
communist
the bulletin

* A NEW REGROUPMENT

* THE "ULTRA LEFT REVIEW"
— A POST MORTEM

* Correspondence — The CWO

* Capitalism — One Way Ticket
to Atlantis

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OUR ADDRESS

The Bulletin

Aberdeen

Scotland

without any other mention.

A NEW REGROUPMENT

This issue of the Bulletin marks a qualitative development in our political activity. The ex-ICC comrades in Aberdeen initially launched the Bulletin as a focus and vehicle for the debate and process of clarification we felt was necessary in the wake of the traumatic splits from the ICC in 1981. The circumstances of those splits - well documented elsewhere - meant that the comrades who left did so without first clarifying in a developed fashion their critique of the organisation they were leaving and without, therefore, laying a foundation of clarity for the way ahead. The only point of undisputed agreement was that a process of clarification was currently impossible in the ICC. The comrades from Aberdeen argued then that this was an insufficient basis for a new regroupment which required an initial period of discussion and clarification to ensure agreement on what it was we were leaving behind in the ICC, and why, and on the perspectives for future activity. Unfortunately, the events of the past year have proved us right with many comrades leaving politics altogether in despair and confusion, and others drifting into impotence in the politics of localism and activism. Although we had hoped that the Bulletin would involve the majority of the ICC splitters, in the event only the comrades from Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Leeds participated. The decision to formally regroup was taken at a meeting in Aberdeen in mid-February. The bulk of this issue contains a record of the correspondence and discussion which preceded this regroupment.

Although the discussions might seem to an outsider to have had too limited a scope to form the basis of a new organisation, being very largely focussed on organisational questions, in reality the foundation for the discussion was the very high degree of political homogeneity arising from our shared political past. Whatever else we were rejecting in the practice of the ICC, two areas remained firm - the absolute necessity for a centralised party, wedded to, the political clarity of the positions contained in the ICC Platform. We don't feel any sense of incongruity at announcing a new organisation and making reference to another organisation's platform in the same breath. (Although we will be publishing our own Platform in the near future.) On the contrary, our ability to do so, is testimony to the major achievements of the revolutionary movement which re-emerged in the late 60's and early 70's. That re-emergence was dominated by the need to re-appropriate the lessons of the left communist fractions of the last revolutionary wave and to delineate the political consequences of understanding that capitalism globally had passed irrevocably into its period of decadence by the outbreak of WW1 - viz the bourgeois nature of reformism, trade unionism, parliamentarism and national liberation struggles etc. For revolutionaries today, this process of re-appropriation doesn't have to be recapitulated. A solid kernel of communist clarity has already been established which serves as a starting-point for revolutionaries like ourselves. This is not to say that these fundamental class positions don't need to be deepened or can be skated over in our interventionary work. On the contrary, the constant and recurring evidence of political degeneration shows the fragility of the major achievements of the revolutionary movement over the past decade.

Although on a practical level, we're outside the ICC today because it

became impossible for us - was MADE impossible for us - to exist inside the ICC, on a much more profound political level, we're outside the ICC today, precisely because we believe that the ICC's mode of working not only fails to fully recognise this fragility of the revolutionary movement but also, in the last analysis, contributes to it.

An overview of the past decade shows that the achievements of the early 70's - the development of political clarity and the no less important emergence of communist organisations based on that clarity - have NOT been extended and built upon. Our hopes for increasing influence in the class have foundered upon our total lack of growth and our continuing and virtually complete, isolation from workers; and within the revolutionary milieu itself, our hopes for a more fundamental and widespread regroupment have been continually frustrated by the crippling weight of sectarianism and monolithism. We think that the current forces of instability and fragmentation within the revolutionary milieu have their roots in a deepening awareness of the current impasse which has trapped all our hopes. All our work in past Bulletins and in the discussions contained within this issue, has been aimed at achieving a rational appreciation of the material and historical limitations imposed upon us so that we can organise ourselves and our work in a fashion which minimises these limitations rather than exacerbates them.

THE LESSONS OF THE PAST.

Of course, we don't approach the problems of revolutionary organisation and practice in a vacuum but draw upon the experience of the revolutionary fractions of the last revolutionary wave - in particular from the Bolsheviks and the German and Italian Left. But if that's our starting point, we can't hope to go on from there and draw the relevant lessons unless we understand how fundamentally our situation differs from theirs. To quote from "Another Look at the Organisation Question" in Bulletin No.2, in which we took a detailed look at the situation and practice of the Bolsheviks.

"In 1903, the Party could afford to pay about 30 fulltime distributors of ISKRA. (That's considerably larger 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. All this has to be set against a total working class population of perhaps $3\frac{1}{2}$ million."

Of course, it's not just a question of numbers. The numbers are only an expression of the much more important political reality that the Bolsheviks, and the other revolutionary fractions, were a living part of the class. Noting the size and influence of the revolutionary fractions is merely another way of understanding that revolutionary politics and tradition were firmly implanted in the class's own consciousness and activity.

Today, we're almost unimaginably remote from that situation. We're confronted with - at best - a few hundred communists in the whole world attempting to intervene in a working class totally unfamiliar with revolutionary positions and its own revolutionary heritage and which remains totally unaware of our existence. We don't think anyone in the

revolutionary movement today has openly and consciously confronted this reality. In discussions with the CWO, for example, they could only assert (with a certain amount of uneasiness, to be sure,) that revolutionaries had known tininess and isolation before and referred us to the genesis of the Bolsheviks and to the post-1905 period of reaction in Russia. We can only repeat here what we replied then - these comparisons substantiate our point. The Bolsheviks emerged as a strong vigorous and numerically substantial fraction of a much larger political movement, both in Russia and worldwide. And if the defeat of 1905 produced organisational decimation, it left untouched the heritage of thousands of revolutionaries still at large within a class familiar with its own revolutionary tradition. WE HAVE TO BE CLEAR THAT THE SITUATION FACING US TODAY IS UNPRECEDENTED FOR REVOLUTIONARIES PRIOR TO A REVOLUTION.

We think this is a starting point for ensuring that any dismay engendered by a recognition of the limitations circumscribing the political achievements of the past decade doesn't become a reason for abandoning those achievements. We don't have any sympathy with the argument that since attempts to build international, centralised organisations have always been crippled by sectarianism we should therefore turn our backs on centralisation. On the contrary, for us, the achievements of clarity and the creation of a milieu to defend that clarity in an organised, continuing and stable fashion, is inseparable from the commitment to the necessity for a centralised party. On this question we are entirely in agreement with the ICC when they argue that the question is no longer "for or against the party" but "what kind of party". And we would extend that to say it's no longer a question of "for or against centralisation" but "what kind of centralisation". However, if we agree on the question, it should be clear to readers of the Bulletin that we begin to part company on the answer.

THE PRESENT.

For us, the tininess and isolation of the revolutionary milieu has two major consequences:

1) First of all, it means a major weakening in the process by which revolutionary fractions give voice and shape to the clarity which emerges from the activity of the class as a whole. The rupture between the class and its revolutionaries means that the process of clarification so vital to the tasks of revolutionaries is condemned to take place in considerable isolation from its material base. The day-to-day contact with the life of the class, the unceasing interplay between communist militants and the class as a whole at every level of struggle, which was enjoyed as a matter of course by the revolutionary fractions of the past, is totally denied to us. When revolutionaries of the last wave "reflected" on the lessons of the class's experience they did so as a living part of the class in a fashion which allowed them not only a sensitivity to the twists and turns of the developments of the class's consciousness, but more importantly, provided them with an immediate feedback on the validity of their "reflections". The Bolsheviks were implanted in the heart of the class not only because of their political clarity, but dialectically, the opposite was also true. They were politically clear because they were at the heart of the class.

For us, however, the situation is quite different. Not only are we forced to carry on the process of clarification from the position of virtual bystanders, but the fruits of this process, the political positions which underpin our activity, aren't subject to the same testing in the fires of the actual struggle. We can't tell how valid or how wrong a position is simply by the response of the class to it since the response is nearly always the same - nil. In this situation, there is almost nothing to guard against an arbitrariness in the emergence of positions and in the weight we accord them. The briefest of glances at the various "vital" issues which have torn the communist milieu apart in the past decade provides no shortage of evidence on this. From the CWO alone we've had an entire series of issues proclaimed to be absolutely essential to revolutionary identity - the Falling Rate of Profit Theory v. Luxemburgism, the necessity for Labour-Time Vouchers in the period of transition, 1921 as the definitive date for the demise of the revolution etc etc - today, of course, they've all been replaced by other equally "vital" issues (like Factory Groups, for example) or become merely areas for debate. The CWO's response to the debris left behind by this sectarianism is simply to apologise for being wrong and insist that they'll be extra careful in the future.

The ICC, on the other hand, began its life with a much fuller grasp of the real weight of sectarianism and of the real material basis which lay behind it. For this reason, it was able to achieve the most complete and significant international regroupment since the last revolutionary wave - an achievement which can't possibly be underestimated. But, as we've argued in past Bulletins and argue again in texts in this one, their grasp of the material basis of monolithism and sectarianism remained tragically incomplete, and that, despite much rhetoric to the contrary, the end result was an edifice of monolithism and sectarianism every bit as stifling as that of the CWO's.

We're not arguing here that our fragility and isolation means that we should never take up positions for fear that we're wrong. What we're arguing for, is, that in the absence of that vital input and scrutiny from the class itself, we must exercise a much greater caution about WHEN to take up a position, and that when we judge the time to be ripe, we exercise a much greater caution about the WEIGHT we give any position. THE EAGERNESS WITH WHICH THE ICC, FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE LEAPT INTO PROGRAMMATIC COMMITMENT OVER THE MOST TRANSIENT AND CONJUNCTURAL ANALYSES - THE LEFT IN OPPOSITION, THE LEFT IN POWER, MACHIAVELLIANISM, etc - IS THE VERY FLESH AND BLOOD OF SECTARIANISM. We believe, and experience bears us out, that in the present period, it's an attitude which interferes with the most vital aspects of our work - the process of clarification and the organisational strengthening of the revolutionary milieu.

2) CENTRALISATION.

We think that these arguments apply with equal force to the question of centralisation. If the question of the moment is "what kind of centralisation", we don't think it can be answered in the abstract, or in advance, but must take as its starting point our extreme fragility and isolation. In this situation, divorced from the invigorating effect of the life of the class, and lacking the natural checks and balances which flow from that, the pressures towards a sect-like behaviour and all

the paraphernalia which accompanies that - bureaucratism, cliquism and suivism - must be enormous. We've already shown in past issues how the ICC, for example, while theoretically rejecting Lenin's democratic centralism, have in practice created central organs more absolute, more powerful and more monolithic than anything that was ever seen in the Bolshevik Party prior to the counter-revolution. Again, we don't think our argument here leads to an abandonment of centralisation, but towards a centralisation which is consistently aware of the pressures on it in the present period, and which therefore, places the emphasis not on monolithic homogeneity and not on rigid discipline with itself at the head, but on a method of working which is more concerned with involving ALL in the tasks of the organisation and which opens up and aids the process of clarification.

All these arguments are developed at greater length in the following texts. All we want to argue in this introduction is that if the crippling weight of ~~the~~ sectarianism and monolithism is to be seriously rejected, then wishful thinking and pious rhetoric is insufficient. Our desires must be concretely reflected in the way that we work and in the way that we organise ourselves. And in the current period, that must mean an organisation which is much more open, much more flexible and which defines itself more broadly and less specifically than do organisations like the ICC and the CWO. We have regrouped ourselves into a new organisation, not because we think we have more correct answers than other currently existing organisations but because we believe we are putting forward a better way of asking more correct questions.

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The next section of the Bulletin contains:

- 1) An exchange of letters between Leeds and Aberdeen/Edinburgh;
- 2) A presentation made at a meeting in Leeds by one of the Aberdeen comrades;
- 3) Four presentations made at a subsequent meeting in Aberdeen which produced the final decision to regroup.
 - a) An introduction to an assessment of the present balance of class forces by the Leeds comrade plus an addition by one of the Aberdeen comrades.
 - b) An introduction to the general question of taking positions. (Aberdeen)
 - c) An introduction to the question of centralisation. (Aberdeen).
 - d) A presentation on the practical consequences for organisation. (Aberdeen).

* * * * *

Letter written by Aberdeen/Edinburgh to all the splitters from the ICC.
12/10/82.

Dear Comrades,

We haven't heard from you for some time but we assume that you received and read the two Bulletins we produced in Aberdeen and that you remain committed to revolutionary activity.

When we split from the ICC, we argued that a regroupment of the elements emerging from the ICC had to be based on clarity about what we were rejecting in the ICC and agreement on the way forward. We argued then that that could only be achieved after a period of reflection and discussion and that the will to "do something" and to "work together" was an insufficient basis for a lasting regroupment. The Bulletin was produced as a vehicle and focus for this process.

However, it's now a year since we split from the ICC and we think that we've gone as far as we can with an organ which was nothing more than a vehicle for discussion. If the two issues are taken as a whole, we think it's possible to discern in a general way, the theoretical framework for future political activity. We've sketched in where we stand on the role of the Party, on the question of centralisation, on the question of the rejection of the sectarianism and monolithism of the ICC and the CWO, and we've also laid the basis for a realistic appraisal of the limitations constraining revolutionary work in the present period. We think that we've now reached the stage where we must transform the general theoretical framework into detailed concrete reality and formally constitute ourselves as an organisation. Therefore, we've set ourselves a timetable for producing a Platform, a text on the perspectives for revolutionary activity in the present period and the first issue of a magazine. Between now and then, we intend to discuss in a detailed fashion what type and shape of organisation we're trying to build. That is, we have to decide -

- what type of interventions in the class struggle we intend to make
- what our relations to the revolutionary milieu should be, bearing in mind our rejection of the ICC's sectarianism
- what the shape and content of our internal life should be, bearing in mind our rejection of the ICC's monolithism.

If you are sympathetic to the analyses we've made in the Bulletin and if you remain committed to the class lines of the ICC's Platform and to the need for centralised revolutionary organisation, then we ask you to participate in these discussions. Please let us know your response as soon as possible so that we can draw up a definite timetable and agenda.

Yours fraternally,

Aberdeen/Edinburgh.

Reply from Leeds. 3/11/82.

Dear Comrades,

We have received your recent letter and have discussed its contents. We are certainly interested in participating in the programme of discussions you outline and are in broad agreement that the object of such discussions should be the formation of a new political organisation.

For some time now two of us have been meeting regularly. Our discussions

have not been very systematic or structured but we have covered most of the present concerns of the proletarian milieu: the split in the ICC, the activity and publications of the various groups, the issues of party and class, organisation, intervention etc. We have also met with members of the CWO, Wildcat and the UCM. We have been joined by a third comrade who has recently moved to Leeds.

