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THE "ULTRA LEFT REVIEW" -VEHICLE WITHOUT LIGHTS.

The purpose of this text is to reassert the politics of the party. This is made necessary by not only the general debacle of the "ICC Affair" but also by the particular impact this has had upon revolutionaries, on their understanding of what constitutes the correct mode of political organisation. In this instance we see the trajectory of Wildcat-Ultra Left Review as being towards the old trap of localism and federalism, albeit motivated by concerns for the real problems which face revolutionaries today.

(1) The impact of the defeat of the proletariat in the 1920s subsequently manifested itself in a number of ways. One of the most important was the disarray around the question of organisation. At its most polarised this debate was seen in the anti-organisational stance of the councillists, Kühle an example of this; and at the other end was the party orientated view of Bordigha. The former saw all political parties as part of a bourgeois racket which were inimical to the interests of the working class and which would lead the class to defeat. The actions of the Bolsheviks and the defeat of the working class in Russia supplied the councillists with the evidence for this interpretation. On the other hand, the Bordighist tradition stands as the polar opposite of councillism, drawing this conclusion from the same revolutionary moment. This tradition concluded that the party is the essence of the revolutionary proletariat.

No matter how we might deprecate either one of these traditions it is imperative that we realise that both were serious responses to a real situation which faced the proletarian movement. The success and defeat of the revolutionary wave, especially the subsequent "turning" of the bolshevik/party/state, this did not pose self-evident solutions. The situation of a successful proletarian revolution, the holding of state power, the attempt by a proletarian party to hold state power in the midst of spiralling defeat, all this was wholly new. Lessons had to be drawn, with greater or lesser speed. The experience could not, did not, leave communist groups unmarked.

(2) With the reawakening of the mass and minority proletarian movements in the 1960s the old legacy of organisational confusion re-emerged. In Britain the councillist vision found extreme expression in Solidarity, to the extent that not only did it reject party orientated politics (characterised as "Leninist" or "traditional left") but also rejected marxism. However, its rhetorical hardness on organisation was not enough to save it from the whole problem of organisation: how should it organise?, indeed should it organise at all? These questions afflicted it right up to the point at which it merged with Social Revolution. After that point the problem remained. The debates that we witnessed over the past few years, culminating in the dissolution of "national" Solidarity were in part merely the continuation of this long standing problem of organisation.

With the founding of Revolutionary Perspectives/CWO and World Revolution the question of the nature and content of political organisation found different expression. Through a long and painful process, inspired by the French group R.I., both organisations arrived at centralised conceptions of political organisation. However, just as Solidarity was plagued by the organisational question, so these groups continued and continue to wrestle with the problem. One expression of this is the constant sniping between the two organisations: WR being charged with councillism, and CWO characterised as an organisation which is incapable of understanding the inner strength of the proletariat.

(3) At the present moment, outwith the confines of WR-CWO, the debate, if not exactly boiling simmers. The fracturing of Solidarity and the splits within the ICC have brought to the fore the question of the how and wherefore of organisation. The first attempt to come to grips with the problem in the new particular situation was News of War and Revolution. NWR whilst rhetorically calling for, in the long-term, a centralised international organisation it argued that for the moment such a formation was not possible. It was argued that the low-level of class struggle, the tiny nature of the communist movement meant that it was meaningless to attempt to build such an organisation at the present time. All that was possible, said NWR, were local actions by like minded people. They did not formulate a theoretical denial of the need for a centralised party simply a pragmatic response to isolation. This response, however, could not be and was not neutral. In effect it was a new localism and federalism.

(4) Which brings us to Wildcat and ULR. Let it be stated from the outset, that the criticisms we make are not to be classed along with those of such detractors as the ICC and the CWO. We recognise the organisation and individuals involved as part of the proletarian movement. Also, although we reject the method of organisation we take seriously the concerns which lie behind the response. The experience we have all had, directly or indirectly, from the ICC-CWO experience means that we are faced with a real struggle to re-establish our political bearings. Any criticisms we make are made from within the same class terrain that the comrades occupy.

We think that the proposals of the Wildcat "collective" are simply nothing more than an attempt to build a revolutionary intervention around localism, connected by federalist principles. The way that it defines the role of the Ultra Left Review testifies to this.

"a modestly produced and non-sectarian newsletter for those individuals who describe themselves variously as anarchist communists, libertarian communists, council communists, left communists etc."

This is straitforward federalism. Clearly the comrades themselves are conscious of this in that they do not formulate any commitment to a long term organisational intent for the Review other than being a "vehicle" for "joint" work. But such a vehicle we fear is destined to be an "old-banger", bound to run out of revolutionary gas. Nowhere in the proposals do we find a commitment to the Review being simply a stepping stone on the road to a future organisation. The Review at the centre of "joint" activities is an end in itself.

We would not be unhappy about the notion of a bulletin which was envisaged as a moment in the regroupment of revolutionary forces. The debacle of the recent past has created great difficulties any attempt to overcome them could be carried out through a discussion bulletin, which would enable differences to be aired, and political resolution to be reached. But the bulletin would only be a means to an end: the end being the rebuilding of an international centralised party, drawing its sustenance not only from the immediate struggle of the working class but also from the legacy of the revolutionary period, as found in the revolutionary 3rd International and the parties associated with it. Because we do not find this concern within the proposals of the Review, quite the contrary in fact, we feel that direct participation in it would not be fruitful for either side. This commitment to centralised politics is not made on a whim, nor is it as some might maintain some failure in our personal make-up but flows from a theoretical appropriation of the realities of class society.

(5) As we said at the begining the aim of this text is to reassert the need for a centrally organised international organisation. This is not to argue that it can simply be willed into existence. It cannot. The experience of the CWO is good testimony to this. We would accept much of what the comrades of News of War and Revolution said when they highlighted the international, and at times intentional, fragmentation of the revolutionary movement. It is most certainly torn by sectarianism, it is very small and heterogeneous. However, we reject the conclusion that NWR allowed to flow from this circumstance. The need to organise for the party now, in the sense of seeing the immediate and the long-term end being international regroupment, this is not put into abeyance because of the present weaknesses. Quite the contrary. To achieve the long term goal requires that we are aware of it now and that we work towards it in an immediate fashion. If this is not done, and the tactics of NWR or the principles of ULR are adopted then there emerges either by design or by default, a localist and federalist practice. Rather than such a mode of organisation being a "realistic" stepping-stone to future united strength in fact replicates all the fragmentations which exist at present, and gives stimulus to their future existence.

The question of why we must organise through international party structure is one which can only be answered by looking at the realities of the divisions which exist within capitalism, by grasping why it is that the history of proletarian struggle is in part characterised by the continued and continual existence of revolutionary fractions. The bete-noir of councillism is the problem of "existence": the lack of surety of why, if indeed at all, why the working class needs the councillists. The history of libertarianism and councillism is strewn with examples of liquidationist tendencies which attempt to dissolve themselves into the class at large, thus dispensing with separate political existence. For us, however, separate political existence is given a coherent explanation by looking at capital; the existence of revolutionary fractions reflects the structural limits of capitalist social organisation.

We all accept that the proletariat is a definite socio-economic category within the capitalist mode of production. It is common currency for the proletarian fractions that the working class is exploited. But not only this. There are implications which flow from the reality of the situation which the working class finds itself in. It is the only class which can emancipate man kind from the fetters of class so, this is derivative of its place within capitalism. But it is also derivative that the class gives birth to distinct political fractions. This is a consequence of the fragmentation which capital imposes upon the proletariat. The bourgeois mode of production, whilst it is organised at a socially integrated manner, is also necessarily disintegrated: the division of labour extends throughout the whole of social existence; the work process is broken down into a myriad of constituent parts within the single work place, within the nation state, and between nation states. For the proletariat this fragmentation is expressed in both time and space. As a consequence its consciousness is circumscribed. In its day to day struggle against the bourgeois state etc the working class does not construct a clear vision of its "destiny" ie to smash capital and build communism. Capitalist reality constantly limits the immediate perceptions of the class. If we take the fundamental positions around which communists organise today - the decadence of capital and the political imperatives which flow from this - these positions did not spring immediately from mass class struggle, from day to day struggle. They were arrived at via theoretical elaboration carried out by political groups. The long term political goal of the proletariat is consciously carried through history by revolutionary fractions. Political groups have, to a greater or lesser extent, clarity on the possible world which the working class might construct.

For us the whole history of class struggle within capitalism, and especially the example of the Russian revolution, has demonstrated that the mass of the class does not spontaneously generate a political critique of capital necessary for it to perceive the political imperatives required so that it internationalises its struggle. This emerges from the interplay of the organised political fractions and mass class organs. We can already here the voice of the libertarian saying "here we go again, the proletariat as envisaged by Lenin, a class incapable of rising above trade union consciousness". Against this objection we would side with Lenin et.al., not because we agree with the details of Lenins politics but because we are aware that his conceptions are built upon the realisation that the political future of the proletariat in part depends upon the ability of revolutionaries to go beyond immediate economic concerns. This capacity is a crucial function of, rather the crucial function in the struggle agst capital. Again we can here the libertarian accuse us of wanting to "inject" consciousness from the outside. But this accusation is to completely misread the formation of proletarian revolutionary consciousness. The historically extended class consciousness as found in political groups, whilst it is distinct from the mass day to day activity of the class it is not separte from it. It grows from the general evolution of capital, and the specific moments of the working class's struggle. It expresses the inner historical possibilities of the given moment and in turn is affected by this moment. The political consciousness of revolutionaries is a living organism, which feeds off and is part of class struggle. The oft-quoted examples of the Paris Commune and the 1905 revolution illustrate the mechanics of class struggle. The attack upon the bourgeois state and the building of soviets these elements were not born from the heads of revolutionaries, "injected" from the outside; neither were the theoretical implications and political imperatives generated by these acts thrown up out of the mass struggle in a simple and immediate way. These latter elements grew within and from the class's own struggle. The historical appropriation of the two acts, Paris Commune and Soviets, was taken up by revolutionaries and returned to the class at the mass level during the revolutionary moment in Russia. At that moment although the organised expressions remained distinct from the mass of the class they were clearly not separte. The Russian revolution was the vindication of political organisation.

Revolutionaries distill the experience of the class and attempt to reintegrate the proletariat's own experience at the level of political consciousness. Both elements, the mass activity of the class and the actions of the minority, are essential parts of the revolutionary equation.

The need for organised revolutionary fractions distinct from the mass expressions of the class is, as we note above, born of the very realities of capitalist relations. But why should this be centralised? Historically the class nature of the proletariat is to be a class which is without intrinsic antagonisms. This is not to say that history is not strewn with examples of internal strife, it is. But very real though this is it is potentially possible, through revolutionary consciousness, for the proletariat to rise above such divisions that exist. This the bourgeoisie cannot do. Only the proletariat can unite over the realities of the capitalist division of labour and by doing so destroy them. The tasks of the proletariat are international and common. The solutions which the proletariat presents to the decomposition of capital are the same no matter what nation state they find themselves in. The solution of communism is global; certainly local conditions are taking into account and modify interventions and actions but the central political structure, and the ordering of social life is global and coordinated.

The fact of the international nature of the working class and the necessity for there to be political minorities force the conclusion that only a centrally organised class party can play a fruitful role in the class struggle, in the long term. The revolutionary organisation mirrors the international nature of the proletariat, and it should be remembered that in action the tendency is for mass organs of the class to centralise themselves. A common political framework, a common political programme, makes it possible for a coherent and consistent intervention to be made in keeping with the essence of the proletariat as a class. To look to a loose federation of like-minded people as the consummate revolutionary organisation is to completely misread the political +++++ of the working class.

(6) Finally, we recognise the difficulties which face revolutionaries now, particularly those who came into contact with the ICC, and those who do not accept the alternative of the CWO. But we should beware throwing out the gains made by both those organisations. In the last Bulletin we stressed the dangers of monolithism, but this condition is not to be confused with centralism. If we take the example of Solidarity, this organisation, although it rejected central party structure was in practice monolithic and bureaucratically manipulated. The openness for debate that exists within the Wildcat collective we welcome; however we feel that for us to enter the "collective" of the Review would be to act dishonestly on our part. For the moment, seeing no alternative, we will continue to use the Bulletin as our medium for debate.

Correspondence

Letter from the ICC

We have recently received a response from the ICC to two letters sent them this year, the first to which they devote twelve lines in reply, concerned possible subscriptions to ICC publications and other mundane matters, the second being a response to our circular letter regarding the Falklands affair. On this latter subject they write the following:

"We have also received, (belatedly?), your undated letter proposing a joint intervention on the Falklands issue. But even had we received this far earlier we should not have wanted to participate. Briefly there are three reasons.

1. The basis of any agreement in the analyses of the Falkland affair among the organisations and anonymous individuals listed would surely be narrow in the extreme and no clear perspective on the real and serious significance of these events would be held out to the working class in such a joint intervention.
2. A joint intervention signed by these organisations and individuals would give the working class a totally false picture of the actual state of the proletarian milieu. Your list is a hotchpotch of libertarian throwbacks to the late sixties/early seventies, groupings who deny the need for organisation and who's existence is even in doubt and assorted dilettantes put alongside militant marxist organisations to give an air of seriousness and basic agreement. We certainly do not want to give the impression to the proletariat that this sectarian-ridden milieu is behaving in a responsible manner when it so blatantly is not.
3. We do not want to participate in any such activity with you. We have already written in our press and to you directly commenting on your unprincipled behaviour, especially your participation in the effort to break our organisation and your threats to call the bourgeois state on us. The publication of your Bulletin speaks volumes about your 'political' concerns, and show them to be unchanged. We can see no basis for political work with elements who maintain such an unreservedly hostile and irresponsible attitude to the ICC.

We shall comment publicly on your bulletin soon."
The ICC.

Now this letter is without doubt one of the most astonishing documents to come our way in a long time. Here a number of statements are made which give us all a keen insight into the present mental state of the ICC. After the traumatic events of 1981 in that organisation it was to be hoped that time would have healed the many obvious mental scars displayed by them and that the ICC would once more be able to view the world around it coherently and rationally rather than in the frenetic, vicious way in which it had been responding to it. Such a calming down, such a return to rationality, would have been a major step in its rehabilitation in the eyes of the international proletarian milieu, a milieu made extremely suspicious by the actions of the ICC over the past twelve months or so. This letter, following on as it does from various paranoid utterances in the press of the ICC, shows that this organisation still needs to take a long hard look at itself and its relationship with the rest of the proletarian milieu in order for it to act positively within such a movement.

This present letter shows not only no positive movement but not even any positive, responsible intention. Let's look at what is being said in these three paragraphs and a line. Basically the ICC rejects involvement with other groups, individuals in the proletarian milieu. Their explanations are as follows:

1. "the basis of... agreement... narrow... no clear perspective"

Using this sort of logic Lenin in 1914 should have shut himself up in his garret in Geneva and asked Krupskaya to knock on his door only when the Great War was over. What the ICC is saying here is that unless the response to war includes agreement in its entirety on the reasons for, results of, the war etc. it is narrow in the extreme and could give "no real perspective to the working class". Using this sort of logic all the activities of the left wing of Social Democracy during WW1 to rally the anti war groups at Zimmerwald and Keinthal was a waste of time. Lenin should have realised that the basis for agreement was "narrow in the extreme" since he would be consorting with anti-war socialists who didn't have his specific understanding of the war or his slogan of 'Turn the imperialist war into a civil war' or Bukharin's clear understanding that the war heralded a new era, the era of the decline of capitalism. In actual fact of course, the War was the single most important item which led to the regroupment of revolutionaries in the RSDLP. (see Lunacharsky's memoirs, The Great Overturn 1919) forcing revolutionaries to reject the sectarianism which had divided them and separating them from those propelled by the war into the capitalist camp. Internationally the war started the process which was to regroup revolutionaries in the Communist International. Now no one is, for a moment, comparing the Falklands situation with World War One but the basic principle is the same. Revolutionaries have a duty to respond to the wars of the bourgeoisie, to oppose the slaughter of proletarians in such wars - whatever their differences in analysis, and this is best done with one voice. To reject this fundamental lesson is to jettison all hope of collaboration on even this, the most direct, obvious and basic of terms.

2. "groupings who deny the need for organisation..."

Looking at those circulated with the original letter it is difficult to see to whom this slander applies. Certainly there are groups and individuals whose concept of organisation is not one which we (or the ICC) would agree with but this is a very different matter from saying that they have none at all. It is the height of arrogance to state that if others do not agree with ones conception of organisation of revolutionaries then they must deny any such need at all. We may disagree with conceptions of organisation of others and in that case we must attempt to validate our case and try to persuade others of the correctness of our conceptions but it is sectarian indeed to dismiss the efforts of others as a denial of organisation itself.

