

The emergence of BIG FLAME as a force outside Merseyside has created varying degrees of paranoia, suspicion, relief and excitement. Comrades not surprisingly have questions in particular about our ideas and practice of organization. What follows is an attempt to simply explain what we think about organising. It is neither a developed theory of organisation, nor a systematic and detailed explanation of how we are at present organising. It is an attempt to sum up at a general level what we've learnt from our practice and discussion of organisation. That's why we call it 'FROM ORGANISING TO ORGANISATION'. This is a process we have been and are going through and we know it is a process many embryo groups are considering. In short it is an attempted methodology of organisation.

SECTION I WHY WE ORGANISE

* WE MUST ORGANISE OUR FORCES LOCALLY

Rejecting the existing national organisations and ideological traditions, the various components of our section of the left inevitably develop local perspectives and policies. Our choice has been to sink roots in the communities, factories and schools of specific areas. Our different experiences relate to the forms we have chosen to do this in. Some have done it as individuals, collectives, groups of friends, semi-organised groups etc. Big flame on Merseyside was unique in that from the start we have done it as a specific and organised group. Very different in form and content than now, but a political group nevertheless. Something implicit lay behind this choice, a lesson that we gradually learnt through our initial interventions:-

* THE CLASS STRUGGLE NEEDS ORGANISING

We all want to encourage people to think act and organise for themselves; but behind this generality lies a difficult process. For a start we can't hope to encourage anyone to do anything merely through propagandising about the necessity for self-activity: while we remain impenetrable and separate groups or groups of friends. Such abstract calls for self-organisation/consciousness usually fall on deaf or suspicious ears. To influence struggle, we first need trust and respect; this comes in the best way, when we are able to offer a common means of organising and political development with militants. Neither the ideas or forms of organisation we want to see necessarily arise spontaneously. They may do, but it is more likely that they develop in interaction with organised revolutionary forces. The expression of working class autonomy is always uneven and in Britain underdeveloped. The reformist traditions of the Labour Party, the Trade Unions and Tenants organisations still hold the major influence. Even when people escape their organised hold, the politics and organisation that is expressed is too often sectional, the struggle and consciousness limited to the specific area of exploitation and oppression. Despite this, there are autonomous tendencies inside many struggles, which an organised force can develop. Guaranteed pay v. guaranteed work on the question of lay-offs, how to transform occupations into genuine anti-capitalist struggles, rather than for merely the right to work developing a general political perspective in struggles for a nursery or to block a road. We have to be prepared to intervene in a systematic way, at a mass level whenever possible, to develop a clear political line and a means of organisation with the most advanced militants in any situation. In this way political organisation is not contradictory to class autonomy, on the contrary, it is vital to its development. Without this perspective we end up as merely servicing agents to existing organisations.

* INTERVENTIONISM IS NECESSARY

What we have said presumes that we are willing to intervene outside our own specific area of experience, if necessary. The reason is very simple, very few of us find themselves 'naturally' in situations where we want to do political work. If we are, fine, but if not, 'struggle where you are' means we fail to analyse where it is necessary to organise our forces. We are all faced with such choices of where best to organise. The criteria we use are varied. Some interventions are dictated by necessity, a community where the comrades live a big factory that the whole area revolves around. Others involve a choice, work in a factory which is at the centre of capitalist production or a secondary industry employing cheap unorganised labour. Both are politically important for different reasons, ideally we want to work in both situations because if we don't we won't understand the whole w.c. The point is that a common organisation helps us to make those choices based on the relative political importance of a sector at any time, our own resources, the possibility of struggle etc.

* INTERVENTION PRESUMES A LEADERSHIP ROLE AND A POLITICAL LINE

There are two equally dangerous ideas about leadership. The first is a familiar one, it sees leadership as a question of a number of fixed ideological positions, a politics brought from the outside to a particular struggle, a leadership that puts itself at the head of the parade.

attitude is one IGNORES THE PROBLEM OF LEADERSHIP BY WISHING IT DIDN'T OR SHOULDN'T EXIST. They take initiatives, intervene as groups but deny role through a false and idealistic fusion of their identity, with the 'people' or the 'movement'. In this way they become difficult to criticise, change and join- in short an informal elite. The question of leadership is posed in every situation, in that there are always a minority of people willing to act, initiate, take risks and act as a reference point for others. This is what we mean by a leadership or vanguard- one that is natural to the situations. Our aim is to work with these militants, so that this process becomes conscious and organised. In this way we become the head of the struggle. There is also the question of our political line. We all have ideas on how we want things to develop. These help us to determine how we work and what we push for. But they are not fixed ideas, they are enriched by our experience of struggle and change accordingly. Not having a line, for fear of imposing it on a situation, is itself a political line, although a bad one, because it leaves the field open for bad politics to dominate. In other words, as Lenin said, the revolutionary organisation must take upon itself the responsibility, the task and risk of leadership.