We are all aware however, that these discussions have only prepared the ground for a more organised revolutionary practice. Some of our conclusions we will mention here because they coincide strongly with positions developed in the Bulletins. Further texts are obviously necessary on the specific areas of discussion outlined in your letter.

1. Party and class consciousness.

We reject the extremes of the Bordigist view of the party as the only motor force of the revolution, and of the councillist view that a party is a hindrance to the development of class consciousness. We hold that there is an interactive process between the party and the class which neither of these views give full credit to.

The party is an essential element of the class movement as an organisation of the communist vanguard. It is a permanent organised expression of the revolutionary movement, a point of reference for the class. It takes on the task of reflecting on the class's activity of structuring and theorising it. It may act itself (the dissolution of the Provisional Assembly during the Russian Revolution) but generally it intervenes within the working class and its mass organisations. It is the class as a whole, fully conscious and with organisations which unify it, which is the active factor in the revolution. There is no substitute for the creativity of millions of proletarians. Certainly the class's self activity cannot be replaced by the most perfect programme, the most clear-sighted militants or the most effective political party.

2. Revolutionary organisations today.

The organisations of today are not synonymous with the party of the future as the PCI (Programma) believe, or the CWO and Battaglia suggest they believe by their projects to organise the class. But neither is the party entirely a question for tomorrow when the activity of the class will make its formation possible. To believe that a handful of revolutionaries has the functions of a party, or to believe that revolutionaries today must limit their horizons to what is immediately possible, both positions lead to activism and demoralisation.

On the contrary, one of the most important tasks of a revolutionary organisation is developing the understanding of what the party constituted in the last revolutionary wave and what are the parameters of its theory and practice in the next. Discussing this question recognises the essential continuity between today's small groups and what will be possible in the future.

We accept the need for a centralised organisation. Federalism is not an alternative to centralisation because in the end it becomes another form of centralisation but in disguise and inaccessible to the membership. But centralisation does not imply a monolithic practice, whether recognised as such or not.

Within a centralised organisation local groups still need to have a measure of autonomy in action. "Transient analyses" (to use your own phrase) should not become binding positions of the organisation, while those positions which the organisation does adopt are never closed to further consideration. The future actions of the class are going to provide new historical insights which it is the task of revolutionaries to uncover and integrate into their programme. A platform of an organisation is not something handed down on tablets of stone by Marxists of the past, it is a living statement of the lessons of class struggle.

Finally, we would argue that discussions within an organisation as well as those between organisations should take place in front of the class. Differences in its own ranks is not a sign of weakness which an organisation needs to hide, but an indicator of its health.

From the above, we think you will agree that there is a basis for further discussion. You imply in your letter that the next step might be a meeting of all those who reply positively to your letter. We would suggest that such a meeting might be more fruitful when some draft texts have been produced for a platform, statutes etc. Your comments about setting yourselves a deadline give us the impression that this might be quite soon. Given also the distance between Leeds and Aberdeen, a more informal meeting might not be all that 'cost-effective'. This of course does not rule out individual initiatives!

Fraternally,

S, J and I.

(Editor's note - In the event, although all three comrades participated in the subsequent discussions, only I, the ex-IOC member, took part in the regroupment. The other two comrades decided to hang fire pending further discussions.)

* * * * *

Leeds
November 1982

Dear Comrades,

We are writing this as a supplement to the letter from Leeds dated 3rd November. We believe this letter to have been inadequate, for it failed to express to you and the milieu our concern over an important issue which we believe must be dealt with before further discussion can take place.

This concerns Aberdeen's threats to call the police on the ICC and the strong implication in the letter to "NoWar" in the Bulletin no.1 that had the ICC "called Aberdeen's bluff" (ie. arrived in Aberdeen in a group to demand the return of their organisational material) Aberdeen would have called the police. "No easy decision to make, at least at the reasoned political level. Although, for physical and family reasons, the choice might have been made without any angst."

There are several important implications of this action and the statement, which expresses:

1 the belief that the ICC is not a revolutionary organisation for no revolutionary could seriously consider calling in the repressive forces of the bourgeois state to arbitrate a dispute between revolutionaries. To involve the police in the internal affairs of a revolutionary organisation is an action aimed at the destruction of that organisation. Aberdeen however, in its letter to "NoWar" and elsewhere in its publications expressly denies that it believes or believed at any time that the ICC is a counter-revolutionary organisation whose destruction must be sought.

2 the belief that the repressive state forces are interested in protecting the safety of workers and their families, let alone that of revolutionaries. Let us attempt to consider the response of the police when informed that an international hit brigade were about to break in to recuperate certain revolutionary documents belonging to their organisation. (That these words have not been used to the police is irrelevant. The investigations as to the link between the supposed assailants and Aberdeen could not fail to come to communism: the houses of the Aberdeen comrades would be searched, anyone who had given their address to Aberdeen would immediately be suspect, the investigations into the ICC would cause at least great disruption and possible criminal proceedings against individual comrades.) In short, the Aberdeen comrades would be dead politically and would have done their best to destroy an important sector of the revolutionary milieu.

Whatever one thinks of the heavy-handedness of the ICC in the circumstances of the splits, Aberdeen's reaction seems indefensible, betraying an almost incredible degree of political naivete as to the nature of the police. It indicates the Aberdeen comrades as a danger to the milieu as a whole. It is also in contradiction with Aberdeen's expressed position as to the class nature of the ICC.

Until refutes its actions in this instance, it seems to us that the group cannot seriously be considered by anyone in the proletarian milieu as a contributory group in the formation of a new proletarian organisation. We feel that this matter must be one of urgent discussion for you, and that a clear statement must be made to the milieu as a whole. We hope this will be done, as our political development towards a critique of the :

organisational practise and theory of the ICC (in particular over such questions as the "conspiracy theory"), whilst retaining a view of class consciousness that would seem to distance us from the CWO, indicates that we share with you many concerns. These have been indicated, but not yet sufficiently developed in the bulletins, which have been, understandably but, we think, too exclusively, concerned with the question of organisation. We would like to be able to work with you towards a clearer understanding of the issues that commonly concern us and the milieu as a whole: but unless you publicly recognise that revolutionaries cannot under any circumstances involve the repressive forces of the bourgeois state in political disputes, we will have to review the possibility of further discussion with you.

Fraternally,

Our reply:

Comrades,

Your letter raises an important issue and gives us an opportunity to make clear our position in response to the smears of the ICC. We don't think anyone in the revolutionary movement will gain very much from another re-iteration of the events surrounding the splits on the level of who-did-what-to-who, therefore, we want to stick to the political issues involved as far as possible.

1 First of all, let's be clear what it is we're discussing. In the accusations of the ICC, and to a certain extent in your letter, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that NO ONE involved the police. What we're dealing with is the threat to do so. No one in Aberdeen has any illusions about the political significance of actually involving the state in the affairs of revolutionaries. Anyone carrying out such an act irrevocably removes himself from the revolutionary camp. It's not an act that can be justified from the standpoint of revolutionaries or the working class. Like yourselves, we don't think there is any room for argument here and our position on this is absolutely clear, without any equivocation.

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No one in Aberdeen has any "naivety" about the role and function of the police. We don't think have any illusions that the police would have "protected" us. On the contrary, it would have been disastrous for us all. What we did believe, was that the threat of the police would stop the ICC's rampage. As far as we can tell, it did.. And to date, no one has yet suggested to us another method of achieving this.

3 However, they should also make it clear that we believe that even just threatening to involve the state, is an action which is quite alien to revolutionary practices. So also is breaking and entering comrades' homes, smashing their telephones, stealing their political and personal possessions, physical intimidation and the deliberate creation of an atmosphere of terror. As is the appalling and cynical political destruction of a comrade by completely unsubstantiated allegations of being a police spy. All of these actions of the ICC are also quite alien to revolutionary practice.

However, as we have argued consistently in the past, we don't believe these actions, however repugnant, and unacceptable, they might be, changes the class nature of the ICC as an organisation. Similarly, we don't believe our response to these actions renders us "politically dead" nor does it make us a "danger to the milieu as a whole". Just as importantly, we don't believe that these actions of the ICC constitutes a barrier to fraternal relations or joint work. The revolutionary milieu is too tiny, too fragile and our tasks are too important to allow us to erect false barriers between us in addition to the very real ones that we are already struggling to overcome. We can see the very real weight that sectarianism has in the communist milieu today in the ICC's blank refusal to contemplate a joint intervention with us against the slaughter of the Falklands ar. When the Zimmerwald of tomorrow arrives, could we seriously contemplate obstructing it because of alleged improprieties in the past? Although we have little hope that the ICC will repudiate their actions and although they remain publically committed to resolving a political disagreement by violence in their still extant threat to remove internal discussion bulletins by force from ex-members, we would be abdicating our political responsibilities if we allowed our disagreement with that to become another brick in the sectarian wall.

4 Finally, it should be said that these threats were not issued by the 'Bulletin Group' which had no collective existence at that time. Of the individuals involved, one of the Aberdeen comrades had no part in the issuing of the threat and immediately disassociated herself from it, and the Edinburgh comrade, after some thought, did likewise.

We hope this letter has made our position clear and removed any possible obstacle to future discussion and joint work.

Fraternally.

PERSPECTIVES.

(Presentation made at Leeds meeting by Cormack (Aberdeen).)

General. We've had a certain amount of difficulty just trying to decide what the scope of this discussion should be, let alone deciding what the detailed contents should be. Fundamentally, we need a text, or texts, to provide the guidelines for our future activity. What is required is something which, firstly, defines in a general way the tasks of revolutionaries in the present period, and then situates our particular role within that. I think it's worth saying that these tasks are objectively rooted; that they spring from the concrete needs of the class and that they're NOT merely a product of our likes and dislikes or of what we think our capabilities are. It's surprising that we even have to state this but it's precisely the way that most of the ICC splitters appear to have approached their tasks. They've asked themselves what they can do (or like to do) in the current period and then generalised from there. It seems to me an approach which has the cart totally before the horse and owes little to Marxism. Our tasks are objectively defined, depending not only on our assessment of the particulars of the present situation but also on our conception of class consciousness and our understanding of the revolutionary process. I'm not trying to argue here that we need all the answers to all the questions before we can act but that if we don't have all these concerns constantly in the forefront of our minds then it will become impossible to separate personal whims from class needs and we will have no basis for stable disciplined work in the face of the fluctuations and vicissitudes of the class struggle. I'm not trying to argue either that we ignore our capabilities. Obviously, our abilities and resources (or lack of them) determine HOW we tackle our tasks, or even whether we judge it worthwhile to make the attempt.

Let us now turn to the content of this text. As a starting point, we have some 'givens' which don't need to be dealt with in such a text:

- 1) The class lines which are more or less covered by the Platform of ICC - decadence; unions; parliamentarism; national liberation etc etc.
- 2) The role of the party. By that I mean that in past issues of the Bulletin we've already defined where we stand in the debate - on the one hand, a rejection of libertarian/localist conceptions and in hand with a defence of the absolute need for a party which is centralised and which plays an indispensable leading role in the struggles of the class. On the other hand, we reject the Bordigist fantasies of acting like the class's general staff.

What we are concerned with in this text is the practical application of these 'givens'. All I want to do today is indicate the most central issues which have to be confronted.

The Reassessment of the Balance of Class Forces.

Here we are really dealing with the old ICC question of the Course of History. At one end of the debate we have the ICC with their scenario of an undefeated class pointed inexorably at revolution, and at the other end we have the CWO's scenario which used to postulate that the course towards war and the course towards revolution could unfold simultaneously. Today of course, they seem to be saying that revolution will only emerge from profound and total defeat. We have to define where we stand in this debate.

As a starting point I think we can probably reassert the ICC's position that we enter this period with an undefeated class. However, given the current impasse PTO

in the class struggle this very bald assertion demands a more detailed look, and perhaps some serious qualifications. When we compare the class today with the class of the last revolutionary wave or with the defeated class of the 20s and 30s what differences can we see? Can we pick out any added weaknesses or strengths?

It's true that the last revolutionary wave emerged from a situation of immediate defeat for the class - viz the crushing of strikes after 1912 and the mobilisation for war itself but it is clear that this was NOT on the level of the total defeats of the 20s and 30s. These defeats involved not only the more obvious consequences of and effects of defeat but but also in a very real sense involved the disappearing of the revolutionary alternative. For that generation of workers revolution had been tried and had obviously failed. For the class of pre-1917 not only was the revolutionary alternative still wide open but they had behind them generations of experience of successful mass struggles. They had a gigantic heritage of knowledge and experience of their own collective strength. On top of the successful mass struggles of the period of capitalism's ascendance there were the insurrectionary experiences of 1905 which pointed openly to the possibility of revolution. Part and parcel of this experience of their own strength was the tradition of political and revolutionary awareness. We've already pointed out in the Bolshevik article the way that revolutionary fractions were imbedded in the life and daily struggles of the class. All of this explains why the class were able to overcome the immediate defeats following 1912.

Today we have to recognise how much of this is lacking in the experience and consciousness of the class. We're beginning to get that experience - the French steel strikes, Poland etc. - but were just at the start of it. We have to deal with the reality that the vast majority of future struggles short of the revolution face immediate defeat. Thus we can't hope to repeat the 19thC heritage of successful struggles. How do we assess that? To what extent can the class regain this knowledge of its collective strength? To what extent can it overcome its isolation from its own revolutionary fractions? Thus we can see that it's true to say that the class today remains undefeated in the 30s sense and that the door to revolution remains wide open but that some of the specific strengths of the pre-1917 class are absent. (It strikes me in typing this up that I have here neglected to make any attempt to look at any improvements in the class' revolutionary potential. Obviously here it would be worth looking at the much greater degree to which the world economy is interconnected, for example, so that the basis for a very rapid internationalisation of struggle is now present - cf. the simultaneous struggles in the steel industry etc - among other things.)

