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IMG to WF, 23 November.

Dear comrades,

We have noted in the past period that our members have been de facto cooperating in different fields of work - Ireland, in the LCDSU - and the question has been raised of this occurring in other areas - Steel, Teachers. We welcome this development. At the same time, however, we also note what appears to us as a growth of sectarianism on your part - the article in Workers Fight on Kronstadt being the most blatant case. On our part we have previously explained our fears regarding the 'invention' of differences between our two organisations and have therefore scrupulously refrained from public polemics. As we have also noted that on questions of politics your paper has not so far taken any positions which we regard as incompatible with the Fourth International and has come out against capitulation to Social Democracy under the guise of 'Tory bashing' and considering the development of cooperation in some areas of work, we find this growth of apparent sectarianism disturbing. In order to discuss these problems, and also those areas where we are, or potentially will be, co-operating we propose a meeting between representatives of our two leaderships as soon as possible. Concretely we propose Tuesday 28th November or Friday 1st December. As Cde. Hornung and Cde. Thomas had previously informally indicated they were in favour of such a meeting, we hope this can be arranged.

Revolutionary greetings. J. Ross (for IMG Political Committee).

WF to IMG, 13 December.

Dear comrades,

Thank you for your letter of 23rd November. As we informed you over the telephone, we are quite willing to meet you for a discussion and hope to do so on Thursday afternoon December 14th.

However, there are a number of points, some of them raised in your own letter, which we want to clarify before a new series of discussions gets under way. One lesson we have drawn from the breakdown of the last discussions (that is, your abandonment of the discussions) is that the basis on which any future discussions take place must be clearly spelled out by both sides in advance of the first meeting, if the exchanges are to serve any useful purpose or are to be any more than a bout of shadowboxing.

1) We are glad that you have 'noted' that WF and the IMG have common fields of work. Why you have noticed this only in the "last period" we are at a loss to know. If it is only now you notice it, you can't have been paying much attention for the past year - indeed, for the past two years or more. Even when WF was in IS, we had a common field of work on the Irish question, the two groups being for long the only tendencies working in the IS. In actuality the common fields of work have probably grown less since last May when you unilaterally withdrew from the then discussions. We are still, therefore, not at all clear as to what is new in the situation.

2) We, for our part, have noted and are disturbed by the fact that you have systematically misinformed both the members of the IMG and those people on the periphery of both groups (like for example the IS opposition group in Oxford) who are interested in the subject, about the relations between WF and IMG over the past year.

You falsely place the entire responsibility for the ending of the 'negotiations' with WF. According to the minutes taken by cde Hornung at the last meeting, you undertook to convene the next meeting; we agreed on joint membership meetings wherever both groups have people (in Manchester such a meeting took place); and we agreed to initiate joint work in solidarity with the Vietnamese in face of the US escalation of the war. What happened? You never re-convened the negotiation meeting, and brushed aside an approach from our then London organiser for a joint membership meeting (to discuss among other things Vietnam work).

True, our wooing was less than ardent. But to put out the story that we

our Steering Committee did indeed indicate willingness to discuss with you. And WF, as you well know, has never had any other position. They were surprised to find leading members of your organisation apparently in complete ignorance of the actual record of the discussions and under the mistaken impression that it was we who refused to continue them. Yet their discussion of the matter with your Cde TA did not, it seems, make any lasting impression on that comrade. Shortly afterwards he presented the same false version of the breakdown of the discussions to a comrade in Manchester.

Moreover, we learn that Cde. Ross has told the Oxford ex-IS people that we "were so sectarian that WF refused discussion, and had simply dismissed the question of the International when it left IS". We will deal below with the FI. But the actual record means that that sort of misinformation must be described as simply lying.

Far from refusing to discuss with you, we virtually ignored the fact that in the course of the fight against expulsion from IS you denounced us to the IS leadership in the pages of RM, giving them proof of organisational 'disloyalty' on our part and therefore a valuable weapon in the factional struggle. We refrained from raising the implications of this piece of unprincipled factionalism in aid of the centrist Cliff tendency, precisely because we didn't want to let secondary things come in the way of discussion.

