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BIG FLAME: RESITUATING SOCIALIST STRATEGY AND ORGANISATION

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In 1970 a group of people in Liverpool founded a local socialist newspaper, called 'Big Flame', which soon became a Merseyside-based revolutionary socialist organisation, and since the mid-seventies a national political organisation with branches in most of the main towns in England. The early impetus came from a critique of the dominant far left organisations which were seen as both incapable of coming to terms with the changing nature of capitalism and of grasping the significance of the new movements which were rapidly developing their strength. The left was seen to ignore or play down the importance of the women's movement and struggles in the community and failed to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of anti-imperialist struggles in their own terms. In the workplace no attention was paid to the way the labour process was being changed to attack the basis of job organisation and overwhelming emphasis was placed on recruiting shop stewards rather than working genuinely at a mass level to help stimulate struggles. In addition left organisations in general crudely overemphasised the role of the party and leadership. In many respects they seemed to live in a world apart, with political activity determined by the internal rhythms of the organisation rather than the needs of the struggle.

Whilst this critique was shared by many on the independent left Big Flame saw as a priority the need to build a revolutionary organisation to aid the development of the class struggle and to act with other left forces to develop the revolutionary process. Thus, whilst rejecting the existing left organisations we also rejected the widespread anti-party sentiments. We argued for the necessity to help build forms of organisation, based round a clear political perspective, so that the power of the independent left current of which we saw ourselves part could be more fully realised and have as much effect at a national, organisational level as it did at a local and sectoral level. Because politics in general has been in a state of flux it has always seemed essential for an organisation to be always open to new ideas and to revising its positions in the light of experience. Although Big Flame has changed and modified its politics in various ways over the years it remains committed to the task of building a new type of organisation with a new form of transitional politics.

For the purpose of this article the two most important areas in which

Big Flame differs from other left organisations will be looked at.¹ These can be summarised as: first, support for the autonomous movements (of women, blacks and gays most notably) and its consequences for organisational structures and for the relationship between movement and organisation; and, secondly, how we see the nature of the revolutionary socialist project in advanced capitalist societies and the implications for socialist strategy, demands and forms of activity. Both aspects of this politics can be grounded in a marxist analysis which is enriched and modified by feminist theory. In the former area the analysis centres on a wider view of the composition of the working class; in the latter area the perspective is based on the modified nature of the relations between capital, the state and the working class under the impact of Keynesianism.

The Autonomous Movements and Socialism

When it comes to analysis of 'the working class' a deep-seated economism pervades both the reformist and revolutionary left in England. For us a wider concept of the working class is necessary. The social base of the explosion of revolutionary socialist ideas since 1968 cannot be contained within the traditional narrow framework. The new movements have uncovered or rediscovered issues such as ecology, sexual politics, and feminism which are valid and essential areas of political activity—as essential as the struggle over wages and work conditions. Such movements were not initiated by the left organisations themselves—far from it. Nor have left political organisations been capable of giving such movements a political direction, because they have largely been external to them and thus failed to understand these movements in their own terms. The left chose to preach to the movements instead of recognising its own need to learn from them.

Some of these movements, whose membership is not drawn from any readily defined constituency based on the forces and relations of production and the division of labour, could be loosely described as 'ideological' or 'cultural' in motivation: the ecological and environmental movements; the movements against nuclear power and weapons; the alternative technology and radical science and health movements, and so on. Indeed it was one such movement, the student movement of the late sixties, which instigated the renewal of a widespread revolutionary current in the advanced capitalist countries through a rejection of bourgeois education values. The left could, if it chose, fairly readily accommodate these without a fundamental challenge to its politics and forms of organisation. The same is not true of the doubly-oppressed sectors—the autonomous movements—who now entered the struggle: most notably the womens', gays' and black movements.² Whilst the origin of the self-expression of these movements might be through an ideological critique of existing social relations they are also based on real, material divisions in

society. It is this last fact in particular, still unrecognised by most left organisations, which has led to the failure to respond adequately to these movements.

