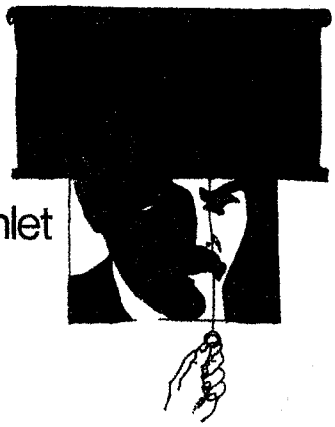
R

1. Revolutionary Organisation

2. Open letter to IS



Solidarity London/Clydeside pamphlet

5p

INTRODUCTION

We have decided to republish two of our former texts as a pamphlet. The first text, on 'Revolutionary Organisation', was written early in 1961. It was first published by the Socialism Reaffirmed group (which later changed its name to SOLIDARITY) in the form of three articles which appeared in issues No.4 and 5 of the journal 'Agitator' and in issue No.6 of 'Solidarity' (the new name by which our journal became known from May 1961 on). In 1969 the Clydeside Solidarity group reproduced these articles as a pamphlet.

The second text 'An Open Letter to I.S.' was produced in September 1968 as a SOLIDARITY (London) special. It was distributed at the Annual Conference of I.S. in Beaver Hall. It deals with topics closely related to those mentioned in 'Revolutionary Organisation'.

The two texts - although outdated in some respects - are being reproduced in response to a continued demand. We present them as a contribution to the serious discussing now taking place, within the ranks of revolutionaries, as to what kind of organisation is necessary. The whole area is a difficult one, in that there are no prototypes on which we can base ourselves. What we have to create is something entirely new, and it is not surprising that the birth pangs are prolonged. The only 'examples' available are examples of what is to be avoided. On the one hand highly centralised and hierarchically-structured organisations of Bolshevik type, run on semi-military lines, and reproducing within their own ranks the order-giver/order-taker relationships of bourgeois society (and hence the political alienation of the average person in that society). Such organisations have certainly 'succeeded' - but succeeded in bringing about societies in their own image. On the other hand we see groups so obsessed with problems of bureaucratic degeneration that they refuse the minimum of organisation necessary to provide a framework for democratic decision-taking. To hold such views is tantamount to saying there is no socialist perspective whatsoever.

On the one hand we certainly wish to influence others and to disseminate SOLIDARITY ideas (not just any ideas) as widely as possible. This requires the coordinated activity of people or groups, individually capable of self-activity and of finding their own level of involvement and their own areas of work. The instruments of such coordination should be flexible and vary according to the purpose for which coordination is required.

There are no institutional guarantees, however, against the bureaucratisation of revolutionary groups. The only guarantee is the perpetual awareness and self-mobilisation of their members.

London, December 1972.

SOLIDARITY PAMPHLETS

THE MEANING OF SOCIALISM by Paul Cardan. What is a socialist programme? The real contradiction in capitalist production. Socialist values. A re-statement of socialist objectives. The case for workers' management of production. 5p.

SOCIALISM OR BARBARISM. A redefinition of socialist objectives in the light of the events of the last 50 years. 5p.

THE CRISIS OF MODERN SOCIETY by Paul Cardan. The interlocking crises in work, politics, values, education, the family, and relations between the sexes. 5p.

THE IRRATIONAL IN POLITICS by Maurice Brinton. How modern society conditions its slaves to accept their slavery. Sexual repression and authoritarian conditioning - in both Western and Eastern contexts. 10p.

THE FATE OF MARXISM by Paul Cardan. Can a theory which set out 'not only to interpret the world but to change it' be dissociated from its historical repercussions? 3p.

HISTORY AND REVOLUTION (A Critique of Historical Materialism) by Paul Cardan. A further enquiry into the 'unmarxist in Marx'. Can essentially capitalist conceptual categories be applied to pre-capitalist and non-capitalist societies? 15p.

THE COMMUNE (PARIS 1871) by P. Guillaume and M. Grainger. The first proletarian attempt at total self-management. An analysis of the various interpretations (from Marx to Trotsky). 5p.

FROM SPARTAKISM TO NATIONAL BOLSHEVISM. A 'Solidarity' (Aberdeen) pamphlet. The flood and ebb of the German Revolution between 1918 and 1923. The strengths and weaknesses of the Workers Councils in an advanced industrial society. 8p.

THESES ON THE CHINESE REVOLUTION by Cajo Brendel. A 'Solidarity' (Aberdeen) pamphlet. How state capitalism (in Bolshevik garb) came to China. The end of the 'Cultural Revolution' and the emergence of the new class. 10p.

SOCIALLY-RESPONSIBLE SCIENTISTS OR SOLDIER-TECHNICIANS? The social function of science in a class society - and the challenge to scientists. The Durham Resolution and its aftermath. 5p.

POSTAGE EXTRA

1. 'WHAT IS NOT TO BE DONE'

The term 're-thinking' is often used as an excuse for not thinking at all. One hesitates to use it. Much re-thinking has nevertheless to be done by revoluntionary socialists. A cursory glance at the Labour movement in Western Europe today should convince anyone of this dire need. More and more ordinary people show an indifference bordering on contempt for the mass Labour and Communist parties of yesterday. The old men of the 'left' attempt to resolve this crisis by repeating in ever more strident tones the dogmas and concepts that were good enough for their own grandads.

We here wish to examine one of the most fervently adhered to dogmas of the 'Left': the need for a tightly centralised socialist party, controlled by a carefully selected leadership. The Labour Party describes this type of organization as an essential feature of British democracy in practice. The Bolsheviks describe it as 'democratic centralism'. Let us forget the names and look below the surface. In both cases we find the complete domination of the party in all matters of organisation and policy by a fairly small group of professional 'leaders'.

As none of these parties has ever been successful in achieving a society where the great mass of people control and manage their own destinies, both their politics and their organisational methods must be considered suspect. It is our opinion that the type of organisation required to assist the working class in its struggle for socialism is certainly a matter for serious thought.

