

The C.B.G., the FRACTION and Regroupment

Over the past eighteen months, since the last issue of the Bulletin, the CBG has held a series of three meetings with the External Fraction of the ICC. The Fraction published a report of the first three of these meetings in their magazine Internationalist Perspectives. The two organisations also held a Joint Public Meeting in London on the crisis in Eastern Europe. An account of this meeting as well as the interventions made by members of the ICC and Subversion can be found in IP 18.

Since the CBG's formation we have discussed and corresponded with a number of revolutionary groups and individuals such as the Tampa Workers Group, Wildcat in Britain and LL Men in Hong Kong. The basis for these discussions has been an acceptance of class lines: the bourgeois nature of Parliament, trades unions and leftist political organisations and the revolutionary potential of the working class. At issue have been the programmatic gains of the current which traces its origins to the German, Dutch and Italian Left Communists: the proletarian nature of the Bolsheviks and the Russian Revolution, the central importance of decadence and the dead end of councilism. We argued that without such an analysis these groups were led into academic theorising and short term localist activism. Our discussions with them have, in the main, been unable to advance beyond these questions.

In contrast the discussions between the CBG and the Fraction are at a qualitatively different level. Our two organisations share a common platform and can agree on which issues need to be discussed and how to approach that discussion. We have been able to meet and put on the agenda the international situation, the level of class struggle and how revolutionaries should organise.

These meetings have also been in marked contrast to the relationship we have had with other organisations with whom we might seem to share a common analysis. In Britain the Communist Workers Organisation was happy to talk to us privately or as individuals but never acknowledged our existence in its press except as a 'pseudo-group', far less engaged us in public debate. The International Communist Current fell back on denouncing us as counter-revolutionaries on ever less convincing grounds. Their latest position is that there is no longer any basis for saying that we are a bourgeois group but since counter-revolutionary groups cannot become revolutionary we have no alternative but to dissolve the CBG. (?)

Malaise.

The beginning of the discussion with the Fraction therefore marked the end of a long period of isolation for the CBG. We might have expected as a result to have seen an increased level of activity by the group and a greater frequency and regularity of our press. In fact, as our readers will know, the opposite has been the case. The CBG has failed to respond publicly to some of the most important events in post war history - the dismantling of the Russian bloc in Eastern Europe and the reunification of Germany, or to intervene in

domestic issues such as the Poll Tax campaign. Until this issue of the Bulletin we have made no statement on the Gulf War and its significance. A revolutionary organisation which ceases to intervene loses its reason for existence and discussions within the group which do not find an external expression are lost to the movement.

It is easy enough to find reasons for this malaise, the pressures of work and family are always present and can have a profound effect on a small group; revolutionaries are not immune to the ideological onslaught of the bourgeoisie which recent events have given rise to, and the absence of a clear response from the proletariat on its own class terrain to the attacks on its living standards makes intervention more difficult.

Paradoxically a contributory factor could be the discussions with the Fraction, or at least the importance which the CBG has placed on them. For a number of years the CBG ploughed a lonely furrow defending the gains of the ICC's Platform against the aberrations of the ICC and the 180 degree turns of the CWM. We attempted to develop an anti-sectarian and anti-monolithic theory and practice of organisation.

Then the EFICC appeared making a very similar critique of the ICC's bureaucratic organisational practice and methods of discussion claiming that the ICC had degenerated politically and calling for a 'renaissance of Marxism'. It looked as if reinforcements had arrived.

Furthermore the Fraction had a presence in four different countries and published regularly in two languages. It was quite consistent with the views we had expressed since our formation that we should initiate discussions with the Fraction with a perspective of an early regroupment of forces. Such an outcome has not yet materialised. In fact it took some time before the Fraction even responded to our initial contacts and agreed to hold the present series of discussions.

There are a number of reasons for this. To begin with there was a history of suspicion arising from the splits which took place in the ICC in 1982/3. The Fraction's article in IP 15 deals with this in some depth and we have written at length on these questions in many issues of the Bulletin in the past. At the time of these splits and the formation of the CBG most of the present members of the Fraction were and remained in the ICC. Our different perceptions of these events were discussed at our first meetings and while it may not yet be possible to reconcile our differing views of these events there is agreement on the relative importance of any continued disagreement and on the yet greater importance of political questions.

