

working with them. This unfortunately reflects a lack of comprehension about United Front tactics. In SOAS, where SWP members led the campaign against the increase in overseas Student fees, we managed to involve a large section of Black nationalists students (influenced mainly by Grass Roots and Race Today). But nowhere in the course of our joint activity did we dilute our politics in any way. We carried on a constant ideological battle against notions of black separatism and Third-Worldism. This in no way affected our joint activity and in fact made our position clear to them. We, in fact, managed to influence a small minority. It was unfortunate that we could not use Flame in our debates, as our branch felt that the paper did not give an accurate picture of SWP politics. It was because of this that we, as a branch, turned down Kim Gordon's suggestion to form a Flame group. Instead we concentrated on building SWSO and the SWP.

True, every place is not SOAS but the general point being made here is that United Front activity with Black nationalists resolves the contradictions between divergent political traditions. In a sense, it enables Black nationalists to know exactly where we stand instead of thinking an independent Flame to be yet another manoeuvre.

Lastly, Kim Gordon's perspective. This follows the same conclusions as that of a section of the Womens Voice Steering Committee. The excellent demolition job done by Nigel Harris and Alex Callinicos (IB 3, 1979) leaves me with very little to add. However the organisational aspect needs to be stressed. Even with the best intentions, we do not have sufficient Black cadres to be able to build any credible independent organisation. We do not have a sufficient implantation among Black people. I should also like to draw the attention of comrades to the fate of similar 'independent' organisations like Asian Socialist Forum, Asian Socialist Alliance (both promoted by the IMG) and the Black Socialist Alliance (inspired by Sivarindan). Kim Gordon's perspective suffers from a similar unfounded optimism.

My conclusions briefly:

- 1 Revert back to the old status of Flame as the Black organisation of SWP.
- 2 United Front work with other Black organisations and when feasible jointly organising *reformist* organisations for single-issue campaigns.
- 3 Black members at all times to project SWP politics and abide by party decisions.

#### What Kind of Paper

The CC document quite correctly addressed itself to the confusion caused by the orientation of Flame towards uncritical black nationalism. Only two years ago (IB March 1977) in praising the political line of the CP (USA) in the 1920s, Kim Gordon wrote: 'They fought a long and bitter battle against the defeatist Garveyites whose basic philosophy was Black Capitalism tinged with 'Back-to-Africa-ism'. That was perhaps the 'young' Kim Gordon. Now under his editorship Flame has more or less abandoned the task of putting across

socialist politics to black people. A Flame article on Garvey was full of uncritical adulation, only two sentences hinting that everything was not OK with the great man. This is not untypical of the general direction of Flame.

Flame should be the paper of the SWP for black workers. It should be remembered that what is lacking in the black community is not militancy, but a conscious revolutionary socialist tradition. It is towards building that tradition that Flame must address itself. At the risk of swimming against the tide Flame must constantly put across revolutionary socialist positions on all issues including black nationalism. Furthermore, given our lack of resources and considering our small implantation among Asians, Flame must orient itself towards black workers as a whole, not merely Afro-Caribbeans. It should attempt to move from its present 'community' orientation to a workplace orientation. Its task should be to win black people over to the SWP not only because of our anti-racist militancy, but also on the basis of our overall politics.

#### Conclusion

Our general perspective for black work, for the moment, should be quite modest. We must aim for the recruitment of a significant number of blacks and more important, develop a black cadre within the party. This entails their full integration into all arenas of party life and awareness of all the ramifications of SWP politics. It is only through hard and patient *political* work that we can hope to increase the influence of revolutionary socialism in the black working class, and pave the way for the building of a multi-racial revolutionary party.

## SOME NOTES ON SOUTHALL

### Pete Alexander

The purpose of this article is twofold. First to set down the facts of our intervention in Southall—which has been a modest success. Secondly to relate our experience to current arguments in the Party.

#### Southall

Although part of an outer London borough, Southall is a recognisable town with its own identity. About half of the town's 70,000 population come from South Asia, and the overwhelming majority of them are from a small part of the Punjab. There is also a significant Afro-carib minority. Southall is unique in Britain in that its economic, cultural, religious and political life is dominated by Asians. Politics in Southall are extremely complicated, but the most significant organisations are the IWA and the SYM.

#### Indian Workers Association

Despite its name the IWA has traditionally represented business interests in Southall, leaving the organisation of workers to the trade unions. Within the IWA numerous factions, mostly relating to Indian politics, vie for control. For many years an extremely backward and corrupt leadership held away. More recently a block, including the CPGB member Vishnu Sharma, has been dominant. This leadership has taken some interest in its members problems, particularly racism. But even then their orientation has been towards representations rather than mobilisations.

#### SYM

The Youth Movement came into existence three years ago, following the murder of Gurdip Singh Chagger, when the IWA and other organisations failed to act. At that time John Rose wrote with *optimism* (IS91): 'The only long-term chance that the SYM has for growth and development is if the leadership comes to decisively adopt socialist politics.' John's analysis was largely correct, but his optimism was *unjustified*. There is no democracy within the SYM, thus assisting the bureaucratisation of a small elite committee. The No Politics position has become entrenched by various state and 'philanthropic' funding agencies. The leaders have become increasingly concerned with the intricacies of Southall factional politics, rather than channeling the frustrations their members have with jobs, housing and the Police.

**Peoples Unite** a 'community' based political-cultural organisation dominated by Afro-caribs. Among its members are the reggae band, Misty. Of all the community based organisations it is probably the best politically (refusing outside funding) and also the most open. Our Flame members, in particular, work closely with P.U.

## The Left

There are important groups of Indian communists, particularly Naxalites and CP(M). Three years ago the CPGB were also a significant force and we barely existed. Even before the riot this balance of forces had switched, mainly because of the CP's decline. But also, through consistent work and intervention in the ANL we had built a branch of 10 members and organised supporters (Flame) i.e. 3 white, 4 Asians and 3 Afro-caribs. Today we have a branch of 14 members and supporters i.e. 7 Asians, 4 Whites and 3 afro-caribs. More significantly we now have 3 Asian cadres, with the effect that the branch is now a black branch with a few white members. We have also markedly increased our credibility and support. How has this transformation occurred?

## The Riot

We have written in detail elsewhere (Southall, The fight for our future). The chief steward on the 23rd April was comrade Balwinder Singh, and in so far as anyone gave any direction it came from us. It was also us who proposed that there should be a strike and mass mobilisation to stop the NF meeting, and us who proposed the march after the death of Blair Peach. When we speak of us, it is important to understand that we mean the SWP as such. We also used the ANL to increase the weight of our position. Balwinder was known in the town as ANL organiser. Most of our mobilising had been as ANL.

Although our politics led us to propose the strike, we were amazed by the degree to which Asian workers related to their workplace organisation. This was demonstrated by both the support for the strike, and the number and magnitude of workplace collections as opposed to temple, IWA or house to house collections. If a similar situation were to arise again we would argue for workers contingents based on workplaces. This would strengthen solidarity on the demonstration and make strike action as part of a defence Campaign more likely.

## Our Intervention

After the riot we agreed that our main orientation had to be towards Asian workers. We accepted that the best vehicle for this work was Socialist Worker, with the possibility of direct recruitment to the Party. A number of factors led to this conclusion:

1. The traditions of our Party were the main guide; but also the IWA and SYM were failing to politically organise workers, therefore leaving a vacuum.

2. SW is our best publication for relating our politics to Asian workers. In addition to the general propaganda and coverage of workers struggles, we were able to produce five special Southall editions. We sold up to 900 SWs in a week and established a number of new regular sales and contacts. Most sales were done door to door, involving up to 20 comrades.

3. Because SW/SWP has a reputation, following from work done nationally and locally, we were able to organise our intervention without having to explain who we were. We are clearly not outsiders. WV, Flame, Rebel all have to be explained in terms of their relationship with the SWP/SW.

4. Organising as SW/SWP has allowed all our members (including whites) to play a role in relating to Asians. We could not have involved as many cdes by organising as Flame/Chingari etc.

5. It is possible to organise around a weekly publication in a way which it is not with a monthly paper.

6. SW/SWP brings together and provides a unifying role for all our work.

7. Although the Southall ANL has the paper support of the IWA and others, in practise its activists are just the SWP and periphery. The limited nature of the ANL's politics clearly makes useless as an organiser of general interventions.

Cdes have also sold Flame, WV and Rebel but we have not been successful in organising around them in Southall. We have also produced thousands of leaflets (all in Punjabi as well as English) and these have mostly been distributed in local factories. The pamphlet we produced sold nearly 1000 copies in the area.