Any attempt to assess the relative strength of the class today and yesterday must also look at the changed role of Social Democracy. To what extent is it less firmly implanted in the class today? There isn't any question that the historically undefeated class of 1914 were able to be mobilised for war precisely because of the strength of Social Democracy and the way that generations of struggle predisposed the class to seeing Social Democracy as their organisations. Up till now we've taken for granted that the class is that much stronger as a result of reformism having lost its deeply planted roots in the class. I think it's an assertion which remains very largely true for us again but again, like the assertion that the class is undefeated, it's one that needs a closer look. We have to recognise that today the hold of reformism isn't counterbalanced by the existence of revolutionary fractions within the class. Despite the profound disgust and distrust which the class holds for reformism there still exists the residual feeling that somehow they are still class organs. Also we have to examine the situation in the Eastern Bloc and in those areas where the left wing of capital aren't allowed an existence. Poland shows how potent a weapon the left can be in these situations for disarming the class and deflecting it. However we still have to see how

the deepening crisis weakens the Left. In the 50s and 60s the left defined themselves by their willingness to buy off class struggles, but today the permanent shrinking of the world economy has undermined their ability to do this. Their room for manoeuvre has greatly diminished. More and more they are forced to openly follow the same policies as the Right. Only their promises can be different. Its clear of course that even that remains a potent weapon but it is one which becomes exposed very quickly.

Its clear that we are beginning to touch on the question raised by Chenier amongst others in the debates within the ICC about whether the control of the bourgeoisie is being strengthened or weakened by the development of the crisis - the questions about the Left in Opposition etc which bedevilled the latter discussions in the ICC. I dont think we can ignore these questions in the formation of a new organisation but what is important for these discussions is not that we commit ourselves one way or the other but that we clearly define how to contain and express these discussions inside a single organisation. In other words we must not only define what the acceptable limits of the debate are but also define what is essential to the identity of the organisation within that debate. In what sense is it necessary for an organisation to throw its programmatic weight behind one analysis or another.

Finally we have to deal with the current impasse of the class struggle. How do we assess the apparent quiescence of the class? Is it a harbinger of the profound defeats to come as the CWO would have it or do the class remain as combative as ever but are temporarily stymied by the immensity of the next step required to overcome the impasse. If its the latter, which in my opinion it is, then its not enough just to be able to point to the evidence of continuing combativity, (after all even in the depths of the profoundest defeats of the class it was possible to find evidence of combativity), what we have to look for and be able to recognise are the signs that the class can overcome the barriers confronting them - ie. evidence of self-organisation, of generalisation etc.

THE ROLE OF REVOLUTIONARIES.

(Although I presented this as two separate sections in Leeds it became clear to me in the typing that its really just different aspects of the same issue.)

The central question which confronted us in the splits from the ICC was how to organise in a manner which didnt fall foul of the traps of monolithism and sectarianism. If we are to succeed in this there are two areas which must be clearly confronted.

1. Why are we separate from the ICC?

Its clear that this is not just the practical question of locating what is different in our organisational practice or in our theoretical positions (although that is something we must do), but more importantly we must be able to make a theoretical defence of the current necessity for the existence of separate organised tendencies of the class. Both the ICC and the CWO, in their own different ways, reject this out of hand. The ICC argues that regroupment supercedes everything else and that political differences can either be expressed within the organisation or, if necessary suppressed to the level of privately held views, in the interests of the public "unity" of the organisation. The CWO, for their part, argue from the basis of their bizarre pantheon of "real" and "pseudo" groups, denying any reason for tendencies to exist outside their designated four "real" poles.

In answering this question we have to look at our understanding of the role of the Party and its relationship to the class. In past issues of the Bulletin weve already begun to define where we stand on this. For us the vital task of the party doesnt reside in the ability to organise the class but in its ability to provide political leadership based on political clarity. Therefore when we

look to build an organisation were not looking primarily for the well-oiled discipline of a military General Staff, but at a structure and method of functioning centred around the process of clarification. (It goes without saying here that I'm not talking about some form of academic clarification but of clarity as a fighting tool of intervention in the class struggle.) When we reject monolithism and sectarianism its precisely because they interfere with the process of clarification. In the last analysis its the class and its struggles which provide the answers to the debates which animate revolutionaries. None of us can be certain in advance who is right and who is wrong and thats why the different sides of revolutionary debate have real physical expression so that they are there when the class struggle chooses the answer. We would argue of course that it would be best if this maturing of debate and clarification could exist side by side with the widest possible regroupment, and it is this which demands the rejection of sectarianism and monolithism. Regroupment is vital, but a single unified organisation is useless to the class without clarity and without the ability to respond to and absorb the lessons and activity of the class itself. Weve seen in the Bolshevik text how it was this very ability of the Bolsheviks which allowed them to take up their tasks and weve also seen how the monolithism of the ICC has rendered them increasingly blind to reality and unable to respond to the class.

2. The Current Isolation of Revolutionaries

As we tried to point out in the Bolshevik text if we cannot recognise how crucially our situation differs, in terms of isolation and size, from the revolutionary fractions of the last revolutionary wave, we cant hope to apply the organisational lessons of the past. The third section of the Bolshevik text deals with these differences at some length so I wont repeat it here except to say that we are tiny and remote from the class in a way that would have been unimaginable in the past. We have to openly confront that and make an attempt at defining the consequences, otherwise the lessons of the past become nothing but blind dogma. We have to decide if our current situation is one which will only be swept away at the point of insurrection or if the implicit assumptions of progressive growth and influence in parallel with the deepening of the crisis and the class struggle are still valid. Whatever we decide on this (and it might well be possible to commit ourselves either way) we have to at least realise and recognise, as a starting point, the degree of our current fragility and the lack of any evidence of a mechanism for growth in the foreseeable future.

a) What does the recognition of this mean for our interventionary work? For a start it very clearly has disastrous consequences for those gravitating towards the Bordigist vision of the Party. For those who believe that the fundamental task of the party is to organise the class and the revolution a realistic appraisal of our tininess and prospects for growth can only lead to despair and the belief that the class is defeated or inevitably headed that way. The CWO seem to have already said this and it seems clear that Battaglia are headed the same way.

For us however its more a question of being able to realistically assess the material limitations which confront us so that we can use our resources in a sane and balanced way. In one sense we can approach this on a more or less practical question of how to draw the balance between our interventionary work aimed at the class and that aimed at the revolutionary milieu. For example, do we aim immediately aim for a paper aimed at the class (like WR or WV), or do we concentrate on a magazine aimed at the milieu with mainly leaflets for intervention in the class? (With hindsight those of us who were in the ICC can see that this question was never posed in the debates about WR going monthly and to newspaper format. The implicit assumption of progressive, almost automatic growth in size and influence meant that the move was seen as automatic. The debate was purely in terms of physical logistics and never really questioned the political criteria for the current usefulness of a newspaper.) We also have to look at the most worthwhile way of intervening in the class itself.

Are regular, general, educative-type leaflets, aimed at all workers worthwhile for instance? Or should we just intervene during actual struggles in a more agitational fashion? Should we be more selective about the actual struggles we intervene in, etc?

It's clear that these questions can't be answered in the abstract or just on the basis of our particular resources but must be related to the conclusions we reach in the first part of this text about the balance of class forces. The weight we give to the balance between intervention in the milieu and in the class in general depends on whether we are confronted with a period of upsurge or one of reflux. Are we in a period where what is important is not so much our ability to intervene effectively in the class but our ability to 'theorise' and to defend political clarity? Over and above the specifications of the immediate period we have to decide on a mode of existence which allows us to deal with vicissitudes in the class struggle so that we can defend the organisation as a pole of clarity. That's clearly needed in a reflux when demoralisation is rife and difficult to avoid but it is just as necessary during an upsurge when the plunge into activism can be fatal unless it is backed up by, and doesn't overwhelm, a steady systematic organised existence, functioning as our political bedrock.

b) What does the recognition of our tenuousness and remoteness from the class mean for our internal organisation? We've already described in the Bolshevik text how the constant tension between local/sectional activity and autonomy and the central organs was resolved in practice by the sheer size and vitality of the Bolsheviks and, most importantly, by the way they were implanted in, and open to, the life of the class. Since we lack that today does that mean that our commitment to centralised organisation condemns us to the cliquism and monolithism of the sects? It is perhaps not possible to answer that question but a couple of things can be said in advance. If we are not conscious of the problem then we can't even begin to tackle it, and secondly, the problem isn't one which can be dealt with simply by the production of formal, constitutional guarantees in advance. If, for the moment, we can't say HOW to achieve what we want, perhaps in the long run that is less important than being clear about WHAT it is we actually do want.

As a starting point we can say that both our assessment of the current fragility of the revolutionary movement and our experience in organisations like the ICC and CWO leads us to an implacable opposition to any expression of monolithism or sectarianism. Therefore we need a form of centralisation which promotes and focusses the widest possible debate rather than suppresses it in the name of "orthodoxy". We need a centralisation which exists for the purpose of allowing ALL members to play their part in the life of the organisation and we don't have room for central organs which substitute themselves for the organisation as a whole. The central organs are not the brains of the organisation and are not the repository or the producer of all clarity.

If we are to build an organisation which allows the widest possible debate then we have to look again at the whole business of 'taking positions'. When we look at organisations like the ICC and the CWO we can see that one of the mechanisms of monolithism and sectarianism is precisely their positive eagerness to leap into programmatic commitment, sometimes even at the first contribution to a debate. We're not arguing here that organisations shouldn't take up positions but that it should be done more cautiously. We must be sure that the necessity for organisational commitment exists. As an example I can't see any reason for an organisational position on the 'left in opposition' debate. How did the ICC gain from this? Also it's necessary to look again at the consequences of taking such a position. It's true that there are class positions which are so fundamental that they are not really open to debate but I want to argue here that the vast majority of organisational positions on the more transient and conjunctural ANALYSES must be open to wide continuous and public debate.

As a final comment on this its worth saying that I dont think its possible or desirable to build a once-and-for-all internal structure in advance of anticipated needs. Whatever forms of centralisation we create must be appropriate for our current needs. I dont think theres any finished blueprint for organisation which can be applied willy-nilly to any situation.

c) Finally we want to look at what the recognition of our current fragility does for our relations with the rest of the milieu. Many of the ICC splitters (viz. the NOWAR comrades) have had a strong tendency to argue that its not possible in the present period to build a coherent centralised international (or even national) organisation but that realistically we can only aim for a fraternal network of local (and localist) groups, based round kernels of people who 'trust' each other. Clearly we wouldnt be having these discussions if we accepted that but we need something more than assertions here. I wont do it here but at some point in the formation of a new organisation we need a more developed critique of localism and a defence of the widest possible centralised regroupment. However, having said that, I think we do need to assess the whole question of regroupment. In the past the whole question was linked to the implicit assumption of automatic growth in size and influence. Continual regroupment was seen as just one expression of the progressive strengthening we all assumed was taking place. With no evidence that this is progressive strengthening is occurring we have to ask ourselves today to what extent regroupment is possible today. To what extent does it depend on the activity of the class and the real material situation? I think we have to reject the old ICC notion that the material conditions now exist for a total regroupment and that only the act of will is missing. I think thats clearly wrong. We cant produce the conditions for a new Zimmerwald by an act of will. It was the outbreak of war and the combativity of the class that laid the foundation for the regroupment which produced the party of 1917.

However recognising this doesnt condemn us to localism nor does it stop us working for the widest possible regroupment that we can achieve. But as I've said earlier the criterion is the defence of clarity. Organisational building which compromises this or hampers the process of debate and clarification is worse than useless. If we follow the logic of this through perhaps it should lead to us abandoning any conception of ourselves as a pole of regroupment, as the kernel of any future Party but rather to see ourselves as a living part of the process of clarification. To this end we want our relations with the rest of the milieu to be as open and as fraternal as possible. If were serious about the rejection of sectarianism then we must look to the practical expression of that. That means an openness to debate, to working for the institution of some structure of permanent ongoing debate (like the International Conferences), to opening up our press to outsiders, to actively striving for joint work and interventions and to turning away from the language of ultimata.

Cormack.

War or Revolution?: The debate on the course of history

I.

Weighing the balance of class forces between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie seems more difficult today than at any previous time in the history of the young revolutionary movement.

In the heady days of the early seventies when the regroupment which led to the creation of the ICC and the CWO was taking place there was no problem. We had no doubts about the re-emergence of the crisis when the majority of bourgeois economists still predicted the continued growth of the capitalist economy. We made apocalyptic pronouncements about the threat of war when CND and the anti-war movement was still a phenomenon of the fifties. Our analyses were quickly confirmed by events and by the growing pessimism of bourgeois commentators. But best of all we had the immediate past history of an enormous upsurge of class struggle: May 68, Italy in 69, Poland in 70, Argentina and so on - see any of the early publications of the ICC for variations on the list of the proletariat's clashes with the bourgeoisie.

At the same time the capitalist states seemed helpless either to control the crisis (strong currencies weakened, trade deficits yawned, stock markets plunged) or to control the working class (strikes had to be bought off, strikers were released from prison by the threat of general strikes, and union leaders were abused and ignored by their members). While no one predicted the date of the revolution, there was nevertheless the assumption that the class was on a fairly straight course to a revolutionary challenge to the power of capital. The main threat was seen as coming from the left - the last card of the bourgeoisie. The scenario (with Portugal as the model) saw successive parties of the bourgeoisie becoming discredited till only the stalinists or the trotskyists would bar the path to revolution.

In the mid seventies some of these certainties took a knock. The level of class struggle nose-dived. It took a little while for revolutionaries to theorise this as a lull in the class struggle. The bourgeoisie began to claw back the gains which the proletariat had made in the previous period, the unions refurbished their militant image, social contracts reduced standards of living, and the state updated its means of repression.

This was also the period of eurocommunism, the historic compromise and governments of parties of the left. The ICC characterised the left wing as the natural party of government. When some members in Northampton suggested that the left might have to return to opposition when its popularity waned, their text was criticised and ignored.

Nevertheless, the crisis still developed in this period - we had the oil price rise and slumpflation. It was generally felt that it was only a matter of time before the class overcame the obstacle of the left and the struggle broke out again, more episodically perhaps, but also more militant and more generalised.

Towards the end of the seventies this prediction seemed to be fulfilled. The miners strike in the US, the lorry drivers in Britain, the steel strikes in France and Britain, the dockworkers in Rotterdam all seemed to show that the lull was well and truly over. The ICC in particular took this as a signal for a much higher level of intervention and involvement in the struggle.

There was a different character to these strikes from the strikes of the early seventies. They were struggles against a much more determined bourgeoisie who were obliged to cut back production in the face of the slump in world trade and they were fought against a background of rising unemployment. Even where the strikes were partly successful in achieving the aims of the strikers, they were Pyrrhic victories for the whole of the class. The greater involvement of revolutionaries meant they were more greatly affected by defeats.

By 1980 there had been a swing to right wing governments and the left wing parties were in disarray. The ICC hailed the eighties as the decade of truth - the bourgeoisie was going to come straight out with the need to increase unemployment, slash wages and the social wage. The military competition between the blocs began a new upward spiral and produced the meteoric rise in the peace movement.

