

REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST CURRENT/ WORKERS FIGHT

JOINT DISCUSSION BULLETIN NO 3

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-S. Lincoln
(L'pool RMC)

REPLY TO WORKERS FIGHT'S "OPEN LETTER FOR A REVOLUTIONARY
REGROUPMENT".

Firstly we wish to make clear that we treat the WF "Open Letter for a Revolutionary Regroupment" with the utmost seriousness. In principle such a regroupment initiative being made at the present time is most welcome. Indeed, our perspectives upon, at various stages, leaving the IMG took into account that, of the ~~x~~ several possibilities open to us, the most desirable - if it proved possible - was a regroupment with other forces on a clear political basis. It was in order to fight for such a regroupment, while maintaining and developing our political activity, that the RMC was established in Liverpool, and that we have set up a national co-ordinating committee of the comrades signing this reply.

We consider that the Open Letter, treated as a statement of WORKERS' FIGHT'S position, can act as a starting point for an investigation of the possibilities of a regroupment. However, we do not consider that WF have approached the issuing of the Open Letter correctly. In the first place, although certain other forces were involved in the discussions around the letter, including one signatory of this present text, no attempt was made to involve all the non-WF forces collectively in the discussions, and all key decisions relating to the text were taken by WF and by WF alone. This can hardly be said to augur well for the future. Furthermore, we must consider that once the letter was produced in the printed edition, the attempt by WF to get further signatures from comrades not previously involved in any of the discussions was misguided. Even supposing that the text were free from faults (which it is not), and even supposing it were an exhaustive statement on the basis of which alone an organisation could be constituted (which it isn't), nevertheless the correct procedure would have been to ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ request other formations to respond to the Open Letter. That is to say, they should have been asked to issue statements setting out their agreements and differences with the Open Letter, with all groups agreeing to a certain procedure and time scale by which to work for a regroupment. For simply appending signatures to WF's text - even if it were faultless and ~~x~~ exhaustive - would inevitably ~~xxxx~~ be understood on the revolutionary left as simple adherence to and endorsement of WF on the part of other comrades. The whole procedure adopted by WF is ill-advised and liable to create questions and misunderstandings as to whether, on the one hand, WF is interested in regroupment, leading to an essentially new organisation, or whether it simply wishes to assimilate potential "regroupees" into itself. We do not, of course, deny the legitimacy of WF's aspiration to recruit people: we would emphatically reject any attempt to do so under the guise of a regroupment.

It is in this light that our reply must be seen. We do ~~xxxx~~ consider that there is sufficient agreement on political guidelines to organise some practical steps, most of which are mentioned in the Open Letter, towards a possible regroupment. Moreover, we wish to emphasise that our not (2) signing the Letter reflects the seriousness with which we view the question, rather than any sectarianism on our part.

THE OPEN LETTER

We do not propose to go into detailed criticism of the introductory section of the Letter, but rather to concentrate upon the twelve points, since from the viewpoint of going forward with regroupment discussions they constitute the most important section. However, we find it necessary to state that the critiques of the major left groups are too superficial to provoke serious discussion from their members about the possibility of regroupment. This is a grievous fault in the Open letter, which ought to have as one of its two main functions precisely the stimulation of such discussion.

We would also add a few other comments. We hold that (on page 2) the CP is treated with smug, self-satisfied triviality (and if the "redundant" means anything, then also with inaccuracy), not only will the building of a revolutionary party involve splits and fusions on the revolutionary left, but also with sections of the CP and LP, as the Open Letter itself seems to pose the matter subsequently (on page 5).

We further hold that it is incorrect to criticise the IMG for "opportunist and evasive politics" over Ireland, because of its acceptance of the basis of the TOM, which does not include "solidarity positions. The basis of the TOM, i.e. Troops Out Now and Self Determination for the Irish People, is acceptable for united front activity. Of course, it is necessary to attempt to win individuals and participating organisations to a fuller position; but it is not necessary to try to make participation in a UF conditional on acceptance therefore. The drift to opportunism in the IMG is real and can be demonstrated in many ways, without obscuring the differences over TOM. Furthermore, in any analysis of the degeneration of the Trotskyist Left common methodological reasons must be investigated, and we would not exclude WF from that critique.

THE TWELVE POINTS.

In relation to the 12 points our disagreements lie with points 7) - the Labour Party- 8) -on the use of the GS slogan and ** -on women. We will attempt briefly to outline our differences on these points.

THE GENERAL STRIKE.

We would analyse that there is a long term tendency for a GS situation to develop in this country. This situation can be manifest in two distinct but related forms.

Firstly, situations can develop from below, in which struggles break out and escalate to a large extent outside the control of the national union bureaucracies, possibly as a response to a direct attack by the state (e.g. Pentonville 5) or around economic demands (e.g. to a very limited extent around struggles for thresholds).

This form of GS situation, or incipient GS, tends to push forward and bring out the second form as a response, viz for the national union bureaucracies to call strikes, not excluding a general strike, "from above", with the objective of co-opting the movements at the base and in so doing either perhaps extracting concessions from the ruling class or, in other cases, leading the working class into a crushing defeat.

The combined tasks of revolutionaries must include developing the class struggle as it is being fought to its furthest possible conclusions. It is particularly necessary to avoid putting forward utopian ultra-left schemas, divorced from and/or counterposed to the objective movement of the class, and its objectively determined preoccupations, since this can frequently act as a cop-out from dealing with the next essential concrete steps.

Unfortunately the use of the GS slogan has quite often served this latter function. Precisely because there is no organisation within the working class movement which has both the strength to initiate and co-ordinate a GS struggle and the political characteristics which would let it do so in an adequate way, sloganising about a GS frequently focuses on the demand that "the TUC must call a GS". This very frequently has the tendential effect of demobilising the class struggle, as for example when the IMG and WRP solemnly paraded their own small forces outside Congress House in Jan 74, to the neglect of real action of thousands of workers the previous day over the Shrewsbury 24. Furthermore, the demobilising effect of the GS slogan, wrongly used, is well understood by all sections of
~~xxxxxx~~

the TU bureaucracy: witness Joe Gornley's performance in Oct/Nov 73.