The development of the branch has occurred because we have consistently argued clear politics and because of our activity. The activity has gone well beyond the Southall demonstrations and the Defence Campaigns. We have picketed the racist 'Labour' Club and organised on Immigration. We have publicised the case of a local man who 'died' in the Police station. We have argued support for a victimised shop steward and are now supporting striking Air India workers. In all this activity we have tried to win the support of the IWA, SYM etc. The United Front tactic has proved just as useful in Southall as elsewhere.

In the downturn (since the riot) we have built a black branch because our politics and activity have distinguished us from the reformism of the IWA and the 'nationalism' of the SYM and Peoples Unite, at the same time as stressing the need for unity in action against the courts and on every other issue.

**Current Arguments.** We want to be careful about generalising from our experience in Southall. It is probably particularly true with black work that most of the best work is in relating to specific local issues. We do not want to suggest that our experience should be transferred to Birmingham, Brixton, Bolton or Brick Lane, where different organisational forms may be appropriate. We have had only limited experience of organising Flame.

Our practise has recognised the importance of understanding that many black people become politically conscious because of their experience of oppression as blacks. SW sales on Southall Broadway fluctuate between below 5 for straight 'industrial' front pages and above 20 when the headlines relate to Asians. Although SW has been useful, there is plenty of scope for improvement, with more anti-racism/black coverage. Even so, SW cannot be adequate and Flame could be useful as a mechanism for both:

- i) relating our politics to the particular problems and struggles of blacks, and
- ii) Organising, educating and giving confidence to our black members and supporters.

In Southall there is a basis for Flame being a joint Asian and Afro-carib paper. The younger Asian youth—the recent school leavers and younger—are increasingly

relating to black culture—particularly music. More politically conscious Asians and Afro-carib workers also recognise that they must support each other. Peoples Unite has organised Asians and Afro-caribs together.

But if Flame is to be successful it must argue our, revolutionary socialist, SWP politics. This should not preclude debate with other tendencies. But we do need clarity of politics if we are to argue with workers who would otherwise be influenced by the leaders of IWA, SYM, PU, and teachers and media. There can be no short cut in winning the argument that liberation can only come thro' socialism, and that requires black and white workers uniting in the organised overthrow of capitalism.

We believe that our modest success has vindicated our approach in Southall, and we will continue to organise our main intervention thro' SW/SWP. Incidentally, with the increase in Asian members, the seperation of these members from the Asian 'community' is declining.

It is wrong to lay down hard and fast rules about our members joining other larger 'community' organisations. In Southall our members do intervene in the IWA. But such interventions are not possible in the SYM, because it lacks any democratic structure. Here we need to demand open meeting and democratic elections.

Our branch is now mainly black. Organising a separate Chingari or Asian Flame branch does not make sense.

PS. There is not room here to deal adequately with the problems of the Defence Campaign, but a few points are worth making:

1. We argued from the beginning that the defendants had to be involved in their own defence, but with only a dozen SWP defendants we were unable to launch our own defence campaign when others rejected this proposal.
2. The sectarianism of organisations in Southall (particularly the SYM) and lack of activity of others (particularly the IWA and temples) has crippled the work of mounting a political defence and collecting sufficient funds.
3. We did not put enough emphasis on defendants winning support from their trade unions.
4. Although some ANL groups have done some good work raising funds, the response of the Left in general has been atrocious. Altogether about £20,000 has been raised—the target is still £70,000.

carefulness, the differences of opinion which could be resolved through discussion and debate, will become fixed and hardened and will inevitably be led to factionalism. This we must avoid.

Whatever happens at the conference, "the PARTY is always right" as Trotsky once said, "because it is the only historic instrument" which the working class possesses for the solution of its fundamental tasks. One can be right only with the party and through the party because history has not created any other way for the realisation of one's rightness."

## RACE WORK AND THE PARTY

### Europe Singh South London

It is difficult as a long standing member of the party to begin to write for the internal bulletin on a subject so branded with the label of factionalism. On an issue where those that disagree with the CC are branded by them as anti-marxists. Yet that in itself is part of the debate. The style of operation of the CC, its remoteness, the absence of continuous debate in the leading committees of the party and the consequent effects of that for the development of a leading cadre.

#### RACE WORK: HOW THE DEBATE BEGINS

Despite their obvious considerable differences with the Flame/Womens Voice perspectives the CC maintained a silence on the issue. We have to ask ourselves what is it that has prompted such a sudden and total rejection of last conference's perspectives on these issues (the CC will obviously say it is a matter of interpretation; but reread comrades the last conference documents on Womens Voice and Flame).

The story really begins with comrades Nicol and Turner producing the State of the Organisation Report of last November. Crudely, their conclusions, were that geographical branches, in particular, were very weak; and on their assessment, since Flame and Women Voice weren't doing too well, an initial and easy remedy was to cut out these activities and draw members back to the central thrust of the organisation. (The debate on the nature of the Present period obviously has a lot of bearing on this). From this point on the attack on Flame/Womens Voice began both theoretically and in shady back stage manoeuvres.

#### THE THEORETICAL DEBATE

One of the central arguments put forward by CC members and supporters of their analysis has been the call for Leninist sanctity. The argument that if Lenin hadn't said it then it wasn't worth saying. Is this the approach that led to the development of State Capitalist theory? The Permanent Arms Economy? Or even the core of our theory: rank and file? These arguments are merely a form of abuse.

I would maintain that there is a paucity of theory concerning the relationship between the struggle of visible minorities in advanced capitalism and the working class struggle. One of Cliff's famous dictums used to be 'Raise theory to the level of practice' it seems that some comrades wish to debase practice to the current level of theory.

#### THE EXPERIENCE OF RACE WORK

Attempting to develop ways of organising inside the black community, to understand the race/class dialectic, has been a prime objective of those involved in race work in the SWP for the last 10 years. Nigel Harris himself could say in 1975 that the success of our recruitment and consolidation of black workers depended on us developing community groups that is groups of Asians or Afro; Caribbeans that met together, discussed politics of 'back home' and of black people in Britain. Nigel's formulation was an honest attempt to come to terms with;

1. the identity of oppression inside black communities.
2. the guarded approach that black workers have to 'white politics'.
3. The recognition that black SWP members have to relate to the black communities and not withdraw from them to a 'safe haven.'

The party as a whole relates to and generalises from the struggles of the most advanced sections of the class. Necessarily the questions that are foremost in the minds of black workers moving towards revolutionary politics are not adequately dealt with. Further new black recruits to the party, prior to Flame, either dropped out through inability to relate or else became divorced from the black communities to join in the main activities of the party.

In 1974 Brixton had a black branch (an issue of some controversy at the time) composed of 10 West Indian manual workers. The major problem we faced was relating the week to week politics of the party to our own reality. We were forced to concentrate our attention towards the black community. Without that we would not have survived. The branch collapsed after a year partly because we felt isolated in what we were doing, partly because of our inability to focus effectively as purely SWP members on the struggle against black oppression.

In Brixton we have been involved with Flame activity for the past two to three years. Since last year's conference decision the focus on the black community, the attention towards the role of black workers in the revolutionary struggle both historically and in the here and now, has stabilised the SWP black membership in Brixton and has begun to turn them into revolutionary cadres.

The black caucus discussion showed quite clearly that for those involved with race work over a long period of time, this was the general experience:

1. There is a potential for involving black workers in struggle around the issues of oppression.
2. Deepening our understanding of black struggles past and present is essential.
3. Flame focusses our black members on the community and forces them to translate SWP politics to the struggles that take place there.
4. this activity develops our members into cadres.

#### CONCLUSIONS

1. The current debate around Flame is inextricably linked to the debates around our general perspectives and structure of the organisation.
2. The continuing debate around oppression v. exploitation is in the tradition of

## INDEPENDENT INTERVENTION

### Azim Hajee Birmingham

On the same day that bright orange clad marchers started their trek across England for the right to work, another group of mainly unemployed youth braced themselves in Birmingham. They were also to go on a relatively long march—ten miles across Birmingham and into West Bromwich—but the colours were different: red, gold, black and green. The slogan was *Black Self Defence; no offence*, and after passing through Handsworth, it grew to 200 strong.

The issue was an old one—police brutality, when they smashed up a rasta party with riot shields, police dogs, truncheons—but this was a proud march. It was the first demonstration of its kind organised by an all-black defence committee, bringing together all the local Afro-black organisations (in itself an achievement).

But members of Flame had another reason to be excited—this was one of our first major public activities and Flame's presence dominated the march; all the banners and placards were Flame's. But this was no band wagon we had jumped on. Flame had been involved from the outset—the committee and the demo were our suggestion. So was the decision, (not without opposition) to invite Asian and white organisation. That we had pulled along with us organisations that two years ago passed us off as puppets and lackeys of whities, is an indication that we are now recognisably part of the black political scene in Handsworth. It may not say much for the state of other black organisations, but is worth pointing out that in nine months we have built an organisation that can take them up on their own ground: we were better organised black nationalists than they were.

