
the bulletin

THE LONG MARCH OF THE
* CWO. (The Hunting of the Snark)

An Open Letter To The
* Proletarian Milieu On The Chenier Affair

* Correspondence on –
-the class nature of the ICC
-communist organisation

THE FALKLANDS WAR
* and the response of revolutionaries

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EDITORIAL

This bulletin has been produced by the 4 ex-ICC members in Aberdeen. We don't have any grandiose claims to make for it and we aren't pretending that our production of it constitutes a general model for the activity and organisation of revolutionaries. Rather, we see it as a very specific and immediate solution to the particular situation we find ourselves in. None of us in Aberdeen finds it possible to work in any of the revolutionary organisations currently in existence but we don't accept that that condemns us to silence or inactivity. We remain militants, with the desire and capacity to contribute to the debates within the revolutionary milieu and to intervene in the struggles of our class. This bulletin, in conjunction with periodic leaflets provides the vehicle for us to do that to the limits of our current capacity.

The recent traumatic events within the revolutionary movement has underlined once again that the overwhelming problem confronting revolutionaries remains the central question of organisation. The re-emergence of the revolutionary movement at the end of the 60's had as its foundation the crucial assumptions that - 1) the economic crisis of capitalism was world-wide, inescapable and inexorably deepening: 2) in this period, the proletariat was an undefeated, revolutionary force and would respond appropriately with the unfolding of the crisis and 3) the revolutionary movement would also grow in size, organisation and its influence on the class. The past decade has seen the first two assumptions dramatically confirmed whilst the revolutionary fractions of the class have remained tiny, fragile and isolated with no indications appearing of the mechanism which will take us from where we are today to the party which will be demanded by the revolutionary upheaval of

of tomorrow. The unspoken assumption that it was an automatic consequence of rising class struggle was severely shaken by the enormous difficulties engendered in all the revolutionary organisations in trying to translate their abstract certainties into concrete interventions in the massive wave of struggle which began with the French and British steel strikes and culminated in the Polish events. Our desire to function as an active factor, as a vanguard element in these struggles came up against the problems produced by our profound inexperience and our sheer inadequacy in terms of our tiny size and our unavoidable remoteness from the class. The results of trying to grapple with this are familiar to us all. The ICC openly withdrew into dogmatism and the search for enemies, while the CWO plunged deeper into its pompous fantasies of party-building with its non-existent factory groups as a magical incantation against the terror of isolation from the class. On the other side of the coin, we've seen an undeniable tendency towards fragmentation, localism, federalism and councilism accompanied by widespread demoralisation. For ourselves, it remains valid that the whole history of the proletarian movement points to the necessity for the existence of the revolutionary party and that it's not sufficient to point to the malformations present in the ICC and the CWO to refute that. Nothing in our experience so far causes us to reject either the theoretical acquisitions contained (more or less) in the platforms of the ICC and the CWO, or the understanding that revolutionary intervention is fundamentally a collective, organised and centralised activity. We don't pretend that translating that into concrete practice while avoiding the terrifying errors of the ICC and the CWO is an easy task, nor do we think it's a task for us alone. It's fundamentally a task for the whole revolutionary milieu (which, for us, clearly includes the above two organisations). Before we can go forward, it's essential that we try to draw the lessons of our own recent past and integrate that into an understanding of how it relates to the experience of the revolutionary fractions in the last revolutionary wave. We intend this bulletin and subsequent issues as a contribution to that struggle. We also hope that it will serve as a focus for debate within the revolutionary milieu and help counter the current fragmentation and isolation. Therefore, we invite contributions from our readers for publication in future issues. To contact us, write to:

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The LONG MARCH of the CWO. (or The Hunt- ing of the Snark)

We take as a central indication of a proletarian group which is alive to class struggle, which is able to actively integrate its political programme to the continuous and continuing action of the class, that it has the capacity to modify its stance in the light of 'experience'. Before we proceed let us clear up some possible red-herrings (no pun intended). Hopefully the issue will not be clouded by us being misrepresented, by accusations of 'innovators' etc. We are not, let us repeat, not calling for a pragmatic approach to the politics of communism. We are not attempting to construct an empiricist marxism. Obviously such attempts are doomed to incoherence and are not compatible with marxism. All that we wish to indicate here is the truism that marxists do not possess final and definitive knowledge and understanding of class struggle and capitalist development. Certainly the general analytical and realist principles of marxism allow a penetration of the phenomena of the social world. But we are all well aware, or should be, that there is a process of unfolding in this penetration. The movement of class struggle and capitalist development is actively assimilated and hence modifies the political programme of an organisation. Clearly, this means that we do not believe that with the Communist Manifesto, the Rules of the IWMA, the Programme of the KAPD etc. that the final word has been said in marxist theory, and that all that is now required of revolutionaries today is simple elaboration of principles set out in some earlier programme. Substantial contributions to marxism have been made since Marx's day and remain to be made in the light of 'experience'. We also believe that some of the statements made by Marx and Engels are not as clear cut as is sometimes maintained. An example of this myopic marxism is to be found in Revolutionary Perspectives 19(RP19)p.32, dealing with the problem of the formulation of the Rules of the IWMA. It might be considered a good way of 'teaching' children: put forward simplistic and unproblematic accounts of what Marx "really" said or believed. But as a method for the proletarian movement it offers nothing but sterility. Hence any claims which are put forward for any organisation being the "real" and "true" voice of Marx and marxism must be handled carefully and critically. We firmly reject any Bordighist notions of the "complete and invariable" programme.

If an organisation is incapable of taking up new experiences of the class then it will be left behind and will ossify. In Britain we need only look at the history of the SPGB as an instance of this. At the end of the day such ossification means, at the very least, that an organisation becomes a source of confusion within the proletarian movement; this because it promulgates a programme which has been left behind by history, and which draws upon principles which are no longer applicable.

The whole point of this introductory note is to establish our bearings for a brief exploration of the as yet largely unmapped territory which is the history of the Communist Workers Organisation (CWO). We do not wish there to be any confusion over what we are about to write about the CWO. We are not setting out to condemn it for the fact of changing its political positions. What fills us with misgivings is the way in which this change has occurred. Previously in this bulletin we noted the general problem of "monolithism" within the

proletarian movement. We take the CWO to be yet another organisation which, rather than being capable of openly assimilating the process of change and the deepening of communist understanding, presents to the world a rigid and brittle political face. Change has occurred but it has been within dogmatic parameters. Change within the CWO is characterised by unbending resistance followed by a fracturing of positions. From this fracturing there emerges a new unbending position.

We will show how this dogmatism manifests itself by looking at two texts of the CWO, one in RP18, "The KAPD and the Party", and another in RP19 "The Italian Left". In both these texts, and especially prominent in the latter, will be found the features of an emergent new dogmatism. Change can be seen to be well under way within the CWO, but rather than being a healthy attempt to openly confront the problems which are facing the proletarian movement at the present on the question of organisation it is a dogmatic restructuring; a restructuring which is typified by not only setting out new and hard political lines, but also by an incipient political dishonesty. This process we could, with some justice, call the "Bordighisation of the CWO".

Originally the text in RP19 was an internal one of the CWO, signed by one J. Domimie. Now it has appeared in the journal of the CWO, however, unlike the text in RP18 this one is unsigned, so presumably this is now the organisational position of the organisation and no longer simply the 'opinion' of an individual member.

In the introduction to the text in RP19 the CWO write that this particular work is "part of a debate which has been continuing within the CWO for over a year", not only this, but it was a "vigorous debate". We can only applaud them if this is the case. Debate is part of the life blood of a proletarian organisation. But unfortunately this "debate" has not surfaced within the publications of the CWO. All that the proletarian movement has been given are the so-called "fruits" it has borne ie. the text in RP19. As an antidote to this blinkered notion of what constitutes debate within the proletarian movement we offer not only the present critique but also a text written by C. Patton, a member of the CWO. This was an internal text of the CWO which, as will be seen, dissented from the process of Bordighisation. The introduction to the article in RP19 nowhere gives any hint of such a text. It is all very well to claim a "vigorous debate", but C. Patton's text poses fundamental problems for the CWO if it accepts the politics and the logic of Bordighisation, and this the introduction completely ignores.

The Hunt Begins

"Then the Bowsprit got mixed with the
rudder sometimes:

A thing, as the Bellman remarked,
That frequently happens in tropical
climes,

When a vessel is, so to speak,
'snarked'."

Reading through the text in RP19 we are immediately struck by the manner in which the politics of the KAPD are treated. Basically they are summarily dismissed. If we were not already familiar with the history of the CWO we could come away with the impression that the KAPD was an alien and hostile organisation, one which had little direct connection with the politics of the CWO. However, the proletarian movement knows better.

Let us briefly recapitulate the relevant part of the history of the CWO, something which the organisation itself seems unable or unwilling to do.

The foundation of the organisation Revolutionary Perspectives and its subsequent development into the CWO was openly and unashamedly orientated according to the politics of the German Left Communists, particularly that expression which was the KAPD. The political stance of the German left was to be the guide to present intervention for Revolutionary Perspectives. The German left, it was claimed in RP1, made the most significant contribution to an understanding of capitalist decadence; this contribution embodying such issues as parliamentarianism, trade unionism and national liberation. It is true that as early as the first issue of their journal Revolutionary Perspectives expressed some reservations about so-called "factoryist" tendencies within the German left. But these tendencies were not thought to be sufficiently obtrusive as to call into question the central and crucial contribution made to revolutionary understanding made by the left communists in Germany. And, significantly, that other proletarian expression, the Italian left, was relegated to the sidelines and given only grudging recognition to it; in fact the contribution it was deemed to have made was put at the bottom of the list of left communist legacies. On the other hand the KAPD was,

"The clearest tendency to emerge during (the) revolutionary struggle . . . (and) with whom we identify critically and from whom we draw the groundwork of our politics."

(RP1 "Platform" thesis 11)

This clear attachment to the German left was to continue through to and beyond the point at which CWO emerged from the fusion of Revolutionary Perspectives and Workers' Voice. We need give only a few references to substantiate this assertion:

RP2, the introduction to the "Texts of the Communist Left" is unequivocal on the leading role of the German Left.

If we move forward to the fusion with Workers' Voice we find the same stress.

RP3, in the article "Communist Organisation" the CWO wrote:

"For today's revolutionaries the KAPD represents the highest mass expression of the working class in the revolutionary period." (p.29)

RP4, again from "Texts of the Communist Left" it is stated that the KAPD was a party "which was clear about the revolutionary way forward."

RP7, the text "German Revolution" whilst remaining critical of some aspects of the German left still asserts that it was the clearest political tendency in the revolutionary period.

