

WHAT IS A BIG FLAME GROUP?

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BIG FLAME

INTRODUCTION: We are putting forward a document that we hope will contribute to a minimum basis for being a Big Flame group. It is minimum in the sense that we have not put down in detail what we would like Big Flame to be, either politically or organisationally in the longer term: although obviously much of this is implicit. This is not out of a desire to hide what we want - Firstly its to avoid the chaos that discussing a very wide range of political issues would create at only our second conference. Secondly to concentrate on what Big Flame needs to be in relation to the demands the current class struggle puts on us. The document attempts to situate organisational tasks in a class perspective and construct a short list of political principles that are a minimum needed to guide our interventions. We are however open to suggestions of additional principles as long as they are put forward in a spirit which realistically grasps our present potential for unified politics.

PART A - ORGANISATIONAL TASKS AND THE CLASS STRUGGLE

1) THE DETERMINANTS OF ORGANISATION : Lenin outlined the reasons that make an interventionist cadre organisation necessary. Essentially, they are that the capitalist division of labour generates in any one section of the working class only a partial and fragmented experience of the system and the struggles against it. These differences are reinforced by the varying ideological experiences of the working class: due to exposure to bourgeois ideology and social relations, different cultural backgrounds etc. Also the class struggle on a general and day to day basis lacks continuity as the crisis is expressed unevenly and often in an isolated way.

Therefore a political organisation operates to bring together militants from all sectors, to totalise experience and generate overall revolutionary perspectives. It links the experience and practice of struggle by bringing individual militants together, overcoming isolation and lack of confidence and providing consistent political education. It should be rooted enough in the masses, to enable it to be in the forefront of the struggle and provide the necessary leadership. This view separates us from anarchists and ultra-leftists who counterpose the autonomy of the struggle to an interventionist organisation. Thus they restrict its role to propaganda, whereas we see organisation as necessary to bring out and make conscious the autonomous tendencies and consolidate the gains made in struggle.

The ultimate task of revolutionary organisation is that of arming and leading the proletariat to the seizure of power. At this point the difficulties arise, because in the past all victorious revolutions have occurred in a situation of inter-imperialist wars (except Cuba) and in Russia in particular in a situation of a sudden collapse of the capitalist institutions. Lenin and the Bolshevik Party adapted their organisation to fit the characteristics and composition of the Russian proletariat, in that historical situation, and they succeeded in seizing power. But that success had the unfortunate effect of stopping the development of the analysis of revolutionary organisation: the 3rd International is the history of the failures of the 'parties of the insurrection' trying to copy the Bolshevik model. So we are left with the difficult task of resituating the concept of organisation - to see how the precise form and character of revolutionary organisation should fit the needs of the general class situation in capitalism today. Because it lacks this analysis, the traditional practice of Trotskyist and 'Marxist-Leninist' groups, on organisation de-generates into repetitive and administrative calls to 'build the party' - A task which never seems to differ in any situation.

As we indicated, organisation is not a timeless concept, to be 'applied' and 'built' in any circumstances. It is the instrument for achieving certain political goals. Naturally those goals differ in varying circumstances and historical epochs, so the form and content of organisation must differ. It is determined by questions like - who are we organising with and under what conditions? This involves making an analysis both of the changing composition of the classes and its likely vanguards (i.e. mass reference points for the struggle) and the general conditions of the changing face of capital, involving a clear view of the nature of particular crises.

2) GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EPOCH: The primary contradiction within capitalism is that between capital and labour. It seems so true and yet it is so often forgotten. By that we mean that following: we identify class struggle as the motor of capitalist development and the prime cause of its crisis.

Competition, the market, inter-imperialist conflicts and contradictions are caused, either directly or indirectly, bounded and determined in their development by class struggle (both in the metropolis and in the 'colonies'). In other words there won't be a collapse of capitalism without a long protracted war waged by the working class to precipitate the crisis at each stage and to ultimately seize the power. The main inherent contradiction of capitalism is the existence of the proletariat which is at the same time labour force and antagonist class. Within this important methodological and analytical approach, we can develop an understanding of the epoch. We believe that changes in the relations between capital, state and the working class in the post war period mean that capitalism has entered a new epoch, with new contradictions. Stated briefly the main tendencies are:

**The new role of the state:- Before the war the state's function was to provide a legal and political framework for the dominance of the capitalist class. Now it is also involved in the economic management through planning agencies, money and tax policies and the nationalised or partly nationalised public sector. The result is that the state attempts to be the collective brain of capital, directing its development, mediating between factional interests and directing the crisis to the best advantage of the system. This means that the traditional identification by the left of nationalised state property with socialism and the concept of capitalist crisis as the result of fixed anarchic laws, is destroyed.

