

About The Communist Bulletin Group

This issue of the Communist Bulletin is the first to be published since the Bulletin Group made the transition from the loose discussion circle which emerged from the splits within the International Communist Current to a formally constituted organisation. The first three issues of the Bulletin, (a few copies of which are still available on request) are a detailed account of these splits and contain an extensive record of the subsequent discussions which led to the formation of the Communist Bulletin Group.

Put very simply the splits were a reaction to the monolithism of the ICC's internal practice and the sectarianism which inevitably flowed from that. Although individual members of the Bulletin group had many criticisms of specific positions of the ICC - the economics of capitalist decadence, the state in the period of transition, the Left in Opposition theory and the question of "Machievellianism" (readers of the ICC's press will be familiar with the debates) - its important to understand that the different analyses some of us hold on these questions, were NOT the basis for the splits and are certainly NOT the basis for a new organisation. The splits took place not because differences existed inside the ICC but because, contrary to its rhetoric, the ICC had developed a practice which dealt with differences by suppressing them.

Given that we defend a platform essentially similar to the ICC's and that our view of the role of the Party in the revolutionary process is also very close to that of the ICC its hardly surprising that we've been asked 'Why another group?' The ICC, for example, argue in WR 60 (p7) that "in practice" we dont actually defend the positions within the Platform because -

" this Platform isnt a disembodied set of ideas but a mode of functioning and collective praxis of the proletariat..."

We accept of course that a Platform isnt a disembodied set of ideas, but we reject the assumption that there is only one mode of functioning which can be logically deduced from it. That assumption must imply that revolutionary practice and organisation has a simple, eternally valid form. We think that this is fundamentally incorrect. It's not just the clarity of the political positions that we defend that determines how we organise ourselves and our work - its also inseparable from our assessment of the specific period in which we operate, from our own strength or fragility and from the development of the class' consciousness and activity and our actual relationship to that.

Of course, although its correct that a Marxist understanding shows that the dynamic of the proletariat's consciousness and activity tends towards a unity which is reflected in its revolutionary minorities by the eventual emergence of a single centralised party, we dont think that its possible yet to tell the precise form and shape of that organisation. We believe the objective and subjective conditions for such a fundamental regroupment are not yet present. It depends fundamentally on the development of the crisis, on the balance of class forces and on the proletariat itself. We cannot summon up the Zimmerwald of tomorrow by an act of will or by wishful thinking. However we dont have any illusions that the Party will somehow emerge spontaneously with the maturation of the material conditions for it. It will also be the product of a long process of clarification involving the unceasing efforts of revolutionaries NOW towards its creation. Therefore we think that it is necessary that revolutionaries today, regroup their forces on as wide as possible a basis but that it can only be a regroupment which doesnt place chains on the very process of clarification which is required for the final regroupment of tomorrow.

In the critique we've made of current revolutionary practice and in the positions we've developed since we left the ICC we believe we have a significant contribution to make to that process of clarification and something to say about the way it should be carried out. Its the fact that we dont believe that that contribution can be made from inside any other existing organisation that underlies our decision to form the Bulletin group. We're certainly open to arguments that our contributions can be made inside other organisations or that our positions are either wrong or trivial and therefore not worth organisational separation, but so far no-one has even attempted to convince us of that. Until we are convinced otherwise the formation of a separate organisation remains the only way that we can both intervene in the class struggle and simultaneously contribute fully to the theoretical elaboration of the tasks facing us as revolutionaries. Paradoxically therefore, we believe that our split from the ICC is a positive contribution to the process of regroupment.

We dont have any illusions about ourselves as an organisation. On the contrary, the crux of much of our critique of current revolutionary practice is precisely that our tasks can only be realistically carried out if we abandon illusions. Therefore we do not present ourselves as the kernel of the future party or the current pole of clarity or regroupment. With only the seven of us such a claim would be

ridiculous. We see ourselves as only one among many elements which make up the revolutionary milieu whose collective efforts make up the process of clarification which will lead to the vital regroupments of the future.

What we've been arguing for the past two years is that the central question underlying the question of regroupment is the question of organisation and that can't be discussed outside an understanding of the material circumstances in which the revolutionary milieu finds itself. The theoretical acquisitions of the revolutionaries of the last revolutionary wave the Bolsheviks and the Italian and German Lefts, in particular the KAPD - can't possibly be understood

and applied until we understand how fundamentally our situation differs from theirs. Today we are more tiny, more remote and more isolated from the class than revolutionaries have ever been in a pre-revolutionary period. Our situation is UNIQUE and UNPRECEDENTED in revolutionary history.

Only by understanding the consequences of that can we begin to deal with the question of organisation. We've already dealt with this at considerable length in the last three issues of the Bulletin but because of their restricted circulation we would like to quote at length from "A New Regroupment" in Issue 3 which deals specifically with the consequences of the current fragility of the revolutionary movement.

"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 task 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' 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' 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 you 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 ideas for debate. The CWO's response to the debris left behind by this sectarianism is simply to apologise for being wrong and insist 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 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, MACHIEVELLIANISM, etc - IS THE VERY FLESH AND BLOOD OF SECTARIANISM. We believe, and experience bears us out, that in the present period, its 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) 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 dont think it can be answered in the abstract, or in advance, but we must take as our starting point our extreme fragility and isolation. In this situation, divorced from the enervating 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 swivism - must be enormous. We've already shown 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 dont 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.....if the crippling weight of 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 positions than other currently existing organisations but because we believe we are putting forwards a better way of asking more correct questions."

Back Issues

Issue 1

Editorial. Who is publishing the Bulletin and why.

The Long March of the CWO. (or The Hunting of the Snark). A brief exploration into the as yet unmapped territory which is the history of the Communist Workers Organisation.

C.W.O., the Italian Left and the Comintern. Another assessment of the process of Bordighisation of the Communist Workers Organisation.

An Open Letter to the Proletarian Milieu on the Chenier Affair. The destruction of the militant Chenier by the ICC has implications for the whole proletarian milieu.

Correspondence. Aberdeen and NoWar on the Class nature of the ICC
Rowntree and Weyden on Communist Organisation.

The Falklands War and the Response of Revolutionaries

Issue 2

The Ultra Left Review: Vehicle without Lights. An open letter to the comrades of Wildcat and Ultra Left Review. Why we believe the path they are on to be a political dead end.

Letter to the ICC and Our Reply. A response to our letter suggesting joint action on the Falklands War and our reply.

Aberdeen and the ICC. A statement of our experience in the ICC and a repudiation of their accusation that our intention was to "destroy" the ICC.

Letter from the CWO and our Reply.

Letter from Tampa. Correspondence and a leaflet from US comrades.

Another Look at the Question of Organisation. A major look at the question in the light of the experience of the last revolutionary wave.

Issue 3

A New Regroupment Introduction, texts and letters which ended with the formation of the Bulletin group
Capitalism - One Way Ticket to Atlantis. A text from Tampa.

Letter on the Aberdeen/CWO meeting.

Intercom. A post mortem.