

This article is intended to be a short introduction to our basic ideas for people interested in joining or getting to know more about Big Flame; it is not a definitive article, but a part of an on-going debate inside Big Flame out of which we are beginning to build a new theory. We are concentrating here on what make Big Flame different from other left-wing groups. This is not to be sectarian: as Marxists we share many ideas about what we want to achieve and how to get it, with other groups. Why then have we formed a separate one? Many people are bewildered by the number of groups on the left; aside from the Labour and Communist parties, there are a whole variety of Trotskyists, Maoists, and anarchists. (1)

Saying this indicates the main reason for our separateness. The existing groups and parties all claim to be the product of a past revolutionary tradition, applying its principles to the present day. We are also part of a Marxist tradition, and owe much of our politics to similar groups revolutionary groups and movements which have preceded us, but although it is necessary to learn from the past, we are trying to construct a politics that fits advanced capitalism in the 1970's. Big Flame grew out of the wave of workers' students' and women's struggles that swept Europe and America in the late 1960's. Many new groups were influenced by these struggles - especially France, May '68 and Italy '69 - and developed separately from existing political tendencies. In Italy they dominate the revolutionary left, in France and Germany they are influential; in Britain, for various reasons, Big Flame was almost alone in forming a general political organisation out of this new period. We hope the following article will help to show what is different about our politics. It does not go into details of individual disagreements, but states broadly what we think is new and changed. Those who want more detailed criticisms and positions will have to see other papers.

(1) Trotskyists - I.S., W.R.P., I.M.G., W.F.
Anarchists - Solidarity, ORA, ASA
Maoists - CPB(ML), CFB etc.

The period between the two world wars was one of bitter class struggle, economic slumps and booms, mass unemployment, revolution and fascism. Neither the working class nor the ruling class were prepared to tolerate this situation again. Working people all over Europe, radicalised by the war and the struggle against fascism, were determined to impose a new order on society: everywhere Conservative and right-wing governments were swept away. But the ruling class were not swept away, and they also had their plans for a 'new order'. They knew that things had to change, so they were determined to make those changes work for them. The struggle and needs of working class people had to be funnelled into the institutions of capitalism else the system would break. Naturally they chose the former course: to restructure the system, to re-order the relations between the working class, capital and the state, so that it simultaneously increased the power and control of the ruling class, while giving working class people the illusion that the changes were working in their favour. So what were those changes?

THE ROLE OF THE STATE

Before the second world war, the state (parliament, the civil service, the bourgeois political parties, the structures of economic and regional management, the higher layers of the police, army etc) was almost solely a political structure. It provided a legal framework for the dominance of the capitalist class, passing laws to protect property and keep down working people. It made sure that the forces of law and order were mobilised when needed, and it provided a set of political institutions and processes, which attempted to act as a focus for channeling people's needs and demands.

Learning the lessons of the slumps, and taking the advice of people like the economist, Keynes, the state took on a new function - economic management, to stabilise the system and prevent crisis. To intervene, the State had to be not merely the guardian of capital's interests - but its collective brain, standing partially above the conflicting needs of different ruling-class groups, and directing capitalist development.

Its interventions took a number of forms. It set up agencies of economic planning, involving both employers and unions, to organise productive forces both nationally and regionally. They acquired control of sectors of the economy through nationalisation. This was not the socialist or radical measure that it seemed - in fact it was essential to stabilise capitalism. Not only did it rid private capital of largely unprofitable sectors (like coal, gas, electricity and transport) but but it enabled these industries to be used to subsidise private ownership, providing cheap coal and transport for example. Governments since

war have seldom attempted to nationalise anything which was highly profitable. But if they did, in order to increase state direction of capital's interests, it wouldn't make much, if any, difference to the workforce, as the miners and steelworkers have found out. The industries are still run by the usual bosses and to the usual standards of 'profitability'. The State also directs the economy through its allocation of capital for investment to private and 'public' industry. In the past decade this intervention has increased through control of wages by freezes and incomes policies, and to a lesser extent, control of prices, profits and dividends. In future, if there was to be an economic crisis, the State was determined to be in there, directing it, and using it to further capital's interests. The old fixed distinctions between the spheres of political and economic struggle were thereby abolished.

INDUSTRIAL POLICY

Before the war, every time capitalism had hit a crisis point, the employers used to respond by cutting wages and thereby reducing their costs. But this only made the crisis worse, as people couldn't afford the goods produced. The changes in the industrial policy of the ruling class after the war, revolved around the changed use of the wage. In future they would use wages as a means of driving the system forward. They tried to use worker's needs for a higher standard of living to develop a mass consumer industry, to promote competition, to stream-line the system and concentrate its capital resources in fewer hands. In ~~doing~~ doing so, they were creating the illusion that working class prosperity was tied to the prosperity of the system as a whole - 'you've never had it so good' and so on. Of course this didn't take into account the possibility that workers would demand more money than the system could pass on in price rises, because of international competition, and that workers might not accept the terms of work and productivity under capitalism. Working class insubordination and the continuing uncertainties of competition mean crisis, and a situation where wages have to be controlled to let capitalism survive. But the changed political use of the wage remains.

THE UNIONS

The next key aspect of industrial policy was the integration of the unions into the running of the system. The unions have never pretended to challenge the system. Their function has always been to negotiate the best rate of exploitation. But before the war, the unions had a role in carrying on the economic struggle, especially defending workers against wage cuts. They were regarded by the working class as necessary if limited instruments. After the war and the merging of economics and politics, the unions were seen by the ruling class as a major means of

making sure things went their way. They brought them onto shop committees, consulted them, and made them feel responsible for the system, hoping that they would spread this sense of responsibility to the 'national interest' on to the working class. So they became less and less able to carry out even their minimal functions, understanding none of the new political realities, and becoming ~~more~~ increasingly divorced from the shop floor. ~~xxxxxxx~~The 'trade-union function' was taken up largely by the shop-stewards movement. The more militant were less susceptible to the 'national interest' argument and closer to the aspirations of the shop floor. In the 50's, this shop-floor was prepared to delegate the struggle to the stewards, who in turn found that narrow, sectional and economic struggles would win. They used piece-work to twist money from the employers for any change they made - any aspect or principle of work organisation had a price. At the time the employers weren't concerned, as they were still using wage struggles as a ~~xxxxxxx~~ 'motor of development', and preferred to deal with stewards on the spot, rather than with the unions nationally.