The morale of the revolutionary milieu was affected by two major events in the early eighties - the Russian invasion of Afghanistan which certain elements in the ICC took to mean that the course to war had been opened up for the bourgeoisie, and the mass strikes in Poland which was given only a tentative welcome (except by the premature enthusiasts) but eventually hailed as proof that indeed the course was towards revolution.

For the ICC the past 15 years has seen the "coming to consciousness", not of the proletariat, but of the bourgeoisie. The forces of capital are putting into effect the most effective policy for containing, demoralising and defeating the working class - the left in opposition. But at the same time the proletariat are undefeated and any day now will return to the revolutionary path. For the CWO and Battaglia the course of history has always been towards war and revolution and recently they have begun to see war as the most likely outcome. The activist elements of the milieu like Wildcat might express an impatience with the whole question of the course of history but their practice does not resolve or even escape the dilemma, but only ignores it. The debate on the course of history today is characterised by increasingly dogmatic assertion of the possibility of revolution in the face of the forces of despair and demoralisation.

II

In order to find our way out of the impasse which faces the revolutionary milieu it is necessary to examine the assumptions which underlie our position on the balance of class forces. We need to go beyond a simple assertion of the course of history.

Certainly no meaningful revolutionary activity is possible without agreement on the following outline of the present conjuncture:

that capitalism has entered the crisis phase of what we characterise in decadent capitalism as a cycle of war, reconstruction and crisis; the crisis cannot be reversed but will inexorably deepen until it finds its resolution in a new world war; that the proletariat is the only force in society which can halt the process towards war by overthrowing the power of the bourgeoisie; and that the proletariat remains undefeated, that is capable of raising its struggle to the level of organisation and consciousness required for its revolutionary task.

This formulation raises many questions in itself. What is the depth of the crisis and how much room for manoeuvre is still left to the bourgeoisie? How imminent is an interimperialist war between the blocs? What kind of a war: a conventional war with large land armies, or a full scale exchange of nuclear arms? What is the situation of the working class faced with an ideological onslaught from the bourgeoisie and massive unemployment? How is the proletariat to reappropriate the lessons of its past historical struggles when its revolutionary minorities are so tiny?

It is easy to find reassuring answers to these questions. For example that the bourgeoisie will not go to war until the working class has been defeated. But this relies on a series of assertions about the level of consciousness of the bourgeoisie, about the nature of the next war, about the ability of the bourgeoisie to control the course of interimperialist conflict when it cannot control the crisis. A whole edifice can be built on the requirements of the revolutionary minority rather than making an attempt to understand the situation we are facing.

If we are to make a real effort to come to terms with the course of history, we must begin with the past. The sketch at the beginning is very impressionistic but our understanding of the period since the second world war and particularly of the period since the re-emergence of the crisis is impresssionistic. After all many of us lived through these events and think we understand them. The first step must be the appropriation of our own period as history. The analyses that were made at the time by the revolutionary milieu are no substitute for an understanding of the long term forces which were developing in that period.

It is almost two years since a comrade began this work with an analysis of strikes in the post-war period. Other themes require a similar extended treatment: the changing balance within the political forces of capital between the parties of left and right, the development of interimperialist struggle, the degree to which the bourgeoisie has managed the economic crisis and how the social effects of the crisis have manifested themselves.

A better understanding of the dynamics of decadent capitalism and an economic analysis of the course of the crisis are equally essential. Much of the economic writings of the revolutionary movement are devalued by simplistic explanations of the crisis, by empirical analyses based on ephemeral indicators like the stock exchange and by a cavalier use of statistics which is the antithesis of scientific method.

Finally, a plea that we rid ourselves of the jaded and routine manner of much of the discussion in the milieu today. There is no

room for phrases which have become shibboleths. Some analyses are posed in a certain way and because they are never deepened they become meaningless through constant repetition. Even the attempt to reformulate them is perceived as a threat to the whole political edifice. As Marx warned, quoting Goethe, "when thoughts are absent, words are brought in as convenient replacements". We cannot afford these barriers to our own understanding and to our task of spreading our analyses to a class wide audience.

THE IMPASSE AT PRESENT

The course of events this past decade have undoubtedly puzzled revolutionaries. The regroupment of revolutionaries in the seventies was based upon a presumption that not only would the relationship between minority and class be such as to produce mass revolutionary organs in the very near future but that the continuing and deepening of the bourgeoisie's attack on the proletariat would world wide, especially in the heartlands of industrial capitalism, produce increasing waves of mass strikes which would sweep away such as the unions and present revolution as being once more on the agenda of the proletariat.

As we look at the first two years of the Eighties however this has been seen to be an inadequate analysis. The mass strike has appeared not in the collapsing economies of the West European heartlands but in the collapsing economies of State Capitalist Poland, only to be diverted into the dead end of Unionism.

What the proletariat in the Heartlands have faced has been a definite increase in the attacks of the bourgeoisie on their living standards, an increase in exploitation coupled with a policy of wholesale sackings and abandonment of industrial production throughout the whole spectrum of industry as the crisis has gutted whole industries. There have been no mass strikes in any major capitalist state of the West and in fact the present hold of the unions on class action seems stronger than ever. This is not to say that class action has ceased, far from it. It has definitely increased in the industrial nations but the nature of the capitalist attack, wage cuts and/or unemployment and the 'harsh reality of the crisis' has disarmed workers in almost every economy. To them the type of struggle they have been used to seems increasingly irrelevant. What use is a struggle to increase wages in an industry which is dying on its knees? Industries which the bourgeoisie say cannot survive if wages are not cut and redundancies not accepted. The message of the bourgeoisie makes sense. Work for less or the whole business will fold. Where workers have struggled the businesses have folded and millions laid off. This has had a tremendous impact on the class. Their militancy is high as the number of actual strikes shows but the traditional methods and aims of struggle have been undercut by the crisis of industry, a situation the bourgeoisie merely have to point to to show workers the uselessness of struggle on that terrain.

So too with the unions. Since they have as much eagerness to see the restructuring of industry and the saving of the economic base of their respective capitals as other sections of the bourgeoisie they look utterly out of place arguing for a type of struggle irrelevant to the present period. In fact their recognition of this has produced clearer than usual from them, acceptances of the reality of capitalist crisis and clearer than usual capitulations. Workers, for their part, appear perfectly aware that the unions are 'betraying' them, selling them out (in a caring manner of course) and that they realise the need for sackings, wage restraint and cuts in the states industries if the economy is to survive "till the upturn" and comments from workers in struggles this past year have shown clearly their distrust and understanding of the real effects of the Union control of struggles. Yet they can see no alternative! While being aware that unions will capitulate they can see no other way of struggling than through them. In both the above senses the workers are standing facing a brick wall. The logic of their understanding of the "sense" of the bourgeoisie's explanation of the situation and their understanding of the unions approach to each strike has led them to realise that their way forward is blocked. Both the bosses and the unions are telling them that they have come to

a brick wall and must stop - even retrace their steps. They are unwilling to do either, as the number of stoppages this past year has already shown. They have not yet realised that the logic of the capitalist definition of the situation must itself be overthrown, that they must destroy the wall and walk through to what lies beyond - and there is something beyond; revolution and not the void that the bourgeoisie would have workers believe.

The proletariat are deeply puzzled, but they are not standing still. Their awareness of the crisis and the incompatibility of the plans of the bosses and unions with their own needs is getting clearer - but they have yet to make the gigantic step to reject the plans of capital BECAUSE the ends too are irrelevant for them. Once that step is taken we can expect immense conscious class action. But it is an enormous step.

In Poland the class posed this very problem. The need to organise your own struggle, to extend it beyond the factory, the industry, even beyond the nation state will be predicated by a realisation that whatever the bourgeoisie say is or is not possible, is or is not needed, we are not going to stand for this. Already workers are saying there must be an answer, though many undoubtedly still believe the bourgeoisie when they say there isn't, but have still to realise that the answer lies outside the framework of bourgeois economy and system.

For example the answer trotted out to unemployment at present is that there is a lack of demand. But look around, there is a scarcity of everything here and an absolute non existence of almost everything in many parts of the world. How can there be a lack of demand. There is an enormous demand. Yet things are not being produced despite the fact that we have ample raw materials, factories which now lie idle and workers who instead of producing goods lie on the scrapheap. The logic of the capitalist answer to unemployment itself is ludicrous.

The role of revolutionaries in the process of making this clear is crucial. We must be clear that the class world wide has in no way been defeated. Who can seriously look at the events of the past three years and see class defeat there. Our class stands puzzled at the brick wall and it is our task to aid in the process of clarification which will result in the first bricks being pulled down.

It is our task to show that the bourgeois answer is not the only answer, that the capitalist answer leads through impoverishment to slaughter, defeat and yet more slaughter. Our task must be to show the alternative, to show who our friends are and who our enemies are, to ruthlessly expose the agents of the bourgeoisie and to demonstrate the possibilities and direction of class action in the future.

In short we must realise that the balance of class forces is still overwhelmingly positive, that the capitalist crisis is deepening daily and producing the basic framework for proletarian revolution. The working class still stands at centre stage and all the indications are that they will remain there.

Ingram.

WHICH POSITIONS?

The existence of revolutionary fractions ultimately hinge round the defence of positions. Though it would be incorrect to say that an organisation is solely identified by its positions, such key items as its internal structure and external intervention being of crucial importance it is the defence of political stances as an expression of its 'leadership' role within the proletariat which identifies the revolutionary minority. We face today within the milieu a variety of organisations holding a variety of positions eagerly identifying these differences as the particular reason for their different importance and autonomy. Yet if this type of analysis is correct we can say goodby forever to any possibility of regroupment for if every positional difference necessitates a new organisational form going on our experience of the last revolutionary wave there could never be a unified revolutionary movement. On the one hand we have such as the C.W.O. whose claim is to be an organisation of utter unanimity, every topic being discussed until agreement, and unable to conceive of revolutionaries with different analyses of certain questions being able to exist within the organisation; on the other the ICC who pay lip service to a heterogeneity of positions so long as one is clearly that of the organisation and, for fear of confusing the proletariat, is the one put forward in the press, disagreements for the most part being carefully kept within the confines of internal publications, only allowed out to see the light of day now and again, and inevitably kept on a short leash when so allowed.

How different it was in the internal and external life of revolutionaries during the last revolutionary wave. How much of a regression the 60 years of counterrevolution have caused. Revolutionaries today seem to have lost any real idea of what positions are and why they are held.

There are two axes along which we can look at the positions we, as revolutionaries, hold. Firstly we can look at them schematically. We commence with a set of positions we can roughly define as the class lines which differentiate us and which declare us to be a minority of the working class. These class lines did not emerge out of thin air, or from the fertile brain of specific thinkers. They are positions explaining the world which stem directly from and are validated by the action of the proletariat. Understandings of the nature of capitalist decadence, the role of the unions, the reality of decadent capitalism and nationalism etc etc are positions which, though they may have been first formulated when individual revolutionaries during the period of ascendancy tried to grasp the changes going on around them were conclusively demonstrated to be true by the action of the revolutionary class. We can see Bukharin trying to formulate the irrelevance of nationalism, the understanding that capitalism had moved into its period of decay; we can see Trotsky in 1905 languishing in prison trying to assess the changes which meant that the day of the progressive bourgeoisie was over and the day of the proletarian revolution nigh. These remained merely clear ideas to be proven or disproven. They now stand (whatever the inadequacies of the formulations by these two and others) as key elements in our understanding today. They form this part of that set of vital positions we may call the class lines.

Out with these key positions, schematically, all is conjecture. It is only when we come to review the positions of the revolutionary movement in a historical sense that we can identify which positions are of relevance and which are mere specific sets of conjunctural analyses.

First of all there are those which are the theoretical explanations of the basic class lines, the amplifications of positions such as the economic basis of the decadence of capitalism and the explanation of the crisis of capitalist society. Thus far no one has ever managed to show why any one of the three, or possibly four, explanations posed by revolutionaries in the past are correct and why any false, or why the acceptance of any one, or more, has any real effect. For the action of the class did not and has not validated one understanding and rejected another. The theoretical explanations of Rosa Luxemburg, Pannekoek and Mattick still remain to be validated or exploded.

There are, however, positions which did withstand the test of revolution, which do indeed stand as having stood, or otherwise, the test of class action but which the terrible effects of the long nightmare of counterrevolution have served to so obscure that for revolutionaries today the correct understanding of the situation still eludes them. Our understanding of the role of the party and of revolutionary minorities was indeed clarified by the mass action of the class during the last revolutionary wave but successive defeats and the virtual annihilation of the revolutionary tradition and the supremacy of stalinism et alia have so obscured these understandings that today we must accept that the true position is so unclear to so many fractions of the class.

There remain therefore those positions which have yet to stand the test of class action. Theoretically therefore there is no earthly reason why these, for the most part, specific analyses of events etc., cannot coexist as possibilities within the revolutionary movement, to be discussed and analysed, but all of which are still 'possible'. But not quite. For there is one further delineation which serves to define which set of positions can coexist. Our understanding of events necessarily leads to actions and specific analyses lead to specific actions. While the vast bulk of conjunctural analyses are merely that, some specific ones are of such importance that the strategy of the movement rest on their adoption or denial. It is easy to explain why such a conjunctural analysis as any one of the analyses of the left in opposition/power are of such minimal importance as to clearly merit only a footnote for discussion. However the understanding that capitalism once more faces its death crisis has fundamental effects on the construction and activity of revolutionary fractions and thus it is inconceivable that fractions would treat this key understanding as "as yet undecided", for the very activity of the organisation will depend on this analysis. If we once more revert to our historical axis we can see clearly that from the period of the revolutionary wave come concrete understandings of reality. Since the regeneration of the revolutionary movement after the period of reconstruction revolutionaries have not only assimilated the bulk of these class positions but have, in effect, taken these understandings forward as a guide to action and have furthermore developed an understanding of the nature of decadent capital, its future and the requirements of revolutionary action to overthrow it. Revolutionary organisations exist to act therefore to clarify these understandings and to act as a political leadership, clear as glass, hard as steel, in pointing the way forward for their class. Our present clarity comes only as a result of not merely of pondering but of being exposed to the validation of communist positions by the activity of the class, both in the last revolutionary wave and in the struggles which the class have entered into since capitalism once again began to suffer its mortal illness. Revolutionaries must base themselves therefore on what has been demonstrably proven to be true. They must regroup on the basis of understandings which lead directly to specific forms of organisation and intervention and analyses of their role. All else, I would argue, remain specific conjunctural analyses which should be debated within the

movement but which cannot be allowed to form the basis for sectarian and monolithic posturing. Just as Bukharin and Trotsky, among others painfully attempted to construct theories to explain reality, theories which could not be proven or repudiated until the class spoke, so too revolutionaries have a duty to attempt to understand as best they can what is going on. Many conjunctural analyses will and must be produced but it is the height of foolishness for such to be arbitrarily elevated to the ranks of 'fundamental positions of the organisation' unless it can be clearly demonstrated that a whole method of action and intervention rest upon an acceptance of such a position.