Flame, as it is now, started in Birmingham after the independence perspective of last Conference. The group was composed of a few black SWP members, and some ex-members of a group called Samaj in a Babylon. Samaj itself had been formed by some ex-members of the SWP who had left following the last black caucus dispute involving Soonu Engineer. These members, inspired by the new Flame perspective, and following the difficulties of maintain their own group, decided to join Flame.

The composition is important for two reasons. Firstly, it meant that from the outset, Flame was larger than the black SWP membership, and so its independent organisational status was jealously guarded.

Secondly, the Samaj members brought with them their experience of working as a tiny black group, an existence that is fraught with all the possible pitfalls of isolation, demoralisation and sectarianism, but also the more positive attributes of modest, self reliance, consistency and attention to detail.

For the new Flame group, it meant that priorities of what could be done had to be realistically assessed. It was no longer possible to be sloppy about Flame money—leaflets had to be paid for. If there was a demonstration or a campaign then Flame sent its own delegate. Whiel expectation of what could be expected of members had to be trimmed; educationals about black history, socialist politics could not be left to chance; equally important were sounds and music. Our first fund raiser for Zimbabwe clearly caught the imagination of both youth and the media.

Working as a small black organisation does not come easily to SWP members we became used to operating as part of an organisation that has already begun to win its spurs inside the labour and anti-racist movement—and organisation that has the confidence of knowing that it is capable of pulling off some significant initiatives.

But that reputation is a mixed blessing for our black comrades. We sometimes make the mistake of thinking that we can forever live off the reputation and cudos of the party. But often, it does not wash—it is not impressive in the black community, and sometimes our confidence comes over as a triumphalism that does not fit the tempo and state of play in the black situation—it can come over as hot air that is not matched with consistency and experience on the ground floor.

The one off grand campaigns, such as we carry out at large elections or like that in Southall, are useful in projecting our politics to large numbers of people. But while they may win us an initial burst of respect, gratitude and even interest, it cannot for long compensate for lack of consistent activity by black militants inside the community; our members have to earn the right to be listened to; no matter how good you think you are, you cannot swim against the stream if your feet don't even reach the water.

Kim Gordon wrote in the internal bulletin, 'We have all the problems of building a small organisation coupled with those of building under the shadow of a much larger one.' He is absolutely right—in fact, the same goes for *all* black militants in Britain; it has affected us in two ways. We either become so overshadowed that we become the shadows of the revolutionary organisation, estranged from the communities. Or else, like the Linton Kwesi's and Black Socialist Alliances of this world, we are so keen to show that we are not influenced by 'whities' that we seek political independence, which in effect leads to reformism, separatism or cultural masturbation.

That is precisely why Flame's independence perspective is just as vital as its revolutionary socialist politics. After the last black caucus dispute, it took those involved in Birmingham two years to sort themselves out after the chaos and confusion that followed in its wake. The conference decision last year for the first time provided the clarity and direction that was needed to build confidently.

That confidence has enabled a handful of black socialists, over a period of time, with constant work, to build a periphery around themselves.

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constant work, to build a periphery around themselves.

But we must not whitewash. Birmingham Flame has more than its fair share of problems—we are not always on the ball, we have a tendency to lean towards community rather than the workplace, we have all the problems of building, mainly among youth, particularly unemployed 'street-people', which we will HAVE TO OVERCOME.

But it is also clear that Flame is able to address and involve, and perhaps more important hold and train black fighters that the SWP simply could not reach. Over a period, through Flame, black militants have accepted the need to have links with white workers, white organisations—there are Flame members who came to Marxism 79 who would not have dreamt of doing so two years ago. One Flame member joined the SWP—but that is not the point. The point is that the credibility and influence of revolutionary socialists is greater as a result of Flame. And this is far more meaningful in the long term than short term SWP recruitment drives which only mean increased turnover of black members.

But the longterm will also depend on how genuinely white SWP members support that development. It is only when our black members can say out loud '*The SWP can't do it for us... (alone)*' without fearing that white comrades will think us separatist, that we will be able to confidently march along the road of 'black and white, unite and fight for revolutionary socialism'.



working of all is that one of the two who left was a member of the Flame National Committee and involved in the central decision making of Flame.' 'Without the independence perspective we would probably have held both the two SWP members we lost and possibly we would have recruited to the SWP and integrated and held some of the six Flame members.'

What these comrades fail to mention is that after conference these two leading members of the Harlesden Flame group refused to carry out the conference decision in building a Flame group in their area. I would also like to point out that the member that they refer to on the Flame National Committee, who as also an SWP member, was given no support whatsoever from Bruce or Mort and became totally demoralised since she could not understand why these two comrades refused to help her in implementing a clear perspective for building Flame. She had been involved as an SWP member for about three months. She had not attended SWP meetings for some time as was becoming increasingly more interested in the activities of Flame. She told me that the SWP meetings were rather boring and that she could not relate to the SWP on that level. She found her Flame work much more important and stimulating—she also found it easier to relate to the black workers who were active in Flame. I spoke to her just before she left the Harlesden Flame group to tell me that she just could not carry on the work of building a Flame branch without the support of other comrades. The support she needed was not given after Flame became an independent organisation.

Their reference to Leeds is also totally incorrect. Let us realise the fact that the comrade who built the Leeds Flame group and who held the group together left Leeds to take up a job in London. That is why the Leeds group no longer exists. How many SWP branches are held together by one or two comrades. When those comrades leave their branches have been known to collapse. It has no bearing on the independence of the Flame organisation and gives no honest indication as to why that Flame organisation collapsed.

As far as the Hornsey Flame group is concerned I think that we are probably the most qualified to spell out the reasons why it collapsed. Here again Mort and Bruce claim that the reason for its failure was the independent perspective.

The Hornsey Flame group was made up of 6 members and 4 contacts. The SWP members were in total agreement with the perspectives of the independence of Flame but were unprepared to do the work involved to build a Flame group. Previous to joining the Flame group their involvement in the SWP was very limited. It was not apparent outside social gatherings. Very few of those black members did anything to contribute to the building of the SWP. Despite this the Hornsey Flame group managed to meet quite regularly. Unfortunately the level of commitment was very low. The only thing that the group ever did was to sell Flame on Saturdays especially when the sun was shining! With the death of Michael Ferreira (a West Indian youth) the Hornsey Flame group was unable to respond or take any positive action. So myself and another

comrade decided that if the SWP/Flame members were unprepared to involve themselves in a campaign around the brutal racist murder of this brother then we could see no point in continuing to work with this group of 'comrades'. Hence the collapse of the Hornsey Flame group and the birth of the Hackney Flame group.

Mort and Bruce claim that the Lewisham Flame group created a barrier between young blacks and the SWP and that the SWP ended up with nothing. Are they so out of touch with the black community that they fail to recognise that barrier existed and was not created by Flame—that is a reality. It is because of this reality that Flame has to operate along the lines of independence.

Their article would have been a far better contribution to the IB had they tried to take up some of the reasons as to why this barrier exists and how we in the SWP can work together to break down this barrier.

The patronising attitude which runs throughout Mort and Bruce's document is an indication of the rift between what they want the black community to be and what it in reality is.

Clearly they have no communication with the black community. Do they really believe that the NF is 'their' problem 'them' being the black community and that it is enough for the SWP to 'show that we care about their problems.' Take your blinkers off comrades and go 'down' to the community—it is the black workers of this country who will tell you what their problems are—it is not up to you to tell the community.

It is not only Mort and Bruce who completely misinterpret the problems, it is my belief that it is a problem of some other comrades in the SWP.

I would like to explain an incident which happened a couple of months ago on a demonstration. In North West London Asian women at Futers were fighting for trade union recognition. We found out about the Futers dispute not through the SWP but through reading the Morning Star. I rang up the district organiser in that area as I was interested in involving the Flame group in the dispute. After speaking to the district organiser he more or less wrote off the women as having some 'weird ideas'. Anyway we did go down to Futers and they were organising picketing and a local demonstration from one factory to the other, hoping to get trade union support. Whilst we were on the march, which was no more than a mile long, we were racially abused by no less than three groups of organised workers who had all recently been involved in industrial dispute, i.e., the bakery workers, the post office workers and the dustmen. Despite their recent experiences in fighting a wage claim, their racism hurled toward this group of Asian women totally overwhelmed their trade union militancy. This is a barrier we in Flame recognise. We in Flame recognise that unity in the workplace is unity as far as the factory gate. What happens outside the factory gate has very little bearing to trade union militancy. Trade union militants can also be very racist, the same militants that we, as the black workers, have to work with. Unless we begin to understand this problem we cannot begin to understand the need for a black independent organisation. That black independent

organisation is Flame.