At any rate we demand of you now that the record on the past discussions should be set straight, that you put out a statement to your own members and anyone else interested in the matter, making clear exactly what did happen in the last discussions.

3) You state that you have "scrupulously refrained from public polemics". We wonder who you are addressing here. It certainly is not true. The document for your conference attacked WF; one of your pieces on the Uganda Asians polemicalised with us (anonymously) - and, of course, last December you attacked us a) politically and b), most important of all in the circumstances, organisationally, by "laying information" with the IS leadership that we had been naive enough to approach you for a preliminary discussion in response to the letter we had received from a representative of the FI in November 1971 (as mentioned above).

The only time it has been of any concern to us, or likely to have any possible consequence for us whether you attacked us or ignored us, was at that period when we were subject to the 'organisational' witchhunting of the IS hacks. Your public attack on us then was of great service to them. In view of your behaviour then even if you had since refrained, "scrupulously" or otherwise, from attacks on us, we would still reply that your attitude was like the new-found "virtue" of the octogenarian; late^{and} of little consequence.

In any case, we welcome open political discussion with other tendencies, and cannot see any virtue in silence. It is necessary to make it plain to people on the left what the political differences are. Provided the necessary standards of honesty and scrupulousness are maintained, then open polemics are healthy.

4) Your use of the word "sectarian" is entirely vulgar, equating it, as it does, with factionalism. That is a centrist, not a Trotskyist, definition of sectarianism. Trotsky's best known definition of sectarianism ("abstract propagandist passivity of the Bordigist type") is one we feel the IMG, of all groups in Britain, would do well to think about.

But even if we take the word as you intend it, then it is double and triple nonsense to apply it to WF, and especially so of WF in its relation to the USFI and the IMG.

Though known to have expressed only critical support for the USFI, and to have a different tradition, orientation, methods of work, and history from the IMG, we were issued in November 1971 with a completely provocative dictat from Brussels. Such a communication could^{only} have the authority of its persuasiveness, and therefore it had none: it received no support at all at our November 1971 Aggregate.

Nevertheless we went along to talk to you. Then you scabbed on us to the

conscious apparently as a response to our Aggregate's rejection of the letter from Brussels. When the split with IS was not at all as messy or as debilitating as you and the Cliff Leadership had tried to make it, and when you found yourselves confronted with a WF group of obvious viability, you again asked for talks. We responded immediately, confining ourselves to a few restrained protests, concentrating on a search for points of agreement.

It was not that we did not resent the attempt at a dictat (motivated presumably by the ridiculous misestimation that there were people in WF clamouring to join the IMG and only held back ^{by} the 'leadership'. Not that we misunderstood your factional designs, or failed to see the political significance of your current political manoeuvre against us with the IS leadership. But we did want not to let secondary things impede any prospects of common work or the possibility of eventual unity.

We repeat: it was your organisation which refused either to call a joint meeting, or honour the agreements of the last meeting of representatives of the two tendencies. We suspect that all the evidence of factionalism of the most unprincipled kind (what you choose to term "sectarianism") is against you and not against Workers Fight.

5) You also allow yourselves to speak of the 'invention' of differences. Really, comrades! We are far too busy 'inventing' excuses for you and for the International which fosters you to have any powers of imagination left for inventing 'differences'. In any case disagreements with the IMG are something we have more of than we are ever likely to find a 'use' for, even if we were as 'factional' as you mean to imply.

Where have we invented differences with you? Kronstadt? The article says that to the best of our understanding the line of the article we criticise is not that of the IMG - unless there had been new internal convulsions. That is neither misrepresentation nor 'invention' but legitimate comment on an atrocious article. Do you really want to maintain that it was unreasonable to attack an article in a Trotskyist paper which described the embattled actions of the Bolsheviks (and Trotsky) in defence of the Revolution as aberrations, echoing the slander of the anarchists and the solidarityites?