This material basis for divisions in the class is distinct from the 'hierarchy of labour powers' within waged work which results in divisions between say skilled and unskilled, white-collar and blue-collar. The theoretical and political framework for analysing and fighting these latter divisions has existed since Marx (though inadequately analysed and taken account of in practice): for example, struggling against the division between mental and manual labour, demanding equal wages and wage rises for all, parity in conditions between white-collar and blue-collar workers, and so on. But the divisions between women and men, black and white, gays and heterosexuals, were scarcely looked at until the end of the sixties. This is partly because, although these divisions also operate strongly in the workplace through such things as the sexual and racial divisions and stratification of labour, at the theoretical level categories other than economic ones are needed: 'patriarchy' is perhaps the most developed of these concepts; 'racism', in the context of an analysis of the effects of imperialism on consciousness, has been extended and developed in a similar way in order to understand the subordination of blacks in a white society; and the combined influence of feminism and anti-patriarchal analysis, with the emergence of sexual politics, has decisively challenged the monolith of heterosexual stereotyping common to the left as well as to bourgeois society.

The point here is not to pretend that these concepts and their relationship to marxism are unproblematical. What is clear is that the left organisations must tackle these questions in a positive manner if they are going to be able to ally themselves with those many thousands of militant anti-capitalists who have developed their critique of capitalism through their individual and collective experiences in these areas.

Nor are these areas as divorced from the 'hard' areas of politics as much of the left would like to think. In the USA the recent growth of the New Right has centred on such issues as abortion, which is subsumed under a defence of bourgeois notions of the family. This New Right consciously chose such issues because of the widespread popular concern for such questions which were seen as a better bet than economic issues for the fostering of reactionary politics at a mass level.³

However, even if the different areas of oppression and alienation are recognised there can still be no assumption that the struggle for socialism and the struggle for, say, feminism and a non-patriarchal society are one and the same. Such a unity must be worked out in practice and in theory. For the Labour left and revolutionary organisations the struggle for socialism as waged by the labour movement is dominant. Socialism is normally seen in the traditional terms of nationalisation of the means of

production, a more efficient production system and the emancipation of workers as wage-earners. But such a socialism would be an incomplete liberation for women if patriarchy were to continue unchallenged, for blacks if all forms of racism and racial domination were not transformed, and for gays if they continued to live in a society which defined homosexuality as a deviancy. The method of approaching the problem has several aspects.

Socialism today must always be seen as comprising a good deal more than the nationalisation of the means of production, and so on. A definition of socialism must include the emancipation of all sectors of society against all forms of oppression and alienation. This is not simply a libertarian moral imperative. Probably a majority of the active revolutionary socialist movement today has been prompted to its socialist beliefs not by its own economic impoverishment, nor simply through opposition to the economic and imperialist oppression of others (though this is of course of great importance), but precisely out of their recognition of the need for socialism in order to challenge all oppressive social relations, particularly those which directly affect them, and to provide a progressive revolution in society's values.

Socialism in the marxist usage is, of course, about the self-emancipation of the working class. For the struggle for socialism to change people, as well as institutional power-structures, it must be based on the self-activity of the class as a whole, not simply the goodwill and fine intentions of revolutionary parties. A lesson from the Russian and other revolutions is the essential need to defend the sovereign organs of the working class—workers' councils, area assemblies and so on. The autonomous women's movement, with the independent organisations of women, will be just as essential after a socialist revolution as before, just as they will be for blacks, gays, youth etc. Only by recognising this can the political and organisational basis for unity between the different sections in the struggle be established. It cannot be delegated to a socialist party no matter how enlightened on these questions it might be.

Of course this may seem somewhat idealistic: revolutionary struggles are serious situations and it might be objected that the need is to focus on the specific struggle for socialism. This type of view constitutes a central weakness of left organisations in relation to the autonomous movements. Of course, in the movements it is necessary to argue, in appropriate ways, the case for socialism as providing the only conditions in which a full and genuine emancipation might be achieved. However among the left organisations there is a powerful and deep-seated economism at work, which is also present among the revolutionary left. This is exhibited in both politics and practice. Political demands will be watered down ('women's rights' rather than 'women's liberation'), economic demands will be taken up and emphasised (e.g. equal pay for equal work) but others played down

(e.g. against domestic violence against women, against sexism and racism in the workplace). It is all too easy, even assuming sound politics and goodwill, for male activists, especially given their dominance in left organisations, to underrate such struggles. Activists in the autonomous movements are, justifiably, extremely sensitive to, and wary of, these attitudes.