RP8, in "2 Years of the CWO", a polemic against the authors of this present bulletin, the CWO wrote that they would "carry on the traditions of the KAPD which fought against opportunism in the past." This is a claim which now rings extremely hollow.

RP11, in the article on the revolution and the Italian left, and also the introduction to the texts of the KAI, the "tradition" of the Germans continues to be the claimed basis for the CWO's politics.

Throughout this period of the CWO's history the KAPD is praised for its legacy of clarity on the need for an organisation to intransigently defend the political principles upon which it is formed. The refusal of the KAPD to enter into "opportunist" relations with the KPD/VKPD, or with the Comintern is praised to the limit. This intransigence, the CWO claimed, was an expression of the German left's superior clarity. The way in which the Germans refused to bow to the demands of the Comintern; the way in which the KAPD attempted to set up a centralised opposition to the "counter-revolution" manifesting itself in Russia and the International, far from being a profound error was hailed by the CWO as the highest point in clarity in the revolutionary movement.

However, since about RP14 (July 1979) the Italian Connection has begun to manifest itself within the CWO. The organisation began seriously to flirt with the politics of Battaglia Comunista. It saw the international conferences initiated by that organisation as a point of re-entry into the international revolutionary movement. At first they approached the Bordighist tradition in an opportunist manner. Friendly gestures were made towards the Italian tradition (at the same time maintaining their hostile stance towards the International Communist Current). However, the flirting was carried out within the existing parameters of German left politics. They betrayed little awareness that to make concessions in this direction threatened the central edifice of their politics. The article "Tasks" in RP14 can be seen now as a transitional text, one which marks the point when the CWO began to fall headlong into the Bordighist tradition. In passing we might note, from the "Tasks" text, the CWO's claim that they might find it necessary to "scab" on striking workers if they were putting forward "reactionary demands". It might be difficult locating this confusion of the CWO within the impact of the Bordighist tradition but what obviously betrays this influence is the comments they make on factory groups. But as yet they do not cling to the Bordighist conception. In this "transitional" text in RP14 they are aware that Battaglia are addressing a real problem for revolutionaries when they pose the setting up of factory groups. The answer they give however, is not within the Italian tradition. Factory groups, the CWO state in RP14, are simply the product of the fact of there being more than one member of the organisation within a workplace. This notion we would contend is easily assimilated to the German tradition. The CWO have moved on since RP14. They have moved on to the theory of factory groups as "transmission belts", a conception drawn directly from the Italian left. (see RP16 "Factory Groups")

The CWO has come a long way from the tentative steps made in RP14. The KAPD is now being relegated to the position of merely one other revolutionary expression among many (a position we have great sympathy with). Unfortunately, they move from this reasonable approach to that of building a new rogues gallery of revolutionaries. The KAPD is now being given pride of place in this gallery. Far from being the clearest the KAPD is now defined as being the most confused moment in the revolutionary period.

In RP18 there appeared an article which broke from the customary practice of the CWO by being individually signed and which took as its point of departure the so-called limitations and mistakes of the German left. As we have already noted, from its very inception RP/CWO had minor criticisms of the KAPD. But the shift of position we find in RP18 is not merely the simple elaboration of earlier criticisms but represents a complete change in perspective (this is clearly noted in C. Patton's text). Although it is an individual contribution this text can be seen as the opening up of the Pandora Box of Bordighism which the CWO has latterly been clutching to its breast. The text in RP19 continues along the path mapped out by D.G.P. in the previous Revolutionary Perspectives. Reducing the argument of the text in RP19 to the bare bones, the author takes as his task an exposition of the fundamental political and organisational strengths of the Italian left, contrasting this with the confusions which are said to be present in the programme of the German left communists. Presumably the rather flimsy argument put forward in favour of this thesis is a product of the limited audience to which it was originally directed, rather than the author being overwhelmed by the "woes" released from his Pandora Box, leaving only Hope remaining.

Originally the shortcomings that the CWO perceived in the politics of the KAPD was its so-called "factoryist" tendencies. By the time we come to the text in RP19 this tendency is no longer seen as a minor irritant. It now assumes the proportions of a fatal flaw; one of such magnitude that the CWO wish now to consign the Germans to the revolutionary dustbin.

Indeed, the learned "Dominie" now characterises the KAPD as a "federalist organisation", guilty of following a "simple minded offensive at all costs policy". And, tail-ending the approach of DGP's article, he writes that the "legacy of the German left is none other than that old bogey "councillism". Firstly, in RP18, we find the statement that,

"Apart from the fossil grove of councillorism, the German Left is effectively dead."

Admittedly, this statement is somewhat ambiguous, involving as it does the problem of "organic continuity". But even allowing for this the CWO is faced with the problem of the how and the why of this reactionary "legacy", left by an organisation which was formerly, for them, the "highest mass expression of the working class in the revolutionary period." (DGP does acknowledge that the ideas of the KAPD "played a vital part in the evolution of the CWO". Apart from the fact that he does not indicate what this "legacy" might be, his subsequent analysis would appear to make this so much empty rhetoric. Perhaps the dialecticians are attempting to show the continuity and discontinuity in their political evolution?)

In RP19 the CWO is less coy about the legacy of the KAPD. Without an apparent blush at how the conclusion is in stark relief to the actual history of the CWO the conclusion of RP18 is re-asserted:

"The historical legacy of the German Left has thus been a fossil (councillism) which has largely obscured the early gains they made under the impulse of revolutionary events in Germany."

A strange conclusion indeed for an organisation which claimed itself to be born of the political clarity of the KAPD, and which rejected councillorism and rallied around the detailed treatment of trade unions, parliament etc. Perhaps with hindsight (a faculty much deprecated by the CWO) the CWO would now recognise itself as having formerly been a councillorist organisation; or argue that it was not such an organisation, despite its own self-perceptions and open avowal of German left politics. The answer is given in RP19, in the introduction to the article "Theories of State Capitalism". There the CWO set out to distance themselves from their past: "the original text", they write, "was heavily marred by council communist scars". Presumably they would argue that this was the legacy of the KAPD. The pitiful cry we find in RP11 - the "Review" - that the editor of the writings of the German lefts Gorter and Pannékoek "doesn't mention the only existing organisation in Britain which has re-issued texts by the KAPD", and which is today representative of that political strain must surely now be taken as so much self-deception.

a product of the
We say that the CWO was not only / general legacy of the revolutionary period but was also a specific working of the politics of the German left. This is not to claim that only the Germans had notions of the decadence of capital, clearly they were not. However, it was the particular expression of the KAPD which inspired the CWO. We reject any claims that the CWO, before Bordighisation, was a councillorist organisation. We do not say that there was sufficient clarity on the problem of organisation - far from it. But admitting the existence of lack of clarity does not force the conclusion that the CWO must therefore have been councillorist.

The Vanishing Prey

"But oh, beamish nephew, beware of
the day

If your Snark be a Boojum! For then
You will softly and suddenly vanish
away

and never be met with again! "

The problems posed by the article in RP18/19 show how far the CWO has travelled. Let us remind ourselves of the 'Old Series' CWO view of Bordighism.

The Italian left was formerly grudgingly acknowledged to be part of the revolutionary tradition, but one which was so confused that it could not possibly make a systematic contribution to the politics of the CWO. Why was it refused central, or even significant status in the CWO's Pantheon of heroes? Ironically, the very reasons which are now praised were the ones which formerly consigned the Italian left to footnote status. The refusal of Bordiga to leave the Comintern, to break decisively with the "counter-revolutionary" policies which the Russian state were mediating through the Third International. Apart from this the notion of the Bordighist party was rejected. For example, in RP3, we find the Italian left being criticised for failing to understand the correct meaning of what is the function and action of the communist party. Bordiga is further criticised for his confusion over trade unions (see RP3, "Texts", and "Communist Organisation"). In fact this failure of Bordighism is said to be a function of the prior confusion over the class nature of Russia (see RP7, "Reply"). And in RP11 the CWO further attacked Bordiga for his concern with the "tactics of splitting with the PSI at the expense of presenting a clear revolutionary voice in the class struggle as it raged in Italy" (RP11, "Italy" p.22). In other words, the Italian left was taken to be a failure in the face of mass class action, unlike the KAPD.

This was the old view of the CWO. And today, what do we find? Bordighism is now in favour RP19 clearly states this. We need not give any details here, the text speaks for itself. The tables have been turned. Now the Bordighists are heaped with praise for remaining within the Comintern; for refusing to follow the lead of the KAPD. No longer is their remaining within the Third International a sign of profound confusion, in fact quite the contrary. This is now taken to be a sure sign of greater clarity, far outstripping that of the German left "councillists". This newly discovered clarity of the Italian left is a product of what was formerly deemed to be a profound error; the Bordighist notion of the party.

In 1977, in the polemic over the Aberdeen/Edinburgh split from the CWO, the International Communist Current (ICC) was criticised for its attempt to come to terms with the class nature and historical content of Trotskyism. The CWO, true to its slanderous and blinkered relations with the ICC, characterised this as the Current coming to an "accommodation" with Trotskyism. What, it may be asked, has this to do with the CWO and its Bordighisation? Only this, the CWO rhetorically asked:

"After moving to accommodate trotskyism, is this a move of the ICC towards accommodation with Bordighism?" (RP8, p.49)

We would not be so ungenerous, or more precisely, so politically slanderous as to ask "what next for the CWO?: tTrotskyism." But we might ask why this question is structured in RP8 so that it appears that Bordighism is further down the road to perdition than Trotskyism? However, we shall refrain from this. But surely this statement in RP8 must cause some

members of the CWO pause and reflect upon its political method and its present political trajectory.

The CWO has indeed come a long way from its original foundation. In a very real sense we can say that the CWO of today, in its central political positions, has little in common with the organisation which emerged from the old Revolutionary Perspectives. Indeed, a comparison of the original Platform of the Organisation and the recent move towards Bordighism is a stunning experience. Almost every key position which delineated the CWO from other organisations in the political milieu has been turned into its opposite (the dialectic at work?) The Russian revolution, the Bolsheviks, 1921, the Comintern, the party etc. The list is endless.

Synthesis and metamorphosis of the Prey

"In the midst of the word he was trying
to say

In the midst of his laughter and glee,
He had softly and suddenly vanished
away---

For the Snark WAS a Boojum, you see."

No doubt the CWO would maintain that it had achieved a more profound understanding of class struggle and consciousness; that they have achieved a higher "synthesis" (a term much used and abused by the CWO. At times the organisation gives the impression that it believes simply throwing out windy phrases will confer political strength upon it). Let them call it what they will, one thing is certain, that it is dishonest of them not to indicate the extent of their political travel. What can we make of an organisation which does not deem it necessary to achieve a self-awareness of its own history? It is no use claiming to be clear on the general lessons of the class struggle if one is blind to one's own history, to the organisation's own political trajectory. Not only must the revolutionary group achieve some degree of awareness of its own history it must communicate this to the larger revolutionary movement so that the lessons may be assimilated. In other words the CWO must publicly address itself to the problems presented by its move to Bordighism. This is an essential part of a dialogue within the proletarian milieu; an essential part of the struggle to build an international class party.