In the light of these considerations, what revolutionaries must do is to carry out systematic propaganda around the question of a GS as a form of struggle, the implications of a GS as a challenge to the bourgeois state, the level of propaganda the class needs for a GS, the desirability of representative forms of organisation of the Council of Action type, the class's historical experience of the use of the GS weapon. In the present period, this task of explanation and education must be carried out continuously. In specific, limited upsurges, however, our agitation must base itself on deepening and developing the immediate struggle, rather than an empty phrase-mongering about the virtues of a GS which would solve so many problems... were it not unattainable!

WHEN A GS SLOGAN?

There is only one type of situation in which small revolutionary groups without a mass base in the working class should use the GS slogan agitationaly; and that is when the general sharpening of social tensions place on the agenda the possibility of a rapidly escalating strike situation, tending to escape the strict control of the bureaucracy. Examples of such situations occurred in France during 1934-6 and in 1968, and also in Britain in July 72. In such situations, agitational use of the GS slogan by a revolutionary group can act to focus on the scope and implications of the struggle which the class is engaged in; situations in which the preparations for which the revolutionary has been propagandising become the next immediate steps to be taken by the class.

THEX LABOUR PARTY

Whilst rightly condemning the slogan "Labour to Power on a Socialist Programme" the Open Letter says that such tactics as pressing demands on the LP leadership and on Labour governments are necessary. Since this statement is given no justification, nor any elaboration, it is unclear why WF thinks these tactics are necessary, under what conditions, or with what scope.

Obviously revolutionaries make demands of a Labour government or any other government for that matter. In general such demands should flow from the campaigns that revolutionaries are involved in. They should not be seen as constituting, or shaped so as to constitute, a sort of overall programme which "we" demand the Labour Party should carry out. Furthermore, since the LP is widely regarded within the working class as representing the interests of that class, revolutionaries can and should argue that the LP can in part be judged, as a "representative" of the class, by the standard of whether or not it carries out those sections of its programme which would be of benefit to the working class movement. Of course, we should never allow the misunderstanding to creep in that, if it should carry them out then it would have to be judged adequate: rather, its usual inability to carry out even the useful parts of its own programme provided topical and concrete evidence of its inadequacy.

But, whenever we demand anything of the LP, or a Labour government, we need to point out that (in most cases) they are unlikely to concede such demands, and further we should emphasise why, in conditions of severe economic crisis, social democracy cannot, because of its commitment to gradualism and reformism, meet even the elementary needs of the workers. Any other approach would leave us trapped in the traditional exposure politics of British Trotskyists, and tend to create the illusion that all Labour needs to do is to "try harder" or "carry out their policies", in order for the needs of the working class to be met. Social democracy

will not be defeated by creating illusions in Labour's ability to carry out a programme which is in the interest of the proletariat.

Our objection, therefore, is not so much that WF's conception of 'demands on the LP' is necessarily wrong, but that as stated it is very imprecise and does not exclude very dangerous errors.

ON WOMEN.

We find in point #1 - "we must demand the socialisation of housework (as a mobilising class slogan)". What does this mean? It could be meant as an agitational slogan, in which case it is on the level of "abolish the bourgeois family" i.e. absurd ultra-leftism. On the other hand, it could be an attempt to raise, in an utterly inadequate way, important questions about how revolutionaries bring up topics relating to those aspects of socially necessary outside the system of market relationships, e.g. housework, child rearing.

We consider that the letter should have treated this question with the seriousness of other aspects of political activity, rather than producing a tokenistic meaningless phrase. It should have been raised specifically in reaction to the Working Women's Charter, and the demands there, which relate to partial socialisation of those tasks; and thus start to draw links and challenge the position of women in work and in the bourgeois family.

PRACTICAL STEPS

We suggest the following framework within which prospects of regroupment can be worked out:

1. A national joint discussion bulletin to be circulated to all members of the groups involved.
2. Liason between the groups in different areas of work.
3. Participating groups to write articles for WF. These to be acknowledged as from the groups concerned. All groups to maintain the right to independent publication.
4. All the above to take place within a time scale leading to a conference at which regroupment will take place if it has proved possible.

Revolutionary Marxist Current.

ADDENDUM A PERSONAL STATEMENT BY CHRIS MARSHALL

WF, in its issue No 74 of 26 Oct to 2nd Nov 1974 announced the existence of the Open Letter, and added my name to the list of signatories (which also included the WF editorial board and Mike Covell of the IS-LO, but no others). I understand that following the publication of this announcement cde Covell withdrew his signature, and have been informed that in any case his statement quoted in that issue of WF was for ~~xxxxxx~~ restricted circulation, not publication. So far as I am concerned, I was first approached by WF, with a view to signing the Letter in August 1974, and was involved in some of the preparatory work (an experience whose drawbacks are mentioned in the above statement). I stressed to WF throughout that I was not willing to sign the Letter unless there were other signatures from cdes representing serious forces within the revolutionary or working class movements.

This position was expressed more forcefully once the early drafts of the Letter were completely overhauled, indeed changed almost out of recognition by the WF NC at the end of Sept 1974. My clearly expressed position was, and remains, that the changes then agreed constituted a marked weakening of the Open Letter, both because the extended critiques of the left organisations (and in particular the IMG) was so shoddy, and because of the complete change in the character of the letter that was involved, the main thrust having been changed from a concentration on the ~~xxxx~~ basis for a new organisation through regroupment to a snug, self-satisfied reiteration of WF's appreciations of other formations.

Nevertheless, in mid-october I wrote a document (Notes on Regroupment) aimed at a specific group of people (former member of the LOT tendency in the IMG) arguing that they ought to sign the Letter, in the belief that the addition of serious non-WF forces to the list of signatories would outweigh the manifest and manifold drawbacks of the WF text. Since the other cdes had not been involved in any way in the discussions round the Open Letter, and since they held that the inadequacies thereof precluded their adding their signatures to the Letter, the necessary signatures were never forthcoming. The only sense in which I ever "supported" the Open Letter is precisely that outlined above: serious signatures outside WF would outweigh the deficiencies of the text itself, and enable me to sign, nothing else was ever communicated to WF, and the necessary signatures were never forthcoming.

