

The contradiction of the title is deliberate, it reflects what is happening inside BF. Over the last 18 months, as a result of the decisions taken at our last conference, in terms of political recognition BF has grown very rapidly - many of the political ideas we have fought for are now being taken up and discussed in the wider context of the left, but this has not been accompanied by any substantial organisational growth. True there are a couplet of new BF groups but there exists a situation of no growth and crisis in all the existing BF groups with the exception of London, where we are catching up with the historical accident of having so few members there. And this contradiction exists at all levels, in Manchester for instance we sell regularly 100 papers in the bookshops yet the number of BF sympathisers is surely less than 10. And membership in Manchester like in most other groups has been stagnant for a long time - even going down at times

It is important that we try to sort out the reasons for this contradiction because it is having a very demoralising effect on BF's members. Only those of us who go round the country have the consolation of knowing that overall there is a lot going for BF - for most members it's a case of the wearying task of keeping a small group together in a situation where the level of class struggle is low and where joint activity means working with SWP or IMG groups who are usually much larger and are thus dominant in whatever front or joint work we are in. In these conditions, it is almost an act of faith to keep things together.

The reasons for this situation

No doubt there are many reasons for this situation, I want to take up two.

1. The politics of our sympathisers. There is no doubt that if BF collapsed our funeral would be the best attended on the left. At it there would be comrades from all over the country who 'like us'. But in the meantime, these comrades will not join BF. At a very useful discussion in the Yorkshire pre-conference aggregate, two sympathisers made the point that they would not join BF now since if they did join they would commit themselves seriously and they thought their political time could be better spent in their grass-roots (rank and file activity). And this is a fair point, which we are all aware of - that being in a revolutionary organisation does make demands on your time. Though it should be pointed out that all this time is not wasted - that time spent in collective political discussion is an essential part of anyone's political formation - and many individual militants do not have access to any form of collective decision-making and discussion. It can also be pointed out to movement sympathisers who argue that an organisation takes up time that they are not prepared to give that this is a selfish decision that they can take as individuals only because they are part of an informal network of friends and lovers that provides them with ~~xxxx~~ much of the support etc provided by an organisation - but by the very way that it is structured this network cannot do anything for outsiders, who want to get involved in the struggle. To do that you have to have a public face - a newspaper, public meetings etc and these things do take time and energy. (It is a paradoxical truth that libertarians etc who are firmly anti-elitist often end up with ways of working and structures that are very exclusive and elitish just because they are not formalised and open).

2. A point made by many sympathisers which most BF members agree with is that there is a tension between building the (autonomous) class struggle and building an organisation, even so humane an organisation as BF. The first thing to say about this tension is that forgetting about it won't make it go away. Instead of repressing it, we must make this tension a central part of our political discussion and debate. And we must make it clear to those are interested in our politics that our organisation crisis comes from our awareness of this tension. At an everyday level, what this means is that the reason BF groups are not much cop at paper selling, recruitment etc is just because the members are more interested in getting on with anti-fascist work, Irish work etc than in building BF.

fascist work, Irish work etc than in building BF. It should be clear that having our priorities this way round is an essential part of our politics. Anyone in their right mind who wants to prioritise party-building would join the SWP and get on with it. This does not mean that BF is bound to sooner or later disintegrate - but what it does mean is that the tension class-organisation (which has recently been a central issue of the revolutionary left in Italy) is an essential feature of our politics. Our debates on this subject must be made public and involve our sympathisers, many of whom disagree with us on this point.

Correct ways of handling this contradiction/tension

It would be presumptuous for me to claim to have solutions for a tension that dissolved Lotta Continua, split the OCT in France and continues to affect any revolutionary organisation that tries to reflect reality and not impose antique dogmas on it. But I will say something about the unsatisfactory way we have tried to deal with the tension in BF so far. Recognising that there is a tension between building the class struggle and building the organisation, BF groups have opted for a division of labour in which some comrades are encouraged to get on with the organisation work enabling others to concentrate on their autonomous-movement work, front work etc. In fact, what develops is a situation where we have the equivalent of 'full timers' except that they are not paid (we can't afford it) and their organisational work is not given much political recognition. In the same way that women in BF (and outside) have fought for the recognition that housework is work so part-time 'full-timers' must fight for the recognition that booking rooms, sending out notice of meetings, selling papers at meetings etc is political work. No doubt this recognition would be quickly conceded - but it is not enough. People who join BF tend not to be bureaucrats - they want to be involved in grass-roots activity. And a division of labour which ends up with some comrades having to do the donkey work is not acceptable inside BF. What is needed is the socialisation of donkey work inside the organisation, with each member taking it upon him(her)self to do their share of - of course there could be some flexibility in this; a person who did not know how to type would (before they learnt how to type) have to do more cleaning up of the office. So, collectivisation of donkey-work inside BF.