If we have been able to calm the questions raised by such as the Chenier affair another issue has run on through the discussions between us without reaching any conclusion. This is usually referred to as the problem of organisations taking positions.

For us it is quite clear that the political basis for an organisation's existence is its platform. But a platform is neither a complete nor a finished answer to every question which faces the organisation and the working class. There are always going to be questions of interpretation, of the evaluation of current events and of attempts to theorise from the experiences of the working class which are incomplete and inconclusive in themselves. Discussions will go on within organisations on these questions using empirical evidence, reference to historical events and debates. Showing how certain arguments contain implicit contradictions with the platform is part of the cut and thrust of debate.

No one should expect this internal debate to produce complete agreement. There will always be differences. Only when historical experience shows which side of an argument is correct, when one or other becomes a class position, can we say that a question is no longer open and continued disagreement forces organisational separation.

However, this does not mean that a revolutionary organisation can or must remain silent on these questions. They must be made public, comrades must be free to express their views publicly. At the same time an organisation cannot limit its effectiveness by at all times giving equal weight to all the views expressed by its members. There will be times when an organisation must take action or express a view. In 1917 the Bolsheviks could not at the same time argue for insurrection and against it. Organisations are forced occasionally to take positions, to speak with one voice. For that purpose they have mechanisms for ensuring that discussions reflect the views of the majority or for electing representative bodies empowered to make decisions where an immediate response is required.

Questions of organisation, of how to carry on the internal life of the group must of necessity be positions of the organisation. The Fraction part company with us on this. It believes that taking positions, and putting forward the view of the majority is one and the same thing. Furthermore the Fraction argues for the taking of positions as a way of sharpening discussion, of ensuring that they are taken quickly to either resolution or to a clear statement of differences. An example of this is given as the differences which have emerged in its own organisation over events in Eastern Europe, namely to what extent the bourgeoisie in Russia is in control of developments. By attempting to arrive at an organisational position on this important question the Fraction feels it has deepened its understanding on a number of questions.

While the CBG would applaud the openness with which the Fraction has carried on this discussion we would point out the dangers that over formalising a discussion can lead to - that setting up minority and majority positions forced other views into one or other camp, that the differences became as important as the shared ground and that publication of debates takes place when events have already moved on and cut the ground from one or other position.

Our differences with the Fraction on this question of positions may relate to our different origins. Although both our organisations were formed from splits from the ICC, the CBG left on grounds which were clearly seen as disagreements on questions of "organisation".

The comrades of the Fraction on the other hand spent a long time in the ICC engaged in arduous debates over political questions; the consciousness of the class, the meaning of centrism and what kind of intervention was appropriate. In a direct sense the Fraction felt its split to be on political grounds. But reading the accounts of these discussions and hearing of the barriers which were placed on the Fraction's freedom to organise, and of the final act of the charade when the Fraction members were asked to take some sort of loyalty oath, then the CBG would draw the conclusion that the Fraction's split was as much over organisation as our own.

What our organisations do agree on is that the freedom to hold different views was curtailed within the ICC, that they had not developed the mechanisms to allow differences to co-exist in the organisation. This was encapsulated in the ICC statutes which stated that differences were either a sign of immaturity or presaged a split. The CBG and the Fraction have both agreed that this sentiment must be well and truly buried.

A Call to the Fraction

Which takes us to the matter in hand, namely whether the Fraction and the CBG? Undoubtedly neither organisation has been able to intrude itself into the larger world. The only area that we can immediately influence (and this with the long term intention of influencing the larger world) is that of our political-organisational direction.

Why have we been meeting? It is not simply that we believe dialogue is a necessary component of revolutionary activity. Dialogue has an organisational goal. We seek to convince others of the correctness of our analysis but not (we would hope) via dogmatism. We do try to keep ourselves open to counter-argument and persuasion where we might be found to be weak. At the same time we acknowledge that some questions will not produce consensus and can be left unresolved. By clarifying and extending our political analysis we better arm ourselves for intervention in the class struggle.

But to be fully armed we require organisation and thus the meetings between the Fraction and the CBG have (for us) had as their immediate goal the possibility of organisational regroupment. We believe that there are no political reasons for the two groups remaining separate, that greater strength is possible by the Fraction and the CBG coming together. This has surely been clear in all our texts which argue for openness and centralisation.