RMC cdes in Liverpool have, correctly, argued that my position was internally contradictory, in as much as I admitted - indeed, deplored - the inadequacies of the Letter, which tended to exclude additional signatures, yet simultaneously argued for a large number of signatures. I am now satisfied that my then position was incorrect, and that I ought not to have ever argued for signatures from non-WF forces. The procedure outlined in the above statement would have been the correct one. In any case, WF never had any justification for adding my signature alone to the Letter, and did not consult me before so doing. None of this augurs well for future collaboration,
.....

REMARKS BY SOME "SOUVARINISTS"

We found cde M. Thomas's "Some Problems of Regroupment" an astonishing and disturbing document. It makes a number of points which we feel need answering.

1. The RMC's "fear" of assimilation is, in fact, a determination to clarify the nature of the differences between the organisations involved in the regroupment project, and to resolve them through a process of discussion and joint activity. Cde Thomas feels that there are insufficient differences between WF and RMC to justify their separate existence. He is, of course entitled to his opinion; but if we had felt the same way, we should have joined WF on leaving the IMG. Cde Thomas's view makes the whole process of discussions about regroupment seem completely redundant, especially since WF "do not have all the time in the world". If there is no "enormous difference between joining an organisation and regrouping with it", why did WF not issue a "Letter for ~~xxxxxx~~ recruiting to WF" rather than a regroupment letter?

We entered into the regroupment discussions because the differences between ourselves and WF seemed to be small enough to be bridged through a process of discussion and joint work. This seems simple enough to us; if it remains "sophistry" to cde Thomas he will just have to live with it.

In cidentally, the second letter to the ex IS-LO says that we entered the regroupment discussions in the expectation that fusion would take place. This, comrades, is news to us. We entered the discussions in the hopethat regroupment would take place, and the belief that it could; but we did not necessarily expect it. It might also have occurred to WF that the RMC would want to say something about the ex IS-LO's desired status as "observers" in the discussions.

2. We accept the slight factual inaccuracy about our "Reply" to the Open Letter (the amended version of which is now available) in that we acknowledge that some non-WF cdes made some amendments to it. Nevertheless, nobody in WF has, to us, asserted that any part of the letter is not WF's position.

3. The RMC did not, of course imagine, that the CP or any section of it, would be involved in this regroupment. But we insist that if the Trotskyist groups were to be analysed at some length (if not with any depth) then it was essential to analyse the state of the CP. In any case, it is absurd, unfortunately, to describe the CP as "~~xxxxxxx~~" "redundant".

4. We accept the inaccuracy over the IMG and TOM. This has been corrected in the second draft of our "Reply".

5. Cde Thomas says that TH argued that the imposition of WF's position on entry work in the LP would be an "obstacle to regroupment" in Bolton. Then on the next line he says that TH "proposed to reject regroupment on the basis of a different assessment of tactical prospects locally". By what magical (or dialectical?) process does an "obstacle" become a reason for complete rejection! Did TH "reject" the idea of regroupment at the November meeting? No! He merely indicated one of the many problems it would face.

An honest reporting of events and discussions is a precondition of the regroupment process.

6. Cde Thomas derides cde Moriarty's statement that a period of joint work was needed to evaluate the real nature of our differences. It seems to us the CDe Moriarty's approach has been fully justified by, for instance, the differences that have arisen between us on the Birmingham Bombings. In any case, cde Thomas's assertion that "the sectarian logic is clear" and the disgusting parody of cde Moriarty's views which he then presents, represents a totally unacceptable method of "argument" in any discussions between revolutionaries.

7. Cde Thomas reports that cde TL asked about the disagreements on method. So he did. What a crime! When did the question of method become taboo?. And who in the RMC is supposed to have said that the RMC has the "right method", but WF have the "right conclusions"?

If cde Thomas believes that the method of the RMC is the same as that of John Ross and Geoff Hodgson, he had better say so openly rather than by means of stupid "jokes" about "infidels" and "true ~~xxxx~~ Believers".

8. Would cde Thomas like, some time, to explain just what he means by "general muttering and, a feeling I wasn't being quite polite"? (in raising the differences at the Nov RMC meeting) We find it difficult to respond to this kind of "political" statement, and we find it difficult to understand why cde Thomas should feel it worth discussing anything (let alone regroupment) with a bunch of people who waste their energy meditating on a political methodology that they cannot even defend.

9. The RMC believes that regroupment may be possible. We do not believe, and never have believed that it was inevitable. Is it really true, comrades, that we have never said what the possible obstacles to regroupment were?

10. We feel that there are potentially serious differences on the question of Ireland, the Labour Party and (yes!) the question of method. Every time that a document such as "some Problems of Regroupment" is written, a new obstacle is created.

11. WD's polemics against other tendencies are generally characterised by a pompous, "holier than thou" attitude, which seems likelier to close the ears of the comrades involved rather than engage them in honest, open discussion. Does cde Thomas think that his "warning" that the RMC's "Souvarinism" will lead to "passive ~~xxxx~~ pessimistic, parochialist, propagandist, coterie-type politics" is going to lead us to cry - "Goodness yes! We'd better join WF right away! That will save us from degeneration!"

*2. We will continue with joint work and discussions in the hope that these will lead to a regroupment and a new stronger revolutionary organisation. We will not be stampeded ~~inxx~~ this process by dishonest and frivolous documents.

The reactions of revolutionaries to the Birmingham Bombings are so important as a demonstration of good and bad politics (Ireland, as always, is the 'acid test' for revolutionaries) that it is necessary to dwell on the issues at length.

It was disappointing that WF should apply a guillotine to such a crucial debate before it had barely begun. ~~With~~ The decision not to print LW's reply was hard to understand.

