

A Response by Tampa Workers Affinity Group to our Analysis of the Organisational Question.

Tampa Workers Affinity Group would like to contribute this detailed answer to the two articles by the Aberdeen comrades on the problem of revolutionary organisation.*

First of all we would like to state that we are in full agreement with their observation that the 1981 organisational scandals and turmoil within the International Communist Current has thrust into relief the need for a completely fresh re-politicization of the organisational question. The Bulletin no 1 has accurately pointed out that the bureaucratic deformation and tyranny of the ICC has rendered considerable damage to the liberatory integrity of our contemporary communist movement. (The same goes for the nefarious organisational manipulations and expulsions by the FOR in 1980-82.) And that,

Everything the ICC struggled to achieve on the question of the need for a centralized, international party, on the question of sectarianism and monolithism stands in danger of being wiped out, of being revealed as hot air, a front, a fake. This stomach turning, unspeakable action has brought the spectre of Stalinism back into the heart of the proletarian movement.

We cannot concur more with these sentiments and we totally support the Aberdeen comrades' conclusions about the "Chenier affair", etc. Also we cannot but praise these comrades for their self-reliance and honesty in trying to re-think the whole meaning of these events - their implications for a theory and practice of genuine revolutionary organisation. In fact, while we have especially strong criticisms to make of these two essays, we felt that their third part - the conclusion - was the best portion of their analysis. Our own position on the party is very close to that of Gorter and the later Luxemburg (of Spartakusbund), and we agree with Aberdeen as to the current weakness, isolation and meagreness of the real forces of world proletarian revolution. And that,

While we remain small and isolated, the pressure towards monolithism, family cliques and sect-like behaviour must be enormous. Our priorities must be a fraternal husbanding of our strength, of reaching out and embracing as much of the revolutionary milieu as possible, while at the same time reconciling that with a method of organisation which allows and promotes a rigorous search for clarity.

Keeping in mind this necessary spirit of revolutionary solidarity, as well as the obvious sincerity of the Aberdeen comrades, we must now criticise what we believe is their boarding of a

wayward historical and political train - a most decrepit and insidious locomotive - the Bolshevik Party.

At the outset we must assume that the Bulletin comrades may be somewhat sceptical and leery as to our 'party' credentials after our "General Pronouncement on the ICC Controversy" and our relentless attack on Lenin with our subsequent long reply to the Current on "Social Democracy and the Russian Revolution". And while it's true that our hatred for and aversion to bureaucratic domination leads us to verbal extremes, we must again insist that our orientation on the revolutionary organisation is almost indistinguishable from that of Pannekoek and Gorter; but unlike the ICC and like the Aberdeen comrades we really mean it! Here as well, our opinion of the eclectic Ultra Left Review is parallel to that of our Scottish colleagues - that the journal and its notion is pretty atrocious, a watered down version of the now defunct International Discussion Bulletin, with the only lucid remarks coming from the ex-ICC people and to a lesser extent, Wildcat. For our part, here in the US, the Tampa comrades are planning to take some initial measures, possibly in conjunction with FOCUS, towards a principled and formal reunification of all combative council and libertarian communist elements in North America. Of course, this must be done minus the academic lassitude and self satisfaction of Root and Branch style groups, or the miserable and opportunist Social Democracy with a libertarian flavour of the sundry anarcho-Cardanists here in the States.

The main trouble we have with the Aberdeen comrades' attempt to re-examine the organisational question, and their intrinsic condemnation of the ICC's bureaucratism, is their seeming inability to confront this problem at its genesis: the debates and contretemps of the First International.

Time and time again, every contribution of the central organs to the debate, even their opening contributions to debates which had not been defined, let alone matured, was considered to be the ICC position which had to be defended against 'dissidents'. Any notion that the central organs should be the expression and synthesis of the organisation as a whole was completely absent. For the ICC 'clarity' is produced by the internal life of the central organs: certainly the rank and file are free to say what they like in an endless flood of internal bulletins but all of this is worthless in the face of central organs who treat it like a school master [which, by the way, M.C. is!] treats his pupils' essays, "six out of ten, must try harder".