**Wages crisis and the unions:- Guided by amongst other things, Keynesian economics, the ruling class attempted to avoid the crisis by a changed use of the wage. Instead of cutting wages to reduce costs, which only reinforced the crisis - manifesting itself as over-production of goods - in future they resolved to use wages as a means of driving the system forward, rationalising and concentrating capital in fewer hands. This necessitated the further incorporation of the trade unions into the state machinery, making them feel responsible for economic management. So they have become less and less able to carry out even their minimal functions of defending and advancing wages and conditions. Understanding none of the new realities they became increasingly divorced from the shop floor. The 'trade union' function was taken up by the shop steward movement which exploited, through piecework, the new form of capitalist development by continual, narrow, sectional and economic struggles. Working class insubordination on wages and productivity in the metropolis, proletarian struggles of national liberation and for higher wages in the 'colonies', along with continuing uncertainties of competition, the growing collapse of the world monetary system, the growing inter-imperialist contradictions, the increasing drain on capital investment through unproductive state spending on welfare, education, arms etc., reproduced the capitalist crisis in a new and more prolonged form. In short, the new forms of development produced their own contradictions. But the terrain of class struggle, the role of the unions and the nature of the crisis (i.e. the continuing combination of inflation and recession) has unalterably changed.

****Changing Composition Of The Class:-** This involves 2 interrelated factors - deskilling and general proletarianisation. The introduction of the assembly line and new methods of work technology that erode the skill and involvement in the job have tended to 'massify' increased sectors of the w.c. Its centre is the mass-line worker of the car factories, but its tentacles reach into traditional sectors of skilled work like ship building. Where the process affects white collar work it produces a general tendency towards proletarianisation of certain sectors, for instance clerks, technicians, teachers and health service workers. These processes create whole new attitudes of work and potentialities for new vanguards and new class alliances. It means that the highly skilled worker is no longer the central vanguard of the working class: the layer around which the unity of the class and its organisations are built, as they were in the revolutionary movements of the Bolshevik era. Another aspect is the increased capitalist use of the immigrants (within countries like Italy and across national boundaries) and women's labour. Both are generally used as an underpaid, disposable, reserve labour force generally in the most de-skilled, alienating or service sector jobs. Women in particular are being increasingly drawn into part time work which mean that capital can squeeze more productivity out of them, while at the same time keeping them as what is virtually a casual labour force which can be taken on and laid off as required. (NB-flexible 4hrs shifts in many Kirkby factories). The location of these 2 sectors in the productive processes and the different needs, experiences they bring to the struggle, means that their struggles are often more advanced and capable of breaking away from the traditional forms of organising. Their political development cannot be reduced to their integration into existing working class institutions as is usually posed by the left.

****THE SOCIAL FACTORY:-** In response to working class demands for better social facilities and the increasing need for capital to manage demand and consumption, institutions were created which were linked very closely to the process of production. Educational facilities, housing, healthcare, the family were all geared to the needs of production and maintenance of the labour force. In this way capitalism gave itself a much broader control over all aspects of society. But these new forms of control brought with them new conflicts, more struggles in and around the social institutions and the 'community'. The power of these struggles was increased and made clearer by their close links with capitalist production and more recently by the increasing shortage of capital and the consequent run-down of services that the development of the crisis dictates.

GENERAL TASKS

The general tasks of an organisation follow from the analysis of the epoch. Firstly it must articulate the new contents of struggle that emerges as a result of the new class relations and epoch of capitalism. This will not mean imposing abstract programmes or 'alternative demands' worked out in separate theoretical processes. It means getting inside the dynamic of new struggles and on the basis of the new relationships and an interpretation of the autonomous needs of the class - attempting to pose political goals and ways of fighting which hit back at the new ways the system is developing. It means articulating and organising the fight to separate wages from productivity, workers' rejection of capitalist organisation of production, health and education from profitability, attempting to socialise the struggles to all sections of the class. In short our aim is to revolutionise the form and content of daily struggle, it is this process we call working class autonomy. It will necessitate abolishing in practice the redundant divisions between political and economic, defensive and offensive struggles. An aim which means a constant stress on the necessity for self-organisation, people directing their own struggle on a mass level, rather than delegating to 'representatives' of any sort.

