

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE JOURNAL

1. Two sets of factors affect the future of RS:

i) What we want to make of it.

ii) The impact that co-operation with other groups in its production will make. It seems we are committed by past editorial and NC policy to explore such co-operation. Both the ISA and the LCG have expressed interest and the NC is expecting us to talk to both.

2. Whatever the future composition of the ed board, however, we need a clear idea ourselves of what we want and what the options are. It's only on that basis that we can usefully talk to others.

3. In considering the options we need to have in mind three questions:

i) Who do we want to reach and why

ii) What do we want to say

iii) What resources have we got to realise the above two.

Unless we get all three right, we're likely to fuck-up. Either the editorial policy will be vague ~~and unworkable~~ or we'll set ourselves targets we can't possibly realise. Or both.

4. With the exception of women's magazines, the working class as a whole doesn't read magazines and it's probably therefore safe to assume from the word go that we're not aiming at a primarily working class audience - unlike the newspaper. Instead we're trying to reach a vaguely defined white collar/student/professional/ intellectual readership, which certainly doesn't exclude working class people, but doesn't look to them as a majority. This is obvious, but it should be stated nevertheless.

5. Within that loose area, we need to decide more carefully what we're trying to do. For many years the left has produced magazines primarily aimed at a committed left readership. In the terminology of the industry - trade journals. Hoteliers read 'Catering News', lorry drivers read 'Headlight', accountants read 'Accountancy Today', and revolutionary socialists read 'Revolutionary Socialism'. Some have been quite successful, though I hesitate to name names. Others have never really ~~got off the ground~~ worked at all - magazines like the old IS journal, that was for ever being revamped, Imprecor, which sometimes contained good stuff, but only staggered along, and I think we can agree, RS.
6. There have also always been magazines aimed at a much broader and vaguer left readership. (In the late '60s/early '70s there were quite a number, all of which died) But the successful ones, whether it's NLR or Time Out, have always had some particular characteristic which has ensured their success. However in the last year or so, there has been a renewed interest in the possibility of producing 'broad left' magazines, stimulated by an awareness of a socialist movement outside the organised left, and the crumbling confidence of the left ~~groups~~ groups themselves about their ability to hegemonise the situation. So we have magazines like The Leveller or Socialist Review, which are designed to intervene in this socialist movement.
7. Of course this 'broad left'/trade journal division (not very happy terms perhaps), but I hope you follow me) doesn't exhaust the possibilities. There are dozens of specialist magazines like Capital and Class, the History Workshop journal, Critique etc.

8. Given, however, that we are not thinking in terms of a specialist journal in this sense, we do need to decide whether we're aiming at a broad left readership or a more traditional, committed one. At our ed meeting last month, two kinds of magazine emerged in particular; a literary journal (OK, I won't foist that dream on you again) or a current affairs magazine like the New Statesman or whatever that ~~Spanxizzzz~~ Spanish one was called (which I suspect carried much more approval) Both, interestingly, contained a common denominator, despite their obvious differences. In their different ways, they were both looking for a formula which would allow the journal to break out of a small left readership; to break out of the trade journal category.

9. If that's the direction we want to move in - and in my opinion it's certainly the most stimulating and interesting - we ~~em~~ need to be ~~xxx~~ aware of the two other points above; what do we want to say to such a readership, and have we got the resources to pull it off?

10. To make sense of the first would mean a very full discussion and assessment of exactly what the nature, composition etc of such a readership is; what would they want to read; what do we want to stimulate and so on. In short, what's the point of making such an intervention.

11. It's a discussion we may have to have, if ~~xxx~~ we all decide to move in that direction. However, very reluctantly, it seems to me we would be fooling ourselves if we thought we had the resources to produce such a magazine, even with co-operation from other groups, without a radical overhauling of BF's priorities. To

successfully launch such a ~~single~~ large circulation magazine (say 5000 plus) requires a great deal of money, time and people. Almost certainly it would have to be monthly, and almost certainly we'd run into distribution difficulties. It's interesting that the PDC, which sold 1000s and 1000s of copies in The Revolution Unfinished - which suggests that it ~~hasn't~~ is capable of being an effective distribution service - never sells more than 1200 copies of any magazine that comes out less than monthly. It only sells about 350 copies of RS. (God knows where the remaining 1650 go)

11. The implication of this, which it seems to me we have to very reluctantly accept, is that we are going to have to go on producing a 'trade journal'; a magazine that comes out at a max quarterly. That's not so depressing as it may sound.

12. The revolutionary left has seldom been in such a state of fluidity, self-questioning, honest doubt, open debate. As Socialist Challenge has shown, there is a real job to be done in providing a forum for non-sectarian debate and discussion around the problems facing the left.

13. The implication is that RS (and are we happy with the name?) would be primarily a magazine of left debate and discussion. That should not exclude articles which ~~are~~ primarily ~~factually~~ give information, but they should be a minority. How would it look? Without being too rigid I think we should try and look at different issues/problems in most editions. For instance the Spring one is

likely to roughly co-incide with a renewed burst of activity around ~~S&X~~ SU . We might devote that edition to an assessment of ~~S&X~~ SU, elections, the revolutionary road to social ~~change~~ change etc. We might devote another one to, for instance, a look at the debate between the neo-Ricardians and orthodox Marxist economists - a debate which has considerable implications of BF politics.

14. In case that sounds too dry, there's no reason why we shouldn't have editions devoted to much more 'subjective'/fiction -type topics. For instance, an area that greatly interests me, would be a series of personal accounts of why people are socialists; not moralising ones, but an attempt to really answer the question. Or we might look in another at the Utopian -v- scientific socialism issue; or what it means to be a revolutionary socialist today in Britian.

15. If this is the main reason for the magazine, it should not exclude other material. "e've always had good foreign coverage, and within limits that should continue. What I think we should avoid is longish editorial pieces which are really extended newspaper editorials, or rep@tage, which again, is simply an extennded version of ~~what~~ what goes in the newspaper . Unless, of course, the latter is particularly good. In short, we shouldn't see it as a quarterly current affairs magazine, which for me is a contradiction in terms.

16. What ever we finally ~~agree~~ agree on, I hope we can leave the next meeting with some clear conception of what we want to do.