But does not this assertion recall the haughty attitudes of Marx and Engels themselves in the First International (and even earlier in the Communist League) and to which the membership gathered around Bakunin fiercely resisted, as the

*Another Look at the Organisation Question in Bulletin.2.

Aberdeen comrades now do themselves against the ICC apparatus?

Instead of chronologically investigating the reasons behind the rupture of the First International, or scrutinizing the evolution of European Social Democracy, or looking at any large anarcho-syndicalist organisation like the Spanish CNT, the Aberdeen comrades move out of historical sync and latch onto the Bolsheviks. While we can understand that almost every present member of the revolutionary milieu - and especially those coming from an exclusively Marxian perspective - has much familiarity with the Russian Revolution and its political parties, we must interpret the Aberdeen focus on the Bolsheviks as too convenient, as an axial error: this is surely not the place to sort out anything positive about the communist democracy of the revolutionary organisation.

We have to note two underlying and recurrent threads of their texts: 1) a tendency towards projecting their own (unstated) libertarian intentions onto the practice of the Bolsheviks, and 2) a tendency to directly name and compliment Lenin whenever something is considered admirable, and to defer to "the Central Committee" or "the Party" whenever something is considered derogatory (thereby absolving Lenin of any personal responsibility).

Going on to the actual texts, the Aberdeen comrades insist that,

It's necessary to realize that Lenin's starting point was the ceaseless fight against opportunism of a Social Democracy rapidly moving into the camp of the bourgeoisie. Lenin's fight for an elitist, vanguard party drawn narrowly from the ranks of professional revolutionaries has to be set against this background of the fight against conceptions of organisation with their roots in a period which was rapidly passing and which would eventually have to be jettisoned.

Should have been "jettisoned" altogether to begin with, we might add! For us, Lenin's "organisational mistakes" of the 1902-04 period were not part of a "fight against opportunism", but opportunism in another guise. You see, it was simply not in the cards for Lenin, or anyone else in the R.S.D.P. for that matter, to define fundamentally the origins of Social Democratic reformist decay, because they themselves were already deeply tainted and infected with this disease! One must remember that Lenin's political and intellectual mentors were Plekhanov and Kautsky - the very architects of Second International ideological degeneration and betrayal - and that the former assimilated body and soul all of the false representational, objectivist and scientific theorems of Kautsky and Co. at the time of his (Lenin's) own intellectual development. Also, recall that all these shared a common, middle-class background with much of the authoritarian substrate that this implies, sociological subtleties notwithstanding. The only difference between Kautsky and Lenin was this: that the latter was the former, only with balls! The Aberdeen comrades should take note that the real explanations for the apostasy of Social Democracy have been given by Karl Korsch, Anton Pannekoek and Guy Debord, among others.

Concerning Lenin's imperative "military discipline" within the party and of "All Power to the Central Committee", the text tries to soften Ulyanov's ruthlessness by quoting an academic (Liebman):

Yet nothing about the Bolshevik organisation as it actually existed at that time, justified Trotsky in talking of a dictatorship [?] ... True, there was no internal democracy in the R.S.D.P. of that time, but this fact was quite unconnected with Leninism. In their day to day practice there was little to choose in this respect between the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks: down to the revolution of 1905 they both employed the same methods in which co-option of leaders was the rule and election the exception.

Sure and now the substitutionist cat is let out of the bag! This quote speaks volumes on the nature of "Marxism" in Russia! And, incidentally, just how do the Aberdeen comrades explain the intensity, the thunderbolts of the Iskra row? Merely Trotsky's youthful impetuosity? No, comrades, one cannot blind oneself to what Trotsky and others saw in Ilyich's personality make-up even as early as 1904: "Bonapartist" and "dictator".

