to expel factions that constantly compromised themselves with their national governments came to nothing.

The origins of Fascism and national socialism lie in social democracy. It was organised on a national basis with separate national programmes. It generally supported its respective governments on the outbreak of the first world war, except when this was not seen as being in the national interest. The fascists merely abandoned the pretense that the whole of society should submit to the national interest, and for this they could not be forgiven.

The Russian revolution was at the forefront of a revolutionary wave that swept the world. The appearance of workers' councils (soviets) provided a framework for the self-organisation of the working classes. From the outset they had to overcome the limitations of the mensheviks. The bolsheviks put forward the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" to ease out Mensheviks from influential positions. However, as they consolidated themselves in the upper echelons of the state, they could kick aside the soviets, which they had used as a ladder to power. They then introduced "scientific management" and the militarisation of labour to revitalize backward Russian capitalism. Trotsky shares with Mussolini the dubious distinction of having got the trains to run on time. The suppression of Kronstadt and the Petrograd strikes confirms that the soviets no longer expressed the self-organisation of the working class, but the bureaucratic organs for the implementation of Bolshevik policy.

The third International never threw off the inheritance of social-democracy. Revolutionaries were the first to champion the Russian revolution and mistakenly saw the third International as its international mouthpiece. But whilst the bolsheviks strangled the revolution in Russia, they also saw to it that any revolutionaries in the third International were pushed out (such as the Communist Workers Party of Germany - KAPD - in 1920), reducing the international to arm of Russian diplomacy. The communist parties made peace with capitalism and presented themselves in the elections, the market place of ideologies, offering rival schemes for the reform of capital. The rise to power of a buffer like Stalin, or the comic posturings of his alter-ego Trotsky could only take place in such a climate.

The direct action of the Spanish workers in 1936/7 was quickly subordinated to the needs of the bourgeois republic by the CNT/FAI. Any revolutionary activity was submerged in a review of the second world war. The whole gamut of the left put its faith in capitalism and imperialism with its support of the allies in this war. Anti-fascism served as a justification for the bombing of Dresden, Nagasaki, and Hiroshima.

Since the war leftists have been reduced to cheerleaders for Russian imperialism (Vietnam) and the rationalisation of production through the struggle for state-owned monopolies. From dissolving the revolutionary project in reformism, the left has gone on to become the ideological spearhead of capitalism.

Modern Social Relations

The social and political configurations of modern capitalism have greatly developed over the last hundred years. Fundamentally capital has extended its real domination over society (see Capital Vol I, Chap.6 and the "Results"). Also the "Resultate" (s Russian "Rlectricity", and "The Wandering of Humanity" by Camatte). This has several results:

- The elimination or marginalisation of the traditional petit bourgeoisie. In the industrialised countries they have been integrated into the larger formations of capital, in the less industrialised countries either this has happened or they have been reduced to the shanty town level of existence. As their star has waned they have been replaced by the growing ranks of apparatchiks, the technocrats and bureaucrats, the social workers and professionals of the mediation of social conflict. This social layer has retained no political independence of capitalism. While they moan about the disastrous manifestations of the contradictions inherent in capitalism, they are never prepared to take this to the point of opposing the
fundamental causes. These layers constitute the heartland of leftism and betray its inability to reform itself. Picking over the remains of the class struggle they are only prepared to adopt and champion those tactics or aspects that have proven themselves as useless as regards a politic of the actual overthrow of the bourgeois order. - Unions have been completely integrated into the management of capitalism. Any idea of revolutionary change, which was present at the turn of the century in syndicalist circles, has completely disappeared. Unionism is nothing other than the practice of reformism in the workplace. They have become a section of the state particularly sensitive to the mood of the workers. They are always ready to push for changes that will help capital function more smoothly in the face of workers' demands, or that will increase the range or power of their particular fief. In disputes the most they can offer is assistance in a legal manner - i.e., upholding the rule of law as regards industrial relations. Thus on the one hand they help workers as individuals with their grievances whereas according to bourgeois law the bosses have overstepped the mark, whilst on the other hand they frustrate the general struggle of the working class which must be beyond the law, which must confront the law that they protect. In this way the unions can properly be described as the police force of the shop-floor. When they row with other capitalist factions such as with the tories over the employment law, they merely react like any other police force when its powers are threatened with limitation. This struggle is to ensure that their powers are duly codified in the statute book.

- Since the nineteenth century reforms removed women and children from whole areas of work, the nuclear family has evolved as the particular form of the family in bourgeois society. In this way work in the home has become dominated by capital although housewives are not waged workers. Campaigns such as "Wages for Housework" rather than presenting a fruitful basis for struggle merely make this relation clearer, and underline the necessity for a struggle against the global domination of capital. The struggle for the liberation of women must be seen as an essential moment in the struggle for communism. But it is not possible to reduce the subjugation of women to this formal aspect. All the sexist shit which this society abounds with has its material basis in the way we are obliged to survive. Capital has only half-digested the old patriarchal relations of feudal times. Whilst patriarchy is not a formally a necessary part of capitalism (i.e., it is possible to describe the essence of capitalism without reference to it), it is an historical necessity due to the social relations which preceded its dominance. Faced with the possibility of the physical disintegration of the working class in the nineteenth century, it was necessary to assure the reproduction of workers through the "family wage" and the nuclear family. This involved the famous victorian suppression of sexuality. Now sexuality has re-emerged in a distorted form whereby it is part of commodity relations. One aspect of this is the presentation of women as sexual objects to be consumed by men.