Post-war capitalism has certainly provided more jobs and better paid ones than many may have thought possible. But its drive to subordinate people to the process of production has intensified at an enormous rate. At work, people are reduced more and more to the role of mere button-pushing, lever-pressing machines. In the 'ideal' capitalist factory human beings would perform only the most simple, routine tasks. The division of labour would be carried to its extreme. Managers would decide. Foremen would supervise. The workers would only comply.

In the body politic, omnipotent social institutions similarly decide all issues: how much production will be 'allowed' to increase or decrease, how much consumption, what kind of consumption, how many H-bombs to produce, whether to have Polaris bases or not, etc., etc. Between those who rule and those who labour there exists a wide and unbridgeable gulf.

Exploiting society, consciously encourages the development of a mass psychology to the effect that the ideas or wishes of ordinary people are unimportant and that all important decisions must be taken by people specially trained and specially equipped to do so. They are encouraged to believe that success, security, call it what you will, can only be achieved within the framework of the accepted institutions. The rebel, the militant, the iconoclast may be admired, even envied, but their example must be shunned. After all no-one can really challenge the powers that be. Just look at what happens to those who try!

Ironically enough the very organisations that have set themselves up as the liberators of the working class and the champions of their cause have become facsimile replicas of the very society they are supposedly challenging. The Labour Party, the Communist Party and the various Trotskyite and Leninist sects all extol the virtues of professional politicians or revolutionaries. All practice a rigid division within their own organisations of leaders and led. All fundamentally believe that socialism will be instituted from above and through their own particular agency.

Each of them sees socialism as nothing more than the conquest of political power, and the transformation by decree, of economic institutions. The instruments of socialism, in their eyes, are nationalisation, state control and the 'plan'. The objective of socialism is to increase both productivity and consumption. The elimination of economic anarchy and the full development of the productive forces are somehow equated with the millenium.

Labour's nationalised industries are proof of the attitude of the Social Democrats. The Bolsheviks would replace the Robertsons and Robens with people loyal to the Party. The Soviet experience makes this quite clear. As early as 1918 Lenin had stated 'the Revolution demands, in the interests of socialism, that the masses unquestioningly obey the single will (emphasis in original) of the leaders of the labour process'[1] By 1921 he was saying "It is absolutely essential that all authority in the factories should be concentrated in the hands of management ..... under these circumstances are direct interference by the trade unions in the management of factories must be regarded as positively harmful and impermissible."[2]

Trotsky wanted to militarise the trade unions. Is it very far from this to the statement, issued by Stalin's Central Committee in September 1929, that 'Soviet Union Communists must help to establish order and discipline in the factory, Members of the Communist Party, union representatives and shop committees are instructed not to interfere in questions of management'.[3]

None of them argued for the working people themselves managing and organising industry and the affairs of society, now. That was a carrot to be nibbled in a distant future.

This conception of socialism spawns the bureaucratic parties that today constitute the traditional political organisations of the 'left'. To all of them the determination and application of policies are a matter for experts. Gaitskell scorns the Scarborough decisions because they were made by people whom he consideres to be intellectually incapable of comprehending matters of international importance. The Communist Party and the Socialist Labour League oppose British H-bombs but support Russian ones. Their leaders consider the millions of people who want to end all H-bombs as being sentimental and uninformed. They have obviously not read the appropriate volumes that would 'clarify' them and make them see how essential Russian bombs really are.

---

1. 'The immediate tasks of the Soviet government'. Isvestiya of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, No. 85, April 28, 1918.

2. 'The role of the Trade Unions under the N.E.P.'

3. Reported in 'Freiheit', German language paper of the American CP, September 9 1929.

The businessmen insist on the importance of their managerial rights. So do the leaders of the political organisations of the 'left'. This rigid control from above creates not efficiency but the very reverse. Whenever decisions are taken at higher levels and simply transmitted to the lower orders for execution a conspiracy against both leaders and orders arises. In the factory the workers devise their own methods of solving work problems. If bonus can be made in five hours well and good. Work is skilfully spread over eight and a half hours. Supervisors lie to departmental managers. These, in turn, lie to works' managers, who lie to the directors and shareholders. Each seeks to preserve his own niche. Each seeks to hide wastage, error and inefficiency. In the hierarchical organisation of the modern factory where work is not a matter for common decision and responsibility, and where relations are based on mistrust and suspicion, the best 'plan' can never be fulfilled in life.

This is repeated in the political parties. Officials have an existence to justify. Members who are nothing more than contributors to party funds and sellers of party literature are regularly called to order to explain how many papers they have sold and how many contacts they have visited with their leader's latest line. Those who attempt to discuss reality or to think for themselves are denounced as either 'sectarians', bpportunists' or just 'politically immature'. The factory managers never really lnow what is happening in their factories. The political 'leaders' really don't know either what is taking place in their own organisations. Only the leaders, for instance, believe the membership figures issued.

Bolsheviks argue that to fight the highly centralized forces of modern capitalism requires an equally centralized type of party. This ignores the fact that capitalist centralization is based on coercion and force and the exclusion of the overwhelming majority of the population from participating in any of its decisions. The most highly specialized and centralized bodies under capitalism are its means of enforcing its rule - its military and its police. Because of their bureaucratic centralism these organizations produce a special breed of animal noted for its insensitiveness, brutality and other moronic qualities.

The very structure of these organizations ensures that their personnel do not think for themselves, but unquestioningly carry out the instructions of their superiors. Trotsky, as far back as 1903, believed that the marxist movement should have a similar structure. He told the Brussles Conference that the statutes of the revolutionary organization should express 'the leadership's organised distrust of the members, a distrust manifesting itself in vigilant control from above over the Party'.[4]

Advocates of 'democratic centralism' insist that it is the only type of organisation which can function effectively under conditions of illegality. This is nonsense. The 'democratic centralist' organisation is particularly vulnerable to police persecution. When all power is concentrated in the hands of the leaders, their arrest immediately paralyses the whole organisation. Members trained to accept unquestioningly the instructions of an all-wise Central Committee will find it very difficult or impossible to think and act for themselves. The experiences of the German Communist Party confirm this. With their usual inconsistency, the Trotskyists even explain the demise of their Western European sections during World War II by telling people how their leaders were murdered by the Gestapo!