THE STEWARDS

But the growing crisis in the 60's has meant that the stewards activities and the wage demands of the working class had to be blunted and tied to productivity strings. Work had to be speeded up, the workforce rationalised, piece-work replaced by measured day work, wage freezes and norms introduced - all to increase the rate of exploitation. The stewards movement has not met this challenge successfully. Wedded to the old and inadequate ways of fighting, they have retreated all the way, holding up operations at times, but seldom reversing them. In most places they have few answers to the needs of the struggle, in others they hold it back, forced to act as 'policemen' on the shop-floor in the new situation, ensuring that contracts and agreements are carried out. Their role is difficult to break, as they feel bound by procedure and the 'rules of the bargaining game'; what's more, many have become used to acting for their sections, often manipulating them on the way. The employers have seized on this, seeking to isolate the stewards more, incorporating them into joint committees, and working out supposedly 'scientific' work study

CHANGING COMPOSITION

The third major aspect of ruling class industrial policy has been to change the actual composition of the working class in industry. One of the great strengths of the working class in the previous era was its use of skill. The early labour movements were based on and led by skilled workers. They had pride in the job, and a consciousness of themselves as producers; the demand for 'worker's control' grew naturally from their situation, and they utilised the necessity of their skills to

gain a large degree of control of the work process, limiting capital's power. To break that control, the ruling class had to gradually de skill many sections of the work force, subordinating workers to machines they controlled, so they could dictate the pace and conditions of work. This process, which grew out of the assembly line and the car factories, has now spread to traditionally skilled jobs like ship building, and even further beyond, to many white collar ~~xxxxxx~~ jobs destroying the meaning of work for more and more people. The nature of this work has also meant that women and immigrant workers have become an important part of the de skilled workforce, bringing in a different consciousness to that of the white male worker and thus posing new forms of struggle. This is not merely a question of the changing balance of sectors within the class but a decisive change in its character and activity e.g. black immigrant workers have none of the "fair day's work for a fair day's pay" hangup. Forced to be shit workers, they reject the idea of job satisfaction, or responsibility at work. Women at work, because they have to do two jobs - one at home and one at work - can also bring in demands like socialised free childcare into the workplace and see how one week's wage rise is next week's price rise, because they have to do the shopping.

THE ROLE OF THE WORKING CLASS

None of these changes in capitalist strategy since the war were the result of a conspiracy by the capitalists they happened in response to the activity and organisation of the working class. It is important to see the role of the working class in determining the ways capital has had to develop to keep the wheels of production turning and the profits rolling in. This sense of working class initiative and response, which has not been developed fully in this article, is presented more clearly in another article "Industrial Working Class Struggles and the State, 1969 - 4."

THE SOCIAL FACTORY

Before and during the Second World War the working class struggled for better ~~xxx~~ social conditions, the government was forced to set up a provisional free health service, social security provisions and better education facilities in order to get the working class to fight Hitler, although many people saw themselves as fighting a war which was essentially anti-fascist. After the war the working class showed that they were clearly determined not to go back to the state of things in the thirties and many people saw the possibilities of beginning to build a socialist society, and were prepared to fight for it. The ruling class managed to contain and incorporate the militancy of the working class and their demands for cheap adequate housing, universal free education, free health facilities and adequate social security and unemployment benefit with the Labour Party's establishment of the Welfare State. This tied the social institutions which were established closer to ~~xx~~ the production system - the schools and colleges, the welfare system, the new housing estates, were all made subordinate to the needs of capitalist production. This was achieved by applying the mode of that production - standardisation and profitability - to social life outside the factory. (This is why we use the term social factory.)

Education is rigidly structured to reproduce the class system, any creative involvement beyond primary level is lost in a morass of exams, grading, streaming, and cramming. At a higher level, it becomes increasingly tied to business, dependent for money for ~~x~~ research - churning out the standardised robots the system requires. Hospitals are increasingly run on factory lines, it's cheaper that way: patients are treated like machines only not quite so valuable, babies are produced by induction to fit in with the day shift and the consultant's rounds - it's cheaper than employing more staff or providing better ~~xxxxxx~~ facilities. The welfare system also increases the power of the state; by introducing a comprehensive policy of national insurance, pensions, social security benefits it also made sure that the non productive sectors of the economy were under its control, influence and discretionary powers. With the introduction of tax credits the control will be tightened. Through the welfare system, social workers, health visitors and baby clinics, the welfare state has attempted to maintain the family as an instrument of capitalist production.

THE POST-WAR FUNCTION OF THE FAMILY

The ~~new~~ needs of industry and keeping costs down has also led to the breakdown of the old working class communities, putting people at the mercy of the planners who have created vast estates which through their very structure tend to isolate people and bind them tighter together inside the immediate family. The capitalist ideal of the family is as an institution which is the centre of social production itself, where women produce and service for free the human labour power that the factories and offices need, where the woman is therefore subordinate, dependent on the husband and accordingly often antagonistic to his struggle at work. It is the centre where obedience, self control and the repression ~~of~~ of sexual desire are perpetuated, where the children are disciplined for the cruel world of work and ~~a~~ competition under capitalism. The family also serves as the incentive for keeping up commodity consumption: people work to get things for their home and family and are encouraged to find their identity in their family rather than in their class, this makes it more difficult for class solidarity to develop. The relationships within the family act as a harmless buffer and safety valve from the world of competition outside.

THE SOCIAL CRISIS

At the same time, there are many contradictions in the role of the family at present. Since the gradual collapse of the post-war boom of the 50's, the conditions no longer exist for the family to function in the ways that would most benefit the ruling class. The economic crisis, the need for women to form an important part of the workforce, ~~xxxxx~~ and the cutbacks in the welfare state are some of the factors that are putting the family under increasing pressure. As a result the family has become an arena of struggle ~~in~~ itself - husband against wife, kids against parents, forcing people to move outside of the family circle to find relationships and support and to fight for the things they need - whether it's women getting together to get childcare, or schoolage kids who at an increasingly early age are organising themselves both formally and informally, revolting against the authority both of the family and of the state (the cops, the social workers, the probation officers and soft cops.)

The need for the state to control our social lives has been the result of the working class strength in this country pushing and struggling for a better life, thus continually threatening economic crisis. (At the same time, we don't underestimate the effect of the struggles of the working class internationally and of the third world countries in contributing to this crisis.) In the present crisis the state is caught in a contradiction: in order to maintain private industry it is forced to pour money into the private sector which means it has less money to put into the public sector which will keep things ticking over adequately to service production. . As a result there is a social crisis - housing, education, childcare, health services, are all examples of where the breakdown is occurring. In order to try and patch up this mess, the state is massively increasing the number of social workers, soft cops, community workers, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ community police, etc., to try and incorporate the struggles that are moving forward in these areas (as well as keeping out of work graduates out of trouble), and to maintain the control over the role of the family which is cracking under the pressure. Women, unable to keep up with their prescribed work ~~xxxxx~~ within the family, are ~~xxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ becoming increasingly active, and beginning to identify and fight for their own social/economic needs, thus taking the struggle beyond the factory into a much more total struggle that covers every ~~xxx~~ aspect of our lives. (Of course during this process many people are ~~k~~ just going under, many women are just cracking up under the strain, or looking towards some fascist ideology for the solutions to breakdown - witness S.P.U.C., the Cowley wives incident, the support for the National Front in areas of poor housing and education facilities, kids getting nowhere mugging these even less powerful than themselves..... The white male can no longer afford to ignore the needs and potential power of these sections of the class.)