Of course a large and growing number of socialists agree in principle with these points. What makes Big Flame unusual and probably unique among English left organisations (and possibly internationally) is the way in which it has confronted these problems and attempted to resolve them both politically and organisationally within a national framework. It is one thing to be sympathetic at the level of ideas, it is quite different and more difficult to survive the contradictions during the course of a collective practice; not by suppressing the problems for the sake of some 'higher' or more immediate unity of purpose ('the party', 'the revolution', 'fighting the Tories' etc.) but by integrating the political lessons into a viable politics and method of working.

There are three main components of the approach Big Flame has adopted. First, politically the task is to enrich and if necessary to transform radically the demands for which we are fighting. For socialist organisations to be taken seriously by feminists they must not simply stop at those demands which are quite easy to incorporate (creches, maternity and paternity leave etc.) but must tackle what are thought to be the more difficult questions: questions of sexuality, of pornography, of violence against women including domestic violence, of housework and childcare, of sexist jokes and so on. Such questions are not marginal but are of central concern to the vast majority of women and should be equally so to men. After all, if socialists do not acknowledge the centrality of such issues *now*, what point is there for women to support the struggle for socialism if this means subordinating your most immediate concerns; especially since there is no guarantee in any event that such a socialism, once achieved, will not be content to keep in place the oppressive patriarchal system?

Secondly, in terms of the relation of political organisation to the autonomous movements it is a prerequisite that organisations not only learn from movements politically but also in all circumstances support the autonomy of the movement as a whole. Of course when one talks of an autonomous movement such as the women's movement one is not talking of some undivided or unproblematical entity. The fact that major divisions exist within these movements does not justify a political organisation intervening in such movements in order to win people to a political line which is externally derived. It is legitimate and indeed necessary to pursue a political strategy and argue for certain courses of action within movements, but only if the politics is informed by, and implicitly defends the autonomy of, the movement as a whole. Also in practice a political position

meeting these criteria will only succeed in winning support if its advocates have shown themselves to be a legitimate part of the movement.

Examples of how not to operate in this regard can readily be seen in the papers of the left which are aimed at women, blacks, youths, etc. More often than not the politics of the main articles will be politically identical to those in the general paper of the organisation. The core of the politics is unaffected and the main strategic questions are seen as the same for everyone, and are unmodified by the particular needs of each sector. Thus when a decision needs to be made on priorities, or when there is a conflict of interests between those in an autonomous movement and the traditional labour movement, the latter almost invariably wins out. Nor are the specific organisations of women, youth and blacks which are set up by left groups little more than fronts for the sponsoring organisation. There is little or no recognition that it is essential for such organisations to have genuinely independent structures in order that they can develop their own political strength and dynamic. Instead the norm for the political relationship of an organisation to such a group is one of indirect control and sometimes even manipulation. Great opportunities to bring people into an organised socialist framework have been lost, particularly among youth, feminists, and the unemployed, because of the absence of genuinely independent organisations with a basic socialist politics.

Thirdly, there are many crucial lessons for organisational forms and structures in all areas of politics, not least the political organisation itself. The structures of the labour movement, of course, have been, in general, stultifying; but far left organisations, preoccupied with the priority of building an 'alternative leadership' are just as bad. Such a perpetuation of forms inimicable to the socialist project is unacceptable. Whilst there is a need for a unity of purpose and tactics to be achieved via national and local decision-making structures the best way to achieve a real collective unity—one which can provide a long-standing solidarity between members so that political and inter-personal problems can be tackled in a good spirit—is through maintaining the most open and democratic structures. It is no solution to have a national leadership imposing its will through the mechanism of a democratic centralist constitution. Rank-and-file bodies and campaigns, also, must be open, democratic and non-hierarchical, and not in the control of a political organisation. It is noticeable that the left, even when it makes the attempt, often has great difficulty in constructing open and democratic structures, especially at the national level.

