

# PUT POLITICS IN COMMAND

A CRITIQUE OF THE  
PLAN FOR A "NEW  
ORGANISATION."

This document is to clarify the differences between the two 'plans' on the way forward for BF. It sums up our criticisms of the proposals to "form a new revolutionary communist organisation," put forward by AH, MD and AF and it explains the alternative. We apologise for foisting another document on people at this late stage, but two things have made it necessary. Firstly some comrades have correctly pointed out that the two motions don't make the differences clear enough and leaving it till the conference is a bit late for people to take in. Second, the proposers of the other motion have produced on top of their motion 33 pages of documents in the last few weeks and we feel we must make some reply to further political clarity. However it will be short.

There are important differences between the two motions; the recent documents have made this absolutely clear in our minds. We believe that these stem from the relative importance given to politics and organisation in the coming period. The MD/AH/AF plan starts from the position that "organisation takes political precedence in the coming period," (P.1 of the motion). Our alternative starts from the view that we cannot go forward unless "politics is put in command" inside the organisation and the class struggle. Both plans would involve a radical break, a 'point of discontinuity' from what BF is at the moment. The question is what kind of break - primarily political or organisational? From this difference comes alternative assessments of the nature of the crisis in BF and the origins of our weaknesses, how to unite the vanguard and the possibilities of forming a new organisation and finally how to unify the proletariat. For the sake of simplicity the motion put forward by MD/AH/AF will be referred to as 'Plan X' and ours (PT/JH/PA) as 'Plan Y.'

## THE CRISIS IN BES FLAME

The location of our problems and tasks as organisational in Plan X is no clearer than in their assessment of the present state, strengths and weaknesses in BF. Plan X considers the main weaknesses of BF to be size, petty-bourgeois composition, inward-looking 'minoritarianism' and lack of political strategies. The last factor, which we hold to be the key is de-emphasised by making it "usually dependant on the other factors." This reduction of our weaknesses to the organisational factors of size and composition is a whitewash of the real reasons for our political weaknesses, a handy means for avoiding self-criticisms of our major weaknesses. It is true that because of our late historical origins we missed connections with important waves of struggles and vanguards of the student, workers and womens movements. This has significantly reduced our size and potential impact. But this would not have been the key determining factor if we had had a realistic political strategy to generalise our politics and organisation. Instead a number of factors have held us back. The Plan X support document "Do we have a future" looks rosily at our past in that we began "with the lightest ideological baggage," and "an impressive collection of the student militants thrown up by the ~~student~~ struggles of 1968 and after." This is nonsense, the political cadre of the student movement went into IS and IMG. The comrades who drifted into BF were mainly peripheral and worked in 'movements' which deliberately avoided political clarity and belief in general vanguard organisation. This 'ideological baggage' was an extremely heavy weight for us to bear in our early years and meant that we missed connections with important struggles in 1972-74 in particular because we were busy deciding whether we wanted to be a national organisation accessible to working class militants, with a clear vanguard character. We are still fighting echoes of those battles inside the organisation, sometimes with some supporters of Plan X who see it as a 'Return to the movement' and who have not prioritised the breaking down of the friendship networks and family mentality that has kept us often inaccessible and impotent.

Time after time in the past years we have been held back through lack of clear political strategies for the class struggle as a whole and its constituent parts - womens struggles and movement, industry, community etc etc. This lack

of impact has not been due to minoritarianism as Plan X would have it. There has been a problem of routinism, comrades just plugging away in their isolated base situation. But most often this was because we were not providing the political strategies for militants to go beyond this. There has been the guideline documents for mass work in the community or industry and the unions, where has been the explicit cadre training of our militants, ~~xxxx~~ how many times have we taken national initiatives in response to struggles? The pre-condition to this is political centralisation of our leadership, ideas and resources, to give the base work a political framework for operation. It is true however that in itself this would not be enough, because it would not guarantee a political connection with the movement of the masses or the left. It is the merit of Plan X to have brought this point to the fore. However the point is how to make the political centralisation connect in this way. In the past when we have said that we need to generalise our politics and initiatives, it has been limited to generalisation within the Big Flame groups nationally. This has sealed us within our existing small forces. We have lacked a strategy for general initiatives through common campaigns with other forces, as well as a means of systematic mass work inside key united fronts. We believe that our plan for the future of BF is the beginnings of such a strategy and general orientation. There has to be a hard and rapid political clarification of our ideas and forces inside BF to make a leap forward. Plan X derides such ~~traditional~~ a "traditional recipe of the Left." but we are talking of clarification as a means to action among the masses, not as an inward looking substitute in a period of defeat. That such a clarification is necessary can be gauged from the pre-conference period. Many comrades, particularly new ones have complained at the amount of documents produced. Why has there been so much? The answer is simple; we are making up for lost time, our base interventions and commissions in general have not had clear political guidelines for their work and are frantically trying to put it together. But lets be honest, the quality has not been good, inevitably perhaps in the circumstances. What it shows is that even if a 'new organisation of our tendency' was possible there is no way we are in a state in the near future to launch such a key initiative. And its no good putting all the onus on five 'super-cadres' on the ~~Executive~~ Secretariat to carry the burden. Unless the whole organisation is politically prepared it a dangerous illusion.