THE SERVICE SECTOR

These developments in the welfare system have affected the conditions experienced by workers in the public service sector. Previously the jobs of nurses, teachers, social workers etc. tended to be seen as a vocation, where you didn't mind being underpaid because you were doing "good work." But what has happened in recent years, for example in the hospitals, is that cutbacks in spending, job regrading, deskilling and the factory-like nature of the work has made those employed there feel more and more like ordinary "workers"; the rundown of resources and increased breakdown of services has made it harder and harder for them to feel that they are doing a good job or even a job worth doing. A similar change in consciousness has taken place among teachers and social workers who have the job of patching up the mess in the homes and schools, and among other workers who have been expected to accept poor pay and conditions in the name of doing a public service. The result has been a number of actions by service workers: the strikes by nurses, hospital auxiliaries and technicians, civil service workers, postal workers, and council employees; and the recent militancy of teachers and playgroup workers. There have even been actions by junior hospital doctors and junior management at the BEC, where a similar public service mentality is beginning to break down. As there has been a considerable growth in the public service sector and in the service sector generally (clerical and secretarial jobs, retail and advertising, night cleaners, transport, etc.) and as these service sectors have become increasingly massified within the social factory, they now represent an important section of the recomposed working class and can be expected to play a significant part in future struggles.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

The changes we have mentioned could not have been brought about in their earlier initial forms by Conservative governments, who neither matched the mood of the people nor understood the necessity of such reforms for the maintenance of the system. In general they were still tied to the system as it previously was. Ruling classes everywhere realized that the only possible agencies for rebuilding capitalism were the left. In Europe the revolutionary left was very weak, the Communist and Labour type parties had almost total influence over the working classes. In most countries different kinds of left-wing governments came into being; many were coalition left i.e. social democracy and communists, or national coalitions including the more modern conservatives. The ruling classes saw the task of the left - to win back the allegiance of the mass of the people to the new capitalism, to convince them that these were their states.

Unfortunately this is what happened. Although meeting some opposition, the social-democratic and Communist parties succeeded in dissolving the radical fervour that abounded, in some places disarming the anti-fascist partisans of France and Italy, who were prepared to knock the final nail

on the coffin lid of the system. As a reward for their favours, after they'd done their job - the Communists were eventually squeezed out of every government post they had in Europe. Social democracy also eventually came to a stop, once nationalisation of public utilities, welfare system and beginnings of economic expansion were completed - this was socialism to them. Their plans spluttered to a halt, in essence they became almost indistinguishable from the reformed conservative and 'moderate' parties. All were committed to keeping the new capitalism ticking on, healing any slight illnesses with reforms where necessary.

Any anti-capitalist tendencies that existed before the war were extinguished. Social democracy became the alternative government, totally integrated into the system. The ruling class would use it wherever their conservative allies were failing to modernize fast enough, or control the working people. Nowhere was this clearer than Britain: Labour regenerated the system in 1945-51, and it then suffered 14 years in the wilderness, with nothing to say - trying to lose its class image. But in 1964, when it was needed, right wing journals ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ were advising ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ businessmen to vote Labour! It was brought into deal with the growing capitalist crisis and to control the working class - it failed on both counts. So the see-saw of government continues.

The Communist parties, ~~excluded~~ from bourgeois governments, nevertheless set participation in them as its aim. The new 'roads to socialism' led to the ultimate possibility of left unity governments, as in Chile. The ultimate in reforming governments, they are the choice of the ruling classes only in desperation, only when the class struggle forces them to choose between outright fascism or a newly reformed capitalism via the reformist left alliance. Such a possibility is now on the cards in Italy, and in the future France. It ^{became} a reality in Portugal, where the ^{Spinoza government} left-leaning/including Communists, ~~crushed~~ strikes, continued conscription to the guerilla wars in Africa, and ~~arrested~~ revolutionary socialists.

NEW PARTIES OR OLD?

We would say that on the whole, the left has failed to grasp and learn from these changes, or at least their consequences for political theory and practice. When the world-wide capitalist crises re-emerged in the 1960's, they were left with the old slogans and programmes; unrelated to the new relations between capital, state and working class.

The new form and content of struggles need to be governed by the concept of working class autonomy. Autonomous struggle happens when people fight back against the new ways that capital is developing.

- Refusing to let their needs, demands and organization be used by and incorporated into the system, fighting for our needs on our terms- not capitals. Therefore the autonomous struggle must ~~fight against~~ understand and fight against the new relations of production. This means fighting back in a way which is not just a defensive reaction, which although anti-capitalist initially, is not autonomous because it puts forward no alternative way of developing the struggle, a way which capitalism cannot use against us.

In the industrial situation, the politics of autonomy means the assertion of our own needs as against the needs of the bosses. We don't need to become wage slaves, but under capitalism we have to because we need money in order to live. Capital doesn't need people, it needs human labour power. In fact people as people often interfere with its smooth running. If you want to stay in bed with someone you love, you'll be late for work. If you get friendly with your workmates you'll resist being moved around. If you feel under the weather you have a day off. Sometimes you just don't feel like working at all. But to fit in with the needs of capital we have to surrender our identities as people and become just labour power, that's what we get paid for. It's obvious that enjoying your life and working 10 hours a day at Fords are contradictory, but the contradiction is obscured as soon as you identify yourself not as a person but as a worker, as human labour power, trying to sell your labour for the highest price you can get. So we have rejected collective bargaining procedures and productivity deals which have offered us more money for more work; and we have rejected the role of the unions as mediators and go-betweens in setting up these deals. Our aim is to earn more and work less; it is an aim which directly opposes the needs and threatens the survival of capitalism.

It follows from our analysis of the changes, that we reject the rigid distinction between 'political' and 'economic' struggles. Yet it is on this basis that most of the left works. They see the day to day struggles in the factories and the communities as sectional, defensive, inevitably reformist, 'economist' etc. Politics for them is an outside process to do with parties, governments, demands directed to the State, with socialist ideology and so on. But the old categories are redundant once the State becomes collective capitalist, extending the tentacles of production into social life, and attempting to incorporate and use the class struggle and the wage as part of the way the system develops. The day to day struggle has become political in itself. This doesn't mean that it is automatically revolutionary, or that people automatically reach a higher form of class consciousness. But it does mean that revolutionaries must find ways of advancing demands and ways of fighting that go beyond the defensive sectional way the daily struggle is fought, to turn what is already political into a class-wide revolutionary challenge to capital, moving constantly towards socialism. Autonomy is the revolutionising of the daily struggle and the assertion of the total separation of working class interest from the 'national' capitalist interest. It means a political perspective which stops apologising for its disruption of capitalist society and starts organising the disruption.

The difference between 'revolutionary' and 'reformist' cannot be made in many instances at the level of demands. This again reflects the split between politics/economics, defensive/offensive. ~~It is not~~ The fight for collective childcare on an estate or a health centre can be revolutionary or reformist. It depends on how it's fought for. Working class struggles cannot be measured purely in terms of the objectives achieved or demanded - it is a question of what is learnt in the process of struggle. Revolutionary understanding will be learnt and consolidated in the way people organise if the struggle is fought autonomously. Organisational autonomy is just as important as political content. It comes from people directing and controlling their own struggles, and fighting them on a mass level, rather than delegating the struggle for representatives to fight for them, or allowing the struggle to be directed by reformist organisations, who will fight in only a partial or defensive way.