We would like to take up the question of WF's replies to criticisms of their handling of the B. bombings. We would criticise both the substance of these replies and the methods of debate used in them.

1. The reply to LW starts with what appears to be a non.sequitur. On examination what seems to be the point is that because the editorial was 'illegal', that in itself implies that the editorial was OK and did its duty in defending those involved in the Irish struggle. We question the logic. However, this could be ignored as a mere inattention were not similar reasoning adduced in MT's reply to the 6 points viz. that our differences in TOM over the solidarity position are now liquidated since any solidarity position is now illegal. In other words, the bourgeoisie settles our political differences for us! (Presumably if both the RMC and WF wre banned organisations, they would no longer have any differences at all, since they would both be unable to lawfully express any opinion whatever.)
2. This relates also to the tendency WF has for relying on the IRA for political defence. The Provies themselves publicly denounced the bombings. O'Connell condemned the bombings - so it's alright for WF to do the same. This is similar daft logic as in point 1 above. (It derives partially from WF's moralist conception of the IRA - but that is another point to be developed later.)
3. Then the question of your attributing the bombings to the IRA. You have finally coughed up the admission that you were wrong to do this. Pity you didn't admit the mistake in your reply to LW especially since he had raised that point.
4. Instead you accused LW of taking the position that the IRA could not possibly have done the bombings and then denounced him for being evasive! He doesnt take that position. Like the RMC he took the position that it was by no means certain that it was the IRA. That there were other possibilities. That the other possible candidates would gain more from the bombings. But these considerations wre not a central feature of LW's letter, anyway.
5. Now a more crucial issue. Do we condemn the bombings ... if they were IRA inspired? We take our particular stand from the general position of 'unconditional but critical support'. In practice the unconditionality of our support comes to the fore in specific circumstances, in others the criticism would be foremost. When we are A/ dealing with the Irish struggle in an agitational manner, before as wide a section of the class as we can address which had not come to a position of support for the Irish struggle, in circumstances when that struggle was under the most intensive of witchhunts then we would moderate our criticism in favour of our support. Conversely, B/ if we were dealing with the Irish struggle in a propagandistic manner to an audience already committed to the Irish struggle and when there were no other constraints or diversions then we would moderate our support in favour of criticisms of that struggle. And a whole range of permutatons in between. Now, the editorial fell into

of the people at whom we are directing our propaganda. And as LW says, it equates the effect of the concrete with the effect of the general upon popular consciousness. But let's develop these points in relation to the question of violence. "Revolutionary socialists have a duty to denounce and condemn this indefensible and senseless slaughter. Do they really? On what grounds? Duty to whom? What is an indefensible and senseless slaughter? Our unscrutinised and urgent need to rush to condemn would suffer a slight setback if we began to answer these questions. Yet we have to answer them before we rush into print. Otherwise we merely act as the mouthpiece of the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie has already implanted a series of conceptions about violence into the consciousness of all of us. In a situation like Birmingham these ideas, sleepers, are ready to be activated. In this situation to blunder about the ideological minefield in the elephantine manner of WF is extremely irresponsible. It is not a question of being 'slippery', 'evasive' or 'tricky' (as WF described LW). It is a question of understanding the role of agitation and propaganda and meeting the requirements of the situation. By all means condemn this bombing of civilians. But only if you set your condemnation into the context of those occasions when you actually support the bombing of civilians. Your headline would then be: 'We support the bombing of civilians in a situation like Tet but this was not the right tactic in Brun'*; or 'Bomb the British Army not Birmingham pubs'; or 'H62 yes --Brun no'; or 'bomb the seamy-not working class pubs' or 'bomb the Brit workers only when that aids the Irish struggle'. These would all be ideologically acceptable; some are necessary revolutionary positions. But of course WF would never have printed them around the Brun bombings. But to say you condemn such and such a species of violence without at the same time saying that you support other species of violence is dishonest and evasive. And all it leaves you doing is confirming the conceptions on violence that have been driven in by bourgeois mystification. If it's true that you can't adopt headlines like these above in the circumstances of the Brun Bombings then it is best to confine such a discussion of violence and your consequent assessment of the BB to a propaganda article or whatever. And of course make your agitational point the defence of the violence of the oppressed. But WF take the worst option. Simply to condemn the BB without any explanation of when and what type of violence is OK. This is truly moralistic. In your definition -- "setting up abstract principles" and putting them above the needs of the class struggle". What are the needs of the class struggle? First and foremost to break with chauvinism in the working class. In a situation like the BB that means a) supporting republicanism b) supporting the violence of the oppressed against that of the oppressor. Then explaining the bombings in the context of these two ideas.

Instead WF continues to hold to abstract principles. For example the reply to LW seems to equate the BB or republican bombings in British cities with imperialist bombings of peaceful cities! The reply to Rose and Hains poses the Irish struggle as "a Question of nation against nation" (not even oppressed nation v oppressor). It further equates Bloody Sunday with Birmingham on the grounds that both were 'indiscriminate slaughter' of civilians. In fact neither were 'indiscriminate slaughter'. One was a carefully calculated act of terror by the British Army. The other was an act of terror, possibly by republicans probably not carefully calculated; but it never was indiscriminate because it was articulated into centuries of oppression of one nation by another. We doubt whether any killing of any kind is indiscriminate; as we exist we understand every nation in history to be located in material existences. Certainly we do not have a morality which determines our actions in distinction from a concept of political necessity as WF appear to do ("it should be condemned both morally and for being a political liability"). Similarly we assure WF that we have no principle we doubt whether WF really did have the necessary information by which to evaluate the effect of the bombings on the population of N.Ireland, or on the republican cause -- at least not so quickly.

a class A/ situation. And so the line of the agitation should be to rally to the support of the elements in the Irish struggle most under attack. Not because we are "principled", "non-hypocritical", "firm", "unflinching", "unbending", "intransigent", "r...r...revolutionary" etc. But because that is the politically necessary task in that situation. In other circumstances another response would be necessary.

