

MOTION 3 - BIG FLAME'S STRATEGY

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MOTION

1. BIG FLAME'S PRIORITIES

BF members should work in areas, and in such a way, as to further the following aims:
a) To help develop the power and self organisation of all oppressed groups. This remains BF's main priority and will determine the way we work to support those struggling in workplaces, neighbourhoods, campaigns, the autonomous movements etc.

b) To help support initiatives and actions which bridge the divisions within the working class and between the working class and other oppressed groups. This is all the more important when we are faced with a government which is doing all it can to heighten these divisions. This perspective has always been within the tradition of BF politics, however this work has to be taken further into the labour movement. As the labour movement largely represents the better organised sections of the working class, the aim of our work should be to build moves which support the struggles of the more marginalised sections. Our aim is to persuade the better organised sections that only through unity with other sections, will they win more than just relative improvements in their situation.

c) To help develop forms of transitional politics which involve struggle around demands which add up to less than the total transformation of capitalist, patriarchal and racist society but which prefigure in some ways the changes we are trying to achieve. In fighting for a transitional politics we should;

- i) Remember that there will always be limits as to how far we can go within the present overall organisation of society, and that we will be treading a dangerous line on the edge of co-option and accommodation to that society. However unless we take this chance we will be no more than purely oppositional and miss the opportunities of learning a great deal in the struggle for prefigurative changes. This perspective grows out of BF's long held position that what makes a demand 'reformist' or 'revolutionary' is not only the nature of the demand itself, but also how it is fought for and what is learnt in the process.
- ii) Ensure that transitional politics are rooted in practical initiatives rather than abstract political programmes. This follows from BF's critique of left currents which see the achievement of a socialist consciousness as primarily the result of a battle of ideas, rather than being developed through an interaction of ideas and practice. This doesn't mean that it isn't important to argue for socialist ideas. Indeed this is particularly necessary in a period in which socialism is far from popular and often identified with narrow, selfish trade union interests and authoritarian, bureaucratic statism. One way of taking up the nature of socialism is to become involved in a debate about an AES. We should address ourselves to the questions raised here, whilst being extremely critical of the statism, national chauvinism and lack of feminist perspective of all the versions of the AES.
- iii) Be aware that in many cases the development of transitional politics will need support from the local or national state and that therefore we must take full advantage of any space opened up by actions within the state. We do not believe that socialism can be gradually achieved by winning over the state, but neither is it adequate to say only that the state needs smashing from the outside. From a base of direct democracy and outside struggle, socialists can take advantage of internal contradictions and crises within the state. Most of the time the state will be totally hostile to what we want to achieve, but there may also be more progressive administrations like the present GLC. Such administrations can and do take initiatives that can aid the development of struggles outside the state. We should take advantage of these opportunities, put pressure on them to go further, and whilst criticising any retreats, defend them from the right.

With these 3 aims in mind we can now look at the way BF should work in its 6 chosen priority areas.

2. UNEMPLOYMENT/EMPLOYMENT

Unemployment is central to Capital's strategy to divide and break the resistance of the working class. We believe that the key struggles at the present time are against and around unemployment and we should direct a maximum amount of energy into these struggles. Our aims should be:

- i) To help create independent organisations of the unemployed
- ii) To develop links between the unemployed and employed
- iii) In the workplace, to support initiatives which go beyond isolated resistance to redundancy.

In detail this would concentrate on work in the following areas.

a) Unemployed Centres

- i) Initiate and support struggles to set up centres and gain resources from the labour movement and local Labour councils
- ii) Fight to put centres into the hands of the users.
- iii) For unemployment centres to be open to and controlled not just by unemployed 'workers' but all other unwaged people.

b) Government Schemes (MSC, YOP etc)

- i) Support work to unionise workers on these schemes and fight for the full rate for the job
- ii) Develop organisation and links with workers within and between different schemes and workers outside of the schemes, independent of the trade union bureaucracy
- iii) Given that the YOPs schemes concentrate young people, wherever we can try and link our work to the question of youth work more generally eg sexuality, YCND etc

c) In the Workplace

- i) We should develop and support campaigns which assist the unemployed such as shortening the working week, banning overtime, for job sharing, and occupations, strikes and work ins in defence of jobs.
- ii) Develop and support campaigns which assist women (and other particularly oppressed groups) - such as minimum quotas, creches, against sexual harassment at work, rejection of bargaining based on the family wage.
- iii) We should recognise that the major reorganisation that Capital has undertaken is creating new and weakly organised workplaces, adding to the numbers of unorganised workers in sweatshops, catering, shops etc. Campaigns for unionisation pay and conditions will become increasingly important and need support.
- iv) We should support initiatives which go beyond negotiating redundancies - the building of combone committees that cut across trade union sectionalism, the development of workers plans at a rank and file level to provide an alternative to the logic of capitalist rationalisation; support for the Labour Coordinating Committee and other initiatives if they aid the process of creating new alliances, extending democracy inside the trade union movement whilst avoiding a predominantly electoralist approach to union work; building international links at the rank and file level.