Obviously the Fraction seeks the same political goal as the CBG but what of the organisational means to achieve it and the imperatives which accompany it? Does the Fraction want to regroup? To be frank we find it hard to accept that the re-organisational vision which motivates us is endorsed by the Fraction. There is evidence of a willingness to discuss but no clear reason why and wherefore.

Is it that you see clear political differences which separate us - the economic foundations of decadence, the state in the period of transition or some other points? Whilst we recognise differences we do not see them as barriers to regroupment. Those that exist can and should be contained within one organisation. If you believe otherwise then spell it out. Be direct and clear.

On the other hand, given the record of the CBG it is possible (likely?) that reticence to regroup is based upon the Fraction's uncertainty about our viability. In other words you think we are not up to the job; that we could not carry out the tasks which go with regroupment; that we would be a dead weight. If this is the case then say so and if you think that individual assimilation is a more realistic target then state it.

One further possible scenario is that the Fraction is concerned that the collective identity of the CBG would remain within a regrouped organisation.

There is a history of members of the CBG working as a continuous political unit from the time of the CWO in the 1970s to the CBG today. There might be genuine grounds for fearing that this identity would remain in a new format and consequently be an ever-present threat to political stability. We do not see this ourselves but if you do then say so.

There is little point in discussion for discussion's sake. We should continue our dialogue yes, but let us clearly set out our immediate respective goals. Ours is regroupment. What is yours?

what positions?

The central stumbling block, to date, in the discussions between our two organisations has been the CBG's stand on the question of organisational adoption of positions.

" This tendency (of the CBG) to pose and then hold open many questions stems from a reluctance to take positions, as an organisation, unless the current situation is posing an immediate and burning question. The CBG has a positive desire to encourage the diversity of views which always emerges in discussion on such a complex reality, but they push this to a fault. They do not see that in taking a position an organisation can also be assisting discussion both within itself and within the milieu as a whole"

(Internationalist Perspective 18)

We should say immediately that this criticism is on a profoundly different level from the distortions of the ICC who argued in International Review 55 that we want to:

" ..dedicate ourselves to a work of study and 'open' debate in which will participate, at a level of formal equality, militant organisations, individuals and circles who have nothing better to do."

And that we want to build

" ..an open, democratic party in which everyone is free to say and do whatever they please"

As we argued in our response to these witless slanders in the last Bulletin this is absolutely not our position. Members of the CBG, while they remain members, are absolutely bound to the defence of the class lines contained in our Platform. There is no place in our organisation for anyone who does not accept the reality of capitalist decadence and its political consequences:

- the inevitability in this era of state capitalism and imperialism.

- the bourgeois identity of trade unionism, parliamentarism and reformism.
- the impossibility of progressive factions of the bourgeoisie.
- the counter revolutionary nature of all national liberation struggles.

For us these lessons have been definitely decided by the blood of the working class. Members are required to accept the indispensable role of Marxism in the struggle of the working class and its revolutionary minorities and must defend the notion of the unavoidable necessity for a centralised International Party to play a leading role in the revolutionary process.

In addition, it is not sufficient for members to simply accept these positions in the abstract. They must accept the political **practice** within which these positions are defended and promulgated, what the role of revolutionary fractions is, and how that role is carried out. That is something we have detailed at length in past issues.

With regard to the internal life of our organisation it demands and understanding that clarity is a product of the whole and depends upon the widest possible debate and that centralisation, which is inevitable in a political organisation, exists in order to facilitate that. Central organs are neither the creators nor the repository of clarity. They are not the ideological thought police of an organisation. They do not exist in order to take up positions on behalf of an organisation within the debate, nor to decide who is right or wrong in any particular debate. However their task is not simply the collation of votes. They are charged with a **political** task. They must try to impose a coherence on the discussion, to draw out the lessons and try to point out the most fruitful direction for the development of the debate.

When the immediacy of the class struggle and the needs of intervention demand it they have the responsibility of speaking for the organisation. But in doing so they do not, and cannot, fix that as a permanent position of the organisation.

On the question of minorities and tendencies there is no room in the CBG for the ICC's conception that

tendencies are an expression of immaturity or weakness. On the contrary we think that they are an inevitable expression of the process of clarification. The terror of tendencies expressed by the ICC is entirely alien to a living healthy revolutionary life. It has its roots in the period of the most profound defeats of the class and is entirely absent from revolutionary practice during the periods when the revolution itself was unfolding. In 1917 Lenin argued strenuously that all elections within the party, both for the executive organs and the deliberative ones, should give expression to the formal confrontation of tendencies. How, in an organisation whose life blood is debate, could it be otherwise?