But, says WF, we made it clear that we supported the IRA in general while condemning this particular action. We found this clarity most unclear. Let's illustrate this with reference to another revolutionary paper; Socialist Worker. Readers of this paper will often find a front page article denouncing the individual(!) terrorism of the IRA (for every soldier the IRA kills there are 10 more to replace him) The fact that there is a small inside-back-page article reiterating that SW supports the IRA does not have a big impact on this reader who has now inevitably come to regard the IRA as a wild bunch of individual terrorists. Why? Because the front page has done its job in confirming the readers in their already ideologically worked out assumptions about the nature of the IRA. That it is a bad thing etc.

The WF editorial was less crude, of course. The WF comrades point out that a) 4/5ths the editorial was 'pro IRA' b) WF has devoted much more space to denouncing UUV UDA British Army violence etc

But to think that this 'revolutionaries version' of BBC type "balance" answers all fears is to misconceive some obvious features of human class consciousness. Consciousness is not some instant computer with infinite retrieval capacity. It's not a vacuum where every idea is entered in an even, ordered and interrelated manner without relation to the circumstances of the recipient. How people receive ideas is determined by how they are presented, how they relate to other ideas that are being presented, how these relate to their past /immediate/ future circumstances, activities etc.

OK. Now consider the reader of WF - maybe a similar person to the militant described in the reply to LW who attempted to hit someone who sold him a copy of WF with a pro-IRA article. Our militant, swamped by hysteria, emotionalism, reactionary ideology, workmates' hostility etc that is generated around the bombings and being confused by these forces picks up his/her essential reading - WF - to 'see what it has to say'. In this instance the paper has a certain credibility ~~xxxxx~~ precisely because it has always supported the Irish struggle. Right off this militant sees the headline, the first key sections, the emotive language, the photo. What is the effect? To contribute to all the pressures that are on this militant rather than to combat them.

This is so elementary. Yet WF chooses to believe that this process does not occur * and that it is the propaganda point in the rest of the editorial and the general line previously outlined in back numbers that are going to act decisively upon the consciousness of our unfortunate militant. To think this is to misunderstand the nature of agitation and propaganda and the uneven nature of consciousness. It is to make huge assumptions about the level

* Fortunately in practice on other issues WF does seem to understand the processes at work. On the question of the EEC for example, WF realises that in the actual situation, undoubtedly formally correct positions such as 'for a united socialist Europe' when put forward as apart of a withdrawal campaign are as nothing to the overall CHAUVINIST effect of any such campaign. Here as always it is a case of the objective situation and the relationship between a small revolutionary group and the gargantuan weight of bourgeois ideology affecting the political effect of your agitation.

principles! Solidarity with the Irish struggle is not a 'principle'; it is a 'correct position'.

In fact, the reply to LW is positively swash with morality. Partly because morality in the context of the WF position on BB becomes a cover for backward tendencies in the direction of chauvinism. Partly because WF's attitude to the IRA is moralistic because of their political assessment of the IRA. For WF the IRA is a historical anachronism with no future. Dislocated from any real social forces it becomes, therefore, for WF a sort of golden-haired knight valiantly fighting the dragon of British Imperialism. And must be judged by a sort of gallant morality. Thus in relation to imperialism it has a "better and more honourable record precisely because it is motivated by values different...". O'Connell "the guerrilla leader" has "the guts to face the probability that it was the work of the republicans". And if the republican movement fails to live up to the standards required of it by WF then it must be roundly condemned for this failure. Only thus can we understand the distinction WF makes between Brun and Tot when the Vietnamese NLF systematically shelled civilian targets. Or the distinction between the callous Brun (republican) bombers and the innocent British working class which apparently has no responsibility for the oppression of the Irish people, despite not having lifted a finger in support of the Irish people in the 150 years of its existence while gaining marginal benefits from the oppressive relationship.

Finally the methods you use in replying to LW and Rose and Haines. They are not acceptable for a newspaper of a serious revolutionary organisation:

a) You were unfraternal

(1) LW's letter was not an "outing". It was a careful serious polemic. It was not "IMC sniping". It raised real issues or else why use a whole page on it.

(**) Its not good practice to diminish a comrade by referring to him as "White"

(111) the reply is unnecessarily sarcastic in places.

b) You distorted what he said. He did not see "Denouncing hypocrisy as the only duty here and now". He said "the first duty of revolutionaries is to distinguish between the violence of the oppressed and the violence of the oppressor". Its true that the treatment of the BB in the Rd Weekly was evasive in the manner you describe; but you use this partial truth as the basis of your whole polemic against LW's Letter;

c) You use innuendo:

it is "sniping" by a member of the IMC not very happy with the way the line of that organisation has wobbled on the issue of solidarity"...

d) Your criticisms of LW's letter became excessively personalised, hysterical and slanderous. White 'wiggles' he lacks the necessary 'guts and seriousness', he acts the 'tough guy', he's a 'vicarious romantic sympathiser', he's clever and slippery', he repeats banalities aren't like.

The 'healy mouthed' Rose and Haines are at one and the same time nihilistic terrorists and bloodthirsty Irish chauvinists whose logic tends to advocate wholesale slaughter of the British working class.

Are you serious, comrades from WF?

RMC

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEBATE ON WAGES FOR HOUSEWORK.

Although this paper is an individual contribution, in the sense that it has not been discussed, nor voted upon by the group, it should be stated that the RMC is completely opposed to the demand for wages for housework (w for h). We regard it as a reactionary demand, which can, in no way, represent the interests of women in their struggle against oppression; and stands in direct contradiction to the other demands of the Women's Movement.

On this level, I am in general agreement with WF's opposition to the demand and its consequences for the Women's Movement, as outlined in WF 79. My major disagreements lie in the area of WF's alternatives.