As we look around us today we can see the horrible effects of such a sectarianism with each group vying for pole position in the revolutionary league as 'group with more correct positions than another' without any real understanding of the value of otherwise of any specific position and the impact such sectarianism has. Of course it is easy to see that such sectarianism has as its root the experience of the period of counterrevolution but that is no reason why we should remain silent in acceptance of such a situation. Revolutionaries must speak out against such sectarianism and fight for a revolutionary movement able to differentiate those positions which really divide them and which remain merely the matter for discussion and debate within the milieu as a whole.

As for us we are clear on this issue. If the crucial role of revolutionaries is the clarity they can bring then we utterly oppose the leap into programmatic commitment at every possible opportunity so beloved of our sectaries. We seek to regroup on clear and unmistakable grounds with a firm commitment to the open elaboration of all the myriad questions still facing the movement.

CENTRALISATION. Presentation by Cormack (Aberdeen).

Introduction.

I've taken it for granted in this presentation that we're all agreed on the necessity for some form of political centralisation in the organisation of revolutionary activity. So, all we want to do in this discussion is locate, in a general fashion, where we stand on the historical debates on centralisation and then decide what the practical consequences are for revolutionaries in general given the current fragility of the movement, and how it affects us in particular. Given the fact that on the most optimistic estimate, we're looking at an organisation of less than a dozen people, we're not really going to have too much to say about the practical suggestions for ourselves, but, despite that, we still have to know where we stand on the question so that future developments don't take us unawares and so that we also have something to say about the way other revolutionaries organise themselves.

I think it's fair to say, for example, that a sizeable proportion of our critique of the ICC's monolithism and sectarianism ties it in with their faulty vision of centralisation. Of course, I'm not saying that if only they had gotten their centralisation right, there would have been no problems, but rather, that their actual practice of centralisation firstly, provided a fertile soil for monolithism and ultimately, became an excellent tool for its maintenance. Getting centralisation right isn't a formula for making problems disappear, but getting it wrong undoubtedly exacerbates them.

History.

Before we look at the specific way we're currently presented with the question, it's necessary to have a look at the history of the debate, which fundamentally means a look at the theory and practice of Lenin and the Bolsheviks and at the critique which the German Left (mainly Luxemburg) mounted on them. I've already dealt with this at some length in the Bolshevik text in the last Bulletin (Another Look at the Organisation Question - Bulletin No.2) so I'll keep this as brief as possible.

The eventual evolution of people like Ruhle and Pannekoek opened the door to the still-current slanders that the German Left were permeated with councillism and anti-partyism etc right from the beginning of the debate. But in reality, all the central arguments against Bolshevik centralisation from Rosa Luxemburg's critiques of "What is to be Done" and "One Step Forward" in 1904, to Gorter's polemics of the early '20's accepted as fundamental the indispensable leading role of the party, and the corollary that the party could only be centralised. As early as 1904, in "Leninism or Marxism", Luxemburg is saying clearly that the nature and tasks of Social Democracy - "Makes it, as a rule, hostile to any manifestations of localism or federalism". She takes it for granted that the party can only be built by, and round, centralisation.

"How to effect a transition from the type of organisation characteristic of the preparatory stage of the socialist movement - usually featured by disconnected local groups and clubs, with propaganda as a principal activity - to the unity of a large, national body, suitable for concerted political action
....Autonomy and isolation are the most pronounced characteristics of the old organisational type. It is therefore understandable why

the slogan of the persons who want to see an inclusive national organisation should be 'Centralism' (Leninism or Marxism)

The point at issue isn't centralism per se, but the TYPE of centralism. And the differences between Lenin and Luxemburg are inextricably tied up with their contrasting views of class consciousness and the role of the Party. For the Lenin of "What is to be Done", the struggle for "all power to the central committee", the struggle to achieve "the absolute and blind submission of the party sections to the will of the centre" (as Luxemburg described it), flows directly from a vision of the proletariat which sees it as capable of only achieving a Trade Union consciousness. With this devastatingly limited view of the capabilities of the class, the role of the party becomes correspondingly unlimited. It's the starting point for the view of the party as the brain of the class, its only thinking part, its General Staff, charged not only with organising the class and its struggles but with the unfolding of the revolutionary process itself. The *raison d'être* of such an organisation is its "unity of action", and for Lenin this could only be achieved by the total domination of the central organs. His vision of the proletariat as an unthinking mass with the party as its brain has its direct counterpart in his vision of the party itself consisting of an unthinking rank and file with the Central Committee "as the only thinking element" (Luxemburg). I've already quoted in the Bolshevik text his famous dismissal of internal democracy with the phrase "only the police could benefit". At this point in his thinking, Lenin is openly equating the discipline of the factory with the political discipline of the organisation.

There's no question that the German Left and Luxemburg in particular had a ~~vastly~~ more advanced and complete grasp of the operation of class consciousness and of the relative roles of class and party within the revolutionary process.

For Luxemburg, it is the activity of the class itself which is at the heart of, both developing consciousness and the unfolding of the revolutionary process. It's taken for granted, of course, that this process is meaningless without the existence and intervention of the party within it; but rejected out of hand is the notion that the party, however clear or well-disciplined, possesses in advance, some form of blueprint for the process.

"Except for the general principles of the struggle, there do not exist for the Social Democracy detailed sets of tactics which a Central Committee can teach the party membership in the same way as troops are instructed in their training camps." (Ibid)

On the contrary:

"The activity of the party organisation, the growth of the proletariat's awareness of the struggle and the struggle itself, are not different things separated chronologically and mechanically. They are only different aspects of the same process." (Ibid)

From the point of view of centralisation, a couple of important consequences flow from this vision. First of all, the political discipline of centralism is NOT the discipline of the factory or the

barracks; aimed at imposing the authority of the centre on the rank and file - it's the opposite of that. Political discipline is essentially self-discipline. It is "the rule of the majority within its own party". (Luxemburg) For Luxemburg, the centralised discipline of the party is directly equivalent to the discipline of the class's own self-organisation and is necessary to both for the same reasons - and that is, the development of clarity and consciousness is something which can only involve the whole and can't be the product of just a part. Centralisation exists therefore, to allow the active participation of all and NOT to impose the will of the centre.

The second consequence of Luxemburg's vision of the class's own activity being at the heart of the revolutionary process and her rejection of the notion that it's the party which assumes the initiative of the revolutionary act, is that the party must be a living part of the class. It can't foresee every twist and turn of the struggle, it can't have a ready-made step-by-step plan for the revolution but can only see the way forward in the most general terms. Clarity on the concrete details can't be produced by the cogitations of the party by itself, but by the class's own activity. If the party is to pick up on these lessons, to transcend them and lead the class beyond their immediate gains in consciousness, then they have to be open and responsive to the class. Centralisation isn't just for the internal benefit of the party, it's also a method of absorbing and being responsive to, the advances of the class.

"If the tactics of the socialist party are not to be the creation of a Central Committee but of the whole party, or still better, of the whole Labour movement, then it is clear that the party sections and federations need the liberty of action which alone will permit them to develop their revolutionary initiative and to utilise all the resources of a situation." (Ibid)

Luxemburg points out, as I did at fair length in the Bolshevik text, that in periods when the advances of the class take the party by surprise, there's a constant tendency for the central organs to be the most removed from, and the most hostile to, those advances. Always, it's the elements of the party closest to the class which makes the running, with the tendency being for the central organs to play a conservative role. I won't repeat here all the examples I've already given in the Bolshevik text.

Summary.

To sum up this section very briefly. The differences on centralisation between the Bolsheviks and the German Left can be located in their different conceptions of class consciousness. For the Bolsheviks, clarity and consciousness is fundamentally a product of, and the property of, the Party which is accordingly charged with not only the organisation of the class but of the revolution itself. For them, therefore, centralisation exists to implement the will of the centre which is seen as the ultimate locus of clarity. The German Left reject this for a much more advanced vision of the dialectical inter-relationship of party, class and consciousness. Consciousness is the product of the class's own activity and the party plays a leading role within this process by picking up and transcending the momentary advances of the class. The organisation of the class and its activity is fundamentally self-organisation. What's important is not the ability of the

party to organise the class and its struggle but rather its ability to point the way forward via the clarity of its programme and slogans. In this vision, the function of centralisation is to allow the active participation of all in the development of clarity and to make the party accessible to, and responsive to, the life and advances of the class..

I think it's fair to say that in this debate we stand squarely with the German Left. However, to avoid red herrings in the future, I want to make a couple of qualifications to that. When I say that we stand with the German Left, I don't mean it as just another expression of that familiar old search for political purity in our heritage. I've simplified the historical reality of the debate so that we can draw the lessons from it and not so that we can find the heroes and the villains. We should be quite aware that the clarity of the German Left was very much a partial one and we can't separate it from its limitations - for example, their difficulty in breaking from Social Democracy and all their resulting illusions about the mass party etc. But we can't look at our history for a perfection which never exists. What we get is a process of clarification, more or less confused, with moments of clarity appearing here and there, with the differing experiences of the different branches of the revolutionary movement highlighting only partial aspects of the problems. Nobody got it all right. It's only hindsight that allows us to look at the totality, at all the contributions to the process of clarification, and to draw the lessons. In the early days of the CWO, there was much agonising over who was part of the heritage and who wasn't (a process they still seem to be engaged in) - the reality is our heritage is the entire process of clarification. It's meaningless to accept or reject the different elements of it.

Therefore, I'm not trying to argue that the German Left got it all right and the Bolsheviks all wrong. The whole thrust of the Bolshevik text in the last Bulletin was to attack the notion that the Bolsheviks had some finished static vision of organisation. The views of "What is to be Done" were completely transcended in practice, and to a certain extent in theory, under the impact of the high points of the class struggle. What was argued in that text was that they managed to perform the role they did precisely because their practice was in ACCORD with the criticisms of the German Left.

It's ironic that in aligning ourselves with the German Left, we line up shoulder to shoulder with the ICC, who, while theoretically rejecting the monolithism of Lenin, have in reality built an organisation more monolithic, more centralised and more sectarian than was ever seen inside the Bolshevik Party before 1921. The central organs of the ICC wield a power that Lenin might well have envied but certainly never managed to achieve until the days of the counter-revolution. The Bolshevik text already makes a fairly detailed comparison between the ICC and the Bolsheviks so I won't bother describing here again the incredible vitality and confidence of the Bolshevik's internal life.

Centralisation Today.

So where does that leave us? Given our starting point of our conceptions of class consciousness and the role of the party, how do we translate that into an appropriate vision of centralisation in a way which minimises the dangers of monolithism and sectarianism? It has to be

said clearly in advance that it's a waste of time looking for THE correct model of centralisation, which is eternally appropriate for revolutionary activity and which we just have to discover and then apply.

"Centralisation 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." (Ibid)

The weight given to the central organs in the life of the organisation isn't something which can be defined in advance, once and for all. I don't think it's possible to say that there is a single correct balance to be found in the relationship between the central organs and the rest of the organisation. Rather, it's a living changing function not only of the particular circumstances of the organisation itself, but much more importantly of the activity of the class as a whole. In

case this point seems rather obscure, the clearest expression of this is the way that the weight of the central organs in the Bolshevik Party changed fundamentally at the high points of the class struggle. At that point, the central organs, being more isolated from the class were overwhelmed by the layers of the party most radicalised by the class's upsurge. The need to survive and maintain political clarity which was uppermost in the periods of isolation and class quiescence was replaced by the need to open up to the class. In such a situation the balance between the central organs and the rest of the organisation had to change. The point is that it's not possible to find in advance one single way of resolving the tension produced by the necessity of centralisation. The tension itself is not only unavoidable but is necessary to allow the changing role and tasks of the organisation produce the appropriate form of centralisation required.

The Task of Centralisation.

In a way, speaking of centralisation in terms of the relationship between central organs and the rest of the organisation isn't the most illuminating way of approaching the discussion. It tends to produce a very static view of centralism and make it look like a thing rather than as an activity, as a way of working. It's much more useful to look at the function of centralisation rather than its form. Centralisation is necessary for revolutionaries for exactly the same reason that it's necessary for the class as a whole. It's a method of assuring that the parts can take an active role in the activity of the whole.

"The aim of centralisation is thus to stimulate the active participation and involvement of every element of the organisation in the work of the whole. Through centralisation, the concerns of each part of the organisation become the concerns of the whole; the actions of each part become the responsibility of the whole." (The Function of the Organism - a WR internal text by R.Weyden.)

However, that's only half the story. The reverse is equally important. Centralisation also ensures that the concerns and activity of the whole find expression in each part. For without that, centralisation loses its political content and becomes merely a technical device for adding up diverse votes and opinions. I remember it being argued in the early

days of the movement that if we could have a computer screen and terminal in every members house we wouldn't need central organs, but that's clearly fundamentally wrong. Central organs are delegated a political task over and above collating everyone's contribution. They also have to impose a coherent order on the total input, to synthesise it and to draw out the priorities for the next stage in the process, and return it to the organisation. To be sure, this is a task that they don't carry out in isolation or arbitrarily; but in a fashion which takes account of, and expresses the activity and concerns of the organisation as a whole. This is something which was entirely lacking in the latter days of our time in the ICC. The central organs had no sense of being an expression of the organisation as a whole - on the contrary, they saw the political dimension of their task as being a product of their own activity. In other words, they had substituted themselves for the organisation as a whole. Centralisation became a method of conveying the opinions of the centre to the rest of us at the periphery. The resultant bureaucratism and the emergence of personal cliques exacerbated the whole problem, but the point here is not to rehash old ground but to try and decide how to avoid the separation of central organs from the organisation as a whole emerging in the future.

Conclusions.

How to achieve this? I have to say that I don't think there's any formal constitutional way of doing this. As we have seen with the Bolsheviks, the ultimate guarantee can only reside in the vitality and responsibility of the members allied to the radicalising influence of the class itself, subjecting the whole life of the organisation to the crucible of its activity. Bits of paper and detailed constitutions can't do it. I think we would probably all accept the statutes of the ICC for example. Likewise, I don't have any confidence in the nostrums that are always floating around about constantly rotating the personnel of the central organs. It's got its merits, but as a guarantee it's useless. All of us who were in the ICC will attest to that. We just have to accept that there aren't any guarantees in advance. All we can do is constantly bear in mind what it is we want centralisation to achieve and what it is we want to avoid.