Then there is the need to re-open the debate inside BF as to why we are a political organisation and not 'dissolved in the class struggle'. To those of our sympathisers who question the need for a revolutionary organisation, we must point out building the class struggle is not a sufficient perspective since it omits any perspective (even in the long term) of seizing power. Now, of course, we needn't be stuck with a notion of seizing power along the lines of storming the Winter Palace. But, given that we do not believe in the peaceful transition to socialism, we recognise that violent confrontations have a role to play in the process. And in this situation the need for the revolutionary organisation as combat force is clear - this is one of the reasons why Eurocommunists (with their love and peace perspective) can aim to be mass organisation whilst we retain the need for a cadre organisation. No doubt there is always the danger of a 'militarist' deviation when such subjects are discussed. And given the backwardness of the class struggle in this country, armed struggle is not on the immediate agenda - but no matter how far in the distant future it is, it has organisational implications for the present. One has only to look at situations where the political has become separate from the military to realise their limitations from a revolutionary point of view - the RAF in Germany, the Red Brigades in Italy and the Provos exemplify the dangers of a military-political separation. The importance of a combat organisation is not the most important argument in favour of revolutionary organisation - more important is the role of the party (organisation) as centraliser of information and initiator of struggles and strategies. Given the very clear organisation of the ruling-class

on national and international lines, there is a great urgency and need for working class organisation that can be effective at this level. Nor do the last ten years provide us with any evidence that the local organisation of struggle is a sufficient perspective. Up and down the country, struggles are being defeated because of their inability to link up nationally or local victories occur which mean a defeat somewhere else (for example in struggles against the cuts where a successful struggle against a ward closure in one hospital means a cut-back in some other part of the NHS.)

Now clearly there are differences of opinion inside BF on these questions as well as between us and our sympathisers. Above all it is important that we make public the discussion around these questions and the fact that we do not take for granted any answers to them. What many comrades 'on the continent' and many of our sympathisers are questioning is the necessity for revolutionary organisation. Those of us who believe in its need must be prepared to argue for it.

Leadership in BF - also the fault of the rank and file.

TM's document on 'Leadership' in the conference documents is a very useful contribution - it puts well the position that internal education and cadre formation are essential if leadership is to be swept back in BF. But what it fails to bring out is that the relation between leaders and rank and file is a two-way process in which the rank and file also have their obligations. Right now, a common rank and file attitude is 'I will accept what the leadership says if I agree with it - if I don't, I'll do what I want - this occurs over political lines (immigration controls, our position on the party etc), on calls for national mobilisations for demos, on which demo to go on if there is a conflict, on selling our publications (as opposed to selling every other publication distributed by PDC), on whether or not to get involved in Socialist Unity etc. Some comrades may see this 'insubordination' as healthy but it isn't since it is not part of a process of political criticism and debate. There is a world of difference between members just not being bothered to sell the newspaper and members who refuse to sell and issue because they disagree with an article in it and who then raise their disagreements inside the organisation. Too often in BF what we get is comrades refusing to accept demands of the leadership without feeling the need to give any reason. This results in leadership bodies like the NS, NC and the commissions feeling totally superfluous and collapsing into apathy. A look at the commissions is enlightening - over the last year many of them have ceased to meet regularly and when they do meet, the meetings are poorly attended. The reason for this is not the red herring of tiring miles on the motorway - it is that decisions made in the commissions are disregarded by rank and file members if they feel like it. There are such extreme examples as an article on anti-fascism being written for the journal without proper consultation of the anti-fascist commission; no wonder they feel redundant.

Most of the discussion on leadership in BF is on the lines of a power hungry clique scheming and plotting to usurp power from an oppressed rank and file (the model used is the rise of Uncle Joe Stalin). In fact the reality is of a leadership bogged down by administrative duties (our heroic national secretary must send out 100 letters a week) and without the time necessary to develop strategic orientations for BF which the rank and file would not follow anyway. In fact what develops is a chicken and egg situation - with a leadership that does not take its role seriously and therefore does its job badly, which of course confirms the rank and file's expectation that they have a leadership that is not worth a carrot. On top of this there is, I suspect, no realisation that the type of leadership that emerges in BF must be different from traditional images of leadership. What BF politics should not produce is charismatic leaders who hold sway over the masses with the brilliance of their oratory - we should select a leadership on its ability to listen to and synthesise what

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is happening at the base. The proposals that have been made so far to improve the leader-rank & file relationship (e.g. that all leaders should do base work, that they should be rotated every two years) are organisational solutions to what is a political problem. Again what is needed is a collectivisation and socialisation inside BF which means a much greater input from the rank and file into the decision making process. But the other side of the coin is that there also has to be a greater readiness on the part of the rank & file to accept and carry out the decisions of the leadership bodies. Otherwise there will continue to be a reluctance in BF for comrades to come forward to take up positions of leadership - the word has gone round that it's a mugs' game.

Though one must be wary of any form of 'miracle' solutions, I believe that the way we tackle the division of labour in BF could be of central importance in finding a solution to our current crisis. As we grow larger and more national, the easiest solution open to us is a greater division of labour and more full-timers. But I am not convinced that it is the correct solution in situations as different as;

- workplace base groups where the existence of full-timers has always inhibited the political formation of worker-comrades.
- on the newspaper where what is needed is a more active involvement of members in writing for, producing and selling the paper.
- on our leadership bodies.

The case is strongest for full-timers over admin. matters but even here there are problems in that 1. is it right to expect of comrades that they alone do admin work - even for money? 2. is it possible to make a clear division between what is admin and what is political work? The perspective opposite to the division of labour is socialisation of tasks inside the organisation.

If put into practice socialisation could be an important factor in sorting out the crisis facing local BF groups. It will be of help to us as we try to get the local growth that should be going together with BF's national growth.

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P.S. Discussion is needed in BF on recruitment. Too many comrades who have joined say they hung around ~~xxxxxxx~~ feeling unwanted for months. Recruitment must be recognised as the time-consuming political job that it is and not left to chance. Also it must be recognised that it is a very large step for someone to commit themselves to joining BF. We won't get (and wouldn't want) people signing up to join at the end of a meeting. For most comrades joining will be a long, cautious process in which we must be prepared to discuss with them all aspects of BF's politics. Each BF group should have members in charge of this work - and it should be recognised as a very important political activity.