But the problem of revolutionary organisation cannot be reduced to the problem of revolutionary leadership as some groups attempt to do. If we measure success in terms of how many people transfer their allegiance they currently give to the trade unions and the Labour Party to us, we simply reproduce the same authoritarian relationship. The revolutionary organisation remains the subject, the masses the object. The question of building a revolutionary leadership then becomes merely a question of quantity - how many proletarians can we recruit into our organisation. Instead success must be measured firstly in terms of the development of the 'creative autonomy of the masses in struggle'. "THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PROLETARIATE IS THE WORK OF THE PROLETARIATE ITSELF". It follows that authoritarian relations, passive delegation are a block to the development of revolutionary struggle and communist consciousness. It also follows that the "new socialist men and women will not be born after the smashing of capitalism creates the conditions for this transformation; they will be born during the struggle against capitalism".

*POLITICAL ORGANISATION IS MORE THAN SIMPLY SHARING EXPERIENCES OF PRACTICE

A political organisation, is more than the sum of its parts, more than the bringing together of the experience of base groups, more than structures and administrative networks. It exists to consolidate the lessons of that practice and turn them into general political perspectives. In turn they guide all our interventions. It's true that our base groups are autonomous, i.e. their political decisions are ultimately their own responsibility. But they are guided by the common political positions the group holds, otherwise there would be no point in developing the common lessons of our experience. A political org. has a character of its own in other ways too. It enables us to go beyond an examination of our own limited practices and see national and international developments. Developments which clarify the nature of politically autonomous strategies. It also means that we are able to develop common political lines on questions outside base group practice of a normal type - the elections, Ireland, fascism etc.. Lines which are binding, because this is the meaning of a general political org. - to develop a common and unified political strength. This has brought us back to our starting point, the our political work takes. Our experience has shown us that a general political group is the only successful form for combining the planning development and learning from different struggles.

SECTION 2 - WHAT DETERMINES THE WAY WE ORGANISE

We do not have a static concept of organisation, a pre-determined model to fit each situation - we are guided by the factors contained within 3 broad and interlinked areas:-

* WHO WE'RE ORGANISING WITH

Few people would deny that forms of organising will differ according to each sector of the working class. But this is not just a formal or mechanic question - rather it is guided by our analysis of the way the actual composition of the working class is changing in relation to the changing structures of capitalism. For instance the de-skilling of work and the emergence of the mass assembly line worker means that we have to look at organisation in the factory in a different way. This is because that changed composition has meant that the workers conduct the struggle differently, have a different attitude to work, are not receptive to old political strategies like those based on workers control. We see that the existing organisations in the factories, like the unions, in general no longer correspond to this new structure and composition of the class and to the struggles and political potential that follows. Therefore we situate our forms of organisation and politics within this new framework. Correspondingly we are also faced with the changing face of working class communities. The new estates act to break down previous patterns of class organisation and consciousness. Our practice is designed to re-compose the unity of the class in new conditions. Our analysis identifies women as the central political protagonist of this

consider forms of organising that fit the isolation of the women at home, their relations to children, husband and the time it gives them to struggle. We have seen the emergence of independent movements of women, immigrants, claimants and students, which all reflect in varying ways the new face of the class structure. They have been challenging the political nature and priority of intervention and organisation of the revolutionary movement. Following from this they have made their first collective reference point their need to organise autonomously from other sectors. How is our type of general political organisation to relate to these movements? First of all we seek both within these movements and in other sectors of struggle to do everything that will strengthen their self-organisation, strength and consciousness. But precisely because we wish to develop their political autonomy, our forces within these movements do not simply melt into them. Inside them, they try to locate and develop an autonomous perspective AGAINST REFORMIST, SECTIONAL OR INADEQUATE LINES OF DEVELOPMENT. This means that they are acting as reference point around which people who agree with that perspective can organise within the overall framework of the movement, just like the 'fish that swims in the water', as the Chinese comrades say.