An organisation must first learn from the changing spontaneous struggles before it can grasp how to develop them further. On the basis of that understanding our role is to help the class to express fully its autonomy; i.e. the capability of making class struggle go beyond the boundaries of capitalist development, of defeating the strategic plan of the bourgeoisie and make the crisis irreversible. In the process of development of its autonomy the class will necessitate a major, at times violent, break and confrontation with the existing institutions and politics of the 'labour movement'. On the other hand we recognise the important hold that the labour movement has on the mass of the working class, and the progressive use that the class can make of it. So whereas the heart of our strategy is the autonomy of the working class, the main feature of our tactics is the use by the class of the spaces created by the 'labour movement' and the contradictions inside it. The dialectical relationship of confrontation, use and cooperation between the class and its social democratic institutions is the substance of the fight between revolutionary and reformist leadership. This process will be a long one and will be resolved only in the final phase of the seizure of power. But the necessary break between working class and labourism is vital in projecting class struggle into a different higher phase (see Italy 1969). Out of that break will develop mass vanguards. They are internal base leadership defined not by their mass of numbers, but by their central role in the mass struggle. From a specific understanding of their own conditions of exploitation and oppression, they will see the need for intervening and linking up outside their own situation. Thus in France and Italy the worker-student assemblies were the linking up of 2 sets of mass vanguards.

By our interventions we aim to accelerate that development helping the mass-vanguards to form develop link-up and communicate on a wide-scale. In Britain, as elsewhere, this needs a sharp break with the politics and forms of organising inherent in trade-unionism and the shop steward movement. The latter of which shows itself to be increasingly unable to adapt to situations of crisis which need an autonomous classwide response. Similar breaks must be made with reformism in the communities and the colleges. Our organisation must grow inside these new developments, our base groups open to revolutionary militants who desire to advance the battle in their own situation. At the same time we seek to recruit the most combative and conscious militants so as to develop an all round communist cadre capable of pushing the struggle in the necessary directions.

To talk of mass vanguards necessitates another task. That is to identify the likely source of development of the mass vanguards i.e. from what section of the class, given our analysis of changing class composition. We always have limited resources, so we must place them where we believe they will have most effect. By this we mean situations which express most clearly the new contradictions of the system, which hopefully will become mass reference points. This is why we concentrate our industrial work so far in the motor industry. As the last decade has shown the motor industry in Europe is not only strategically important to the economy, it is also the arena in which new forms of organisation and consciousness are most likely to arise, given the organisation of production. We are also aware of the potential of all the following areas of struggle for developing into mass reference points and are beginning to intervene in many of them though our analysis of them is still embryonic. These areas are in hospitals/health service and the state sector in general, immigrant workers, white collar workers, struggles of women workers (e.g. Equal Pay) and technical college students. In the past we have also identified housewives on estates as potential mass vanguards (e.g. in the rent strikes) and we continue to work with them but we are in the process of reanalysing where the centre of womens/housewives struggle is situated at the present time. One thing that is evident is that womens struggles in waged work now coming up (particularly in the service and state sector) have a lot of potential for being generalised to the housework they do. We are not saying that all our interventions will or have to

to be of this strategical nature. Out of desire and through accidents, other forms of interventions always develop. But it is still necessary to have an analysis which gives strategical starting points. Within this process it is our role to re-compose the unity of the class around emerging mass vanguards (as they are likely to express the highest points of political resistance, that are most generalisable) and to articulate the process of proletarianisation to build new class alliances.

The specific nature of the crisis and class relations in Britain makes it necessary for us to re-situate our general analysis to account for the 'peculiarities' of our own situation. The economic crisis in the capitalist world and particularly Britain (as one of the weakest capitalist countries) will undoubtedly become more severe over the next few years. But it will be a slow drift rather than a recessionary collapse. It is necessary to stress this to combat the view on the left that sees us in a pre-revolutionary period on the verge of a traditional 'slump'. Modern capitalist crises are marked by a combination of recession and inflation - which can combine rationalisations and unemployment, shortages of capital/liquidity crises, cut backs in public spending, 'trade wars' and continuing big rises in prices and necessarily to a lesser extent wages. These are an inevitable product of the contradictions of the modern capitalist economy. The crucial difference however is twofold. Firstly the state as the collective brain of capital can intervene to shape and use the crisis to re-structure the system; to mitigate certain effects (eg. by bailing out certain companies and by pumping funds into the economy to offset recessionary tendencies), and to attack working class organisation. Secondly the crisis takes place in a context where the working class has not been massively defeated and where its strength continues blunt the effects of the crisis itself.