As we stated earlier we are not condemning a-priori any change which is occurring within the CWO. Clearly such a position within marxism is untenable. We might not agree with the specifics of a new political programme but this in itself would only demand a particular refutation. Certainly, it is true that we do not accept the present political stance of the CWO. However, we cannot stop there in our criticisms. We must go beyond this to assess the way in which this change has occurred. The term we used previously to describe the shift in direction of the CWO towards Bordighism was a "dogmatic restructuring". By this we simply mean that the change in position is typified by the new stance being held to in a blind and asserive fashion. It is unbending, not in the positive sense of showing a willingness to stand firm to political principle, but rather in the sense that christian fundamentalists defend their beliefs. There is no notion of process or dialogue. Substituted for this is holy writ, in the present case the word of the Italian left (as interpreted by Battaglia Comunista). This is the act of restructuring which we are witnessing at the moment. The attempt to mount a devastating critique of the KAPD (NB. not the history of the CWO) is a necessary part of this change. Rather than attempting to openly and actively integrate any failures of the German left to the breadth which is proletarian history, the CWO plumps for dogmatism. It simply resorts to a rejection of this part of the proletariat's history.

What the CWO is at present displaying is a mode of change the motor force of which is not only not expalined but is undoubtedly unknown to the CWO itself. At one point the CWO presents itself as holding THE TRUTH and categorizing all others to the lower regions of history for holding opinions, defending positions which are more or less part of the counterrevolution. Moving forward to the present, 1982, we see the CWO holding precisely those positions which it had latterly denounced as bourgeois; but now redefined as THE TRUTH and castigating their own past in terms similar to those they previously used for defenders of

the "counterrevolution". How they got from A to B is a mystery they do not care to explore. From perfection 1976 to perfection 1982 - each (even in terms of the CWO) diametrically opposed to the other in many respects. If the CWO cannot see or even acknowledge its own historical process what future can it now look forward to? More blind lurches, to new positions equally distant and equally unacknowledged? From one dogmatically held position of perfection to another, claimed to be equally perfect.

Dogmatism has a long history inside the CWO. We need only recall the way in which it defended itself from the criticisms of the ICC; the way in which it handled the problem of the defeat of the revolution in Europe in general and in Russia in particular ie. the debate over 1921; the way in which the CWO raised the 'economics' of the rate of profit to the status of being a class line; the problem of the period of transition and the use of labour-vouchers versus rationing; and finally, the class nature of the ICC. All these came together in the hands of the CWO in a particular and a hard way; to the extent that the CWO found itself in deepening self-imposed isolation, consoling itself for the moment with the belief that it was the only communist group in the existing world. All this was done in the name of a principled defence of class lines. We cannot here recapitulate the details and the arguments of the split which we ourselves were involved in with the CWO in 1977 (see RP8 & 12). Suffice it to say, that our understanding then was towards the conclusion that the CWO was an organisation which had, through its incomprehension and political rigidity, cut itself off from a much larger proletarian movement. Since then we have not changed our opinion on this.

However, we are aware that the split of 1977 did have an effect upon the CWO. It became aware of its isolation, but rather than recognising that its problems were to a great extent a function of its own political structure it resorted to an ad hoc explanation for its woes. No systematic or coherent alternative was sought. Rather, it believed that its general approach was basically sound, and that with some minor tinkering any observed deficiencies could be corrected. This approach by the CWO led to such gems of understanding as that;

"we (the CWO) thought it was enough to prove a view wrong scientifically once for our own view to be taken up (this the CWO saw was not happening, so great is the power and vision of their "science") . . . As a consequence of this we must relax our criteria for evaluating whether discussion with this or that group is 'worthwhile'."

(RP8 p.54, CWO's emphasis)

Clearly, the CWO thought it was not its "science" or its "scientific proof" which was wanting but merely the number of times it asserted it! If we were to be ungenerous here this could be characterised as a crass form of positivism, with its unproblematic use of "proof" etc. But, obviously, being marxist such an accusation aimed at the CWO would be unwarranted. What it can be accused of here is failing to see that it was nothing to do with the degree of repetition of its "truth" which was posing problems for the organisation but the nature of that "truth", within the larger context of the proletarian movement. An organisation can claim, must claim, the correctness of its political positions and hence must fight for them. But this is to be done within the understanding that for marxism a number of possible interpretations can coexist at one particular time, admittedly it is far from unproblematic the parameters which are deemed to be those which contain a variety of views. We are not saying that we should make a virtue of a multiplicity of interpretations but it does mean that we must retreat from the

view that THE definitive marxist interpretation is easily and finally located. The CWO did not grasp this in 1977, and today it goes to repeat in new guise the old errors.

The CWO, when faced with the split of 1977, thought a simple revision of its contingent approach to other groups was all that was required for it to be able to intervene in a larger movement (this without addressing itself to the problem of comprehending the class nature of the groups which it saw around it - rather than the "scientists" systematically looking at the problems which beset it the CWO preferred opportunism and expediency). It failed to realise that the problem, or rather a crucial part of it, was its own dogmatism. No simple tinkering could resolve this. Only a frontal assault on the bastion of its own politics could have allowed the CWO to reach the much sought after "synthesis". What we witnessed after the split of 1977 was a patchwork of a "solution" to the problem of isolation within a proletarian movement which encompasses within it a variety of contending positions, all being marxist, all claiming some degree of descent from Left Communism.

Today the CWO lurches towards Bordighism, searching once again for the panacea to all the ills which beset the revolutionary movement. In keeping with their previous practice they look to the Bordighist party solution as the one which will finally allow them to achieve clarity. The nightmare of having been associated with the "councillist" KAPD is being purged from their system. A clear expression of the dogmatic registering of this is found in both RP18 & 19, where both texts address themselves to the question of the so-called "legacy" of the German left. With regard to the question of the shift of commitment we have already noted the detail of this. But it tells us more than simply that the CWO had changed its mind, it tells us that it has learned nothing from its own experience let alone the experience of the class.

Rather than attempting to comprehend failures which are manifest within the KAPD as part and parcel of the struggle which revolutionaries were involved in during the revolutionary period CWO go for the one-dimensional answer: 'New Series' CWO is content to reduce the complexity of the German left to the simple condition of "councillism". This involves a wholesale reconstruction of the history of the KAPD, whilst obscuring that of the CWO. The discussions of the German left on trade unions etc. are now said to count for nothing. The only contribution which can be got from the German experience, according to the Bordighised CWO, is the negative one of failure to understand the role of the party. As if this piece of reductionism wasn't enough the author of the text in RP19 pushes on. Not content with the particular he gleefully goes for the "universal", he takes on the general history of the working class. Some might think that such a task is far from easy, but not so the 'scientists' of the CWO. Armed with their "more dialectical approach" they give us the answer to the question of the lessons of the long history of proletarian struggle. Of over one hundred years of class struggle and history they write:

"The whole of the working class history since 1848 is

underlain by the attempt to create such an organisation (the Party). This reductionism gets nowhere near penetrating the complexities of class struggle and history. By its very nature such reductionism can only obscure the history of the proletarian movement, and thus buttress the dogmatism from which it is born. All that RP19 gives in the way of validation of this claim that the essence of the history of class struggle is the fight for THE PARTY is the word of Marx. We are assured that in 1864 Marx was clear on the relationship of the party to the class.

Given the nature of the period in which Marx lived, the period of capitalist ascendancy, the fact of mass reformist organisations, the relative immaturity of the class, CWO's claim can only be dismissed as so much special pleading. In all but name the CWO would have us believe that Marx in the nineteenth century had already formulated the Bordighist Party Programme. They claim that Marx's words "That the emancipation of the working class must be conquered by the working class themselves" is equivalent to "The central thesis of Marxism is that the proletariat is the gravedigger of capitalist society but that it can only carry out its historic role if it constitutes for itself an international organisation of revolutionary leadership - the party." We would agree that in the "soft" sense Marx was aware of the need for a specifically proletarian organisation, one which transcended national boundaries. But this is not the claim being made here by the CWO. CWO are claiming Marx to have been a Bordighist. In this way, hey presto, they present to the world over one hundred years of the class's history. What is this but dogmatism. The "reborn" CWO has not rid itself of its old failings, it has only redrawn the battle lines and entrenched itself in a new political trench (which could well become their grave).

In effect, and it would seem in intention, the CWO is searching for heroes. Previously it was the German left, now it is the turn of the Italians. The nationalities change, but the dogmatic backcloth remains constant. The new hero is said to be not just superior to all other revolutionaries but in fact is now the ONLY positive expression to emerge from the revolutionary struggle:

"The conclusion accepted by our Second Congress, is that, while not denying the insights of the German Left Communists, all revolutionary organisations today must base themselves on that part of the Italian Left which not only fought energetically against the degeneration of the Third International but also managed to create the nucleus of a truly revolutionary movement after World War Two. Whilst not denigrating the contributions of individual communists from the German Left it is now our conclusion that only the Italian Left tradition can provide the theoretical starting point for revolutionary Marxist work today." (RP19 p.31 - our emphasis)

And, on page 8 of the same publication:

"Although we do not deny that both were communist today we maintain that it is the Italian Left tradition which furnishes the elements for communist work."

Ignoring the sleight of hand of the CWO when they move from the contribution of the German left as an organised expression to the "contribution of individual communists from the German Left" (is this the dialectic of quantity into quality?) these statements show them as dogmatists. The task of revolutionaries is not to seek out heroes, to find organisations which are claimed to have revolutionary purity. This is to seek the impossible. The task is to "synthesise" the whole experience of the revolutionary period; to realise that all factions of the movement made positive contributions to a greater or lesser extent; that no single organisation was the "true" expression of the class.

Dogmatism plagues revolutionaries today. It threatens to overwhelm all organisations as they search for solutions to isolation. This evident not only in the CWO, but the vile machinations of the ICC, and also the ex-ICC Solidarity elements at present constructing a new federalism. All are dangerous to the revolutionary struggle. All must attempt to rise above their dogmatism and enter into an open and communist dialogue with one another.