* THE CONDITIONS OF THE STRUGGLE

This refers to the overall balance of forces in the struggle, the strengths and weaknesses of the w.c. or the specific sectors we are organising with, the specific character of the community, factory, city, etc. that we are operating in. These factors operate within the question of changing structure of capital and class composition. They appear as their manifestations in daily class struggle. At the moment this would mean such things as the relationship between the working class, unions and the Labour Party as shown in the response to the social compact. The relationship between the housing market and capital as a whole, the successors to the Fair Rent Act to elaborate a strategy for our intervention on question of rents, squatting etc. The growth of fascist groupings, their relation to the ruling class, their social basis and possibilities of development, their strength and degree of support in specific situations, is also a pressing question. In general it means that the character of our interventions is determined by the INVESTIGATIONS OF THE SPECIFICITY OF OUR SITUATION. Investigations that are only meaningful in the context of a guided interventionist practice - as only praxis in a specific situation constitutes a means of measuring the validity of our ideas.

Our investigations have shown that we need to develop particular forms of organisation to meet the needs of class struggle and revolutionary politics in Britain. One, we must be able to cope with wide-spread, sporadic and brief outbursts of class autonomy. Two, we must face the fact that the revolutionary movement in this country is small and external to the mass of the working class. Thirdly, as we have already said, the class struggle is uneven. We need to produce structures capable of dealing with these problems. This is the basis on which our branches and base groups are founded. Branches are primarily a recognition that in order to be effective we must meet the first situation. Branches are flexible structures capable of intervening across a broad spectrum of brief and sporadic struggles. Their intervention is necessarily superficial, because of limited resources, but also because the out-bursts of mass mobilisation they are intended to meet are brief and interspersed with long periods of low mobilisation and interest. Branches are also the structure which deals with the education and political formation of the militants on general and ideological issues, where the experience and practice of the base situations is shared and generalised. Base groups are the 'rank & file' structure of our organisation. Means of sinking deep roots inside a situation, developing our experience and theoretical knowledge, linking militants and ourselves with militants, fusing 'external' and 'internal' experience, developing a common political practice, acting as a reference point for autonomous struggle and organisation, trying to recruit new militants into the organisation. Base groups are a recognition of the second and third problems. To take the second problem - we've already said the revolutionary organisations in Britain are small and external to the mass of the people, i.e. there is in general no organisational relationship between the revolutionary organisations and the organisations or self-organisation of the working class; the majority of the w.c. doesn't recognise these groups as having the power to change their conditions; and finally, that the mass of the w.c. is dominated by reformist politics and ideology and doesn't look to these groups as a reference point. This is true for all rev. orgs. in Britain today, regardless of their size. In this situation, the first step for a revolutionary organisation towards overcoming their 'externality', is to develop ways of getting inside the dynamic of class struggle. This can't happen in the case of small ideological sects which propagandise from above on the basis of a series of badly learnt slogans, or of dogmatic principles. This problem can only be overcome by having a MUTUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE MASS OF THE PEOPLE, STARTING FROM THE CONTRADICTIONS WHICH CONFRONT THEM IN EVERYDAY LIFE; A RELATIONSHIP WHICH SEEKS TO EXPRESS THE NEEDS AND INTERESTS OF THE W.C.; TO SYNTHESISE AND GENERALISE THESE NEEDS AND TO DEVELOP AND PRODUCE MASS VANGUARDS. Base groups are designed to be an organisational expression of this mutual relationship. They are a recognition that the rev. mov. in Britain cannot overcome its 'externality' by imposing itself from the outside.

short-cut solutions and 'dissolving' its politics into the general reformism of the labour movement, as we think I.S. do.

Of course the role of the Base Groups will and must change in time. It's not enough to be external to the struggle, we need to become internal to the organisation of the masses .i.e. to change from a propaganda group to one which HOLDS POWER AND HAS NUMBERS.

WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE

The third factor is the political direction we wish to push the struggle. This is a difficult question and one that many groups fall down on. We are all guilty of putting forward strategies and tactics that do not fit the situation and therefore receive no response. Usually this does not mean that our politics are inappropriate in general, but that we 'haven't found a way of developing them organically from the actual situation we find ourselves in. There is nothing more self-defeating than trying to impose a set of abstract principles on a struggle, that have no meaning to its real dynamic. We try to raise things from inside the struggle, so we understand how to develop what already exists in an underdeveloped way, or to raise things that don't show themselves explicitly. For instance we want and need to struggle against racism and sexism, not just for after the revolution, but because such attitudes and relations hold back the struggle now. But how we conduct that struggle depends on the particular situation. In other words there are differences between analysis/perspectives, Strategy and tactics. Take the question of the unions. We understand their function and what they have become in relation to the capitalist state. But our strategy depends on the concrete relations that the w.c. has with them and in turn the particular relations the unions have to the plans and strategy of the ruling class. We have learnt the hard way that having an analysis is not simply a question of transmitting ideas, but of making them effective through a realistic revolutionary strategy - a strategy that in this case how workers use the unions without necessarily being trapped by their structure and politics. At an even more detailed level we also have to elaborate tactics which express how to operationalise some aspects of our strategy.

SECTION 3 WHY OUR ORGANISATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ARE FLEXIBLE

There are certain reasons why a political organisation is always necessary, reasons recognised long ago by Lenin. Essentially they are that the different strata of the w.c. dictated by the capitalist division of labour, generates in any sector, only a partial and fragmented experience of class struggle. These differences are accentuated by the inevitable ideological differences which arise in the w.c., due to exposure to bourgeois ideology and social relations, varying cultural backgrounds, jobs, social origin etc. Secondly the class struggle on a general and day to day level lacks continuity and the capitalist 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. But the recognition of these factors are not the only reasons for political organisation, for they tell us nothing about its precise form and character. This is because the latter is a product of the particular epoch of class struggle and capitalist development. Our organisational perspectives are flexible because we believe that any political org. in this epoch must be a product of the new situation, the new struggles. To build an organisation rooted in the present we have to start from scratch. We cannot impose a fixed structure or model of development. The aim of our interventions is to help create the conditions through which mass autonomy will grow. Expressed politically by clear strategies for struggle against capitalist development and organisationally by mass self-organisations of the w.c. in each sector. To enable us to create the opportunities and means for links and communications between the mass vanguards that will emerge from the new struggles and to participate with the militants themselves in the analysis of their own conditions - we must remain flexible, our organisation provisional to the level of development of the struggle. So that at all stages we are capable of learning and being transformed by development.

Flexible doesn't mean loose and unclear. Because within this process we seek to develop ourselves, acting as general communist vanguard pushing the struggle in the necessary direction and systematising the developments in consciousness. This is especially necessary in Britain where we are a long way from a mass expression of class autonomy. By linking together the most advanced militants in our organisation, we hope through the organisation of our existing forces, to help produce the conditions for further mass development. Therefore we do want to recruit people. Because when we attempt to join our forms of organisation to the struggle, it is inevitable and healthy that some of the most conscious militants will want to join us - not as a fixed body of concepts and structures, but something capable of mutual transformation, at the service of the struggle, but not reduced to it. In this sense we judge an org. by its capacity to develop the political level of mass struggle. Therefore the growth of an org. is not judged on its own terms, but by its ability to grow with learning from and responding to the struggle. THIS IS THE ONLY GUARANTEE AGAINST BUREAUCRATISATION AND POLITICAL STICKLEHEADNESS; there are no magic structures that preserve revolutionary

It must be clear now that any conception of forming the revolutionary party outside the growth of mass w.c. mobilisation is foreign to us. From this it follows that we reject the concept of the party seen as a linear continuation of a past tradition (Trotskyism, I.L.), where the revolutionary strategy is always seen as a return to the 'correct' tradition. In the same way, we reject the notion it is sufficient to want to create the party - the consciousness of its necessity is not enough to create the conditions for its development. We counterpose to this the idea that the only correct political leadership is one derived from an intimate involvement with the masses and which is a conscious and general expression of the revolutionary needs of the proletariat.

The basis for the formation of the revolutionary party is the development and unification of mass vanguards. What do we mean by this? Mass not in terms of size, but as an expression of the fact that they emerge inside the development of the class struggle. We have the example of May '68 in France, where the struggle was not led by any 'external leadership', but was the product of the spontaneous mass vanguards, when the struggle had developed, especially students and mass production workers.

The distinction between mass and party is not one that disappears in a revolutionary situation. While the concept of mass vanguard implies that the party has a deep and widespread implantation in the w.c., and is a political reference point for the mass; IT CANNOT SUBSTITUTE FOR THEM.

If we look at the Chile experience, we see "that the masses, through an ever deepening involvement in the struggle, give birth to united organs of self-management, and through these they become the driving force of the class confrontation!"