Now how does this tie up with the work we in Flame do in our branches? In Hackney, the Flame group came together over the murder of Michael Ferreira. Flame, along with the Black Socialist Alliance (BSA, which has since collapsed) argued for the need for a separate black organisation which would organise in the black community as an on going group. This would prevent the campaign from falling in to the hands of the liberals in the Community Relations Council and also to expose the reformist ideas held by many involved in the campaign. We were able to hold a group together in the Hackney Black People's Defence Organisation. We were able to get our politics through Flame to a section of people we otherwise would not come across in the SWP. The sectarian hostility towards Flame within the HBPDO was overcome when we proved to be the most active and consistent workers.

The Blacks Britannica film tour, a joint venture with the Socialist Bookbus, was a success. Because of street sales in Holloway, we made contact with a Further Education college and were able to show the film to over one hundred students, 95% black. The discussion that followed enabled us to get a regular sale to the students union of 30 Flames.

Because of our SW and Flame sales we were able to speak at an AGM of NUPE at the Children's Hospital in Great Orman Street where Jagdash is a shop steward. This was in support of the Right to Work Campaign and also to get financial support.

Two workers at the hospital were interested in Flame and want to come to our meetings. The Flame contacts we made, one from a street sale, the other through the film tour, both teachers, became involved with the Hackney Schools Stay OK campaign and helped to produce a leaflet outlining the need for blacks people to support the campaign.

The same contacts also went along to R & F teachers meeting. Without pulling these people in on the initial basis of their racial oppression, they would not have progressed to a class conscious conclusion which Flame, unlike other black groups, led them to. This is where the links between Flame and the SWP become apparent to these who otherwise would not be around us.

the demand for a black republic in some of the majority black Southern States which was 'revived by the black nationalists in the 1960s. It had become much *less relevant* since the blacks were by then heavily concentrated in the industrial centres of the North East.'

In fact the black workers of the urban centres expressed its continued desire for self determination by transforming the demand for a black republic into the clarion call for 'black Power'. This call was taken up not by the unemployed but by the employed workers, as they systematically attacked banks, insurance buildings, the army and police in the attempt to make 'no go areas' of the ghettos to capitalism.

The struggle of the 'nationally oppressed population' is not reduced because one enters industry. In fact it intensifies as the black worker for the first time gains industrial muscle to execute the ongoing struggle against racial oppression which affects us in the workplace and outside.

The underlying assumption behind much of the CCs argumentation against Flame is that the struggle against oppression is *external* to the working class and the workplace. 'Only by building a socialist movement can you unite workers with oppressed blacks, women and gays,' asserts Cliff in his introduction to SWP pamphlet "the word is Gay".

To add insult to injury the CC in its document constantly describes the black nationalist movement as 'petty bourgeois', 'reformist' etc. *Because* Flame is black nationalist 'there is very little even about black workers' we are told. (That's a lie anyway).

In the CC's document the black struggle is described or referred to almost exclusively in terms of police versus black youth. The black struggle is not only underestimated by the CC, but it is incidental or peripheral to class struggle. It allegedly involves only the unemployed, dispossessed non-worker members of the black population.

I however see the black struggle as all-encompassing. The struggle for black liberation goes to the root of present day capitalist relations and as such has revolutionary implications of its own right.

For me, racial oppression is the main factor in determining consciousness of black workers.

For it is the spotlight that makes us stand out from ones fellow workers and highlights the unequal way we are treated, that forces us into activity.

The double burden of racial oppression and class exploitation will undoubtedly push the black working class into the front ranks of the struggle against capitalism.

But *only* on the basis of its self-confidence and self-organisation. As Trotsky wrote of black Americans in 1933 'It is very possible that the Negroes also through their struggle for self-determination will proceed to the proletarian dictatorship in a couple of gigantic strides ahead of the great bloc of white workers. They will then furnish the vanguard.'

## FLAME PERSPECTIVE

Flame's efforts over the last 18 months have been an impressive attempt to relate the

politics of the Party to the black struggle. Those groups of SWP black members in North London, South London and Birmingham who have worked consistently to build Flame have found that they have not only activated and caderised formerly inactive members but also recruited to the party. They have built an organised periphery to Flame and increased its penetration into the community. This has to be compared to Asian work where the CC line has ruled supreme. Since 1976 we have not had an Asian paper; since 1978 not even an organiser. In 1978 there were 57 registered Asian members, in 1979 only 22. The lowest in many years.

That is why the Black Caucus of the SWP now feels that the relative success of Flame should be extended to cover Asian work. That Flame should become Flame/Chingari. The paper has already substantially increased its circulation and the number of comrades involved and could well do with extending to 12 pages monthly, 4 pages on the Asian struggle. We also feel that it is high time SWP alongside Flame/Womens Voice/Rank and file should take the initiative in calling a Black Workers Conference to begin the task of co-ordinating the struggle against workplace racial discrimination.

## A REPLY TO MORT MASCARENHAS AND BRUCE GEORGE Micky Gay North London Jagdish Dalal North West London

We totally disagree with the article printed in the Internal Bulletin published in May, and their attack on the independence of the *Flame* organisation. We believe that they falsely blame the independent perspective of *Flame* as the over-riding factor in the collapse of certain groups.

They attempt to outline to the party what has happened to these *Flame* groups, notably Leeds, High Wycombe, Harlesden, Lewisham. We must understand that these two members have not agreed or understood the need for an independent organisation and therefore never worked with the *Flame* members and were instrumental in the collapse of the Harlesden *Flame* group.

Despite the fact that last years SWP conference overwhelmingly passed a resolution in favour of the independence of *Flame*, these two comrades chose not to carry out that decision. This has resulted in these two comrades being left on the outside of any race work which has taken place by the majority of black party members. It is painfully obvious to us that the facts contained within their document are not only false but have been argued by two SWP comrades who do not and have not worked within the black community.

Nowhere in the article do they mention the difficulties that we as black members have in carrying out SWP politics. By cutting themselves off from *Flame* members they have managed to write an article under the heading *Flame* and the independent black organisation. They then outline the collapse of various *Flame* groups. At no time during the past 12 months have they spoke to *Flame* members as to the work that they are involved in, the experience which they are gaining, their successes or their failures. The go on to say that in Harlesden they had worked along the independent perspective to build a *Flame* group. This is a deliberate lie. I quote:

'In Harlesden, in North London, which has one of the biggest concentrations of West Indians in Britain. We spent months trying to build a *Flame* group along the lines of the independent perspective. We reached a peak last August with 11 card carrying *Flame* members. Since then the group has collapsed and the SWP has lost 6 black contacts and two black members. The story of the two black members who left the SWP is similar to the Leeds story. They used the perspective of conference as a justification for not involving themselves in SWP activity. (Like the two authors of this document one of the two who left attended conference.) Most

Flame was an attempt to do that) we had to recognise the sometimes contradictory nature of black consciousness. On the one hand it certainly had revolutionary dynamic; the black American and West Indian experience proved that conclusively but it also contained a growing element of distrust of whites in general.

Rising racism is breeding an understandable rising hostility and distrust amongst blacks which can be ignored at the peril of serious revolutionaries.

We recognise that the desire for self determination, for self organisation was in fact increasing.

This clearly manifested itself in a fear of 'control/manipulation' amongst the non party members, by another organisation which happened to be 98% white.

Although these non party Flame members were willing to accept the general class politics of the SWP provided it was not forced down their throats but argued fraternally and shown to be meaningful in practice; they were not going to remain active for long if their views had an *inbuilt second class status*.

Although SWP and non SWP members were together building an organisation to fight for black liberation and socialism it was the name of another organisation, SWP, that was on the mast head. Flame is described not as a group in its own right but as a 'periphery' to SWP, its programme etc should not *voluntarily* include support for SWP, or a recognition of joint political tradition but it must be under direct control of the CC of the SWP etc.

Only the CC can see all the above conditions as crucial to either maintaining the revolutionary direction of Flame or ensuring it remains within the ambit of the party's politics.

The way I see political control being maintained is through the real life methods of black members fighting and winning 'the line' through argument and through the credibility of being the most dedicated members of Flame and its clearest thinkers.

For me, the self governing nature of Flame is vital to solidify the confidence of the non party members in Flame and therefore in fact makes it easier to get them also to identify with SWP.

I believe that in the final analysis a political hegemony that depends on words on a masthead, words in a programme or constitution etc is a false hegemony and is next to useless.

It is also a certain way of killing Flame altogether and thereby throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

For me, apart from the obviously tactical reasons for the organisational independence of Flame from the party there are the more *strategic* reasons why the party should be keenly involved in the building of independent organisations like Flame (and Womens Voice).