We publish below another text on the present situation of the CWO, a text which forms part of the discussions within the CWO on the question

CWO THE ITALIAN LEFT AND THE COMINTERN

The events of 1921 have always been extremely important to the politics of the CWO. Previously the group had held that the decisions and actions taken by the Bolsheviks in this year led to the restoration of normal capitalist relations within Russia and the defeat of the subsequent revolutionary attempts which occurred in Europe and Asia. These events are, the suppression of the Moscow strikes, the suppression of Kronstadt, the introduction of NEP and later the normalising of trade relations with the world bourgeoisie through the treaty of Rapallo in 1922. These actions were supported by Comintern policies of united fronts with the social democratic traitors of 1914. In support of this view the CWO spun a web of arguments in which our opponents entangled themselves. These arguments were strong arguments and have never been adequately answered by those against whom they were directed. Up to now the CWO has recognised that to condone the events of 1921 undermines large sections of our politics; the politics concerned not simply with distant questions such as the period of transition but questions we face today.

When D.G. Place in "Origins of The Specious" maintained that 1921 should be replaced with December 1922 (which marked the formal adoption of the united front policy) Sheffield warned that many political positions the group had previously defended would collapse. D.G. Place subsequently withdrew 1922 and simply suggested we define the demise of the Russian revolution in a "less absolutist" manner. Since then the argument has been presented as simply being one of method; Sheffield have accepted D.G. Place's method and all their warnings have been forgotten. We have now reached the point where certain comrades are attempting to retain our position on 1921 but abandon the method which led us to adopt it in the first place. No wonder the debate is causing confusion in the CWO. We are ourselves becoming ensnared in the very arguments and traps we set to catch others!

The northern comrades now argue that Russia was capitalist from 1921. They recognise that the Bolshevik party was therefore an administrator of capitalism, but think it would have been able to restore its "proletarian" class nature if the German revolt of 23 had succeeded. This is the position of the ICC. Further, the platform now argues that the Italian left were CORRECT to stay in the comintern until their expulsion in 1927, and only the events of 1935-43 definitely settled doubts about the class nature of Russia.

In attempting to make sense of this, two conclusions have been drawn in London. The first is that we have abandoned objective analysis of history altogether and must now accept the subjective assessments of the protagonists who were actually faced with the situation we are examining. The second is that since the Bolsheviks were bourgeois from 1921, and since the only reason given for the Italian Left staying in the comintern is a tactical one (i.e. it was a tactic which helped them survive) working in Bourgeois organisations is a tactic we now support. In other words instead of seeing the united front as the final betrayal, as D.G. Place does in the origins text, it is a tactic we, in fact, support. These conclusions, despite the ridicule they have received, are an attempt to make sense of our changing positions.

The Question of Method

The northern comrades maintain that we have changed our method. Apart from the obvious consequence that all our conclusions must also change it is difficult to grasp what precisely they mean by changing our method. Have we abandoned the marxist method?

Surely despite all the protestations about hindsight as marxists we recognise that objective truth exists no matter how inadequate our own or our predecessors' attempts to grasp it may be? We further recognise that the economic infrastructure of society determines the superstructure. This is generally true. Anomalies may exist but they cannot last long

Therefore to answer the riddles of the Bolsheviks and the degeneration of the Russian Revolution we must turn our attention to the infrastructure - the economy of Russia. It was this which we previously did so successfully, and even today no voices have been raised denying our conclusion that Russia was capitalist from 1921. If this is accepted we must ask ourselves what was the class nature of the Bolsheviks and the comintern from 1921. Surely this is the marxist method which will provide the key to our problems. There are only three answers:-

A) It was bourgeois. This is the previous CWO position and saw the superstructure of Russian society as coming quickly into congruity with the infrastructure. It was pointed out that the accommodation with the international bourgeoisie, the retreat in the comintern and the bungling of the German revolution in 23 were due to the conflict of the bourgeois interests of the Russian state with the needs of the world revolution. It is on this understanding that our views of the period of Transition rest.

B) It was proletarian and still is proletarian. - the stalinist view.

C) It was proletarian for a while but later became bourgeois. Such an unstable position cannot last long otherwise the whole marxist notion of infrastructure/superstructure must be challenged and with this other sections of marxism. One or two years must be the outside limit. However, if this view is taken the actions of 1921 become tactics which we must condone. If rebuilding capitalism is an admissible tactic what is wrong with fighting for republicanism in Spain, the Hitler pact, the dismembering of Poland and Finland, the incorporation of Eastern Europe into the Soviet bloc for self defence etc.

(The argument that Russia was centrist is not worth considering as it's just a way of getting out of answering the question.)

In spite of what revolutionaries may have thought at the time only one of these positions can be right.

The Question of the Italian Left and the Comintern.

We need to consider the view that the Italian Left were correct to stay in the Comintern until their expulsion in the light of these possibilities.

If A is true then staying in the comintern can only be justified as a tactic. If it is a correct tactic to remain inside a bourgeois organisation then we must today support not only the united front but entryism into all bourgeois organisations. Our assessment of other political groups, in particular the Trotskyists must change.

If B is true the Italian Left were wrong to form the fraction and the faction the party in 1943. It is futile to consider this further.

If C is true then the Italian left should have left the comintern when the

Bolsheviks ceased being proletarian, if, of course, this was before they were expelled. If it was after they should have tried to rejoin after their expulsion. It must be emphasised that we are speaking of policies and politics. There must be a point at which the comintern's policies were a hindrance, an obstacle, to the world revolution and the revolution would have to be made against them as well as against the world bourgeoisie. We are not as some comrades think, talking about futurology. Neither the bolsheviks nor the left of the PCI could have predicted the future. We are not fatalists. The future will prevent us with opportunities which correct politics will exploit. There must have been a time when the politics of the comintern was actually working against the working class exploiting the revolutionary opportunities which arose. It is therefore up to us to define that time, point out what politics it was which determined this point and say that the Italian Left should then have left the comintern. It is clear that if this option is accepted our views on the period of Transition will need complete revision.

To argue that we have changed our method cannot alter these conclusions.

Position of the Italian Left.

It is clear that the Italian Left believed that the bolsheviks and the comintern were proletarian until their expulsion. United Fronts, workers governments, Bolshevisation of the party were regarded by the left of the PCI as signs of the degeneration of the comintern. Against these degenerations the left of the PCI wished to act as an international left opposition. Even in 26 when Bordiga crossed swords with Stalin, demanding that the policies within Russia be determined by the interests of the international proletariat, his criticism was as an opposition within a proletarian movement. Because this is what they thought does not mean this was the truth. As has been pointed out by the northern comrades they were justified in thinking this just as scientists were justified in thinking the sun went round the earth before Copernicus published his observations in 1543. The lessons of history were not clear. However we, today, are not justified in accepting their errors. It is up to us to clarify history.

The northern comrades in the minutes of 5/12/81 and in the redraft of the platform argue the view that the Italian Left's experience within the comintern helped it survive and was therefore justified. That is, they support position A above. Leaving aside for the moment the other implications of this view, simply examining the history of the Italian Left shows that they survived despite the comintern's attempts to crush them. By a process of attrition the left was battered into silence. It is a tribute to their strength of their positions that they survived at all. We must remember the comintern succeeded in getting what it wanted, a pliant communist party which would do as it wanted. The left was defeated and forced to retreat from every major engagement.

On the United Front Bordiga wrote in the Rome theses:- (1922)

"It is an error to imagine that the party's base among the masses can be expanded by manoeuvres. Variations in the situation should not change the fundamental programme, organisation and tactic of the party. Others think that ~~by~~ conquering the masses is a question of will, but they fall into opportunism by continually adapting themselves to specific situations."

In 1922 this was the position of the party. Two years later, under Gramsci's leadership the policy of United Front was being applied. In 22 the comintern tried to force the PCI to unite with the rump of the PSI. Bordiga refused and finally the scheme fell through because the

PSI also refused. In 24, under Gramsci's leadership the PCI united with Serratti's PSI faction. After Bordiga's arrest in February 23 the comintern set about creating a leadership which would serve the interests of Russian foreign policy. From prison, Bordiga attacked the United Front, the policy of entering bourgeois governments and the comintern's fusion demands as policies leading to the liquidation of the left. On being released from prison Bordiga found a new leadership imposed upon the PCI against the wishes of the majority of the party who favoured the left. The majority was, however, soon to erode by the 'bolshevisation' of the party. Between the Como and the Lyons Congresses the policy of bolshevisation, which meant the elimination of tendencies opposed to Moscow, had reduced the left from a majority to a minority. At the Lyons Congress (1/26) the left specifically attacked the comintern as "an organ of the Russian state" but being now in a minority were unable to prevent the Lyons theses being accepted. These theses converted the PCI into an obedient section of the comintern. Future resistance within the comintern and the PCI proved equally fruitless and finally, with their base eroded, the left were simply expelled.

How is it possible to argue that such an experience helped the Italian Left survive? From being an overwhelming majority in a party of 40,000 in 1921, the Italian Left were reduced to a few dozen members in 28. Bordiga, the initial leader of the left was silenced for 20 years. To argue that this helped the Italian Left survive is like saying that the OKhrana helped the bolsheviks survive.

Conclusion.

If we are to justify the Italian Left staying in the comintern it can only be because the comintern was proletarian. If the comintern was bourgeois it is clear that not only was it not a useful tactic but that such a position on tactics requires a major reappraisal of our politics today - a reappraisal so drastic it is questionable whether the group could stand it.

If we are to justify the Italian Left staying in the comintern 1921 has to go. This will entail saying that the bolsheviks as a proletarian party administered capitalism - a position previously scorned by the CWO. The group cannot then avoid the task of determining when the bolsheviks and the comintern became bourgeois and amending its views on the period of transition accordingly. If we find this was before 1927 we must say the Italian Left were wrong to remain within it. I think the only clear position is the original one of the CWO which holds to 1921. The northern comrades appear to think that because they have proved the KAPD cannot hold our analysis when they left the comintern in 21 our analysis itself has collapsed. To return to Copernicus, this is like saying that because he said the universe was heliocentric for the wrong reasons it is not heliocentric at all. There is no need now and no was there any need in the past to say that revolutionaries who did not understand the class nature of the comintern were traitors. They were not traitors any more than the Communards who failed to seize the banks in France in 1871. Holding to 1921 we can still say our lineage is with the Italian Left and the politics they fought for. We must, however, say they were wrong to remain in the Comintern after 1921.

C. Patton.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PROLETARIAN MILIEU on the CHENIER affair

In September of last year, the French Section of the International Communist Current published in their press, 'Revolution Internationale', the following statement:

"The Section of the ICC in France has decided on the exclusion of an individual who signs his name Chenier (previously Lopez). The behaviour of this element within the ICC along with his previous trajectory in LO, PCI, OU, CPAO, indicates that it is a question of suspicious behaviour and his presence in a revolutionary political organisation constitutes a danger to it."

This statement forms part of a Resolution of the Executive Commission of 'Revolution Internationale' (the French Section of the ICC) of 23-9-81 and was preceded by the explanation

"The events which have agitated the organisation these past months, their precipitation during the summer, the methods used, and denouement in the present situation and the role played by Chenier leads us to think seriously that elements alien to the organisation and its problems have played an important role in the present situation."