---

4. See Deutscher 'The Prophet Armed' p.76.

The overthrow of exploiting society is not a military operation to be planned by a Secretariat of amateur Generals, armed with a library of marxist textbooks and an outdated military manual. A social revolution can only take place providing the working class itself is conscious of the need to change society and is prepared to struggle. Its success is dependent on the disintegration of the capitalist institutions more than on their military overthrow. Unless whole sections of the military can either be won over or neutralized, then the taking of power is impossible.

Because of their basically reactionary ideas and methods of organization neither social democracy nor Bolshevism are able to understand or express the real needs of people. The dynamic of any socialist movement is the desire of people to change the conditions of their lives. The Hungarian Revolution was more than a struggle for an extra ten bob a week. It was not a struggle for an extension of nationalization or for more 'efficiency' in Government departments. Millons of Hungarian people rose against their oppressors because they wanted to determine the conditions of their own lives and to manage their own affairs. For a brief, heroic period they replaced the society of rulers and ruled with direct democracy, where every representative was not only elected by direct vote but was revocable at any time. The ideas of committees appointed from above and of 'panels' commissions' would have been quite alien to them. Surely political tendencies whose organizational methods are the very antithesis of what the working class has demonstrated, in practice, that it wants, should re-examine all their ideas and previously held theories.

2. WHY?

All the ruling groups in modern society encourage the belief that decision-taking and management are functions beyond the comprehension of ordinary people. All means are used to foster this idea. Not only do formal education, the press, the radio, television and the church perpetuate this myth, but even the parties of the so-called opposition accept it and in so doing, lend it strength. All the political parties of the 'left' - whether social democratic or Bolshevik - oppose the present order only by offering 'better' leaders, more 'experienced' and more capable of solving the problems of society than those who mismanage the world today.

All of them, bourgeois and 'radicals' alike, distort the history of the working class and attempt to draw a discreet veil over the immense creative initiative of the masses in struggle. For the bourgeois, the Russian Revolution was the conspiracy of organized fanaticism. To Stalinists and Trotskyists, it is the justification for their right to lead. For the bourgeois, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 showed how capitalist rulers were better than Stalinist ones. For the Stalinists, it was a fascist conspiracy. The Trotskyists wrote pamphlets showing how badly the Hungarians needed their services. Over every revolution and struggle the parties compete in the squalid business of seeking to justify both themselves and their dogmas. They all ignore the efforts, the struggles, the sacrifices and the positive achievments of the participants themselves. Every attempt by people to take control of their own destiny by instituting their own rule has been buried beneath a million official tracts and a welter of 'expert' interpretations.

It is now almost impossible to learn what actually happened in Italy during the early 20s when the workers occupied and managed the factories. The Asturian Commune of 1934, the May Day in Barcelona in 1937, the sit-down strikes in France and the U.S.A. during the late thirties and the events of Budapest in 1956 have become closed books.*

If the myth that people are unable to manage, organize and rule society themselves is to be debunked, workers must be made aware that on several occasions other workers have in fact managed society. They have done so both more humanely and more effectively than it is managed at present. To us who publish AGITATOR ** there can be no thought of socialism unless the working class establishes its own rule. Socialism for us implies the complete and total management of both production and government. The essential pre-condition for this is a rise in mass consciousness and the development of a confidence within people that they are able not only to challenge the old society but to build the new one.

Making these past experiences available to people is one of the primary tasks of revolutionary socialists. All channels of information are in the hands of capitalists, bureaucrats, or self-appointed saviours with special axes to grind. We disagree with those who argue that there is no need for a revolutionary organization. The production of a truthful and a serious history requires the conscious and organized association of revolutionary socialists.

The revolutionary organization must also bring to workers' notice the common interests that they share with other workers.

On the one hand the concentration of capital has led to an increasing concentration of workers in giant factories often linked with one another in various kinds of monopolies. On the other hand the new productive techniques have led to greater division between the producers. The labour process has been so broken down that workers are not only separated by national, regional and sectional boundaries, but also by artificial divisions within factories and departments. The increasing tempo of production and the introduction of piecework has fostered the idea that the interests of workers in one section are quite different from those of men in other sections.

The trade union officials help the employers to maintain these divisions. Separate and often widely differing wage and piece-rates are negotiated. Workers in one factory or shop are pitted against workers in other factories and shops. The employers and the union officials unscrupulously use the men's short term interests - or apparent short term interests - to sabotage their real needs. The very presence of different unions competing against one another for members illustrates how sectional interests are promoted above general requirements. Clerical workers are today being reduced to mere cogs in the impersonal machine of production. The increase in union membership among these workers shows that they are becoming aware of this fact. The union bureaucracies organize them into separate unions for white-collar workers, or into special sections of the industrial unions.

The revolutionary organization must help break down the false divisions between workers. With its paper and publications and through its militants the revolutionary organization should bring to people's notice the struggles that are taking place in society. It must truthfully report what these struggles are about and show how they affect the lives and interests of other workers.

---

* See Solidarity pamphlets:- 'Hungary', 'The Kronstadt Commune', 'Kronstadt 1921'.
** Agitator became Solidarity.

