

ABOUT THE REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST CURRENT

Most of the original members of the Revolutionary Marxist Current came out of the International Marxist Group in 1974. And it was there, inside the IMG, that the basic political ideas behind the RMC first developed. The people that did this were part of a much larger grouping that took over the leadership of the IMG in mid-1972. That larger group had challenged the old leadership on two fronts: first, it stressed the need to orient towards the working class, and second, the need to move away from the IMG's past "sectoral" practice. On the whole, the new leadership group sought to correct traditional interpretations of Lenin's theory of organisation. They interpreted democratic centralism as the drawing together of the experiences and activities of all sections of society. This was in opposition to the administrative interpretation generally found in the trotskyist movement, which sees democratic centralism as having a leadership body giving the right orders at the right time, and everybody else doing their job efficiently and according to majority discipline. In line with this criticism, the new leadership documents attacked the idea that consciousness is simply the "ideas in people's heads." Rather they saw consciousness as tied to people's overall activity. Politics was thus not defined in terms of "organising people", but as "presenting ideas" to people which they could then act on.

Nevertheless, what seemed to be common agreement - and more important, a common understanding - of these ideas turned out to contain vast differences in both interpretation and political practice. In the spring of 1973 groups around Liverpool, Manchester, and London formed the "Left Opposition Tendency". It was the LOT that later formed the nucleus of the RMC.

The LOT's main criticisms of the IMG were as follows: first, it attacked the tendency for the IMG leadership to indulge in grandiose schemes and plans for the working class, which had little relation to what was actually possible at the time. The IMG's slogan for a general strike to bring down the Tories was the worst end product of this approach, and it was the immediate issue that provoked the formation of the LOT. Secondly, the LOT attacked the increasing bureaucratisation of the IMG. They saw the IMG as suffering from bad internal disorganisation and a lack of adequate education for the membership. The result was that people were increasingly unable to develop and express criticisms of the leadership; the other side of this was that the leadership then tended to explain its mistakes as "bad formulations". The LOT thus argued that the IMG needed a rational plan of work, which defined the goals of the organisation and what it could accomplish within the overall class struggle. At the same time it sharply attacked the general strike call, because it ignored what had to be done if a general strike were actually to be possible - it was an abstract call, and nothing more.

However, the LOT was unable to survive and dissolved in the summer of 1973. A year later local groups in Liverpool, Bolton, and Manchester separately left the IMG. A little later they formed the RMC, first as a "federal" organisation of these local groups (along with people in London, Brighton and Glasgow), and later as a national organisation. Our paper, The Spectre, first appeared in July 1975.

Our main activity was directed towards encouraging a revolutionary regroupment, whilst keeping up the areas of work where we had always been active: women's struggles, anti-fascist work, and Ireland.

Given the size of our forces, we aimed at making an impact within the revolutionary left, by appealing to those groups and individuals who were disenchanted with the state of the left and were either dropping out or on the verge of leaving existing organisations.

We certainly did not see ourselves as the nucleus of a revolutionary party; still, we hoped to attract sufficient numbers of these types of people to our ideas and to our critique of orthodox trotskyist currents. This would both help stimulate a larger regroupment within the left and would give the political ideas we considered important a more solid basis within the left.

On two separate occasions the RMC entered into regroupment discussions - first with Workers Fight (late 1974 - early 1975) and then with the Marxist Worker Group (spring and summer 1976). In both cases the regroupment efforts failed, though for somewhat different reasons.

In the case of Workers Fight we saw that tendencies - and in fact any serious opposition - were unable to function without harassment. Instead the bulk of their members tended to automatically jump to the defence of the leadership (who in turn saw themselves as the last great defenders of orthodox trotskyism). In this situation we felt that it would be impossible to get our ideas heard inside a fused organisation. This did not mean that we had no major differences with WF. We did, especially over three questions: their position on the Birmingham bombings, which we felt was moralistic and caved in to bourgeois public opinion; their stance towards the Labour Party, which was increasingly moving towards entrism; and their (in our view) rigid, administrative concept of organisation. Perhaps none of these would have been insurmountable were it not for the internal problems inside WF - the most disturbing example being the way they defended their position over the Birmingham bombings.