I should also like, in passing, to mention that our comrades who attended the one day school on Women (WF) were disappointed with the general level of discussion, and in particular with the debate on w for h; the content of which was largely irrelevant to the main issues; and the conduct of which was, at times, offensive. Suffice it to say that political argument among revolutionaries consists of attacking ideas, not individuals. Further, while I think SM was correct to place the demand w for h in the "petty-bourgeois" political tradition, I regard it as outrageous political practice to discredit the demand and those who made it on the totally inaccurate grounds that it is "corporatist" or "neo-fascistic", (because it is the state who would pay the wage, on this count we could also label the demand for nurseries and free contraception as a corporatist demand).

THE RATIONALE BEHIND THE DEMAND FOR W FOR H.

Those who have written in support of w for h have raised a number of important points relating to the condition of women in the family which revolutionaries must understand, and have an adequate answer to (many don't and haven't). Some of the points are:

a) Women, in their role in the family, as producers and servicers of the present and future generation of workers, perform socially necessary labour for capitalism. Through the nuclear family, and the relegation of women to it, the ruling class is relieved of responsibility for the servicing of the workforce, which is privatized within the family.

b) In this situation, capitalism has created a vast pool of necessary, but unpaid labour, which is likened to a situation of "slavery". (It is, of course, not strictly true that the capitalist does not pay for servicing. Wages are not calculated on the basis of what is necessary only for the subsistence of individual workers. Although the women is not paid directly).

c) They correctly analyse that part of "trap" of women in the family is their economic dependence on men, and that greater economic independence increases women's potential for greater power. They therefore, attempt to solve this, incorrectly, by w for h. The question of economic dependence is a real one, which I do not think we have the answer to.

d) The demand is also designed to gain "recognition" for the socially necessary labour housewives perform; and to overcome the idea that housework represents "natural" fulfillment, labours of love etc. (The demand has the effect of labelling housework as feminine work, as discussed later).

THE BASIS FOR OPPOSING THE DEMAND W FOR H.

Opposition to this demand, as with others, has produced its fair share of "world truisms" by the theoreticians on the left. I do not think it adequate to oppose the demand for w for h in the simple sentence; "W for H institutionalises housework", as if we have automatically said something terribly profound. Housework is already

"institutionalised" as the work and responsibility of women. And the fact that many working class women have always gone out to work and comprise 40% of the labour force has not altered that institutionalisation significantly. Similarly, we could argue that any payment made to workers under capitalism institutionalises wage slavery. We want to abolish housework and the nuclear family and "women's role", similarly we want to abolish wage slavery and the relegation of the working class to it. We do, however support workers in their struggle for higher wages and better conditions etc - their right to a better deal in a bourgeois contract. Why do we oppose w for h? Both are "democratic" demands. What is it that differentiates the demand of wages for housework, from the "democratic" demands of other workers which we support?:

- we oppose the perpetuation of a sexual division of labour which is not in the interest of women, nor of the class as a whole we want to strengthen women, not the role of housewife.

~~we~~ we want to strengthen working class combativity. As revolutionaries, we must consider what is the nature of the struggles which could possibly come out of the gaining of such a demand? Only those which would further entrench women as "home makers" (as WF correctly point out) and further exacerbate the sexual polarisation within the class which weakens its collective ability to struggle, This would happen in individual relationships within the nuclear family, the man sees the woman as paid to produce his clean shirts etc, as he is paid to produce commodities within the factory, as well as in general relations within the class.

These points, stated as they are necessarily briefly and inadequately, seem to me to be at the "heart of the matter" and those which I would like to have seen discussed at the WF's school. In this sense, I think WF have expended much wasted breath and effort in a dispute over whether housework is "trivial" "drudgery" etc all of which has tended in the direction of imbuing certain tasks with inherent characteristics, which they usually do not possess. ~~FB asks us; "would it not be a giant step forward to just dust round after ourselves?"~~ The nature of work and how we see it is socially determined. FB asks us; "would it not be a giant step forward to just dust round after ourselves?" As "giant steps" go, frankly, no.

WHAT WE POSE AS THE ALTERNATIVE TO THE W FOR H DEMAND.

As was stated earlier, this is the area of my main criticism of WF position. In FB's paper "Reply to S.A", I think the nature of consciousness is ~~mis~~ misunderstood. FB writes:

"... perhaps POWC and Ros Gains have only just discovered the fact (that housework is work -SL) but women of the oppressed class have known about it for ~~many~~ a thousand years." and later

"Women know they work in the family and are exhausted by this work, they don't need to read pamphlets telling them this..."

It may be true that women recognise that they perform tasks in the home and that they labour and get tired, ~~(they do not recognise that they work, in the sense that they do not understand:~~

- a) themselves as part of a labour force used by capitalism
- b) the social and economic functions and significance of the work that as a collective group they do in relation to capitalism (because ~~they~~ of the privatisation of their work, it has no exchange value).
- c) the identification of interests they have with the working class workforce (even at the basic level of solidarity). There are some exceptions to these of course. They most certainly do need to read "pamphlets" (as do other workers) telling them this. Unless the doctrine of spontaneism is to be adopted in relation to women.

being the way in which wives are used against husbands in strikes etc. Many of the independent struggles of the working class have taken place outside the factory. Historically the working class have been strongest where their base in the community has been strongest.

No one denies that women need to get out of the home, but many can't/ don't want to work in factories. Women can and must also organise where they are, and if that is in the community, it is as necessary for revolutionaries to be involved in developing such struggles, as for them to develop struggles in factories. (Obviously our tiny resources on the left is a major problem, so is our economism).

Community struggles has become almost a dirty word on the left. Partly because the great difficulties in working in the community (revolutionaries are even less adept at this than they are at working in factories). Partly because none of us are free from the economism, which provides us with the "sneaking suspiscion" that unless bona fide proletarians in a factory are involved its not really a working class struggle. And partly because there is a tendency not to distinguish between populism and working class politics e.g. community struggles become associated with noise level over middle class struggles etc *subverts*

If WF are seriously suggesting the shift of women to the factories as the "way forward", as their paper implies, then they are part of the problem, not the solution. We must accurately assess the situation with which we are dealing, Revolutionaries must be consistently trying to break down the contradiction between those in the community and the factory. If we do not we have effectively left that field of play to the ruling class and its ideology.