Then in 1905 "all is changed". A democratic passage from Lenin is duly conjured up:

The St Petersburg workers' Social Democrats know that the whole Party organisation is now built on a democratic basis [since when?]. This means that all the Party members take part in the election of officials, committee members and so forth, that all the Party members discuss and decide questions concerning political campaigns of the proletariat and that all the Party members determine the line of tactics of the Party organisation.

For Aberdeen, "It was clear to Lenin that in the ferment of class struggle on such a scale, that the rules of membership appropriate to the fight against the opportunism of the old Social Democracy, constituted a barrier between the party and its relationship to the class". Exactly, because without such a tactical turn and such rhetoric, why or how would the insurgent workers even listen to him or join his party? From our point of view, this new policy is nothing but an ingenious ploy, a clever gambit, a patented manoeuvre at which Lenin is the master, and which he will make again and again on his road to State Power!

And what of the Bolshevik Party's initial response to the Petrograd mass strikes cited by the Aberdeen comrades themselves?

The Petersburg Committee of the Bolsheviks was frightened at first by such an innovation as a non-partisan representation of the embattled masses, and could find nothing better to do than present the Soviet with an ultimatum: immediately adopt a Social Democratic programme or disband! The Petersburg Soviet as a whole, including the contingent of Bolshevik workmen as well, ignored this ultimatum without batting an eyelash. (Trotsky-Stalin)

In other words, SUBMIT IMMEDIATELY TO THE SOCIALIST FATHERLAND! But the Aberdeen comrades see no connection between Lenin's 1905 Bolsheviks and Kronstadt - it's merely our deluded 'libertarian' imagination. "Poor undialectical fellows."

The Aberdeen text always wants to see a beneficent Lenin, something which just isn't there.

[It] wasn't any question either of the workers being recruited as cannon fodder. At the 3rd Congress in 1905, Lenin is arguing for bringing workers onto the committee in a ratio of 8 workers to 2 intellectuals. By November he's calling that 'obsolete' and demanding a ratio of several hundred to every single intellectual! There's a clear understanding also that this opening up of the party means a change in structure and functioning.

And the result? Since when did Lenin, Zinoviev, Kamenev or Krasin ever stand aside to make room for revolutionary workers? Talk is cheap, comrades! Then, with the reflux of the class movement in Russia, we see the real Lenin re-emerge:

However, the years of reaction which followed the collapse of the 1905 revolution saw the return of monolithism and sectarianism with a vengeance to the Bolshevik party. The call now was "Strengthen the Organisation" which meant in reality "strengthen the Central Committee" [what else]. The drive within the party was for absolute homogeneity and adherence to the "party line". The constitutional guarantees for minorities and free discussion, though formally still in existence, were abandoned in practice. It was during this period of viciousness and unscrupulousness in polemics which wouldn't be surpassed until the Party of the Counter-Revolution, with Lenin for example accusing Martov of being "objectively in the service of the Tsar's police".

What this passage does, in actuality, is to sum up, almost in exactitude, the reprehensible antics of the ICC during the 1981 "Chenier affair"! The Current's leaders are the loyal students of, not deviants from, the execrable and nefarious organisation canons of the Bolsheviks and especially Ilyich himself!

Then the myth of the "democratic" Bolsheviks is again prestidigitated for 1919. "The party once again flung itself open to the working class, growing ten-fold in less than a year. The monolithic and sectarian practices of the years of reaction, the years of rigid obedience to the 'party line' and the dictates of a hierarchical centralism were shrugged off as if they had never existed."