This means that the nature of the crisis is not inevitable, but a product of the struggle itself, to a large degree. Every weapon in the ruling-class armoury will be used to make the working class pay. But despite its real weaknesses, international capital aims to emerge from the crisis stronger and more streamlined with a working class that is weakened by the de-composition of its organisations, as well as lower living standards. Key elements of this are productivity drives, rationalisations against 'over-manning', controlled unemployment in key sectors and 'workers participation' schemes. However the ability of the ruling class to impose its solutions is severely limited by a crisis of the bourgeois political institutions and solutions. Neither right-wing or social-democratic parties have proved effective vehicles for ruling class policies that have become more confused as each strategy has been thwarted by the unpredictability of its own system and the working class response.

Right-wing governments, in this country the Tories, have shown themselves incapable of imposing co-ercive, overtly repressive measures without disastrous responses. The results have been to strengthen the class conflict and frighten sectors of the middle strata into seeking 'third-force' solutions, usually of a 'liberal' but potentially fascist types. On the other hand social-democracy has not shown itself capable of controlling the working class. The social contract is not yet working and the ruling class (which is itself split into various factions) does not yet believe that the Labour Party's attempts to integrate the unions, introduce workers' participation and increase state planning and control of the economy can work, without sparking off further demands by the working class.

But given the inability of the Tories to come up with anything apart from the pathetic 'national government' strategy, the ruling class is forced to make the best use of the Labour Party. By a combination of threats, blackmail and pressure they will attempt to push Labour's already accommodating strategy to capital even further in their direction, trying to determine the balance of policies and personnel in the government. There is every evidence that they are succeeding very easily. Wilson's recent speech, warning car workers of 'unnecessary strikes', Healey's jobs or wages effort, Heffer's compete or go under offering to I.P.D. workers, the backtracking on the common market, the loans to industry, the preference of 'Levers bank' to Benn and the national enterprise board as an instrument of economic policy, the threats of the oil companies about easier terms for development of North Sea Oil are all indicators of the present trend. This strategy in itself is only a re-production on a governmental level of what the ruling class is trying to achieve in the workplaces. That is by the maximum use of threats of unemployment/rationalisations they are trying to lower wage demands and reduce opposition to re-structuring of the work force. Despite the instance of the women textile workers in the midlands handing back their wage rise, there is little evidence that capital's plans are succeeding on a wide scale. Attempts at re-structuring and de-skilling are meeting with fragmented but fierce resistance and wage demands on the whole continue to be high.

5) The existence of a Labour government in power in the midst of this crisis, poses a difficult situation for the working class. It is simultaneously our 'weakest enemy' (given its base of electoral support, ~~and inability to impose any of its measures~~) but capitals' best hope (because only the Labour Party could hope to impose anti-working class measures by stealth). The use of the Labour left, in particular Benn, Haffer and co. to attack class organisation in the workplace through drives for higher productivity, lower wage deals and participation/co-ops etc indicate the role social democracy can play for capital. Yet it cannot really deliver the goods for the working class, increase its material interests, which sustained the appeal of traditional reformism inside the 'labour movement.' So social democracy becomes increasingly 'ideological' in its attempts to integrate the struggle, with more attacks on militancy etc. This in itself might set up profound contradictions in the Labour Party, with deeper 'splits' within the party and disillusionment of some rank and file members. It is this contradictory situation which gives a real possibility for an advance of working class power, if it can break free of the existing shackles of reformism.

The state of the struggle

As yet there are few signs that the struggle is breaking out, decisively from that framework. The struggle has reached an impasse, or more precisely a series of stalemates, a constant flux according to who is showing the greatest power. The accumulated sectional strength and the fragmented autonomous struggles, despite their limitations consistently open up contradictions in the system and exhaust bourgeois solutions. It is this strength (born partly from the fact that the British working class, alone has not suffered a major defeat for over 40 years) that the key speech of Sir Keith Joseph on 'over-manning' was aimed at; the same for Wilson's speech etc. Even the extremely limited strikes of skilled workers, act as a reference point for other sectional groups, especially white collar workers to take action: laying the ground for future class alliances.

But the working class has failed to mount a generalised confrontation that would seize the initiative, to qualitatively advance its power. It is not the fact that struggles are waged by separate sections of the class that is the immediate problem; but that the struggles are seen and fought in a sectional way. The generalisation of the anti-capitalist content of the struggles is the effective pre-condition to physical link-ups. A look at almost any of the recent battles, shows the weaknesses clearly. ~~We saw the failure of Scottish strikes to generate class objectives.~~ The many successful strikes against the social contract have still tended to articulate their fights in terms of a sectional 'special case' ideology, avoiding questions of state policies - which de-value the political understanding that could be gained. The struggles of women workers and immigrants, for instance at SEI, Imperial Typewriters and Intex, are not merely left isolated; but often scabbed on by male and/or white workers.