Most people do not at present see the need for socialism. If by socialism is meant what currently passes as such - both East and West of the Iron Curtain - we can scarcely blame them. There is no doubt, however, that vast numbers of people are prepared to struggle on real issues, on issues that really concern them, and against the innumerable and monstrous social injustices and social frustrations of contemporary society. At an elementary level, they are prepared to fight against rent increases, against changes in piecework rates and against changes in job organization about which they have not even been consulted. At a higher level, they are prepared to campaign against the production of nuclear weapons. They are constantly challenging the various 'solutions' to these problems, imposed upon them from above. How can this challenge be generalised? How can it be transformed into one directed against the very society which perpetuates the division of men into order-givers and order-takers?

The revolutionary organization must assist people engaged in a struggle against exploiting society to understand the need to act in an organized class way and not as isolated groups with limited or sectional objectives.

* * * * * * * * *

Is the socialist society a utopian dream? The answer depends on how one sees the development of socialist consciousness. The Bolsheviks - Stalinists and Trotskyists alike - both endorse Lenin's statement 'The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade union consciousness.'[5]

This view implies that workers are only capable of struggling for reforms and that they are too backward to understand the more important need to bring about a revolutionary transformation of society. Socialist 'consciousness could only be brought to them from without'.[5]

The adherents to this theory, quite logically, consider it the job of professional revolutionaries to plan the strategy, organize the taking of power and take all the decisions for the instituting of the 'socialist' society. Lenin, the firmest advocate of this reformist and reactionary idea which was borrowed from Kautsky[6] went so far as to applaud the Webb's ironical and scornful comments about the attempts of the British workers to manage their own trade unions.[7]

---

5. V.I. Lenin, 'What is to be Done?'. (Lawrence and Wishart, 1944. p.33)

6. In NEUE ZEIT, 1901-02, XX, No.3, p.79, Kautsky wrote: '...socialist consciousness is represented as a necessary and direct result of the proletarian class struggle. This is absolutely untrue... Socialism and the class struggle arise side by side and not one out of the other... Modern socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge... the vehicles of science are not the proletariat but the bourgeois intelligentsia...
   Lenin, in What is to be Done? (p.40), quotes Kautsky in full and refers to his views as 'profoundly true and important utterances.'

7. Lenin wrote (ibid. p.125): 'In Mr. & Mrs. Webb's book on trade unionism, there is an interesting chapter entitled 'Primitive Democracy'. In this chapter, the authors relate how, in the first period of existence of their unions, the British workers thought it was an indispensable sign of democracy for all the members to do all the work of managing the unions; not only were all questions decided by the votes of

We completely reject this idea. First, because it attempts to impose upon worker a relationship to 'their' leadership which is a replica of the relations already existing under capitalism. The effect would only be to create apathy and the alienation of the masses - conditions which powerfully assist the growth of decision-taking groups, which rapidly assume increasing managerial function and which, however well-intentioned originally, rapidly start settling matters in their own interests and becom exploiting groups and bureaucracies.

We believe that people in struggle do draw conclusions which are fundamentally socialist in content. Industrial disputes, particularly in Britain, frequently take on the character of a challenge to managerial rights. Workers constantly dispute the bosses' right to hire and fire. Strikes regularly take place over employers' attempts to reorganize and 'rationalize' production. In these workers counterpose their own conceptions and ideas of how production should be organized to those of the employers. Such disputes not only undermine the whole authoritarian, hierarchical structure of capitalist relations. They also show quite clearly that people are repeatedly seeing the need to organize production - which is the basis of all social life - as they think best.

During the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 the Workers' Councils demanded drastic reductions in wage differentials, called for the abolition of piece-work and introduced workers' management of industry. These organizations of political and industrial rule - far more important than the Nagy government - were based on elected and immediately revocable delegates.

The Hungarian Revolution followed the tradition first established by the Commune of 1871. But the aims of the Hungarian workers went further than those of any previou revolution. In the anti-bureaucratic nature of their demands the Hungarian workers showed that they were fighting for something which will become the fundamental feature of all workers' struggles in this epoch. Such a programme is far more revolutionary and more profoundly socialist in character than anything advocated by any of today's so-called socialist parties.

The Social Democrats and Bolsheviks look either to war or economic miseryas means of converting to socialism. It is primitive and insulting to believe that people are unable to oppose exploiting society unless their bellies are empty or their heads about to be blown off.

That this is untrue is shown by the innumerable disputes which take place in the motor industry. Car workers - despite their relatively high wages - fight back agains employers' attempts to establish an ever more rigid control overworkshop conditions. Often employers are prepared to pay more money if workers will give up their hard-won rights in the workshops. Workers often reject this bribery.

Capitalist and bureaucratic societies both seek to subordinate the great majority to the needs of their ruling groups. The rulers attempt to impress the stamp of obedience and conformity onto every aspect of social life. Initiative, intellectual independence, creativeness are crushed and despised. Unless man can develop to the

---

7. (Contd.) all the members but all the official duties were fulfilled by all the members in turn. A long period of historical experience was required to teach these workers how absurd such a conception of democracy was and to make them understand the necessity for representative institutions on the one hand, and for full-time professional officials on the other'.

full these, his most precious qualities - he lives but half a life. Men want to be something more than well-fed servants. The desire to be free is not a pious liberal phrase, but the most noble of man's desires. The pre-condition of this freedom is, of course, freedom in the field of production - workers' management. There can be no real freedom and no real future for humanity in an exploiting society. The path to freedom lies through the socialist revolution.

The resentment of people today against the stifling and degrading relations imposed upon them by class society provides the strongest driving force towards the socialist future.

3. HOW?

What type of organization is needed in the struggle for socialism? How can the fragmented struggles of isolated groups of workers, of tenants, of people opposed to nuclear war be co-ordinated? How can a mass socialist consciousness be developed?

In parts I and II we were quite emphatic about what we didn't want. We looked at all the traditional organizations and found both in their doctrine and their structure mirror images of the very society they were allegedly fighting to overthrow. We would like now to develop some of our own conceptions of what is needed.