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

(John Molyneux *Marxism and the Party*)

The Milieu.

As far as the external life of the CBG is concerned members must share the clearly stated orientation towards the rest of the milieu we have established in past issues of the Bulletin. They must accept that no single organisation can possess or be responsible for producing political clarity. The process of clarification must involve the whole milieu and that demands a recognition of the fraternal commentary which exists and the responsibilities which flow from that. Sectarianism can have no place in our life. The CBG is committed to fraternal, open, public debate and to ongoing joint work with other elements where possible.

Part of the CBG's political identity is the understanding that the Party of the future will not emerge from any single organisation or currently existing body of positions. Like the Bolshevik party in the past it will be a product of many elements from within the milieu. It will be the end result of a long process of clarification involving the unceasing efforts of revolutionaries now towards its creation. Therefore we think it is necessary that revolutionaries today regroup their forces on as wide as possible a basis, but it must be a regroupment which does not place chains on the very process of clarification which is required for the final regroupment of tomorrow. Of necessity, we think that demands an organisation both more open and less narrowly defined than the model on offer from organisations like the ICC and the CWO. The basis for regroupment which we defined in the founding texts of the CBG and which we state again in this text is a defining position for the CBG and its members.

The Class.

In addition, members are obliged to accept a well defined conception of interventionary work in the working class based on the understanding that revolutionaries play a leading role within the proletariat by virtue of the clarity of their programme and slogans and not on their capacity for physically organising the struggles of the class

and the unfolding of the revolutionary process. Although the freedom of debate and the expression of political differences remains an absolute, even at the height of the class struggle, when the need for determined and coherent action becomes paramount, there is no room in the CBG for members who use their differences to refuse to undertake aspects of the organisation's work. That is a stance alien to a marxist organisation.

Taking all this together then, it is very clear that nothing remains of the ICC's accusation that we are an organisation in which:

"... everyone is free to say and do whatever they please."

However the criticisms of the Fraction clearly do not lie at this level. Rather, they are concerned that our caution about taking up an organisational position might hinder debate by leaving it fragmented or shapeless and render us less able to speak and act decisively when required. With hindsight, it is clear to us now that much of the discussion between us has been bedevilled by a certain amount of talking at cross purposes. When the CBG talk about taking up positions, we use the phrase in a very precise sense. For us, to take up a position, is to programmatically incorporate that position into the identity of the organisation. It becomes part of the definition of the organisation in a way which clearly separates it from other organisations and the rest of the milieu. It becomes binding on members who become obligated to defend it in public and forms a barrier to political recruits who do not accept it. It commits the central organs to using it as a foundation for debate (internal and external) and intervention. Although, on positions falling short of class lines, dissenting views could still exist and be expressed internally and publicly, it would happen within the influence of organisational discipline. The whole weight of the organisation's energy and direction stands behind an organisational position.

This is part of, but not identical to, the process by which an organisation puts forward conjunctural analyses as part and parcel of its ongoing life.

An organisation does not remain silent in the face of events. It is part of the task of revolutionaries to analyse and pronounce upon the world outside it. To do this is not the same as taking up a position programmatically incorporating the pronouncement into the organisation's identity. Rather, it is to contribute to the debate within the milieu, to participate in the process of clarification. Such analyses can carry varying degrees of certainty and conviction, depending on the nature of the issue and the circumstances of the debate. It can be the product of a minority view, a majority view and might even be unanimous. But even in the latter case it remains a contribution to the debate and a statement about the current state of understanding within the organisation. It is not binding on members and does not stop or hinder differing contributions. It does not become a requirement for integration. For example the current issue of the Bulletin carries a text analysing the events of the eastern bloc. The essentials of the text are endorsed by the bulk of the CBG and would be defended in public debate but it is in no sense a position of the CBG. It is both a contribution to the wider debate, a summing up of current thinking within the group. In such a complex and fast moving situation it seems to us that taking up a position risks

freezing the discussion into a false polarisation. We can not see the point of any organisation having to speak with one voice in such a situation.

Certainly in the event of action being demanded in any particular situation, foregoing analyses will be drawn upon as a guide and the action decided upon will be binding on individual members, however the analysis will not be, and debate will be free to continue.