This indicates that the development of mass autonomy in Britain will not follow the pattern of a generalised society-wide confrontation of classes, as in May '68 or Italy '69 (at least for some time to come). That is we are unlikely to experience the kind of spontaneous explosions of autonomous struggle, that lay the basis for a whole new cycle of developments, led by new vanguards. The specific history of British class struggle militates against this:-

***The overwhelming influence of trade unionism; its creation of social democracy and the exclusion of a tradition of marxism and revolutionary culture that followed. The self-activity outside of the labourist framework has been mostly limited to syndicalist or sectional forms which have tended to re-inforce the sectionalism that is deeply rooted in the British working class.

***This is consolidated by the experience of British imperialism which has created an 'island mentality,' widespread racism and narrow class consciousness about areas outside particular spheres of experience, in particular Irish, women and immigrant struggles.

These tendencies obviously have their roots in the early industrial revolution, the dominant position in the world market and the aggressive imperialism that followed. As this co-incided with the formations of the major classes, the ideology and institutions of the working class were firmly imprinted by these experiences. Despite the decline of Britain as a world political and economic power, that is despite the gradual disappearance of the material roots, the ideas live on and shape the struggles that occur.

Effects on our work

The slower and uneven expression of autonomy has two aspects. Firstly the impact of the crisis and proletarianisation is so vast and varied that we are constantly being taken by surprise by the struggles that do break out. These are often led by previously inactive sectors, small womens' factories, the bakers, white collar workers etc. This does not mean that actually or potentially these groups are capable of being a mass reference point, a new vanguard - but that this unevenness is an objective characteristic of the present period, and not a temporary oddity. Secondly, the potential mass vanguards of the class, like the car workers - whilst in their daily struggles often expressing the autonomous content of the way forward, are taking longer to emerge as classwide reference points because of the dominant influence of the labour movement, ~~the traditional workers' (except in the) (sectors).~~

Consequently this means for BF, a re-analysis of our long term base-group interventions, or planned interventions. We have to examine whether they have the possibility of emerging as central reference-points, either for the class as a whole or for the immediate localities. To be in the centre of such sectors is crucial for the expansion of our later work into less strategical sectors, as we will have a real basis for the generalisation and socialisation of power, in particular to 'community' situations. We must also develop more flexible means of responding to the immensely varied and sporadic struggles of the present period. We cannot afford to throw all our resources into long-term activity that can degenerate into routinism and small group-politics without the experience of consistently taking wider mass initiatives. These initiatives must be linked to where the class is showing its power, not to abstract definitions of who should be leading the struggle. Many of our interventions are not geared at the moment to this kind of generalisation of the content of struggles - to making things reference points to other sectors of the class. This in itself is a key argument for national organisation, co-ordination of our interventions and politics. Although it must be said that our effort should be concentrated on getting the participants themselves to carry out the work of generalisation with us. The fact that militants are often unwilling to do this indicates yet again the weaknesses of the struggle.

Our task at the moment is to engage in the limited forms of uneven struggle to lay the basis for its further development into mass autonomy and the formation of mass vanguards. This means we will be often relating organisationally to small groups of activists, the individual and often isolated vanguard. We have to mould them into groups who have the potential to raise the level of struggle. Given this, it is important that they are treated as potential cadres not mere contacts, peripheral to the overall activities of the group - whilst maintaining the essential 'openness' of our base-groups. We have to recognise that in many instances our base-groups will be the framework for autonomous organisation of militants, rather than some mythical 'autonomous' rank and file group. It is a preliminary form, but then we are at a preliminary stage of struggle. What is vital, no matter what form the intervention takes is that Big Flame members do not dissolve themselves into the base structures as individual activists. But retain the capability of acting as a vanguard organisation, and taking wider political initiatives. Every experience we have had in Liverpool of this 'dissolving' shows that it is disastrous both for the base organisation and for the development of BF. We also have to adapt to integrating militants into the group who we can't back up with base-group resources, but who we can still support or provide alternative activity.