What do you mean, "as if they never existed"? This kind of fantastic reasoning might be o.k. for mystics, but not for communist revolutionaries. Lenin's organisational methods, his disciplinary spirit and aura, his chain-of-command mentality, which Luxemburg had early and rightly excoriated, would never leave the inner mechanics of the Bolshevik Party! This query again - when did the party hierarchy ever resign in deference to the development of consciousness by the workers themselves: in February, in March, in July, or the 'squealers' in October 1917? How did the composition of the Party change fundamentally? When was the inner circle around Lenin, of which STALIN was a senior partner, ever get removed from organisational authority?

Throughout this period the debates were fierce, open and public on almost every major issue from the difference of opinion over the July days, through the debates on the seizure of power, to the polemics over Brest-Litovsk,

etc. The Brest-Litovsk debates, for example, took place in the pages of Pravda and even when the decision had been made, the Siberian Party organisation refused to recognise the signing of the Treaty.

And just how many of these debates did Lenin ever lose, even when his position was in sharp minority within the 'Party', much less in revolutionary Russia itself? And precisely how did the Brest issue resolve itself? Isn't it true that Lenin threatened to resign if the war faction won, and that he used personal intimidation against the Left Communists - Bukharin, Radek, Kollontai, Lunarcharsky, Ryazanov, etc (viz, the party intellectuals) - all of whom cowered before stern Vladimir? In the meantime, all of the other forces of revolution in Russia - the Left Social Revolutionaries, the Anarchists, the Maximalists - wanted indefatigable class war against German imperialism, as a direct way of sparking the workers revolution in Germany! But, curiously, Lenin's will prevailed; his capitulationist policy carried the day and the world-historical debacle of the class then began to set in. Here was the acid test of Party democracy and internationalism, and the Bolsheviks failed it miserably circa February 1918.

The Aberdeen text then goes on to quote J. Molyneux:

In reality, 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?

This statement forgets to mention that all of these "iconoclasts, fighters and insurgents" were in total agreement on the overriding commandment to seize, exercise and hold fast to state power, and of these, Lenin was the most far-sighted and determined of all!

Then the article makes a very careless slip from an unidentified source (which is probably Trotsky): "In the heat of the battle, when the proletarian army is straining every nerve, no criticism whatever can be permitted in its ranks." No criticisms? Of what, of whom? And by whom? Carry out blindly the directives of the Party-State!?!

"What also has to be grasped is the degree to which the emergence and functioning of tendencies wasn't a product of the theoretical clarity of the central organs [Surely!], but was fundamentally the product of the pressure and influence coming from the lower ranks of the Party who were closest to the class." This is our position exactly! "As much as anything, the formal guarantee of minority rights was not so much more than a reluctant recognition of a de facto situation which couldn't be changed." Right, and certainly no thanks to Ilych! "The opening up of the Party to the class swept away the monolithic tendencies and the hierarchical respect for the central organs which in any case was much less substantial than is usually imputed." Really? And the Party cult of Lenin? And the Cheka? And the rapid sealing off of democratic rights beginning in early 1918? The Aberdeen comrades can't seriously expect the contemporary revolutionary movement to believe

this for one second can they? Yes, the "monolithic tendencies" may have diminished for a few months during the period of Bolshevik consolidation of state power, but any commitment to workers' democracy, to REAL SOVIET POWER, was then abruptly nullified because this kind of authoritarianism and substitutionism is de jure Leninism!

Then the Petrograd Military Organisation of the Bolsheviks is cited as an example of an organ of class autonomy. "During the July Days when the Central Committee was calling for calm, the military organisation used its press to call for action." (And this is also the Tampa comrades position on the July days.) "After the July days the Central Committee tried to exert control and despatch Stalin to insist that their decisions must be carried out without discussion. He was bluntly informed that this was 'quite unacceptable' and the Central Committee had to retreat with as much grace as it could muster. During the same period, the Petrograd Committee demanded its own press because of the timorousness of Pravda and when the Central Committee refused, it went blithely ahead with acquiring a publishing company and press." "Central Committee"? You mean Lenin, don't you? And Ol' Koba was merely carrying out the orders of patriarchal master Ilych! You can't name one and not the other!