UNIFICATION OF THE VANGUARD - THE NATURE OF OUR POLITICAL TENDENCY

No-one in BF holds the organisation so precious that if a serious re-groupment of sections of the political vanguard with similar ~~political~~ ideas and practice to our own was possible - they would turn it down to maintain 'purity.' But politics is the art of the possible and the whole of Plan X rests on the assertion that a new, larger and politically more advanced organisation can come into being, uniting large sections of that is said to be our (political tendency) and that organisation can be an embryo of the party in dialectical relationship with a much larger movement which will totally transform class struggle, have its own daily newspaper etc - all within a few years. We don't think this plan is possible for two reasons:-

- (i) Such a project is impossible in a period of retreat of the working class.
- (ii) The tendency is mistakenly identified, including a failure to understand the autonomic development of the black and womens' movements.

Let's examine the first point. No-one has yet argued against the notion that this is a period of defeat and retreat. We have estimated that this retreat will continue for at least 18 months to two years, when the emergence of a Tory government will create the space for a gradual emergence of struggles led by a small but politically more advanced set of vanguards. But these will not be mass vanguards as they will not have emerged as wide base leaderships of higher levels of mass struggle, with a directly leadership relationship with the masses. Plan X totally confuses this point. The 'Do we have a future' document says - "In a period like the present when there are very few mass struggles, the mass vanguard will tend to be individuals or small groups who have rejected the blackmail of the crisis."

This is the individual or ideological vanguard, which only potentially can become a mass one. The distinction is not nit-picking. Our previous position in BF has been that party formations, including embryos of the future party need to

arise from a qualitatively higher level of struggle and of the needs of the mass vanguards. We believe this is still correct for the reasons that we have ~~already~~ said so many times - that party formations initiated without a direct linkage to the consciousness and struggles of the masses, through the mass vanguards are bureaucratic impositions on the struggle, substituting their own (no doubt genuine) desires for this level of organisation for the reality of the class situation. This is the criticism that can precisely be levelled at Plan X. This poses the necessity and possibility of creating a qualitatively new level of organisation, which will quickly become an embryo of the party before and as a stimulus to the higher level of struggle. Comrades, this is not only a revision of Big Flame's previous theory on party and class, it is a complete abandonment of Marxism and a materialist analysis of class forces. We are not afraid of revising BF's politics on party and class, but Plan X sets up a 'straw man.' It has been said by them that the alternative, existing idea is to wait for the spontaneous wave of mass struggles as in Italy '69 etc. This caused much hilarity at a recent meeting in Sheffield, because we gave this medal up 3 years ago (see the Liverpool 'Group 3' document), no-one is so naive. We have long recognised that the process of formation of the vanguard, mass vanguard and party will be a much more uneven process. We have recognised that we could not be a servicing organisation to mass struggle that did not exist, but that we must be a vanguard working class organisation that could attract the best individual militants. But that has not blinded us to making a necessary distinction between a vanguard organisation and a party formation even in embryonic form. Organisation must still serve and come out of the level of class struggle. The backwardness and unevenness of the struggle in Britain necessitates a long period of forming a general political organisation rooted in mass struggle. One that still has as its main task the stimulation of the higher level of mass struggle and the formation of mass vanguards - even if inside this longer and more uneven process a tighter cadre-type organisation than previously envisaged is needed. Plan X talks of the urgency of the situation, we agree. There is a desperate need for re-directing the politics of the struggle and moves towards unification of the vanguard: but a proposal that is based on an impossible and wrongly conceived organisational re-grouping carries the danger that this will divert attention away from this task and badly effect our base work in the process. They talk of 'seizing the time,' - but to seize the time you must first be able to tell it, and that has gone badly wrong in Plan X.

We turn now to a closer examination of our supposed political tendency, and others on the Left. We don't believe that a semi-constituted political tendency with similar ideas to our own yet exists. To say this has so far invited accusations from supporters of Plan X that we are purists and that if this is true we may as well give up. Nothing could be further from the truth, we just have a different analysis of the balance of forces and characterisation of a tendency. Plan X confuses the social and political base of our politics, with the existence of a tendency. A tendency should refer to something that is at least partly conscious and organised, aware of the process of its own identity and formation. Anything less invites external definitions that allow almost anyone to be said to be part of tendency, no matter what the levels of their views and organisation, and secondly for the degree of formation and unity of such a grouping to be vastly over-estimated. Both things characterise Plan X. So they refer to "several hundred Ford workers" as being "part of our tendency." Instead they should be seen as part of our social and ~~the~~ political base. Social base in that our politics arises from an analysis of the changing conditions of capitalism and the working class and that our politics find their most immediate manifestations in the line-worker, the housewife, the proletarianised white collar worker and student etc. (However we must be careful not to over-estimate the complexity and unevenness of the changing composition of the class, Plan X has a tendency to restrict our basis to narrowly, marginalising our ability to make an impact on other sectors. We must remember that the role of a political organisation is to put forward the politics that can appeal to and unite the whole class). Political base in that through our interventions we can create sections of the working class who are capable of giving and taking political initiatives in relation to the organisation.