In industry, the conflict between the old and new politics is ^{very} clear of ~~it~~, and the distinction between economics and politics is dangerous. Accepting that industrial struggle is economic and defensive, means fighting within the trade-union framework. Yet this framework is totally inadequate for the modern struggle. This was shown during the struggle against the Tory pay laws. The unions tried to fight them in a sectional way, arguing each 'special case', Because they were reluctant to make a political challenge, and susceptible to the 'national interest' fallacy, they were naturally outmanoeuvred by the State and the Tories. This is not a question of the bureaucracies, or left or right leaders - it follows from the role the ~~Texts~~ ^{unions} have come to play in capitalism. Having left-wing leaders may give the rank and file more room to manoeuvre, but it doesn't alter the fundamentally limited role the unions play. No-one should be surprised when Jones and Scanlon etc 'sell-out', as they have done time after time, to the disgust of militants. They are not 'selling-out' - they are doing their job, the way the system defines it.

Autonomous struggle in industry begins at the point where the usual manoeuvrings between employers and unions end. Two key examples illustrate this. The first is from the recent and continuing struggle against lay-offs in the car industry. The main union demands are for guaranteed work; some workers began to demand guaranteed pay, work or no work. The difference is crucial; the demand for guaranteed work, however militant, still ties the living standards of workers to capitalist production, to the bosses' 'right to profit'. Wages are still dependent on work, and if the bosses haven't got any - often due to the action of our fellow workers - tough on us, we don't get paid. The demand for guaranteed pay overturns the favourite slogan of unions and bosses - 'A fair days pay for a fair days work', and also makes unity with other workers on strike easier.

The second example is 'workers' control', with or without nationalisation. To raise this demand in modern capitalism is dangerous and misguided on two counts. Firstly it does not connect with the actual experience and needs of the modern worker. Work has become so boring and unsatisfying that the slogan 'workers' control' does not find an echo in mass consciousness. It fades as skill is eliminated by capitalist work technology. The modern worker is more inclined to want to forget and abolish the kind of dehumanising work he or she does, to struggle against the nature and conditions of work under capitalism. Our politics must express this, putting forward the perspective that only in a socialist society will such work relations be abolished,

and real automation and reduction in working hours be brought about. Working class determination of the goals of production - yes, but not workers control.

But the demand is wrong for an even more important and immediate reason. Workers' control is actually within the way the system is developing. The major political parties and sections of the ruling class are themselves putting it forward in various forms. What they want is for workers to 'participate' in their own alienation and exploitation; to 'control' the rundown and rationalisation of their jobs. How long will it be before we see workers fighting against their own representatives' as bosses in nationalised or private industry? We know that when the left puts it forward, they mean different things. Most mean it to be propaganda for the post-revolutionary situation - if so, it's bloody dangerous propaganda. They haven't realised that the system develops through the utilisation of such demands raised in the course of class struggle. When they demand 'nationalisation under workers control' they are fighting against capitalist backwardness, not its development. We should be advancing strategies and tactics which increase not workers control or participation in the workplace, but workers' power - their own strength to resist the daily terms of work and exploitation - more money and less work.

But autonomy is not super-militancy. A demand for a £10 a week increase is no good if it's tied to contracts, productivity strings, increases in line speeds, or if it's fought in a defensive, sectional way on a 'special case' basis. This is a sure recipe for a losing struggle. The new content of industrial struggle has to be against the system's organisation of work, against wage differentials and bonuses, the hierarchy of the factory, productivity strings and profitability. This is not utopian or unrealistic, it is the only practical way of going forward. What's more it builds from the real experience of workers themselves. This is shown time and time again in the fight against redundancies. The genuine rejection of life on the dole is transformed by the demands for the 'right to work' into a solution of 'work at any price'. The demand for the 'right to work' as at UCS may be put forward by the workers to maintain the only source of income they have - their jobs - but it can be used by the unions to negotiate gains which are not really gains at all. This can mean signing away the right to strike, and agreement in productivity deals, with no guarantee that jobs will be saved anyway; in the long run, living standards fall. Fisher*bendix workers are already having to fight closure for the second time - being 'good boys' did not save them. The bosses were grateful, and their thanks - the sack when the firm became 'un-profitable.'

Anti-redundancy struggles need to be conducted in a way that preserves and extends workers' organisation and power. This can only be done by rejecting the terms of profitability. Let the employers and the State subsidise the work, or provide a guaranteed income until other jobs can be found. These demands recognize the role of the State and the employers;

unemployment is no longer a 'natural disaster'. It is a means of making us pay for the crisis - a political device the bosses create. They can pay for it.

NEW FORMS OF ORGANISATION

What does autonomy mean for the way we organise in work? It means that we reject the strategies of electing left leaders, or of rank and file control of the unions, or at shop floor level, electing left stewards or building left caucuses on the stewards' committees, as major solutions. They will not advance the struggle because they accept the trade union definitions, when we need to go beyond the unions within the industrial struggle itself. This does not mean we reject all contact with such bodies. We recognise their influence in most situations and we seek to involve them in the struggle on workers' terms, under rank and file direction. In the same way, the tactic of individuals becoming stewards or using branch meetings can be useful if it is part of a clear overall strategy for the development of mass autonomy; rather than 'working through the unions'.

The new forms of organisation will initially be small. They will grow as the autonomous struggle itself is stimulated and developed. Small groups of workers, including stewards, need to act as a reference point for the struggles in the work-place, as a source of revolutionary politics and ways of fighting outside the union framework. This doesn't mean outside the unions. We don't advocate leaving the unions or forming others. We recognise their minimum function of bringing workers together in one forum; it's up to us to utilise that forum to develop the struggle. It is a long and hard task, but it's better than the short cuts of manipulation and playing politics above the heads of the masses of workers, such as passing wonderful 'left-wing' resolutions at branch meetings and pretending that it is representative of mass consciousness. We did not intend using any quotes, but this one illustrates perfectly that short cuts are no practical solution.

Jack McCrea, Ex
Convenor, Fords
Dagenham, Body
Plant -1970,
being inter-
viewed in Black
Dwarf.

" You go to the meeting: in five minutes you tell the workers the salient part and you say we're on strike. You don't have interminable discussions because that leads to no bloody action, the longer a meeting goes on, the less chance you've got of having any strike action carried. It's Better to have a planned well-organised meeting, with all your own people ready to say the right things and do the right things, and you're in. You take your strike vote and that's it."

We are not taking a 'moral stand' over this; we realize the dilemma that militants find themselves in. We know that often stewards or even sometimes officials, are more political or militant than the rank and file. But creating such mass dependency and passivity makes it difficult to change the situation, to politicise mass consciousness and action. Three weeks after the above interview, Dagenham workers rejected the stewards' strike call at mass meetings.

AUTONOMY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The changes in all areas of life outside the factory have also been passed over by the left.