Notions of internal structures and the role of leadership are closely tied to the question of where political ideas come from. If one largely accepts that most central questions of revolutionary strategy were resolved, in one way or other, by the European revolutionary movement at the beginning of this century, then the answer is simple. Correct ideas come from a study of this period and leadership should be exercised by those who can best

apply the lessons to the situation of today. However an exaggerated emphasis on knowledge in this and similar areas leads to distortions. Modern capitalist societies have given rise to new movements and modified the traditional forms of struggle. A better emphasis now would be on seeing new ideas, and their development into a coherent body of politics, as only being possible through a living relationship between movement, class and organisation. This involves an openness to new concepts and the flexibility to modify old ideas.

One organisational way Big Flame has tackled this is through the establishment of national 'commissions' for each major sector of work. Whereas left organisations usually have someone appointed by the centre to organise the sectoral work—typically a full-timer with a great deal of authority and power to get the leadership's decisions implemented—Big Flame's commissions elect their own convenors and have no internal hierarchy. Each commission is open to all members, and indeed to non-members and members of other groups who we work with in that sector. The task of the commission is to develop the practice and analysis within their area, in collaboration with the national committee and in accordance with national conference decisions.

A similar approach is used on the question of full-timers. The leadership of the main far left groups has traditionally been seen by the members as using powers of appointing full-timers as a form of patronage. Here the left chooses not to learn the lesson of revolutions in which generally the party apparatus, after the seizure of power, has established itself as a new ruling elite (and then ruling class based on a fused party-state apparatus). Such problems associated with traditional concepts of party workers and full-time revolutionaries have led Big Flame to circumscribe the political powers of full-timers and create some internal plurality of power bases—commissions, national committee, administrative committee, newspaper collective, journal collective etc.—rather than operating an internal oligarchy, with effective power vested in a central committee, along the lines of most left groups.

It is also necessary to 'institutionalise' mutually agreed obligations and political commitments. In Big Flame women have the right to meet separately, nationally and locally, so as to strengthen their own power within the organisation and ability to operate collectively outside it. In addition it is a constitutional requirement that all branches of the organisation have women's meetings as a regular and integral part of branch life. This is based on an awareness that it is not enough to be verbally committed to some ideal. A further way these questions are tackled is through a commitment to build wideranging prefigurative forms and structures not simply in the directly political area but in all areas of life. It is important that these politics are not simply tacked on to a political programme only to be dropped later, but are struggled for in concrete ways in the here and

now. We have to follow the lead of the women's movement in avoiding stifling structures and procedures: in matters such as seating arrangements, chairing of meetings, positive discrimination, timing of meetings, provision of creches and so on—whilst recognising that unstructured forms can also be undemocratic and alienating. Of course, these organisational practices and political commitments by no means solve all the problems of women's participation at all levels of the organisation, but at least they offer concrete ways in which women's power inside left groups can be strengthened.

It is traditional on the left, particularly the far left, that being an active member means devoting the greater part of one's time to the service of the organisation. Obviously, committed socialists should be expected to take seriously their political activity but it is equally important that their own personal needs are recognised. By the demands it makes of its active members the left almost systematically excludes from its ranks people with responsibility for children. The effect is a distortion both in terms of the composition of its activists and the content of its politics.⁴ In *Big Flame* this question has at least started to be tackled. The ability of members to play an active role as militants is recognised to be constrained by their commitments as individuals. Collective support in one's personal situation is seen as a valid and indeed a central part of what an organisation is for. Discussions on such questions as 'children and socialism' are organised so that the organisation as a whole becomes aware of the different needs of its members and those they share their lives with. Summer schools are held with the needs of the children seen as central. In these ways the personal alienation one often feels as a socialist militant can start to be overcome and strong collective personal support systems, engendering a sense of comradeship, can be established and integrated into the life of the organisation. The general ignoring of these questions has greatly exacerbated the exodus of a large number of militants from left organisations.⁵

Strategy for Socialism

In deciding what is the most likely and best way of achieving socialism it is facile to pretend that the path is already clearly mapped out in the form of a political agency and its programme (courtesy of either the revolutionary party or the Labour Party). Capitalism, even in its present severe structural crisis, remains an extremely powerful enemy. Power is not concentrated at one simple point which by seizing gives control of the system. Power is diffusely distributed—in the army, in the state apparatus, down through the ideological weight exerted by the education system and media, and so on—and capitalism is that much stronger for it.⁶