The other facet of WF's alternative is ~~xxxxxxx~~ "socialisation of housework". The RMC's views on this as a "class mobilising slogan" have already been expressed to WF (see the Reply to the Open Letter). Suffice it to say that we support "socialisation of housework" as a slogan as we would support the equally vague slogan " down with capitalism". As a general orientation, or ultimate goal it is of course, correct. But, to my knowledge, WF have never defined what it means. (Capitalism could conceivably do without the nuclear family and socialise housework - in for example - labour camps. This is obviously not what we are aiming for. Is it then, the ultimate state in a communist society, given a high level of mechanisation and social responsibility?). The situation is not clarified by the production of "world historic truths" from WF such as:

" The only way we even begin to do this (do away with the bourgeois home) is to socialise the role imposed on women, and by transforming capitalism into socialism. The working class creates the possibilities for us to "throw off this yoke" (FB)

I do not think it unjustified to ask WF, not just for myself, but for those who read their paper - how does one use ~~xxxxx~~ "socialisation of housework" as a basis ~~xxx~~ from which to organise? In some ways I am reminded of the "maximum" demands that bedevilled the 2nd International, and can only hope that WF's do not have a "minimum" programme for the women's movement, which will suffice until socialism.

It seems to me that the demands of the Charter are a much more realistic basis from which to work. While, of course, it does not represent a "magic formula", it can be used in all our areas of intervention ~~xx~~ and to fuse in part, the many questions which the oppression of women raises. (A further paper on the Charter is being produced. This paper is aimed specifically at the wfor h debate in WF.

Sue Lincoln

REPLY TO THE RMC'S "REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION"

The following is a reply to a letter from Liverpool RMC requesting clarification on a number of statements reported to have been made by me at a WF southern region meeting on 2nd February. It has been approved by the WF Secretariat. Martin Thomas 26-2-75

On the RMC's points, one by one:

1) "That cd. Marshall's recent activities were "irrational", and that he was the "leader" of the RMC".

Yes, we do believe CM's recent activities are irrational. He has withdrawn from all organisational relations with WF, in practice since December 1974, formally since mid-January. Although he accepted membership of the WF Editorial Board and an invitation to attend London WF branch meetings, he has never attended either. He has even refused discussion with WF. Just a few days ago CM contacted me once again to fix up a discussion. Why the change from the previous attitude of refusing discussion, we do not know.

About CM being the "leader of the RMC": at the February 2nd meeting I quoted CM's own remarks in discussion with me. I had expressed the view that some step or other of the RMC's would be a block to regroupment. CM replied: "That depends on the leadership". "What do you mean?", I asked. "Basically", he replied, "it means me". CM has made similar remarks to me on other occasions and to other WF comrades, notably P. Longman and P. Smith.

I do not necessarily share CM's estimate of his being the deciding voice in the RMC (more on this later). However, it is clear that in terms of being the dominant ideological influence (and that is basically what one means by 'leadership' in a Trotskyist organisation), CM is the leader of the RMC. The principal documents of the Left Opposition Tendency, fore-runner of the RMC; the documents leading to the foundation of the RMC and its adopting the perspective of regroupment with WF; all were written by CM. The other main document to come out of the RMC, the Liverpool resignation letter, acknowledges a considerable ideological debt to CM.

At the February 2nd meeting I argued that our attitude must be to say that CM's irrational behaviour should not be allowed to hinder regroupment. (I stressed that we do not hold the RMC collectively responsible for CM's behaviour). I hope the RMC cds. agree.

2) "That RMC were hesitant and/or backward on the question of the EEC."

I said at the meeting that, as far as I could see, the most substantial political disagreement between WF and (some) RMC cds. was on the question of the EEC. Cd. Pete Cresswell, in a discussion with me in November 1974, expressed the (tentative) view that Trotskyists should support withdrawal from the EEC. CM later told me that this view was not just cd. Cresswell's, but was quite widespread in Liverpool RMC. Cd. J. Taylor has also said to me that he agrees with the IMG on the EEC. Cd. EK, at the February 2nd meeting, said that she thought the RMC was coming closer to WF's position. Good.

3) "That RMC were 'dishonest' on the question of selling WF."

I did not say the RMC were 'dishonest'. I quoted reports from Liverpool WF that Liverpool RMC were not in practice selling WF on any great scale. I also quoted the fact that RMC cds in Bolton and Manchester generally do not sell WF either. (Cds. associated with RMC in Brighton, in Glasgow (until recently), and cd. JT in London, have, however, been selling WF).

4) "That RMC are merely a bunch of individuals".

I quoted a conversation with cd. C. Cornthwaite, ex-Bolton RMC, now in London. CC refused to work with WF in London. I asked him why. He said he was fed up with small Trotskyist sects. I asked, what did he imagine the RMC was? "A group of friends who had got together to work in the Anti-Fascist Committee", he replied.

I made it clear that I did not hold the RMC collectively responsible for CC's opinions. It is, however, WF's opinion - expressed by me at the November 1974 RMC meeting - that the RMC does not have any principled basis for existence as a distinct political

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tendency, separate from WF.

5) "That the RMC were 'stalling' (.sic) on the question of regroupment, and had not kept to the 'original time scale'".

It is a fact that, over four months after the Liverpool RMC cds. left IMG, and over six months since discussions towards regroupment started, we are no nearer establishing precisely what political disagreements RMC cds. have with WF.

It is a fact that CM's Notes on Regroupment proposed a time scale leading to fusion in February 1975. The WF Steering Committee proposals of 26-10-74 proposed a shorter time scale. As we understood it, those proposals had been approved in general by the RMC meeting of 17-11-74, with the reservation that perhaps the time scale might be a bit longer. Nevertheless, despite repeated proposals from WF for a date for the agreed-on joint pre-conference, it was not until yesterday (25-2-75) that we received any response from the RMC.

It is a fact that since the RMC meeting of 17-11-74 we have received not one single new contribution from RMC cds. towards the Joint Discussion Bulletin, nor a single controversial contribution for the WF paper, bar JT's & CM's letter on the Birmingham bombings.