3. "hotchpotch of libertarian throwbacks... assorted dillitantes... air of seriousness"

Here the ICC push essentially the same line, but with an additional twist. The implication here is that because these people are a hotchpotch of libertarian throw back then they cannot be serious revolutionaries. Now this is itself quite a serious thing to say. We had been aware that certain statements of the CWO concerning their belief that there were but two proletarian organisations in Britain

seemed to preclude all others, including the libertarian milieu, from the workers movement but we had been unaware that that the ICC were moving towards the same position by saying that such a milieu, even if a "throwback to the sixties", could not be serious revolutionaries. We ourselves have serious criticisms of libertarian methodology and organisational practice but none of this indicates that there is a lack of serious commitment to revolutionary activity. The ICC must justify this slander.

4. behaving in a responsible manner .. etc.

Now this really is a Catch 22 situation. The ICC, in order to prove that this sectarian ridden milieu cannot behave in a responsible manner, will themselves act in a sectarian manner by refusing to act responsibly with the rest of the milieu - thus proving (sic) that the milieu cannot act in a responsible manner. A real piece of doublethink. Any attempt to act responsibly and in a non-sectarian manner will evince a sectarian response from the ICC and a refusal to involve themselves in a responsible non sectarian activity. Just who is being sectarian and who is being responsible here?

5. Now the ICC letter would have been depressing enough if it had stopped at this point. However the ICC are not content to only expose themselves partially - its the whole hog for them or nothing at all. The third paragraph of the letter is the real killer. One can almost imagine the scene. They've written the first two paragraphs: the writers pause, realising the weakness of the arguments therein, realising how easily they can be refuted. They are thus forced to put down in black and white the REAL reason why they don't want to be involved.

"we do not want to participate in any such activity with you."

The non existent underlining of the last word positively shrieks at the reader. After all the flannel of the preceding paragraphs, after all the smokescreen of 'responsibility', 'sectarian', 'dillitantes' etc. etc., the central point that any activity involving Aberdeen is verboten finally comes to the surface. And why? Because we are deemed to have "been involved in the effort to break our organisation". {In fact this is the corrected version. The original, covered in snopaque, reads "your effort to break our organisation")

It is necessary here and now to publicly, before the whole proletarian milieu, REFUTE THIS CALUMNY, to deny ABSOLUTELY this false accusation of the ICC, not merely to clear our own name since even the most ridiculous of lies, if not refuted, take on some reality by repeated telling, but because it is around this assertion that the ICC will hinge its continued refusal to involve itself in the activities of the proletarian milieu in Britain. Let us therefore state clearly, here and now, that we are not in any way involved in any attempt to break, destroy, or even mutilate the ICC. Readers of the bulletin should be only too clear that our present activity, public as it is, is based upon an understanding of the need to combat sectarianism within the proletarian milieu. Our actions speak for themselves. As to the assertion that in the past we have been involved in attempts to break, destroy the ICC, we would refer readers to the text which follows this letter wherein we attempt to give a clear picture of our development vis a vis the ICC over the past year or so.

Aberdeen and the ICC

This is not the first time that the ICC has attempted to con the proletarian milieu into believing that our criticisms of their activities was part of a well laid plot to destroy them. It is therefore about time that we showed the stupidity and falsity of these claims. To do this we are forced into the murky past of the ICC and we hope that our readers will bear with us. What follows is not an attempt at an analysis of the ICC, let alone an attempt to analyse the events in that organisation in 1981, merely an attempt to refute this infamous assertion that the ex-comrades of the ICC in Aberdeen who produce his bulletin, were ever involved in any attempt to break the ICC.

By the early summer of 1981 it was obvious that a crisis was brewing within the ICC. A number of comrades, mainly in the British section, World Revolution, had resigned over what they identified as the negative way in which the political positions of the organisation were developing and the monolithism and sectarianism they considered rife. Partly in response to these resignations a group of comrades, again predominantly in the British section, proposed the formation of a faction within the organisation so as to allow a coherent response to the problems they saw. The basis for this tendency was later outlined in their foundation document.

"INTRODUCTION

1) For some time now a growing number of comrades have been becoming increasingly concerned about the state of the ICC. Different comrades, more or less independently, became aware of a number of problems including,

- (i) The numerical stagnation of the ICC and the growing number of resignations.
- (ii) An increasingly 'routinist' attitude towards our activity and our intervention, reflected above all in the declining quality of the press.
- (iii) The failure to deepen our analysis of class struggle beyond the level of abstract generalisations.
- (iv) The increasingly bizarre nature of our analysis of inter imperialist conflict, election results and every aspect of the life of the bourgeoisie.
- (v) The development of an organisational practice which, while rejecting monolithism in theory, was becoming increasingly monolithic in practice.

Constructive criticism of all these weaknesses in the work of the ICC can be found in the internal bulletins and International internal bulletins. At first sight these different problems don't seem to be related to each other. However in every case comrades who tried to address these problems found that it was impossible to have a meaningful collective discussion which would enable us to resolve them. On the contrary the response we got was indifferent, patronising or (increasingly) hysterical. But whatever their tone the common content of these replies was to deny that the problems we were concerned with even existed. We found, to our astonishment, that we seemed to be confronting the kind of bureaucratic apparatus, jealously guarding "its" organisation, which we had naively assumed only existed in leftist and other bourgeois organisations.

This experience forced us to ask ourselves whether these different problems were in fact related. Our initial conclusions suggest that not only are they related, they have reached the stage where they are become mutually reinforcing. We further concluded that it was no longer possible to improve the work of the ICC through piecemeal criticism, or through the established organisational framework. We decided therefore to form a Tendency through which to address the various problems in the ICC in a more systematic and concerted way."

from "The Formation of An International Tendency within the ICC."

The Aberdeen section of WR, though we were in sympathy with a number of the concerns of the Tendency, did not join it. We considered at the time that its formation was premature, since we were unable to see a coherent thread in the many concerns expressed. In addition we felt that the formation of such a fraction would produce a response from the central organs which would merely raise the tension and set the tendency on a trajectory outside the organisation.

At about the same time a prominent end founder member of the ICC and a member of the central organs of the organisation, one MC, wrote a text commenting on the situation within the ICC in which he located the problems of the organisation in an alien, menacing influence which had to be eliminated. As the tendency foundation text introduction noted:

"This text was written before we had a chance to read MC's latest, denouncing a "tendency" within the ICC. It really is ironical that when at last a member of the International Secretariat admits that those of us who have been saying that there is something seriously wrong with the ICC were right all along, he tries to pretend that it is all our fault! We can assure MC from our own experience (if he will excuse this lapse into empiricism) that our influence in the ICC has, until now, been minimal. It is to overcome this that we have finally decided to form the Tendency which MC seems to think has been secretly directing the work of the ICC for the past three years. So he who seeks the cause of the problems in the ICC must look elsewhere. We cannot claim (in all modesty) to yet be more than an extremely weak expression of, or reaction against, these problems.

The other notable feature of MC's text is that it quite openly refuses to deal with the political questions which have been raised by the various elements which now form the tendency. Instead it, in effect, calls on the ICC to kick us out before the political discussion has even begun. Like most of MC's recent texts, its aim is organisational rather than political. This simply proves yet again that one cannot be a bureaucrat, (even a minor one), and political thinker at the same time. To see this kind of degeneration in someone who has played such an important role in the revolutionary milieu is at once sad and frightening."

From: Intro to Draft of "The Formation of an International Tendency."

The response of the central organs of the ICC was predictable. They wholeheartedly endorsed MC's text. They seemed to believe that they should be the arbiter of whether a tendency was or was not to exist and gave a version of the statutes of the organisation which denied the tendency separate meetings, correspondence etc., defining these as secret, conspiratorial practices outwith the accepted parameters of the organisation. Not surprisingly many tendency members soon grew disheartened at the prospect of discussion on these premises and left the organisation. Some kept material they had when they left such as internal bulletins and others in London took a typewriter from a store of machines in order to continue their political life and some archival material which they informed the organisation they intended to copy and return. The response of the central organs to these latter was hysterical and focused on the morals of such activity rather than on the political consequences. The Aberdeen and Edinburgh comrades of the ICC were attacked for stressing that the loss of a few magazines and a couple of typewriters was paltry as compared with the collapse of the British section of the ICC and we were falsely accused of supporting such thefts. At this juncture and after many letters, we wrote to the entire organisation summarising our position, especially in the light of new attacks then being launched at an ex tendency member from France - Chenier, which attempted to identify him as a police spy. This we saw as yet another smokescreen to divert the membership's attention away from the political questions onto false trails of moral turpitude, the evil of

keeping your internal bulletins and the supposed penetration of the ICC by police spies. We quote here the entire letter since we have no wish to be accused of compulsive quotation. We therefore apologise if much of the letter is obscure. We feel however that the full text will accurately give our position at the time, a time when we were still inside the ICC, a time immediately following the departure of the majority of the Tendency.

Aberdeen
26th October 1981

Comrades

The recent circular letter from the WREC Secretariat of Oct 15th, closely followed by the text of the 15th, from Exeter, in their studied evasion of the real issues that confront us, merely tempt us into another debilitating chase to pin down the half truths, the distortions and the untruths. Tempting as it is to annotate the former in order to drag out what is being said, what is being avoided, and what actually WAS said by various comrades at various times, we refuse to be drawn onto this exhaustive path once more. The time for that is past. The only 'winner' to emerge from these destructive "you said, we said, you said" arguments, are those who wish to avoid the political issues. In this letter we will attempt to stick to the major political questions that are raised in both the circular letter and the text from Exeter, political questions which bring into question the very existence of the ICC.

1. On the Question of the Expulsions

We think the arguments put forward to justify this are preposterous. We don't think that the present situation can be compared to the occasions in the past where the organisation has refused to accept resignations. In these situations the refusal to accept a resignation had a meaning, a reality which derived from our real ability to affect specific aspects of the real world, that is to say, by refusing to accept a resignation we were saying to a comrade that, despite his intentions, for our part we still considered him a part of the organisation. This had real consequences which we controlled, that the comrade's place in the organisation was still open to him without going through the process of candidature and that the comrade was free to contribute to our internal debate in International Internal Bulletins, which he would still receive, with access to correspondence and group meetings etc. It is not a case of keeping a comrade in against his will or forcing him to do something he doesn't want to do - we know that is impossible - if a comrade wants to leave we can't stop him - our acceptance or rejection of his resignation deals only with our behaviour. We have only two choices here: we can say that we don't accept the consequences of his resignation and we continue to treat the comrade as a member or we are free to accept the consequences of the resignation and thus confirm it. In this case, of course, we are still free to add whatever criticisms of a Comrade's political behaviour we feel is necessary. What makes no sense, either logically or politically, is to refuse a resignation, to say "no we don't accept the consequences of your actions, you're still in the organisation and to prove it were expelling you."

We ask all comrades to consider how this must appear to the outside world. For those unfamiliar with the situation the announcement in WR43 could only be meaningless. For those familiar with the events it could only seem a lie. If some form of the gobbledegook and doublethink contained in the circular is to appear in public it can only further discredit the organisation. It will seem as a clumsy effort to cover a lie or as evidence of our increasing estrangement from reality. (note 1)

We would wish to take up one further point on this issue. We want to dispute once again the Sec's assertion that comrades who refuse to accept the terms of the Sec's resolution are, by definition, outside the platform of the ICC. If the taking of material at the point of a split is anti-proletarian and absolutely unacceptable to the collective understanding of the ICC then why were we accepted with open arms when we split with the CWO? The Sec is correct to point out that they advised us to return the CWO's materials, that hasn't "slipped our minds", but neither have we forgotten that we rejected their advice and that they took us into the ICC with considerable quantities of CWO materials, a fact which was no secret to the ICC, and some of which material now graces the archives of the ICC. It should be noted that there was no attempt thus to destroy the CWO, no keeping of material which we knew the CWO had no other copies of.

2. The Question of Tendencies

There are many aspects of this question - the significance of the emergence of a tendency, its mode of functioning, its relationship to contacts and candidature, how to act at Public Meetings, how our press deals with it etc. etc. - all these aspects the ICC must define for itself once and for all at forthcoming congresses. For the moment we want only to deal with a tendency's mode of functioning. To quote from the circular:

"... the methods employed by tendency members only accelerated the departure of comrades. Why? Because members of the Tendency flouted and opposed the methods the organisation has set itself for conducting its work. And being part of this tendency, or aiding and abetting it - like the comrades in Aberdeen - could only condone such actions and encourage more of them, accelerating the trajectory of these comrades outside the organisation."

Or as Exeter says:

"What is unprincipled activity? ... organising secret meetings while pretending to be members of the organisation - distributing secret texts."

If the Sec is referring here to the tendency's insistence on its right to its own meetings and correspondence then we can only reject the Sec's interpretation of our Statutes. If we accept the possibility of tendencies and refuse to suppress them, which, according to our statutes we do, then as far as we are concerned that can only mean that we allow them the means to function as a collectivity within the larger collectivity of the whole organisation. A tendency is not just a group of comrades who share similar views on specific issues and happen to say similar things in IBs and at our congresses. If we say that they are allowed to act collectively then they must be allowed to meet together to correspond and to discuss in order to prepare their collective contribution to our discussions. It's not a question of allowing them secret meetings or texts or whatever. On the contrary we insist that they understand that their discussions and contributions are not their private or personal concern but are part of all our discussions. Therefore we insist that their collective efforts are returned to the Organisation as a whole. For us that doesn't mean, and can't mean a refusal to allow a tendency to meet and deliberate together as a separate grouping, as part of the process of collective intervention in our internal life. Obviously there is much more to be said on this but we would ask comrades to investigate how tendencies in the proletarian movement operated in the past and not just in the ICC. All we want to add here is that we believe that a major factor in the exit of the tendency, this one, and all prior ones, is the ICC's practice of suppressing them in defiance of our statutes by refusing them the basics for their existence. That's why we have no sympathy with all the outrage and hysteria emanating from the central organs on this question of secret texts and meetings. As far as we are concerned they weren't secret texts but tendency texts. We think the existence of a tendency represents less danger to the ICC than the suppression of a tendency by the central organs by this sort of demand which effectively cripples any such manifestation and labels their legitimate actions unprincipled. It is therefore no surprise to anyone that every tendency that has formed within the ICC has been subjected to this and has precipitately fled the organisation. Comrades must look to their own actions as well as to those of the tendency in order to discover why these comrades left when they did.

3. Aberdeen

In their treatment of the Aberdeen section in their response to the furore (note 2) occasioned by these activities we believe that the Sec has not only been dishonest but has also stepped outside the platform and statutes of the organisation. On the one hand they have said that they will not trust us with the funds necessary to carry out a task which we were delegated to do and are in the process of completing but on the other hand they state categorically that we are not suspended from the organisation and that we are free to carry out other tasks. We think that they are acting in a manner alien to the ICC's conception of a militant. We don't have, and never have had, inside the ICC, a hierarchy of different types of militant receiving different levels of trust from the organisation, trusted to do some tasks and not others. This is NOT the way we operate. A comrade is either a militant of the organisation, trusted with the resources of the organisation or he is not. We can't have partial trust, partial members. It's an intolerable situation for us as a section. The central organs must tell us where we stand. We can't continue in this neither fish nor fowl situation.

But let us state again how we have been seeing the situation. Firstly we had no intention of resigning. Despite our criticisms of the organisation and our growing concern at the way things were shaping up we've been arguing our heads off to anyone who would listen over the past few months that resignation was not the way forward – cf. our letters to HL and ME and to the Tendency. We refused to join the tendency not only because we thought its formation was premature but also because we thought that the way it was constituted was likely to lead/drive it rapidly out of the organisation. This had been our position both individually and collectively throughout the events above. Despite this the WREC Sec chose instead to rely on the remarks supposedly made by one comrade which none of us in Aberdeen can remember being made about comrades in Aberdeen in the present period and which did not represent our views. Whose fourth hand rumours now? As for 'ripping off' the organisation, we think our views have been consistently distorted by the WREC Sec. We can't see any fundamental difference between our views and those of Huddersfield or Birmingham. Let us once more quote from Cormack's letter:

"In this situation our overriding priority is to reply to the political analysis behind the actions; to argue as clearly that we are NOT a sclerotic organisation, that we DO have a vital role to play within the communist movement and the struggles of the proletariat; to point out to the comrades involved . . . we remain, according to their own analysis, part of the communist movement and have need of our physical and political resources and that their actions can only hinder the fraternal relations which will have to exist in their and our future activity." (letter of 25/9/81)

However we are clearly wasting out breath saying all this. The Sec's circular letter tells us plainly that it doesn't matter what we say:

"Whatever the comrades of Aberdeen write, they are on the way out of the organisation unless they soberly assess their trajectory."

