

Letters

Red and Green

Dear Big Flame,

The articles by Paul Holt and Ben Lowe in last month's *Big Flame* are important—they help us begin a long overdue discussion on how to assess the current period and the conclusions for revolutionary strategy that follow from such an assessment. Both articles end on a note of forced optimism that bears little relation to the sombre analysis that has gone before.

Holt informs us that 'Better Must Come' and Lowe, burdened with the guilt of the white male revolutionary, writes 'A downturn? Like Hell. There's more work for us to do now than for donkey's years. We've just been looking in the wrong direction.' Examples of the direction for Lowe are Greenham Common and the street fighting of black youth. What such advice fails to consider is that neither Greenham women nor black youth welcome the arrival of the revolutionary left—and this for good and bad reasons.

campaigns and the new social movements) with this role—they are to be the new bearers of the communist project. His incorrect assumption that they share a common politics reflects his lack of detailed knowledge and distance from these campaigns and movements. For sure, certain themes like 'autonomy' are common to the perspectives of the different movements but this can regress into individualism and narcissism just as easily as it can progress towards the vision of a society which has as an important goal the extension of autonomy for all.

Instead of assuming that the 'non-class of non-workers' share a common politics, it is essential to develop a new visionary politics on the basis of insights developed within feminism, personal liberation, ecology, animal liberation etc. Such a politics would involve radical changes in people's relationship to the environment and to animal life. Domination would replace exploitation as the main evil and the goal of ending the domination of one person by another would be seen as intimately connected with ending the domination of mankind over nature. Central to such a politics would be an ethical/moral dimension too long forgotten by revolutionary socialists (and, by the way, central to campaigns like Greenham). Such a politics would be a clear challenge both to capitalist values and to high-tech Marxism that sees socialism as a logical continuation of productive forces and technology developed by capitalism. The development of a utopian politics on these 'green' lines is full of pitfalls. In particular, it must avoid the insular first-worldism that characterises much 'green' writings—we must rise to the challenge of combining autonomy with internationalism.

The record of the revolutionary left's relation to campaigns/struggles is one of infiltration and manipulation. And there is no reason for activists in such campaigns to believe Big Flame members ('look we have clean hands') when we profess to be different from the RCP, WRP, SWP etc—whose records of arrogant manipulation are outstanding. It is also true (and this is a bad reason) that Greenham women and black youth won't welcome revolutionary socialists because they don't see their fight as part of an overall struggle for revolutionary change in society—for communism which I use deliberately instead of 'socialism' a transitional stage of state management which history has shown us is far from transitional). Of course, individuals in single issue campaigns may come to see their struggle as part of the overall struggle for communism—but they may not. The demands of their campaign may be won (e.g. Cruise missiles withdrawn) or they may come to see what they are fighting for as antagonistic to the demands of other single issue campaigns (e.g. ecologists and miners fighting over whether or not a new mine should be opened). The idea central to Big Flame's early theory and practice that 'communism was inherent in the struggles of the working class' is a misleading oversimplification.

Not by anger alone

No doubt, there is a lot of anti-establishment anger around today. Whole sections of society are experiencing life as powerlessness. This anger is reflected in popular culture—in the music of groups like *The Jam* and *The Specials*, in the 'rants' of poets like Seething Wells and Joolz, in graffiti and in the success of TV programmes like *The Boys from the Black Stuff*. But, this anger can very easily be contained by the ruling class as long as it remains a destructive and negative force as opposed to a force for change. And it will only be the latter when it is fused with the belief that there is another way of organising society. To develop such an alternative vision is a priority for communists today.

Wouldn't it be lovely

In *Farewell to the Working Class*, Andre Gorz reaches the conclusion that skilled industrial workers are no longer the reference point for the fight for communism they once were. Freaked out by this conclusion, he invests the 'non-class of non-workers' (single issue

Pete Ayrton
Camden/Haringey BF

Philippines correction

Dear Big Flame,

It is good to see Big Flame giving courage to the workers' struggle in the Philippines.

The Philippines is one of the countries that British and international capital has transferred to in recent years to profit from partnership with a military dictatorship that through repression, violence, and vicious anti-labour laws holds down the average industrial wage to approximately £2 a day. The recent expansion of companies like Dunlop, Ford, and Phillips there while closures occur here makes the development of solidarity an important and urgent task.