It is also of crucial importance for a fully meaningful definition of socialist transition that the struggle for socialism is based on the self-activity and involvement of the majority of the people. Both these points

play a determining role in socialist strategy and tactics. Yet the revolutionary axiom still holds that the ruling class will ultimately *fight* to maintain its class power—as it now effectively holds out the threat of the use of force (by the legal system, the police and army) in order to maintain social control. Such an eventual resort to violence by the bourgeoisie makes it important that we organise and develop our politics with this eventuality in mind, and do not sow illusions that a peaceful transition to socialism is possible. Commitment to building revolutionary organisation (which cannot be reduced to *the* revolutionary party), and preparing politically for some ultimately decisive confrontation, is essential. This means adopting militant tactics and forms of organising: not by making unnecessary concessions at the expense of militant self-activity, but winning those left of centre by the power of our arguments and the validity of our struggles.

Yet the classical revolutionary views of achieving socialism are seriously flawed and the system of ideas needs radical overhaul in various respects. The orthodox trotskyist left bases its strategy (in varying degrees) on some simple premises: that, since we are in the epoch of revolutions and the collapse of capitalism is inevitable if not actually imminent, the revolution is round the corner; and that the working class is held back in the struggle for socialism by a traitorous labourist leadership. The task therefore is seen as being to build an alternative leadership in the form of a revolutionary party, even if this means leading a revolution as a small minority. Such a position (admittedly caricatured here) has profound implications for practice.

Our view starts from an understanding of the complexity of capitalism and the impossibility (and undesirability) of an approach to the revolutionary transition based on the seizure of power by a minority party. In advanced capitalist countries the struggle for socialism will be protracted and will take place as part of an international struggle for socialism during a profound crisis of capitalism. This does not mean putting off raising the question of socialism and revolution nor opposing the need for revolutionary parties. Though it is wrong to have a fatalistic faith in some economic collapse of capitalism accompanied by a rise of revolutionary consciousness, it is also a mistake to ignore the fact that the present severe economic crisis objectively poses the possibility of socialism being seen at a mass level as a solution to unemployment and the threat of militarism. The seeds of socialism are found in a large number of struggles and if we compromise on the end in view we shall also compromise on the immediate tactics, effectively acting as a break on struggles, as the reformist left has done over the years. Since socialism must be achieved by the majority, not simply proclaimed by those claiming to act as representatives of the working class, a successful socialist project will most likely be achieved in a period of general left advance, which includes having left governments in

power. In England this means finding ways of relating to radical left reformism without compromising on militant policies and a class-struggle approach.

The method of the orthodox trotskyist left suffers from two major weaknesses (the first rightist, the second ultra-leftist): either it leads to 'tailism'—letting the reformist leaders determine the course and, effectively, content of your central demands; or it leads to a resort to an exposure politics—supposedly raising people's consciousness by placing demands on reformist leaders which cannot be met (demanding that reformists be revolutionaries). Both these notions and the consequent leadership-fetishism derive from a false understanding of reformism. For the trotskyist left, reformism is a comparatively unproblematical concept. It is seen to reside largely in the institutional hold of the leadership of the traditional labour movement bodies over the working class, who otherwise would be waging, it is implied, a vigorous struggle for socialism. (A similar approach, it must be said, is used by many on the left of the Labour Party.) The 'semi-trotskyist' SWP (Socialist Workers Party) greatly improved on this in their IS (International Socialist) days by locating the hold of reformism within the daily struggles of the industrial working class. This enabled the IS to focus on militant struggle at the rank-and-file and shop steward level (whilst, mistakenly, ignoring the question of the Labour Party leadership). This largely accurate assessment of the industrial sector explains the relative success of the IS/SWP compared to the orthodox trotskyist left (and indeed to the Labour Party and Communist Party 'broad left' as well). However their placing of the 'locus of reformism' exclusively in the workplace was itself economistic. For us a wider definition of reformism is necessary. This has important consequences for socialist strategy.