- 1) We want it to promote and allow the active participation of all in the life and work of the organisation.
- 2) We want it to give expression to the life and diversity of the organisation as a whole - I think that carries with it the understanding that, like the Bolsheviks, factions and tendencies are seen as a vital part of the life of the organisation and are given free rein. We must reject out of hand the ICC contention that the appearance of a faction is a sign of "immaturity" or "degeneration". We must follow the Bolsheviks and, as a matter of course, allow them representation on the central organs. And the central organs should not feel bound by the necessity to present a united front to the rest of the organisation. The prime criterion is to facilitate the process of debate and clarification.
- 3) Its role in the internal discussions of the organisation isn't to take up a position, or to decide what's right and wrong but to try and impose a coherence on the discussion; to draw out the lessons and try to point out the most fruitful direction for the future development of the discussion. It's no part of their task to function as

the repository or producer of clarity, or to act as the ideological policemen of the organisation. Clarity is a product of the whole organisation, not of its parts.

4) As far as the outside world is concerned, by and large, central organs are charged with speaking as the voice of the organisation. Again, this shouldn't be seen as presenting a united front, but of clearly expressing the life and debates of the organisation. Obviously, the demands of rapid intervention frequently require that concrete positions are decided upon more or less instantly and that's clearly the task of the central organs. But, as with everything else, it's not something they do in isolation. They do it as part and parcel of the process of giving voice and shape to the concerns of the organisation as a whole. The fact that the central organs have publically spoken doesn't fix that as a permanent position of the organisation. Time and time again, we saw in the ICC, that having made a contribution, either in public or within the internal debates, that contribution immediately became a position of the organisation which the central organs felt obliged to defend against further discussion. The result was the constant polarisation of debate into "dissidents" versus "the organisation".

5) Finally, it should be clear that it's not possible to do what the ICC attempted and build an edifice of centralisation which will be appropriate to future needs. (At a time, for example, when the entire membership of the ICC can sit in one room, voting at full congresses is an astonishingly complex affair of national delegations rather than the straightforward one of having every member vote!) Centralisation can't be isolated from the real life and needs of the organisation in that fashion.

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This discussion was followed by concrete proposals for the functioning of the new organisation.

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ORGANISATION

(1) The *raison d'être* of revolutionary organisation is the need for intervention in the class struggle. Our existence is not dictated by a whim on our part, nor is it predicated upon the possibility that revolutionaries might be able to "accelerate" the emergence of a revolutionary class consciousness. No, we exist, as was explained in Bulletin number 2, because the very structure of class relations in capitalism make revolutionary organisation both vital and necessary. Hence, we say that intervention is central to our existence.

However, this general necessity finds concrete expression within given circumstances which will determine the possibilities for intervention. In short, the revolutionary group, if it wants to be effective, must take account of the general and particular circumstances which face it.

(2) The general situation which faces us today is the smallness, the isolation and the immaturity of the revolutionary milieu. In the last Bulletin, the article "The Organisation of Revolutionaries", we pointed out the material differences which exist between the situation today and that which faced the proletarian milieu in the last revolutionary wave. The extent of this, and its significance must not be underestimated. Today revolutionaries find themselves not only at each others' throat but also in a very real sense separate from the class. The crushing of the proletariat in the last revolutionary wave, the capitulation of Social Democracy and the post-war period of reconstruction has severed links between the class and its political factions. The class has lost the "tradition" of recognising and being aware of revolutionary organisation. The fact of this separation, and the miniscule nature of the political movement (itself a reflection of this separation) we believe dictates how we should approach the problem of organisation and intervention. This is not to say, as we shall probably be accused of, that there is nothing to do in the present situation, that we must be "realistic". This is not our position. However, to ignore the content of the historical legacy which confronts us is to court political disaster.

(3) One thing which has plagued the revolutionary movement since its re-emergence in the 1960s has been its failure to come to terms with the fact that there is not, nor do we expect to see, a single monolithic organisation in existence. Nor is there a looser umbrella organisation within which the revolutionary movement comes together.

The failure to come to terms with this, which itself makes unified action even more difficult, manifests itself as an ongoing sectarianism, perhaps the most hideous expression of this was that found in the CWO when it characterised all political expressions other than itself as reactionary. More generally, and apparently more benignly, it also appears as the idea that a single group is the pole of revolutionary regroupment. This belief, which is confounded by the details of revolutionary unification in the last revolutionary wave, is a product of the isolation and immaturity of today's proletarian milieu. The notion that a group is the pole of regroupment, that it alone possesses political clarity, is an attempt to bridge the barrier between the class and revolutionary groups; groups take the separation as a consequence of the lack of political hardness

and absolute homogeneity in organisation, in other words rather than perceiving the distance between the class and its political factions as having its roots in historical experience it sees it as simply a failure rooted in the actions of the factions. Hence, an act of will is the answer. The logic of this understanding (or probably more correctly, lack of understanding) was played out in International Conferences which were initiated by Battaglia Comunista. Battaglia and the C.W.O., the latter organisation increasingly seeing the Italian group as the pole of clarity, could not tolerate the presence of an organisation which did not conform to their view of the party. Hence, the I.C.C. was squeezed out. And this practice was justified as a positive gain for the class!

Historically, past regroupment did not proceed according to this monolithic vision (the historical details and content of past regroupment will be dealt with in a future Bulletin). Today, as with the past, international regroupment will only occur when revolutionaries recognise that a degree of heterogeneity is not a circumstance to be feared, nor is to be overcome by bureaucratic manipulation. Contrary to what some revolutionaries believe all the problems which face the class have not been resolved, it is this which gives birth to the multiplicity of political expressions within the proletarian movement. Historical experience of the class has certainly resolved certain questions, the nature of "reformism" and the decadence of capital, but there are finer detailed points which have yet to be answered. It is absurd that any one group can put itself forward as the clearest expression within the proletarian movement, that is clear on all questions.

The failure of the International Conferences is probably clear to all but the self-deluded C.W.O. and Battaglia. This failure, however, must not discourage us from the struggle for revolutionary regroupment. We recognise our separation from the class and the internal sectarianism of the movement, at times these realities can "weigh like a nightmare", but the nightmare will only be obliterated if revolutionaries come to terms with the political world they inhabit. We see ourselves as part of the struggle to regroup revolutionary forces. Our contribution to discussion of the crisis which is affecting the milieu is part of this process. We are not, nor would we claim to be, the pole of international regroupment, such a claim would be absurd. What we are is one part of the milieu's struggle to become aware of itself and its reality.

(4) How do we see regroupment proceeding? In a word by openness, this does not mean uncritically relating to the various expressions within the proletarian movement, but it does require an acceptance of the existence of a movement. Other parts of the proletarian movement, whether it be the C.W.O., the I.C.C. or some other part of it, these we do not intransigently oppose. The enemy is capital not the proletarian movement. This means that we wish not only to polemicise with other groups but also to work with them. Non-sectarianism which we espouse will only be tested in the larger class struggle. Our ability to cooperate on a principled basis will be the touchstone of our non-sectarianism; although having said this we cannot unilaterally "cooperate", if we find our call falling on deaf ears then all we can do is to struggle against the deafness. We see the Bulletin as one means of this struggle and this cooperation.

(5) As we stated earlier, the general and particular circumstances which face a revolutionary group will largely govern what is possible at any given moment. We are a small group. Our resources are limited. This means that more than ever we must beware of launching ourselves into a

course of activity which will burn up these limited resources. This is the particular reality which faces us. At the more general level, and this applies without exception to all revolutionary elements, we must take account of the broad objective limits for struggle and intervention. We do not believe, unlike the C.W.O., that a significant presence within the class can be achieved by a mere act of will. Factory Groups and Discussion Groups will not magically appear simply because we might think them necessary. Nor do we now believe, as we did when within the I.C.C., that the act of moving into newspaper format will solve many of the problems of separation from the class. For this separation to be got over two elements are necessary. The first is the need for the class itself to be struggling, we cannot initiate struggle. It is in struggle that the class becomes aware of itself as a class, however, this awareness is not immediately born in the struggle, it is necessary that there be a revolutionary presence i.e. an organised political faction. This is the second element of the equation. For a political group to be able to make influence the class in struggle it must have a deep political sensitivity, be able to read the class struggle and know when to intervene and saying what. The formalism of immediate newspaper format, daily standing at the factory gates or calls for Factory Groups now is no substitute for this political sensitivity.

Given our size and the general conditions which exist at the moment (both the quiet in the class and the nature of the milieu) we see the bulk of our work in the Bulletin being directed towards the milieu. This does not, will not and must not *activity directed towards the larger world.

*preclude

(6) Finally, in the past we have been criticised by the C.W.O. for being a "pseudo-group", an organisation which should not in fact exist, but should return to its natural home, the I.C.C. (we await full theoretical development of this concept and category of "pseudo group", as yet we have only been given a hint of the edifice which supports them). No doubt, now that we have crystallised our political break from the I.C.C. into a formal organisation this criticism will be repeated, so we take the opportunity to refute the notion that we are merely a rerun of that organisations politics.

It must seem very ironic that an organisation which declares itself for cooperation and openness in the international milieu should begin its life as a split from an existing group, apparently further fragmenting the limited resources available to the class. This split, however, was forced upon us, we had no option but to leave an organisation which had shown itself to be unable to contain within itself internal dissent. The fact that the splits from the I.C.C. involved some of the most sordid political actions since the rebirth of the revolutionary movement should not be allowed to obscure the political content of the affair. We see the manner in which the I.C.C. responded to the splits as a logical expression of the inherent monolithicism of that organisation. Certainly, on the face of it the organisation was committed to internal discussion, but the fact of internal life denied this rhetoric. This is not the place to detail how this manifested itself, this would require reference to discussion texts which were never made public, what we can do here, however, is spell out the general framework within which discussion broke down and dissent was stifled.

Crucial in the monolithic domination of the organisation was the way in which the central organs conceived their tasks. At one level it was taken to be the case that they coordinated and unified the actions of the organisation, and synthesised discussion. With this general conception we find no fault. The failure of the I.C.C. was its inability to allow discussion, indeed it feared discussion which was disagreement with the central organs; this fear was the fear that internal disagreement would threaten the external activity of the organisation. How did this fear manifest itself? Essentially it appeared as a premature rushing to take up positions on all issues which face the class. We do not take issue with the demand for revolutionaries to pronounce on the ongoing struggle, but this does not mean freezing discussion. This is exactly what the I.C.C. did. Rather than seeing issues which were not directly found within the class lines of the Platform as part of an ongoing struggle for clarity (which is how we conceive them) they took them to be questions which could be definitively answered by the dictat of the central organs. The most notorious public example of this practice appeared in the form of the "Course of History" and the "Left In/Out of Power" 'debates'. Internal dissent from these dogmas of the organisation were denounced as threatening the life of the I.C.C., and were explained as being products of an alien political strain, characterised as the intrusion of bourgeois ideology. When the cracks appeared in the rigid edifice of the I.C.C. it reacted by refusing the right of factional dissent, tow the line or get out was the message.

This mode of internally organising, being unable to cope with disagreement, is very similar to the actions of the C.W.O. - for this see Bulletin 2, "The Hunting of the Snark". Why should revolutionaries be so afraid of discussion and disagreement? As with most problems which beset the revolutionary movement today this is a response which finds its sustenance in the historical rupture which exists between the class and its political factions. In the I.C.C. monolithic domination was the means whereby the organisation could defend itself against what it saw as the threat of further isolation, something which would follow from disagreement within the organisation being given a public airing. This they believed would hamper their ability to intervene in the class struggle. But this monolithicism far from aiding the organisation actually closed down its ability to understand and intervene in the class struggle. Prematurely achieved positions very quickly became dogmas, the example of the Course of History, and the nonsense of the Left In/Out of Power is witness to this. Despite what the I.C.C. claim we are not empiricists, but we do say that if an organisation refuses to take note of empirical reality then something has gone far wrong. Being empirical and being empiricist is not the same thing. Their fear of disagreement has driven the I.C.C. towards the defence of positions which clearly have no empirical basis. The empirical reality of the I.C.C. is that those who refuse to accept the hegemony of the central organs must get out. It is not possible for us to exist within such an organisation.

An openness in external life must be reflected in internal organisation. Central organs must not be charged with the task of dominating the organisation. Yes, they give an organised political lead within the class struggle and coordinate intervention but they must not shy away from and stifle debate, either internally or externally. Debate and disagreement is not a luxury; it is structural to the proletarian movement. It reflects the historical uncertainties which face the class, it is witness to the fact that definitive answers have not been given every problem which faces the class. In all political modesty we see our aim is to play some part in the reorientation of the proletarian milieu and help make it more effective in the coming decisive battles with capital.

THE CAPITALIST CRISIS

We are happy to print below a recent text of the Tampa Workers' Affinity Group. TWAG recently sent us a number of texts asking us to print this one. Readers can obtain copies of the others, on the March 1982 Conference in Seattle and on the Miami Ghetto riots direct from TWAG who may be contacted at P.O.Box 16000 SG Tampa Florida 33687 U.S.A.

THE WORLD ECONOMIC CRISIS: CAPITALISM - ONE-WAY TICKET TO ATLANTIS.

The world crisis of political economy, of the capitalist market-economy is blindly driving itself ahead at top speed. From Mexico to Rumania, from Italy to Nigeria, from South Korea to Brazil every nation state of capitalist irrationality continues its guideless tobogganing toward total economic, political and social collapse. All the structural institutions of the global capitalist system - banking, monetary policy commodity traffic, investment, amortization - now face the just prospect of nuclear disintegration.

Even the various bought and sold intellectual mouthpieces of the bourgeoisie no longer keep up a cheery pretense of "imminent recovery", of possible solutions to the crisis. The Reagan administration's economic Council (Martin Feldstein, Donald Regan and David Stockman), the Congressional Budget Office and the Federal Reserve Board in the U.S. and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, and Time Magazine's European Board of Economists abroad all agree on this: Hard Times Are Here To Stay!

Gloom and pessimism, sometimes bordering on desperation, are the watch words for all capitalist parties. Just listen to the voices of shit-scared rabbits. "All claims that the recession is ending now ring rather hollow", intones George Perry of the liberal think-tank Brookings Institute, For Harvard economist Otto Eckstein, "The economy is probably in the worst shape it has been in for nearly half a century". And in-house Kennedy Family economist Walter Heller, "This is the deepest and most dangerous recession of the postwar period". Sure, most dangerous for you, but an elixir for us - the world proletariat! "We are sitting in the midst of a major depression", states a sombre Rimmer de Vries of Morgan Guaranty Trust Co. The economic crisis is "without precedent in the postwar world" according to the heady bourgeois Paul Volcker, Chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank.