Our main criticisms of the Marxist Worker Group were that they took a moralistic view towards many political questions, at the same time that they had a mechanical view towards organisational questions and "discipline". Yet we also were impressed with their efficiency, dedication, and the high quality of some of their popular written material. What seemed to be an unbridgeable gulf was their workerism: they seemed to associate ideas directly with a given class, so that those coming from people of proletarian background were "good", those from other social groups were suspect. The result was that we had serious disagreements over the importance of "theory". We agreed that theoretical questions could - and had to be - made as easy to understand as possible. But that did not mean they were unimportant. More important, we differed over the priorities of small groups. They wanted maximum direct involvement with so-called 'mass work'. We felt that while the revolutionary movement has to acquire a mass base, this has certain steps that have to be accomplished along the way, one of which is strengthening the revolutionary organisations and figuring out how to develop that base. These were by and large beyond the capacity of such small groups as the RMC and the MWG.

In the end we felt that such a small group as even the fused RMC and MWG had to have a large degree of political agreement. In a larger organisation such differences might be worked out through discussion and joint practice. But in a small organisation the time needed to settle major disputes would have paralysed its work.

Besides our involvement in day to day local political work, our organisation needed a national publication to put across our politics to a larger audience. The majority of the RMC considered that newspaper would do this job best. There was, however, a minority within the RMC who felt that a journal or magazine would be more useful.

The question of publications remained a major debate within the RMC. The question was whether it was best to write directly for the left, or to produce a publication written for a wider working class audience. We knew that we would in any case have little impact within the working class. So the issue was how best to get our politics across to the left: directly or through an "exemplary" paper?

The main aims of the paper had been to show that it is possible to present complex ideas in simple language. In addition it was to be a major tool in internal education and illustrate to the left the way we approach political issues. Those in favour of a journal or magazine argued that, on the basis of their own political experience, the paper could not develop its ideas fully enough. They needed a more detailed publication for discussion with their contacts and people they worked with in united fronts. Nor could the paper serve as a means of consolidating our forces within a left that was not growing. Those in favour of retaining the paper argued that it had served an important function in keeping the RMC together at a time when recruitment was difficult - especially since it allowed for the active participation of the

bulk of the membership. Publicly it was important because most of the people we hoped to appeal to were probably isolated and demoralised. They would not be impressed or won over by just "good ideas". The RMC needed an "exemplary" newspaper which would show how we would put our political ideas into practice if we had the forces to intervene.

It is not possible to go into the various positions we have held in our united front activities or about other major political issues. Our views on Ireland, women, fascism, important international questions, and the class struggle in Britain were dealt with in our newspaper. As we try to make clear in our documents, however, we have always emphasised the importance of independent struggles and have taken the position that revolutionaries should support them in their own right, and not just when it is "advantageous" to a particular revolutionary organisation. This has certainly been one of the factors behind our approach to Big Flame's regroupment project.

Some words should be said about the development of the RMC over the past half year. After our regroupment discussions with the MWG failed the RMC found itself faced by increasingly difficult problems. We had not managed to develop good internal education or internal discussions. We were also becoming too isolated from the mainstream of left political activity and political debate - thus our members did not have to keep their ideas "sharp" by debating them with other tendencies. Our paper was becoming a larger and larger burden giving too few results. Finally, one of the reasons why we were having difficulty in growing - but not the only reason by any means - was that our "non-sectarian" politics produced a certain passivity that seemed to see recruitment as a sectarian act.

Thus in late autumn 1976 the organisation decided to suspend the paper and go over to a magazine. Although the majority of the organisation now agreed with the practical conclusions of the pro-journal group, there was a difference over the role the paper had played in the RMC's past. Those who had favoured the journal felt that the paper had been a serious mistake that had over-taxed and weakened the organisation. Those who had supported the paper felt that it had played a crucial role both internally and as a way to give our political ideas currency amongst the left. In any event, it was now agreed that we had to consolidate the small but not insignificant number of contacts who had shown interest in our politics. At the same time we had to try to make a more direct impact upon dissidents inside larger organisations. This was a more narrow and more specific audience. It needed a publication that could provide more analytical and detailed ideas.

However, the real difficulties we faced could not be solved without an input of new ideas from outside the organisation. These could only come from being part of a larger organisation. Although it would be possible, and in many ways politically desirable to produce the magazine, the membership felt that it would not be equal to the quality of the newspaper.

As we have explained in the statement published in Big Flame, the RMC feels that the Big Flame regroupment initiative gives us the best chance to develop our political ideas and to bring them before a wider audience of revolutionaries and working class militants.