The text then again talks of organisational tension between the base and apex of the party. But we repeat, this "dialectical interplay" existed in spite of, rather than at the behest of, Lenin, who, naturally, as always would have preferred that everything be done unquestionally and bureaucratically 'his way'.

What stands out above all is the total falseness of the myth that the Bolshevik Party was a well oiled monolith, founded in the disciplined implementation of an infallible and invariant blueprint drawn up in 1902. With this myth as a starting point any attempt to draw the appropriate lessons for the period is bound to be doomed to disaster. On the one hand we have the libertarians who mechanically connect Kronstadt to 1902, and on the other hand we have the Bordigists who equally mechanically draw a line from 1902 to 1917.

Comrades, the plane of travel for Lenin and Co. is concretely just such a straight one: subordination of all else to the exigency of wresting State Power. The Bolshevik Party was held together internally on the basis of Lenin's dominant personality, and externally by the central apparatus with its intellectualist, pseudo-vanguard liturgy. Here we find the invisible bond, the psychological glue which held the Party machine intact, right or wrong. The Aberdeen comrades themselves have indeed seen such a machine (or guillotine) at work - the ICC!

"In the ICC we have an organisation which prides itself smugly on the rejection of the monolithism of Bolshevik democratic centralism. But in reality it has created a monolithic practice of all-powerful central organs beyond the wildest dreams of Lenin at his most centralised." Just the opposite! The ICC in its wildest dreams, in its subconscious reflexes, could never match or wield the material and demiurgic power of Lenin in his element! And the convulsive splits within the ICC and the healthy revulsion to M.C. and Co. by the Aberdeen comrades themselves proves this, and also confirms obliquely that the revolutionary

class has historically inoculated itself - even if only semi-consciously - from all such authoritarian abuse. We simply won't stand for it, from whatever quarter!

About growth and mergers with other political currents by the Bolsheviks, the Aberdeen comrades must mean some of Lenin's old friends (Lunacharsky) and adversaries (Trotsky) of the Inter-Organisational Borough who were brought in and elevated to positions of importance; or maybe ex-soldiers like Krylenko and Dybenko to the extent that they possessed technical, military skills and learned well how to execute the 'party line'.

We have already said in this text that in one sense the history of the Bolshevik party can be seen as the history of the fight for the autonomy of working class interests and their espousal of that can't be separated from the form of their organisational work - their emphasis on factory work as opposed to Parliamentary manoeuvres, etc. Their achievement of clarity is both a result of, and dialectically, a cause of, their implantation in the heart of the class, in combination with the massive and real freedom of debate which existed in the Party and which, at the vital points in the struggle, frequently went against its centralized authority.

"Frequently went against its centralized authority"? When? Where? How? What line formulated by Lenin was ever rejected on a Party basis, with or without internal or public discussion? Just look at it: the April Theses, July days, the Insurrection, the assumption of State Power, the nationalisation decrees, the Cheka, the Vesenka, the Red Army, Brest-Litovsk, the suppression of socialist parties, militarisation of Labour, right on down the pike to you know where!

We must repeatedly stress that Lenin could never grasp the reasons for the collapse of the Social Democracy because his own ideology and organisation were an integral part and continuation of that collapse. And when Korsch succeeded in ferreting out the philosophic roots of reformist miasma with his Marxism and Philosophy, he and his exposition were calumniated and suppressed by the Third International, and no less an arrogant and cowardly bureaucrat than the slinky Zinoviev called Korsch a "wildecklein-burger". Let the revolutionary movement decide for itself who was the real petty-bourgeois gone mad: Korsch or Ilych!