Debates within a centralised revolutionary organisation are not simply a collection of individual contributions. Discussion exists for the purpose of political clarification and that can not meaningfully take place simply on a show of hands and a totting up of positions. A political synthesis has to be made and a 'bilan' drawn up to give direction and shape to the process. No organisation can avoid this. It is a necessary part of political life. But when an organisation, or its central organs does this it is not the same as the taking up of an organisational position. It does not have the same organisational consequences.

We cannot understand the argument that an organisation must take a position in order to:

" assist discussion both within itself and within the milieu as a whole"

As we have just pointed out perfectly good mechanisms for achieving that already exist in normal political life. On the basis of ongoing discussion, central organs synthesise, make a 'bilan' lay down orientations; to the outside world the organisation speaks, pronounces, states what it thinks. Depending on the circumstances that can be with one voice, majority and minority positions or even simply the presentation of a spectrum of debate.

Organisational positions, on the other hand, are not simply contributions to debate. By definition they are what separate one organisation from another, on issues where an organisation is convinced it must speak with one voice and must separate itself from what other organisations are saying. We can see the necessity for this on the class lines which have been definitely settled by the class itself and demand a very specific political programme. We can see the necessity on the question of organisation, on what the role of an organisation is and how that must be carried out. But can the comrades of the Fraction tell us why we need to speak with one voice on the question of Rosa Luxemburg's economic analysis? Do we need organisational separation on the debate between saturated markets versus falling rate of profit? Do we need to speak with one voice on the Left in opposition theory, or on the Machiavellianism of the bourgeoisie? Do we need organisational separation on the question of the definitive date of the death of the Bolshevik Revolution? Do we need to speak with one voice today on the issues of the Period of Transition? Does ongoing analyses of events in the Eastern Bloc require to become part of organisational identity?

We do not need positions on all these, we need clarity, and that is produced by wide ranging, continuous debate within and without each organisation. We cannot produce clarity by organisational measures, by voting, passing resolutions or adopting positions.

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To argue that the very act of taking a position is an aid to discussion seems grotesque in the light of our own history. We know from bitter experience within the ICC that positions were taken precisely to stop debate and to smother dissent. It became the primary tool for sniffing out heresy and building an edifice of horrific monolithism in which every nuance, every exposition of a theoretical point became a position and where to disagree with a position was to identified as an alien presence. Even before this profound degeneration took place, our shared history in the ICC contains compelling evidence that adopting a position crippled debate. On the question of the state in the period of transition, for example, the imperative to produce a position, firstly produced an artificial polarisation, reducing a complex debate to two poles, and finally, when a position was adopted, stopping debate altogether.

However we don't have to confine ourselves to the ICC. The monolithic sectarianism of the CWO has been just as destructive from its earliest days. At one point it even reached the staggering conclusion that the only revolutionaries in the world were the dozen or so individuals who accepted the positions of the CWO!

We know that the EFICC agree with us that this malady is not a product of individual organisations but is an expression of the condition of the entire revolutionary milieu, which today is in a state of crisis. After two decades of existence it remains entirely stagnant, without growth, cut off from the class, afflicted by political degeneration and a crippling and rancorous fragmentation. There exists little or no sense of fraternal community, no forum for direct discussion and no possibility of joint work. The imperative for the regroupment of revolutionary forces remains entirely blocked by the blind and wilful insistence that a bewildering and changing myriad of specific positions demand organisational separation. We have seen group after group presenting set after set of "essential" positions which make regroupment impossible, debate difficult and joint work a non-starter, but which ultimately turn out to be transitory as morning mist.

If revolutionary forces are to go forward we must find a way of surmounting this. We have to be able to distinguish between what is historically necessary and inseparable from revolutionary identity (the class lines and organisation), and what is, for the moment, purely conjunctural (ie. the analysis of a particular situation), or simply debatable (in the fullest sense of the word), like the economics of decadence or the date of the death of the Russian revolution. This has always been true of revolutionary work but in the present period it has become of overriding importance.

