

## THE FUTURE OF THE NEWSPAPER

This document does two things. First it sets out some of the options open to us for the newspaper. Second, it gives preliminary information about the day school in September which will decide on the future of the paper.

But before doing either of those, we (the newspaper group elected at conference) would like to say a few short words.

ITS OUR STRONG BELIEF THAT THE FUTURE OF THE PAPER DEPENDS ON THE WAY THE WHOLE ORGANISATION IS DEVELOPING. There is no magic new paper format or content which can substitute for the building of Big Flame and the politics of our tendency. The times when the paper has been most effective in the past have been when there have been vibrant local branches active in the community, in workplaces and in campaigns who could use the paper and contribute to it in such a way as to create a dynamic between political practice and our publications. (There is one alternative we've not considered which is the building of the organisation around a paper. We don't have any evidence that this is a serious option) So we have to consider what the role of the paper is and its potential audience. The problem with the day school in September is that there may be a tendency to see the paper in isolation. Whatever kind of "relaunch" we decide on depends on the overall commitment and enthusiasm members have about BF, as much as on the specific commitment some individuals may make to the paper. For example, we don't want a repeat of the situation where 4 or 5 people slog their guts out producing the paper, with perhaps another 6 or 7 slightly involved - only to find that hardly anyones selling it, and that theres no feedback at all.

Finally, by way of introduction, everyone reading this should be aware that there are general problems with the paper which have surfaced before and will undoubtedly arise again, what ever option we decide on in September. These require some serious thought from all members. Especially :

- 1) Finance- paying for copies, subs, fund raising etc
- 2) Deadlines, copy dates, producing reasonable copy etc
- 3) Supporting the editorial/production teams.
- 4) Distribution, sales, political use of paper.
- 5) Regularity of publication
- 6) Language, style and overall presentation

### OPTIONS

#### A. SAME AS NOW BUT MORE ANALYTICAL . MONTHLY A3

The survey suggests (despite poor returns) that most members are happy with the present paper. However suggested improvements are sometimes contradictory. Option A is for those who say that BF as a monthly can't be a news paper, must have more in-depth analysis and debate, whilst keeping the newspaper format.

Advantages: No radical changes required  
Can be used for discussion with people interested in BF ideas  
Lessens impact of loss of journal  
Educates membership and periphery

Disadvantages : Could be rather "heavy" and offputting.  
Not what people expect in newspaper format  
Has too narrow a readership in mind

OPTION B . SAME AS NOW BUT MORE "AGIT PROP". MONTHLY A3

This would take up suggestions in survey for more "subjective" contributions e.g. interviews with activists, more cartoons, photonews, fewer words overall, more "popular" style etc whilst retaining some more analytical and debating articles:

Advantages: Could make street/pub/factory sales possible again  
Could encourage new people to contribute  
Would make the paper and BF more outgoing  
Practical use in campaigns, workplaces etc

Disadvantages: A lot of work involved chasing up articles etc  
Comes up against problems of monthly "news" being out of date  
We can't compete with Socialist Worker and don't want to anyway  
Cover price might counteract more accessible content.

BOTH A & B OPTIONS can be criticised on the grounds that "we've been here before". Much of this has been said before, but what changes have resulted? We have to look more deeply at why members/sympathisers aren't selling the paper. Would either A or B really change this? There is still a cultural and class gap between the paper/organisation and the readership we say we want to reach. B might help to overcome this but have we the resources/commitment to achieve the breakthrough?

OPTION C . NEW MAGAZINE FORMAT, Plus leaflets/bulletins.

There are two versions of this option. One sees a magazine every two months, with the intervening month for branch and commission bulletins and possibly national leaflets for key events/issues.. The other sees a monthly magazine with local leaflets inserted and distributed at same time as sales.

Advantages:

A break with the past - fresh impetus  
Magazine format helps to break longer articles up - if well laid out could be more accessible  
Stops us having to compete as a newspaper with weeklies  
If combined with leaflets and bulletins, will encourage branches to think more about using publications and supplement with own leaflets  
Gets over price problem. People expect to pay more for magazine. Also chance of more subscriptions

Disadvantages:

Could be seen as more selective/theoretical  
Less options in terms of use of photos etc  
Puts too much on branches and leaves out isolated members  
Won't sell so well in bookshops, or on demos etc

OPTION D. Rotation of production around branches, with some national editorial support.

This could apply to any of above models, which all assume continuation of London based editorial/production teams. Should perhaps be taken therefore as second level decision after deciding what kind of paper we want. It would mean more modest publication - less "professional". But more membership involvement like old local editions and women's struggle notes. Extra demands on editorial collective/less assurance about dates etc  
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