Let us be clear. For the Sec it's our actions which are putting us outside the ICC. What do they mean by this? Is it our receipt of secret texts of the tendency? We have already said what we think of this. It is our understanding of this that the Tendency were remaining within the statutes in the partial circulation of those texts and it was up to them to decide when and how they returned their deliberations in a collective manner to the whole organisation. As for our own texts and letters within this period, there has been nothing secret about them. We have ensured their total circulation to the ICC by distributing them to everyone and not just to the central organs. Because of the urgency of these debates and the incredible speed of events, delays in correspondence in these times can only be damaging and we do not have confidence in the ability or the will of the current central organ to achieve a speedy or full circulation. From references in other comrades' letters there seem to be at least two letters emanating from the Sec which we have not seen. We still haven't seen the letter from Lille threatening 'exposure' (note 3) which caused so much heat. We have no idea what the comrade in Leeds thinks of all this, nor the section in Southampton. If they haven't said anything, that in itself is significant and the central organs should let the rest of us know. And what about the London section? Has this section anything to say about current events? More importantly why have we not had an Internal Bulletin since July? How are the comrades in other national sections supposed to be able to follow these debates without an IB or an IIB?

Let's look at our other actions which, according to the WREC Sec are putting us on a self induced trajectory outside the organisation. They accuse us of fuelling hysteria. We would be the first to admit that we have been outraged by the outrageous behaviour of our central organs and that this has been reflected in our correspondence. However we ask comrades to ask themselves which is more damaging to our organisation, comrades being called liars or comrades telling lies, comrades being called Stalinists or comrades acting like Stalinists? People who are wiping their hands after calling a comrade a police agent have no right to lecture us about attacking political positions and not individuals. Its actions like that and such as in the Sec's last Resolution calling for a loyalty oath (why not a blood test), in which we can find the source of any hysteria in the organisation, not in the angry response.

It has thus been the position of the comrades in Aberdeen, both individually and collectively, that the ICC had not yet been proven to be sclerotic or dead. It was certainly becoming increasingly clear that the platform and statutes of the organisation had allowed differing interpretations of many political

questions to coexist within the organisation, questions which the dynamic of class struggle was forcing us to investigate and elaborate and which elaboration was resulting in differing interpretations being brought to the surface which were necessarily being discussed and evaluated. Such discussion and clarification has always, we believe, been a hallmark of an alive proletarian organisation as opposed to the impudent brushing aside of such questions, a-la-MC, as alien, menacing interjections, in an otherwise rosy, solved world. We reject the notion that there is and always has been, ONE ICC view of many of the points of debate over the past few years and that any criticism, any opposition, represents a shift, a change, a different (even alien) view to 'that' of the ICC. This is patently not true and for comrades to present the situation in this way is itself a major means of preventing a full elaboration of the differences - and their resolution. For example, to present the present development of the left in opposition and the nature of the capitalist state etc. as the ONLY possible development of the resolution previously agreed by the ICC, sanctified by time even as far back as the Communist International, is both utterly incorrect and clearly partisan. It is also a very effective way of polarising any discussion into that old duet - the ICC versus others.

Thus, however fearful we were of what we regarded as the turn to Sectarianism, exemplified in part by this kind of 'organisation of discussion', this kind of conception of what had been the major preoccupations of the current over the past two years or so, the crippling of discussion, the lurch into political positions on the state deriving directly from the period of counterrevolution, as proletarian militants our perspective was a struggle within the ICC, no matter how hard, to reverse this turn back to the sectarian sterility of the 30s and 40s. Our commitment was to continue the painful work of the past ten years, to produce in the ICC a live vital proletarian organisation looking to the future and open to the discussion and clarification of political questions which the development of class struggle was forcing upon us, so that our intervention in the class struggle would aid the development of proletarian revolution, an organisation which could take its place proudly within the proletarian milieu, trusted by that milieu and able to act as a key part of the political leadership, a pole of clarity which is essential for the destruction of capitalism.

4. The Chenier Affair

However the Chenier Affair has put all this into question. First of all let us say that we take the WREC Sec's point about using 2nd and 3rd hand information from people outside and hostile to the organisation and then adding our own conclusions to such. Whatever our own feeling about who can and who cannot be trusted in this affair, we haven't helped, in this instance, to create the foundations for an objective analysis of the affair. However our understanding of this affair remains unchanged. It does not depend in any way on any information received from Lille. It depends on:

- a. The public pronouncement in RI declaring Chenier 'suspicious' and 'dangerous'.
- b. The open and widespread rumours about him being a police agent. It is irrelevant here who started these rumours, although it seems obvious enough to us. Taken in conjunction with the ICC's public statement, unless the ICC says otherwise, it can only be believed by the milieu that we endorse them.
- c. KT's presentation to the London section in which Chenier is clearly and unequivocally indicted as a police agent. We quote:

"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."

We presume that KT was speaking on behalf of the central organs and explaining the rationale behind the public pronouncement, even if no evidence whatsoever was given in the presentation.

Taken together it seems absolutely clear to us that the ICC is attempting to politically destroy the comrade in question on evidence which is utterly non-existent. Whatever the reasons for this, whether it is a mistake, self deception or something more conscious and sinister, we believe that it is absolutely unacceptable in a communist organisation. We think that it has done irreparable damage already, both inside the organisation and in the milieu at large. It has reinforced all the anti-party elements in the proletarian milieu, damaged whatever progress we had made on the question of sectarianism and monolithism and created an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust throughout the milieu, discredited us

as an organisation and has seriously compromised our ability to carry out serious debate internally in the future.

These actions of the central organs of the ICC effect such a marked move away from the essential basis of the ICC hitherto that all comrades must re-evaluate the ICC itself and their own position within it. As we have said in our text and appeal on this question, the Chenier affair stands on its own. In this sense it must be seen as an event of such importance that the consequences will decide the future of the ICC itself. However much some comrades may see it as one more step in a progression of mistaken, confused or unprincipled actions by the ICC, every comrade, wherever he stands on the discussions of all the other questions we have mentioned earlier, must decide which side he is on in the Chenier affair. Whatever you think about the role of the Central Organs, the Left in Opposition, the State in Decadent Capitalism, how to conduct discussions etc. etc., these pale into insignificance before the fact of a proletarian organisation carrying out a political assassination on one of its former members without a shred of evidence whatsoever. There are no easy options on this one, no half way house where one can rest and let the furore slip by you

The WREC Sec in their circular letter says that we must consider the possibility that no one agrees with us. First of all of course this is patently not true as the letter from ex-members recently circulated clearly shows and as calls and correspondence received from existing members also shows. But let us take the Sec at its word. What indeed if the bulk of the membership of the ICC is willing to accept the present situation regarding Chenier and validates the actions already taken? What an indictment of the ICC! Before the whole proletarian movement. Here we have a situation akin to the most bizarre, surrealist parodies of bourgeois justice. The judge has already pronounced sentence and is donning the black cap. Only now are the jury being asked for their verdict and are being told that the evidence to substantiate both judgement and sentence will be given them after the trial is over. How like the Moscow Trials!

If this is to be the accepted practice of the ICC where then will the ICC stand before the proletarian milieu and the class? The line will already have been drawn. Those who are willing to wait until after the 'execution' (November) to hear the evidence, stand as condemned as those who carried out the judicial murder. The ICC is already acting in a manner that is totally unacceptable in a proletarian organisation. Those willing to judge, condemn and carry out sentence on such a basis have been seen to be acting thus long since.

If the comrades of the ICC are prepared to be involved in these disgusting affairs they are as much part of the rot as those who carry them out. The ICC will indeed have been proven to be as dead as a doornail, for what possible respect can anyone have in the milieu for an organisation which is willing to destroy a militant in such a manner and on such a basis?

How could any militant or political organisation possibly trust an organisation, regard it in comradely fashion, see it as a part of the future party of the proletariat, as a pole of regroupment, as a political leadership?

Even within the organisation itself the burden of such disgusting behaviour will be immense. For every militant there will always be the questions:

How far can I go in this discussion before I am condemned as an alien force, a menace, a petit bourgeois?

How far can I go before I am regarded as suspicious?

How far before I am a police spy?

Comrades, if this is indeed the future, as it is the present for the ICC as the Sec says, if indeed the bulk of the organisation wholeheartedly accepts this reality, then you will have categorically destroyed the best organisation the proletarian movement has managed painfully to produce since the last revolutionary wave. You will have been responsible for the creation of a monster which every thinking militant throughout the milieu can only regard with extreme suspicion, an organisation which no proletarian militant worth his salt would approach with a barge pole until a period prolonged of self rehabilitation has been carried out.

Until it is made clear to us whether this is or is not the present position in the ICC we see no value in meetings such as that projected in November, in post trial justifications. The Chenier affair is not a subject for discussion, for this would be like discussing the culpability of the corpse as we take it down from the gallows. Rather it is a subject for outright condemnation, a condemnation which, if it does not erupt from the membership of the ICC as whole, will mark the pronouncement of death for the ICC as a living, vital, open organisation of the class able to take up any position other than outcast in the regroupment of revolutionary forces.

Ingram: Cormack: Ferguson: HC: / Aberdeen
GM / Edinburgh

Notes to the letter:

1 The position of the central organs of the ICC with regard to those who had resigned and taken materials such as IBs and a typewriter with them was that their resignations were not accepted and instead the ICC would exclude them from the organisation (and this AFTER they had resigned), because of the manner of their resignation.

2 This refers to the fact that Aberdeen had been arranging the printing of a pamphlet for WR and without telling Aberdeen AT ALL the WREC Sec had decided to ensure that no further funds to pay for this would be forthcoming. Despite what a recent Internationalism-Tampa correspondence seems to say about this matter the text of the pamphlet was returned to the ICC when we left the organisation as a matter of course.

3. This letter is still unknown to us. We have been told that it refers to the exposure of militants of the ICC before the proletarian milieu as lacking seriousness shown by the taking of drugs at a political gathering in France. Without sight of the letter however we cannot really say what its significance is.

4. See issue No 1 of this bulletin for our public statement on this affair.

The above letter, in summing up our understanding of the situation within the ICC during our last days in that organisation, shows clearly that while members of that organisation we in no way attempted to "break" or "destroy" the ICC. Our concerns to the last were to reform it by drawing members' attention to the problems afflicting it.

By the middle of the next month the central organs of WR and the ICC had taken decisive steps which resulted in the Aberdeen section and other sections of the ICC in Britain leaving that organisation. On Guy Fawkes night they entered the homes of former members and took material belonging to those persons, tried to reclaim monies they claimed were theirs, took personal and hostage material and generally acted in a manner totally unacceptable in a communist organisation. We in Aberdeen alerted the rest of the milieu and the ICC to this situation and for our pains received a hysterical response from the ICC. To this we replied on 25th November once more but this time from outside the ICC, giving a resume of our position.

Aberdeen
25th November

To the WREC Sec

We are in receipt of your letter of 15th November. It is good that you have sent it not only to other comrades who have abandoned the ICC though we note that you have omitted Rowntree and the Manchester comrades, but also to the CWO, who will now be able to see the collective lunacy the ICC is reduced to at first hand. There is thus no need for us to point out the internal incoherence of the letter, the fact that arguments in one paragraph are flatly contradicted in others or even later in the same paragraph, or that points being made at one place are justified with reference to something or someone entirely different.

However in all this bizarre material there are a couple of things which we would wish to comment on and bring to the attention of all receivers of the letter.

1. With reference to your recent spree (note 1) the logic of your defence (sic) is clear. They behaved badly to us so it is OK to do the same to them eg. you say:

“What you leave out of your Victorian melodrama is what the ex tendency comrades did to begin with.”

Well apart from the act that we have already spoken on this question and the fact that this slanders some members of the ex tendency who have done nothing at all, by this sort of logic ANYTHING is possible as policy for a proletarian organisation if the ‘others’ did it first. This is a very clear exposition of how clouded your appreciation of what the duty of a proletarian organisation is under such circumstances, whatever the provocation. This cloudiness is even clearer in the matter of Aberdeen’s response to the original taking of typewriters. It is an utter and base lie to say, as you do,

“Aberdeen publically defends the position that when you leave a proletarian organisation you are entitled to steal the resources.”

This we repeat is LIE which only your collective hysteria has prevented you alone from understanding, despite repeated Attempts by us to direct you to what we have really said on the matter. We have no intention of YET AGAIN quoting from our letters. Those who wish to remain blind and deaf will do so despite the fact that they have eyes and ears so long it would appear as they can use this evil slander to blacken our names.

2. We don’t understand this cryptic reference to Aberdeen’s secret correspondence. (note 2) Is this another red herring to confuse your members, another slander to avoid responding to political questions? So far as we are aware everything we have written has been extensively circulated (despite the opposition this perfectly respectable action has brought forth from certain quarters.) Some elucidation is certainly required or is this to be another accusation with no evidence forthcoming? Will you ask your members to take this on trust as you asked the CWO to take your filth about Chenier on trust because, “you’ve known us for a few years”. You seem to allude here to some well organised network of secret writings from us. I assure you all comrades, this is as much of a mystery to us as the evidence for Chenier being a police agent is to the ICC.

3. Ewe are intrigued by the phrases quoted from the letter from Chenier to Klara (note 3) and since you obviously think it important, would wish to see the whole letter. As it stands it merely shows that one comrade at least didn’t hold out much hope for the ICC in June, a fact which should be only to well known to you since the first texts by the Tendency and interventions at the July Plenum clearly indicated that this was the case. The whole text comrades if you intend to use this to prove some point.

4. It is indeed strange that you are accusing all and sundry of slander when this very letter shows that it is a technique you yourselves are becoming more and more adept at. What in heaven’s name is slanderous about what Aberdeen has been saying about your recent activities? Do you deny having done EXACTLY what we said you did? NO! In fact in this particular letter you appear to be revelling in it. Well, you know what they say about pigs and shit.

More, it is you who are hiding behind the police in this disgraceful affair. (note 4) You were confident as you broke into people's homes and stole their personal possessions that your victims would put proletarian security before their own or their physical safety and NOT do what they could to protect themselves. So don't give us any more crap about anybody hiding behind the bourgeois state or children. The only difference is that you do so willingly, knowingly, as a part of a decided practice. We do so in defence because we can see no other way of protecting ourselves, our belongings and dependents from the ICC hit squads. And to add insult to injury you have the cheek to tell us in this letter that you "defend the principle of non-violence within the working class." And this after your recent demonstration of just where you really stand on this issue - a graphic demonstration of the disparity between principle and practice in the ICC.

5. But worse is to follow. You threaten that you intend to continue carrying out such acts. You intend to continue to attack peoples homes and steal their personal belongings and would do so WHETHER THE PREVIOUS THEFTS OF TYPEWRITERS HAD TAKEN PLACE OR NOT. This is absolutely clear from your letter.

"The ICC fully intends to recover the material and money."

"The bulletins belong to the collectivity."

Your statements about recovery are nowhere specific to those who took typewriters, they are not even related to injustices you feel have been committed against you. ANY comrade who leaves owing any dues or who keeps his bulletins, is automatically due for a visit by the heavy mob. We can only be grateful that this letter now makes this policy CRYSTAL CLEAR.

In such circumstances how can there be anything but an atmosphere of fear between comrades who have left and the ICC, whatever their response to the events of the past six months. Yet you have the audacity to berate us for trying to ensure that such performances are not enacted in our homes!

Our threat stands. You invade our homes at your peril. You steal our belongings at your peril. You destroy our equipment at your peril. Our threat stands until you cease these outrages and repudiate these policies.

6. The greatest tragedy, of course, is that throughout all this you have refused to make any political response at all to the disintegration of the British Section of the ICC. So fixated have you been with the loss of typewriters and the principle of splitters not taking Internal Bulletins that the (presumably) inconsequential fact that half the membership of WR has left has received no comment at all, no political analysis whatsoever. Comrades, you desperately need to swallow your bile and attempt in a calm, rational manner to study what is happening to you.

7. Your comments at the end of your letter about what we in Aberdeen brought into the ICC are sadly reminiscent of what the CWO said when half its membership left(5). The leavers had leaver really understood what the CWO was about, in fact had never really been CWO members. In fact over a two year period 75% of the members of the CWO had never really been members of the CWO. Since then the CWO has, in this respect at least, learned a lot about what the duties and responsibilities of being part of the proletarian milieu are. It is a sad, sad affair that in this respect you demonstrate that the ICC has a considerable amount to learn about precisely the same point today.

8. To conclude, if the actions of some of the ex-tendency, on leaving the ICC, were a blow to proletarian unity, then the recent performances of the ICC, from the Chenier affair to Breaking and Entering, have undoubtedly set back the proletarian movement at least a decade. You can't continue to blame others for your shit. Nobody believes you, comrades, and the sooner you admit that the better for all of us.

Aberdeen

Notes to the letter.