We have argued many times in the past that we cannot properly approach the task of how to organise our work until we grasp the historically unprecedented situation which confronts revolutionaries. The material, political and social conditions of the period of capitalist decadence has produced a rupture in the relationship between the proletariat and its revolutionary fractions unique in working class history. The ability of revolutionaries to function, and prosper, within the day to day life and struggles of the proletariat disappeared when the Second International and the mass class organs which comprised it passed passed irrevocably into

the camp of the bourgeoisie. With the passage of three score years and ten since the Third International followed suit on the death of the last revolutionary wave the political basis for the existence of a revolutionary tradition within the working class, of a familiarity with revolutionary fractions and their positions, also disappeared.

The revolutionary milieu as a whole has yet to get to grips with what this means for the development of class consciousness in the period but its significance for the life of revolutionaries is unmistakable. Today we exist on such a minute scale it is scarcely comprehensible. Fourteen years before the outbreak of the revolution in Russia the Bolsheviks had a membership in tens of thousands. Relatively small within a class of perhaps five million but they represented only a part of a much wider healthy and vigorous political milieu. Their existence and their politics were widely known within the class. Their militants were on every shop floor, they were prominent in every strike. On the eve of the revolution they were numbered in hundreds of thousands.

Today in a world wide population of workers numbered in hundreds of millions, revolutionaries number in their hundreds. The class have no idea we exist, no knowledge of our politics. We have only the most minimal of contact, confined largely to the distribution of a few thousand leaflets outside factory gates and marches. When we speak we are not heard.

This situation produces an unavoidable 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. When revolutionaries of the past reflected on, and pronounced on, the lessons of the proletariat'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 development of the class's consciousness, but more importantly, provided them with an immediate feedback on the validity of their 'reflections'.

All this is denied to us however. Not only are we condemned 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, are not subject to the same testing in the forger of the actual struggle. We have no way to judge the validity of any particular position by virtue of the class' response because the response is always the same - zero.

In this situation there is almost nothing to guard against an **ARBITRARINESS** in the evolution of discussion, the adoption of positions and the weight we accord them. In an organisation with only a dozen or a few dozen members, the process of clarification can be badly skewed by irrelevances - by the influence of a guru figure, by a militant with a bee in his bonnet, by the emergence of a clique or even the political behaviour of married couples always supporting one another. Laughable perhaps, but there is not one of us in the **Fraction** and the **CBG** who has not seen examples of all of the above.

None of this is an argument for organisational impotence. But it should lead to the exercise of great caution about programmatic commitment and to the understanding that once the adoption of a position becomes inescapable it must not be used in a sectarian fashion against the rest of the milieu or as a monolithic weapon against internal debate. There is a world of difference between the partisan

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defence of a position as an element contributing positively to the overall process of clarification within the milieu as a whole and the defence of a position as a means to build a barrier against that milieu. Certainly an organisation can claim, must claim, the correctness of its political positions and analyses and hence must fight for them. But this must be done within the understanding that for Marxism a number of possible interpretations can coexist at any time. We must guard against the illusion that the definitive marxist interpretation is easily and finally located.

However the need for caution about programmatic commitment does not simply derive from the specificities of the present period. It springs directly from the role that revolutionaries must play within the revolutionary process. We stand with Luxemburg and the German left in insisting that it is not the Party's capacity to **organise** the class that is essential. We are not the general staff of the proletariat, we have no blueprint for the revolution, no detailed battle plan. We have no need to build a unified executive machine capable of carrying out with military discipline the manoeuvres and instructions emerging from Communist infallibility.

What we bring to the revolutionary process is a **political** leadership based on programmatic clarity. It is not the Party's instructions which are vital to the revolution but our ability to give political shape and direction to the class' own activity, to absorb the advances made by the class in action, to **transcend** those advances in a way that the class as a whole cannot (lacking as it does the historical overview and programmatic clarity unique to revolutionary fractions), and then to incorporate these advances into a clear vision of the way ahead. In this way revolutionary fractions act as the political compass of the class, able to point the way forward by accentuating what is positive in the class' own activity and fighting against the cul-de-sacs and dead ends.

Our only weapon here is our political vision, our clarity and that is not a fixed, immutable entity, either in its totality or its constituent parts. It lives and develops in ways impossible to foresee, inextricably linked to the life and struggles of the class. Clarity is not a finished product, it is a process, inseparable from living open debate, as wide and as thorough-going as possible, allied to an openness and responsiveness to the class itself. If we look back at the history of the last revolutionary wave it is fruitless to search for programmatic and organisational perfection. What we see is an entire process of clarification, more or less confused, with moments of clarity appearing here and there, with the differing experiences of different branches of the revolutionary movement highlighting only partial aspects of the problem. No one got everything right. Although the Bolshevik Party was pre-eminent in the revolution in Russia the organisation and programme it took into the events of 1917 was a product of many elements from within the milieu as a whole.

