

THE

NEWS

LETTER

BOX

INTRODUCTION

Experience has taught us that starting a newsletter is not an easy task. For a long time members of the "independent left" have realised their isolation and the problems which both reflect and perpetuate this situation. They have also realised that some form of communication bulletin could be a beginning towards a solution of this problem. The obvious question then is--why has this not happened?

As we see it, the problems are both practical and political in nature. Certainly, geographical and technical (co-ordination, distribution, etc.) problems are important. But, the primary determinant exists within the political realm. On one hand, traditional ideologies have inhibited the ability of leftists to deal with the problems posed by corporate state capitalism. Yet the power of these ideologies has been such that it was often assumed that in terms of political ideas, everything had been said and the situation today demands practise, "getting down to it", rather than debate.

We feel, however, that our experiences in Canada underlined by the movement of the working class in Europe both express the need for new direction and generate alternative ideas. (Italy: New Tactics and Organization by the International Workers Solidarity Committee is an example). With these things in mind people from Winnipeg, Windsor, Toronto, and Kitchener-Waterloo met in an attempt to begin a newsletter which would address in a new way the problems that all of us faced in our political work.

This meeting was held in late December in Toronto, A position paper was presented by the K-W group discussing the position of the left and the need for a newsletter as they saw it. Through discussion some differences arose concerning the nature and role of the newsletter. But it was decided that the production of the newsletter should be initiated as soon as possible despite the differences. The discussion could be developed and broadened as the newsletter got out to more people. In this light, the first issue was to be composed of a slightly reworked version of the K-W paper and various responses to the issues it raises from the other centres. An editorial board was also chosen for purposes of co-ordination and distribution.

This, then, the first issue of the newsletter will be mainly directional, and in effect, an announcement of its existence. Hopefully, the next issue will be much broader in scope. At this point we can foresee the following content:

- (a) responses to the discussion of the first issue
- (b) analyses of particular situations or experiences (of which two are already lined up)
- (c) bibliographies, reviews, references of articles or books relevant to the revolutionary movement
- (d) articles concerned with the historical and/or theoretical development of the new tendency.

But it must be emphasized that the newsletter can be little more than a compilation of the articles, reviews, etc. that you send in. So

send us your comments on the discussion begun in this issue. Also, any questions you have concerning the ideas, direction or role of the newsletter will be appreciated. If you have written on any topic or know of any articles which could be presented in the newsletter let us know. We hope to be able to present in each issue review of or at least a list of various books, pamphlets, articles, etc. which would be of particular theoretical or practical value to Canadian revolutionaries. If you have anything to contribute in this vein please do so.

Getting down to the nitty gritty, we would ask that whatever is sent in be written legibly or typed if possible. We hope to be able to produce the second issue of the newsletter in about two months from the time that this reaches you at the latest. So if you plan to contribute do so as soon as possible.

Our address is:

THE NEWSLETTER
P.O. BOX 884
WATERLOO, ONTARIO

TOWARDS A NEWSLETTER

Within the last two years leftists all across English Canada have moved more and more out of the universities, in attempt to develop working-class politics. These people, predominately from a new-left background are now working and are involved politically in collectives or small community groups.

To those of us who have travelled across the country it becomes clear that the problems and activities of these groups are very similar, yet in many cases they are unaware of each other's existence. Our discussions with these groups often led to the realization of isolation being a common factor and thus the necessity of developing some form of communication. Most immediately a newsletter seemed to be the practical solution to this problem.

However, at a deeper level there seemed to exist a need and consequently a searching for a new approach to political organization, the crucial point being that, in practice, these groupings have rejected the two dominant conceptions of revolutionary change, the orthodox communist and the social democratic. This means that many people no longer see the viability of existing left organizations such as the C.P., C.P.L., C.P.C.-M.L., N.D.Y., Waffle, L.S.A., etc. With this in mind we hope that the newsletter brings both clarification and an examination of the problems that these groups face in practice.

As indicated above, revolutionary leftists have moved into the community in attempts to develop working-class politics. Community groups, labour centres, working women's groups, etc. have formed which

are non-hierarchical, closely related to the problems of everyday life, and extremely alienated from the vanguard style.

Although these tendencies are healthy, they are inhibited by the "hegemony" of the orthodox political tendencies---their institutionalised party structures and worked out programs as well as their control of left publishing and press. In such an environment, a critical view of the development of revolutionary theory is not available. "The traditions of all the dead generations weights like a nightmare on the brain of the living." (Marx, 18th Brumaire). This has facilitated the reproduction within these community groupings of the orthodox political conceptions, predominately taking the forms of what we may term "vanguardism" and "ouvrierism" (or "workerites").