Our suggestions are not blueprints. Nor are they intended as the ultimate and final word on the matter. The methods of struggle decided by the working class will to a large extent mould the revolutionary organization - that is, provided the organization sees itself as the instrument of these struggles and not as a self-appointed 'leadership'. 'Elitist' conceptions lead to a self-imposed isolation. Future events may show us the need to modify or even radically alter many of our present conceptions. This does not worry us in the least. There is nothing more revolutionary than reality, nothing more reactionary than an erstwhile revolutionary idea promoted to the rank of absolute and permanent truth.

Exploiting society constantly seeks to coerce people into obeying its will. It denies them the right to manage their own lives, to decide their own destinies. It seeks to create obedient conformists. The real challenge of socialism is that it will give to men the right to be masters of their fate.

It seems quite obvious to us that the socialist organization must be managed by its members. Unless it can ensure that they work together in a spirit of free association and that their activity is genuinely collective it will be useless. It will appear to people as no different from any other organization or institution of capitalism, with its rigid division into order-givers and order-takers.

Without democracy the revolutionary organization will be unable to develop the required originality of thought and the vital initiative and determination to fight upon which its very existence depends. The Bolshevik method of self-appointed and self-perpetuating leaders, selected because of their ability to 'interpret' the teachers' writings and 'relate them to today's events' ensures that no-one ever intrudes with an original idea. History becomes a series of interesting analogies.

Thought becomes superfluous. All the revolutionaries need is a good memory and a well stocked library. No wonder the 'revolutionary' left is today so sterile.

Struggle demands more than a knowledge of history. It demands of its participants an understanding of today's reality. During strikes, workers have to discuss in a free and uninhibited way how best to win. Unless this is made possible the ability and talent of the strikers are wasted. The loyalty and determination that strikers display - often referred to by the press as stubbornness or ignorance - derives from the knowledge that they have participated in the decisions. They have a feeling of identification with their strike and with its organization. This is in marked contrast to their general position in society where what they think and do is considered quite unimportant.

During strikes, representatives of the various political groups gain control of the Committee. Demands entirely unrelated to the dispute then make their appearance. The outcome is inevitable. A lack of interest, a diminution of activity, sometimes even a vote to return to work. The feeling of identification disappears and is replaced by a feeling of being used.

When the direct management of an organization by its members is replaced by an alie control from above, vitality is lost, the will to struggle lessens. Many will ask what do we mean by 'direct management'? We mean that the organization should be based upon branches or groups, each of which has the fullest autonomy, to decide its own activities, that is in keeping with the general purpose of the organization. Whenever possible decisions should be collective ones. Branches should elect delegates to any committees considered necessary for the day-to-day functioning of the organization. Such delegates are not elected for 3 years, for 12 months... or even 12 days. They are revocable, at any time their fellow members consider it necessary. This is the only way that the membership can effectively ensure that their representatives carry out their jobs properly. We lay no claims to originality in proposing this. In every revolution , during most strikes and daily at the level of workshop organization the working class resorts to this type of direct democracy.

It is rather amusing to hear bolsheviks argue that this may be all right for everybody else - but not for themselves. Apparently the same workers who are expected to have determination and consciousness sufficient to overthrow capitalism and to build a new society do not possess sufficient know-how to put the right man in the right place in their own organization.

The same arguments against direct democracy repeatedly raise their bald heads! We are reminded that you cannot have a mass meeting to discuss every single issue - true, but not very profound. Of course certain committees are needed. They must however be directly responsible to the membership, and their duties must be clearly defined. They must be charged with placing all the facts of any matter under discussion before all the members. The withholding of essential information from members is a powerful factor reinforcing the division between leaders and led. It lays the basis for bureaucracy within the organization. Genuine democracy does not only imply an equality of rights .... it implies the fullest possible dissemination of information, allowing the rational use of those rights.

We reject the idea that matters of great importance require split second decisions by a central committee, with 'years experience' to its credit, meeting in secret conclave. If the social conflict is so intense as to require drastic action, the

need for such action will certainly have become apparent to many workers. The organization will at best be the expression of that collective will. A million correct decisions are quite useless unless they are understood and accepted by those involved. People cannot fight blindly in such situations, their unthinking actions projected by a group of revolutionary theoreticians - if they do the results are liable to be disastrous.

When important decisions have to be taken they must be placed before the members for approval or otherwise. Without this there can be no understanding of what is involved. And without understanding there can be no conviction, and no genuinely effective action. There will only be the usual frantic appeals to 'discipline'. And as Zinoviev once put it: 'discipline begins where conviction ends'.

Our critics will ask us about differences of opinion within the organization. Should not the majority decisions be binding on all? The alternative, we are informed, is ineffectiveness. Again there are precedents to which we may refer: the real experiences of workers in struggle. During strikes and even more so during revolutions, big issues are at stake. Fundamental decisions have to be taken. In these circumstances the members will automatically expect of each other full and active participation. Those who do not give it will cut themselves off from the movement, will have no desire to remain members. It is quite another matter, however, to insist on the absolute acceptance of a party line on matters not calling for immediate decision and action. Those who wish an organization to be run on these lines have clearly assigned to themselves a divine right of interpretation. Only they know what is 'correct', what is 'in the best interest of the movement'.

This attitude is very widespread and is an important factor in the utter fragmentation of the revolutionary left today. Various sects, each claiming to be the elite, the one-and-only 'genuine' marxist group, fight furiously with one another, each quite certain that the fate of the working class, and of humanity at large, is tied up with 'finding the correct solution' to each and every doctrinal squabble. Faction fights and the 'elite' conception of the Party (the 'brain' of the working class) are but different sides of the same coin. This conception profoundly underestimates the creative abilities of the working class. No wonder they reject this type of organization ... and this type of politics.