The second text by Aberdeen more or less covers the same ground as the first and it would be redundant to answer each and every point again. What we would like to conclude with is a plea to our Scottish comrades to cut the umbilical cord to Lenin because whoever does not will eventually gag on its rancid fluids. The class instincts of the Aberdeen comrades are sound, even if erroneously they project them onto a party where it simply just doesn't correspond. Let us then advance with the arduous task of constructing our New International without hoary illusions, and in which the quality of the revolutionary movement itself is the main guarantee of its emancipatory, communist integrity.

Our Reply

The CBG's texts on the Bolshevik Party have provoked interest and discussion within the milieu. With the exception of the present text, however, this interest has not been expressed in writing. This makes particularly welcome the contribution from the Tampa Workers Affinity Group. But there is a second reason why we welcome Tampa's critique. They put into words an analysis of the Russian Revolution and the Bolshevik Party which is very common in today's movement. Unlike the CBG, Tampa holds the view that the Bolshevik Party was a bourgeois organisation and that the October revolution in Russia was a bourgeois counter-revolution.

This analysis is the touchstone for all those groups and individuals who call themselves variously libertarian communists, anarcho-communists or council communists. While we have many positions in common with this part of the milieu (the nature of trade unions, national liberation struggles, parliamentarism, etc) and we would include Tampa within this, the evaluation of the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks has a fundamental importance for the nature and functions of revolutionary organisations and poses a barrier to further discussion and co-operation.

Our framework

Let us begin by making our analysis clear and elaborating the framework which informs the original CBG texts. We hold firmly to the view that the Bolshevik Party was a revolutionary organisation which made an important contribution to the revolutionary wave of the early part of this century and that the revolution of October 1917 in Russia was a proletariat revolution which smashed the bourgeois state and instituted the political power of the working class.

To back up our view we would point to a whole history of analyses and interventions by the Bolshevik Party which could only be made by a revolutionary organisation: to the political critique which the Bolsheviks made of the Mensheviks and the other elements of the degenerating Second International, to their denunciation of the first world war and their call to turn the imperialist war into a civil war, Lenin's contribution to the Zimmerwald and Kienthal conferences of groups opposed to the war, and Lenin's April theses in the aftermath of the February revolution. We can quote here the declaration of the first congress of the Third International which shows that the Bolsheviks, who were the moving force behind the International, had a global view of the revolution and not one restricted to Russia.

Our task is to generalize the revolutionary experience of the working class, to purge the movement of the corroding admixture of opportunism and social-patriotism, to unify the efforts of all genuinely revolutionary parties of the world proletariat and thereby facilitate and hasten the victory of the Communist revolution throughout the world.

Equally we could point to the views of the Bolsheviks' contemporaries who had no doubts, whatever their criticisms, of the nature of the Bolshevik Party - and to the way in which all revolutionaries of that time, including many anarcho-syndicalists, acclaimed the October

revolution and rallied to the banner of the Third International.

We could have gone on from this framework to write a completely different article from the ones we published. We could have examined the mistakes and errors of the Bolsheviks and how these weaknesses contributed to the defeat of the Russian proletariat. But this kind of critique has not been exactly neglected over the last fifty years. We have many good analyses of the Bolsheviks' and Lenin's substitutionism, of the July days in 1917, of Brest-Litovsk and of Kronstadt. These critiques began with the opposition tendencies in the Bolshevik Party itself and continued through the German, Dutch, Italian and other Lefts. While today we have the living proof in the leftists, both the Stalinist and Trotskyist varieties, of where Lenin's errors lead.

Alternatively we could have made a more extended critique of Lenin's conception of the revolutionary organisation as a highly centralised body of professional revolutionaries and attempted to bring out how the ICC echoes the early Lenin. Our comment on the ICC and the Bolshevik party was made in passing but perhaps Tampa should have the benefit of the doubt when they trace the ICC's organisational practice back to the Bolsheviks. The following for example is from Lenin in 1902, but it could be the ICC today.