History (particularly West Indian and black American) has shown that any *consistent* struggle against racial oppression leads one to revolutionary socialist conclusions and we therefore find that within the black nationalist tradition there have always been *two poles* of thinking: the extreme left (like Malcolm X, the Black Panther Party

and the earlier African Blood Brotherhood) and the extreme right like the Andrew Youngs, Lord Pitts etc.

Finding a bridge between the revolutionary party and those who inhabit the extreme left of the black nationalist movement; the *the revolutionary* nationalists is for me an *absolutely fundamental* task.

The fact that this revolutionary nationalist tendency exists at all has to be spelt out. The CC certainly does not think it exists. They think it all has one tendency - petty bourgeois!

Malcolm X, the foremost black revolutionary of the 60s started his political life as a white hating black muslim.

As he put it: 'My life is a chronology of changes'. He ended up in sympathy with the ideas of revolutionary socialism and stating that only world working class revolution would achieve socialism and black liberation. The African Blood Brotherhood with its 4 to 5,000 members during the early 1920s was the only black communist organisation to have existed. It ran workplace and trade union campaigns and was involved in armed self defence. Said Cyril Briggs its leader 'Nor was I interested in socialism per se. My sympathies were derived from the enlightened attitude of the Russian Bolsheviks towards national minorities... My interest in communism was for the national liberation struggle not economic struggle.' No black or multi racial organisation since has surpassed the achievements of the ABB in injecting revolutionary ideas into the black community.

I believe that thousands of black revolutionary nationalists exist in the black community today. People who are utterly fed up with the system, who are revolutionaries. These people are willing to *align* themselves with the politics of the SWP; they can become sympathisers *but* many won't immediately join. Many may never join till after the revolution and they see socialism in practice).

It is up to us, the party, to find bridges to *them*. I believe that Flame/Womens Voice can become the bridging organisations between the SWP and those revolutionary nationalists/feminists on the extreme left of the struggles against racial and sexual oppression.

#### PERIPHERY OR REVOLUTIONARY?

Lenin, in his discussion of the national liberation struggle made a great distinction in 1920 between those 'genuine revolutionaries' fighting for national liberation (he called them the national revolutionaries and those bourgeois who wanted to reduce the struggle to a 'petty squabble'. Even though the national liberation struggle couldn't be fulfilled without world socialism he didn't demand that these movements become a 'periphery' of the Communist International. He recognised they were revolutionary in their own right, because they were defacto struggling against imperialism. *They were not revolutionary socialists by any means.*

The black liberation struggle in Britain today also cannot be achieved without socialism, the Party etc. We also have our reformists and revolutionary nationalists.

To argue that black militants cannot be

revolutionary without being class conscious socialists and/or peripheral to the Party is a negation of Lenin's method.

To argue that the relationship of organisations like Flame to the party, must be the same as the periphery organisation SWSO, is to deny the specific nature of racial oppression.

The struggle against racial oppression goes to the root of the capitalist system and is defacto revolutionary.

It therefore throws up many *non-class conscious* revolutionaries who can be organised into revolutionary organisations with special independent relations to the most consistent anti capitalist force - the Party. No similar process can take place amongst students, since they are not oppressed as a group. The analogy with SWSO type periphery groups is misleading.

#### FEDERALISM

'We must not weaken the force of our offensive by breaking up into numerous independent political parties' wrote Lenin in 1903. He was fighting the Jewish Bund in its attempt to break up the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party into federated sections.

The CC are arguing that Flame and presumably Womens Voice want to also break up the SWP into federated sections... one for women, one for blacks, presumably later one for the Welsh, Scottish etc.

This is an utterly silly straw man argument. Flame is trying to extend the hegemony of the SWP through the building of overlapping groups bridging organisations *from the party outwards*.

In fact the CCs argument that Flame should have the *same rogrammaprogramme as the SWP* is a sure recipe for federalism. If it was the same programme surely the political level and commitment of the Flame members should be the same as the SWP, we are not presumably then trying to relate to people of a different consciousness.

Flame as present *does* relate to non class conscious militants and comprises party and non party members. The CC ideas will mean Flame becomes nothing more than the Black Caucus of the SWP... that is federalism.

#### THE NATURE OF THE BLACK NATIONALIST STRUGGLE

All national oppression calls forth the resistance of the *broad masses* of the people; and the resistance of a nationally oppressed population always *tends* to national revolt' (Lenin 1916).

For me the modern struggle against racial oppression by the 'broad masses' of blacks (98% manual workers) has the tendency to 'national revolt'. Racial oppression is the mechanism by which the ruling class keeps black workers as a permanent sub-section of the working class in order that it can be super-exploited.

In fact unlike the pre-independence period when Lenin wrote, black resistance today is at a higher level *because* they are economically integrated into the heartlands of capitalism.

Alex Callinicos (in reply to Joan Smith in IB 3) wrote about the ideas of Afro-American national self determination and



I.S. politics; in developing theory that extends our understanding of the class struggle today.

3. Flame is a proven way of developing the black cadre we desperately need.
4. Black SWP members involved in Flame are in no doubt that they are relating SWP politics to the 'Black consciousness' of Asian, African, West Indian workers in Britain.
5. The independence perspective flows from the need to involve the non SWP Flame members in the general work of Flame. Independence in that sense is a clear indication of the commitment to the struggle of Black oppression. The idea that everything Flame did was controlled by the SWP central committee would ensure that developing black revolutionaries drawn to Flame would see themselves as having no say in the activities in which they were involved. All the academic debate about independence evades the real situation from which the demand stems.

## **BLACK WORK**

### **Kim Gordon**

### **Flame Organiser**

Although it has taken the CC over 18 months to air their views on Flame and the SWP's black work, we should be thankful for small mercies. For now, less than a month before conference, we can start an open debate on the future of Flame.

#### **WHAT IS FLAME AND WHERE DID IT COME FROM**

The paper, Flame, was founded by some black members of North London Idistrict of IS back in October 1975. Since then it has appeared thirty times; it has grown from a 4 page to an 8 page paper and has increased its paid sale from the 500 copies a month range, to over 1,000 per month. It has gone from a paper around which four or five black members from North London organised around, to a paper where now at least 20 black party members in London and Birmingham use the paper as a basic tool in their daily political work.

At present in three areas Black party members have an ongoing organised relationship with a whole number of non party black militants. This organised relationship operates through the Flame groups in the Flame Organisation.

The first such group emerged in Hackney in October 1977 almost spontaneously. It emerged without central direction or active encouragement from SWP centre, including myself! It emerged before there was even any national Flame perspective.

#### **RAISING THEORY TO THE LEVEL OF PRACTICE**

Towards the end of 1977 there were very good Flame groups in Hackney, Leeds and Brixton. From the early part of 78 a group developed in North London and Birmingham Flame emerged after last years SWP conference endorsing the building of Flame organisation.

However it is now clear that well before the SWP conference the majority on the CC opposed this perspective. They could accept the paper Flame, they could accept Flame groups but they couldn't stomach an 'Independent Flame organisation'.

Whereas the active party members involved in building Flame saw the natural progression from Flame newspaper to Flame groups to national Flame organisation, the CC could not. I believe they were and still are blinded by their hostility to the 'theory' behind it.

The 'theory' of course was quite simple. That the struggle against racial oppression was a major aspect of the class struggle of black workers, whether in Jamaica or America or Britain. That because racial oppression was a fundamental aspect of western capitalism any consistent struggle against it had revolutionary implications. That through the struggle against racial oppression many black workers have and would come to revolutionary socialist consciousness. Indeed for many black workers this was likely to be the *most important* route to revolutionary socialists' consciousness.

The "theory" followed really in the wake of fact! In the Flame groups the politics of the SWP are being put consistently to groups of predominantly black workers. In the past only ones and twos who happened to be enticed to SWP/IS branch meetings were being related to. Now it was on an ongoing sometimes weekly basis.

In other words, Flame had always been tapping that route to socialist consciousness that came via the struggle against racial oppression as opposed to the struggle against class exploitation.

We were seeing that only if we could relate to the level of consciousness and struggle that black workers were at *now* could we have any hope of leading them, relating to them or getting then anywhere near our party at all.

Flame began to take on an identity of its own as black party members began to see it as part of their party work to build Flame and as non party members began to witness a serious attempt to relate revolutionary socialist politics (which they sympathised with) to the struggles of oppressed black workers.

So by the middle of last year we decided to launch the idea of trying to build an organisationally independent Flame. With its own editorial board and national committee etc which would include non party members.

Practice has since shown that Flame must have a revolutionary socialist programme because in the highly political struggle for black liberation nobody can for long fudge issues like the need to overthrow capitalism; how that must come about; the role of the revolutionary party; the nature of true as opposed to Stalinised 'socialism' especially the Third World variety.

Practice has shown that only those with the widest political experience those with the clearest class consciousness will be the ones able to consistently build Flame and steer it through the pitfalls and ambushes laid for it by reformists etc.