What should the activity of the revolutionary organization be? Whilst rejecting the substitutionism of both reformism and bolshevism, we also reject the essentially propagandist approach of organizations such as the Socialist Party of Great Britain. We consider it important to bring to workers information and reports of the struggles of other workers - both past and present - reports which emphasise the fact that workers are capable of struggling collectively and of rising to the greatest heights of revolutionary consciousness. The revolutionary press must help break down the conspiracy of silence about such struggles. It must bring to the working class the story of its own past and the details of its present struggles. But it must do more than merely disseminate information. When strikes occur, when tenants oppose rent increases, when thousands protest against the threat of nuclear war, we feel it our responsibility to provide the maximum support and assistance. The revolutionary organization or its members should actively participate in these movements, not with the idea of 'gaining control' or 'winning them over' to a particular line - out with the more honest objective of helping people in struggle to win.

This does not absolve conscious revolutionaries from arguing for their own ideas or from the need to try and convince people of the wider implications of their struggles. We do not 'bow to spontaneity'.[8] We believe we have something positive to say but also that we must earn our right to say it. The revolutionary organization must see its job as serving the working class, not leading it, helping co-ordinate its struggles, not imposing methods of struggle upon it, learning from the struggles that are taking place, not ramming its learning down the throat of others. It must realise that correct as its ideas may be, they are dependant on workers agreeing with them.

---

8. Most discussions on this theme are quite meaningless. All mass struggles have both immediate and remote causes and all are influenced to a greater or lesser degree by the experiences of previous struggles.

Published by 'Solidarity' (Clydeside), c/o Dan Kane, 43 Valeview Terrace, Dumbarton.

SOLIDARITY PAMPHLETS

MODERN CAPITALISM AND REVOLUTION by Paul Cardan. A fundamental critique of the traditional left. The problems of our society (bureaucratisation, political apathy, alienation in production, consumption and leisure). What are revolutionary politics today? 25 p.

G.M.W.U.: SCAB UNION by Mark Fore. A close look at one of Britain's biggest unions. Are the unions still working class organisations? 5 p.

SORTING OUT THE POSTAL STRIKE by Joe Jacobs. An ex-postal worker describes a bitter, prolonged and unsuccessful strike. How NOT to wage the industrial struggle. 3 p.

STRATEGY FOR INDUSTRIAL STRUGGLE by Mark Fore. How to link the struggle at the place of work with the overall objective of workers' management of production. 10 p.

THE WORKERS OPPOSITION by Alexandra Kollontai. A fully annotated account of the anti-bureaucratic struggle of 1919-1920 within the Russian Bolshevik Party. 80 pages. 20 p.

KRONSTADT 1921 by Victor Serge. An erstwhile supporter of the Bolsheviks re-examines the facts and draws disturbing conclusions. 3 p.

FROM BOLSHEVISM TO THE BUREAUCRACY by Paul Cardan. Bolshevik theory and practice in relation to the management of production. An introduction to A. Kollontai's 'The Workers Opposition'. 5 p.

THE KRONSTADT COMMUNE by Ida Mett. The full story of the 1921 events. The first proletarian uprising against the bureaucracy. Contains hitherto unavailable documents and a full bibliography. 68 pages. 20 p.

HUNGARY '56 by Andy Anderson. The anti-bureaucratic revolution. The programme of the Workers Councils. 25 p.

THE BOLSHEVIKS AND WORKERS CONTROL 1917-1921 (The State and Counter-Revolution) by Maurice Brinton. 'Workers control' or workers' self-management? The story of the early oppositions. An analysis of the formative years of the Russian bureaucracy. 25 p.

WORKERS COUNCILS AND THE ECONOMICS OF SELF-MANAGEMENT. The libertarian socialist alternative to private capitalism and to bureaucratic state capitalism. From workers' management of the factory to workers' management of society. 25 p.

Available (postage extra) from 'Solidarity' (London)
c/o 27 Sandringham Road, London N.W.11.

the struggle for self-management

AN OPEN LETTER TO I.S. COMRADES

SOLIDARITY SPECIAL SEPTEMBER 1968

INTRODUCTION

This text was first produced as a 'Solidarity' publication in September 1968, under the title 'An Open Letter to I.S. Comrades'. The occasion was the National Conference of 'International Socialism' (I.S.) being held at the Beaver Hall, London. The gathering was the first I.S. Conference after the May 1968 events in France, which proved a turning point for so many revolutionary groupings in the West. Until that date I.S. was more open-minded than most other organisations of the Left, being neither doctrinaire nor authoritarian. As a result of the events of May 1968 the ranks of I.S. swelled with eager, militant youth, awakening to political action.

The response of the group's Executive Committee was an attempt to impose the authority of the central bodies over the rank and file. In a duplicated document, dated September 12, 1968, and headed 'Perspectives for I.S.' the Executive Committee proposed certain organisational principles to the Conference including one proclaiming that 'Branches must accept directives from the Centre'. These proposals met such opposition during the Conference that the Executive Committee had to withdraw them without even attempting to defend them. They disappeared just as they had appeared, only to be implemented in a much more gradual and slow process of sifting 'responsible' comrades and electing them to 'responsible' positions.

The truth is that the Leninist faction in I.S. (just like the Leninist faction in the Bolshevik Party) stands or falls with the organisational and ideological principle of the absolute rule of the Centre over the rest of the party (and of the party over the rest of the working class). It would, however, be erroneous to attribute the principle of the rule of the Central Political Bureaucracy - and the idea of its right and duty to make political decisions 'on behalf of' the rest of the party - to the machinations of that bureaucracy alone. Hierarchical leadership feeds on the readiness of the led to be led. It soon transpired that many I.S. comrades wanted a Centre that would take political decisions on their behalf.

The historical, organisational and ideological arguments supporting this principle can easily be shown to be rationalisations rather than proofs of the belief that 'not every cook can govern'. It is the acceptance of this principle that provides the basis for both bourgeois democracy and for its 'revolutionary' counterpart: democratic centralism. The total and systematic rejection of this idea, wherever it manifests itself, singles out 'Solidarity's ideas on society, revolution, socialism (and on the role and structure of revolutionary organisations) from those of all other revolutionary groups in Britain. Our insistence that every cook can, should and must govern is not merely a desirable distant goal. It is something which must be implemented today within every unit of the revolutionary movement and at every level of social activity. We believe that this is what the revolution, and socialism, are all about.