This resolution in its turn followed on from a resolution by the International Secretariat of the ICC of 19-9-81 which said

"The IS draws the attention of the Secretariat of the Executive Commission of the section in France to the nature of the actions of Chenier.

- (a) a systematic attitude tending to awaken, maintain and animate dissention among the members of the ICC and creating suspicion and demoralisation among the comrades in regard to the organisation
- (b) an equivocal attitude pretending to carry on the debate while at the same time (August-September) circulating outside the organisation in a secret way a text denigrating it and calling for the formation of a new organisation

These implications, along with the fact that in recent years Chenier was at the basis of convulsions and dissensions in all the different organisations he went through (Lutte Ouvriere; PCI; Union Ouvriere; CPAO) indicate the idea that it is a question of an element who is, at least, suspicious and whose behaviour is such as to constitute a danger to a revolutionary organisation."

The denunciation was then published in the press of the ICC without the slightest attempt being made to either put forward any evidence in support of such an astonishing statement or to justify this statement to the rest of the organisation, let alone the proletarian movement.

Comrades, let us be clear about what this statement says. It singles out an individual militant and declares him to be a danger to the revolutionary milieu in terms which clearly imply he is believed to be a police provocateur. To make sure that the message is heard by all, phone calls were subsequently made throughout the proletarian milieu stating openly that he was a police spy, and this was stated once again at a Public Meeting in Paris.

Subsequently a member of the Secretariat of World Revolution (British Section of the ICC), in late 1981, made a presentation to the London Section of WR (since circulated within WR) in which he amplified the 'reasoning' behind the statement. The key passages said

Finally, we want to report some of the discussion that lies behind the IS resolution of 19-9-81, concerning the recommendation to exclude Chenier. In the 1930's, entire sections in France and in Belgium of certain Trotskyist organisations were destroyed by the work of the police and/or state security functionaries. The method used was not repression, but infiltration. It consisted of turning members against each other; of issuing counter-reports of discussions; partial circulations of texts; innuendoes and lies subtly dropped here and there. The method has been long-established (try Victor Serge's work recently re-published under the title of 'All You Need to Know About State Repression' and the writings in French of Veragan on the destruction of the Trotskyists in the 30's) and is combined with other, more overt forms. In the ICC recently, there have been several disturbing occurrences

- in Paris, within the last 8 months, eight houses containing at least half the membership of the section (including addresses not generally known) have been broken into. Nothing has been stolen in any of these raids.
- there have been police enquiries at two of our regular meeting places in France: one of them was closed to us after such a visit.
- there have been police enquiries at our Paris box number, and the inexplicable delays to the delivery of letters and texts.

There is no doubt within the section that it has been under state surveillance.

Internally, the activities of Chenier have been re-assed.

- his political history: he has been expelled from every group which, to our knowledge, he has been a member of
- each expulsion was accompanied by the exodus, not only of Chenier, but of numbers of comrades, in some cases whole sections
- his political trajectory is 'weird' to say the least: from Trotskyism to Bordigism, back to Trotskyism, to the fringes of Levertarianism, to the ICC. It's not consistent with any political trajectory we've seen before.
- his method of operating within the ICC is dubious, to say the least. It includes; threatening to 'expose' the ICC to the 'milieu' (police) for certain alleged illegal activities; claiming to hold a discussion, while circulating texts outside calling for the destruction of the organisation; sending of texts to addresses in Paris not normally known to those outside the IS; the urging of 'private and secret' meetings.

"This behaviour on the part of Chenier has not gone unnoticed in the revolutionary milieu. A member of FOR gave us a guarded, verbal warning against his activities, which was not taken up at the time. The PIC apparently published a denunciation of him for his activities within the CPAO. We are trying to contact the rest of the milieu (the PCI) for the reasons and circumstances surrounding his expulsions.

Bearing all this in mind, there is a strong suspicion against Chenier. There is no fundamental proof either way, and probably never will be. No one is 100% convinced but most members in RI at least, feel there are grave grounds for disquiet. It would be foolish to believe that the ICC is any more immune from state infiltration than other organisations of the past - statistically speaking (in terms of our length of existence, size and international spread) we are long overdue for such a visit. In themselves, the actions of Chenier constitute a danger to revolutionary organisations. When added to other factors, it was felt necessary to draw the attention of the milieu to his past history.

We stress to comrades: we are not imputing any knowledge of any of this to other members of the tendency. Nor is it a question of attempting to 'discredit' Chenier for reasons internal to the ICC. The broader implications of our suspicions are serious within and of themselves. As the RI secretariat resolution says, our own weaknesses - hostility and personalisation of debate, refusal to maintain organisational discipline; an attitude of 'anything goes' within the organisation - are the most fertile soil for the penetration of both bourgeois ideology, and possibly of the bourgeoisie's representatives."

Comrades of the proletarian milieu, there can be no equivocation about the purpose of all this, the intent behind these statements. It is a conscious, deliberate and sustained attempt to destroy the comrade totally - to ensure that he can never again function within the proletarian milieu. And comrades, we are not children playing games, we know that such accusations put more than a comrade's political life at stake. There are elements in the proletarian movement, and many, many, in the leftist movement who won't stop at mere words when dealing with a police spy. This is the most serious and grave allegation that can be made in our movement. No matter what happens now, the action is irrevocable. The comrade will never be able to disprove such an accusation even if it was to be withdrawn tomorrow.

But let us look at the allegations themselves. They are as follows.

1. That the comrade had a tortuous political history from "Trotyskism to Bordigism, back to Trotskyism, to the fringes of Libertarianism, to the ICC".

Comrades, we can only be astonished when this is presented as unique and suspicious. The revolutionary movement is full of comrades with an erratic political trajectory. The ICC itself has had comrades who have moved from Zionism to Trotskyism to left Communism, comrades who oscillate between the IWW and the CWO . . . the list is endless. It could be no other way. Our movement is young and emerged from an empty wasteland. Its birth was painful and tortuous. We stumbled around blindly with only sparks of light to guide us and the stumbling has not yet finished. All of us who have been militants in the proletarian movement over the past

ten years carry with us, to a greater or lesser extent, the marks of this painful process in our personal history. Chenier's is neither unique nor suspicious.

- 2 That in addition to his "weird trajectory" he was "at the basis of convulsion and dissensions in all the different organisations he went through (Lutte Ouvrière; PCI; Union Ouvrière; CPAO)", that he was "expelled" from all these organisations and "expulsion was accompanied by the exodus, not only of Chenier, but of numbers of comrades, in some cases whole sections".

Firstly, we think there is a qualitative difference between expulsion and splits from bourgeois organisations than from proletarian ones. We reject utterly any attempt to amalgamate the two (but apparently the ICC are no longer concerned with the difference). No comrade can ever be criticised for his exit from a leftist organisation. As for his history within the proletarian movement before he joined the ICC, the fact of expulsions themselves tells us nothing. Who among us has not been involved in splits and expulsions? Given what we have already said about the painful struggle for clarity of the past decade and a half, how could it be otherwise? And taking comrades with him? Comrades, a militant splitting from an organisation on clear political grounds is obliged to attempt that. What we are presented with here is evidence of how hard and confused the struggle has been (and continues to be) to give birth to the organised political expression of the proletariat. The worst interpretation that can be put on this behaviour is that Chenier is a comrade who finds the disciplined demands of organised political life difficult. It's grotesque, a product of paranoia or worse, to suggest that we should consider such behaviour evidence of state infiltration.

- 3 Clear evidence of state surveillance of the French section over the past 8 months.

We cannot see that this is either unexpected or evidence of infiltration, let alone evidence of the guilt of one particular comrade. The ICC is a revolutionary organisation and police interest in it is inevitable. It's not the first time and it won't be the last - for anyone!

- 4 His behaviour within the ICC. We are told "his method of operating within the ICC is dubious, to say the least. It includes; 'threatening to 'expose' the ICC to the 'milieu' (police) for certain alleged illegal activities; claiming to hold a discussion, while circulating texts to addresses in Paris not normally known to those outside the IS; the urging of 'private and secret' meetings".

All of this behaviour was during the time the comrade was formulating a profound unhappiness and disquiet about the politics and practice of the ICC. As for the threatened exposure of illegal activities, we cannot say too much because we have not seen the relevant letter and know only what we have heard unofficially. As far as we know the comrade was concerned at the security implications of militants taking drugs, and on at least one occasion doing so openly at a public intervention. We cannot disagree that habitual illegal practices by militants constitutes a security hazard. Resolutions passed by the central organs of the ICC itself have already stated that. If the comrade threatened the ICC with exposure to the proletarian milieu then we can only condemn that, but we reject it as evidence pointing to the comrade as a police agent, for this is what the statement expressly says by following the word 'milieu' with (police) in an attempt to imply that the latter was the true intention behind any such 'exposure' to the milieu suggested by Chenier. So far as we know the involvement of 'police' in such an exposure exists solely in the minds of the ICC. As for the other

dubious practices - "secret texts" etc - how we view them and whether or not we have criticisms of such behaviour depends on where one stood in the debates which were taking place inside the ICC about the existence and operation of tendencies at that time, and about the ICC's ability or inability to allow real internal debate. Whether or not we have criticisms of the comrades behaviour, none of it points to the activities of a police spy. Comrades who were involved should ask themselves if these allegations have made these debates easier or harder.

However, even outside the period when the comrade's trajectory was taking him outside the ICC, we are told that he had "a systematic attitude tending to awaken, maintain and animate dissention among the members of the ICC and creating suspicion and demoralisation among the comrades in regard to the organisation". Chenier's many contributions to the internal press are available to all comrades inside the ICC who can judge for themselves whether they are evidence of a systematic attempt to destroy the organisation or the work of a serious, committed militant of independent mind who took the ICC's commitment to debate seriously. However, the point here is not to look at Chenier's contributions to the life of the ICC in order to decide whether or not he was a perfect militant, or whether or not his contributions were fruitful or troublesome, but to decide whether they justify the allegations which have been publically made about him. For us, the answer is clear. We cannot believe that anyone of sane mind could accept the "evidence", and WE CALL UPON ALL COMRADES WITHIN THE PROLETARIAN MILIEU TO UTTERLY AND PUBLICALLY REJECT THE BEHAVIOUR AND ACCUSATIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT BY THE ICC.

