

# A NEW REGROUPMENT

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

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

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

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

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

#### THE LESSONS OF THE PAST.

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

"In 1903, the Party could afford to pay about 30 fulltime distributors of ISKRA. (That's considerably larger than many entire organisations today.) By 1905, there were just under 10,000 Bolsheviks. As a result of the insurrection that rose to 34,000 by 1906. In the same period, there were about 14,000 Mensheviks. In the RSDLP as a whole, in 1907, there were 84,000 excluding the Bundist, Polish and Lettish sections. .... All this has to be set against a total working class population of perhaps 3½ million."

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

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

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

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

#### THE PRESENT.

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

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

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

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

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

## 2) CENTRALISATION.

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

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

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

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The next section of the Bulletin contains:

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

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