In the U.S., Director of the Congressional Budget Office Alice Rivlin quietly declaims "The unemployment problem is not going away quickly". And all these "experts" now understand that the Keynesian trick is played out as well: as Rivlin puts it in summation "The experience of the past decade has made economists a lot more sceptical about using the federal budget to create new jobs." The January 10th issue of Time magazine gives the best condensed testimony: "No one has produced yet the sort of wide-ranging answers needed. What is acknowledged is that there are no quick fixes." Certainly! 'No quick fixes' for capital except for it to slowly strangle the life out of the international proletariat (by its I.M.F. garrotter), or finish us off not with a whimper, but with the bang of a mushroom cloud!

However we - workers of the world - must rejoice at the onset of the advanced stage of the global crisis because these very objective features of increased misery and suffering have also put forth the real material and subjective conditions for a generalised class offensive against oppressive and woeful capitalist rule. Every motion towards breakdown, towards disorder, towards disempowerment, towards irrationality gives us an opening, a world-historic opportunity to contest our class enemy - the bourgeoisie - for humanist power: to raise an anti-power, a Higher Order and Reason which will bring to an end all exploitation and alienated society, to root out the domination of capital, of

exchange value over human community, and to begin to usher in an epoch of global libertarian communism. But let us first measure the extent of the crisis.

UNITED STATES.

The severity of the crisis is such that now the heartlands of capitalism are being hit hard. As the most industrially developed, and therefore by the lynchpin of the Western bloc, the situation of the United States assumes decisive importance: its economy is pivotal to all other members of the Western array and the world capitalist market as a whole.

As we have already pointed out, the mood among the US bourgeoisie is undisguised panic. And in this regard, they show good sense. Official unemployment is at 11% and climbing every month; the real level taken with those who are underemployed and even stopped looking for jobs is probably twice that figure. According to the US Labor Dept 12 million Americans are out of work. Most of these are industrial workers from the Midwest and Northeast... autoworkers, metalworkers, coalminers and textile workers. Government statistics place unemployment in Michigan at 17.2% and Ohio at 14%; for black teenagers the national rate is over 50%! Both public and private predictions for 1983 jobless levels give an anxious nod to even higher figures!

The US industrial capacity is operating at less than 68%, which means that nearly a third of the country's plants, factories and mills are standing idle! The business tax-cuts meted out by the Regan Administration, the 'supply-side' farce, has gone for naught; companies are going to reduce real capital spending by 8.5% in 1983. How can investments be made in new production when the factories and plants already erected are sitting unused?

Business failures totalled over 24,000 in 1982, the highest number since 1932! The US trade deficit will exceed the 1978 record of a \$42.4 billion mark. There are, and can be, no buyers for expensive US goods in the saturated and depressed international market-place. In the States the Gross National Product (GNP) fell to a -13/4% in 1982, and both government and private economic "experts" sheepishly anticipate only a marginal rise in 1983 of less than 2%. Inflation has been curtailed somewhat only because of the over-all torpor of the market; and even at lower retail prices most American workers can hardly afford anything more than the basics.... food, rent, gas and clothing (if they are lucky). At the current tax and outlays level the federal budget will score \$200 billion in the red for "common sense" businessmen-actor Regan. The only government schemes to lower this deficit are even more slicing of the social wage... unemployment, medical, food and pension benefits for the working class.

In agriculture, the glut of farming produce has also caused a dramatic crisis of the capitalist market. Indebtedness and foreclosures are running rampant among small farmers, even with the standardized federal subsidies and huge overseas allocations. Agricultural Secretary John Block has come up with a remarkable plan to bail out the flagging farming industry and also reduce the massive government stockpile of goods. Big farmers would cut back their output on arable land from a mandatory 20% to a mandatory 50%, and in turn would receive back payment-in-kind of crops now held in government storage, which were bought from these same agribusinessmen in the first place, to sell a second time on the open market! This is the keen logic of capitalist insanity; while all humanity is literally starving under the impact of a lifeless exchange-market, the US State wants a 50% reduction on food-stuff on order to keep the agriculture industry, and mainly the conglomerates, financially sound! Here one sees the essential signature of the capitalist system; the overriding priority of market over human needs.

In Europe the crisis is taking an even higher toll on capitalist stability. Austerity is the order of the day, for both right-wing and Social Democratic governments. The European bourgeoisie prefers a neat division of labor, the "realist" conservatives call for the end of the "welfare state", while the Left clamors for more statification while out of office. Like the edginess between the United States and Japan, squabbling among the Common Market "partners" has led to new cries for protectionism .. tariffs, quotas, fixed prices .. in some quarters as each sinking ship of capitalist State scurries to save its own thick bourgeois hide. This nationalist fervour is being led both in the U.S. and Europe by the Left and the Unions: just like General Patton lets lay it on solidly on the other son-of-a-bitch!

Great Britain is at 13% unemployment and climbing, 9% inflation rate, GNP at 0% The 1983 forecast: more of the same except worse!

West Germany once thought to be the stud of the Western European bloc is behaving more like a eunuch. Unemployment is at 7% and projected at 9% in 1983. Last year inflation ran at 5% while economic growth dipped to -1.4%; business failures are also accelerating, like the bankruptcy of the AEG-Telefunken, the electrical equipment giant which called it quits in July 1982. The Kohl regime is currently embarking on the patent Reagan-Thatcher scam of lopping the government budget, ie. knifing the social wage for the working class, and the results - burgeoning economic collapse - will be the same. Watch out here for the wail cries of the unions and the left wing of social democracy (and the moronic greens as well).

"Socialist" France has also gone the way of all shopkeepers: sock it to your customers! In this case the entire working class of France. Wage and price controls were quietly enacted, the social wage was pruned down to compensate for a 2.4 billion a year running deficit (sounds familiar?). Meanwhile, notwithstanding the promise of Mitterand of "full employment", joblessness is at 9% and rising, inflation is up to 12% with the GNP a mere 1.2%. No wonder they're so hot for the Siberian pipe-line deal - God knows the bourgeoisie needs it!

Italy of course is in the worst shape of all. Its governmental indebtedness is over \$52 billion - 15.5% of its entire Gross National Product! Inflation is a staggering 17% for the past year; unemployment is over 9% and climbing and the growth prognosis - nil! The multi-cycled Fanfani government has the same answer to the crisis that its had the past: no answer!

Where the Left has recently come to power - France Greece and Spain - the governmental "Socialists" have quickly abandoned their credentials and palliatives of a more firmly stitified capitalism, turned squarely to a centrist position. This has then conveniently allowed the left wing of the SPDs, the unions, the various Stalinist and other Leftists parties to take up the rôle of the 'true' workers opposition, the real defenders of Euro-state capitalism.

WORLD

Around the planet every zone, every quadrant of national capitalist value is rapidly losing its green hue. The total world debt held by banks and governments is \$706 billion. For these less capitalised countries the figure is \$626 billion. Topping the list is Brazil at \$90 billion owed. This natural resource rich Latin American land, once presumed to be the Horatio Alger of the southern continent has just been given a monetary respite (one bigger than the August '82 transfusion to Mexico) by a consortium of its 1000 banking creditors. The Brazilian bourgeoisie had been borrowing heavily on the basis of its previously strong export ability - coffee, sugar, tin and copper - at the rate of \$1 billion a month for every \$400 million paid back when the walls caved in this past December. It took no less than Paul Volker to organise the

liquid fix: \$1.2 billion from the Bank for International Settlements and a reluctant grouping of world bankers to fork out over another \$4.4 billion. Others with massive foreign debts are of course Mexico (\$83 billion in arrears), Argentina (\$43 billion), South Korea (\$36 billion), Poland (\$24 billion), Israel (\$26.7 billion behind), Egypt (\$19.2 billion), Yugoslavia (\$19 billion), Rumania - which just postponed all debt payments (\$9.9 billion) and Nigeria (\$9.3 billion). Chile with a \$19 billion foreign debt and a pop. of 11 million people (the world highest per capita indebtedness) has just, along with most of the rest, requested a large infusion from the International Monetary Fund. (And of course the standard ante for an IMF loan is total austerity: wage freeze, consumer goods price hike, speed up slash the government budget/social wage). Major US banks like New York's Chase Manhattan, Citicorp, Bank of America and Chemical are holding the bulk of the World's IOUs meaning that the financial redemptions are imperative and a foregone conclusion at this time. Meanwhile the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation has just had to pump \$175 million into some of the smaller and exposed N.Y. banks.

What has caused this global crisis? Why did all the bold plans for "modernisation" by these developing capitols into the incinerator? Because of OPEC oil? Because of corruption and and "poor management"? Because of Western Bankers' greed? Of course not and these are just part of the endless smokescreen thrown up by the clever bourgeoisie. All of these capitalisation programmes failed because of contradictions inherent within the system itself. Simply put, there was just no sales space for all of the various commodities these countries tried to lay on the market all at once in competition with each other and the advanced capitals. There is already an over production of goods, services and technology which the value-defined market cannot accomodate. There is an inability to circulate, to sell that which is already there. The resulting contradiction of the domestic and foreign markets shows that less overall investments could be amortized, less surplus value (profit) realized and especially by the weaker nation-states - Brazil et alia. The organic boundaries of market exchange are beginning to fissure and will soon yawn wide open. And these gaps must be filled by the emergence of a conscious world proletariat.

INTERNATIONAL CLASS STRUGGLE

What seems to be the end of the world for the bourgeoisie (and it is!) is in reality the start of a New World for the global proletariat - the universal wage-slaves who are taking the brunt of the crisis - a new world without capitalism and the State: a global society of freely associated and creative human beings, the heralding of the age of El Comunismo Libertario!

It is only the planetary working class through its refusal to submit to and combat against the crisis which can break the chains of capitalist barbarity - of wage labour, of hierarchy, of starvation, of wars, of untold anxiety and misery. Therefore we welcome this crisis because it offers to our class the requisite material compulsion to overthrow the entirety of the capitalist system. The more suffering inflicted, the worse conditions get, the faster all the lies of the bourgeoisie are used up, then the less will the workers listen to and believe the voices of their masters - the various ideologies and gambits, right and left, of all the political parties, the unions, the media, the "cultural" narcotics. As this happens those of us who have been forged by our class, and by humanity proper, as the revolutionary vanguard of species emancipation can then begin to intervene in the struggles of our class with monumental effect. Our voices, which will seem like a hurricane of oxygen against the pall of bourgeois pollution will then interpenetrate with the rage of our class and find a geometric reverberation among all our brothers and sisters.

Already the class battle is heating up and in some areas where it

was least expected... in Argentina, in Israel, in Portugal, in the U.S.

A month ago (December 82) the largest demonstration and street fighting in the 7 year rule of the military occurred in Argentina. A 24 hour general strike for higher wages was honoured by over 90% of Argentinian workers. A call for class peace by the government has been rejected on the streets; transport workers have threatened a national strike against the austerity. Of course the leftist parties - the Peronists and Radicals - and the Unions are still calling most of the shots. Nevertheless without open defiance none of the leftist mystifications will ever be overcome.

Recently in Israel the El Al airport workers have broken the myth that Jewish nationalism is inviolate of class divisions. The confrontations at the airport grounds was a demonstrative and violent attack on the Israeli state; strikes including government workers, teachers and truck drivers have been ignited in Tel Aviv. The ethnic repression of the Sephardim - the dark Jews - is rebounding against Zionist ideology as these slum dwellers have just gone on a rampage. Again the Labour Party will try to co-opt all this under a populist blanket. Still the class struggle inside Israel is the only thing that can prevent further military adventures and massacres and show the way forward for the entire Semetic proletariat - in Egypt especially - who are the real class brothers and sisters, Allah and Jehovah be damned!

The Right has come to power in Portugal and the Left goes into opposition as recently occurred in West Germany and Mexico. In the northern town of Vizela rioting erupted as the central government attempted to displace town councillors who had enacted economic benefits for the unemployed. Workers wrecked polling booths and tore up voting slips and taunted riot police with shouts of 'This is not Poland' meaning that the class was worthily contesting state power.

In the United States the December riots in Miami's Overtown Ghetto are merely a few sparks from the firestorm awaiting the American Bourgeoisie. Elsewhere the Unions are doing their best to keep the lid on - like the UAW at Chrysler - and ironically its white collar workers - the protracted and violent teachers strikes in California, Pennsylvania and Hartford Ohio - who are casting light on the proper course for their blue-collar fellow-workers.

Now is the time for all the authentic forces of world social revolution to come together politically and organisationally, prior to the immense struggles for human liberty that lie ahead. All genuine free communist elements must then coalesce, must consolidate themselves on the foundations of the principles of both Marx and Bakunin - Smash Capitalism! Smash the State! - to join in circumference like the steel sinews of a battering ram to bash in the rotten edifice of alienated exchange-society. We must unfurl the banner of the international proletariat - which is a Red and Black banner - and make it visible to our class; to point out the insolubility of civilisation's crisis under the fetters of capitalist value and to call to arms all of exploited and downtrodden humanity - Workers of the World Unite Against Your Class Enemy! We must address directly our class thus: Follow the lead of the Polish workers in August 1980 - launch the coordinated general strike everywhere and across all borders in answer to the 'final solution' our rulers, East and West have in store for us if we acquiesce - Nuclear World War, total destruction of earth and all living beings. Let us resume our long awaited class march: we still have a New World to Win.

Tampa Workers Affinity Group
January 1983.

LETTER ABOUT THE CWO

(In October of 1982 two members of the Communist Workers Organisation visited Aberdeen. We print below an extract of a letter describing this visit.)

Dear,

The meeting took place at the request of the CWO. The first discussion was about the 'technical' details of our future (and past) relations. DGP (of the CWO) Kicked off by demanding to know why we refused to have face to face discussions with them and more or less implied that unless we gave them a commitment on this they would have to reconsider their relations with us. We replied by stating that first of all what our position had been as an informal grouping, more or less along the lines of our previous reply to their letter (see BULLETIN 2) stating that for obvious reasons we didnt give them a very high priority. We then went on to explain that as a formally constituted organisation (especially one committed to non-sectarianism) our approach and priorities would be different somewhat: that we would want as much debate as possible and on as fraternal ~~debate~~ a basis as possible with as many fractions of the milieu as possible; that this would involve the whole gamut of intercourse - correspondence, textual, formal meetings, informal ones, confrontations at interventions and whenever possible, joint work. The only proviso we added to this was that all this take place in a structured and disciplined fashion and not at random or on the basis of whim and that it be as public as possible. We pointed out that we didnt think that debate between ourselves and the CWO was of interest and value to only us (or indeed them) but had to be seen as part of the process of clarification within the political milieu as a whole. It became very clear that this concept of a 'milieu' with 'fraternal responsibilities' for the process of clarification was quite alien to them.