Reformism has a deep, multi-layered materialist basis in present society. It does not simply reside in the forms of organisation and relative gains of the rank-and-file trade union movement. Reformism also has a materialist basis in the wider number of reforms won, and frequently conceded quite willingly by progressive capital, in such areas as the welfare state, housing, education and so on. Moreover the vastly increased penetration by capital and the state of all areas of social and cultural life—itself one of the by-products of these changes—has created a sophisticated basis for the generation of bourgeois ideas, which enables the reproduction of reformist and social-democratic illusions within the progressive sections of the working class. The socialist response to this must itself be subtle. If reformism is a living relationship between the working class and other forces in society—mediated by institutions and representative forms of organisation, as well as having a strong ideological component—then socialism must also be multi-levelled and adaptable, with radical and revolutionary policies for all parts of society.

That it is possible to construct an alternative way of doing socialist politics can be seen through the example of workers' plans. The best known, but by no means only, example is that devised by Lucas Aerospace workers.⁷ Such plans need to be developed through the full, democratic involvement of workers. The nature of the products or services must themselves be challenged and alternatives proposed; environmental and ecological considerations should be taken full account of; the labour process itself, implicitly accepted by nearly all the left, needs to be challenged, including the sexual division of labour and the division between mental and manual work; and, in all this, hierarchical structures must be avoided and people's latent talents released.

The far left groups have done little more than be passively supportive towards these alternative plans—much of the independent and Labour left has been much better. For us, the workers' plan approach points the direction of a new way of doing politics. Most importantly, it indicates that the content of a socialist programme can and must be transformed and enriched. Both the revolutionary and reformist left tend to separate economic from political struggles, with political struggle remaining the sphere of the Labour Party and revolutionary party respectively. What is necessary is for socialist strategy to break down this false dichotomy. In the workers' plan approach this split is overcome. The Lucas Aerospace plan itself is not economistic but highly political—it challenges the nature of the product and poses production for use-value rather than exchange-value; it learns from environmentalism, feminism and the alternative technology movement; it tries to relate to the needs of the local communities, yet it is also internationalist in proposing to develop appropriate technology for underdeveloped countries; and it challenges hierarchical and representative models of political activity. This is all much more socialist and subversive at a mass level than the repetitive and timeless demands on the TUC to call a general strike or on the state to nationalise a company. The socialist left must learn from these examples. If socialism is to be firmly placed on the agenda and achieve mass support it is important that similar methods, challenging the left's traditional approach in terms of content and forms of organisation, are developed in all areas: housing, health services, education and so on. In this way a coherent body of socialist policies can be developed at a local and national level, and political organisations—and socialism—can be identified with them.

Towards a New Transitional Politics

One of the ways in which the revolutionary left must seek to relate to left reformism is illustrated by the example of workers' plans. People fighting for such plans, and on many other issues as well, cannot duck the question of their implementation, since these are not simply consciousness-raising devices. Rather they are concrete programmes of struggle which seek to

shift the terrain of struggle in favour of the working class whilst at the same time being entirely consistent with a socialist programme. Yet to achieve any chance of implementation of such proposals one is going to need financial and physical resources which would most readily come from a left Labour government or local council. The fact that such a situation poses a real risk of co-option into a reformist project or by progressive capital is not a sufficient reason not to run the risk. The task is to be aware of the pitfalls and take steps to avoid them.⁸

Just as we cannot avoid the question of implementation when fighting for a workers' plan approach, the left cannot avoid the question of economic strategy. Given the likelihood of a protracted struggle for socialism and the need to develop politics which are clearly in the immediate, as well as long-term, interests of the working class, it is necessary for revolutionaries to find ways of relating to the left versions of an alternative economic strategy without compromising on the need for independent rank-and-file forms of organising as the starting point for one's politics. This means supporting aspects of a left alternative economic strategy such as increased public spending, whilst remaining critical of the dominant political approach, which is statist, centralist and chauvinist (the latter most clearly in the presentation of the case for import controls). In this way it should be possible for socialists to use the space offered by a radical reformist strategy to develop militant rank-and-file organisation and demands, and campaigns round other issues.