1. This refers to the forced entry into the homes of ex-members
2. The WRECSec letter alleged that Aberdeen had been in secret correspondence for some four months, presumably for nefarious purposes.

3. This refers to a letter from Chenier to a member of the London section of WR which we believe was purloined when an ex comrade's house was broken into, along with hostage materials belonging to that other comrade. Despite repeated requests the ICC has never let us see that letter.
4. Aberdeen was accused of hiding behind the bourgeois state by threatening the ICC with the police if the hit squads visited us. Our bluff succeeded and we were not 'visited'..

Nowhere in this letter or in the earlier one is there any attempt to break or destroy the ICC. Our intentions are quite clear, to explain clearly to the ICC and the rest of the milieu, the effects of the actions taken, and to urge the ICC to reappraise their decisions and actions.

Since this letter was written we have continued to act in a completely responsible manner towards the ICC and we will continue to do so in the future. It may be unpleasant for the ICC to see their actions made public but this is not an attempt to destroy them. To claim so would be like blaming those who report on wars for being the instigators of the bloodshed. Such a position is clearly ludicrous. Nor do we have we any desire to continually truckle through the trough. However, while the ICC continue in their press to attempt to justify their activities it is necessary for the innocent to defend themselves against slanders repeated there.

Once more we say there has been no attempt to destroy the ICC on our part. Such notions arise exclusively from paranoia on the part of that organisation. The real tragedy is that this paranoia is essentially preventing the ICC from contributing to the process of clarification within the proletarian movement. It is therefore to be hoped that they will soon find the courage to clear their collective minds and abandon this self imposed isolation in an attempt to rehabilitate themselves in the eyes of the whole milieu so that they can once again take their place in the vital task of clarification and the regroupment of revolutionaries.

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LETTER from the CWO

June 1982.

Dear Comrades,

Several factors have necessitated that we make a further attempt to engage you in a political dialogue, the most recent being the erratic nature of your response to the Falklands issue. Although we regretted the psychological barrier that forced you to do so indirectly we welcomed your desire to distribute our leaflet on the Falklands as a step out of your self-imposed ghetto. The subsequent zigzags with contradictory messages emanating about whether or not you intended to distribute it - and return of a used stencil, leaves us completely bewildered as to what to make of the affair. We are quite willing to offer you the chance to give out our leaflets on matters of importance, and to leave it to you to decide whether you feel our efforts are clear enough to merit distribution. But contact round such issues must be OPEN and UNAMBIGUOUS. Could you clarify whether you gave out this leaflet, and whether you would be prepared to consider giving out others in future?

We also have to clarify the question of 'joint' leaflets. We have no opposition indeed welcome where it is possible, the production of joint leaflets with other communist groups. However, joint leaflets can only be produced between political GROUPS. Unless you are informing us indirectly that you consider yourself as such (in which case we would reasonably have to inquire as to the political basis of such a claim), we would be committing nothing short of "crass opportunism" were we to produce a joint leaflet with a collection of individuals of no stated political positions; especially given that these individuals had consistently refused to meet with us for 9 months.

In order that a healthy political dialogue can take place it is essential for the Aberdeen comrades to "climb out of your private bastion and engage in dialogue". We are prepared to take Ingram's letter on our leaflet, and to interpret it as the beginnings of a willingness to debate (despite other indications to the contrary). The implications of the present war in the South Atlantic have shaken you out of your complacent isolation, and it is up

to us to seize the opportunity posed by this.

We accept that the phrasing of the leaflet may have given the idea that the war between Britain and Argentina was a 'plot'. At the time of writing we had no idea that the ICC said the war was a plot (a "phoney" war etc) arranged with Reagan's blessing. Had we been so we would have been much more careful to avoid any (false) impression that we thought so too. Given ICC ideas on the course of history (no war till the class is defeated) it is not surprising that they react to the war as a plot. We have always said that the crisis gives rise to both tendencies of war and revolution, and have never said that wars are impossible (or phoney) till the class is smashed. Thus, while we accept your criticism here we think it is a much more important point for you to ask what the recent war has shown about the ICC's course of history perspectives (and conversely those of the CWO).

On the other hand the points you make about "demands" show that - not surprisingly given the ICC's position - you have not even begun to think clearly about these vital issues. There is no parallel between a call for revolution and a call for limited actions against a limited war. Communists in any given situation call for the maximum that is objectively possible in order to cement the class struggle and achieve maximum gains in class consciousness. It is NOT 'unrealistic' to argue that, at the beginning of the war, to have called on workers to carry on struggles, not call off strikes, work overtime etc, AND to have taken the token symbolic actions against the war outlined, was realistic. The impact of even a small section of the class carrying out such actions would have been phenomenal, and we were right to call for them. We DONT think this could have stopped the war, since we dont, again unlike the ICC, believe that class struggle stops war, unless it becomes revolutionary. But such actions would have been blows for internationalism, heightened class tensions, given revolutionaries a focal point to agitate round and been a harbinger of bigger struggles ahead. Simply denouncing the war is not enough; we have to show that there is an alternative to parliamentary pacifism and pressurising the bourgeoisie, and that this lies in class opposition against the war. Even though we disagree with your comments we think that it is a positive sign that you are willing to pose the issue of demands and not simply rest on the old ICC position that the whole issue is irrelevant. We hope that this is a beginning of an attempt to deepen the debate on the issue, and to clarify the tasks which face us.

If there are some positive signs in Ingram's letter we wish we could say the same about the text 'Long March of the CWO' which we received (indirectly) recently. Here we are accused of many things, including the presentation of a 'rigid face' to the world; this text presents nothing but a soft arse. In it NOT A SINGLE ARGUMENT IS PRESENTED AGAINST ANY CWO POSITION. one searches through it in vain to find out what is wrong with our views. Gradually it becomes clear that we are not being criticised for having wrong views BUT FOR HAVING VIEWS AT ALL. The text points out that the CWO used to draw its views from the German Left, and now does so from the Italian Left. Despite attempts to imply that it has been dishonest and furtive the text itself shows any reader that this has been a gradual acknowledged and open process, as far as any process can be fully understood by those involved in it at the time. Our fault apparently lies in thinking that our views are correct! At any given point in time - though admitting past errors and also that our views may yet change - a group needs agreed position to intervene in the class, positions which it defends in a partisan manner. For our northern latitudinarians this is "dogmatism", "monolithism" and other phrases substituted for arguments. The TOTAL INABILITY of Aberdeen to organise any debate, either amongst themselves, or with others, for nine months shows clearer than anything else, that dialogue takes place round political positions, not round open mindedness or whatever. With all their calls for going forwards into the 80s the Aberdonians are in fact heading backwards to the libertarian existential angst of the 1960s ("How do you know you're right" "You could be

wrong" etc, etc) ALL this leads only in ONE DIRECTION, of which this text is a 'theoretical' justification TO INERTIA, since the burdens of possible error are too great.

We could go through this text pointing out its distortions (that the CWO doesn't analyse its history, doesn't debate etc.), its simple untruths (that we said the rate of profit was a "class line") and its ignorance (that we, or the PCInt are 'bordigist' and don't criticise the errors of Bordiga or the PCI), but there would appear to be little point, since the text simply festers with ill-will towards the CWO and all its works: that no amount of correction would appear to be able to heal. It is incredible that people who have argued themselves into total isolation and inertia can accuse us of not being open to debate and dialogue; the hostility with which they have reacted to ex-ICCers who ARE debating with us and KNOW that it is possible, is a self-condemnation. For despite all the talk about dogmatism in the CWO, when the Aberdonians denounce these faults they are really seeing their own image; Aberdeen in the Looking -Glass.

The behaviour recently exhibited by the comrades in Aberdeen comes in a long line of Ultimatum Thule actions, expressions of the chronic Aberdonian disease, cliquism. Cliquism is a far greater danger than sectarianism or dogmatism, since it is not susceptible to political argument at all. In the space of a few years the Aberdonians have shown themselves incapable of functioning within the only two communist groups in Britain (leaving aside the failings of these groups, which however do not prevent others from functioning within them.). Both these splits were accompanied by acrimony, and followed by bitterness. Within the CWO they were instrumental - as they admit - in the Liverpool split, and since leaving the ICC have failed to debate with anyone. Unless the comrades are willing to recognise - incredible thought! that some of the fault of all this might lie with themselves - the ONLY conclusion they can draw is that all groups are "rackets", and retire. Time is running out; it requires a massive effort from the guardians of the Holy Grail to realise that the faults they delight in attributing to others are in many cases their own. It needs revolutionary maturity to break from cliquishness, engage in dialogue and rebuild a political existence. The CWO may have made a long march (which is a stupid metaphor, since the long march was a success), to what we believe is political clarification. The Ultima Thulians face short step - to theorised inertia and the conclusion that no communist group was worthy of them. It is time that they began to accept some responsibility for their own "trajectory" to borrow a phrase, and realise that whatever faults the CWO and ICC had, the Aberdonians compounded them with their own cliquishness.

This letter is written with the hope and anticipation that you are willing to end your self-imposed isolation from the communist movement, and specifically to debate with, and engage in joint work with, the CWO,

for the CWO
B.G.Place.

OUR REPLY

Dear Comrades,

We think it best to address ourselves only to what we consider the most important political questions raised in your letter rather than chasing down every wild goose and red herring. Experience, both with yourselves and the ICC has taught us that such a chase tends to be fruitless.

The Falklands Leaflet

Firstly, on the question of the Falklands Leaflet, we think we have only ourselves to blame for your evident confusion about our position. We felt that the war not only demanded an intervention but was sufficiently important to warrant a joint intervention from as much as possible of the proletarian milieu in the UK. Without rehearsing the arguments again, it seemed to us that in a situation where a national capital was actively marshalling its working class behind imperialist slaughter it was necessary to make the attempt to overcome sectarian differences in a communist intervention against the war. We decided to make this suggestion to all the elements we knew of in the proletarian milieu and wrote accordingly. When we telephoned our comrade in Edinburgh to let him know what we intended doing he informed us that he was meeting with out the following day and it seemed obvious and quicker to ask him to broach the subject with you directly. We intended to follow through by sending you the same letter we sent everyone else, but unfortunately, it is clear from your letter that we didn't. We should also have kept you better informed about the aftermath of the initiative. It was an irresponsibility we'll try to rectify here. No, we didn't distribute the leaflet for the reasons we have already given you. (There's nothing mysterious about the stencil being used. To save time, one comrade began running off the leaflet before the meeting at which we discussed it). In addition, we felt it important that the intervention be a joint one, rather than a question of giving out a CWO leaflet. We think your squeamishness about joint political work with "a collection of individuals" as opposed to a self-proclaimed "GROUP" is a self-imposed limitation which is your own problem. There is no shortage of precedent for joint interventions of that sort in the history of the worker's movement. If you are worried about "crass opportunism", nothing could have been more opportunistic than for us to have prematurely constituted ourselves as an organisation just so that we could have done a joint intervention with you. We think that in a situation as serious as the one we faced, agreement on an anti-war intervention along revolutionary and class lines was sufficient for a joint effort on a specific intervention. For the future, we have every intention of pursuing the possibility of joint interventions whenever possible. As for giving out your leaflets, we have nothing in principle against giving out the leaflets of any communist organisation depending entirely on the particular circumstances of the intervention, or the content and on our own activities and capacities. We'll try in the future to be as open and unambiguous in our contacts about such issues as we can.

Debate With The CWO

It is clear from your letter and from what others have told us that you are convinced that we can't bring ourselves to have any contact with you because of "psychological barriers" and personal acrimony etc. Nothing could be further from the truth, as we thought we had already made clear to your comrade who visited us after our split from the ICC. Even if a legacy of personal hostility from our past involvement in the CWO did exist, we would consider it criminal to allow that to interfere with a political relationship. I think our attempt to engage the ICC in a joint intervention so soon after the very acrimonious split testifies to that. Our approach to you is a political one and in general has the same starting point as our approach to all the rest of the proletarian milieu. We don't refuse to debate with you any more than we would refuse to debate with anyone else. We have contributions we wish to make to the discussion within the proletarian milieu and inevitably these contributions will occasionally be concerned with the positions and practice of the CWO. We would expect you to respond to what we have to say and we would in turn respond to that. That seems to us to constitute debate and to be what we are currently engaged in. We don't think that there is any question of us withdrawing into a "self-imposed ghetto of isolation". It's a question

of deciding what is the best and most fruitful way of conducting any particular debate and that's fundamentally a tactical question depending on particular circumstances. Nobody in the revolutionary movement can afford to spend all their time conducting individual discussions with each and every element in the milieu. It's a question of political priorities and resources. With regard to yourselves our judgement is that at this particular time we can best say what it is we want to say about the CWO in the pages of our bulletin to ensure the widest possible audience. Given our own current situation and given your political positions and trajectory, our general priority is to address ourselves to the milieu as a whole rather than devoting considerable effort to what we would consider to be, at the moment, the fruitless task of addressing ourselves specifically to you. Clearly a more specific priority is to expend effort towards those elements in the milieu who to some extent share our preoccupations, and for the moment that doesn't include the CWO. Again there's no question of a retreat into isolation. In addition to the pages of the bulletin we have conducted and will continue to conduct face to face discussions with the elements we consider closest to us.

We don't think our approach to this differs in principle from your own but rather the problem arises from a tactical misjudgement on your part. You believed, mistakenly, that elements splitting from the ICC who still held to the need for centralised organisation could only move towards the CWO. Bluntly, your urgency for face to face discussion with us sprung from hopes of recruitment. There's nothing reprehensible about that, it's just that your judgement was wrong. While we can understand your puzzlement and your need to know why we weren't interested you should also be able to understand why our priority wasn't to make specific explanations to the CWO.

Aberdonian "Cliquism"

Unfortunately you've compounded your misjudgement by building theories about "psychological barriers" and "festering ill-will" to explain your rebuff. We repeat, our relations with you are entirely dictated by political criteria and have nothing whatsoever to do with personal hostility. We just don't have the time or room for that in the revolutionary movement. As for your accusations of "cliquism" (whatever this new -ism might be) we think that your polemics have degenerated into simple insult. You appear to have forgotten your own history. The Liverpool split from the CWO took place for compelling political reasons stemming from the confusion of the original regroupment. It's true that the Aberdonians were clearest about the need for a split but the political reasons we advanced were accepted without any equivocation by the rest of the organisation. Our own split from the CWO had nothing whatsoever to do with our alleged "inability to function within it". We functioned without criticism within the CWO from the day of its foundation until our split two years later. We split from the CWO for clear and compelling political reasons based on our rejection of the sectarian and monolithic theory and practice of that organisation. I think it's fair to say that much of our critique has since been accepted and partially assimilated by the CWO.* Similarly with the ICC we functioned within it without serious dispute for the better part of four years before splitting on the same question of monolithism and sectarian practice. We're not spending time refuting your slander for the sake of point scoring or to make ourselves feel better but because we think that the issues involved in the ICC split have vital repercussions for revolutionaries and it's essential that these issues are not obscured by attempts to explain the split in terms of individuals' psychological defects. To the extent that bitterness and acrimony were involved then certainly we must shoulder our share of responsibility like everyone else but we insist there is no room in the

* All the documents pertaining to these splits are available to anyone who contacts and asks for them.

revolutionary movement for the harbouring of grudges.

Sectarianism and the CWO.

Finally we want to take up your comments on our text "The Long March of the CWO". Your criticisms of it seem to us bizarrely misplaced in the light of what the text openly proclaimed its purpose to be. Firstly we had no intention of criticising there specific political positions of the CWO past or present (although we certainly have a critique to make and will do so in other texts), nor were we criticising you for holding positions, or changing your positions. We cant envisage organised revolutionary activity without the commitment to political positions or without the dynamic of change. All this is stated quite clearly in the text. What the text addressed itself to was the question of sectarianism and monolithism by attempting to draw the lessons which we believe are starkly illustrated by your own development. You started off your political life with one set of political positions which you defended in a manner which openly consigned everyone else outside your platform to the ranks of the bourgeoisie. The "defence" of your positions meant your total isolation from and rejection of the entire proletarian milieu in the most destructive and sectarian manner imaginable. Five years on the vast bulk of those positions you so brutally wielded to keep yourself separate from the proletarian milieu have been abandoned. Its clear to even you now how spurious, how trivial these positions were, however formally correct they might or might not have been. Today you have a completely new set of positions which in practice you "defend" just as intransigently and just as divisively. (we note for example that you apparently conceive only yourselves and the ICC to be part of the revolutionary movement in Britain.) And what lessons have you taken from this Odyssey? Simply that your positions were wrong then but are right now! Oh mea culpa. Has it not occurred to you that your current positions might prove to be just as spurious and just as trivial and inconsequential as your last set? We dont think that recognition of that possibility leads to existential angst or organisational inertia. It should lead to an understanding of what is historically necessary and inseparable from revolutionary activity (eg. bourgeois nature of Trade Unions, Parliament, National Liberation etc etc) and what is, for the moment either purely conjunctural (eg. Course of History analyses or Left in Opposition) or simply debatable (in the fullest sense of the word) like economic or the date of the death of the Russian Revolution. We think it should lead to a profound seriousness and responsibility about the gravity of taking up a position organisationally and constant assessment about whether or not there is a necessity to commit an entire organisation to any specific position. We think for example that there is nothing to be gained by programmatic incorporation of such a transient analysis as the Left in Opposition; we dont see any reason why all points of view cant be vigorously expressed in a single organisation. We think that one of the lessons to be drawn from your own experiences and that of the ICC should be a positive reluctance to leap into a programmatic commitment prematurely. Your own history is an undeniable example that in a revolutionary milieu as tiny, as fragmented and as remote from the life of the class as ours there is almost nothing to stand in the way of arbitrariness in the adoption of positions. Any organisation existing of two or three married couples and which views the rest of the revolutionary milieu with opportunistic contempt has very little antidote against idiosyncrasy. We dont think that recognition of that reality should lead to paralysis but rather to a profound caution about programmatic commitment about a position and to the understanding that once the adoption of a position becomes inescapable the defence of that position mustnt be taken up in a sectarian fashion. There is a world of difference between the partisan defence of a position as an element contributing positively to the overall process of clarification within the revolutionary milieu as a whole and the defence of a position as a means to build a barrier against that milieu. Clarity is not synonymous with certainty

and is not to be used as a sectarian cudgel to beat comrades.