We should also be clear on the necessity of united front activity in certain circumstances. Whilst being aware of the limitations of united fronts (in particular sectarianism, substitutionism and isolation from mass activity) - principled opposition to participation is ultra-leftist. In the particular cases of Ireland and Fascism, it ignores the important effect they have in determining the outcome of the present situation, linked as they are by the common chauvinism of large sectors of the class. The inability to deal with the Irish situation is

Advocating 'integrating of Irish/fascist questions into our other practice,' while ~~possibly~~ necessary, runs the danger of reducing the problem to the ideological and practical lessons for other struggles. Unfortunately this ignores the fact that the struggles to combat reactionary ideas and policies on Ireland and fascism are independent factors in themselves, which require collective responses from the left. So this adds another task: that of developing our activity in the Troops Out Movement and anti-fascist committees, wherever possible and desirable.

PART B HOW LOCAL GROUPS WORK

Our analysis of the state of class struggle in Britain at the moment has shown us that we need to develop forms of organising locally which can be flexible and respond to the various levels of struggle. Although we recognise the need for long term, daily political work in certain areas we also want to be able to plan our resources so that we can respond to new struggles, initiate new base interventions and make sure that our existing base work isn't becoming routinised.

In Liverpool, our two main foci for organising at a local level are base groups and branches - having these two different forms enables us to make choices of intervening in a consistent way in certain situations while at the same time being able to respond to struggles which spring up in an area.

BASE GROUPS : base groups are a means of local groups sinking deep roots inside specific situations. They work in a continuous daily way, in specific workplaces estates, areas of struggle etc. and are the means of Big Flame militants building close relationships with militants in these situations - so that we can begin to fuse our experiences with theirs and develop a common political practice. In this way our experience and understanding of different kinds of struggle is deepened and our theory is tested and rooted in Merseyside. The base group acts as an organisational focus. It brings together people who want to organise - some are members of Big Flame others are not (though they all usually share a similar perspective). It organises in a mass way and Big Flame members try to build it as a reference point for the development of mass autonomy and the organisational forms that strengthen it. The base groups work independently and are controlled by all the militants inside them. The Big Flame members are guided by the militants in their base group and also by the strategic perspectives and theory of the organisation as a whole.

BRANCHES : branches are a means of local groups responding to brief sporadic struggles in a more flexible ~~and spontaneous~~ way than the base groups (BF members attend the branch which corresponds to the area where they live or work or do base work - depending on specific circumstances) In this way we can come to terms with our limited resources - which mean that at any given time we can't have as many base groups as we might want - and we can also cope with sudden outbursts of mass mobilisation which later die down, without having to make the decision to set up a base group in that area of struggle. The branches can also be a force for investigating and initiating new base activities - looking closely at the area it operates in, setting priorities and dividing its resources accordingly. Within the branch, comrades who might be involved as individuals in a specific place, can find support and the possibility of calling on other branch members to set up a base group with them in their area. The branches are also the structures which attempt to deal with the political education of militants on general and ideological issues and where the experiences and practices of the base situations are shared, generalised and criticised,

Membership of a local group involves primarily a commitment to mass work in a base situation and a commitment to collective responsibility in the group - in practice the latter means that all members contribute to collective decision making in the group (ultimate decision making body being a general meeting), carry out these decisions in base and branch work and delegate comrades to carry them out in such things as United Fronts, Political committees, Commissions, etc..

NATIONAL ORGANISATION

At a national level our analysis means a number of things. The increasing crisis, impasses and unevenness of the struggle pose urgent demands on us. To ignore these demands is to abdicate any responsibility for the political development of the struggle. An organisation that retreats into itself and remains locked in small and unrelated units at this time will rightly be passed by and lose any real reason for existence - except to provide an umbrella for educational discussion for the projects of different activists. Unfortunately an umbrella isn't a very useful instrument to struggle with at the present time. Nevertheless the degree of urgency must not mean that we impose unrealistic measures on ourselves. We are a small organisation without yet, a great deal of coherence or political planning of resources. What is important, is a perspective of how to initiate a process of moving from the present federated political tendency to a functioning national organisation - capable of seriously effecting the struggle. It is not clear yet whether DF has the potential for such growth, many factors are beyond our control. But that potential will never be tested unless we initiate certain processes. National organisation in the immediate future will mean unified political perspectives, national discussion and planning of resources and a clear analysis of the crisis and the strategical implications that follow for our work.

We are not suggesting that we can expect immediate results. Our aim is not to create paper structures out of a fetish for centralisation. But rather the centralisation of our political analysis, that is a pre-requisite for advancing our interventions. In other words the collective working out of central strategical projects that will aid the development of our local mass work. Without such projects our political activity will reflect a localism that is a product of the fragmented backwardness of the present struggles. It is a matter for debate in terms of the time-scale, the content of the projects, the structures etc. But we are not prepared to share an organisation with comrades (if there are any) who are opposed in principle to national organisation and political centralisation. This would obviously imply totally different perspectives for the future. There follows certain implications for the existing DF structures. Our stress is on the political processes rather than the detailed administrative workings, as stress on the latter usually obscures the political issues.