At the end of World War II the working class was militant from the struggles of the 30's and the war years. Many of the soldiers coming home wanted to know they hadn't fought for nothing and were determined not to be sold out again. The Keynesian economics of the post-war boom saw an attempt by capital to contain this militancy by integrating the working class ~~xxx~~ within the system and tying the working class more closely to its own aims - not only through the use of the wage as a meter ~~xxx~~ for production but through the improvement of welfare benefits and their use to stabilize capitalism; through the promise of upwards social mobility via rising wages, mass education, and the use of the new immigrant workforce for lower grade jobs; through the consolidation and glorification of the nuclear family as the unit for domestic bliss and sexual consummation; through the promise of freedom contained in "the permissive society"; through the promise of better living conditions in the post-war housing schemes; and through the promise of more consumer goodies as the domestic market for manufactured goods was developed and credit became readily available. The boom enabled the capitalists to offer more because they had more: it looked as if every man could have his home, his family, his car, and his television - "You've never had it so good". These promises were made in the belief that social democracy and a growth economy could satisfy the needs of the population and lead everyone to a happy classless society. At the same time new technological developments like television made it possible for these carrots to be dangled in front of the eyes of the people in ever more effective ways; the spread of television has been ~~xxxx~~ important in determining consciousness generally, and along with mass education and the growth of a mass newspaper readership has enabled capital to wage its battle for the hearts and minds of the working class on ever more subtle and intimate levels. Lying back in your 3-piece suite you ~~xxxxxxx~~ can get brainwashed six hours a night with the delights of a consumer society. To some extent these new forms of social control might be seen as an attempt to re-integrate and recoup areas formerly controlled by religion.

The failure of the system to fulfill any of these promises has led to the opening up of whole new terrains of struggle. The industrial militancy and new demands of the working class during the ~~2x~~ 50's led to the capitalists trying to recoup the profits they lost through wage rises by the use of inflation and rising prices as a weapon against the working class. Manufactured goods which have a higher rate of profitability because they are more capital intensive have not risen in price as much as more basic labour intensive items like food, transport and housing which hit housekeeping money hard. At the same time the general decline in the rate of profitability in industry led to investment in other areas where money could show a quick return, like commodity speculation (which again put up the price of basics) and property speculation which led to more expensive housing - higher mortgages for those of the working class who could afford to buy a home, and higher rents. The promises of the post-war rehousing ~~xxx~~ fell short as the reality of living in the new estates did not ~~xxx~~ live up to expectations: communities were broken up and people experienced the isolation, cramped conditions, and ~~x~~ generally anti-human design of the new high-rise developments. ~~xxx~~ This was exacerbated by the crisis in the social services. The promise of satisfaction in the family also failed to materialize as women experienced boredom, isolation and emotional stagnation in performing their domestic role and the rate of women admitted to hospitals for nervous breakdown, or receiving treatment by tranquillisers went up. The role of mother as it was cracked up to be became impossible to fulfill anyway as increased economic pressure forced women to go out to work, as and when childcare facilities were available.

Mass education since the war had held out the promise of upwards social mobility and increased job status and satisfaction to many working class and lower middle class kids; it also seemed to promise to middle class women that they would have equal opportunity with the men. The frustration of these aspirations and the realization that the schools and universities were little more than production lines for the labour power required by capital led to a change in the consciousness and a growth in the militancy of students; at the same time schoolkids who experienced the same contradictions, exacerbated in the cities by cutbacks in government spending and the shortage of teachers, reacted with truancy, indiscipline, and school strikes.

All the other promises of the postwar period have in one way or another ~~xxx~~ fallen short: the promise of a better life in Great Britain for immigrants who found themselves landed with worse jobs and pay and housing than white workers, and ~~x~~ found themselves the scapegoats for social anger; the promise of sexual freedom and satisfaction which became increasingly contradictory to the needs and structure of the nuclear family. Also, the need of capital to extend its markets has led to areas which were previously private, such as emotional and sexual relationships, being increasingly ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ turned into commodities. The growth of porn movies, sex supermarkets, the sale of vaginal deodorants, and the continuous use of sex in advertising mean that instead of the joy and satisfaction they are promised, people are made to experience themselves more and more as objects, usually inferior to the sexual ideals that are held in front of them. The emotional and sexual repression ~~is~~ built into the structure of the family and education continue to contradict the promise of social freedom held out by ads and TV.

The result of all these developments is a decisive change in the nature of the class struggle and a shift away from the industrial sector as the only important area of struggle. As capital has tried to recoup in the social sphere what it has lost in the industrial sphere, new sectors of the population have felt the rub and have been drawn into the struggle, sometimes in a major role. The demands of the working class which the Keynesian economics attempted to satisfy and contain, were given in the 50's room to consolidate themselves and develop; the failure of the capitalist system to satisfy those demands has led to new forms of militancy which we must try to understand and recognize. Some factors hold back organisation ~~is~~ outside the workplace (the breakup of communities, the lack of ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ traditions or structures for collectivity such as there are at work, consumerism centred in the family which re-inforces people's isolation from one another) and some of the response of the working class has been on an individual or spontaneous level e.g. vandalism, shoplifting and the growth of petty crime, taking drugs, getting into rent arrears, buying a freezer so you can get meat wholesale, etc. But there is a potential for collectivity in the structure of the estates and cities, and in many cases the response of the working class has been collective and class conscious, even if limited ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ and starting in some cases from a social democratic perspective. For example, the response of the working class to dearer and ~~xxx xxx~~ worse housing and living conditions has been rent strikes, mass squats, road blocks to stop traffic where children need to play, and demonstrations against poor transport facilities. In many of these struggles women have come to the fore. Rising prices have been fought by campaigns against supermarkets and by food co-ops. The general rundown in welfare benefits has been fought in a variety of ways: campaigns to prevent the closure of a local hospital or school, or against part-time schooling, for better childcare facilities, for unemployment benefit through the claimants unions, and for better conditions by those who are institutionalised e.g. patients in mental hospitals and prisoners. The intensified struggle around sexuality and personal relations has been manifested in strikes against anti-sexual shift hours, women organising against wife-battering and for abortion, the sexual rebellion of teenagers, etc. The students' and women's movements, which emerged in the late 50's, have opened up whole new areas of struggle because of the particular contradictions which they experience. They have shown that ~~xxxxxxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxx~~ the way capitalism seeks to control our conditioning and our ~~x~~ consciousness is as crucial to its survival as the other more obvious forms of control it exercises over our lives. As capital has invaded even the most intimate areas of our lives, our minds

and bodies have become legitimate areas of struggle; this understanding has been reflected in struggles for different education, different relationships, and ~~xxxxxx~~ different forms of health treatment which give us more control over our own bodies. It has also thrown up new forms of organising - in particular the small leaderless group in a network.

All these struggles that have developed are autonomous in the sense that they assert our needs as opposed to the false needs that capital tries to impose on us; our need for children's play-space as opposed to capital's need to house us as densely and uniformly as possible; our need for basic necessities as opposed to short-lived consumer goods; our need for an education that will help us to lead a happier life, not one just to prepare us for the role capital requires us to play.