Finally practice showed that Flame could not be built as a paper, group or organisation without a recognition of the ideas and level of consciousness of the non Party Flame activists.

#### **INDEPENDENCE: THE CC'S FETISH**

The question of organisational independence for Flame can only make sense when Flame is seen as an organisation comprising party and non party members (people who are generally not class conscious revolutionary socialists but moving that way).

We recognise that in order to organise black workers on any significant level (and



## REPLY TO NOTES ON SOUTHALL

Balwinder Singh  
Danny Burnett  
Prokash Chatterjee  
Ajay Sehgal  
Southall

Pete Alexander's 'Notes on Southall' in the last IB contain a number of inaccuracies which we feel should be corrected if the IB is to be, among other things, a place where we can learn from each other's struggles. Whilst going along with the bulk of Pete's Notes re the breakdown of the political groupings, their influence in the community and our attitude towards Flame, we feel that these inaccuracies create too rosy a picture of the situation in Southall with regard to the SWP.

Pete says: 'Our Flame members, in particular, work closely with Peoples Unite - a 'community' based political cultural organisation dominated by Afro Caribs.' None of us, unfortunately, work closely with PU. We have worked at it. At one point we had two black comrades involved in PU but they were there as blacks; they were not seen as Flame members. Like elsewhere, the Southall Afro-Caribs are hostile and suspicious of what they see as white-dominated SWP.

A small point of classification on the SW sales and the sale of the special pamphlet on Southall. Pete says these sales involved up to 20 comrades. True but these 20 comrades came from all over our district and from outside the district. We sold around 700 pamphlets, not 1,000; these two were sold mainly door to door.

Pete says: 'The development of the branch has occurred because we have consistently argued clear politics and because of our activity.' He then goes on to cite the picket of the racist Labour Club as an example of our activity. This was a real slip-up on our part. The picket itself was a great success. It occurred not long after the riot, and there was an excellent turnout, and it was organised very well by us. But there was no follow-up. It was just chopped. We feel this was counterproductive.

Pete says: 'In the downturn (since the riot) we have built a black branch because our politics and activity have distinguished us from the reformism of the IWA and the nationalism of the SYM and Peoples Unite.'

Unfortunately, those politicised by the struggle in Southall have not shunned the other groups in favour of the SWP. Out of the recent events we have managed to hold one new Asian member to the Southall branch. Effectively, we have a branch of seven members (four Asians, three white) now. In terms of recruitment to the Party, the Southall experience obviously wasn't good. But recruitment to the Party is not the only criterion for success. We in Southall have an excellent branch and are optimistic about the future.

As a result of our consistent involvement in the affairs of the Southall community and in particular the leading role we played in the big events of 76 and this year, we have gained a lot of credibility and consequently are better placed than anybody for a successful intervention in future struggles.

## SOCIALIST REVIEW

John Rogers  
Fleet Street

Most sales of the party's publications have their ups and downs. You inevitably have to prioritise. Each contact can't buy everything. Not even every member does that. The party's monthly should presumably be second only to the weekly in selling priority however. It is not by any stretch of the imagination. Crudely speaking it is 'unpushable' to all but the most loyal of contacts. If most members are honest they find it an effort to read themselves. After over two years production this indifference to what should be the party's second most saleable offering can no longer be put down to teething problems. The newer quarterly designed for a more restrictive 'introduced' readership provokes more fruitful discussion at work than with all the readership cajoled into buying a quarter of monthlies put together.

Every party publication's reason for existence is continuing success in stimulation, encouragement and the creation of an acknowledged lead on every aspect of class struggle. Those that do not work have to be dropped or transformed for two reasons. They alienate our contacts from our other more successful publications. They demoralise us the sellers when we see that they are wasting precious time, effort and money that the party must put into them to prop them up. We cannot drop our monthly as this would lead to a yawning gap between the agitational weekly and the theoretical quarterly. The entrenched format of the monthly which has proved so offputting must be radically altered therefore.

Before making detailed comments, an observation on the general drive of the monthly. Under the current editor its main orientation has been to win over left reformist intellectuals whether in the CP, the Labour party or (dare we say it?) the SWP to a revolutionary position. No one would question that this is an ongoing necessary task. It is not consistent with the party's much expressed priority eg IB 4 1979 first para - 'trade unions are the most important working organisations within which we have to struggle for influence and leadership'. The monthly does not help us struggle for influence and leadership in the workplace. It fails on this central count.

## FRACTIONS AND OUR RANK AND FILE GROUPS

Until fairly recently the perspective of most fractions and rank and file groups assumed a wide immediate periphery and made low demands upon it, ie buying a rank and file paper, voting for one of our candidates etc.

Now we recognise that our periphery will not come to us, it has to be built. And the demands we put will be much greater. They are more likely to require *active* participation at a time when a response to the employers' offensive becomes more essential.

To build our periphery, *all* of our fraction work must be directed towards the struggle in the working class, ie in the fight for wages, against the cuts, redundancies, victimisations, for the Code of Practice, and using this activity to lay the basis for a National Rank and File Movement.

Of course, we will continue to campaign, discuss and organise around issues like union democracy, and other matters specific to each rank and file group: falling rolls, facility times, amalgamation.

The key problem of all fractions is to build and maintain strong *local* organisation. Fraction strength should be measured by the number, regularity, quality and effectiveness of local rank and file groups and bulletins, and the extent to which these are used to support and develop the struggle, support strikes and disputes.

This does not mean that national fraction organisation is unimportant. We do have problems and need to tighten up in some important areas: Socialist Worker and Socialist Review have a *crucial* role to play in transmitting experiences *between* fractions and rank and file papers *within* them.

Links between the Industrial Department and Editors of rank and file papers need to be strengthened but not formalised. However, we should support a meeting of rank and file editors to discuss building towards the Liaison Committee Conference on January 26 to assist mobilisation of the organisation as a whole and consider similar initiatives in the future.

We do oppose the ghettoisation of industrial discussion to a small group of comrades in the organisation and oppose the notion that our perspective should not be discussed and carried to non-SWP members.

Therefore, in most instances, fraction discussions should be aired to the whole organisation *and* our periphery. In cases where, for security reasons this is not possible fractions are, of course, free to distribute internal bulletins if this is considered necessary.

The test of rank and file groups lies in the amount of activity they create *within the struggle*. This means that the whole party, every member, must make industrial work number one priority.

This will require more education within the fractions and rank and file groups on the history of the union, union structure, how to build etc.

But it also needs to be linked to the work which all of us should be involved in as SWP members selling SW on factory gates,

producing SW bulletins, support on picket lines. Our job is to take politics into the struggle. Our party work is an essential part of building the rank and file groups and vice versa.

## CARRIED

## BENN, THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND UNITED FRONT WORK

1. The Labour left has gained a new lease of life since the election, with the popular revulsion against Thatcher's policies and its own victories at the Labour Party Conference. Its ideas can be expected increasingly to influence those who want to fight back against the Tories, including some of our own periphery. Left reformism will be in future more of a competition with us among the active element in the class than it was during the year of the Labour Government.

In anti cuts campaigns especially the left MPs, councillors and union officials will make much of the ideological running.

2. However, for the time being the growth of left reformism's ideological influence is still accompanied by a crisis of its organisations. Witness the declining membership and increasingly open divisions inside the CP; the very low level of active membership of the Labour Party and the predominantly middle-class membership of many of its local parties.

3. The growth of left reformism offers us opportunities insofar as it offers a wider audience for all left-wing ideas. At the same time, however, it can also make it more difficult for us to attract people directly to ourselves, since Bennism will often seem to be a much more realistic alternative than ourselves.

4. We have to relate to this growth of left reformism by combining (a) repeated pressure for *united action* with the CP and the Labour Left, with (b) clear and open expression of our own views about the impossibility of a parliamentary road, the rejection of the possibility of using the Labour Party as a means of moving to socialism, the need for a new workers party etc. In particular, we have to oppose the nationalism, and class collaborationism inherent in the 'alternative Economic Strategy', with its call for import controls and planning agreements.

Socialist Worker must step up its arguments on these points. In view of the moves of a section of the CP base towards neo-Stalinist position, it should also argue clearly but sensitively about the reality of the 'Communist' countries and what we mean by socialism.

5. But we will never undermine left reformism at the ideological level alone. Its key weakness ideologically - that it sub-

stitutes political manoeuvring for the self-activity of workers - is also a practical weakness. Even when left reformists initiate struggles, they invariably refuse to carry them through to the end for fear of alienating their allies within the trade union bureaucracy or within the local and national hierarchies of the Labour Party. This applies equally to the CP, the Bennite Left and the allegedly 'Trotskyist' Militant tendency.