Let us be clear here. What is on trial before the whole revolutionary milieu is not one militant, but the ICC itself. The revolutionary movement is tiny and fragile and the ICC constitutes an enormous weight within it. Everything the ICC struggled to achieve on the question of the need for a centralised, international party, on the questions of sectarianism and monolithism stands in danger of being wiped out, of being revealed as hot air, a front, a fake. This stomach-turning, unspeakable action has brought the spectre of Stalinism back into the heart of the proletarian movement. The ICC asks us to remember that the destruction of revolutionary groups in the 30's was often achieved by the bourgeois, not by repression, but by infiltration. We would remind comrades that the same result was often achieved by the Stalinists precisely by false accusations of infiltration and of police agents. Trotsky, the Left Opposition and many others were all victims of this vicious technique. Many comrades lost their lives as a result. The stench of the 30's is unmistakable in this present accusation.

Chenier has been accused not out of concern for the safety of the milieu, but to destroy and obliterate debate. His "crime" was to take the ICC seriously when it said it rejected monolithism and sectarianism and insisted that the health and vitality of a communist organisation could come only from the fullest debate and confrontation of ideas involving all the militants of the organisation. Comrades, what has happened to the ICC that its central organs will stop at nothing to suppress opposition?

These events, sickening and stunning, though they might be, have not arrived out of the blue. Increasingly, we have seen the debates of the ICC crippled, polarised and crushed by a conception of centralisation which saw the central organs as the unique repository of clarity and, as ideological policemen guarding the sacred tablets. From there, it was a short step for the central organs to embark upon a course of substituting themselves for the organisation as a whole. But this is not the place to draw out such a critique, but the consequences of this process must by now be clear to all - central organs which demand blind obedience, who can only tolerate token debate, who characterise criticisms of themselves

as attacks on the ICC, who are so terrified of differences they will literally stop at nothing to destroy them. The Chenier affair is only the logical conclusion of this process.

Comrades, all of this is intolerable to us, as it should be to the whole proletarian milieu. We cannot and will not stand by silent while this attempted assassination goes ahead, and we, by this letter, call on all militants of the proletarian milieu to unite in condemnation of this disgusting action of the ICC.

Former militants of the International Communist Current

postscript. Since the above Open Letter was written we have seen the I.C.C. continue its campaign of vilification and self-justification in the Chenier Affair - an affair which has, for them, been successful in that it has succeeded in its primary task, that of driving the militant Chenier out of politics completely in despair. However they obviously feel the need to try to con the rest of the milieu still into believing that they acted properly, to delude their readership into believing in the pristine purity of the I.C.C.

In particular in International Review 28 there is an article by one JA which sets itself this specific task. The article can only be taken as a joke, a sick black joke - unconscious on the part of the author but a joke none the less.

How else can one take the following except as a joke:

"When the ICC published in its press a 'warning' against Chenier's activities we were only doing our duty towards the political milieu. Some interpreted what we wrote as being a more positive denunciation: they were wrong."

As our Open Letter clearly shows the central organs of the ICC were quite explicit about what they wanted their own membership and the milieu to believe about Chenier and this is said once again AS EXPLICITLY in the text of JA as indeed it is again in Internationalism 32. Only a cretin or someone totally unfamiliar with the English language would believe that the sleight of hand perpetrated by the use of the 'no formal proof' ploy is anything other than a blatant accusation.

How else but as a joke can we regard the statement:

"still less have we descended to inventing stories about security."

So far the I.C.C. for all its vaunted 'masses of evidence' have produced NOT ONE IOTA of evidence to the proletarian milieu as the CWO in their investigation have already CLEARLY demonstrated.

How else but as a joke, and a sick one at that, can we regard the statement:

"if we wanted to resort to manoeuvre we would have acted like Chenier: through plots, never saying anything openly."

The WR EC Sec presentation quoted in our letter given by WREC Sec secretary KT which came completely out of the blue to every section of WR, about which no section had had ANY advance notice did not come out of the fertile mind of KT. He didnt dream it up. This presentation came as a direct result of a process of manoeuvring in which KT and his then bedfellow JA played a prominent part and in which the membership of WR at least outwith the confines of the select group of schemers had no say at all, no knowledge whatsoever. And of course this is the same JA who some weeks earlier when asked at a meeting of the WR Secretariat DENIED ANY KNOWLEDGE WHATSOEVER of the basis

for the central organs of the ICC section in Frances' excluding the Lille section of RI, Chenier included, from some of the normal responsibilities of a section of the ICC. Whatever conspiring Chenier may have done he was certainly not alone. The plotting of the centre faction of the ICC to silence the tendency and destroy Chenier far outstrips anything I have heard about the tendency. (1)

But of course we are used to such 'jokes' from JA and her associates for we have seen others such as raiding peoples homes and calling the actions of the victims to defend themselves terror tactics: or claiming that the taking of one typewriter from among three as well as a few archives which were to be photocopied and returned which was said to the ICC was an attempt to silence the ICC. Jokes abound in JA's company.

How else then except as black humour are we to take JA's absurd pronouncements slanders, innuendo and pleas to be taken seriously, literally and unblemished. However one conceives the actions of Chenier or of the other members of the tendency one inescapable fact stands out: It was the actions of such as JA and the other plotters in Paris and London which destroyed the British section of the ICC. When JA has the effrontery to say:

"...those who work deliberately to destroy revolutionary organisations on behalf of the state and its appendage would not act differently from the way Chenier did".

Comrades we need only replace Chenier with JA and her colleagues to make the same point. Or rather the idiocy of both points. (2)

- (1) It should be noted that the writer here was not a member of the tendency nor was he a member of the cabal.
- (2) There is a great deal of material on the machinations within the ICC in 1981 and the fragments so far published are at best bits produced to substantiate one side or the other. Aberdeen has in its possession practically all the texts, letters etc. To publish it is impossible but the milieu should contact us if it seeks further clarification on the whole sorry business from the material itself.

Correspondence.

LETTER FROM ABERDEEN TO NOWAR

We feel we must make some response to your leaflet which denounced the recent actions of the ICC.

Who could disagree with you that actions of the Current must be denounced and utterly rejected? The manner in which that organisation has responded to the problem of political debate and the emergence of a 'Tendency' etc, has been nothing short of criminal (in the political sense). Rather than being able to comprehend the necessity of clear political debate it has consistently over the past few months at least, put barriers in the way of such debate. This has ranged from downright lying, through the Chenier affair through to the most recent actions. All these actions can be explained in terms of the ICC sinking into sectarianism. Its political mind is atrophying. As a consequence, it is increasingly unable to relate to class struggle, either at a mass level or at the level of political fractions. This is part of the explanation for it blindly thrashing out at what it deems to be its political enemies.

Obviously, faced with this, our task must be to explain why this has happened and to ensure that the proletarian movement is aware of the dangers of such actions. The former can only be done through a clear and extended critique of the ICC. The latter is more problematic as regards the 'raids' of the Current. The serious problem here being security. Once the actions are publicised then there is a very real possibility of the state's forces being involved. This involvement not only threatens the ICC but those connected with it. We in Aberdeen, when we heard of the possibility of the Current turning up here, responded by calling their bluff. We threatened them with police involvement in an attempt to forestall their attack.* Fortunately, we did not have to make the actual decision about the police. They did not move North. If they had done so we would have had to decide between two evils: physical defence and consequent breach of security: or capitulate to their threats and suffer accordingly. No easy decision to make, at least at the reasoned political level. Although, for physical and family reasons, the choice might have been made without any angst.

Maybe, after the event of the raids, a leaflet or some form of public communication is called for despite any possible security threat. certainly we would accept that something must be done to halt the actions of this crazed political beast. This is not to say the Current as a political organisation must be destroyed.. We think not. What must be stopped is the irrationality which it at present is manifesting. Thus far we would sympathize with you.

However, we were unhappy about the particular way you took up the problem. For a start, we thought the presentation of the events was a wee bit one sided. Some indication of the background was needed. The raids, as we all know, were in part a response to the fact that equipment which had formerly been the ICC's was held on to by some comrades who left that organisation. This does not politically justify the ICC. But if now we look back at the actions of the comrades, we can say, albeit with hindsight, that a blunder was made. Keeping equipment only succeeded in clouding the issues. If it was worthwhile denouncing the ICC for their raids then surely it was worth making this complimentary point.

* Comrade HC rejected this strategy

Another point, and this takes us back to the problem of security, was the use of the phrase 'terror campaign'. In the present national and international political climate, this can only pose a serious security threat. If the state gets a whiff of any organisation being involved in anything which smacks of terror or terrorism it will surely look closely at it and those in any way connected with it. So, if for no other reason than self-protection, we should be extremely wary of using such language.

At a more fundamental level, we are unhappy about your general characterisation of the ICC. Unlike you, we don't see the Current as an organisation 'like any other capitalist organisation', 'like any other set of capitalist thugs'. Thugs maybe, but not capitalist ones. Presumably when you so describe them you are being politically precise, although, given the recent highly charged atmosphere the use of such extreme denunciatory terms is easily understood. When we first heard of the attacks we were almost immediately wishing to categorise the Current in the same way. But now that the scene is somewhat calmer a more sombre reflection is called for. If you really believe that the Current is capitalist then obviously any harm which might accrue to it as a result of your leaflet cannot unduly concern you. Why, after all, should we worry about the fate of a capitalist organisation vis-a-vis police action? The defence of the proletarian movement is our concern. To defend our own is our starting point.

But, if like us, you refuse to see the ICC as capitalist then your concerns here must be different. The Current is in a state of profound degeneration. This is our opinion of its present dynamic state. As far as its class condition goes we still see it as part of the proletarian movement. Degeneration and death are not identical. The former is a process, the latter an end-point. If the end-point had been reached then yes we would have to accept that the ICC 'can never again make any contribution to the struggle of the working class'. But we don't think that this is the case. Even the hideous face it presents to us at the present moment is not enough to condemn it to the grave. We need only recall the the problem of appropriating the actions of the Bolsheviks - Petrograd, Kronstadt, Brest-Litovsk, etc - to see that simple pronouncement cannot be made. Much more than the raids is required to validate the claim that the ICC is no longer a proletarian organisation. Ironically - you might of course argue that it was self-interest on the part of the ICC - this lesson is one of the legacies of the Current's work. The Current, unlike the CWO for instance, was able to see that it is no simple matter judging when an organisation has ceased to be part of the proletariat. The judgement is made by looking at the context, the platform and the actions of the organisation. A closing down of the ICC as a dynamic proletarian organisation is clearly occurring at the moment. We are sceptical about such a possibility but the question remains open.

We would hope that you would reconsider your characterisation of the Current. Not because we have any particular feeling for the organisation or for the individuals within it. We do not. But because of the possible dangers attached to a premature assessment. The primary danger, as we see it, is a counter sectarianism. A sectarianism which emerges from a reflection of the ICC's actions. We cannot afford to easily give up our understanding of the intricacies and apparent contradictions which are found in the proletarian movement. The danger is that by reacting to the actions of the ICC and calling it capitalist we not only cut off contact with that organisation (which we would have to do) but that we lose our sensitivity to the general movement of the class. In other words, that we mimic the worst moments of the ICC, or worse still, the CWO ie. a static analysis is defended.