The former, vanguardism, although rejected the present self-constituted vanguards and their simple party-building mentality, nevertheless accepts the ultimate need for a vanguard party and the belief that "socialism must be brought to the working class from outside" (Lenin--What is to be Done?). Their practice amounts to propaganda and developing the necessary cadre for the construction of the future party.

Workeritis, on the other hand, glorifies the weakest aspects of the present situation of the working class. Thus the trade union movement and the N.D.P. are given "critical" support, which in practice becomes complete support because they are "institutions of the working class". Attempts are made to keep the working class free from

"political" exposure because "the workers know best." In practice this results in work on the fringes of the union or social democratic structures in such activity as union reelection organizing. Or, in a more developed way, the organizing of militant trade union support organizations at the community level which promote trade union unity and publicize cases of corporate exploitation.

The conceptions of vanguardism and workeritis function as attitudes and as ideologies in all left formations outside of the orthodox parties. Clearly, these conceptions are one of the most important weaknesses of such formations, because in the last analysis the internal logic of these ideologies structure the practical alternatives available such that they do not differ fundamentally from the strategies of the orthodox.

For this reason we can expect many individuals, or small groups to give up the hope of an independent political practice and instead to enter one of the parties in an attempt to orient it in a more revolutionary direction. Indeed this is happening to a certain extent already, the left opposition becomes an internal rather than an external phenomenon.

There are, however, other developments occurring in and around the small groups. There is a tendency emerging, if such a fledgling development can be called a tendency, which sees the two orthodox strategies as false alternatives. It is attempting to produce a revolutionary strategy based on an understanding of the

present historical situation and the limitations of the orthodox alternatives. We consider ourselves as part of this development and by writing this letter we hope to make contact with others who see themselves in the same way.

Most directly those who make up this tendency are limited by their rejection of the Leninist organizational model and all political conceptions which are based on the separation of political organization and economic organization, party and class. This does not mean, however, that the question of political leadership is neglected--we are not anarchists, but Marxists. Rather, the problem is confronted in a different way. That is, the problem of developing a political leadership within the class situation rooted in base organizations geared towards the control of production and direct action.

Such a position requires, and is a result of, an understanding of the working class as a concrete reality rather than an ideological category. An analysis of real needs and motivations as a part of the class situation is required, and can only be understood in terms of the particular structure and dynamics of this situation. A sociology of the work place which is concerned with work groups, divisions in the factory, the relations between domination, technology and production relations, etc. is beginning which is an attempt to understand the work situation in a concrete sense.

Partly as a result of this and partly as a result of the new left and the women's movement, an aspect of Marxism is being rejuvenated which

hitherto has been subsumed by the hegemony of the dominant conception of Marxism (as a science of the economic contradictions of Capitalism). This is the critique of everyday life. We have learned that the locus of oppression and exploitation is not confined to the factory but extends to every aspect of life, from sexuality to technology, from language to the sports arena. We feel it is necessary to develop a total critique of society to show how the poverty of everyday life is rooted in as well as reinforcing the basic structure of the relations of production.

In many ways, we see the existing small groups as a practical critique of the orthodox conception of revolution. But it is clear that unless a new theory of revolutionary change is elaborated (and the practical implications of such a theory made clear) the possibilities that exist for an independent political formation of a new type will not be realized. It is for these reasons that we are producing this letter. We hope to draw together all those people who agree in some way with the schematic analysis presented above and who accept the elements outlined which generally characterize a tendency in opposition to the orthodox communists and social democrats.

This tendency obviously is not adequately worked out, it is not clear on all questions; there are many gaps and limitations in its analysis. Thus, it is necessary to clarify and develop these things through debate and discussion with Marxists from all across Canada. This could be a major function of an newsletter.

The newsletter as originally conceived would simply have placed the various community groups in contact such that ideas and experiences could be shared. But considering the ideological differences which exist within and between these formations it would be reasonable to expect the newsletter to be a forum for ideological in-fighting rather than theoretical development. So, we feel the original conception should be changed. We now recognize a nascent political tendency on the Canadian left and we wish to give it a forum for debate, development and clarification. This means that the confrontation between vanguardism, workerites and the new tendency will not take place directly within the newsletter. But, as the situation changes, we will be required to struggle with both these tendencies on their own terrain. We will, however, do this from a position of greater confidence as we will have made contact with others of similar orientation and will have deepened and strengthened our theoretical position.