THE SOCIALISATION OF THE STRUGGLE

Many groups on the left would relegate all these struggles to secondary significance, and insist that the main fight against capitalism has to take place in the factory. For a long time capitalism was associated primarily with the factory, but post-war capitalist development has created the social factory. Many groups fail to see how capital can and does take the offensive in both the social and the industrial sphere, simultaneously or alternately, and attempts to recoup in one area what it has lost in the other. It is also said that these areas are marginal because "students have no power", "housewives have no power" - but in fact both are involved in the production of human labour power and are intricately bound up in the perpetuation of the system. The student is capital investment for the future, to run the factories, schools and institutions for the bosses; the student movement has challenged the smooth reproduction of the class system, undermined its values and hit at its career structure. The housewife is servicing workers, and reproducing and training the next generation of workers; by questioning her domestic role, by demanding different relationships with her children and husband, by refusing to pay higher rents or higher prices, she is perhaps hitting the smooth running of the system as hard as many normal strikes, which challenge little and which the bosses recuperate by raising their prices.

The socialization ~~of~~ of the struggle is essential for fighting modern capitalism. Contained within the factory it will stagnate, as is happening in Britain - a stalemate between the powerful battalions of capital and labour - or it will be short circuited by the use of inflation as a weapon against the wage. Life inside and outside the factory are not separate components; struggles in one need the support of the other. The rent strikes, the students occupying their college, the mothers blocking the road, all ~~xxxxx~~ need the extra muscle and different kinds of experience of the industrial workers. But the successful strike, the successful factory occupation, is increasingly the one that goes beyond the gates - that reaches into the community - involving the people whose interests are naturally allied to theirs. The miners showed us what a socialised struggle is; the miners' wives were organised, the community involved and utilised as power bases to conduct the struggle from. The "Cowley wives" incident and the failure and isolation of the recent wave of rent strikes, shows up what happens when the struggles ~~xxxxx~~ remain separate, locked in the tight compartments of traditional left politics.

We can get a sense of how autonomous struggles in the social sphere could spread and develop in this country from the example of Italy, where there have been a series of mass squats, and where whole communities have got together to make collective payments of electricity bills and to fix bus fares at their own prices, refusing to pay any increases. There is also the example of what happened in Chile when ~~xxxxx~~ people took over their own food distribution and their own education.

THE REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT MUST ~~XXXXXX~~ BE REVOLUTIONISED

It follows from all this that we don't make the same distinction that many left ~~gx~~ groups make between "politics" and "everyday life". It's important to see the links between economic and personal life and to recognize that people's daily experience of capitalism determines their political consciousness and their political actions. What we mean when we talk about revolution is not just a change in the ownership of

the means of production but a total transformation of all social relations, and what we want to transform we will have to fight to transform. Unless we are continually aware what we are fighting for, and flexing our muscles in those kinds of struggles, we are left with a very economic and mechanistic view of revolutionary struggle-- and the best that could come out of that is an economic and mechanistic revolution. The strength of the autonomous struggle lies in people recognizing the oppression of capitalism however it affects them most acutely, and getting together to fight for their own needs. The definition of a revolutionary struggle is not limited to a struggle which confronts the bosses on the shopfloor, but is any ~~struggle~~ struggle which builds up the solidarity, strength and communist consciousness of the working class, while at the same time the power of the bosses is reduced and their power to encroach ~~on~~ on our lives is lessened.

The fact that we in Big Flame do not separate politics from everyday life means that we do not set ourselves up as "political experts" above the class struggle and handing down tablets bearing the "correct political line" to masses who need our guidance. We have continually a lot to learn from the masses about what they ~~xxx~~ experience and how; it's important to see the ways the working class is finding of organising and fighting back, and to draw out the revolutionary potential in them. Our role as revolutionaries is to help strengthen those elements of the fighting back which are revolutionary -- not to dictate to working class people about how they should fight with dogmatic guidelines drawn from different or past situations which may not be applicable. There is a tendency among left groups to set our own lives apart -- the "missionary" trip as if the revolution was something we need to do for other people. This approach leads to dry, mechanical thinking, not rooted in our own experience or anyone else's, and theory mystified, placed above us in the realm of "economics" instead of in the sphere of daily life. But people will not swap one set of bosses, experts, authority figures and moralisers for another, even if they call themselves revolutionaries.

To avoid this, it's important to have a sense of how we as revolutionaries are part of the struggle and part of the masses; historically our involvement in the politics of Big Flame grows out of our struggles as women, as students, claimants and workers mostly in the servicing institutions (schools, hospitals, media etc.) Seeing what we need to fight for for ourselves helps us to understand the autonomous struggles of others; and also makes us want to fight for what we want to change now, as well as for long term objectives. The fact that liberation only comes with socialist revolution does not mean that we have to wait till then before we start to free ourselves. This fundamental perspective has been grasped by the independent movements, and their struggles have forced us to re-examine ourselves, our attitudes to race and sex, the ways we live and relate to each other and the ways in which we see the struggle developing. The years since the late 60's have seen the growth of many movements, ~~xxxxxxx~~ few of them self-consciously 'political', which have represented a subversive challenge to law, morality and behaviour in general: alternative films and law centres, underground newspapers, gay liberation, collective living and childcare, etc. Many of these movements have remained individualistic or static in isolation or reached the dead end of 'exemplary' politics -- we can't smash the family simply by building alternatives to it. But we have a lot to learn from these movements. Without setting up another set of uniform oppressive standards for the way we live, the revolutionary movement must itself be revolutionised. We want to revolutionise our own lives, not as an answer in itself, but to help us develop a sense of what we are fighting for and to have some kind of foretaste of the possibilities life could have after capitalism. The struggle is long and hard, and we need to be reminded that this life which the capitalists make us hate can be beautiful. Unless our political involvement is enjoyable, unless being active means affecting how we live, unless it offers real advantages, it is not worth doing, for us or for the mass of working people. Our autonomous struggle is to affirm, not only in what we fight for, but in ~~xxx~~ how we fight, the right of everyone to a communal social life, free from necessity, a life which is collective, free and creative, healthy and happy.

Unfortunately for them, many of the other left groups have not understood this at all: They have failed to see how the working class in expressing its autonomy, the trade unions are totally inappropriate, if not in the way. This is most clear for women.

Instead, we understand that the politics of the womens movement cannot be understood in male left terms. How the womens movement can aid the "general class struggle". Of course we dont understand all the womens movement to be revolutionary. The womens movement grew out of the crisis, where capital had to rapidly adapt its plan in the face of the initiative and growth of power of the international proletariat. The womens movement developed at the same historical period when many mass movements around the world were threatening the imperialism on all its fronts. Like all of these struggles, capital as tried to use its impetus for its own development and continuance. It will continue to try to use the campaigns for daycare, contraception, and even equal pay to develop a new largely untapped labour force. Already we can see this in the government and private plans, eg. more parttime and flexitime work. This is why we are so worried about the strategies of the left groups which are only oriented to the fulltime waged worker. Strategies which are tailing the struggles of women, and often of the government planners as well.

(Already we've seen how this strategy of equal opportunity for equal exploitation has led to the development of a new female managerial elite, newly suited to womens problems, helpfully confusing and diffusing the revolutionary content of womens liberation demands.)