- Imperialism has become a permanent feature of the capitalist economy. National Liberation has been reduced beyond farces (the Easter Rising, Dublin 1916) to the readjustment of capitalism and superpowers. The inability of China to maintain an independent line vis-a-vis the twin superpowers of Russia and America shows that the possibility of less powerful countries is out of the question. Even the illusion of independence is disappearing as entente is being eroded by international tensions. Imperialism as a generalised phenomenon revolves around two poles - Moscow and Washington. The other nations can only aspire to the dubious freedom of choosing their own masters. All the national liberation wars can only offer to harness popular discontent to the nationalisation of the state. If they do not have a strategic importance they will fail to get the backing of the rival imperialism (e.g., Ireland). The only resolution of global imperialism will be generalised war. The pious statements of the lefties in the labour party only offer an insipid form of pacifism which proved its weakness in 1914. It will do nothing to impede the progression towards war. This can only be checked by class struggle leading to world revolution which will end the causes which spawn these belligerent tensions.

Perspectives of "Beyond the Fragments"

All this shows that it is necessary to oppose the "left". All the debate around "Beyond the Fragments" has the superficial and structural criticisms of the left. Is it surprising that the left (unions, campaigns, the labour party, and all the lesser parties whether stalinist, trotskyist or Maoist) is hierarchical, sexist and continues to throw up a steady stream of "traitors"? Its function is that of a protective flank to capitalism. Discontent is steered into institutionalised channels. A waste apparatus has been "built", providing lots of little niches for careerists to make themselves at home in.

The left is rotten to the core. The rival factions wrestle with each other in an attempt to capture the hearts and minds of the workers. They make tactical concessions to the autonomy of the proletariat in order to carry out their strategic priority: a return to the more ordered terrain of reformism and the
bolstering of their political base. This strategy is obscured by a thin veil of "revolutionary" verbiage. An example of when this thin veil slipped: during the Lewisham riot of 1977, when young blacks came out to violently confront both the NF and the police, an SWP member with a megaphone was calling on the rioters to desist from their physical attack on their immediate oppressors. They merely paused for a while to stone this representative of law and order. Of course there are other examples that concern all the other groups.

"Beyond the Fragments" goes no further than attempt to reform reformism. It attempts to bury the fundamental tension between reform (the self-revolutionising tendency of capitalism) and revolution (the abolition of capitalism). This tension is lost in a debate on the tangential aspects of leftism - this is not to deny their importance but to assert that they result from the function of leftism. Like capitalism as a whole the left is in crisis. Its pleas for people to mobilise behind it fall on deaf ears (eg. the fiasco of the May 14th day of "action"). Those people involved in the left who have a greater sensitivity to the movement of the class and to their own frustrations are well represented at this conference. There are also those here who are essentially engaged in a flight from reality - horrified by the social decay they see around them, they retreat into even more vacuous phraseology. Disenchanted with the left, they entertain liberal illusions that are ridiculous even by the standards of the old nineteenth century utopians. To these we have nothing to say - they understand nothing anyway. It is to the former we address ourselves.

There are also the cynical manipulators.

Beyond the Left
Perspectives of Autonomy

- We assert the revolutionary potential of the proletariat in opposition to bourgeois ideology, whether in the garb of the traditional bourgeoisie or dressed up in the beautiful livery of the left.
- We reject the subordination of communism to the scant attainments which can be obtained in day to day struggle (and which are so rapidly snatched back). Daily practice must unite the immediate struggle with the overall project in an open and honest way. (No more of the idea of "tricking" the workers into being revolutionary through Trotskyist transitional demands.)
- We refuse to speak for or to represent the class i.e. we represent ourselves as a fraction of the revolutionary movement, no more, no less. As such we present our views as just that, our views. We do this forcefully so as to be heard. We expect others to do the same. We claim no privileges. We are not a vanguard. We do not seek converts or followers but equal partners in the revolutionary movement. We are not sectarianists. (See Leveller No.40) What liberals seek to pass off as sectarianism is no more than our intransigence against the most highly developed forms of capitalist ideology.

- We call for all struggles to be conducted through direct democracy - instantly revocable delegation, decisions made by mass meetings, etc., with the exclusion of representatives of the bourgeoisie i.e. union officials, politicians, etc.
- No abandonment of the struggle against sexism, racism or nationalism for some illusion of unity. If there is conflict in these fields it must be tackled from the outset. Revolution is changing social relations not just seizing power. Consciousness changes through action. We demand as much to change ourselves as to change the the objective limitations we suffer from. These two aspects are inseparable.

These are policies of confrontation - we must face the reality of capitalism and realise that socialism is more than a few cheap words. We are serious. We recognise that political activity is not all beer and skittles, that we are likely to be the subject of repression. (It has already started). Those who are not prepared to face this unpleasantness should stop playing at socialism. (They will not however be able to avoid the increasing misery of capitalism.)

We have spoken of the proletariat in this piece. We want to clarify the use of this term. We are not trying to create some new kind of workerism. We recognise that modern capitalism has heightened class divisions at the same time as having mystified them. The proletariat is defined politically. It includes all those who are excluded from wealth and power, whose lives are directly dominated by capital, who have to live on the left overs of the bourgeoisie and their hangers on, it includes all these in their collective struggle. It specifically excludes those who live by the manipulation or control of others - teachers, social workers, journalists, administrators, etc.

Our analysis does not have all the answers, but it poses some important questions. We have not had the opportunity in this leaflet to discuss all the relevant areas. We hope we have drawn out a coherent approach. Many questions still have to be tackled i.e. what form will the unitary organs of the proletariat take in the light of the contemporary form of capitalism, how will the division of productions and reproduction be overcome, and that of city and countryside and town, of different levels of development? However these questions can only be tackled as the communist movement emerges from its long sleep, as the working class starts again to assert its own autonomy.

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