At this point the discussion became very repetitive since DGP kept pressing for a commitment to face to face meetings and seemed oblivious to our repeated statements that that was part and parcel of the relationship we had in mind. Even with hindsight and in the light of the rest of the discussion I'm still baffled by the mutual incomprehension here.

A couple of other points emerged here. On the question of written polemics and on a response to what weve already written in the Bulletin, they had an extremely mechanical and formal approach. They seemed to think that we were demanding a detailed, point by point, text by text response as a prelude to further discussion. We replied that that wasnt our position but that it was up to them to decide what, in their own opinion, was the best way to respond and to focus on what they considered the most important areas. The second point was that they couldnt understand why an informal grouping had such a low priority for discussion with the CWO should have spent so much effort polemicising against them. We replied that since leaving the ICC our central concern had been the question of organisation which couldnt be addressed only in the abstract. The attempt to clarify ourselves necessarily involved mounting a critique of the concrete organisational practices we were actually confronted with in the revolutionary milieu. Since we were situating ourselves in the tradition of the centralised party that meant dealing with the CWO and the ICC. There wasnt any question of picking on them, there just wasnt any way we could avoid a critique of them when dealing with the organisation question,

At this point we moved onto the possibilities for joint work between us. It was explained to us that joint work just wasnt on since we were a 'pseudo-group' and it would thus be opportunistic for the CWO to engage with us in joint work. We could, if we wished help the CWO in their work (possibly) but there could be no question of them reciprocating, let alone attempting joint projects. It was at

this point that they explained why they were keen to conduct discussions with us. They believe that it is their duty and political task to "break the collectivity" of what they defined as "pseudo-groups" and that this duty forms the basis for any possible relationship they might have with such groups. Its fair to say that we were a bit taken aback by this but we were absolutely flabbergasted when the political theory which underlies this policy was explained to us. The CWJ believe that there are only four "real" groups in existence within the revolutionary movement - the councilist/libertarian camp and the ICC both coming from the German Left, and both Battaglia and Programma coming from the Italian Left. Every other group is really only a pseudo group whose only real task is to dissolve themselves into the group which represents the pole to which they 'belong'. In the light of this we can see that their past statements to us about our lack of viability weren't based on a simple pragmatic or empirical analysis of our capabilities nor even on an assessment that our differences with the ICC were too small to justify separation but were meant in an absolute sense. For the CWO it is simply not possible for political fractions to have any 'real' existence outside their 'real' pole: and since they will only engage in fraternal, joint work with 'real' groups their policy to all the rest of the milieu is necessarily sectarian and destructive in the extreme.

Whats apparent is the incredibly arbitrary nature of this bizarre pantheon of 'real' groups and 'pseudo-groups'. When we pressed them they couldn't produce any historical or theoretical basis for this edifice, except that it was self evident and that Battaglia also believed it. It really begs so many questions. What, for example, are the defining characteristics and positions of each pole, and what is it that decides which is the 'real' group in the ones which gravitate around this pole? Why is programma a 'real' group amidst the plethora of Italian Bordigists? How is that pole qualitatively different from the Battaglia one? (Although they replied here that "everyone just accepts that the Party is split" !) Why does a group which supports the PLO and work in unions qualify as a proletarian pole in the first place? (On this point the CWO said that if the worst came to the worst and Battaglia ~~and~~ Programma since they would be the only 'real' pole left defending the correct position on the party!) As for us, according to the CWO, we should do likewise with the ICC - accept whatever they demanded of us, bite our tongues, and rejoin. Moreover they think that the ICC are angling for this anyway in their comments on the Bulletin in recent issues of WR.

We asked whether the CWO of 5 years ago had also been a 'pseudo-group' of the ICC and, if therefore the Aberdeen comrades had been right to split from the CWO on that basis. They found this a bit puzzling. First of all they said that that was different since the CWO was a group in evolution and secondly that we should have joined the PCI! Both points are quite illuminating. It is difficult to see why the CWO should be allowed a process of evolution but groups today cannot, but also implied is the notion that the 'real' groups have reached static perfection and won't have any further evolution. (Shades of the Invariant Programme) Secondly it reveals the extent to which they have repressed their own history from their consciousness. They seem completely unaware that five years ago they were within the pole of the German Left and therefore, using the ~~r~~ own methodology, of the ICC.

The other obvious question (which unfortunately we didn't think to ask at the time) is: Why isn't the CWO a pseudo group today? Why are they prepared to 'integrate' new members for example instead of directing them towards Battaglia? Perhaps they solve this problem by pointing to their commitment to dissolve into Battaglia, but if that's the case, would we become 'real' if we stated a longterm commitment to reintegrate into, say, the ICC? Or perhaps they are 'legitimised' because Battaglia's still uneasy about extending outside Italy - in which case groups become 'real' or 'pseudo' according to nothing more than the policy decision of the group. The whole discussion was horribly reminiscent

of the period just before we split from the CWO when they had backed themselves into a logical corner about everyone else being bourgeois and how there were only 5 revolutionaries in the entire world, ie the members of the CWO.

The one good point that did emerge from this section was the way it highlighted our need to be clear about why we exist as a separate grouping. It was a task we were always aware of of course but up to then we had seen it simply in terms of showing that our differences were sufficient to justify separate existence from other groups such as the ICC. It is clear now that we have to address the problem in a much broader fashion and situate it in a historical and theoretical framework rather than a purely pragmatic assessment. In the CWO we are confronted with an organisation of extreme partyist vision. What matters above all to them is the organisation and its actual physical survival. Political clarity is secondary to this. Hence their attacks on the KAPD for leaving the Comintern which not so long ago they were praising on the correct grounds that it was an act that preserved political clarity for the future. It is clear that the Italian Left paid the price of degenerating clarity in exchange for physical survival and we can see this in the legacy of confusion existing today in that camp on questions like working within the unions and parliamentarianism - for them, merely tactical questions (as they are now rapidly becoming for the CWO). If one reads the text in Revolutionary Perspectives again on the Italian Left it is clear that things like NEP, Frontism and even Kronstadt were necessary and unavoidable policies if the Party were to survive. For us on the contrary the existence of the party is inseparable from its political clarity. You can't sacrifice the latter for the former.

This emphasis on the physical survival of the Party is obviously what lies behind the CWO's assertion that, if necessary, they could swallow their scruples on the PLO etc. and join Programma. Clearly what lies behind this is a conception which believes that the vital quality of the Party is their ability to organise the class. For the CWO what has to be built is a unified executive machine that can carry out the manoeuvres and instructions emerging from Communist infallibility. For us, the revolution and revolutionary clarity is made by the class mass action and not by the cogitations of the Party's collective brain. It is not the Party's instructions which are vital to the revolution but its ability to give political shape to the activity of the class, to absorb the advances made by the class and then transend them in a way that the class itself can't and feed it back into the life of the class as political and programmatic clarity. In this way the party acts as the political compass of the class, able to point the way forward by accentuating what is positive in the class's own activity, and fighting against cul-de-sacs. The essential element is clarity and that can only be a product of living debate as wide and as thorough going as possible, allied to an openness and responsiveness to the class itself. We cannot know in advance which positions and analyses will be found wanting when it comes to the crunch so it is essential that the process of clarification, the confrontation of positions and analyses, have a living, concrete expression and are not suppressed a-la-Bordigism or hidden away in private a-la-ICC. It was precisely this ability of the bolsheviks which made them the party of the class and of the Revolution and not their mythical discipline, "unity of action" or qualities of generalship. Rigidity and monolithism are the last qualities needed by revolutionary fractions.

It's true also to say that the CWO have a tendency to write off the value of the free expression of debate because of their very mechanical notion of "scientific marxism". They tend to believe that given a specific set of starting positions everything else can be logically deduced. They are quite resistant to the idea that there can be genuine debate and differences even within a common axis. This came out quite clearly when we discussed Factory Groups with them. We were trying to find out how vital their commitment to FGs was to their definition of the CWO and asked if they would or could integrate elements who differed with them on that point. They found it hard to take

the question seriously, arguing that anyone who held their position on the Party would necessarily evolve the same position on factory groups. There was extreme shiftiness when we pointed out the example of the Bolsheviks with DGP trying to claim that Bolshevik factory cells were the "same sort of thing" as factory groups and then conceding that that wasn't the case but arguing that "a lot had happened since then"! They also argued that we had misunderstood what they had said about factory groups, that they didn't see them as a means to bridging their isolation from the class and that it wasn't a major emphasis in their interventionary work. Some of us took this shiftiness as evidence of their uneasiness about the reality of their original claims about factory groups; however others of us thought that an unannounced policy shift has taken place stemming from a reassessment of the possibilities for revolutionary work in the present period.

There was certainly evidence for this in the final part of the discussion. We kicked off by asking them to respond to the final section of our Bolshevik text on the material differences between the situation of revolutionaries then and now and asking for their perspectives for growth. They began by admitting that the revolutionary movement was tiny but denied any qualitative difference between that situation and that of the Bolsheviks. DGP came up with the old chestnut again about there being only 11 Bolsheviks in 1902, completely ignoring the gigantic and deeply rooted political and revolutionary tradition of a class emerging from the mass parties of ascendance. Despite pressing from us they seemed unwilling to deal with the question except by ignoring it.

On the question of future growth their analysis was startling and frightening. They believe that the movement will only grow after a long series of total and profound defeats, involving continent wide, and perhaps even a world wide war. They quite specifically mean profound political defeats rather than economic ones. To quote DGP "The proletariat need to have a hell of a lot of shit kicked out of them yet". Its only at the end of this process that they envisage the class turning to revolutionaries. It is quite the starkest and bleakest analysis ever heard inside the revolutionary movement. Elements who have accepted this analysis in the past have, understandably, left politics. They think the ICC have also arrived at this position but are putting a brave public face on it while privately preparing for ~~factious work~~ a retreat into faction work. For the CWO it would certainly explain any possible downgrading of factory group type perspectives. It also explains why they thought the discussion about who best survived 1921 and how they did so, was so important. It should be said that this is still under discussion inside the CWO and Battaglia and what we've heard so far is only DGP's opinion of the likely outcome of the discussion. Obviously if this position is adopted then it is likely to have extremely significant consequences and implications for their work and activity, so we might see some very rapid political evolution taking place. Frankly its hard to see how a group can survive such a perspective.

As far as we could tell from the discussion, what has taken place is a theorisation of the current isolation of revolutionaries and lack of growth rather than an assessment of the balance of class forces in the present period. They seem to have implicitly accepted the milieu's current tininess and importance and, seeing no mechanism for growth presently at work, theorised what they think must happen if we are to grow. Holding their conception of the party, that it is its organising abilities that count, its hardly surprising that they have succumbed to the most profound despair. We don't exactly have the most cheerful perspectives ourselves, but for us at least there is no need to envisage our influence depending fundamentally on the strength of our organisation, but rather on the strength of our positions. We've already said how even the tiniest revolutionary organisation could have had a qualitative effect on Poland, for example, whereas for the CWO they think that "at least 600 revolutionaries would have been needed" to have had any effect.

Going back to the first part of the discussion it seems clear that our initial hopes of an ongoing fraternal relationship arent possible any more. It is difficult to see what sort of direct relationship we can have with them outside benereal polemics in our press. There doesnt seem much point in expending much energy in detailed discussions with an organisation committed to our destruction (in the kindest and most fraternal sense of course). We will have to decide however how to publically deal with all the issues which emerged from the meeting, but given that, so far, they've nothing in print yet about all this "real" and "pseudo" business, or about their perspectives for defeat its difficult to see how best to do it.

ULTRA LEFT REVIEW

In the last issues of The Bulletin we announced our abstention from the Ultra Keft Review project launched by Wildcat, a group comprised of former ICC and Solidarity members in Manchester. Following a conference held last September the first issue of the review (now styled Intercom) has duly appeared.

The Manchester conference was a confused affair with the discussions completely bypassing the central political issues. The main argument revolved around the attempts of the "delegate" from the rump of solidarity to have all criteria for participation in "Intercom" dropped so as not to exclude "progressive elements" (sic) inside organisations like Big Flame. While the conference fixated on such questions as the precise meaning of the term 'democracy' and the most appropriate title for the review, it rapidly became clear that the only groups prepared to make any sort of commitment to the project were Wildcat and its sister organisation Careless Talk (from Stoke-on-Trent) and Subversive Graffiti (from Aberdeen). Thus the resulting publication is umbilically linked to the concept of organisation shared by these groups: its seen as a means of communication and swapping leaflets between autonomous local grouplets who distribute their own strike bulletins in their own cities and as such is designed to act as a crutch for localism and federalism.

To situate our critique of Intercom we must return to the events of two years ago. In 1981 the British section of the International Communist Current was rent asunder by a series of confused splits schisms in which the political issues at stake were largely obscured by a series of ugly incidents which we have dealt with at great length in previous issues of the Bulletin. Far from being a well orchestrated conspiracy the splitters had little internal coherence and splintered into a number of directions. The majority immediately dropped out of revolutionary politics altogether, while others embarked on a frenzied period of workerist and activist adventures which rapidly led to demoralisation and more departures from politics. It was to counteract these tendencies that the Bulletin was originally set up: a means of focusing debates on the political issues involved in the splits and of preventing further fragmentation. While we argued that centralised and disciplined political activity was the only way forward our former comrades in Manchester took quite a different approach. They merged with those revolutionaries in Manchester who had managed to extricate themselves from the fast degenerating Solidarity to form the Wildcat Collective. Complete local autonomy was seen as the panacea that would obviate the various problems experienced by W.R. and Solidarity and the activity of the group was to centre on the production of free local newssheets distributed as widely as possible within the Manchester area. After eighteen months of such activity much of the steam has gone out of Wildcat and its sister groups and it is many months since the last newssheet was issued: at the time of writing there seem to be no moves towards producing a second issue of Intercom and the groups are

paralysed by a general mood of resigned apathy.

When greeted by no response whatsoever from the working class, workerist interventions such as wildcat and the ill-fated News of War and Revolution are bound to crumple into despair and a retreat from all political activity. There are no magical solutions to the separation of revolutionaries from the class as a whole and in the testing years ahead only those communists who base themselves on the solid foundation of disciplined theoretical work and centralized organizational activity will be able to fulfil the tasks demanded of them by the class struggle. The members of Wildcat and the rest of the comrades connected with Intercom must begin now to draw the lessons of their recent past, to reexamine the organizational question and to make a clean break with Libertarianism if they are to play any part in the momentous struggles that lie ahead.

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