

ON THE IMG'S CONCEPT OF THE VANGUARD AND OURS.

It is clear in Socialist Challenge's answer to us called 'In defence of SC' (9 Feb) that the fundamental difference between our concept of a mass newspaper and their's is over who the paper is directed at - who is seen as the vanguard. In fact, the SC article poses the problem and then wanders off on a tangent; the question which remains unanswered is; 'In the first instance even a mass paper, in our conception has to decide which section of the masses it is going to attempt to reach. Unorganised workers, unemployed, residents of council estates, trade unionists, Labour party supporters, and so on' (it can be noted that this is a strange list to have to choose from; what about someone who is unemployed and in the Labour party?). The way the article gets round answering the question is by saying; 'This does not mean that one does not provide a line of advance for the masses. We do so, however, by arming the vanguard militants, responsive to the initiatives of revolutionary socialism, and desirous of taking the struggle forward.' Now although it is not very clearly put in the SC article, by reading the paper we get an idea of the approach. Which is to appeal to very advanced militants (more often than not in another political group/party) and to hope to reach the masses by winning over these advanced militants.

Now, there are questions to be asked about this strategy;

- 1 - Does SC begin to achieve what it sets out to do?
- 2 - What kind of paper is it that these vanguard workers need?
- 3 - What relation is there between the SC/IMG concept of the vanguard worker and the party/class debate?

1. There is a great difference between the news coverage of SC which is good and the features and theory articles which are often incomprehensible. What is very clear is that the editors are not writing for a general vanguard but the vanguard in each specific sector. What this means is that the culture articles are written for the vanguard of culture workers, articles on women are written for the most advanced members of the women's movement etc. Now clearly if the same person cannot be a vanguard in every field, so presumably it is not expected of the reader that he or she reads the whole paper - you are just expected to relate to those sections that you are a vanguard in. And in fact this works against what should be an important function of a newspaper - providing a generalised political perspective to enable its readers to locate the particular struggle they are involved in within an overall class offensive. But we shouldn't forget that there are problems here since articles which are at a level of that interest the non-specialist will tend to be a little interest to the specialist e.g. an article on Ireland which is of interest to the average left-wing militant may well not be of any use to the T.O.M. militant who, for instance, might want a detailed analysis of the bipartisan policy on Ireland. A correct solution to this problem would be to argue that there is a 'specialist' press (e.g. 'Unfree Ireland', 'Scarlet Woman', 'Leyland Bulletin' etc) for a detailed approach and that a general newspaper's role is to pitch all articles at a level that is acceptable to the non-specialist and to see that these articles are presented in a way that contributes in the formation of an overall socialist perspective in the reader; so for instance articles on socialist-feminism must be presented in a way that makes them interesting to readers outside the SF movement and builds a feminist consciousness amongst them.

2. But even if all the articles in SC appealed to the vanguard (one and the same) this would not be enough since the paper must also be a useful tool of the vanguard to go to the masses. For instance, a vanguard worker in

an office, a factory or a woman's group must feel able to sell the paper to their mates, to use it to try and win them over to socialist positions. For this use, 'Socialist Worker' is pretty good and the same cannot be said for SC - though this is denied by the North Branch of South London BF.* A paper that is just of interest to the vanguard and is of no use to them to work with the 'masses' is no more than an internal bulletin of the revolutionary left which can be duplicated etc. So our difference with the IMG is not only over the nature of the vanguard but also over what should be the relationship between the paper and the vanguard.

3. The ideas behind SC do not come from nowhere - they reflect political ideas of the 4th International. The Trotsky pamphlet makes the point clearly; (page 23) "Mandel writes 'The gradual injection of these demands into mass struggles can only come about through the efforts of a broad-based layer of advanced workers, who are closely linked to the masses and who disseminate and publicise these demands which do not normally grow out of the day-to-day experience of the class'. In other words, these advanced workers are the passive carriers of a 'politics from the outside'. Perhaps, this helps to explain why party leaderships can so often have bureaucratic and manipulative relationships with the rank and file members.....This political approach in fact only creates self-appointed vanguards, who can teach but cannot learn.....The Italian organisation Lotta Continua once correctly noted that the problem was not to put yourself at the head of the masses, but to be the head of the masses.....For us the vanguard organisation must sink itself into the changing process of struggle, to learn the effects of changes on consciousness so we can articulate working class needs and generalise them.....The Trotskyist theory lays such stress on working class domination by capitalism and bourgeois ideology that it is forced to reduce the transition from class-in-itself to class-for-itself as a sudden ignition of consciousness in crisis/dual power situations.....' And as the pamphlet points out there are a number of issues connected with these Trotskyist positions - an incorrect Leninist theory of consciousness (see also my 'party and class'), an exaggerated split between the economic and the political which leads to a hierarchical concept of the party/class relationship not unconnected with the idea of a rigid division between party and class mediated by vanguard workers.

Now what I am saying is that this is IMG's theoretical baggage, it plays a large part in determining the shape SC takes. If we engage in debate with the IMG over SC (as I think we should), we must make clear our theoretical differences and then see whether or not the differences are too large for us to both work on the same paper. At present, our position on SC is 'we'll think of joining if the paper changes in the way we want it to'. But this is a fundamentally incoherent position since it will only change the way we want it to if we get involved. As IMG write 'But even if one accepted Big Flame's concern on this score, there is only one way to change the situation. (That is to get stuck in). Understandably it seems a risk to many Big Flame comrades,. Better stay with what we've got than risk it for something that might never happen.' Our position on SC has to be either there is no way in which, given our political differences, we can work on the same paper or we have these political differences with you over what a paper should be like and if we think we can reach after discussion a satisfactory compromise we are prepared to get fully involved in SC. If in the course of our discussions, IMG made it clear that they were willing to make substantial concessions on the form/content of the paper, the only straight thing for us to do would be to get involved on the editorial committee of SC for a trial period, write for the paper and sell it. If we decided on the latter course, there would be the problem of what to do with our paper. A possible solu-

*In which London offices and amongst which white-collar workers does SC go a bundle? And since when have London office workers become 'the majority of the political vanguard in this country'? - maybe since the writer of the letter moved to London. And what's wrong with a paper that goes down well in 'pubs along the Dock Road in Liverpool'- it depends on in what way it goes down well.

tion would be to keep it on as a monthly magazine.

CONCLUSION

What I am saying is that our differences with SC reflect fundamental political differences that we have with Trotskyism - to sum up they are

question	our position	IMG's position
the vanguard	a broad concept which includes some housewives, some unemployed etc	a narrower concept centered around industrial workers
the function of the paper	to be a tool for the vanguard in their political work with the masses	as a political educator of the vanguard.
revolutionary consciousness	inside the struggles but needing to be made explicit by the vanguard party	not to be found in struggles which are economic. Has to be brought from without by the vanguard party.
party/class (tentative)	three way relationship which includes party-autonomous movements and autonomous movements-class. Changes with the development of capitalist organisation and the consequent changes in the working class.	Fixed as laid down by Lenin and Trotsky. It is the coming together of the revolutionary programme with the struggles of advanced workers.

There is nothing which says that political groups with political differences cannot work on the same newspaper - after all, it may be a good thing to go beyond the concept of a 'line' newspaper. The important thing is to locate the political differences and then see how to proceed from there.

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