d) The Alternative Economic Strategy

We also recognise that the AES could have a substantial impact by reversing monetarist policies at a state level towards creating new jobs and combatting the effects of the recession on existing jobs. Existing variants of the AES substantially underestimate the power of capital to subvert the programme and the need for self activity by the working class to implement it, and overestimate the ability of the AES to even mitigate (let alone solve) the harsh realities of the long term international crisis of capitalism. Nevertheless we must relate in a positive way to the struggle for an AES

3. STRUGGLES WHERE WE LIVE

The struggles where we live, particularly in the inner city, linked to growing unemployment, are increasingly important. The riots have been the first signs of serious resistance in areas most affected by the draconian policies of the state. But it is already clear that the state is trying to use those events to further isolate the most disadvantaged sections of society, and increase its repressive resources. The crucial work of the white left in this period is to widen support for these struggles, with people who live and work outside of these areas of confrontation.

a) Policing

We should be trying to generalise and deepen the loss of consent to police operations and extend it towards the judiciary.

- i) We should call for and support both independent mobilisations against repression at the same time putting pressure on those progressively involved in police accountability, on police committees, in local councils, and in the trade union movement, We should use these contacts to get information for propoganda purposes (eg recent case of the machine guns issued to the Manchester police).
- ii) We should support progressive independent enquiries into police activity and the legal system.
- iii) We should support reforms which decrease police powers eg disbanding the SPG and special units.

Generally we should support all campaigns on civil rights that highlight and oppose the increasingly repressive role of the state.

b) Defence Work

We should seek to gain both financial and political support for those charged by the police, particularly from inside the labour movement. The lead should be taken from the organisation and demands of the people directly involved in the confrontations, and not try and impose demands or by-pass the autonomy of youth and black people.

c) The Cuts

The struggle against the cuts is extremely weak, most campaigns having effectively collapsed. The issue of cuts is locked at the level of the enormous power wielded by central over local government. There are exceptions to the decline, like the housing campaign in Walsall where the local Labour Council has been working with independent tenants groups to resist central government rents rises and to democratise the process of housing management.

At the moment involvement in anti-cuts campaigns cannot be a general priority. However we should support those few campaigns that exist, with our perspective of uniting consumers and producers, and developing socialist alternatives to present services.

There is a possibility in the future of some Labour Councils attempting to mount a united campaign in opposition to Heseltine's measures to restrict local authority spending. Such a campaign can only succeed if there is a major effort to involve local people in the process of defending and improving services. BF should be prepared to become involved in these campaigns, and try to ensure that they proceed on this basis and do what we can to help develop a popular mobilisation.

4. WOMENS STRUGGLE

In fighting for a feminist perspective, BF supports the emphasis of the WLM which is not simply on equal rights for women, but instead on changing all aspects of the division of labour and sexist ideology as they affect both women and men at work, in the home and in sexual and personal relations. This means that both men and women in BF will attempt to:

- a) Counter the current ideological attack on all the gains of the womens movement, which strengthens sexist ideology and reasserts that womens place is in the home, as social services are cut and women first to lose their jobs.
- b) Support NAC and all struggles for womens control of their sexuality and reproduction For lesbian rights.
- c) Support feminist struggle in the labour movement and Labour Party, for womens right to waged work, against sex segregation and the devaluing of 'womens jobs', against the notion of a higher 'family wage', and for a shorter working day and shared house-work and childcare.
- d) Campaign for state policies which attack womens financial and legal dependence on men. This means fighting for changes in the social security system, national insurance and taxation, all of which assume womens dependence on a male breadwinner. And for increasing child benefits and collective childcare resources. It also means fighting for the specific interests of black people with dependents abroad.

e) Develop a sexual politics which exposes and attacks the connections between masculinity, femininity, male violence and female subordination, as exemplified in pornography, romantic fiction, advertising, the cult of motherhood and domesticity, of masculinity and authoritarianism, competitiveness and homophobia (hatred of gays) Support for womens aid and rape crisis centres.