The one serious organizational principle for workers in our movement must be strictest secrecy, strictest choice of members, training of professional revolutionaries. Once these qualities are present something more than democracy is guaranteed: complete comradesly confidence among revolutionaries. ...It would be a great mistake to think that the impossibility of a really 'democratic' control makes the members of a revolutionary organisation irresponsible. ...They feel their responsibility very keenly, knowing by experience that in order to rid itself of an unworthy member an organisation of genuine revolutionaries recoils from nothing.

What we tried to do in our texts was something entirely different. We tried to show that any living, proletarian organisation, in spite of what it thinks and says about itself, is by its nature not just a conveyor belt of consciousness to the working class but must be profoundly affected by the movement of the class. When the revolutionary movement is on the upswing then the revolutionary party is revitalised. When the proletariat is in retreat then its organisations withdraw in to themselves.

If we took the Bolshevik party as our example it was because of the myth of the monolithic party, never deviating from the straight line from its correct analyses to the victorious overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the working class. If we took "favourable" quotes from Lenin to show this effect it was because he was the clearest advocate of the view that the party leads the class as well as the originator, in Left-Wing Communism, of the myth of the monolithic party. In fact Lenin was astute enough to learn from the class (and on occasions like the April theses more so than the rest of the central committee of the Bolshevik Party) without ever resolving these partial insights with his

view of the relation between party and class.

Finally our text drew out some relevant lessons for those revolutionary groups today like the ICC and the CWO which we see as closing off their analyses prematurely, closing their minds to what the class will teach us tomorrow.

Tampa's critique

While Tampa in their reply agree with our conclusions they are extremely critical of our initial framework. To them Lenin was not a revolutionary at all but a bourgeois, the Bolsheviks his personal instrument for gaining state power in Russia. They are therefore completely out of sympathy with the method of our text. For them there is nothing to be learned from the history of the Bolshevik party. Their reply is really a reply to yet another text which we didn't write - a defence of the proletarian nature of the Bolsheviks and the October revolution. Thus their argument suffers from not having a clear target to attack and results in a text which gathers together some varied and contradictory evidence for their views.

Tampa lay great emphasis on Lenin's character. Lenin's 'authoritarian' style they attribute to Marx's and Engels' activities in the Communist League and the First International without saying whether they think this makes Marx and Engels bourgeois too. However a close analysis of the history of the First International shows in fact that it was Bakunin who introduced an authoritarian structure to the International and only denounced 'authoritarianism' when he could not put it to his own use. Trotsky and Luxemburg are taken as authorities on Lenin's character but if 'jettisoning' all vestiges of Social Democracy is a prerequisite of revolutionary integrity then we have to point out that at the time neither of these critics had made a clear organisational break from parties of the Second International. For the sake of argument let us accept Tampa's statement that Lenin always got his own way in debates in the Party. Certainly the history of the Bolsheviks gave Lenin immense authority in the Party, which he didn't hesitate to use. But what is Tampa's gripe here? If the Bolshevik Party's members were "in total agreement on the overriding commandment to seize, exercise and hold fast to state power" then no-one was putting forward the interests of the working class. The debates were only debates between representatives of bourgeois views and it doesn't matter to us who won or lost. In fact Tampa don't say that, they obviously think that some members at some times were arguing from proletarian positions. They only catch themselves when it is Lenin who is on the 'right' side and then they put it down to his machiavellianism.

Tampa are on firmer ground when they point out the dangerous implications of Lenin's views on the relationship between the party and class, his substitutionist conception of the revolution and his view that the revolution was at the same time the completion of the bourgeois revolution in Russia and the opening of the proletarian revolution. However we could agree with all this without for a moment giving ground on the revolutionary nature of the Bolsheviks.

Another of Tampa's arguments, which they state more forcefully elsewhere, is their critique of the social origins of the leading members of the Bolshevik Party. But who are the workers, the men and women of humble beginnings which Tampa want to hold up to us as the real revolutionaries?