Commissions

We lay great emphasis on the commissions. Not as mere talking shops, but as forums where our developed interventions are discussed, planned and initiated. They must become tighter and seek to give political guidelines and directives to local groups and conferences. This will not be simple or easy, given our present level of coherence and resources. But emphasis should be put on local groups to explain why they can't or won't carry out the policies worked out at the commissions. In this way a genuine process of political discussion is generated, instead of unhelpful assertions of federal independence. Militants sympathetic to Big Flame should be involved as activists in commissions where mutually advantageous.

Conferences

Conferences should be the supreme and overall decision making body of the organisation for all areas of activity. It debates and decides on the reports of the commissions and attempts to provide guidelines for the functioning of the National Committee. How often and who comes as observers etc, are tactical questions that should be left to the National Committee, unless there are strong feelings otherwise.

National Committee: Should be delegates of local groups, permanent (at least 1) for fixed periods. It should be an National Committee rather than a National Co-ordinating Committee i.e. it should go beyond its present administrative and co-ordinating functions - a process which in fact it is already doing, by necessity. It should make binding decisions on minimum areas of agreement and on issues that the organisation wants it to, e.g. EEC, Elections etc. This is the only way to guarantee political homogeneity and to avoid chaos in both the newspaper and the journal. It should implement and clarify the decisions of the conferences and the commissions. It should also have the power to initiate discussion on non-commission areas, with specific responsibility for assessing the national situation in the light of the activity of the groups. National Committee should decide on new groups and commissions.

Journal: The confusion and disagreements that have dogged the Journal only reflect the inadequacy of the existing federal structures. Again it should comprise fixed delegates of local groups for fixed periods of time. Its primary role is to put our politics over to militants, rather than express every difference between existing BF groups. Debates should be restricted to those helpful to an external dialogue. Detailed internal dialogue should take place within an Internal Bulletin (already agreed at last NCC that we should start this after the conference). The real question is not the formal voting procedures, but how we use the journal. We favour majority decisions on the content of the journal and if an article raises serious disagreements we think the journal delegates should have the power to refer the article for further discussion by all the groups. If there is still no way of coming to a consensus on the article it should be published in the next issue of the journal, if sponsored by a group. At the same time there should not be more than one minority article per issue and the majority should have the right to print a critique of it. The important thing to stress is the spirit of political criticism and discussion, rather than formal rules. The journal has also an important role to play in creating new BF groups. It should be linked to speaking and film tours as a way of meeting and discussing on a national level with sympathetic militants.

Newspaper: We think a national newspaper is necessary and possible. We want to engage in discussion on the practical and technical details and difficulties. We think that the production and discussion of a national newspaper is a powerful weapon towards national coherence, clarity and understanding, towards building political and practical links. The newspaper could become our main weapon to establish a national presence and could be used by groups who might think about joining our organisation. The contradiction between local papers and a national one should be solved through the production of local bulletins.

New Groups: Any decision about whether a group becomes a BF group in the future, should be made by the NC, but only after the NC has arranged visits to these groups and had full discussions about their activity, perspectives and the implications of joining BF. We should, all the time, be making moves to encourage new groups to form. This means travelling to speak about BF, using the journal, public meetings, discussing amongst ourselves where groups are needed and the resources we can spare etc. We should not be afraid of growth as the period demands it and we would stagnate without it. The question is to structure it politically, in the best way possible for everyone involved, so the growth is on a clear basis. We should be prepared to send edes from other BF groups to places for longer periods if help is needed to set up groups or initiate interventions. However we should avoid encouraging new groups to become part of the national structure, until they have begun or have clear perspectives of practice in their areas, so that when they join BF it is on a much better basis.

MINIMUM POLITICAL AGREEMENTS

1) ORGANISATION : The form and content of revolutionary organisation is determined by the stage of class struggle and the tasks it imposes. But the final aim of the revolutionary organisation is that of arming and leading the proletariat to the seizure of power, the destruction of the bourgeois state and the establishment of proletarian dictatorship. This is a constant content of revolutionary organisation. It structures it from its most embryonic stages. Without an awareness of this task our political activity can always fall towards gradualism, localism and syndicalism. At this stage Big Flame is neither a revolutionary party or its embryo. It does not deny the need for a revolutionary party but recognises that it must be a product of a new level of

mass struggle and real working class needs. At this stage BF is an interventionist cadre organisation whose own growth is directly linked to the necessity of creating the kinds of struggle that will break out of the existing reformist framework. By interventionist we mean that the bulk of our activity consists of mass collective interventions, organised and responsible to the groups as a whole. By cadre, we mean that BF seeks to combine the most conscious and combative (at least in potential) militants in its general organisation, whilst maintaining the necessary openness and flexibility at base level. A combat organisation does not recruit by 'signing up' anyone, without a clear political basis.