We don't need to rationalize the importance of the women's movement in male industrial left terms. For the women's movement has made significant contributions to our understanding of what we are fighting for. We've learned from past revolutions that we don't just want to change our rulers, but are fighting for a total re-organisation of our everyday lives and social relations. The women's movement, in struggling for our own needs, has undermined the sexual division of labour, which is the underlying basis of women's powerlessness and one of the severest divisions within the working class. In struggling against this sexual division and showing that the work women do is not part of our natural role or destiny, the women's movement has shattered one of capital's greatest myths, that everyone gets paid for the work they do. Women aren't paid for a tenth of what they do, inside and outside the home, and are beginning to make demands for more time and money, regardless of any wage contract. In challenging this myth, the women's movement has forced a change of our revolutionary goals from the old ~~"SMASH THE STATE"~~ "SMASH THE STATE" strategy to a doing in of the wage labour system itself.

BLACK PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE

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In our society, black people are doubly oppressed. They are exploited at work, and in addition they have to put up with racial prejudice and racial discrimination, which means that they often end up working in the worst paid jobs, living in the worst houses, black kids being segregated in the lowest classes of the worst schools.

The presence of black people in this country is due to Britain's position as an imperialist power. Britain has drained the raw materials and resources of the third world to build herself up as an industrial power; the result is that these countries, robbed of their natural riches, have remained underdeveloped, providing little employment for people there. So people have come to Britain from the third world in search of work, and this immigration has been encouraged by successive governments since the war, since these immigrants could be used as a source of cheap labour by the British bosses to do jobs which white workers were no longer prepared to do for those wages, and at the same time this supply of cheap labour would help to keep down the wages of British workers. At the same time, if the working class was racially divided, it would be easier to control, and the ruling class would have an instant scapegoat for its failures to provide adequate housing, health, and welfare facilities.

These strategies have not been altogether successful. The black workers have been as militant as the white workers in fighting for higher wages, sometimes more militant. And they have often been the first to challenge the inadequacy of housing and welfare provisions. But racism in the white working class has meant that the black workers' struggle has often had to develop separately.

The trades unions, which traditionally protected the wages and privileges of skilled organised workers, were alarmed by this flood of unskilled labour, which they saw as a threat to the gains they had fought for over the years. Rejected by the union bureaucracies, and rejecting their bureaucratic and limited strategies, the immigrant workers began to forge new weapons of struggle, at once more autonomous, and embracing wider areas of social experience. The immigrant communities, with their close kinship networks, could provide formidable support in strike situations, and introduce social issues into the struggles; having less tradition of control by remote hierarchies, their organisations had great cohesion and solidarity. An example is the recent strike by Asian workers at the Imperial Typewriters factory in Leicester.

Because they have no historic attachment to the 'British way of life' or the institutions of the British Labour movement, the immigrant workers have dispensed with the old capitalist bogeys of 'the national interest', the ethic of a fair days work for a fair days pay, and the moral value attached to work by large sections of the labour movement; they have substituted the stark confrontation of capital and labour - the bosses' interests against theirs. They have introduced a new internationalism to the class struggle in this country, an awareness of the importance of anti-imperialist struggles in former colonies, and at the same time, black militants reared in the ghettos of Europe and America have become involved in these struggles.

Immigrant workers have come to Britain, the Irish between the wars, the West Indians in the post-war boom years, and the Indians and Pakistanis in the sixties, bringing with them ~~xxxxxx~~ different and specific traditions of organisation and struggle, and they have totally changed the nature of the working class in Britain. By organizing together independently, black people can find the collective strength to confront racist oppression, and by exposing its ~~working~~ anti-working class roots, to truly unite the working class, changing themselves, their oppressors, and the nature and breadth of the class struggle in the process.

The ruling class will try to use black people's struggles, by encouraging them to participate in administering and policing their own oppression. Already, especially in the USA, the black struggle has been used to ~~xxxx~~

accelerate the growth of a black elite in social work, business, and the profession - an elite that the white ruling class hopes will win the leadership of black people, and thus defuse the struggle for liberation. We have seen that many black struggles do not aim for a spurious equality under capitalism, but have an autonomous anti-capitalist direction; these are the black people's struggles which Big Flame seeks to promote and develop.

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STRUGGLES OF YOUTH

Young people have become increasingly vocal and active in challenging our society and its values, both in a highly organized and political fashion like the students' revolt, and in an individual and only half-conscious way, like truancy, vandalism, drug-taking.

The organized political challenge has come from young people in the schools colleges and universities, who have seen that their situation is not a privileged initiation into the mysteries of knowledge, but simply an extension of the capitalist world, which is geared to making profits, and where 'education', training, and grading exist not for the benefit of the students, but for the benefit of their future employers. So students in educational institutions throughout the country have demanded changes in the content of their education, to make it relevant to their own needs and development, and not to the needs of their future bosses. At the same time they have challenged the repressive authoritarian structures of the educational institutions, which have held young people in fear and passivity for so long, have discouraged them from thinking for themselves, or asserting their own needs, or even discovering what their own needs are. (The totally unwarranted interference by educational institutions into young people's sex lives is an example of this). Young people have fought for the right to meet with members of the opposite sex, to be able to live their lives without interference, to have contraceptives available, to be able to decide for themselves what is right and what is wrong.

Whereas this conscious challenge to the content and form of education has come mainly from middle class students, many young working class people assert the irrelevance of 'education' to their own needs by playing truant and dropping out. In the same way they reject the values that capitalist society teaches us, that you should get a steady job, work hard and save up, get married and bring up a family. Often what they rebel against is the boringness and seeming pointlessness of this kind of life, and, (without having much conscious political idea that life might be different if society was organized differently - to make us happy, not just to make profits for the bosses) they try to find ways of life which are more exciting or meaningful, with different clothes, music, drugs, freer relationships. Delinquency, vandalism, hooliganism, drug-addiction, gang-fighting, these are all ways in which young people express their boredom and dissatisfaction with what our society has to offer them. But because this revolt is not conscious or organized, and because there is no clear sense of fighting for a different kind of society, it is all too easily contained or diverted, both by the profiteers who try to appease young people with more and newer commodities, and line their own pockets at the same time, by the forces of law and order which come down on young people with great severity, and by social workers, youth workers, and all kinds of social manipulators.

Nevertheless, we must not underestimate the gains that young people have won, nor the changes they have made in society. They have challenged the emptiness of life under capitalism, both work and family life, and they have shown that it is possible to reject the work and career structures laid out for us, and to have freer and happier relationships. The struggle of youth has been largely the struggle to create its own culture, to carve out its own space for freedom and creativity. And this space has constantly been invaded by the commodity culture of a capitalist production system desperate for new markets. One consequence of the

NATIONAL LIBERATION AND CLASS STRUGGLE

It is through imperialism that the world economy is united into one single market. It combines the most backward and advanced kinds of economic activity, exploitation, political and social life. The advanced capitalist states keep part of the world in an under-developed, super-exploited condition, and either control them directly, or use neo-colonial elites who are dependent on the imperialist power.

But each situation is different. Each struggle takes a different form depending on national peculiarities, differences in development politically and economically, levels of consciousness and organisation, and the state of the class forces. This means that world revolution cannot take place everywhere at the same time.