This idea of 'inventing' differences first occurred in the letter from Brussels. It is a ridiculous piece of self conceit on your part, and it would be nice if you refrain from wasting our time or straining our patience by raising it after this. Inventions? You are a tendency which has actually lived through the greatest upsurge of the class struggle for decades - without even producing a workers' newspaper! (Despite having massive resources, by our standards at least). You produce a paper which has consistently turned out a series of odd and sometimes weird lines. (We don't even have a theory about where the line "Asians: Big chance for left" came from!) and which is most charitably summed up as a long series of blunders, ranging from your bankrupt advocacy of a mere boycott of the NIRC, refusing to raise the offensive slogan of the General Strike, all the way to the recent - albeit brief - endorsement of the settlement forced on the Vietnamese people by US imperialism as a "victory". Your current issue achieves the amazing feat of simply having nothing - nothing! - at all on the AUEW fines crisis; perhaps it is one way to avoid having to eat your words afterwards....

Typical of the much vaunted IMG New Thinking is the idea in your recent conference document that it is the 'concept' of the Epoch that gives rise to the various key theories of Leninism-Trotskyism - including the theory of imperialism! (Which is back to front mysticism basing the necessary premise on its own conclusion....)

And so on. Meanwhile the class struggle reaches the highest point for half a century - - - and one or other of the leaders of the IMG slips a sheet of paper into his typewriter and begins to write yet another document based on new "brilliant insights" to replace those of last month or the month before. It is not, comrades, that we are "contemptuous of theory"; but yours hasn't stood up to any of the tests of the events of the class struggle in the last tumultuous year.

Your practical work is not untypified by your behaviour during the Manchester engineers' sit-down where you were nothing but satellites of the CP or the AUEW bureaucrats as if trying to enact in the real world the fantasies about you have been filling the pages of the Workers' Press for years now. This was no accident, nor the responsibility of some non-representative rank-and-file member, but was the direct responsibility of one of the leaders of the IMG's recent "Cultural Revolution", trying to apply the ideas of your conference documents.

You have moved so far from the elementary truths of the movement that you think it permissible to have as a member a comrade who is a non-elected full-time official of the GMWU !

In the crisis last July you were without any slogans to relate to the state at all (except ... Dictatorship of the Proletariat), either the revolutionary call for a general strike (which implies the possibility of the opening up of a working class political road, cutting through the normal institutions of bourgeois society), nor even the reformist call for a Labour Government. Your general advocacy of the full revolution, in the best Bordigist style, bracketed you closer to the SFFP than any other tendency (see the Left and the Crisis). And so on, and so on.

Twentieth Century we will not take a single step away from what we see as politically correct and necessary, either to draw away from you or to move closer to you: you loom less large on our horizon than you imagine, comrades.

In truth you loom on our political horizon at all only because the struggle against the sectarian anti-internationalism which predominates on the British left, and the crippling lies and myths of the "anti-Pabloites", has led us to identify, despite serious reservations, the International of which you are part as the mainstream of the Trotskyist movement. The reservations have led us to refuse to accept the discipline of the International: this has been essential to us given that the work which has allowed us to build WF as a growing tendency within the working class would have been impossible if we had been under the discipline of the FI - and the IMG majority.

WF in fact grew up in opposition to the IMG and its cadres were formed partly through an understanding of the inadequacies of the IMG. The political breakthrough we achieved when we declared for critical support for the FI didn't materially change this, despite its importance for the development of the tendency in its severing of all contact with the camp of the irrational "anti-Pabloite" bible-thumpers, those Ian Paisleys of 'Trotskyism' who stand blocking the light from any rational understanding of Trotskyism.

In any case our support is and was critical support, and does not ignore the opportunist and other faults of the FI which were partly responsible for generating the "anti-Pabloite" aberrations, or at least for giving them some apparent credibility. Neither does it ignore the very bad role which the interventions of the International have always played in the Trotskyist movement here, right since 1938. Then, as you know, the group which was to prove the most healthy in Britain was denounced as a "nationalist deviation, in essence reactionary". The intervention of the FI centre thereafter led to the setting up of the open Healy tendency (and moreover as a fundamentally reformist tendency in the Labour Party); to the creation of the Grant tendency in 1957, or at any rate to its resuscitation; and now to the creation of the IMG.

Our attitude has therefore been one of attempting a rational appreciation of the history of the FI and the problems of Trotskyism, utterly rejecting the SLL and OCI fables about 'Pabloism', but simultaneously resisting the lures of the IMG approach which makes of the FI a romantic shibboleth and nostrum.