A. O.

AN OPEN LETTER TO I.S. COMRADES

September 27, 1968.

Dear Comrades,

It is remarkable how few socialists seem to recognize the connection between the structure of their organization and the type of 'socialist' society it might help bring about.

If the revolutionary organization is seen as the means and socialist society as the end, one might expect people with an elementary understanding of dialectics to recognize the relation between the two. Means and ends are mutually dependent. They constantly influence each other. The means are, in fact, a partial implementation of the end , whereas the end becomes modified by the means adopted.

Once could almost say 'tell me your views concerning the structure and function of the revolutionary organization and I'll tell you what the society you will help create will be like'. Or conversely 'give me your definition of socialism and I'll tell you what your views on the revolutionary organization are likely to be'.

We see socialism as a society based on self-management in every branch of social life. Its basis would be workers' management of production exercised through Workers Councils. Accordingly we conceive of the revolutionary organization as one which incorporates self-management in its structure and abolishes within its own ranks the separation between the functions of decision-making and execution. The revolutionary organization should propagate these principles in every area of social life.

Others may have different conceptions of socialism. They may have different views on the aims and structure of the revolutionary organization. They must state what these are clearly, openly and unambiguously. They owe it not only to the workers and students but to themselves.

* * * * * *

An example of haziness in the definition of socialism (and of its repercussions concerning revolutionary organization) is to be found in the material published by the central bodies of International Socialism (I.S.) in preparation for the Bi-annual Conference of September 1968.

In the duplicated 'Statement of Basic Principles' (I.S. Constitution) we find that I.S. struggles for 'workers' control'. But we also find that 'planning, under workers' control, demands nationalization'. These are the only references, in the document, to the structure of the socialist society towards whose creation all of I.S. activity is directed.

How, precisely, does I.S. conceive of working class 'control'? What does 'nationalization' mean? How does I.S. relate it to 'workers' control'? Does the working class implement its 'control' through the mediation of a political party? Or of trade union officials? Or of a technocracy? Or through workers councils?

Are those who formulated the I.S. Constitution aware that 'nationalization' means precisely relegating authority of decision-making on industrial policy to a group of state officials? Don't they realise that the struggle of the French students and workers for 'auto-gestion' (self-management) renders 'nationalization' irrelevant? Apparently they do not. In the analysis of the French events ('The Struggle Continues') written by T. Cliff and I. Birchall (and produced as an official I.S. publication) the relation between self-management and nationalization is not discussed at all.

Why should a national federation of Workers Councils (composed of elected and revocable delegates of regional Councils) allow any other group in society to wield ultimate authority in relation to all aspects of production?

In political terms the question can be posed thus: does I.S. stand for the policy of 'all power to the Workers Councils'? Or does it stand for the policy of 'all power to the Revolutionary Party'? It is no use evading the issue by saying that in France no workers councils existed. When this is the case, it is the duty of revolutionaries to conduct propaganda for their creation.

In Russia, in 1917, Workers Councils ('soviets') did exist. On July 4, 1917, Lenin raised the slogan 'all power to the soviets'. He ended his article with the words: 'things are moving by fits and starts towards a point where power will be transferred to the soviets, which is what our Party called for long ago'.(1) Yet two months later, on September 12, he wrote: 'The Bolsheviks, having obtained a majority in the soviets of workers and soldiers deputies of both capitals can and must take state power into their own hands'.(2)

However one analyses Lenin's transition, in the context of Russia in 1917, from a policy of 'all power to the soviets' to a policy of 'all power to the Bolshevik Party', one must recognize that his choice was a fundamental one, whose implications for Britain in 1968 cannot be evaded.

---

(1) Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 25, p. 154.

(2) Lenin, Collected Works, vol. 26, p. 19.

The 'leading' (i.e. decision-making) bodies in I.S. are very careful not to state explicitly that, like Lenin, they believe that the Party must take power on behalf of the class. This principle however runs through the entire Cliff-Birchall analysis of the French events. Their analysis is, in fact, tailored to fit this principle.

We say to these comrades: if you believe that the working class itself cannot 'seize power' (but that the Revolutionary Party must do it on behalf of the class), please say so openly and defend your views.

Let us put to you our own views on the subject. Political 'power' is fundamentally little more than the right to take and impose decisions in matters of social production, administration, etc. This authority is not to be confused with expertise. The experts give advice, they do not make the decisions. Today, during the development of the self-management revolution, it is precisely the authority of decision-making in relation to the management of production (whether the means of production be formally in the hands of private bosses or of the state) that is being challenged. The challenge is being repeated in all branches of social life.

Those who think in terms of 'seizing power' unwittingly accept that a political bureaucracy, separate from the producers themselves, and concentrating in its hands the authority of decision-making on fundamental issues of social production must be a permanent social institution. They believe its form (the bourgeois 'state apparatus') has to be changed. But they refuse to question the need for such a social institution. They want to capture political power and use it for allegedly different purposes. They do not consider its abolition to be on the agenda.

As for us, we believe that once self-management in production has been achieved, 'political power' as a social institution will lose both its social function and justification. To speak of 'workers' control' and of 'seizing political power' is to confuse a new structure of society (the rule of the Workers Councils) with one of the by-products of the previous form of class society, which was based on withholding from the workers the right to manage.

* * * * * *

Comrades Cliff and Birchall fail to recognize the specific, new features of the May events in France. They fail to explain why the students succeeded in inspiring 10 million workers. 'The student demonstrations created an environment in which people were free to coin their own slogans' ('The Struggle Continues', p.17.) What slogans? The two most important were 'Contestation' and 'Auto-gestion' (self-management). What was being contested? What does self-management mean? How are the two slogans related to each other? Not a word on all this. What we do find however is the important statement (ibid, p.18) that 'when a worker went to the Sorbonne he was recognized as a hero. Within Renault he was only a thing. In the University he became a man'.