If we flip the sectarian coin over we inevitably find on the other side a monolithic internal practice. The maintenance of sectarian purity has a tendency to militate against the existence of internal divergences. Internal debate and especially its public expression is seen as a threat to the sectarian identity of the organisation. You claim that it is possible to trace out your journey from the legacy of the KAPD to that of the Italian Left in your public press totally misses the point we are trying to make. Yes, we can pick out transition points in your transition from one pole to another (eg. B.G.Place's article) but what is entirely missing is any sign of the political process which underlies that. No sign of that debate can be seen; it is entirely lost to all the rest of the milieu and all the rest of us ever see is the "winning" side of the argument. What happened to divergences within the CWO on this issue? Were the dissenters all convinced or have they merely swallowed their scruples? Are the arguments they put forward now considered to have no weight, no substance at all? Its not as if the issue were a private CWO affair like the format of your paper or the number of your public meetings or whatever rather its a debate which is crucial to and concerns the whole revolutionary milieu. The result of your monolithic practice is to remove an entire part of that debate and relegate it to the status of private property. In addition the voices of those within the CWO who continue to disagree with the CWO 'position' are now effectively suppressed with no possibility of contributing to the debate unless they split from the CWO. Is this what you mean by the "partisan defence of positions"? The reality is that the CWO has never shown any sign of comprehending the complexity of what is one of the central issues of revolutionary organisation and that is how to deal with internal divergences and debate in a manner which benefits the whole revolutionary milieu. You have managed to deal with the monolithic consequences of your sectarianism only by virtue of the fact that you've spent most of your political life with less than a dozen members. Unfortunately the experience is entirely inappropriate to help in any understanding of how to deal with the central problem which now confronts the revolutionary movement.

As a final word, its depressing to note that, despite the political cartwheels you've turned since we left you, the years have totally failed to wither your own unique style. Comrades, read your letter again. Is that old familiar mixture of self-righteous bluster leavened with accusations and insults really your best effort at extending a fraternal invitation?
yours
Aberdeen.

- o -

LETTER from TAMPA

Since the publication of our first Bulletin we have received correspondence from a number of groups and individuals in the proletarian milieu, from Britain Europe and America. One such, the Tampa Workers Affinity Group also sent us a leaflet on the Falklands War which, along with their letter, we reproduce here.

" Dear Comrades,

We received a copy of your new journal. Enclosed is \$ 5.00 for your production expenses. You can send us more of the June issue if you like you like and we'll distribute it to our contacts here in the USA.

Also inside you will find a copy of our General Pronouncement on the

ICC splits (which you might already have seen) and a recent letter to us from their US section (Internationalism). In the next several weeks we will be, among other things, answering all of the issues brought out with three separate, but in reality interrelated, replies. 1. our views on Social Democracy, Lenin and the Russian Revolution; 2. our past relationship with the ICC and all of the wayward criticism of us made in their July 25th letter and 3. our analysis of the Pannekoek-Lenin controversy. We can tell you in advance that we were going after 'Ilych' with everything we have and be assured that we were going to nail him, and the ICC as well.

From your introductory statement we concur that the problem of political organisation is a central and pressing one for all communist revolutionaries. We intend to discuss this problem at length in our second reply to the ICC. Its pure distortion as the ICC knows, to describe our position on organisation as "federalist" or "localist". We have consistently shown marked, principled reasons -- the nature of the 2nd International, the Bolsheviks, the 'State in Transition', etc -- for our refusal to join the Current over the past several years. At the same time we have come to understand the paramount necessity for an internationally coordinated organisation of revolutionaries as an indispensable condition for victorious class struggle and we have made this point in the International Discussion Bulletin and even more vigorously in public pronouncements here in the US. It is the character of this body -- in its practice which causes the dilemma.

there seems to us to be no way that such a centralised organisation of revolutionaries can avoid bureaucratic corruption, regardless of the qualities and intentions of the members of the central International Bureau, without formal guarantees against a permanent division of labor within the organisation. Such would involve a mandatory rotation in part or in toto, of the composition of the International Secretariat on an annual or other temporal basis. What the organisation might lose in continuity and efficiency it would more than gain in real communist, integral self-activity of the organisation's membership and insure that no elitist stranglehold could evince itself within the organisation. We are confident that, given the high caliber of the revolutionary milieu of this epoch, any political and practical challenge to the proletariat could be met by such an organisational framework. Anyway more on this will be forthcoming with our up-coming Replies to the ICC.

FOR ANTI-STATE COMMUNISM
TAMPA WORKERS AFFINITY GROUP
(PUIG)

Copies of the Tampa 'General Pronouncement' and the letter in reply from Inter. can be obtained direct from Florida. The address of TWAG is P.O. Box 16000 SG Tampa, Florida 33687, U.S.A.

Their leaflet on the Falklands war is reproduced overleaf.

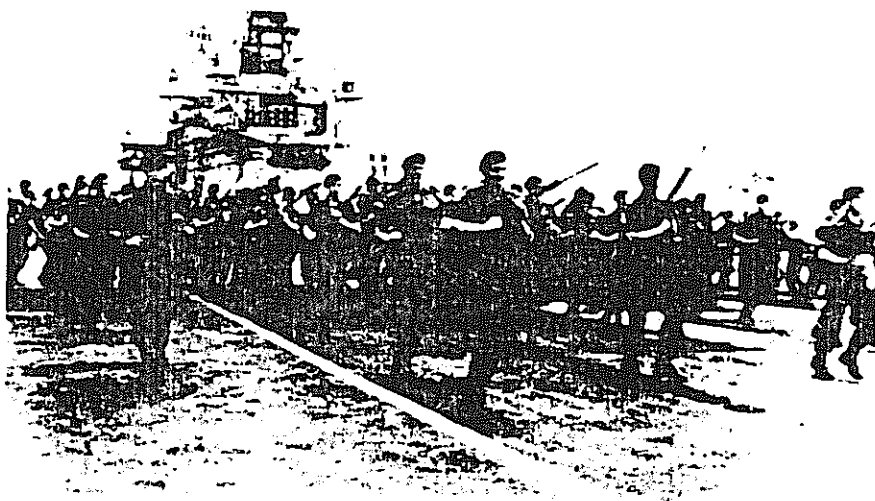
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TO HELL WITH THE WAR!



One, Two, Three -- What are we fighting for?

Fighting has broken out between Great Britain and Argentina over the Falkland Islands. The Falkland Islands? You mean people are dying for a desolate, rocky dot in the South Atlantic, and for national regimes which have done nothing but suppress the working-class?

What does this absurd war really mean? One thing is for sure, it's not about any high moral principles, the end of colonialism, self-determination of the 1800 Falklanders, or respect for "international law". The issues of the 200-mile territorial fishing rights and the prospect of drilling oil and mineral deposits for the winning "sovereign" party are relevant, but these aren't the overriding points either.

No, what this war means is just that: WAR! War for the sake of WAR! Destruction of human lives for the "glory" of the "mother-country". You see, the mutual economic and social systems of these two nation-states -- England and Argentina -- are in deep trouble and have been for some time. Each has a national economy in shambles -- massive unemployment, runaway inflation, industrial collapse and huge foreign debts -- and with no solution whatsoever in the cards for them. The only prospects for the Thatcher and Galtieri governments prior to the war fever was more domestic unrest and disorder -- strikes and riots by the working-class who are bearing the brunt of the social misery.

So this war came as heaven-sent, and in fact, was needed politically by both the British and Argentine governments to bolster their precarious rule with jingoism. And within each country all factions of the bourgeoisie -- including the Peronists in Argentina, and the Labor Party in England -- united as one rabid animal behind their right-wing governments. After all, the "opposition parties" are patriots, too!

The U.S. press which at first described the seizure of the tiny Falklands by one nationalist mob from another as a comedy, soon lined up behind closer ally Britain, and is now euphoric over this new violent sensation. Everybody in the U.S. is being pushed to take sides -- some for "Good Ol' England", others for rightful "Third World" Argentina.

But both sides are Aggressors! To hell with both regimes which are both enemies of the international working-class!

The main thing to keep in mind is that the Falkland War is the future on a small scale of what the capitalist rulers of the world have in store for humanity: Total Destruction of Civilization! due to the incurable crisis of their socio-economic system. This war is being fought, just like the horrible conflicts of 1914 and 1939, because War is the only answer every national ruling-class can give to the economic, political, moral, and cultural decay of their respective country.

War and patriotism are used to rope in the working-class, firmly tie it to the State and thereby prevent any class actions against the domestic misery of the exploiters. Jingoism can be used to stop strikes, clamp down on the workers with national sacrifice and discipline -- to again demand "Blood, Sweat and Tears", whether in Britain, Argentina, Nicaragua, Iran or Poland. And for what and for whom? So that when the global state of hostility between the real contenders -- the equally imperialist U.S. and Russian blocs -- reaches a certain threshold, those nuclear missile buttons will be pushed! In the meantime Thatcher's playboy son can continue to gallivant around the world while Harrier planes hit the murky deep! And the Argentine Generals can play with all of their Western-bought lethal toys!

American workers! Don't be taken in by these monstrous tricks the masters of this earth have to crush you. To prevent more future wars, to prevent the nuclear annihilation which is "on the agenda" for us if we fail to act in our own class interests, reject all calls for patriotic mobilization and Strike, Strike, Strike against the class enemy -- the bosses and their governments!



Falklands so firmly

Bloody good show!



Today they cheer me -- Maybe tomorrow the workers shoot me!



After the lousy war

We've got another one waiting in the wings!

TAMPA WORKERS AFFINITY GROUP
P.O. BOX 16000 SG
TAMPA, FLA. 33687

Another Look at the Organisation Question

Introduction

The one clear lesson that emerged from the recent traumatic and confused splits within the International Communist Current is the pressing need for a fresh look at the most central problem which confronts the revolutionary movement today - that is, the question of revolutionary organisation. The splits were the product of not so much the large number of political differences which began to surface latterly in the internal debates of the ICC, nor because of the gravity and seriousness of these differences, but because of the inability of the organisation to deal with those differences as a fruitful and necessary part of its life. Instead the differences were finally perceived as threatening and alien forces which had to be cut out of the body of the organisation. In this process the tendencies towards a monolithic and bureaucratic practice which had always been present, became absolutely dominant.

The background to the emergence and heightening of the differences within the ICC was the upsurge of class struggle at the start of the 80s beginning with the French Steel Strike, moving on through the British one and culminating in the Polish explosion. This wave of struggle was seen, more or less clearly, as a signal that we had entered a qualitative change of period with a corresponding change of emphasis in our work as revolutionaries. Up until then the overriding priority within the revolutionary movement which had appeared towards the end of the 60s was the urgent struggle for programmatic clarity for the re-appropriation of the theoretical lessons which had been produced from the last revolutionary wave, and, hand in hand with that, the struggle to integrate that clarity in the building of an organisation from the mass of fragmented elements making up the milieu. Both the ICC and the CWO are the fruits of this process. The scale and depths of the class upsurge triggered off with the French Steel strike produced undeniable tensions in the whole of the revolutionary movement as we tried to grapple with the task of transforming our political clarity into concrete and effective interventions. Within the ICC these tensions manifested themselves on the one hand as a belief that the mode of functioning we had evolved appropriate to the search for programmatic clarity left us ill-prepared for effective sensitivity to, and intervention in the deepening struggles of the class; it was felt that we were too inward looking, too concerned with the doings of endless commissions and committees and spent too much time and effort speaking to ourselves and that all of this constituted a barrier to our efforts to understand the reality of the struggle. On the other hand there was the fear that opening up to the class and attempting to relate more closely to its activity would necessarily compromise our clarity and that we were bending the stick too much towards intervention. These concerns formed the background to the increasingly acrimonious debates on not only our interventions in the wave of struggle but also on many of the ICC's analyses of the conjunctural situation. The Course of History, the Left in Opposition, Machiavellianism etc.

By the end of 1981, it had become clear that these debates could not be fruitfully conducted within the ICC, let alone resolved there. This text is not the place to rehash or to prove all the bitter disputes which led to the splits. It is sufficient merely to state here that the debates foundered on an increasingly monolithic fear of political differences being expressed within the organisation. Debates continually came up against the barrier of central organs which, in practice, and despite much rhetoric to the contrary, tended to substitute themselves for the organisation as a whole. Clarity, (and the organisation itself) was seen as the property of the central organs whose simple task was to disseminate (and impose) that clarity on the rest of us. Time and time again, every contribution of the central organs to the debate, even their opening contribution to debates which had not even been defined, let alone matured, was considered to be the ICC position which had to be defended against "dissidents". Any notion that the central organs should be the expression and synthesis of the organisation as a whole was completely absent. For the ICC, "clarity" is produced by the internal life of the central organs. Certainly, the rank and file are free to say what they like in an endless flood of internal bulletins but all of this is worthless in the face of central organs who treat it like a schoolmaster treats his pupils' essays, "Six out of ten. Must try harder."

Not only was there a faulty understanding of centralisation at work within all this, in which the mechanics of centralisation was seen and used as a device to settle all debate in favour of the central organs, but it was compounded by the fact that centralisation was inseparable from the operation of personal cliques, a Holy Family of carefully selected spouses and chums. Central organs were selected for their "homogeneity" and their ability "to work together" with the bizarre result that at a time when the organisation was being torn apart by ferocious debates, the central organs were totally isolated from the differences in an island of peaceful homogeneity. The end result of all this, a welter of lies and slanders, accusations of a comrade being a police agent, break-ins, theft and the paranoid search for "enemies who are out to destroy the ICC", is familiar to everyone in the revolutionary movement. Its perhaps worthwhile adding here lest anyone think that its merely sour grapes of splitters at work, that these criticisms of the operation of centralisation in the ICC has been made many times by elements who still remain inside the ICC.

All of the foregoing is the background to where we find ourselves today - in desperate need of looking at the abc's of organisation once again (and also in desperate need of avoiding the temptation of just washing our hands of it all by saying that all organisation are rackets or that political centralisation is synonymous with monolithism. It's important that mounting a critique of the ICC doesn't obscure the very real and considerable gains made by it over the past decade.

Therefore what we want to do in this text is to look once again at the lessons of the last revolutionary wave and in particular at the experience of the Bolshevik Party. Rather than taking a detailed look at the theory of organisation or even at the history of the debates, we have the rather more modest aim of attempting to look again at the historical context of the debates as a start to looking at their relevance for revolutionaries today.

There are three basic areas we want to look at:

1. The internal life and organisation of the Bolsheviks - what was theorised at any given time, and how that related to their actual practice.
2. Their relationship to the class and its struggles in an effort to map out the parameters of what we mean by a party taking up a leading role in those struggles.
3. And finally a brief comparison of the general material context of revolutionary activity then and in the present so that we can begin to look at the consequences of the differences.

The Internal Life of the Bolsheviks

It's necessary to point out to both the epigones and the critics of Bolshevism that Lenin's position on the organisation question was never a simple cut and dried invariant which can be lifted and applied, more or less wholesale, by revolutionaries today. On the contrary, Lenin's theories, and Bolshevik practice, was a living, evolving dynamic, inextricably linked to the life of the class and rooted in the changing material circumstances. Comrades who should know better, quite wilfully engage in the most horrifying a-historicism in order to justify their own organisational fantasies. Both the councilists and the "partyists" have an overwhelming tendency to freeze Lenin's theories at a single point, usually at the point of "What is to be Done", and then use that as a distorting prism to look at the unfolding of the revolutionary wave and the role of the Bolsheviks within it. But the reality, of course, is much more complex than that, both in terms of how the theory shifted and evolved in response to the material situation and in terms of being able to situate the theory in its original context in the first place. And in addition we're faced with the added complexity that there frequently existed a yawning gap between what was said and what was actually done.