But however, nor can the party be reduced to the mass. The role of the rev. party is to come to terms with the contradictions and obstacles facing revolutionary advance; it must encourage both the growth of the mass movement and ITS OWN GROWTH AND HEGEMONY INSIDE THAT MOVEMENT. Chile provides us with an example of what happens when this is missing. The mass movement of its own accord was unable to develop a strategy and tactics which would have lead on from the situation of dual power to the actual taking of power. What was missing was a clear understanding that the next step involved the arming of the proletariat and the immediate taking of power while the bourgeoisie was still disorganised. The delay in doing this allowed the bourgeoisie to re-group and launch a decisive military coup of its own. (In passing we want to say that the Chilean revolutionary organisations, especially the M.I.R., that we support unconditionally, posed this question and took the initiative even if too late. What is interesting is not the tactical mistakes that the M.I.R. might have made, but the fact that the process of building the party, i.e. of leadership and hegemony in that situation, was late in respect to the needs of the mass movement). This is why BIG FLAME argue that in the long run we will have to face up to the problem of building the revolutionary party.

What does this mean for us in Britain today?

In Britain no organisation is either the party (as we've defined it) or even the embryo of the party. Existing rev. orgs. will be completely transformed as the class struggle develops. Today's rev. orgs. will produce a nucleus of revolutionaries - all round communist vanguards - which will provide an element of continuity between the old organisations and the new. This is what we are building today.

Put another way: we are at the stage of building and unifying the mass vanguards out of whom the party will develop. Concretely this means we are dealing with very groups who are relating often to individuals in specific situations. We are linking and stimulating individual vanguards and our base organisations are and will remain for sometime small and weak. (At the same time it must be pointed out that this present situation characterised by sharp inter-imperialist contradictions, the worst economic crisis of capitalism since the 30's, governmental instability, a general worsening of the material conditions of the proletariat, gives the best opportunity to make those organisations a little bit less small and a little bit less weak. Class struggle, the mass movement and the class enemy don't wait for us to be ready.)

Two points follow:

- 1) This should add a cautionary note to our discussion on national org. We emphatically are not trying to create, in any shape or form, the party at this stage.
- 2) National organisation should not be seen as something imposed from outside on our existing local work. It is our local work that through an analysis of the balance of class forces in this situation, should move us towards national organisation. As our understanding and experience of local work develops, it will become clear that a vital element in tipping the balance of forces in our favour, lies in BUILDING A NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE CLASS STRUGGLE; in having greater resources, information and contacts; and in being able to support and learn from each other. THEREFORE IT MUST BE A PRIORITY FOR US TO ESTABLISH A NATIONAL PRESENCE, i.e. A UNIFIED AND TOTAL POLITICAL LINE, and a COORDINATED AND CENTRALISED INTERVENTION, which provides an alternative to Trotskyism.

What kind of national organisation?

It should be clear that some degree of centralisation is needed. How much? Again the degree of centralisation should flow from the needs and possibilities of the struggle at any particular time. At the moment, for instance, it would be mistaken to insist on a too high

gh degree of centralisation. Although the needs of the struggle often demand greater unity, our possibility for fulfilling this is limited.

) B.F. is not able to provide a national leadership; we simply don't have the necessary level of political maturity.

) In many cases we would be centralising very little; in most cases we would not be centralising a mass intervention or mass presence, but merely ourselves.

Nevertheless even now there are important reasons for moving beyond our present federal structure; a fact which has been implicitly recognised, both by the creation of a national committee to produce the B.F. journal, and by the meeting of Troops Out 'newsletter' delegates to prepare for the T.O.M. conference. There are numerous other cases where we need to be able to pull together our different experiences and understanding to produce a common line: the Labour Party and the coming elections; anti-fascist activity, struggles in the health service, the unions, the women's movements, to list just a few. Over and above this we must recognise that local groups will develop immensely. Particular struggles and contradictions predominate in different areas; immigrant struggles in the Midlands, the service industry and housing in London; old declining industries in the North West. We must have structures and procedures for evening out these experiences.

Finally, greater co-ordination implies a more efficient use of scarce resources. Finally, greater centralisation of resources and experience does not mean creating a top heavy bureaucracy. We are only as effective as our roots in the w.c. and this means strengthening and broadening base group activity. **THIS WORK WILL ALWAYS BE A PRIORITY.** National organisation should be seen as strengthening and amplifying it - in fact these should be no separation, the two should flow together.