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ever, there are plenty of reformist workers around, ready to demand a wage rise, or abortion rights, etc, without going further. Some lefties think we have to formulate reformist demands for workers to take up because otherwise they wouldn't think of any themselves. This is patronising and wrong. Workers are constantly making demands. For us to take part in putting forward demands would be merely to lapse into reformism, as we gave the impression that we believed a few more crumbs off our masters' tables would appease our real class interests. Our message must be revolutionary, not reformist. We support the struggle of the working class to improve its living standards. We aren't interested in reform campaigns that, by their nature, are only aiming at modifying the economy, which means modifying our exploitation. However, just because some people want to turn a struggle into a reform campaign does not mean that we don't support the struggle.

The anti-Poll Tax fight was an example of this. It was primarily a struggle of the working class to resist an attack on living standards. When there is a pay dispute we try to show the way to win it but also why pay rises will never be enough. When we go back to work, whether we have won or not, it is not the revolutionaries that should negotiate with the bosses, others can do this. Some might say this is "purist", to not negotiate with the bosses ourselves if we agree that, in the circumstances, such negotiation is inevitable.

Well, we may win the odd battle in the class war but the working class is always in defeat while there is wage-slavery so revolutionaries should never lead workers back to work. To do such a thing is to help the bosses manage our oppression, which is what reformism is all about. If we have to go back to work we go as proletarians, not as "managers".

Just as we shouldn't take union posts we shouldn't encourage the creation of rank and file groups or movements. A revolutionary rank and file movement is a contradiction in terms, there can only be a revolutionary movement.

Workplace Groups

There is a knee-jerk reflex amongst a lot of revolutionaries when talking about "the workplace", they say that what we need are workplace groups. Beyond this though little practical is usually done or suggested. It's time to face up to the hollowness of this slogan and forget about trying (or talking about trying!) to set up our exalted Revolutionary Workplace Groups. What we need is more revolutionaries everywhere. If we have more revolutionaries everywhere a few, at least, are going to have jobs. Revolutionaries in their workplaces will respond to disputes, attempt to escalate workplaces struggles and generally try to show other workers what a crap situation we are all in. They will argue against the economy (capitalism) and its union lackey, and during struggles they will actively participate in specific actions: like producing leaflets, secondary picketing, sabotage, setting up and speaking at unofficial assemblies, etc.

If we happen to be a few revolutionaries at one workplace and produce regular propaganda specific to work, this is fortunate, but obviously we are also acting as revolutionaries together outside work.

The time has come to finally put to rest the myth of "workplace groups" and their desirability unless we are talking about temporary groupings of workers formed during struggles to perpetrate specific acts of propaganda or violence against the bosses, union and economy in general.

Some might say that this is all a bit too "purist" and that we should be involved in creating or sustaining reformist demands or campaigns in order to supposedly escalate the class struggle, how-

Contents

recruits and unable to brainwash them fast enough to keep the group on its original lines!

We have enough reformist organisations around already, we don't want to inadvertently create any more.

To cut a long story short, the anti-union tendency finally realised the impossibility of keeping, or rather making, this rank and file group revolutionary. By no means did this mean we had fully developed our ideas but we did know that we no longer wanted to make the compromises towards unionism that were necessary in working with anarcho-syndicalists and leftists.

Keeping Out the Riff-Raff

There was no formal way of preventing people from entering the group, we just hoped that if we didn't like someone's politics then the rest of the group would agree and that person wouldn't be let in. Obviously this wasn't very satisfactory. Some thought we shouldn't let SWP members in, for example, because they were actively pro-statist/authoritarian and they might try to hijack the group. Others thought we should let them in as long as they didn't stray out of line too much or try to push their politics down our throats, thus causing interminable political arguments. Others thought we should let them in since they were militant workers. This problem was never satisfactorily resolved, the reason being that it lies at the crux of the argument over whether a rank and file group can be revolutionary. That is, whether a group that attracts an increasing number of non-revolutionaries can remain revolutionary in all its publications and interventions.

Our temporary solution was to print our basic aims and principles in the bulletin and hope the "wrong" sort of people wouldn't want to join anyway! (In the event this never became a practical problem, partly due to the fact that the CWG didn't survive that much longer.)

It has been argued that we should set up groups, encourage people to join, and hopefully their experience and learning in the group will turn them into revolutionaries. This might be alright if you have a hierarchical Party of thousands and are recruiting one or two people a month. But if a drastically smaller group (a few people), with egalitarian methods, recruited that many people as members then they would soon find themselves outweighed by the new

The first thing to state is that the last thing *Subversion* would want to encourage is the creation of a rank and file movement. Rank and file movements are always and without question union movements. They are inspired by the mistaken notion that The Unions have failed us, instead of the truth: all unions are our enemy. (Unions are organisations that negotiate with the bosses over the ways and rates at which we are exploited, but in no way do they object to the principle of our exploitation. Unions support capitalism and work, and need capitalism to survive.)

DAM Rank and Fileists!

Take the case of the postal workers' Communication Workers Group:

The CWG was set up by members of the Direct Action Movement (DAM, now the Solidarity Federation) and was a rank and file postal workers group. The DAM promoted anarcho-syndicalism as a means of working class organisation. Anarcho-syndicalists want to organise unions democratically and imbue them with anarchist politics. Such unions, imbued with anarchist methods and ideals, anarcho-syndicalists argue, will be revolutionary. CWG never got to the stage where the DAM members pushed for it to become an actual union. CWG, through its bulletin, *Communication Worker* (CW), aimed to inform and radicalise postal workers, to emphasise that active solidarity across trade, industry and union divides was essential if victories were to be won. In the tradition of rank and file groups CWG was open to all militant workers, including low-level union officials; i.e. shop stewards.

For most of the time CWG worked on the basis of an agreement between the various political tendencies. These ranged from anarchist, or anti-state communist to Trotskyist, as well as the original anarcho-syndicalism. As time went by these divisions became more pronounced. Eventually we had to reëmphasise the groups broader rank and file nature by drawing up a basic aims and principles. Due to the variance of views within the organisation these common denominators had to be fairly low and it was generally felt that the aims and principles were virtually meaningless as soon as we had written them.

Compromising Positions

This compromise didn't last long. Some of us felt we needed to make deeper and clearer criticisms of unions and rank and fileism. We all saw the potential (however distant!) for a group like CWG to eventually replace the union — in small ways, over certain areas, or totally. To some this was highly desirable of course, but others had misgivings. We realised that we could only replace the existing postal workers union (UCW) with another union, and if CWG expanded and became more successful this is eventually what the group would become.

The question became: how to work in a rank and file workers group, clearly and consistently attacking the union, without letting the group turn itself into a reformist organisation or union. We liked to see ourselves as a revolutionary group, but what would happen if we were flooded with militant, but reformist-minded workers? What if these workers wanted the group to articulate reformist demands? What if we gained more support in a workplace than the existing union, would we then participate in a day to day dialogue with the employers, would we help make deals, would we accept the "legality" of exploitation as long as it was a "fairer" exploitation and one we had actively agreed to? Would we behave in just the same way as the old union once we had become the permanent workplace organisation?

The first problem we tried to tackle was the old one about being swamped by different minded individuals.