5. IRISH/INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY WORK

BF's main priority in international work should be Ireland, the main focus for that being the TOM, as the organisation with an orientation not only towards the labour movement but to wider sections of society, including the womens and anti-racist movements. In the immediate future TOM is unlikely to become a mass movement, like the anti-war movement in the USA. Nevertheless it is important for TOM not to reconcile itself to being a small pressure group, and avoid making its demands in a way which would make this more likely. Where possible TOM should work alongside groups with more limited objectives (eg Phased withdrawal, Irish unity at some date in the future) without submerging its own identity. BF members should carry on arguing inside TOM for the following:

- a) That the question of women in Ireland is raised in all areas of TOM's work, and that TOM builds effective links with womens groups concerned with Ireland.
- b) Co-operation with the Labour Committee on Ireland (LCI) and support for LCI initiatives.
- c) Now, in the aftermath of the hungerstrikes, for more emphasis on working for British withdrawal.
- d) Recognition that Prior's appointment as NI Secretary may signal a renewal of the attempts to negotiate a neo-colonial solution, and therefore preparation of propoganda to counter moves in this direction.

Some members of BF should work in the LCI. This is a recognition of the fact that the LP is one of the few places in Britain where there has been a shift of opinion over Ireland over the past few years. It is an important task to advance the break with bi-partisanship initiated at this years party conference. We should recognise that changes in attitude at the level of the parliamentary party and the trade unions are bound to be slow and uneven, but there exists real opportunities for extending the already substantial support among the CLP's for a British withdrawal from Ireland.

BF members within the LCI should argue that it not restrict itself to the work of getting motions passed in LP bodies, but also in attempts to involve LP members in campaigning work around Ireland - leafletting, pickets, demonstrations etc in co-operation with the TOM.

It is important that other areas of BF's international work are kept flexible, to allow for the emergence of major new international conflicts. At present the priorities are Southern Africa, Poland and El Salvador. These are all countries where the outcome of struggle will affect the world balance of forces. BF should give these struggles prominent coverage in our publications and raise them in other political work.

We should continue to help try and consolidate the European Co-ordination around sectoral and theme meetings and explore the possibilities of a more specific basis of political agreement between the participating groups.

6. ANTI-RACIST AND ANTI-FASCIST STRUGGLE

In most areas ARAF groups are barely existing and where local branches of the ANL continue, they are usually controlled by the SWP. We see little possibility of rebuilding ARAF groups at present, and therefore propose that we take up anti-racist and anti-fascist work in the following ways.

- a) In areas where there are dynamic campaign around particular issues eg deportations racist attacks, defence committees (see earlier) then BF members should continue to work in these.
- b) In vigilance against attacks on our homes, bookshops, and resource centres by fascists
- c) Most importantly, all BF members should raise anti-racist perspectives in their workplace, neighbourhood, campaign etc. We should recognise that the labour movement has a very poor record of support for black people and we need to fight this. The record of the Labour Party is even worse as Labour Governments have consistently failed to repeal Immigration Acts and even reinforced them with racist measures of their own. BF members active in the Labour Party should do all they can to ensure that the Parliamentary party does not renege on its commitment to repeal the Nationality Act and changes the law on immigration.

7. ANTI-NUKES

The nuclear disarmament campaigns, and linked to this the struggle against nuclear power in general, is the only independent struggle at present that has what approaches a mass affiliation, taking in the far-left, independents, the Labour Party, trade unions and, very importantly, young people. BF members should be actively involved in this campaign raising a number of issues to broaden and strengthen its politics:

- a) Nuclear disarmament and withdrawal from NATO is in fundamental opposition to the state as it is presently constituted. It is important for us to try and connect the growing dissent to state power vis-a-vis life and death, to all the other day to day ways that the state determines our lives.
- b) It is important to develop socialist-feminist perspectives which highlight the ideology of male violence and machismo which underpins the rhetoric of missiles and militarism (a constant theme of Reaganism) without by-passing the reality of imperialism and class power.
- c) Arms production is one of the most viable and successful sectors of British industry. The perspective of workers plans and socially useful production is central to these workplaces and we should give our support to the initiatives already taken by some-workers there as well as raising these perspectives in CND/END.
- d) The struggle to keep tabs on military developments and the inevitable arrests for direct action around CND/END campaigns, raises the question of civil rights, and the anti-nuke campaign will need to link itself with all struggles against state repression.
- e) CND is one of the main issues politicising youth today. We should encourage and support all existing initiatives like "Schools against the Bomb" and YCND, in which young people are active.
- f) While the vote at the LP conference in favour of disarmament (unilateral) offers us the prospect of a major shift on the issue of nuclear weapons; if this commitment (or even the partial one on Cruise) is to be fulfilled, work in the LP is important but not enough. A mass campaign is vital not only to maintain pressure on the Labour Party, but also to be in a position to take direct action against, for instance, the siting of cruise in 1983.
- g) The struggle against nuclear power should be extended beyond questions of hazard and safety. The development of nuclear power is integral to the state's economic and military strategy. We should seek to develop opposition to nuclear power in tandem with CND, by for instance supporting the struggle for nuclear free zones as opposition to all applications of nuclear technology.