We feel that theoretical clarity will be realized in a number of ways: first, through debate and struggle among ourselves and reflection on the reality of Canada in the 70's. But also by seeking in the history of the Marxist movement theoretical and practical developments which contain valuable historical lessons. Such political organizations' as the Workers Opposition in Russia, the Left Communists in Germany, and the Council Communists in Holland and America would be important here. Also such Marxist writers as Alexandra Kollantai, Karl Korsch, Anton Pannekoek, Paul Mattick, and others would have to be rediscovered

and studied. We would also have to analyze the developments in other countries which have recognized the limitations of the orthodox left and have broken new ground--Lotta Continua in Italy, Base Ouvrierx in France, Big Flame in England, etc. In these ways we can be assured that this tendency is not a particular Canadian aboration, but has a history of development and an international presence.

Through the newsletter we have to deal critically with the theory and practise of the orthodox left in Canada, But we also must generate an alternative on both of these levels. Such a project can only be realised through an understanding of the complex economic, political and social reality that is Canada, Thus, these broad problems must be addressed at every stage as we confront the concrete problems of the day to day work in the newsletter.

Where possible, explanations and critiques of the practical experiences of those people who are engaged in political work could be communicated through the newsletter for the benefit of others across Canada. And any type of information exchange to generalise the experiences of the revolutionary left could be carried on.

For all of these reasons we feel that a newsletter is both desirable and necessary.

RESPONSE FROM WINNIPEG

The emphasis of Waterloo comrades initial letter pointed to the necessity to develop a new theory of revolutionary change. This is clearly important, for if this new tendency is going to survive and become effective as a political force we must develop what the other political formations already possess--a well constituted revolutionary theory, an interpretation of past situations relevant to historical change, a strategy based on the above and an understanding of the institutional complex and political economy of to-day.

However, we feel that the analysis of why independent left groups cannot correspond at this stage is fundamentally incorrect. You, yourself pointed out that what is crucial about the development of independent left groups is "that in practise these groupings have rejected the two dominant conceptions of revolutionary change the orthodox communist and social democrat." Such formations as "Community groups, labour centres, working womens groups, etc., have formed which are non-hierarchical, closely related to the problems of everyday life and extremely alienated from the vanguard style." You go on to develop the analysis that because of the hegemony of the orthodox left, "vanguardism" and workites" are operative in all independent left groups. As a result communication would result in ideological in-fighting mostly over the necessity of a vanguard party, a debate the tendency is not ready to encounter.

It is here we disagree. What is important to understand is that in the main, people in these independent left groups grew out of the university new left. The majority of the new left rejected the

old bureaucratic left structures and the concept of the vanguard party (their very mode of operation bears this out). They however, did not do so on any solid theoretical basis. Indeed the student power movement for a large part was always anti-intellectual. Most people from the new left have fallen by the wayside. Those who remain represent people who have seriously attempted to take their politics to the community and into the working class. It is, in most cases, these people that we are dealing with when we talk of the composition of independent left groups. It is certainly true that there is a movement within these groups towards seeing the necessity of some form of party formation. In certain instances that movement is reflected in people joining one of the various parties or pre-parties already existing. We feel it is worth noting that in many cases it is the more theoretically advanced people that join. We see this movement towards a pro party position reflecting two things. First, people are moving in a party direction as a result of the failure and frustration of their past practice. Second, the anti-intellectualism that characterized the new left is being discarded by necessity. People are seeing the necessity and beginning in practice to study (a) the revolutionary leaders of the past and (b) Canadian society. Precisely because of the hegemony of the orthodox communists, their positions with study, naturally evolves towards pro 'vanguardism.'

This however is still a fledging movement. And the point is to stop it. These people's roots are anti-vanguard. At this stage they are open

to investigation, a situation that was not true in the past. And what is most important they are engaged in a practise that is not fundamentally based on a vanguard party mentality. We feel this holds equally true for individuals that are presently non affiliated and groping. As a result we propose that for the independent left groups to engage in correspondence over (1) their practise and (2) important questions concerning Canada i.e. nature of trade unions, the Canadian union question regionalism etc. is extremely important. We cannot see the result as a debate over the Lenninist conception of the vanguard. Rather people will be corresponding over their practise and in that practise lies the seeds of theory that should not be delegated the position of "Where possible, explanations and critiques of the practical experiences of those people who are engaged in political work could be communicated through the newsletter for the benefit of others across Canada." The correspondence between groups should be a very important and constituent part of the newsletter.

We should note that regarding the workitis camp. There are some groups who are operating within this framework. However, they have in no way broken from social democracy and we cannot see how they would be interested in such a newsletter. Although we may be incorrect we do not see the workitis tendency as a strong tendency within left groups that would be interested in the newsletter. These people tend to join together, are thoroughly social democratic and anti-intellectual.