Comrades, you should seek to clarify this assessment (with which we agree). Please tell us what was the mysterious element in the 'environment' which transformed a man into a thing and vice-versa? Are we wrong in assuming that a man feels like a 'thing' when he has to live as an executant of social decisions which he cannot influence, whereas he feels like a 'man' when he lives under social circumstances which he has shaped by his own decisions (or in whose creation he was an equal partner)?

If this is really your opinion, why not say it in so many words?

But if this is really what you believe how could your Political Committee suggest an organizational regulation saying that:

> '4. Branches must accept directives from the Centre, unless they fundamentally disagree with them, in which case they should try to accord with them while demanding an open debate on the matter.'
>
> (Perspectives for I.S., September 12, 1968)

Isn't the Political Committee attempting to transform I.S. members from 'men' into 'things'? Isn't the attempt to limit the right of rank-and-file I.S. members to initiate political decisions - while democratically permitting them to debate (not overrule!) the directives of the Centre, after having carried them out - an indication of an ideological disease more serious than being out of touch with the spirit of the young workers and students? If I.S. is to play a significant role in the revolution this regulation must be defeated, not only organizationally but also ideologically.

In the last chapter of their analysis of the French events, comrades Cliff and Birchall quote Trotsky to the effect that 'unity in action of all sections of the proletariat, and simultaneity of demonstration under a single common slogan (Are these really essential? Did they ever exist in history?) can only be achieved if there is a genuine concentration of leadership in the hands of responsible (to whom?) central and local bodies, stable in their composition (!) and in their attitude to their political line'. ('The Struggle Continues' p.77)

This is to confuse the technical and the political aspects of a real problem. Coordination is essential and may require centralisation. But the function of an administrative centre should not include the imposition of political decisions.

Trotsky's argument (and Cliff's) sound almost stalinist. A centre, 'stable in its composition', concentrates in its hands the authority of political decision-making. 'The branches must accept directives from the Centre'. The Party 'leads' the working class and 'seizes power' on its behalf. Workers are 'summoned' (ibid, p.78) to an 'open revolutionary assault on capitalism.' From this it is but a short step to Trotsky's statement that 'the statutes should express the leadership's organized distrust of the members, a distrust manifesting itself in vigilant control from above over the Party'. (3)

---

(3) I. Deutscher, 'The Prophet Armed', O.U.P., 1954, p.76.

This approach reveals a very definite view concerning the role of the Centre in relation to the Party and of the Party in relation to the class. But it is wrong to identify this view with Stalinism. It preceded Stalin, Lenin and Marx. As a matter of fact, it has been part of ruling class ideology for centuries.

* * * * * *

Cliff and Birchall mobilise every possible argument to support the doctrine of 'Centre leads Party, Party leads class'. They write: 'Facing the strictly centralised and disciplined power of the capitalists, there must be no less centralised and disciplined a combat organization of the proletariat'. (ibid, p.77) Yet two pages earlier they had admitted that 'the 14th July 1789 revolution was a spontaneous act of the masses. The same was true of the Russian Revolutionof 1905 and the February 1917 Revolution'. (ibid., p.75) In other words they admit that two of the most centralised regimes in history were overthrown by masses that were not led by <u>any</u> party, let alone a centralised one. How do they reconcile these facts with their assertion that 'only a centralised party can overthrow centralised power'?

The conscious factor in changing history, embodied in revolutionary organizations, can play a significant role in shaping the <u>new</u> social structure. However after the Russian experience it is clear that this 'conscious factor' must develop its own self-consciousness. It must recognize the connection between its own structure and practice - and the type of socialism it will help achieve.

Writing in 1904 Lenin took sides unequivocally for 'bureaucracy' (as against democracy) and for 'centralism' (as against autonomy). He wrote: 'Bureaucracy <u>versus</u> democracy is the same thing as centralism <u>versus</u> autonomism. It is the organizational principle of revolutionary political democracy as opposed to the organizational principle of the opportunists of Social Democracy. The latter want to proceed from the bottom upwards and, consequently, wherever possible and to the extent that it is possible, it supports autonomism and "democracy" which may (by the over-zealous) be carried as far as anarchism. The former proceeds from the top, and advocates an extension of the rights and power of the Centre in respect of the parts'. (4)

With all due allowance to the objective factors which contributed to the degeneration of the Russian Revolution, <u>these ideas</u> (the conscious, subjective factor) must also be stressed, certainly in 1968.

We can only add here what Rosa Luxemburg, answering Lenin, said in 1904: 'Let us speak plainly. Historically, the errors committed by a truly revolutionary working class movement are infinitely more fruitful

---

(4) Lenin, <u>'One Step forward, Two steps back'</u>, Selected Works, vol. II, pp. 447-448.

and valuable than the infallibility of the cleverest Central Committee'.(5) Are these words less relevant in 1968 than they were in 1904?

Today in Britain the danger is not that future society will be shaped in the image of a bureaucratic revolutionary organisation based on 'genuine concentration of leadership in the hands of responsible central and local bodies, stable in their composition', organisations in which 'branches must accept directives from the Centre', etc. The danger is rather to such organisations themselves. They will cease to be relevant to the social self-management revolution now developing. Before long they will be identified as just other 'centre-managed' political bureaucracies, to be swept aside. This is the fate now threatening I.S., should the Political Committee's recommendations be accepted.

We wish all I.S. members a useful Conference and a serious discussion that will help them clarify their ideas about socialism, workers' management and the structure and function of the revolutionary organisation.

---

(5) R. Luxemburg, Leninism or Marxism, Ann Arbor Paperback (1961), p.108.

Published by SOLIDARITY (London), c/o 27 Sandringham Road, London N.W.11.