8. IMPLICATIONS FOR BF'S RELATION TO THE LABOUR PARTY

Major locations for developing the perspectives outlined in the previous 6 sections, will be the independent campaigns, the autonomous movements and the trade unions. However in some of these sectors of work, local constituency Labour parties (CLP's) and ward parties, will provide an important organising base, both for providing support for existing campaigns, and initiating new ones. This is so because of the access to greater financial and other resources, increased contact with other people in the areas (both those in the LP and in other local organisations) and the greater public profile which the LP may offer.

Therefore BF resolves that it is important, if we are to make progress towards the objectives outlined, for a certain number of members to work in the Labour Party. Just how useful LP work is will depend on local circumstances - what the local CLP's/Wards and councils are doing, what BF members are already doing, what other options are open etc. Just how many NF members do join should be decided by joint discussion between branches and the NC. But all local branches should take seriously any national decision about work in the LP as an important priority. Conversely, people in the LP with politics close to BF's should be encouraged to join BF. The procedure for this should be the same as the present procedure for non-aligned people wishing to join.

BF recognises that it will be impossible for members to work in the LP unless the work they do is seen as useful by the rest of the organisation, and therefore resolves that BF as a whole, including the newspaper and other publications, should provide real support for the members who do join. The work should be coordinated at a national level via discussion on the NC and the establishment of a commission or fraction.

If BF members join the LP their objectives should be:

- a) To turn the LP outwards towards a mass politics approach. This should be the main priority and will mean further extending the process of transforming wards and CLPs to be much more than resolution passing bodies. It means giving real support to workplace and community struggles including active involvement in activities such as picketing, leafletting, taking part in demonstrations. CLPs should make their resource (printing, rooms etc) available to campaigning groups and use things like locally based, popularly written newsletters to extend their involvement in their local areas.
- b) To use their LP membership to support initiatives such as those outlined in this motion around unemployment, police accountability and womens struggle, attempting to bridge divisions in the working class. This will include arguing for an anti-sexist and anti-racist perspective in all the struggles we are involved in.
- c) To intervene in debates in the LP about the AES on the basis that this allows us the opportunity to raise questions about the nature of socialism for which we are struggling
- d) To liase with others in the LP with politics close to ours, some of whom will be in other groupings, many of whom will not. This will help sectoral and local work, but we should also investigate the possibility of building a more general, permanent alliance with them. However we must recognise that this will be a long term process and we should be wary of any exclusive concentration on alliances within the LP which may conflict with the need to bring together all those with politics similar to ours, inside and outside of the LP.
- e) To stand where this may be useful to our work, for positions within the LP. This has a lower priority than the other objectives and must be carefully controlled so that it does not conflict with them. We have to avoid an over-concentration on struggles within the LP as there is no reason to be confident that the left will gain control of the party in the immediate future nor that the LP will be in a position to form a government. Our emphasis should be on what can be achieved in the here and now by working in the wards and CLPs.

Work in the Labour Party will need to be continually reassessed in the light of changes in the political situation in this country. We are not now arguing that BF should have a permanent commitment to work inside the LP. Like all perspectives it is not meant to remain static. However the proposal is neither about entrism to make short term recruitment, nor about individuals joining in occasional and isolated cases, We are arguing for a nationally organised collective intervention inside the Labour Party as one of BF's priorities.

9. IMPLICATIONS FOR BIG FLAME

For this strategy to work, BF has to be better coordinated than it is at present. BF therefore resolves:

- a) That the organisation of commissions should be improved and the position of commission convenors seen as an important political task.
- b) That branches should make a greater effort to ensure that there is more collective work in BF's priority areas, and provide a regular 3 monthly report to the NC on how work in those areas is progressing.
- c) That branches should discuss the commitment of members to the organisation and ensure that all members are fulfilling the conditions of membership laid out in the constitution.
- d) That branches should give greater priority to BF's internal education programme and provide a report to the NC as soon as possible on what they are doing in this area. Overall responsibility and coordination of the education programme should be made by an NC member who will liase with the branch responsables.
- e) Groupings or tendencies putting perspectives to the conference should see it as their responsibility, if they win a majority for their perspectives, to put up for election to the NC, enough members of the grouping to provide the majority of the NC.