First of all the struggle against imperialism is national, being carried out differently in different places, and sometimes involving alliances between classes which are usually in opposition to each other. To be successful, the goal of national self-determination must also imply the struggle for socialism, that is, taking the struggle out of the hands of the local bourgeoisie, who want to put themselves in the place of the colonial leadership. The political programme and perspectives must be proletarian - the control of the struggle must be in the hands of the masses of workers and peasants. It must see the need to develop socialism in conditions of economic backwardness.

But increasingly, as the world becomes unified into one great market, the struggle against imperialism is international too; in particular the same struggle for the mastery of natural resources is being fought in the advanced countries and in the most economically backward ones. The British coal-miners' and the Arab guerilla's' struggles are complementary; the world food crisis is international, an aspect of US economic imperialism.

This perspective is different from two main approaches on parts of the left. The first is the idea of revolution by stages, where the imperialist regime must be replaced first of all by bourgeois democracy based on political alliance dominated by the bourgeoisie. The other approach sees the national struggle today as being reactionary. Socialism is seen as something pure and immediate rather than the goal of a process of developing the struggle. Therefore only support pure total revolutionaries, and refuse to give any support to groups like the MIR, the Y NLF, or the IRA.

The issues are most acute for British revolutionaries in the Northern Irish struggle to free the colony from imperialism, which keeps control ~~xxx~~ through the Protestant ascendancy in the North and by incorporating the national bourgeoisie in the South. A Marxist analysis of the balance of class forces and political possibilities for anti-capitalist policies dictates that we support the struggle of any republican forces in the North which are fighting to end British domination and military occupation. It is the role of the Provisionals in escalating from civil rights campaigning to armed struggle, that has smashed the institution of imperialist rule and destroyed the class unity of the Protestant block - two essential preconditions for the development of further anti-capitalist struggle. We support the IRA against British imperialism, while recognising the limitations of both wings political programmes and perspectives. . Only a mass socialist revolutionary force can develop the struggle on truly socialist and long-term anti-capitalist basis, and win the initiative from the Southern national bourgeoisie. Then the real goal will be placed on the agenda - a united socialist Ireland.

REVOLUTIONARY ORGANISATION

To have an anti authoritarian perspective does not mean that we are against organisation. On the contrary, we believe ~~strongly~~ strongly in the need for a general revolutionary organisation. The intervention of its groups is crucial if the ~~autonomous~~ autonomous revolutionary tendencies in any struggle are to be organised, the gains consolidated, and the issues clarified. The development of conscious autonomous politics has not been and will not be a straightforward process. The hold of reformism is ~~strong~~ strong, the trade unions exert a powerful pressure, holding back the struggle. The ruling class exerts an enormous influence through the media and the schools. The good developments tend to remain fragmented, half-formed, and often forgotten because of this. There is a need for conscious vanguards of militants, linked through a political organisation, who seek to understand every development in class struggle, and who are not mere spectators, but are prepared to give a lead and direction to the way it develops.

In talking about such political organisation, we are talking about the creation of a new kind of leadership, not new leaders. The role of revolutionaries is not to substitute themselves for worn out reformist leaders, but to give a lead in transforming the forms of organisation that hold most people in passivity, and keep control in the hands of small cliques. Revolutionary politics can only develop on the basis of the creativity and involvement of the mass of people, taking control over their lives and ~~their~~ their struggles.

For Big Flame, organisation is not a timeless concept, to be 'applied' and 'built' in any circumstances. It is the instrument for achieving certain political goals. Naturally all these goals differ in different circumstances and historical epochs, and so the form and content of political organisation must differ. When Big Flame started, we believed, like many other groups abroad, that what mattered was not a set of ideological stances on traditional issues like Russia, but our ability to be inside the development and a force for the creation of the new kinds of struggle we have indicated. Our first phase of organisation was one of learning; the more we learnt from our experience, the more we were able to bring a clearer political line to our interventions. We have learnt many things, and developed certain theories and ideas, but we have always refused to develop those too far ahead of our ability to ~~be~~ be inside struggles, though sometimes this is necessary. The pace and the demands of the struggle dictate it, for instance the growth of fascism or the struggles in Ireland. Big Flame sees the importance of putting the needs of the class struggle first; in this context we are not interested in recruiting people merely to build the organisation. ~~Revolutionary~~ Revolutionary organisation must be rooted inside the class struggle and grow with it, it must have a practical base rather than mere affiliation to a set of political ideas.

OUR GOALS - THE SOCIALIST FUTURE

The most common reaction when communist ideas are put forward is -- "What about Russia?" Most of the revolutionary left rejects the Russian model although it differs on how it defines Russia. Certainly we don't believe there is anything communist or socialist about countries like Russia, which is a society ruled by a party/state bureaucracy. The working class has to suffer the same exploitations, the same lack of control over their working and social lives, as under Western capitalism. Their development is frozen; the working class must again free itself by social revolution.

We stand for a communist society of common ownership of the means of production, but even more important, for the common control and management of every aspect of society by the mass of people, not by any elite in their name. We want a society where sexual and racial counterparts are eradicated along with material exploitation and privilege, a society which continues its own social and cultural revolution against old and new forms of privilege and bureaucratic power.

This direct democracy stands against the sham 'representative democracy' of parliaments. It follows that we don't believe that parliament can be a way of winning or expressing socialism. Parliament exists to express the power of the ruling class. Different parties form governments, but they can only effect slight variations on a pattern of power that lies elsewhere. When parliament ceases to provide its allotted function, as in Chile recently, or in Spain in the 30's, it quickly ceases to have any function at all -- and the ruling class will discard it cynically in favour of open military class war or fascism.

We also believe that the working class will have to fight for power. There is not one single historical example of a ruling class giving up its power without an armed confrontation. Chile is only the latest example of the disastrous effects of the 'peaceful road to socialism', using bourgeois institutions, which is the policy of the Communist Parties. They managed to interpret the defeat as a sign that they should compromise even more with the army and the right. We think that they ought to have prepared the workers and peasants ideologically and militarily for the inevitable confrontation. They didn't and we have paid in the blood of 20,000 of our comrades, murdered by the dictatorship. The more the masses are prepared in this way, the less violence there need be, as they will fear our power. Especially as revolution is no longer a question of 'seizing state power' as in Russia in 1917. To 'seize state power' it is necessary to challenge the power of capitalism in every area of society.

DEAR COMRADES.....

Several of us, with comrades from West London, have tried to ~~xxx~~ rewrite this piece in the light of the specific criticisms made of it at the Liverpool conference. In some cases we have just put in a rider (for example, in response to Manchester's complaint that the early parts gave a bit the impression of a conspiracy) - in other cases we have ~~xx~~ re-written whole sections (in response to comments that the bits on the social factory and women were inadequate and that it didn't give enough impression of how the commodity relations of capital penetrate every area of ~~xxx~~ people's lives). Some of the points, for example ~~xx~~ about the international situation, we felt were too complex for us to write in adequately so we either made minor alterations or left it as it was. We took out parts which the conference had queried (like the bit about the party) and other sections which it was felt needed further discussion.

We realize it's still not comprehensive, but our brief was only to make certain changes as it will not be going out as a definitive document. We hope it will be useful in stimulating discussion within and between the groups -

love and solidarity, EAST LONDON.