Before looking more closely at the theory, it's necessary to realise that Lenin's starting point was the ceaseless fight against the opportunism of a Social Democracy rapidly moving into the camp of the bourgeoisie. Lenin's fight for an elitist, vanguard party drawn narrowly from the ranks of professional revolutionaries has to be set against this background of the fight against conceptions of organisation with their roots in a period which was rapidly passing and which would eventually have to be jettisoned. Everyone else within the then still proletarian camp was arguing for mass organisations with no clear organisational distinction between the hard core of activists and the general mass of sympathisers and general supporters. Lenin was clear that this was a mode of organisation totally inappropriate both for the needs of revolutionary intervention and for the struggle for clarity. The whole history of the Bolsheviks' role in the debate on organisation is the history of the growing clarity on the need for complete autonomy of the expression of working class interests and thus the growing pressure for organisational separation from the old and dying workers movement which still clung to compromises and alliances with the liberal bourgeoisie. It hardly needs to be said that for

revolutionaries today, the argument has been won. No-one today, within the communist movement, is arguing for mass parties with a broad and fuzzy definition of membership nor for any kind of alliance with "progressive" elements in the bourgeois camp. And yet we still find today, Lenin's fight for separation from a movement passing into an alien camp being quoted as a defence for sectarian practices today within the communist movement. Thus we saw, for example, the CWO at the beginning of their existence, refer back to the Bolsheviks' fight for separation and to the later fight by the KAPD to split from a movement again passing into an alien camp, to justify their organisational separation from the ICC. It's just one example of the tendency to a-historically appropriate positions from the past of the workers movement that we intend to deal with in this text. Let's be clear. The fight for unity today in the revolutionary movement is not the same "unity" that Lenin fought against from 1903 onwards. Bolshevik "sectarianism" was able to contain within it, as we shall, see, gigantic differences both in theory and in practice. The need to separate revolutionary activity from reformism and the opportunism that an alliance between them brings is NOT on the same scale as the differences currently existing within the revolutionary movement.

Theory: What Is To Be Done

If we now turn to a closer look at the evolution of the theory, again, it's erroneous and a-historical to think that Lenin and the Bolsheviks produced the definitive blueprint for organisation in 1902 and then proceeded to implement it and thus finally produced the successful party of 1917. Even a closer look at the 1902-1908 period (let alone the 1917 period) shows how false this is. The Lenin of 1903 at the point of the original Bolshevik/Menshevik split is the Lenin of "What is to be Done?" and "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back". It is the Lenin most familiar to the revolutionary movement and the Lenin that the libertarians love to hate. It's the period of the fight for "military discipline" within the party and of "All Power to the Central Committee". In Lenin's own words:

"the organisational principle of revolutionary Social Democracy . . . strives to proceed from the top downwards and upholds an extension of the rights and powers of the centre in relation to the parts."

There was to be no room in a revolutionary organisation for "democratic" procedures. He commented that the 2 conditions for the existence of the broad democratic principle - full publicity and election to all offices - was utopian and could only benefit the police. (Although its clear that the conditions of illegality and clandestinity had a huge role to play in this vision, its necessary to realise that it was also theoretically buttressed by an appropriate theory of class consciousness which saw revolutionary consciousness a product of the intelligentsia). This was also the period, as we shall see later, of the working class only being capable of a Trade Union Consciousness. For Luxemburg, Lenin's position meant "the blind subordination, in the smallest detail, of all party organs, to the party centre, which alone thinks, guides and decides for all." Plekhanov called him a Bonapartist and Trotsky called him a dictator.

There's no question that we can see here the emergence of a theory of organisation fundamentally at odds with the one held by the vast bulk of the rest of the RSDLP, but at the same time we should be aware that the theory and practice weren't identical.

"Yet nothing about the Bolshevik organisation as it actually existed at that time, justified Trotsky in talking of a dictatorship . . . True there was no internal democracy in the RSDLP of that time, but this fact was quite unconnected with Leninism. In their day to day actual practice, there was little to choose in this respect between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. Down to the Revolution of 1905 they both employed the same methods in which co-option of leaders was the rule and election the exception."

Liebman: Leninism Under Lenin

However, when we come to the uprising of 1905, all is changed. Both factions, but especially the Bolsheviks, applied themselves with vigour to getting the elective principle accepted. We find Lenin saying approvingly:

"The, St Petersburg worker Social Democrats know that the whole Party organisation is now built on a democratic basis. This means that all the Party members take part in the election of officials, committee members and so forth, that all the Party members discuss and decide questions concerning the political campaigns of the proletariat and that all the Party members determine the line of tactics of the Party organisation".
(original emphasis)

Hand in hand with this went a determined effort to curb the powers of the Central Committee. The Bolshevik Congress of 1905 declared itself in favour of the autonomy of local committees in relation to the Central Committee which saw a serious pruning of its authority. That's not to say that the Party was wholeheartedly behind the change - Lenin found himself joining arms with the rank and file of the Party against the dogmatism and conservatism of the very "committeemen" he had fought so vigorously for prior to 1905. But the defence of organisational dogma stood no chance against the most important feature of the Party's response to 1905 and that was the dramatic opening up of the Party to the working class. In January 1905 there were 8,400 Bolsheviks. By spring of 1906 there were 34,000 with the vast majority of new members being workers. It was clear to Lenin that, in the ferment of class struggle on such a scale, the rules of membership appropriate to the fight against the opportunism of the old Social Democracy, constituted a barrier between the party and its relationship to the class. Accordingly, he fought to allow the thousands of workers circles that had sprung up, entry into the Party, providing only that they were not avowedly anti-Social Democratic. There wasn't any question either of the workers being recruited as cannon-fodder. At the 3rd Congress in 1905, Lenin is arguing for bringing workers onto the committees in a ratio of 8 workers to 2 intellectuals. By November, he's calling that "obsolete" and demanding a ratio of several hundred to every single intellectual. There's a clear understanding also, that this opening up of the party means a change in structure and in functioning.

"The new form of organisation . . . must be definitely much broader . . . the new nucleus will most likely have to be a less rigid, more 'free' more loose organisation"
(from the first letter Lenin wrote on return from Exile in Nov 1905.)

Democratic Centralism now:

"implies universal and full freedom to criticise. . . and if we have resolved to draw the masses of the workers into intelligent decisions of party questions we must have those questions discussed in the press, at meetings, in circles and at group meetings."

The new attitude to debate and discussion took constitutional form at the 1905 Congress where it was resolved that:

"The Minority now has the unconditional right, guaranteed by the Party rules, to advocate its views and to carry on an ideological struggle."

There's very little left here of the Bolshevism of "What Is To Be Done". The impact of the mass class struggle and, just as importantly, the openness of the Bolsheviks to that class movement, transformed the old Party of 1903 and allowed it to transcend the mode of existence appropriate to doctrinal conflicts and internal quarrels and move onto the terrain of an open offensive against the class enemy.

However the years of reaction which followed the collapse of the 1905 revolution saw the return of monolithism and sectarianism with a vengeance to the Bolshevik party. The call now was "Strengthen the Organisation" which meant in reality, "Strengthen the Central Committee". The drive within the party was for absolute homogeneity and adherence to the party line. The constitutional guarantees for minorities and free discussion, though formally still in existence, were abandoned in practice. It was during this period in 1909 that Bogdanov and the Vpered group were unconstitutionally expelled for disagreeing with Lenin's policy on the use of the Duma. It was the period of a viciousness and unscrupulousness in polemics which wouldn't be surpassed until the Party of the Counterrevolution, with Lenin, for example, accusing Martov of being "objectively in the service of the Tsar's police". The de facto split with the Mensheviks, temporarily abandoned in 1905, reasserted itself once again and was formally recognised in 1912.

When we look in the next section at the actual practice of the Bolsheviks we can see once again the stunning and transforming effect the class upsurge in 1917 produced. For the theory and practice of the Bolshevik Party it was 1905 all over again but on a far larger scale. The Party once again flung itself open to the working class, growing ten-fold in less than a year. In January 1917 there were slightly over 23,000 bolsheviks; by August most estimates put the total membership at something over 200,000. Again a very large proportion of the new members were workers. The monolithic and sectarian practices of the years of reaction, the years of rigid obedience to the 'party line' and the dictates of a hierarchical centralism, were shrugged off as if they had never existed. Throughout 1917 the Party couldn't have looked less monolithic than it did. The Party became openly the Party of Tendencies with almost

every single issue giving rise to a plethora of more or less formal factions at every level of the Party organisation. The practical suppression of minorities which had taken place in the years following the collapse of 1905 was swept away under the fresh impact of the revolution. Throughout this period the debates were fierce, open and public on almost every major issue from the differences of opinion over the July Days, through the debates on the seizure of power, to the polemics over Brest-Litovsk etc. The Brest-Litovsk debates, for example, took place in the pages of Pravda and even when the decision had been made the Siberian Party organisation refused to recognise the signing of the Treaty.

Again, like 1905, the monolithic, obedient, rigidly centralised party so revered by today's partyists and hated by the libertarians is nowhere to be seen.

Practice

In trying to draw lessons from the experience of the Bolsheviks, we're not only dealing with the complexities of a changing theory dialectically linked to the ebb and flow of the class struggle but we're also faced with the added complication of a practice which was frequently at odds with (and ignored) the stated theory and frequently ran ahead of it in a manner which transformed it. Not only is it necessary to historically locate the theory it's also necessary to locate it within its actual practice. Without doing this, the calls for greater centralisation or more local autonomy etc, can't mean anything to us. A detailed and developed examination of this is obviously beyond the scope of this text and all we can hope to do here is provide a few illustrative examples which the lie to the tendency to see the Bolsheviks one dimensionally.

Minorities and Tendencies

If we look at the question of how debate and differences were handled within the Bolshevik Party, even the theory would be enough to curl the hair of the ICC or the CWO. We've already seen how the impact of the 1905 revolution produced a formal commitment to the right of tendencies to exist and function within the Party. As we've seen already with the way that the debate on Brest-Litovsk was carried on in the pages of Pravda, the existence of tendencies carried with it a more or less automatic access to the public press. To quote Lenin in 1905:

"There is no question that literature is least of all subject to mechanical adjustment or levelling, to the rule of the majority over the minority. There is no question either that in this field greater scope must undoubtedly be allowed for personal initiative, individual inclination, thought and fantasy."

Moreover, as a matter of course, minorities were represented on both the executive and deliberative organs of the Party, from delegation to Congresses, to the make up of the Central Committee and the Poliburo. In September 1917, for, example, Lenin is arguing strenuously that all elections within the party should be conducted around the question of support for versus opposition to,

participation in the Pre-parliament. This formal confrontation of tendencies was to be found on every level and branch of the Party.

"almost all the local organisations formed into majorities and minorities".

Trotsky quoted in Liebman

This included the organs of the Press also. The notion that homogeneity within central organs was demanded by the needs of efficiency didn't enter Bolshevik thinking until the days of counter revolution well after 1917. To quote one commentator:

"In reality, the history of Bolshevism is a history of the struggle of factions. And indeed, how could a genuinely revolutionary organisation setting itself the task of overthrowing the world and uniting under its banner the most audacious iconoclasts, fighter and insurgents, live and develop without intellectual conflicts, without groupings and temporary factional formations?"

John Molyneux: Marxism and the Party

Of course, there were formal limits to the functioning of tendencies:

"In the heat of battle, when the proletarian army is straining every nerve, no criticism whatever can be permitted in its ranks."

However, it has to be said that, for the Bolsheviks, unlike the ICC, the "heat of battle" wasn't defined as any old run of the mill strike which after all was the common currency of Bolshevik life, but rather the insurrection itself. And for Lenin, at least, it wasn't the central committee or Politburo which could decide when to suspend debate but the Congress. It also has to be said, that when the Party finally did plunge into the "heat of battle" in the revolution itself, far from debate being suspended, that was the very time that debate became fiercest and most public. The disappearance of debate in the history of the Party is inextricably tied up with the years of retreat and defeat.

What also has to be grasped is the degree to which the emergence and functioning of tendencies wasn't a product of the theoretical clarity of the central organs but was fundamentally the product of the pressure and influence coming from the lower ranks of the Party who were closest to the class. As much as anything, the formal guarantee of minority rights was not so much more than a reluctant recognition of a de facto situation which couldn't be changed. The opening up of the Party to the class swept away the monolithic tendencies and the hierarchical respect for the central organs which in any case was much less substantial than is usually imputed.

What is striking about the Bolshevik Party (even during the post 1905 year of reaction) is the stunning (to our eyes) degree of sectional autonomy which existed. The party was structurally divided on many levels, both horizontally; and vertically. There was a Trade Union wing, a Military Organisation (itself subdivided into army and naval wings), Factory Organisations etc, and, most of these divisions were, duplicated in the local level. In Shlyapnikov's memoirs we can find a detailed description of the Bolshevik organisation in Petrograd which is mind-boggling in its complexity. In addition to the factory organisations and the various centralising organs springing from

them, there existed separate "colleges" for propaganda and agitation, for literary work and for organisation. There were also the legal insurance and hospital fund organisations and, in addition, there were many non-territorial groups like the Marxist Building Workers, and the Petersburg Railway Organisation of the RSDLP. Even within the single city of Petersburg many of these sections of the Party functioned virtually independently with their own centralising organs and their own means of publication - the Hospital Fund even ran its own newspaper. This situation was duplicated across the country on a huge scale with the tendency toward autonomy massively strengthened by communications and clandestinity. For example, even after the revolution, as late as 1919 the central committee had managed to maintain regular communication with only 52 out of 219 uyezd committees.

There existed within the Party a long tradition, even through the period of momolithism, of jealously guarding the high level of local and sectional autonomy which resulted from this situation. The Military Organisation, for example, had almost total autonomy and published its own paper, Soldatskaye Pravda. Throughout 1917 it functioned as an organised tendency of the Left, openly defying the Central Committee. During the July days when the Central Committee was calling for calm, the Military Organisation used its press to call for action. So much for unity in the "heat of battle"!! After the July Days, the Central Committee tried to exert control and despatched Stalin to insist that their decisions must be carried out without discussion. He was bluntly informed that this was "quite unacceptable" and the Central Committee had to retreat with as much grace as it could muster. During the same period, the Petrograd Committee demanded its own press because of the timidity of Pravda and when the Central Committee refused, it blithely went ahead with acquiring a publishing company and press.

It must be stressed that these weren't isolated examples nor was it confined to the politically more muscular sections of the party. It was a commonplace, for example, that many small local committees happily ignored the formal split with the Menshevik fractions and carried on joint work with them as late as Autumn 1917 and in the case of Omsk and Irkutsk, up until October! Space forbids any more examples - suffice to say that they could be multiplied indefinitely.

None of the foregoing is an attempt to obscure the undeniable struggle waged by Lenin and the Bolsheviks for the establishment of centralisation as a principle of revolutionary organisation. But it is a struggle which can't be taken out of context. It existed side by side with a parallel tendency towards decentralisation and sectional autonomy. The balance between the two wasn't achieved by recourse to, some infallible blueprint for organisation invented by Lenin, but by a dialectical interplay between the party, the class and the upsurge of the revolution. The emphasis shifted according to the period and the demands of the class struggle. In the periods of class quiescence or defeat the struggle against political opportunism took precedence with an invariable closing down of the organisation and a growth of sectarian practices. With the upsurge of class struggle all this was swept aside by the influx of members. A party which doesn't open itself up to the class in such a period and which doesn't turn in response to class pressure can't survive as a revolutionary organisation. But a party which does open itself up to the class invariably finds that the weight of the central organs diminishes. In the task of responding to the class, of being sensitive to the class it is the "lower" levels of the party, the sections in closest

contact with the class which come into their own. The centre is invariably more isolated in this process and inevitably has less of a role to play. Within the Bolshevik Party we can see the formal recognition of this in the fundamental changes which took place in structure and functioning which took place in 1905 and 1917.

What stands out above all is the total falseness of the myth that the Bolshevik Party was a well oiled monolith, founded in the disciplined implementation of an infallible and invariant blueprint drawn up in 1902. With this myth a starting point, any attempt to draw the appropriate lessons for the period is bound to be doomed to disaster. On the one hand we have the libertarians who mechanically connect Kronstadt to 1902 and on the other hand we have the Bordigists who equally mechanically draw a line from 1902 to 1917. And in between we have the elements like the ICC and CWO who a-historically pick and choose the features they want to appropriate or disown.