The aforementioned analysis of course does not mean that the other aspects of the newsletter mentioned by the Waterloo comrades are not important. In these matters it will be mostly individuals who contribute. This process is extremely important for all the reasons outlined in the K-W paper. We, should also make it perfectly clear that the above section does not apply to "vanguards" that exist or groups that hope to become vanguards or see themselves as pre party formations. For here you are dealing with a whole different cup of tea. We do not want to debate with them. It would be a waste of time and effort. Their ideas are quite set.

Dear Newsletter:

The Labour Centre is a group of militants in Windsor who organizationally came together ten months ago around study group activity. Since that time our activities and experiences have led us to develop a committed socialist collective. Most of us are presently working and trying to systematically learn from the work-place situation. Any further description of the groups growth and development must wait until a future issue of the newsletter. For the present, this letter represents our collective response to the concept (as we understand it) of the Newsletter.

The Labour Centre has as yet no common political ideology that would allow us to respond collectively to the proposals of the newsletter, specifically, that is, to its theoretical direction. However, we are all agreed that the newsletter, in principle, is a good thing to provide, communicative links and share organizing experiences, and observations. Many of us feel that we have valuable experiences to contribute to such an undertaking. For the moment, the collective has taken the position that groups of people within the Labour Centre who have a shared experience may contribute to the newsletter. (for example--several people were in a local rank and file group called Worker's Unity) The collective as a whole will discuss the question of participation after one or two issues have been published and respond accordingly.

Solidarity in struggle,
COLleen Paquette/ Steering Committee
Labour Centre

WHY A NEWSLETTER?

It is my impression, from meeting and talking to many people from several different cities in Canada and Quebec over the last six months, that there is a new tendency taking shape on the left. Members of this tendency, although by no means agreed on every major contemporary political question, find unity around a particular conception of and attitude toward revolutionary organizing and thus toward the working class and the development of call autonomy on a mass scale.

The impetus for this development can be found largely in the growing workers movement itself. Although the latter is international in scope, in some countries it tends to be stronger, more developed and more articulate---for example, Lotta Continua in Italy, which has roots in the existence and rapid formation of autonomous workers committees since 1969. The new tendency seeks to join the spontaneous political direction by changes in the objective conditions (eg. in Britain the struggle against the Industrial Relations Bill and massive unemployment and job cuts.)

In Canada this tendency is still very young. It can be found mainly in small collectives of revolutionaries that have begun to focus on workplace organizing. A high degree of importance is being placed by members of these groups on autonomous workers organizations and battles initiated and led by rank and file workers. Further, the necessity is realized for rank and file groups, once formed, to unite together and develop a common political orientation as the class struggle deepens. Whereas most workers in Canada and Quebec are not

revolutionary in their way they see themselves, there are indications that in sentiment many are moving in that direction. For example, at work we openly discuss revolution, some more seriously than others, but generally in a positive way. In a situation of struggle, the rank and file formation of which I am part see itself as an "underground", as a bunch of "commies", "radicals," etc. Unfortunately the opportunities for mass discussion are limited. But, the development of class consciousness in a political direction is no doubt taking place.

Just as there is a need for rank and file groups to begin communicating with one another as a prelude to organizational unity, so there is a need for the dispersed "membership" of the "new tendency" to discover one another and to begin communicating. Hence the newsletter. So far, people from Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Windsor and Kitchener-Waterloo have expressed interest. The purpose, generally agreed upon, will be to communicate political analysis rooted in the actual experience and needs of the contributors. At the moment there are plenty of pressing problems, many of which we face daily. One that strikes me as acutely important is the following--How do revolutionaries, seeking to act as catalysts in the development of workers autonomy relate to unions of all types? Concretely, what do we suggest as general strategies to workmates?

Most would agree that this is no easy problem (unlike the vulgar Leninists who see the question in terms of simply winning the leadership of the union movement). What we must attempt here is: 1. theoretic

al analysis of the position and role of unions in contemporary capitalist society and 2) examine how most workers, especially the more conscious section, view unionism? This is just one of the many problems that the newsletter must begin to grapple with.

Some of us in Toronto intend to prepare articles on these and other questions for both our own meetings and for the newsletter. Needless to say, articles from other individuals or groups, or other countries would be of great interest to us in our work.

IMPORTANT: Because of a conjunction of favourable circumstances we are able to send this newsletter out free. How long this state of affairs will last we do not know.

But what we do need is a greatly expanded list of those people who wish to receive the newsletter. We will send a number of the first issue to anyone we know of who would be interested. Hopefully in this way the extras will get out to more people. If you are one of these people and you wish to receive the newsletter in the future be sure and send us your name and address. Also if you know of any other people who would be interested, send their names and address in as well. We hope too hear from you soon.