The trial you reported followed the arrest during August and September 1982 of more than 30 trade unionists. This in turn was the government response to a general strike inside the Philippines main Free Trade Zone where both Dunlop and Ford have factories. When workers picketing one factory were beaten up by the military and 53 arrested other workers in the zone downed tools in sympathy. Within two days 14,000 workers from 23

factories in the zone were on strike and besieging the zone offices. Despite the military, the authorities had to capitulate. The 53 were released and in hastily convened negotiations all the striking workers were re-instated and the original demands of the picketers conceded.

The man who led the workers' negotiating team in the settlement was the same Bert Olalia whose trial you reported.

There is one important correction to be made to your report. KMU stands for Kilusang Mayo Uno (May First Movement) and is a 250,000 strong trade union Federation. It is not the Communist Party as you reported. Bert Olalia was arrested for being a trade unionist and chairman of the May First Movement Federation and not as chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines as some readers may have thought.

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Left censorship

The following letter has been sent to us by our Derry correspondent. The incident he refers to occurred at the rally following the Bloody Sunday march in Leeds in January when the organisers prevented him from speaking.

Dear Comrades,

Over this past ten years of association with Big Flame, as a regular reader and infrequent correspondent, I can state without hesitation that its record on Ireland has been outstanding and consistent, which sadly cannot be said of other sections of the British left. For that reason, it is with sadness and alarm that I read of the paper's dire financial situation, and would urge all supporters of the cause of national liberation and socialism in Ireland to rally around and contribute towards keeping the paper alive and in circulation. This is vitally important when we consider how difficult it is to get across the facts about Ireland, by the use of such racist legislation as the PTA, which I feel should be re-named the Act for Threatening Protest (ATP).

During the past decade, while the British Army scabs on the workers of Britain during industrial disputes, sections of the British left have scabbed on the Irish people's right to self-determination and socialism. Some

sections of the Brit left continually admonish the Irish liberation forces in an arrogant fashion, and give little space to the barbarous slaughter of unarmed combatants and non-combatants. Their column space is filled with criticism of the actions of the oppressed, rather than exposures of the actions of the oppressors... your governments... be they Tory or Labour. This tradition of scabbing was well illustrated at Leeds on the anniversary of Bloody Sunday when after being invited there, free speech was denied with no real explanations offered. I was held for almost seven hours under the PTA and slandered in some gutter papers after my release at Manchester airport. I wish to thank those comrades who turned up after midnight to organise a picket on my behalf. I believe if they had not done so I would have been held for at least three days and possibly deported. To arrive in Leeds and realise that the British state hardly needs a PTA when sections of the Brit left can do the job for them quite well, has made me think twice before ever again accepting any invitation to address any meetings or rally in England.

I am not angry, but rather filled with pity for the pettiness of some sections of the left. My trip however was not worthless as I addressed meetings in at least three cities in Scotland and England. My visit to Scotland had to

be cut short because a close comrade had been assassinated by the SAS a few days after the Leeds demo, and I wished to attend his funeral. What I find ironic is the fact that I was the only Derry person invited to speak and was asked to do so because I had written a pamphlet in 1977 entitled 'SUNDAY, BLOODY SUNDAY'.

I am still awaiting an explanation, and after years of harassment by the Brit and Loyalist police at ports and airports, after being without considerable finance personally, and having spent five weeks on the road during the 1981 hunger strike trying to mobilise support throughout England, and immediately after release from hospital hobbling on a walking stick as BF comrades know, am I not entitled to ask 'WHY COMRADES, WHY???' If the spoken word by Irish activists is to be throttled by the PTA (or ATP as I call it) then the printed word becomes vitally important.

Let me hope that this letter will get your readers thinking, and that as many as possible will come to your aid financially. Let me conclude by saying, your efforts on our behalf, and on behalf of other minorities, is appreciated, but it must be expressed in hard cash at this time in the history of BF. I'm sure your readers, and particularly those in the Irish solidarity movements in Britain, will not fail you.

Fraternally yours,
Derry Correspondent.

Farewell the middle class

Dear BF,

Congratulations on the series of articles in the last Feb/March paper analysing the present situation in this country. It is excellent to have such thought-provoking material in the paper...