If you cannot see any point in what we are saying we would hope that you would say why the Current must now be seen as capitalist: what this means

...is organisations such as CWO, Battaglia etc and if this in fact allows us to make a more positive relationship to the class struggle?

REPLY FROM NOWAR TO ABERDEEN

Thank you for your letter of 26 November.

We shall probably not print this correspondence in the next issue of NEWS because we feel that the ICC has had too much exposure in our publication of late. This issue of NEWS will be put out at Christmas. However, we do want to take up some of the points that you make in your letter.

Firstly, concerning the categorisation of the ICC - whether it is capitalist or communist. The first point we want to make is that such a categorisation is not settled by consideration of what an organisation says - at least this factor cannot be considered in isolation. We feel it is as important to consider what an organisation does. On the whole, we think that consideration of organisations which have degenerated in the past leads us to the conclusion that there is a degeneration in practice that precedes degeneration in positions. We think this is particularly evident if you look at the case of the Bolsheviks and the 3rd International.

You may recall that when we left the ICC, we had strong criticisms concerning the way that the practice of the organisation has degenerated, both internally and externally, but that we also drew some connection between this and the evaluation that was being made of the current situation. It seems to us that this degeneration will inevitably show itself at the level of formal positions - but that the relative insignificance of the ICC, and the ambiguity of several of its positions - which leads to a vituoso interpretation of what they mean - may retard this stage.

It isn't in dispute that the ICC puts forward positions which are proletarian - but the interpretation of these, and the comfort they give to practices which are clearly bourgeois, makes it very clear that we have to consider the totality of what they are as an organisation.

We would also remark on the rapidity of the degeneration. I think most people who left the ICC were surprised, not to say astounded, at the transformation that appeared to take place over the space of a few short months - and this is true however pessimistic the view you take of the organisation. It seems to us that in this situation you must consider the trajectory of the movement which is taking place in the ICC - and consider what effects it can have at the formal level of positions, or the freedom with which these are interpreted by the ICC. It seems to us as well, that there are no precedents for degeneration being reversed when it has reached such a stage. Some of us have a theoretical view that degeneration at this level is resistant to proletarian impact. You must ask yourself the question 'How resistant is the ICC to the rejuvenation of proletarian struggle?' and also 'What would be the point of the proletariat rescuing such an organisation as compared to founding new ones?'. On the first question, we think that the tendency is for the ICC to make itself even more cut-off from a healthy contact with struggle than it ever was before, and on the second question we think that the ICC really is far too small and has too little to offer, of any value to merit any special concern by workers, when compared to the possibilities of building a fresh organisation.

There is no comparison whatsoever with the history of the Bolsheviks. Lenin would turn in his grave at the thought of an organisation which is entirely composed of drawing-room dissidents who, on the whole, had no first hand experience of working class struggle before joining the organisation - and who subsequently, made no effort to seek it out. The ICC

is not like the Bolshevik Party. And it's simply a delusion that it's behaving like the emigre section of the Bolsheviks - turning out theory and polemics, and waiting to link up with its sections which are embedded in ongoing struggle. We are not aware of any theoretical contribution made by the ICC in the last three or four years. This work came to a full stop shortly after it was founded - and we've seen its attempts to apply the theory becoming increasingly shaky and erratic. Nor has it succumbed to events of a world scale like Brest-Litovsk and Kronstadt. It has gone down the drain because it couldn't cope with a period of mere existence. The degeneration has not been provoked by events of the scale and quality which faced the Bolsheviks. It's difficult to point to any thing except the corruption within itself. So we can't look at the ICC and say that it has distortions which are similar to those of the Bolsheviks before 1917, or even before 1905. On the contrary, it's developing the habits of the Russian CP in the late 20's - without any intervening period of substantial activity or test.

Take a good look at the ICC, and if you want to compare it with anything try the Russian CP of the late 20's. The ICC's got the same custom of exploiting its original platform to cover up the bourgeois nature of its internal life. Each twist and turn of policy is a test of membership. The party line is handed down about current events so it can control its internal affairs, and justify repression - external activity is simply a function of opportunism and the need to maintain internal control. If you want examples, have a look at what use was made of the 'new line' over Afghanistan, the steel strikes in France and Britain, the quiescence of the US workers, Poland, Spain, the left in opposition, the nature of the period, and the categorisation of other political groups. As long as it is a small sect you won't get an outright revision of main principles to help you decide its class nature. It's role in society is restricted to feeding off the proletarian milieu, and that role is actually helped by the absence of any revision. As for the fine test of wars and revolutions, if you wait for that you'd presumably have agreed it was right to stay in the Russian CP from 1917 to 1936, or 1939, or 1941.

When we founded News we said the ICC was dead. None of us were in any doubt that the ICC was headed for the capitalist camp. The only question was when it would show itself to have got there - in other words when it acted against the working class in a way that others could recognise its nature. We weren't sure at the time whether its role would give it scope to show the bourgeois character of the organisation. Our articles about Chenier and the raids were intended to bring out the fact that as much as it could act against the workers, the ICC grasped the opportunity with both hands. You are under a misapprehension if you think that what we said was rhetoric - or was intended to influence the ICC itself. It makes no odds to us whether we say the ICC is a capitalist organisation - or that it behaves like a capitalist organisation.

You are quite correct when you infer in your letter that we are indifferent about the fate of the ICC. It's nothing to us whether somebody rips off the ICC or the local supermarket. We might write in News about the petty-bourgeois nature of crime and what influence this has on communists, but we're not going to get trapped into the discussion on their terms about relations between communists - because it doesn't apply. As for the individuals in the ICC, we have as much hope for them as we do for individuals in the SWP - except that the smallness of the ICC, and the efforts it made to ensure that its present members were complicit in the decision to raid homes and the execution of those raids, leaves little room to assume naivety or ignorance.

We wouldn't have done what you did - either as a lie, a bluff, or because we hadn't faced up to the decision about calling the police. It's a good maxim for all the working class - 'Never tell the scuffers anything'. As for your ideas of mediating between the ICC and its ex-members, with the views we hold we can't go along with anything like that. To make the point again about the difference between what groups say and what they do, we want to make a point about yourselves and the CWO. In both cases we think your ideas about the

party are incorrect. We think they are dangerous to the working class because they verge on substitutionism - and so we'll criticise such views. However, we don't recall the CWO raiding your homes when you left despite their present assertion that it's justified. They draw back from the brink. You denounced the ICC raids - despite the tendency in your recent letter 'to see the other point of view'. Whilst there is this positive aspect to what you do, then it seems to us there is fidelity between your actions and what you say about the vital role of the working class itself that goes beyond the question of communist organisation.

The latest newspaper from WR says "the defence of a communist organisation becomes a question to be taken as seriously as the defence of the proletariat itself", but they say this in a context which implies their ex-members are not communist, or are at least some lower form of life in their conception of things, and are therefore the people against who it is permissible to use violence. For it is against these people that the ICC poses the need for defence. Can we suggest you re-read the arguments which were used to justify the imprisonment, exile, death and expulsion of the various oppositionists within the Russian CP between 1920 and 1927. The wording is almost identical.

An Open Letter from Rewntree to Weyden

Thanks for the copy of the proposals for a new national newsletter and the accompanying circular letter. Assuming the proposed date should not have read 6th Feb I would certainly like to attend the meeting you plan to hold in Manchester. I have certain reservations about the project but will save them for later. The six criteria for participation seem adequate although I experience slight 'culture shock' at seeing active opposition to sexism in the class struggle down as point two.

Incidentally does the Wildcat group as a whole have a conception of a "Proletarian Movement" (one of the good things we go out of the ICC) or do some members stick to the solidarity definition which poured the PCI, ICC etc into a bottle labelled "Leninists"

How many people do you think your initiative will contact/attract? A mere handful is my prediction; basically just some of the ex-ICC milieu and the Marxist elements of Solidarity. There is a large number of anti-Marxist libertarians in Britain (their wares are on display in SFSR 17) but they would not qualify for participation. However there seems to be a feeling at Manchester among ex-ICC members that there is a vast number of revolutionaries willing to cooperate with us if only we become a little less 'sectarian' and you serve up 'non-sectarianism' as a panacea for all our ills.

You identify two tendencies which emerged with the break-up of WR: the Leicester/Manchester approach and the London/Lille approach (now no longer defended by anybody). I think there was a third stance, that of people who did not want to rush into a WR mark 2 but who wanted to build upon the work of WR and didn't want to everything up for grabs. This is the approach which I feel most in sympathy with. You appear to dismiss any attempt to analyse why the ICC degenerated into necrophilia and like the News group you write off your long years in the ICC as a waste of time. I find this attitude incomprehensible - when did revolutionaries of yore behave in this cavalier fashion?

I am sad that you have abandoned the positions you used to defend on the indispensability of the revolutionary party, and even sadder that you have not

taken the time to explain to us why. In fact this seems to be one of the worst aspects of recent developments in Manchester: important moves are taken without any attempt to justify them to the outside world; they are merely assumed to be self-evident. You feel that autonomous local groups, possibly accompanied by a national newsletter to keep the local groups in touch, is the correct way forward, but now where can I find any theoretical enlightenment on the strategy.

I do not see what you are trying to say that Wildcat considers the definition of the final goal of communism as a classless, stateless and moneyless society to be of critical importance. The CWO and the Bordigh sts would not disagree with this definition, but then neither would the SWP or Tony Benn. Being in a revolutionary organisation involves not only an understanding of where we are now and where we want to get to but also some agreement on how we get there - this surely cannot be dismissed as an 'open' question.

Wildcat cannot pose the question of War or Revolution because some members of the group (as far as I can remember) do not believe that capitalism is in its death throes. Similarly the problem of partial struggles (ICC lingo for things like Feminism etc.) is going to reappear from under the carpet putting strains on the group and making intervention on these topics impossible. Please do not misunderstand what I am saying - I entirely agree with you when you say that the people with whom you are now working are part of a political tradition which defends the interests of the working class. The original idea behind Wildcat - a means by which all revolutionary groups and individuals in Manchester could make a joint intervention in the class struggle - was a good one but I am not sure that the way you have coagulated into a formal group is a step forward. I am not opposed to Wildcat, just the idea that autonomous local groups are all that is possible today. You argue that local groups should be supplemented by a national newsletter but in my opinion you have got the relationship between national and local work the wrong way round.

Having criticised what you are doing in Manchester it is only fair that I sketch out an alternative. I think that the medium term perspective for those ICC seceders who are in basic agreement to formalise their relationship by creating a new group. This must involve a candid assessment of our tasks and resources and this would mean no precipitous rush into producing a national newspaper - far more realistic would be jointly written leaflets and a discussion journal. (Left Communist Correspondence or some equally daft title). In my opinion this is the best way forward although I don't know if anyone agrees with me. Such a regroupment would not rule out cooperation with other revolutionaries at the local level in projects like Wildcat, nor participation in the proposed National newsletter - rather it would complement them.