It is a fact that, although Ireland is cited by CM in his "Notes on Regroupment" as one important possible area of disagreement between WF and RMC, and the question of women as another in the Liverpool RMC draft reply to the Open Letter, RMC cds. have raised no criticisms (indeed, no distinctive opinions of any sort) at the schools on those questions to which they have been invited.

It is a fact that recently joint work has shown no tendency towards closer cooperation; indeed, in some cases, just the opposite, (e.g. CM's activities cited above).

Taking those facts together with the facts cited above on selling WF, I asserted that the RMC had been stalling. It may be that the fixing of a date for a pre-conference is an indication that we are getting underway again with some speedy progress towards fusion. I hope so.

6) "That RMC indulged in unnecessary semantics".

It was in fact cd. Chris Taylor of Brighton WF, not me, who said that the RMC did tend to indulge in verbal nit-picking. However, we agree with Chris.

Having responded to the RMC's points, we would like to put the following questions to the RMC cds. We do not wish to indulge in nit-picking ourselves; but we feel that for Trotskyists speaking to Trotskyists, diplomacy is not called for; it is better to state problems bluntly, even if by that method one risks offending sensitive souls.

1) The following are the most important political questions on which the RMC cds. have on occasions expressed differences with WF. Can RMC cds. state which differences they consider to be outstanding, and how they think we should deal with them?

a) Ireland and permanent revolution. This question was put on the agenda for the day school of 18th January, and CM was invited to present his views. As you will know, he refused to do so. However, SM presented WF's position with a view to a discussion. We have had no response from the RMC.

b) Vietnam; and

c) China; and

d) the Middle East. On all these questions WF's positions are available in print. At a London WF meeting on the Chinese Revolution, CM made a number of criticisms of WF on that question. It would seem to us that on all these three questions full discussion is not a precondition for fusion.

e) Women's Liberation. A school on the question was held on 22nd February, and some sharp differences within WF were debated. RMC cds. present at the meeting will have the relevant documents, besides those printed in WF paper. We would suggest RMC cds. contribute to that discussion if they feel that RMC, as RMC, has important differences

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with the WF majority view on these questions, or indeed if they as individuals wish to intervene. We do not think regroupment need be slowed down on this account.

f) General Strike; and

g) the Labour Party. These questions have been discussed in local WF-RMC meetings and in my "Notes on the Mass Struggle". It is our view that there is a high measure of agreement, and further clarification will best come from common activity rather than from juggling with generalities.

h) the Troops Out Movement. The question of whether we should press for an explicit solidarity position in TOM is now not practical, since such a position would be illegal. Our present policy, which we consider to be consistent with our previous approach, is to concentrate on arguing for: (i) TOM to campaign against the Jenkins law; (ii) TOM to prepare for relief activity in the event of full-scale civil war in Ireland. Do RMC cds. disagree?

i) The E.E.C. If it is the case, as cd. EK stated, that RMC cds are coming over to a position near WF's, then there is no problem here; if, however, some RMC cds. favour the position of advocating withdrawal from the EEC, then that is probably the most thorny political problem in relation to regroupment.

2) CM, in discussion with two comrades of London WF (P.Longman and P.Smith), has repeatedly expressed the view that WF's internal regime is that of a bureaucratic sect: "Sean Matgamna's fan club". This view is in contradiction with CM's written opinion (not publicly retracted) that WF does have a reasonably democratic internal life.

A number of RMC cds have had opportunities to study WF Internal Bulletins, and also to observe a fair amount of the internal life of WF in recent months. Do RMC cds. believe WF is a bureaucratic sect? If so, why? Are they in doubt on this point? If so, how should we best go about resolving the doubt?

As for ourselves: I, and other WF comrades, naturally object to the idea that we are mindless "fans" of Sean Matgamna or anyone else. Our surmise as to what lies behind CM's allegations is the following. CM tends to think of the RMC as his "fiefdom" - not in the sense of it being a hard organised grouping which he directs, but in the sense of his being the 'great thinker' of the RMC. He fears that in a fused WF/RMC he would not have the same 'great thinker' status.

3) What is the attitude of Liverpool RMC to the cases of cds. CM and CC who have refused to work with WF; or the Bolton and Manchester cds. who in practice have scarcely done so; or the statement (according to our information) by cd. Mike Luft to WF cd. Sue Arnall that he is against regroupment?

Our frank opinion is this. Inside the RMC there are a number of comrades, mostly in Liverpool, who are seriously in favour of regroupment and seriously working towards it. There are a number of other comrades, such as CC, CM, or ML, whose attitude to regroupment is at best equivocal.

We said before the RMC meeting of 17-11-74 that, alongside regroupment, we would be fighting for the specific positions of WF, and thus aiming to recruit individuals to WF. As RMC cds. may know, we argued specifically with cd. CM for him to join WF - to which he replied that he had no objection in principle, but thought that the cause of regroupment would be better served by him being outside WF. We have to say now, in view of CM's recent record of irrational behaviour, that we would not be in favour of CM joining WF as an individual.

However, certainly the best thing from WF's point of view would be all the comrades associated with RMC joining with WF to form the fused INTERNATIONAL COMMUNIST LEAGUE. But in realistic terms it looks less and less likely to us that this will happen. In realistic terms, it looks to us as if there will be a division among the RMC cds., between those actively taking part in regroupment, and those not doing so. We do not rejoice in that division. It is nonetheless becoming increasingly clear.

What is the view of the RMC cds. as to the speed at which fusion should proceed after the joint conference? Our view is: at best, immediately; at least, within a matter of a few weeks. Otherwise we will drift away from regroupment, not towards it.

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It seems to me that the demands of the Charter are a much more realistic basis from which to work. While, of course, it does not represent a " magic formula", it can be used in all our areas of intervention ~~xx~~ and to fuse in part, the many questions which the oppression of women raises. (A further paper on the Charter is being produced. This paper is aimed specifically at the wfor h debate in WF.

Sue Lincoln