Revolutionaries must distinguish between supporting a programme of reforms, which can be seen as being in the immediate interests of the working class and consistent with the struggle for socialism based on self-activity, from a reformist programme, which effectively incorporates the working class in what is little more than a progressive capitalist approach. Where the line is drawn in practice may be unclear, but what is clear is that there must be no compromise on the question of developing forms of self-activity and support for autonomous movements and placing the immediate interests of the class at the forefront.

Despite the very unfavourable general political situation at present, with the left and working class as a whole unable so far to mount an effective resistance to unemployment and the general rightward drift of society the elements of socialist advance are nevertheless still not negligible. Any socialist advance, certainly in terms of political organisation, will have to draw on the three key areas where socialists are presently active: in the left of the Labour and Communist Parties, in revolutionary groups and among independent activists. The simple agglomeration of these forces, even if it were possible, would not break down the mass apathy and hostility towards socialism. To alter this a political transformation within the left and in its ideas of socialism is a prerequisite. For example we should not simply defend existing state services, which are

accurately enough seen by people as bureaucratic and statist, we must also seek the transformation of such services both in terms of content and democratic accountability, locally and nationally.⁹

The realignment of the socialist left must therefore be seen above all as a political project. How this is articulated precisely—through the Labour Party, the far left, the autonomous movements, independent journals and campaigns, or some combination of these—though important, is secondary to the political task. The immediate role of political organisation in developing this socialist project is crucially important, because it is too easy to gloss over or ignore very real organisational differences, both of a national and international nature, outside of an organisational framework. Central to this task is the breaking down of the traditional division between the economic and the political, fighting for a recognition of the importance of all areas of people's lives, and accordingly redefining both socialism and the strategy to achieve it.

NOTES

1. This is by no means intended to summarise all areas where Big Flame has a distinct politics among left organisations. Others include support of the right of self-determination of the Welsh and Scottish peoples, coupled with strong support for the struggle of the Irish people for self-determination; and the nature of Soviet-type societies which we see as constituting a new mode of production, called 'state-collectivism'. This latter question is discussed in *The Century of the Unexpected: a New Analysis of Soviet-type Societies*. Details of this and some other Big Flame publications are given below.
2. With some major modifications similar political points can be applied to youth, and possibly now the 'permanently' unemployed.
3. See for example the article 'In the Wings: New Right Organization and Ideology', by Allen Hunter in the Spring 1981 issue of *Radical America* (Vol. 15, Nos. 1 & 2). This has been reprinted in abridged form in Big Flame's journal *Revolutionary Socialism* 7, Summer 1981, together with 'US Gays Fight Back', an interview with Amber Hollibaugh.
4. Such questions form a central part of the discussion in: Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal and Hilary Wainwright, *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism*, Merlin Press, 1979.
5. See '1968—Ten Years On' by Peter Anderson, in *Revolutionary Socialism* 2, 1978.
6. For a discussion of the problems of socialist strategy posed by the restructuring of capitalism and divisions in the working class see Andrew Friend and Andy Metcalf, *Slump City: the Politics of Mass Unemployment*, Pluto Press, 1981.
7. For an account of the Lucas Aerospace plan see Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards' Committee, *Lucas: An Alternative Plan*, IWC Pamphlet No. 55, Institute for Workers' Control. For another example see Coventry Machine Tool Workers' Committee, *Crisis in Engineering: Machine Tool Workers' Fight for Jobs*, Institute for Workers' Control, 1979.
8. For a detailed account of some of these issues see *State Intervention in Industry: a Workers' Inquiry*, written and published by Coventry, Liverpool, Newcastle and North Tyneside Trades Councils, 5 Queens Street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
9. See London Edinburgh Weekend Group, *In and Against the State*, Pluto Press, 1980.

FURTHER READING on BIG FLAME

The Revolution Unfinished: a Critique of Trotskyism, Paul Thompson & Guy Lewis.

Walking a Tightrope, Big Flame women's pamphlet.

The Century of the Unexpected: a New Analysis of Soviet-type Societies, Moshe Machover & John Fantham.

The Past Against Our Future: Fighting Racism and Fascism, Big Flame anti-racist/anti-fascist commission pamphlet.

Children and Socialism, papers from a Big Flame day school.

Organising to Win, Big Flame industrial commission pamphlet.

Revolutionary Socialism, Big Flame journal.

Big Flame. Big Flame newspaper.