In the ICC we have an organisation which prides itself smugly on the rejection of the monolithism of Bolshevik democratic centralism. But in reality it has created a monolithic practice of all-powerful central organs beyond the wildest dreams of Lenin at his most centralised. It's only deep into the counterrevolution that we see the Bolshevik Party approach anything like the monolithism, rigidity and fear of debate that currently resides inside the ICC. We would ask all the comrades of the ICC to compare the vitality, confidence and freedom of debate of the Bolsheviks internal life (even with all the vicious polemics and internal guerrilla warfare), with the fear and timidity with which the ICC approaches the possibility of expressing differences at Public Forums or in the Press. A comparison of the treatment of tendencies and fractions in itself is instructive. For the Bolsheviks we've already seen how the interplay of factions and tendencies was the very life blood of the organisation. For the ICC, according to its statutes, the appearance of organised divergences must be understood:

"as a manifestation either of the immaturity of the Current or of a tendency towards degeneration."

In practice tendencies have no right of representation on central organs, they have no right to separate meetings) and correspondence, and can only express their divergences in public under the control and decisions of the Central organs, which tends to mean not at all. At the appearance of the last Tendency in the ICC, it was even suggested that it was up to the organisation as a whole, (i.e. the central organs in practice) to decide whether or not divergences should be crystallised in the formation of a Tendency! Not surprisingly, in the face of this practical suppression, no Tendency in the history of the ICC has ever managed to survive more than a short time without splitting.,

In organisations like the CWO, we have the other side of the coin. The "monolithism and rigid centralism" of the Bolsheviks is to be embraced because it (1) allowed the Bolsheviks to physically survive the years of reaction and continue to function as a pole of clarity and (2) it was a method of organisation which produced the "unity of action" necessary to their visions of leading the class. We will deal with this latter point in the next section of the text. On the first point, we want to say firstly, that their own nightmare vision of monolithism and centralism, like the ICC's, is a million miles from the vitality and fecundity of the life of the Bolsheviks. On the question of survival, the partyists would have us believe that

the greater cohesion and discipline allowed the Bolsheviks to survive the years of reaction better than their rivals in the rest of the proletarian movement. It was a position much defended by Lenin himself.

"Of all the defeated opposition and revolutionary parties, the Bolsheviks affected the most orderly retreat, with the least loss to their "army" with its core best preserved."
 Lenin;" Left Wing Communism

But it is difficult to find any reality in the claim. All of the revolutionary organisations came close to being wiped out after the failure of 1905. In 1909, for example, the Bolsheviks had no more than 6 local committees left in the whole of Russia. Certainly with the renewal of class struggle and the outbreak of war, they had significantly re-established themselves but actually, so had the Mensheviks, the SRs and the Anarchists, etc. We wouldn't dispute that the Bolsheviks played the decisive role they did in the revolution because of the correctness of their political positions but even at the best, it's arguable that this clarity was a product of their sectarianism. There is a fair case to be made that the Bolshevik Party of 1917 was constituted fundamentally on the central questions provoked by the war, in particular, the espousal of a revolutionary internationalism in opposition to the various forms of defensism, and had little to do with the pre-1914 sectarian debates. Certainly, its undeniable the Bolshevik Party had undergone a massive transformation by 1917 both-in terms of their political practice (as we have already seen) and in their composition. In addition to the huge influx of workers, there has to be added the absorption of many, many, other political currents like the Mezhrayontsy and elements from the left-wing of the Mensheviks etc. All of these had a profound influence on the role that the Bolshevik Party played in the revolution. There is not any question either that one of the most decisive elements in their appropriation of clarity was precisely their ability to turn their back on sectarianism at the vital moment and open up to the class.

We are not trying to argue here that there was no connection between the Bolsheviks of 1903 and 1917, nor that there can be a separation between organisational functioning and the clear defence of class positions. We have already said in this text that in one sense the history of the Bolshevik Party can be seen as the history of the fight for the autonomy of working class interests and their espousal of that can't be separated from the form of their organisational work -their emphasis on factory work as opposed to Parliamentary manoeuvres etc. Their achievement of clarity is both a result of, and dialectically, a cause of their implantation in the heart of the class, in combination with the massive and real freedom of debate which existed in the Party and which, at the vital points in the struggle, frequently went against its centralised hierarchy. As we've already pointed out, Leninist sectarianism was aimed at the degenerating Social Democracy of the time and can't be applied to the current debates dividing the revolutionary movement.

The point we have tried to make throughout this section is that the Bolsheviks did not play the decisive role that they did as a result of some magic formula of organisation which can be a-historically lifted and applied by revolutionaries today. Certainly we can and must use the experience of our revolutionary forebears as a foundation for our activity but they haven't bequeathed us some eternally valid form of organisation which we can happily apply

willy-nilly to the best of our resources. The efforts by these elements in the revolutionary movement who are trying to rebuild the Bolshevik Party today or like the ICC who are building Byzantine, convoluted bureaucratic structures in preparation for future needs, owe little to a Marxist understanding of the crucial problems which confront us.

Party and Class

Although this text is primarily concerned with the "internal" aspects of organisation, it would "be totally artificial to try to separate that from the Bolsheviks' relationship to the Class and from the role that they played in the revolutionary process. The understanding of how revolutionaries organise is inextricably tied up with an understanding of how a revolutionary class consciousness emerges and of the relative roles of party and class in the revolution itself. Once again, it would be totally false to imagine that there exists some single invariant blueprint, articulated by Lenin in 1902 and which, when rigorously applied, allowed the Bolshevik Party to play their indispensable role in the revolution of 1917. The dialectical and historically rooted unfolding of Bolshevik clarity and practice which we traced out in the foregoing section has to be repeated when we look at their external life

The fight for a rigid centralism that we've seen in 1902 in "What is to be Done", is inextricably tied up in a view which sees the working class capable of achieving only a Trade Union consciousness. Revolutionary and socialist clarity is seen as the product of the intelligentsia who are charged with injecting this clarity into the class from without. The Party is fundamentally the Party of the intelligentsia. Although its true that "What is to be Done" has to be situated in the context of the fight against the Economists and against their tail-ending of "economic" struggles, and that the thrust is more against an attempt to separate working class activity from "political" activity than it is against the potential of the class, there's no doubt that Lenin's understanding lagged far behind that of the German Left and Rosa Luxemburg. Her critiques of the Bolshevik centralism of this time and her "Mass Strike" text remain an excellent and valid analysis of the inextricable connection between the "economic" struggles of the class and its political dimension.

However, the reality of the class upsurges in 1905 and even more importantly, in 1917, fundamentally transformed Lenin's theories and Bolshevik practice. In "Two Tactics of Social Democracy", written immediately after the 1905 events, he's acknowledging not only:

"There is not the slightest doubt that the revolution will teach Social Democratism to the masses of the workers in Russia ...At such a time, the working class feels an instinctive urge for open revolutionary action."

but also that:

"The elementary instinct of the work class movement is able to correct the conceptions of the greatest minds."

The revolution of 1905 and the halting role played by the Bolsheviks, forced Lenin to a recognition, not only of the vast revolutionary potential of the autonomous activity of the working class, but also to a glimmering of the very real limitations on the capacity of a Party. The ferment of 1905 emerged from the class itself quite independently of the revolutionary fractions, who for the most part, were taken aback by events and for months after, very hesitating about supporting them. There could be no denying the greater boldness, dynamism and radicalism of the working class, nor the way a revolutionary politicisation arose inevitably out of the day to day ferment of the struggle. "Economic" strikes flowed into "political" ones and from the factories out onto the streets and against the state. Lenin was forced to recognise that it was the proletariat who were the first to realise the objective conditions of the struggle were maturing and demanding the transition from the strike to the uprising. True, it was the Bolshevik Party which eventually called for the rising in Moscow but it was brought about by the inexorable pressure on them being exerted by the workers. As much as anything, it was a case of endorsing the rising or being swept aside by it.

Bolshevik confusion and timidity is perhaps best summed up in their initial response to the Soviet phenomenon.

"The Petersburg Committee of the Bolsheviks was frightened at first by such an innovation as a non-partisan representation of the embattled masses, and could find nothing better to do than to present the Soviet with an ultimatum: immediately adopt a Social Democratic programme, or disband. The Petersburg Soviet as a whole, including the contingent of Bolshevik workingmen as well, ignored this Ultimatum without batting an eyelash." Trotsky - "Stalin".

Despite the lessons learned from 1905, this same hesitancy and confusion within the Bolshevik Party was to be repeated in 1917. Time and time again, we find the Bolsheviks and particularly their central organs, lagging behind the impetus and radicalism of the class. The crucial February 23d strike in Petrograd broke out against the instructions of the Party, although, when confronted the following day with the spectacle of 200,000 striking workers, they managed a reluctant endorsement. But their intervention was always to try to calm the struggle. When Bolshevik workers began to demand arms, Shlyapnikov, on behalf of the Central Committee, refused point blank. It wasn't until the 27th that they managed to produce a leaflet and that was in extremely limited numbers and merely called for a Provisional Government with no mention being made of Soviets.

Until Lenin's arrival, the strong rightward drift of the upper hierarchy of the Party tended to dominate its life, despite the radicalism of much of its rank and file. In the early days of 1917, the Bolsheviks were finding difficulty in separating their policies from those of the Mensheviks with a constant tendency towards support for the Provisional Government. There was even the emergence of a right wing tendency arguing for a policy of national defence and re-unification with the Mensheviks. The fight waged against all this by Lenin from the "April Theses", through the splits of the July Days and all the way to the seizure of power is familiar to us all. As in 1905, we can search in vain for the well-oiled Bolshevik fighting machine with sharp political clarity and a disciplined "unity of action", leading their worker troops into the revolution. Far from presenting a monolithic bloc of clarity the Bolsheviks were publicly and fiercely split almost continually through 1917.

Their initial views of a class capable of only a Trade Union consciousness were totally confounded by the spectacle of a revolution being made by that very class.

"The February revolution . . . was the spontaneous outbreak of a multitude exasperated by the privations of war. . . The revolutionary parties played no direct part in the making of the revolution. They did not expect it and were at first somewhat nonplussed by it. The creation at the moment of revolution of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers Deputies was a spontaneous act of groups of workers without central direction."

E.H.Carr - "The Bolshevik Revolution".

The reality was undeniable. We have Lenin's famous quote of the period about the workers and peasants:

"...(they are) a thousand times more leftwards than the Chernovs and a hundred times more leftwards than we are."

This awareness marched hand in hand with the opening-up of the party to the working class that we I've chronicled in the first section of this text. The history of this period, from 1914 onwards, and especially in 1917, is the history of the Bolshevik Party becoming the party of the working class, in every sense of the term. We can see this manifested at every level, from the huge influx of workers into the party that we've already noted, through to the electoral successes in the Soviets in the latter half of 1917, to their complete control of the factory committees. By September 1917, there were only Bolsheviks to be found on the factory committees, with the Mensheviks and SRs completely routed. Despite the disputes and vacillations of the Bolsheviks, from 1914 onward, their stance on the war separated them sharply from their rivals in front of the class. Only the Bolsheviks stood unhesitatingly for the class struggle in the face of the war. While everyone else denounced the discord and the threat that class struggle brought to the policy of national defencism, the Bolsheviks were wholeheartedly behind it. The consistent policy of fighting for the autonomy of working class interests led the Party to being deeply implanted in the heart of the class by 1917.

"They were among the masses, at the factory benches, every day without a pause. Tens of speakers, big and little, were speaking in Petersburg, at the factories and in the barracks, every blessed day. For the masses, they had become their own people because they were always there. The mass lived and breathed together with the Bolsheviks."

Sukanov quoted in M.Liebman: Leninism under Lenin

It was this openness to the class, this vulnerability to the pressures of the class, which was finally responsible for sweeping away the timidity and conservatism of the Bolshevik central organs. Almost everywhere it was the rank and file of the Party, the ones closest to and most sensitive to the class who were the most consistent radical elements. The Bolshevik Military Organisation was one of the best examples of this. As we've seen, it functioned consistently in 1917 as a left, radical faction of the Party. Composed of soldiers who had, for the most part, only recently joined the Party, it was in direct and intimate contact with the class. Whereas the main central bodies of the Party - the Central Committee

etc. - were free from direct pressure from workers and soldiers, the Military Organisation, born of revolutionary events, was more exposed to the radicalising effect of popular exasperation and could draw its arguments against the timidity and, conservatism of the central organs directly from working class pressure. Its an irony of history that Lenin, who originally set out to build a Party based on a rigid centralism as a guarantee of political cohesion, and clarity in order to provide a sharp edged tool of action, found himself in the revolutionary process having to reach over the heads of those central organs to appeal to the lower ranks of the Party and even to the class outside.

"Class conscious workers must take the matter into their own hands, organise the discussion, and exert pressure on those at the top."

Lenin, quoted in Liebman

In a very real sense, the political clarity and correctness of Bolshevik slogans throughout the period came almost directly from the class itself.

When we turn to the period following the seizure of power, we find the same process multiplied a hundredfold. Despite, or perhaps because of, the formal assumption of state power by the Bolshevik Party, we can see absolutely clearly in Lenin, the realisation that the carrying through of the revolution, the building of a new society, is fundamentally in the hands, of the class. At the 2nd Congress of Soviets in November 1917, Lenin is arguing:

"We must allow complete freedom to the creative faculties of the class."

and in Pravda that same month, he writes:

"Comrades, working people! Remember that now you, yourselves are at the helm of state. No-one will help you if you yourselves do not wait and take into your hands all affairs of state ... Get on with the job yourselves; begin right at the bottom, do not wait for anyone."

(Original emphasis)

In his "State and Revolution" of the same period, the whole emphasis is on the fundamental role of the class in the tasks ahead. The Party hardly rates a mention. And there's nothing surprising in this stance. It was fundamentally not much more than the recognition of the social reality in front of his eyes, for once again the class were running ahead of the Party. While the Bolsheviks, for example, were still tied to a policy of nationalising only the "commanding heights" of the economy and were exploring the possibility of some form of collaboration with the more amenable capitalists in the running of the economy, the class were surging ahead with the expropriation of the means of production. The slogan of Workers Control and its application sprang directly from the autonomous activity of the class and forced the Bolsheviks onto a much more radical stance. According to Liebman, for example, of the 500 odd enterprises that had been nationalised by June 1918, about 400 were taken over as a result of local action that the Bolsheviks had either tried to hold back or divert.

On the land question, the Decree of Land Division merely followed after the virtually totally uncontrolled seizure of the land by the

peasants themselves. Many of the first collectives on the land were also the product of local initiative independent of Party wishes, as were the actual setting up of the Committees of Poor Peasants.

At every level of society, this process was at work. In the administration of justice, hundreds of popular tribunals with elected judges sprang up spontaneously: in the question of housing, expropriation went ahead in an uncontrolled fashion and the educational system was thrown open by the dynamic upsurge of the masses themselves. Committees in every conceivable area of social life sprang up spontaneously. Lenin was speaking only the literal truth when he said at the 7th Party Congress in March 1918:

"What our revolution is doing is not accidental...it is not the product of a Party decision but ... (is) a revolution that the masses themselves create by their slogans, their efforts ... Socialism cannot be implemented by a minority, by the Party. It can be implemented only by tens of millions when they have learned to do it themselves."

Whatever illusions might have still lingered in the Bolshevik Party about their role in the building of the new society, the reality, following on the seizure of power rapidly dispersed them. However potent a tool the party might have been for intervention in the class struggle in October 1917 they certainly weren't physically capable of taking the entire administration of the state into their hands. In Petrograd, for example, the Central Committee had an office staff of 4. Even by 1919 it was still only 15. At local levels there were virtually no permanent apparatus in existence. In the early months following on October, the assumption of power by the Bolsheviks was to a large extent symbolic. Stalin as Commissar for the Affairs of the Nationalities had at his disposal one table and two chairs in a shared office. The Commissar for Agriculture wasn't even that lucky. He had to borrow a table from Lenin's office. In addition to all this, as we've already seen, communications throughout the country were very bad and even where they were possible the local organisations frequently chose to blithely ignore instructions from the centre. To quote Liebman again:

"In general, the drawing up of laws and decrees...was, as a rule, only symbolic in character, or rather it served merely propagandist aims, since the Bolsheviks were without the means of making their legislative decisions effective."