Likewise today no fraction can imagine that the clarity it contributes can be anything other than partial and fragmentary. The only thing we can be certain of is that some of what we defend will prove to be useless or wrong and that some of what other elements defend will prove to be valuable and correct. We need a method of working which

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believes this is not on, or will mean giving the west too much - well its not possible to say what their plans are. But for both sections, if we believe perestroika will not succeed and going back to Brezhnev and/or Stalin wont work either, what alternative once they have defeated the workers is there but war?

But another theoretical framework for understanding the situation is also available. We may deny the logical progress outlined above and argue that in the collapse of the Russian bloc, the clear retreat from the prospect of Global War between the blocs we can see counterposed the economic and social fragmentation of Eastern Europe - with the prospect, as their crisis deepens, that this will inevitably spread to Russia itself. Elsewhere in the world the 'Third World' is already far along the path to absolute pauperisation and chaos and even within the confines of the West the recession is getting deeper and deeper.

In such unprecedented circumstances can it not be argued that the alternatives of War or Revolution are no longer valid? The blocs are less and less capable of mobilising their economies for war and their populations are far less willing to fight a war. But the proletariat has, thus far, been unable to face up to the crisis and their class enemy on their own class terrain.

War or Revolution was originally a specific theoretical development of a more theoretical framework from the last revolutionary wave that the only alternatives for Capitalism as it lurched into its decadent phase was Socialism or Barbarism. Its transcendence by the victory of its slaves in a revolutionary transformation or its decline into a barbaric rule seeking at all costs to keep power in an ever worsening situation. The notion that the alternatives 'socialism or barbarism' could be more specifically identified as 'revolution or world war' was based upon an assessment by the revolutionary movement that the specific way in which decadent capital had shown and would show its

barbaric alternative was and would be through world war to be followed by a new cycle of accumulation based upon victory in that war and on the ruins of the defeated.

It may well be that events this past few years have found that this "tightening up" of the general theory was incorrect and that the particular manner in which the alternatives "socialism or barbarism" will present themselves to the proletariat and the bourgeoisie will be different. If this is the case, then as revolutionaries trying to comprehend the dynamic of capitalism we will have to approach these issues with an open mind and in a spirit of free and fraternal discussion.

For the crux of all these questions is how we understand the present circumstances of the proletariat internationally, what the balance of class forces is and what prospects there are for proletarian action against the slide into capitalist crisis. Throughout this text we have claimed the present situation to be unprecedented. And this lies at the root of our problem. We have no real comparisons with the past to relate to in understanding a situation where the world is moving deeper and deeper into recession, where a bloc has collapsed, but where the proletarian response has been so muted, so hamstrung by bourgeois ideologies like nationalism and 'democracy', 'free market' etc. A situation where there has been no major appearance of class conscious struggle, no appearance of communist minorities. At root this refers back to the circumstances of the late Twentieth Century and the separation of the proletariat from their own history and minorities about which we have spoken many times before in the pages of the Bulletin. But we have now reached the point where it is no longer merely a theoretical question. The capitalist world is collapsing before our very eyes. Where is the proletarian alternative being posed?

Ingram

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emphasises and defends the process of clarification and not simply this or that point of possible clarity. We need to be able to encompass as much of the milieu and as much of the debate as we can within any organisation and that means keeping our programmatic identity as wide as possible. Every time an organisation programmaticly incorporates a position it necessarily cuts itself off from other parts of the milieu and limits its own internal debate. In such circumstances it must be doubly sure that any such incorporation is justified. We have nothing to fear from political diversity and nothing to fear from debate.

The Fraction have clearly drawn some of the political lessons from the splits from the ICC. they have emerged with a strong desire to deal with the reality of the fragility of the revolutionary

movement and to confront the horrifying destructiveness of sectarianism and monolithism which dominates the milieu. However, good intentions are not sufficient. Without a comprehensive rejection of the ICC's political practice, internal and external, and a clear understanding of the organisational consequences which flow from that rejection they face the danger of being saddled with a method of work and organisation which, for all their good intentions, will easily fall prey to the same sectarianism they believed they had escaped from.

Cormack