Unity in Action means calling on reformists to join struggles for demands *they* claim to support, and insisting on carrying through these struggles even when they try to retreat from them.

So the CP called for united action from the shipyards against the closures and redundancies - and then retreated at the first possible moment, causing splits within its own ranks.

The left Labour councils claim they want to fight the cuts, lead workers on demonstrations - and then try to persuade people that 'fighting' the cuts means increasing the rents and rates of working class families.

The Militant Group claim to be 'Trotskyist' - and then, in the union where they are strongest, the CPSA, refuse to involve their strongest base (in Newcastle) in real action over the wage claim and pour water on strikes against cuts in Liverpool.

6. We have to recognise that such instances will be repeated again and again. We have to be in on the action, so as to be able to draw towards us those workers who will want to go on fighting as these organisations go the other way.

The main arenas for this will be on the fight in the workplaces against the anti-union laws and the cuts. But it also applies in local campaigns against the cuts, in the struggle for abortion rights, against the new nationalities bill, etc.

7. The combination of ideological stringency and unity in action will not lead immediately to any great movement of people from left reformist ideas and organisations to ourselves. But over time it will enable us to be seen as *the alternative* to the Labour Left, and to benefit every time the reformist leaders vacillate and betray struggles.

## CARRIED

## FIGHTING REDUNDANCIES

The capitalist system's inability to cope with deepening world economic recession must only increase. We have to face the corresponding massive rise in unemployment that this will create. In Britain, women and black workers will be particularly hit.

Problems:

1. The major problem is that in the workplaces ear-marked for redundancies or closure there is seldom belief that any serious fight can be won. So called reforms like the Redundancy Payment Act and the Employment Protection Act undermine a serious

women to WV. In strikes not including women workers, WV should consider how to carry the arguments for solidarity and organise concrete support wherever possible on the lines of the WV groups in Edinburgh and South London over the dustbin men.

#### Immigration

The Tories are tightening the 1971 Immigration Act to stop Asian women from bringing in fiances and husbands. They are also restricting dependents over 18 years, and elderly dependents. Their proposals are both racist and sexist and we must both participate in the campaign against racist laws and look to ways of working with Asian and Afro-Caribbean women. The demonstration on Nov 25th is the first shot in the campaign which will also be concerned with the fight against any new British Nationality Act. Although the proposals are not yet known, it is likely they will render any black person as stateless and without full rights of citizenship.

WV magazine must develop as a weapon for political intervention amongst working women in particular and deal with the issues, strikes etc. which affect women in the class as well as issues like the family, rape, violence, abortion etc.

We should encourage WV groups to start a regular workplace or union bulletin where possible, as well as internal and external workplace sales. We should also attempt to tie in many more of the existing readers of WV into either geographical or workplace groups.

If we work in the above ways, we should hope to increase the size of existing groups and the number of groups in a small but significant way over the next year. We should also be able to increase the paid sale of WV by a couple of thousand.

## FELL

### BLACK WORK AND FLAME

Racial oppression is an essential feature of the situation of black people in Britain today. One of the main tasks of the SWP must be to combat this oppression and especially the hold of racialism in white workers. However, we do so in the recognition that this oppression can only be destroyed by the struggle of a united working class for power under the leadership of a multi-racial revolutionary party.

There is very little black work being carried out by the SWP at present, despite the prestige the party has gained through its anti-racist and anti-Nazi activity. Black work must be a priority for all districts and branches, not simply the job of our few black members.

Unfortunately, the perspective of building Flame as an independent revolutionary organisation is an *obstacle* to developing our black work. The notion of an 'intermediary' organisation which is somehow both revolutionary and yet based on a partial programme and independent of the revolutionary party is a confused concession to black nationalism and must be rejected. It

provides an excuse for white members not to engage in black work and fails to tackle the serious problems of recruiting more black people to the SWP and building up a level of black cadres within the party.

1 Socialist Worker does not always relate to black people. It should each week carry at least one article relating specifically to black people. Articles on Rastafarianism, the caste system, the history of slavery etc would both help us to sell the paper to more black people and give our members more confidence to discuss such issues with black people.

2 The paper Flame must be kept in print as the SWP's paper for black workers. (Black means Afro-Caribbean and Asian.) It must also be drastically improved. Any paper which is aimed at our periphery, such as Flame, should carry articles explaining our politics instead of hiding them. Flame should include 'the Meaning of Marxism' series, a 'Where we Stand' explaining the need to build a revolutionary party and more articles devoted to explaining the centrality of the workplace and the working class in our politics.

3 Black educational meetings to be organised from time to time on subjects such as Rastafarianism, Garveyism, the caste system etc in order to build up a level of black cadres within the party.

4 Black Caucus meetings should be held once a quarter if possible so that the black comrades can get together and review the party's black work and the issues affecting black people in Britain.

5 We must retain a flexible attitude over building black supporters groups. From time to time there will be opportunities to organise a series of meetings of Flame/SWP black supporters and we must be prepared to do this. However, the emphasis must be to recruit the leading black activists around us directly to the SWP.

6 Our more experienced black members should be encouraged to work around or in existing black and community organisations, such as the IWA, BPO, various Asian youth movements etc in order to build the SWP's influence in the black community.

7 All branches whose areas include a sizeable black community must get back to the detailed hard work which has dropped over the last few years, selling both SW and Flame at the youth clubs, housing estates, record shops etc and visiting of contacts with the aim of direct recruitment of black people to the SWP.

8 It must be understood that black work is something which has to involve all our members and not be hived off to the few black members we have. White members must be prepared to face up to their responsibilities if we are to progress in this important sphere of our activity.

1 Conference reaffirms last year's decision to build Flame as an independent organisation. *Experience* of the last year has shown that Flame is able to involve in its activity, and bring into an organised relationship with the party, a militant radicalised milieu whom we would otherwise not involve.

2 Whereas in the pre-revolutionary situation nearly all white male workers are hostile to the SWP because it is revolutionary, there are many black workers who are less hostile to revolutionary politics because of their double burden of oppression and exploitation. It opens them up to revolutionary ideas.

3 The experience of racial oppression doesn't just occur in the community but is all encompassing. Racial oppression also operates in the workplace. The economic struggles are not the only ones that mobilise black workers and mould their consciousness.

4 Flame is an organisation that attempts to unite in action black revolutionary socialists (members of the SWP) with non class conscious black workers who are nevertheless forced into action. It is essential for gaining the confidence of these black militants that Flame is an independent organisation. This means that all decisions of Flame committees, branches etc, cannot be simply overturned by SWP committees (including CC) but must be carried by black SWP members within Flame. (All black SWP members are responsible to the SWP.) Flame is therefore not just a periphery organisation, like SWSO.

5 Flame's programme and operation starts from the black struggle against racial oppression and goes on to show in practice and theory why socialism (and therefore the Party) is the only way for genuine black liberation. Flame has the general politics of the SWP.

6 Building Flame is not just the job of black members. White members particularly in the workplace have to take and sell Flame too. Black members who have been directly recruited to SWP should be encouraged to develop Flame.

7 Socialist Worker and other SWP publications must increase its coverage of black issues.

8 All districts building Flame and Flame groups should encourage joint activity and joint educationals. Joint workplace bulletins should also be encouraged.

9 Conference supports the Black Caucus perspective of:

- a) Extending Flame to cover and organise Asian workers too,
- b) Flame should be extended to 12 pages with a double front page.

## FELL

### CARRIED

# Opposing the Nazis

## Central Committee

In 1979 the activities of the Anti Nazi League led to splits and demoralisation in the ranks of the National Front. Since then, they and other nazi grouplets have remained in the doldrums.

Nevertheless, periodically they have re-emerged in some areas and organised a paper sale or perhaps a meeting or a march or even a physical attack. It is worth considering our past experience of fighting the nazis and understanding how we should respond to their present low levels of activity.

It was not until the mid-1970s that the fascists began to make a major impact on British politics. Three interconnected factors assisted their growth: increasing unemployment and declining living standards, the failure of the Labour government and the unions to deal with these problems, the development of a major wave of racialism. Under these conditions popular support for the NF grew rapidly.

In the 1976 West Bromwich by-election, for example, Martin Webster won 16.2 per cent of the vote. They even made some impact in the unions. Furthermore their marches were growing in size and ferocity.

At first our response was piecemeal. But at the end of 1977 two events made it possible for us to shift our strategy, and, together with people well to our right, we launched the ANL. First, we mobilised some 8,000 people in Lewisham and succeeded in stopping a National Front march. Secondly, the nazis polled over 100,000 votes in the GLC elections and forced the Liberals into fourth place in a number of by-elections.

As a consequence sections of the Labour Party felt vulnerable to the Front electorally, whilst having their activist base undermined by our successes on the streets. For our part we had always, in theory, favoured uniting with the reformists against the fascists on more than an ad hoc and local basis. Now it became possible and important to turn theory into practice.