For these reasons we have been and are engaged in an internal self-clarification on the question of the FI, as you know very well. It is only the question of the FI which makes any thought of close collaboration between the two organisations even thinkable. Yet even here, the differences are substantial - quite apart from our critical attitudes to the USFI.

You make a fetish of the International. Indeed, without the FI the IMG would not survive in its present form. But making an organisational fetish out of an international does not make a national organisation internationalist, nor

render it immune from the pressures of chauvinism. This is amply demonstrated by the fact that the IMG buckled under the pressure of the chauvinist hysteria on the Common Market issue last year, exactly as did all the other groups. Here was a practical testing time for internationalism and you failed it as miserably as did IS. (One of the strongest arguments used by Cliff against WF's campaign on IS's capitulation to chauvinism was to point out that the British section of the International to which we had given critical support had done exactly the same as IS was doing. We didn't really have an answer to that one ...) As it turned out, WF's 'nationalist deviation' lacking, it seemed, your finely developed sense of 'internationalism', was yet the only tendency to stand up to the wave of chauvinism.

Likewise on the general strike question: we have based our approach on the whole international experience of the general strike; you have tacitly confined yourselves to the very inhibiting experience of the one catastrophic British general strike.

The conclusion we draw is not then that an International is unnecessary, but that there is a need for a rational approach to the question; and that your sort of fetishism on the question can lead to the most worthless and hollow 'internationalism' in practice.

3) The conclusions.

a) discussion is possible and may be useful. Though it seems very likely to us, in view of your record of hostility to WF and the various sudden switches in your public face towards us, that your current initiative is seen by the IMG leadership as what we believe you refer to privately as a "unity offensive". (We also believe there is a genuine feeling amongst many IMG members for unity) Fine! Good and useful things occasionally result from bad motivation.

b) Certain changes have taken place since the last discussions. WF has been consolidated and stabilised as an independent organisation, doing an amount of work in the class which we think bears very favourable comparison with yours, despite the 5 to 1 ratio of membership in your favour and even measured in absolute terms. We will not see it jeopardised; practical collaboration in various fields will for us depend primarily on the likely effect on our own work.

Any discussions with the IMG cannot place in question the organisational integrity of our group, whether motivated on the issue of the FI, or motivated on any other pretext. All political relations between the two groups must be through the elected leaderships: so far your approaches to our local groups have had more the character of would-be organisational raids than approaches from one democratic centralist organisation to another.

c) The current discussion on the FI is the business only of WF; the group's organisational integrity as an independent organisation will remain inviolable throughout this discussion. The purpose of this discussion is to decide how, when and if the organisation is going to form any international organisational links. Any attempt, such as various incidents in the past (eg the letter from Brussels turned 'open letter') to intervene from outside in the democratic processes or to affect its decisions, will be treated as a hostile act which will lead to a break in relations.

d) While we are not prepared to offer the IMG any general privileges in our internal discussion on the FI, we want to request, through its British section, that the USFI furnish us with the documents concerning the current thinking of the USFI in the preparations for the 10th World Congress.* It is obviously essential for any thoroughgoing discussion by us of the current ideas of the USFI. We want documents rather than, at this stage anyway, offers of speakers, because it is important to consider the issues calmly, in depth and on their merits without the intrusion of organisational factionalism by or on behalf of the IMG which would be inseparable from the participation of non-WF members in the discussion. We would of course offer the necessary guarantees regarding the restriction of circulation of such material.

* At the meeting, the IMG agreed to this request. However, they have since reneged on the agreement.

In addition, we would like simply to know the USFI's position on the alleged reports of a Commission on the Ceylonese section at the 9th World Congress, which have been published by the US Spartacist League. (You will certainly have had a copy). These "reports" concern problems more serious than the SLL's obvious slander that Bala Tampoe is a CIA agent, and if genuine are quite disturbing. We want to know if the USFI admits or denies that these documents are authentic.*

Yours fraternally the Steering Committee of Workers Fight.

* The IMG "refused to comment" on this question at the meeting.