You will doubtless argue that my vision is sectarian. However it would have several tangible benefits: it would get us all back into the rhythm of regular political work, like a prism it would focus our participation in the newsletter you are proposing and it would dispel the searing feeling of political limbo that I suspect I am not alone in experiencing. Several fine revolutionaries have been lost to the class struggle in the months since we left the ICC and I fear the process will continue if things are just left to drift. Despite your new-found 'non-sectarianism' you are rapidly going to find yourself working with far fewer revolutionaries than you were twelve months ago if present trends continue.

Fraternally,

Rowntree.

Reply from Wuyden to Rowntree.

Thanks for your prompt reply to my letter. I would like in turn to reply briefly to some of the questions and points you raise.

1. Yes the Wildcat group does have a conception of a "proletarian movement" (although some of us might not like the expression) which broadly speaking

coincides with that of the ICC. I think we are more sympathetic towards some of the currents which call themselves "anarchist" than the ICC would be.

2. I don't think we have any illusions about the number of people who will be interested in our initiative at the start. The 'pilot issue' of the newsletter will include details of the mailing list to which it will be sent. This includes all the groups which we think should be interested - including for example the SPGB, CWO and ICC - but we are not expecting to get a response from many of them. Hopefully we will be able to make the newsletter good enough to convince more people to contribute to it as the project progresses.

3. I don't write off my years in the ICC as a waste of time - although if I had the time again there are many things which I would want to do differently. I don't really know what the 'News' group would say about this. I left the ICC because three factors seemed to be making work in the ICC more and more counter-productive, namely - bureaucratisation, megalomania and sectarianism. I know this is simply a description of what happened and not an adequate explanation, and I am not at all against anyone trying to produce a more coherent analysis of what went wrong. However I'm not at all sure how far this question can be answered by just thinking about it: the continuation of political activity is necessary to resolve this question in practice, even if this is necessarily a process of trial and error. At the time there appeared to be only two practical alternatives for ex-members of the ICC who wanted to continue political activity: broadly speaking those advocated by Manchester (and in a slightly different way by Northampton) on the one hand and Lille/London on the other. (Lille and London stood for more megalomania and sectarianism.) I now realise that politically I am closer to the ICC than the aborted Lille/London alternative - although of course the ICC's behaviour towards Chenier remains unpardonable.) This does not mean that I am opposed to all the kinds of organisation that I think you would like to see. If such an organisation existed I would like to join it - only with the proviso that I could also continue the work I am now committed to in Manchester. But you should remember that most of the participants at the Manchester conference, apart from Lille, London and ourselves were still members of the ICC. Regardless of any visions we might have had of what we would like to see in the future we had to make an immediate choice between our comrades in Manchester, and London/Lille since the vision of political work being put forward by the latter did not, and could not tolerate the kind of work we were embarking on in Manchester. We chose to cut our political links with the comrades in London and Lille - an entirely correct decision, a subsequent events have shown.

4. At the Manchester conference I gave what I thought was a closely argued presentation of why I thought that the problem of the party should be considered an "open question". Unfortunately only the Aberdeen group seemed to understand the implications of what I was saying. Clearly I should have written up and distributed the text of this presentation. I still have my notes so I'll try to do this in the near future.

5. The attitude of the Wildcat group to the question of capitalism's collapse and the alternative of war or revolution is sketched briefly in a letter we have written to 'News' which we will publish in the pilot issue of the newsletter. Personally I don't give agreement to the majority view in Wildcat on this issue. I still hold to the traditionalist view defended by 'News' the ICC and, no doubt yourself. But I no longer find it easy to defend this position convincingly so I am looking forward to reading (what I hope will be) some serious replies to the Wildcat letter. This letter also sets out in more detail Wildcat's attitude to what you refer to as 'partial struggles'. Here I completely agree with the argument set out in our letter that it is wrong to exclude from a definition of class struggle everything except workplace based activity/struggle in the defence of economic interests. (In this respect it is interesting to note that the 'News' group seems to be more 'extreme' than the ICC.)

6. We don't see Wildcat as the be-all-and-end-all of political activity. Our

group includes one person who is still a member of Solidarity, and intends to remain one, and in principle is not opposed to its members belonging to other political organisations. The group which is co-ordinating work on the newsletter is not the same as the Wildcat Group, nor does the membership of the two groups co-incide exactly.

7 Your proposal for a discussion journal is very similar to our proposal for a newsletter, and both attempt to fill the same void presently existing in the left communist milieu. Only we think that a discussion journal is healthier, the more people who participate in the discussion. We don't see what is gained by such a journal announcing at the onset that its purpose is to create the foundations of a new organisation. The Wildcat Group is split in our attitude towards the possible formation of a national organisation. Some members of the group are not personally interested in the idea of a national organisation (although they don't put forward any "theories" to justify this). Others, including myself, hope that a new national organisation will become possible in the future. We think that one of the functions of our newsletter would be to provide a forum for discussions where the basis for such an organisation could be worked out, at least in its initial stages. However, regardless of whether (a) new national organisation(s) emerge(s) we still think there will be a place for a "non-sectarian" forum for discussion within the whole of our political milieu.

8 I don't think that your vision is sectarian at all. However, the political "limbo" you want to escape from is an objective fact, which won't be abolished by forming another self-centred small group with delusions of grandeur. The remaining ex-members of the ICC must now decide, as a matter of urgency, on how to relaunch themselves into political activity. But whatever you decide to do, at best you will only be another small group in a fragmented political milieu. (And one or two extra members from Manchester won't change this at all, of course). What is essential is that all of us remain dissatisfied with this state of affairs, and continue to discuss and work together towards creating a movement which is more united, purposeful and effective.

Fraternally,

Weyden
Manchester

- Note. (1) The newsletter mentioned in Weyden's letter has since appeared as Ultra Left Review.
(2) The text Weyden mentions has since appeared in the above Ultra Left Review.

THE FALKLANDS WAR AND THE RESPONSE OF REVOLUTIONARIES.

The fighting in the Falklands between the Argentinian and British bourgeoisie sets certain specific tasks for communists, especially those in the belligerent countries. Whatever the differences between communists over all sorts of issues the murder of British and Argentinian workers in the South Atlantic demands a unified response by all revolutionaries condemning the slaughter and clearly stating that the working class has NO country. The proletariat of all countries is the enemy of the bourgeoisie of both Argentina and Britain. We thus wrote in this vein to everyone we knew of in the proletarian milieu in Britain suggesting that while differences of analysis could appear in the press of each group one single unified statement in leaflet form should be distributed as widely as possible - in Britain at least condemning the slaughter. Though some groups and individuals failed to respond we have had all in all a favourable reaction and overleaf is a tentative draft for the projected leaflet. Comments please! If it is acceptable everyone is enjoined to copy and distribute as widely as poss.

The War in the Falklands is a war waged against the working class - Argentinian and British. Workers have absolutely no interest in which of the warring factions, British or Argentinian Capitalism wins the war despite all the lies being told by both sides.

Galtieri lies when he tells the workers of Argentina that it is a war of national liberation, of anti colonialism. What possible interest could the starving masses in South America, reeling under the brutal capitalist regimes of such as Galtieri have in the acquisition of a few windswept rocks in the South Atlantic. Would the taking of the Falkland Islands solve the economic crisis in Argentina, stop the raging inflation, stop workers wages tumbling, stop the capitalist death squads and end the concentration camps? Of course not!

Thatcher also lies when she tells us that it's a war between democracy and dictatorship. British capitalism, left and right, has been supporting and running dictatorships all over the globe as part of the essential task, for the Western Bloc, of maintaining capitalism and attacking the workers. They have helped thugs like Galtieri smash working class opposition to the collapse of their living standards in the same way that 'democracy' has done in countless other countries itself. Democracy or dictatorship doesn't matter to capitalism so long as its successful in derailing the working class' attempt to fight back against encroaching misery.

Nor is it a war as Foot and his cronies on the left wing of capitalism would have us believe, to save the Falkland Islands and their inhabitants. For the past twenty years successive British governments have been trying to give the islands away to Argentina so its a bit late to be so concerned about the 1800 islanders who have had to move to the other side of the world to earn a decent wage.

No, the war is about none of these things. What it IS about is the bourgeoisie of BOTH countries trying desperately to survive in an increasingly collapsing world economic system.

For the embattled bourgeoisie of Argentina its a desperate attempt to divert the workers away from the realisation that their capitalist economy is crumbling. For months before the invasion hundreds of thousands of workers have been out on the streets protesting about their living conditions and threatening the state. The invasion was a blatant attack on the consciousness of workers in Argentina, a blatant attempt to divert workers away from their struggle into the dead end of nationalist fervour. For the moment it has certainly succeeded. Instead of rioting workers we have seen thousands of them cheering on the war and thus giving capitalism in Argentina a much needed breather.

The response from the British bourgeoisie was no different. Thatcher gleefully seized on the opportunity given by Galtieri to mount a massive campaign against working class consciousness, whipping up nationalist, patriotic hysteria through capitalist control of the media in order to draw workers in Britain behind the national capital, in order to make them agreeable to make sacrifices for capitalism. The war has been fought to get workers used to the idea of less wages, more austerity SO THAT Britain can have a large navy, a better army etc etc.. In a more general sense the notion of sacrifice for the country is to be instilled into the working class so that future plans for the programme of austerity can be sold as 'necessary patriotic sacrifice'. Workers are of course always asked to make sacrifices and the war shows theres a direct relationship between accepting lower living standards and being asked to die for the homeland. Even in the short term this poison is poured out by capitalism eg. the health workers are even now being castigated for striking while people are being killed in the Falklands war.

With the fall of Port Stanley the war between Argentinian and British capitalism may or may not be over. But the real war isnt over by a long chalk. The real war that is being fought is the ONLY war worth fighting. The war between the workers and the bosses. In this war the workers of Argentina are the allies of the working class of Britain. Our mutual enemy is the capitalist system in both Argentina and Britain which callously is murdering hundreds in the South Atlantic, and condemning millions more to increasing misery solely to save their rotting regime. This is the real war. This is the war the workers have to win before capital moves from murdering hundreds in the Falklands and thousands in Afghanistan and the Lebanon to the mass slaughter it has prepared for workers everywhere in the next global war.

Once an acceptable draft is agreed groups wishing to be signatories can run off copies putting signatory groups at the bottom. Aberdeen will circulate list. Individuals can get copies from Aberdeen or more likely from the nearest signatory group tendering some finance preferably to pay for the printing etc.