That theory had been developed by Trotsky in relation to the struggle in Germany. The nub of his argument was very simple. Given the level of social chaos in Germany (42 per cent loss of production between 1929 and 1932, 30 per cent unemployment etc) and given the failure of the established political organisations, it was quite possible for Hitler to build a mass party of 'counter-revolutionary despair' very rapidly indeed. Already, between 1928 and 1930, the nazis had increased their vote from 0.8 million to 6.4 million.

The only way in which the nazi steamroller could be stopped was by the two parties of the working class — the Communists (KPD) who had won 4.6 million votes in 1930 and the Socialists (SPD) with 8.6 million votes — operating in a United Front. For this to be achieved it would be necessary for the KPD to break from the ultra-leftism of 'third period' Stalinism which entailed them treating the SPD as 'social-fascists', no better than the nazis themselves. Unfortunately this did not occur until too late.

Trotsky's argument was for a United Front not a Popular Front. That is for a front between the Communists and another organisation, based in the working class, albeit one led by

reformists.

He argued that the victories against fascism that would be achieved by united action would give the workers the confidence to take on the bosses and increase the possibilities of building the Communist Party. The Popular Front, which Stalin eventually instructed the communist parties to build, was a front with non working class forces and classes, including sections of the bourgeoisie.

The generalised class-collaboration which inevitably flowed from this policy had disastrous consequences, particularly in Spain. Although the CPGB always attempted to push the ANL towards Popular Frontism, we were largely successful in building it as a United Front.

It is important to understand that the question of violence was not central to Trotsky's argument — building the United Front was. A clear attitude towards violence had been well established by the Bolsheviks. They were absolutely opposed to terrorism, essentially because it relegated the importance of mass struggle, and substituted for that struggle the actions of gangs of individuals separated from the class as a whole. Terrorism could not be combined with political struggle among the masses because the former needed secretive and exclusive organisation and the latter requires honesty and openness.

Of course Trotsky opposed those reformist cretins who thought that the state could be used to stop the nazi marches, but the tactics he argued for were those of mass violence, and that could only be organised successfully on the basis of the United Front.

In the ANL many of the reformists opposed any use of force, believing that a good, wholesome media image was all that was required. Some elements believed that merely stopping the marches and meetings was sufficient. Both were mistaken. The ANL was successful precisely because it combined mass propaganda (leaflets, carnivals etc) with militant action.

Militancy alone would not have isolated the nazis from their base among sections of workers, the middle classes and young people. Propaganda alone would not have prevented them from mobilising and motivating their periphery and raw recruits. We beat them by halting their electoral advance and by stopping them on the streets. The ANL enabled us to draw in new activists and new resources both for propaganda work and for militant street activity.

For a period in 1980 and 1981 the British Movement and the National Front appeared to successfully reorganise themselves on the basis of a radical appeal to disaffected white youth and a high level of violence. In one year there were 26 racist murders and some of these were directly associated with the nazis. Their advance was shortlived.

This was partly because their new base, unemployed youth, was unstable and difficult to organise, and prone to disintegrate rapidly if a few key organisers were imprisoned or resigned. Partly also, as the riots of 1981 revealed, large numbers of white youth were willing to fight together with blacks against the state.

It was in this period that we identified the problem of 'squadism' within sections of our own organisation. That is, a tendency to respond to nazi attacks by organising our own harassment squads.

The Party took the very firm view that 'squadism' was a form of terrorism and contained all the same problems. Some comrades had made the mistake of believing that they could substitute themselves for a mass anti-fascist movement.

In reality we very quickly learnt to our cost that squadism was not only ineffective: it was counter-productive. The violence and counter-

violence provided a focus, often the only focus, for the nazis and allowed them to grow. It distorted our activity, sometimes prevented us from selling SW on the streets, and always led to demoralisation.

Our general attitude towards fighting fascism can be summarised as follows: we are absolutely opposed to substitutionism (ie to all forms of squadism) and are for united fronts, mass action and mass campaigns. But, and it is a big BUT, as with all questions of revolutionary strategy and tactics, getting the timing right is absolutely essential. Organising an armed uprising was mistaken in July 1917, correct in October. A united front was needed in Germany in 1932; it would have been absurd in 1919.

The ANL was right before 1979, and no good now. How we actually organise is never based purely on generalised theory but on an understanding of the balance of forces. So how do we respond to the nazis here and now?

It is important to begin by recognising just how weak the nazis are at the moment. In the mid 1970s the combined membership of the NF and the National Party was estimated at more than 20,000. Today it is doubtful whether all the nazi organisations have much more than a tenth of that.

Then their marches were impressive affairs capable of drawing in new layers of activists. Now their marches are not only smaller and fewer but their assemblages of fat, ageing skinheads are somewhat pathetic. Then their popular support was increasing (an average of 5.7 per cent in the 1977 GLC elections). Since 1979 it has continued to decline (averaging 2.1 per cent in the 1981 GLC elections).

Of course they are still capable of sporadic activity — paper sales, hit squads etc. However, in the last five years they have been incapable of sustaining higher levels of activity and building their organisations.

There are good reasons why this should be the case and why it is likely to remain the case in the immediate future. Most importantly, Thatcher's government currently makes it impossible for them to develop a perspective for recruiting among backward sections of the working and middle classes.

Thatcher does not just proclaim her patriotism, she sent a task force to the Falklands; she does not just talk about 'too many blacks', her government has been responsible for thousands of deportations; she does not just whine about the unions, she has succeeded in reducing their power.

There are fascists in existence in Britain, even some fascist activity, but there is no fascist movement. It would therefore be impossible to build an anti-fascist mass movement, and foolish to try. Specialised anti-fascist activity would inevitably end in squadism in the current period.

Of course the situation can change again. We should remember that the growth of fascism in the 20s and 30s was based on massive defeats for the working class (particularly in Germany and Italy) in the period after the first world war. Today, a demoralising defeat for the miners could help to revive the fortunes of the nazis in Britain. This might not occur immediately, but if support for the Tories declined and if Labour and the unions failed to provide an effective opposition, the stage could be set for a rapid growth.

This is speculation. What has occurred in France is not. There, Le Pen's National Front was able to secure nearly as many votes as the Communists in the recent elections. They have increased their support particularly in the poorer urban areas, the one-time strongholds of the Left.

They have grown because Mitterrand's government has attacked the working class. Had the Communists, or even conceivably the revolutionary left, presented a serious



alternative, the story would doubtless have been different. The situation has been made worse by the CP's own racism and their inability to defend (mainly black) strikers at Talbot Poissy plant.

It was under similar circumstances that there was a rapid increase in support for the nazis in Britain. 1974 to 1979 were the years of the Wilson and Callaghan governments, when the unions were shackled by the social contract. As in other periods and in other places, the nazis grew out of the failure of the left and the demoralisation and despair amongst workers. There is no reason to suppose that under a future Labour government the official Left would behave any differently.

Although the nazis are not a serious problem today, our ability to respond to a growth of their support in the future will be affected by what happens in the current period. The key problems which we face are those of a massive Tory-led ruling class offensive combined with a crisis of leadership in the working class movement. In these circumstances organising and arguing for the most effective defence of working class interests necessarily entails extremely sharp criticism of the left leaders.

The result of the miners' strike is of central importance. A defeat will lead to renewed attempts to find scapegoats and racism will increase once again. We are too small to affect the outcome, but we can build our own party and increase support for its politics, and that can be extremely important in the future. Our size, as well as our politics and the level of class struggle, will affect our ability to push the reformists into united front work with us.

Whether or not we can build the Party is affected not only by doing and saying the right things, but also by us avoiding mistakes. There is no doubt that responding to nazi provocations would be a mistake, and we must avoid the trap.

Does the campaign at North London Poly disprove this argument? Not at all. We did not initiate the campaign against Harrington. We responded to a campaign which had already been started by students on Harrington's course.

We tried to give a lead to that campaign, partly in order to prevent it from being defeated, partly in order to relate to those students it was radicalising. In the process we have won a new audience to our arguments about the central importance of the miners' strike.

We are not saying 'ignore the nazis, and they will necessarily go away'. We are saying, *at present*, 'organise specifically against the nazis and we'll build their organisation'.

The practical conclusions are few, but important. If the nazis start paper sales we should not pay them any special attention. If they attack a SW sale, make a tactical retreat and start again the following week. If they try to organise a march or if there is a particular problem raise the matter with the Central Committee, so that we can consider the nature and scale of the response.

We welcome contributions to the discussion. Please keep them brief, so that we can fit them all in, and typed if possible. All contributions should be addressed to: National Secretary, PO Box 82, London E2 9DS, and must reach us by Monday 17 September.