I'm afraid I cannot agree with Paul Holt's suggestion (see BF No. 111) that our theory's emphasis on the working class, the divisions within it, and the importance of building autonomy in each oppressed sector, has driven militants away from us and revolutionary politics.

GIVE YOSSER A JOB



Here in Liverpool, I think that many people left BF to join the Labour Party after an exhausting and unproductive venture into electoral politics with the IMG, called 'Socialist Unity', in 1978/9 (remember that?). Having mistakenly been drawn away from grass-roots mass politics into electoral politics, it was logical that those same people should have tried to draw BF into the LP. I believe we are still suffering from a mistake that lost us our working class base and many excellent activists.

We do not now have a working class membership. The social composition of BF is predominantly middle-class and educated. It seems to me all the more important, therefore, that, at a time when rightwing ideas are on the offensive and appear to be winning, we do not lose sight of our orientation to the working class. Of course, we must not be blinded by the facts that, with five million unemployed, with sections of both the middle and working-class prepared to take direct action over the nuclear threat and animal liberation, that the fightback to the capitalist racist patriarchy, as Paul puts it well, is limited solely to the employed sections of the working class. But it is another thing altogether to suggest that this important core of the class is no longer significant. This implies that the employed are not worth mobilising and lack in some way revolutionary potential.

Who loves ya, baby?

Dear Big Flame,

Please find enclosed a couple of quid towards your appeal for funds to keep the paper going. Sorry it can't be more. I find the paper very useful, especially the February/March issue—and I would be sad to see it disappear.

I think the more analytical Feb/March issue was good. There is obviously no point in writing the paper as if it's selling 50,000 copies—articles on how rich the rich are, etc. obviously have their place, but not in a small-circulation paper. Similarly, comprehensive news on every issue you support is obviously better covered in single-issue publications, such as *Troops Out*, *Anti-Apartheid News*, *Sanity*, etc. (though there are political limitations with the latter two).

But I think the Feb/March issue struck the right balance, concentrating on today's most alive and major issues—namely the power of women/Greenham Common/Cruise; Ireland; state of racism and black resistance; and mass unemployment and government offensive smashing resistance in the workplace. Room was still found to raise a whole load of other issues as of course it must be.

But on all these issues, and others, perspectives were offered which differed both from other mixed/white left groups, and in many cases from the leadership of the 'official movement', e.g. CND. This doesn't apply to Ireland, where your coverage is similar to what can be found in *Troops Out*, though none the less welcome. (The recent article of SWP's attitude to Ireland was different and good.)

As someone whose main political activity is around Ireland, I find BF paper valuable because it keeps me in touch with ideas and actions in different parts of the country and different movements, being produced by people with broadly the same politics as BF members active on Ireland, whom I respect. If BF ceased to publish, this would get lost.

This is not to say that I agree with everything in it (I don't), nor that everything is the same standard (it isn't), nor that everything is that well-

informed (it isn't), nor that I don't get bored or angry with some of it (I do). But I'd like to see it growing and increasing its readership. I have on practical suggestion—advertising. I know you can't afford to pay for ads, but what you can do is write a standard letter (to be followed by phonecalls) to various publications, offering to swap adverts with them.

In solidarity,
Tony Harris
Leeds

Dear Big Flame

Enclosed is a cheque for £10 towards your fighting fund. The main change I would make in your paper would be to print an appeal in every issue asking the readers to send in articles—however short—about their areas and their own experiences. Many of us lack the confidence to write a lot—but it would lead to a much richer dialogue between us.

Fraternally,
Frank Conway
Manchester

Dear Comrades,

I have received the little notice, which announces that my subscription to the BF paper is expiring, so I write it you because I want to renew it. I've got the feeling that BF is a very pleasant paper because it's very easy for people to understand the main lines of your practice as socialists. But it would be better for a communist project and more exciting to debate, if BF was publishing more writings on the Irish liberation and socialist movement. I think it's one of the main tasks of revolutionaries in Europe to support this struggle. I am often afraid when I see the unknowledge of that war... I don't think people who don't know are oppressors, so... revolutionaries must explain that civil war and colonial occupation until victory!

Friendly yours,
Jean Claude (France)