Pannekoek? Luxemburg? Sylvia Pankhurst? Count Bakunin? Prince Kropotkin? Did social origins make Ebert or Keir Hardie communist militants? For Tampa the degeneration of the Second International can be explained by the presence of middle class elements spouting bourgeois philosophy.

For the CBG none of these arguments are convincing. What makes a group or individual counter-revolutionary is not character defects, social origins or philosophical leanings. These are secondary questions to the concrete facts of their programme and their actions. What made the Second International a bourgeois organisation was its stance in the first world war, helping to drag workers into support for their national bourgeoisie, putting them in uniform to slaughter their fellow workers. Those who stood firmly for the autonomy of the class and for its international nature, who called for replacing imperialist war by civil war, they were the revolutionaries.

Their method and ours

Here lies the root of the problem which disrupts the possibility of regroupment between ourselves and groups like Tampa. By tearing the Bolsheviks and the Second International out of the historical fabric of the revolutionary movement, they abandon the political tradition which we share with groups like the ICC and the CWO (for all their faults). The past of the workers movement and its political organisations is often a tragedy of dead-ends and failures. But the critical examination of the mistakes of past revolutionaries is the only way forward. The strength of Marxism as a systematic study of the historical process lies in its ability to overcome the errors of the past in new analyses. If we can learn something from the Bolshevik Party and the Russian revolution then we should. We can and have cut the umbilical cord to Lenin but we cannot deny our parentage.

What are the alternatives posed by the groups like Tampa? Revolutionary activity can become a question of reinventing everything anew. But revolutionaries are conditioned by history and by the concerns of other revolutionaries. We can no more expect a revolutionary practice to start with a clean sheet than we can expect a child to create its own world.

Some revolutionaries attempt to pick and choose from the past revolutionary movement. With the benefit of hindsight they champion the clearest individual or party from each era and condemn the rest. Thus Tampa accept that Spartakusbund was a proletarian group but the Bolsheviks, who had similar origins and many similar analyses, were not. This can become a sort of sectarianism imposed on the past. We have written elsewhere on the CWO's ahistorical critique of the German and Italian Lefts.

Groups can reject Marxism altogether either for the unaging certainties of Anarchism or for a position which says a plague on all theory. Anarchism has never proved to be the conscious guide to action which Marxism has provided. If Marxism were compared to a clock which sometimes runs slowly then at least it gives some idea of the time of day. Anarchism is like a clock which has stopped. It is useless for all practical purposes but has the immense satisfaction of being right twice a day.

This leaves the position of denying the need for

any theoretical reflection on the revolutionary process. All that is required is the class instincts of the proletariat and their unitary organisations, the workers councils. The history of past revolutionary attempts then becomes the history of the class being hijacked by some political organisation or other for its own ends. But here we come the full circle. By denying theory and our own history we end up with the mirror image of Lenin's view of the Party. Lenin thought that communist consciousness was brought to the class from outside. Our anti-theorists see the party as an alien body in exactly the same way, but bringing counter-revolutionary ideas to

the class.

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Class consciousness is not something which develops unconsciously. It involves reflecting, theorising and discussing. It is a process within the class where the political organisations of the class make an invaluable contribution. Our debates within the revolutionary movement today are based on the analyses produced by the historical movement. That has been the method of revolutionaries in the past and it is ours today.

Sinclair

the bulletin

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- * Correspondence
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- * Letter from The CWO and Our Reply
- * Letter from TAMPA
- * ABERDEEN and the ICC
- * TAMPA LEAFLET on THE FALKLANDS WAR

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The above Debate originated with a text published in Bulletin Number 2, called "Another Look at the Organisation Question". This issue has been out of print for some time, but in response to the many requests for copies we have got together a reduced size copy of the original in printed form.

A copy may be obtained from us for 50p from our group address:
Box 85. 43 Candlemakers Row
EDINBURGH. U.K.

Only a few such copies have been printed and it is likely that this issue will go out of print once again very soon.