Throughout the first year of the revolution, the most substantial force in politics and society was the direct activity of the masses themselves, with more dynamism and effectiveness than any other factor in public life. In this period, the intervention of the class was decisive, continuous and was effected without mediation. Throughout every level of society, as we've seen, workers control appeared before the law that legalised and persisted without regard to official attempts to divert it. The theory and practice of Bolshevism, at the full flood of the class in revolutionary action, could do little else but absorb and reflect that reality. Instead of the customary picture of a unified, monolithic and disciplined General Staff directing the course of the revolution, we see a Party swept up into the dynamism of the class, becoming a living expression of the class, open to it, expressing in fierce public debate all the confusions attendant upon that, but most importantly, becoming radicalised by it. It was the disappearance of this upsurge and the disappearance of the working class from the stage that concretised

the tendencies in the Bolshevik Party towards monolithism, rigid centralism, party dictatorship and absolute hegemony of the central organs.

Role of the Party

We're aware that this text is, of, necessity, seriously unbalanced. The indispensability of the Party to the revolutionary process and the necessity for centralisation with that Party, are taken as given. The point of the text was to try to lay the basis for countering the widespread myths of the monolithic party and look at the limitations on both the role of the party and the operation of centralism. But we don't have any illusions that the gigantic upsurge of the masses, as thoroughgoing as it was, as politically radical as it was, as influential as it was on the clarity of the Bolsheviks, was any more than just one side of the equation.

It was the political intervention of revolutionaries which was vital in giving shape and direction to that upsurge. It was revolutionary intervention which ensured that class response to the war and the privations imposed, remained on a proletarian terrain and defined the consequences which flowed from their activity. We're not arguing here either, that it was just a question of clear communist propaganda which persuaded the working class but that an inextricable part of that was the actions of the Party. The Bolsheviks were a fighting part of the class struggle.

Their role in the planning for armed insurrection, the seizure of power and the dissolving of the Constituent Assembly, was an indispensable part of the revolution. It set the parameters for class action and eliminated the negative alternatives in a way that propaganda never could have. Only a Party could act like that and only a Party could provide the necessary depth of political clarity. Only a Party:

"... foresees the whole struggle, locates and establishes tactics, exercises persuasion over the remainder of the proletariatit seeks revolution alone, regards everything from this perspective, always puts the general cause of revolution above all other interests both in the national and the international struggle."

Gorter- "The organisation of the Proletariat's Class Struggle"

For, no matter how advanced and radical the class might be in the revolution, their consciousness is bound to reflect, to some extent, their fragmented material position under capitalism. To quote Gorter again speaking against the councilist tendencies:

"Can they deny that the class condition of the proletariat enables only a small section of the proletariat to develop broad and deep understanding? Can they deny that large sections within the factory organisations will therefore always be opportunistic, individualistic, utopian and insufficiently developed? No. And that, therefore, the factory organisation can never make or lead the revolution alone."

(Ibid)

Of necessity also, this heterogeneity in the consciousness of the proletariat means that the Party can only be a fraction of the class,

a minority. Gorter's quite well aware that the conception of mass parties belong to the past.

"Therefore, a small Party everywhere."
(Ibid)

He goes on to say:

"Can this one small party simultaneously rule this mighty adversary, massively armed capitalism, and the mighty proletariat? Can it be the dictator, the despotic ruler of both, of adversary and proletariat? The very numbers involved rule it out."
(Ibid)

And Luxemburg herself makes clear that it's not simply a question of numbers. The ability of the Party to function as the organiser of the class struggle, as the order-giver, is limited not just by size but by the very activity of the class itself. We've seen time and time again, how often and how crucially, the initiative and dynamism sprang directly from the class, catching revolutionaries completely unaware. This doesn't mean, and didn't for the German Left either, that revolutionaries can't or shouldn't involve themselves in direct organisation of moments of the class struggle. Certainly, as part of their intervention, revolutionaries will call for strikes, for demonstrations and for armed uprisings. The German Left did so. Sometimes successfully, sometimes not: just like the Bolsheviks. There's no question of the German Left being nothing but some form of super-propagandists. The point is that we've seen historically that this organising role can only be a PART of the struggle and by no means the decisive part. The movement of the class in revolution just doesn't lend itself to detailed plans of action which can be implemented by an omnipotent Party. The twists and turns, the sudden outbursts and periods of quiescence, can neither be foresee nor called into existence by any Party, no matter how sharp or disciplined. What is essential, and unique to the Party, is the political intervention. And even here there are no blueprints. We've seen how even that most centralised and "homogenous" party, the Bolsheviks, were in reality constantly divided about their analysis and intervention. Of course, the general guidelines can be picked out, but the understanding of what that general clarity means in the day to day struggle, only comes on the march.

It's fundamentally the class themselves who pose the questions and give a guide to the answers. It can't be foreseen in advance. A party which understands this and realises it can't pretend to have the answer to everything in advance is a party which must be open to the influence of the class in revolutionary action. At such a time, rigid centralism is entirely inappropriate. It's the layers of the party closest to the class which makes the running, and we've seen that that tends NOT to be the central organs, which frequently at the vital point play a conservative role. In addition:

"The political purpose of an organ having such great powers is understandable only if those powers apply to the elaboration of a uniform plan of action, if the central organ assumes the initiative of a vast revolutionary act.

Luxemburg - "Leninism or Marxism"

If, on the contrary, the political dimension of the party's intervention is seen as central, then that fabled "unity of action",

so dear to the Lenin of 1902, is seen as a chimera. What's important is the party's political contribution which demands a party open to the widest possible debate. What we've tried to demonstrate in this text is that the Bolsheviks played such a decisive role precisely because their practice and to a certain extent their theory, at the high points in class struggle was in accord with the criticisms of the German Left. We know, of course, that that accord had a fragile existence and didn't survive the removal of the class from the revolutionary stage.

What we've tried to do in the text so far is situate the questions of monolithism, centralism and the nature of the party's leading role, within a concrete, historical framework, cleared of myth and wishful thinking. Without that, the question of organisation must be doomed to remain on the plane of the abstract. We hope that we've demonstrated that the party of history was neither the nightmare monolith of libertarian slander nor the superb, unified, decisive, fighting machine, the revolutionary General Staff of the partyists' wishful thinking.

Then and Now

It's impossible to draw any accurate lessons from the material we've just dealt with unless we were aware of how crucially our material situation differs from that of the Bolsheviks. Even on a straight-forward quantitative level, the gap between revolutionaries today and the Bolsheviks pre-1917 is so huge and unthinkable it tends to be universally ignored by the political milieu. In 1903, the Party could afford to pay about 30 full-time distributors of *Iskra*. (That's considerably bigger than many entire organisations today.) By 1905, there were just under 10,000 Bolsheviks. As a result of the insurrection that rose to 34,000 by 1906. In the same period, there were about 14,000 Mensheviks. In the RSDLP as a whole, in 1907 there were 84,000 excluding the Bundist, Polish and Lettish sections. Bolshevik membership fell during the years of reaction, but by the beginning of 1917 it stood at about 20,000. By August of that year, there were almost a quarter of a million members. All this has to be set against a total working class population of perhaps three and a half million.

But the numbers really only give a hint of the vast differences between then and now. Revolutionary fractions in general, and the Bolsheviks in particular, were implanted in the class in a way we can't even dream about today. Even when the Bolsheviks were finding little direct support in the class, their arguments and politics were totally familiar to the class. Revolutionary positions and debate were part and parcel of working class life. For the flavour of what this meant in concrete reality, it's worth reading the memoirs of Shlyapnikov. Although anecdotal, many of the anecdotes are very telling. In 1914 he re-entered Russia disguised as a Frenchman and began work in a Petrograd factory. Within days, he was at the centre of a lively and vigorous debate surrounded by workers not only keen to discuss political activity, but demanding to know about revolutionaries in exile like Martov and Lenin. In his travels throughout Russia, even in the most remote and isolated of villages he has no difficulty finding politically active and committed workers. Not always Bolsheviks of course, but the political tradition was there.

The entire proletariat were highly politicised. When strikes broke out, as a matter of course, the workers co-opted members of revolutionary fractions onto their strike committees. We all know the stories of Bolshevik leaflets being passed from hand to hand until the print was rubbed off and the paper was in tatters, of workers in factories who would handwrite copies of newspapers and even pamphlets in the absence of duplicating facilities. Revolutionary parties were seen by the class as their parties (even when they disagreed with them.) By 1917, of course, it was the Bolshevik Party which predominantly held this position. We've already quoted Sukhnov's evocative descriptions of the masses "living and breathing together with the Bolsheviks"

As we've pointed out elsewhere in the text, on every conceivable level, the Party was seen as the Party of the working class. Even on a straightforward sociological level, the vast majority of its members were workers. Even as early as 1905, over 60% of members were drawn from the industrial working class. (D.Lane - The Roots of Russian Communism) This percentage increased in the years of reaction as a result of the exodus of intellectuals. In some areas as many as 12% of all factory workers were actual members. (L.Schapiro.) Even in the darkest days following 1905 when the party was in disarray and its ranks were decimated the milieu was unimaginably different from today. Even with workers demoralised and shunning the party for fear of repression, the fertile soil still existed in terms of the hundreds of thousands of workers with a revolutionary background and a familiarity with the political arguments.

All the debates and polemics of the period about organisation, regroupment and the role of the party only make sense if we can grasp this general background. Obviously, we must draw lessons from the period, but it can only lead to disaster if we think we can transpose the arguments and positions directly onto our present situation. Today, were not talking about thousands or tens of thousands in our fraction alone, surrounded by hundreds of thousands of other militants, all working in a class of only a few million, more or less totally familiar with the debates and fiercely committed and partisan. On the contrary, we're faced with a few hundred militants throughout the world, working in a class gigantically bigger, which doesn't know we exist and is totally unfamiliar with revolutionary positions. We are tiny, isolated and remote from the class in a way which would be unimaginable before 1917.

It was our starting assumption, (a largely unspoken one), in the revolutionary movement of 10 to 15 years ago, that, yes, we were tiny and isolated but the process of deepening crisis and class struggle was inseparable from a growth in size and influence of revolutionaries. So far we've seen no sign of that. We think we've reached the point where the revolutionary milieu must confront that openly and decide how it affects our activity. It seems clear that different types of activity and organisation might flow from an initial assumption of progressive growth than from believing that the organisation will only grow at the point of revolution.

Isolation

It's clearly an attempt to grapple with this problem that is at least partly responsible for the paths chosen by elements like Wildcat and

NoWaR who have argued, in practice if not in open theory, that centralisation in our present tiny state can only be synonymous with monolithism. In a different way the CWO fantasies about factory groups and "transmission belts" are obviously another response to this problem. Whatever the pros and cons of the utility and role of factory groups in a period when we have sufficient influence in the class to be able to set them up, to put them forward in the present period as a means of creating that influence in the first place, is clearly a delusion based on desperation. The CWO don't have any factory groups and they have no means of getting any. No-one in the revolutionary milieu has (including Battaglia Comunista, notwithstanding their token factory groups.) One might as well argue that if we had a multi-million circulation daily paper, or 10,000 man sections in major cities, it would increase our influence in the class. It would, but it all belongs to the realm of fantasy. It's impossible to have any respect for an organisation which indulges in this sort of make-believe. However, perhaps the CWO can be forgiven their desperation given their conceptions of organising the class. We've already seen how the Bolsheviks themselves were unable to undertake this role so it's hardly surprising to see signs of stress in the dozen or so members of the CWO.

The plain truth is that as revolutionaries we have to face up to the fact that there are NO magical devices to short-circuit our isolation from the class. Certainly, we must intervene in the class to the limits of our abilities but the destruction of our isolation doesn't reside in our hands. We can't change that, no matter how self-important we become, or how ouvrierist or activist, and no matter how hard we try to make our language and press more "accessible" etc. All we can do is realistically assess the material limitations which confront us, as a guide planning our work on a sane and balanced basis.

Monolithism and Sectarianism

The fight against monolithism and sectarianism must also take account of our tiny size and isolation. We can reproduce the Bolshevik and German Left rhetoric about party democracy, about opening up to the masses etc and we can reproduce their intentions (the best of them), but we can't reproduce the social and political reality which gave the Bolsheviks their vitality. Their tendencies towards monolithism and the substitutionism of their central organs were always countered by their size, implantation in the class, and the relative autonomy (in practice) of the various elements which made up the party. The vigour of the debates inside the Bolsheviks, their ability to retain relatively enormous differences inside the party without splitting it, can't be reproduced in a group numbered in dozens and remote from the class, despite all the best intentions and all the detailed constitutional safeguards. Without the invigorating contact with the class enjoyed by revolutionaries in the last revolutionary wave, it's hardly surprising that the milieu is racked by sectarianism.

While we remain small and isolated, the pressures towards monolithism, family cliques and sect-like behaviour must be enormous. But, however powerful they might be, we can't hope to even start to deal with them unless we can first recognise their existence. The sectarian practices, guerrilla tactics and vicious unscrupulousness employed by Lenin towards fellow revolutionaries might have been acceptable in the fertility of pre-1917, but in the fragility and

isolation in which we find ourselves, its criminal. Our priorities must be a fraternal husbanding of our strength, of reaching out and embracing as much of the revolutionary milieu as possible, while at the same time, reconciling that with a method of organisation which allows and promotes a rigorous search for clarity. Any attempt to attain one without the other can only be political suicide.

Perspectives

This text is not the place to present a detailed plan for the future of revolutionary activity, but we can begin to sketch out the general framework of where we stand.

1. We remain committed to the belief in the necessity for a separate organisation of revolutionaries which will play an indispensable role in the revolutionary process. Nothing in the history of the working class or in our understanding of the operation and role of class consciousness leads us to believe that communist revolution is possible without the existence of a party, however momentous the upsurge of class struggle might be. The upsurge and decline of struggle in Poland confirms us in that belief. We think a communist intervention, however tiny in such an upsurge, can have a decisive impact out of all proportion to its size. In addition, the experience of the Bolsheviks in 1905 and 1917 shows the enormous speed at which an organisation can grow in such a situation.

On the question of what it means to play a leading role, we're entirely with Luxemburg and the German Left in the belief that the influence of the Party over the working class is exercised primarily through its ideas, its programme and its slogans rather than through the power of its organisation and its own initiation of action. The latter two elements are undoubtedly part of the activity of a Party, but they can never be the defining part. Certainly, in our present tiny size and isolation, any attempts to "organise" the class can only be fantasy.

2. Without elaboration here, the body of class positions contained more or less in the Platform of the ICC are inseparable from revolutionary activity, and would form the necessary foundation of political clarity.

3. Federalism and localism are incompatible with communist organisation, which can only be centralised. We've already tried to demonstrate in the text that we don't think it's possible to rummage through working class history and produce a blueprint for revolutionary organisation which can be applied willy-nilly.

"Centralism in the socialist sense is not an absolute thing applicable to any phase whatsoever of the labour movement. It is a tendency which becomes real in proportion to the development and political training acquired by the working masses in the course of their struggle."
Luxemburg - "Leninism or Marxism"

The accusations of the ICC to the contrary, when we left that organisation we didn't turn our backs on centralisation, but on a form of centralisation which had substituted itself for the organisation as a whole. We are FOR centralisation which allows the

whole organisation to speak, to think and to act. We are with Luxemburg when she says:

"The Ultra-Centralism asked by Lenin" (or of the ICC apparat) "is full of the sterile spirit of the overseer. It is not a positive and creative spirit. Lenin's concern is not so much to make the activity of the party more fruitful, as to control the party - to narrow the movement rather than to develop it; to bind rather than to unify it."
(Ibid)

4. We reject the notion that defence of clarity on the class lines and commitment to a centralised mode of organisation is synonymous with monolithism and sectarianism, along the lines of the ICC and the CWO. One of the lessons we've tried to draw in this text is that an organisation can't survive as an organ of the class without the widest and most thorough-going freedom of debate both internally and publicly and that is inseparable from the free operation of tendencies and fractions. Far from seeing this as a sign of "immaturity or degeneration" as the ICC do, we think this is an inevitable sign of the health of an organisation. As we've pointed out elsewhere in this Bulletin (in the letter to the CWO), a practical rejection of sectarianism must start by understanding that in a milieu as tiny, fragmented and remote from the life of the class as ours, there is almost nothing to stand in the way of arbitrariness in the adoption of positions. Therefore, we should exercise a profound seriousness and responsibility about the gravity of taking up a position organisationally, and a profound caution about the way we choose to defend those positions in the political milieu in which we work. But standing alongside this caution must be a positive boldness about opening up debate publicly. The whole revolutionary movement has to put away its current timidity. It's the suppression of debate we have to fear. The milieu is too tiny and weak to be able to afford the bottling up of debates inside individual organisations. We have to exorcise the notion that political clarity and cohesion demands either the total agreement of everyone on everything (as in the old CWO vision of "programmatic centralism"), or the presenting of a united front to the external world as in the ICC.

We don't present this text as a final closed position but as a contribution and we hope, a focal point, in the debates opened up by the clear sharpening of the tasks of the proletariat and its revolutionary fractions at the beginnings of the 1980s. We would welcome all comments and responses.

Cormack