2) MASS POLITICAL WORK: It follows from our analysis of the epoch that the starting point of our politics is a commitment to mass political work. Building on the existing spontaneous content of the struggle, working class organising and politics must be rebuilt from the bottom upwards; to express its full autonomous potential. To be in a process to aid these developments means directing our politics and organising, at the mass of the working class, so that the minority we do organise with concretely will have a creative and non-manipulative relationship with that mass. Direct contact with the daily struggle is the only way in which we can help to create a revolutionary politics that is built from the inside of those struggles, not imposed from the outside. This means that we reject strategies of 'entering', taking over electing new leaders, building left caucuses or democratising the Trade Unions or other reformist organisations of the working class; as anything other than a tactical focus of our activity. The latter means that we don't ignore such organisations and their relations with the class (the main defect of ultra-leftism) - but seek to relate to them from a position of the autonomous strength of the struggle and our involvement in mass activity. Only then can such organisations be used on our terms whilst breaking the class from their political grip. Mass work also inevitably means a rejection of any views that see the industrial working class as 'integrated' into the system; revolutionary politics therefore being located everywhere but the workplace.

3) SOCIALISATION OF THE STRUGGLE: By the same token we are against the narrow view of the working class which reduces all struggles to the factory and sees no power lying outside. It is necessary to organise with and recognise the potential of all sections of the class, because different problems and questions are raised in their struggles out of which class unity and a total strategy can be built. Without this full understanding and many-sided practice, differences are submerged and vital sectors and struggles ignored. It is vital to generalise the struggles outwards from whatever its starting point. Factory and workplace struggles are strengthened and given more political weight when they are taken to the community around them: when the needs of the workers are linked with the needs of their families and the potential for the involvement of women in the struggle is recognised. Similarly struggles outside of the workplace are strengthened when they make links with the workplaces around them. No struggle is inherently sectional or inherently total.

We affirm the revolutionary potential of everyday struggle. All struggles wherever they are fought can be revolutionary or reformist. It is not simply a question of what is being fought for but also how the fight is seen and how it is fought, and most crucially what is learnt in the process of struggle. The key to the development of revolutionary understanding is the growth and consolidation of working class power, - The ability to struggle autonomously in every area of social and economic life.

4) INDEPENDENT ORGANISATION: We recognise the need for sections of the class who suffer particular oppressions (e.g. women, blacks, immigrants, gays) to organise independently to fight that oppression. These specific oppressions pre-date capitalism and may continue under socialism unless the struggles against them are submerged in the so-called general struggle. The specific struggles of such sections of the class have the potential of re-shaping the objectives of a working class which is at the moment weakened by sectionalism, racism and sexism. The form which their organising takes is dependant on specific circumstances and the needs of particular groups. If BF members organise directly within independent movements they should attempt to develop a general class perspective which can develop the real autonomy of those movements. At the same time it is vital that the experience

gained is generalised to the whole of Big Flame, so that our perspectives and organising are
organising are truly general.

5) NATIONAL LIBERATION : Because of the uneven development of world capitalism
anti-imperialist struggle inevitably takes on different national forms. Traditionally
this has often meant that revolutionary class forces have had to make alliances with
normally opposed class forces - to struggle for national self-determination. Where conditions
conditions necessitate such strategies we continue to support the struggle for national
national liberation, to ignore this is to impose pure and unrealistic views of revolution
on the reality of the objective situation. However we recognise that in conditions
of modern capitalism/imperialism, where national bourgeoisies are subordinate and
dependant on imperialism and its multi-national companies - the struggles for
national liberation and socialism are inseparable. The centre of the struggle must
be the masses of workers and peasants. This question is posed sharply for British
revolutionaries by the struggle in Ireland and it is one of our key tasks to explain
and link the anti-imperialist struggle to ours in Britain. We support the right of
Irish people to self-determination in a 32 county state and are in solidarity with
all socialist and republican forces fighting imperialism.

MERSEYSIDE BIG FLAME

February 1975.

