

FEB 17 1977

Open letter to all members of the Revolutionary Communist Group

We note your letter of 22 December and the statement 'Once again on Democratic Centralism', a reply to our public statement on the split within the RCG. As we stated in our letter of 14 December:

'We feel that it is essential that the working class movement should be in a position to assess the two different political standpoints. It is in the interests of the workers' movement that it learns the political lessons of the split.'

To this end we intend shortly to publish a full critique of the political differences underlying the split within the RCG. This open letter will not attempt to take up all the points made in your recent correspondence. Both the letter and your statement, which purports to 'make clear the real nature of the Revolutionary Communist Tendency' are crammed with a host of petty organisational points. Our reply will deal only with some matters of immediate political consequence.

Firstly, the question of whether the RCG intends to continue to exclude us from its public meetings. Revolutionaries understand that the full debate of political differences by individuals and tendencies on the left is essential if the movement is to gain the political clarity adequate to the task of leading the struggle to overthrow capitalism. When confronted with the fact that the RCG broke with this principle in excluding seven members of the RCT and an ex-contact of the RCG from its public meeting in Manchester, cde. Brown, in her letter on behalf of the RCG's Political Committee, does not dare to challenge that principle openly. Indeed we hear no talk of principles at all:

'We remind RCT members, whose memory more and more conveniently fails them, that we have thrown others than the fascists out of RCG meetings on similar grounds. We remind them that the Maoists were thrown out of the August dayschool, and indeed that many of you argued very strongly in London Branch meetings for the exclusion of your new found friends, the IST, on the grounds that their interventions at our meetings were becoming increasingly sectarian and disruptive.' (Letter, p1)

The RCG, which has clearly developed amnesia where matters of basic revolutionary principle are concerned, falls back on the convenient argument that there are after all precedents, claiming that at any rate the RCG has done this kind of thing before. It is necessary to remind our forgetful comrades that the members of the workers' Institute who were 'thrown out' in the middle of cde. Yaffe's speech at the dayschool, were ejected because their constant barracking was making all political debate impossible. Nevertheless, we did admit them to that meeting because at that stage the RCG recognised that no organisational barriers should be placed in the path of political clarification in the workers' movement. The charge that comrades now in the RCT argued for the exclusion of members of the International Spartacist Tendency from RCG public meetings because their interventions were 'becoming increasingly sectarian and disruptive' can only be attributed to another trick of cde. Brown's memory. What is more remarkable than this lie is the fact that the RCG makes no attempt to dissociate itself from these alleged views. More perceptive readers, who refuse to be diverted by snide innuendos concerning the RCT's new found friends, the IST, will draw their own conclusions on this question. For our part, we simply state that no member of the RCT has argued in the past, or would argue now, for the organisational exclusion of individuals or political tendencies on the left from political debates. Where do you stand comrades?

The RCG does attempt to provide a veneer of justification for our exclusion from the 10 December public meeting of the Manchester RCG by accusing us of a) disrupting the London branch meeting of the RCG which followed the expulsion of three Political Committee members and b) 'stealing' 'property' belonging to RCG Publications Ltd. and refusing to return personal property of RCG members. These charges are no more than a smokescreen to cover the RCG's own contempt for political debate. Firstly, that branch meeting was not prevented from taking place by the actions of comrades now in the RCT - we clearly had every interest in ensuring the fullest discussion of the events which had culminated in the expulsion of three Political Committee members. It was the rump of the Political Committee which wrecked the meeting when it chose to withdraw, along with its supporters, rather than justify its actions in democratic debate with a democratically elected chairperson.

The RCG's second charge is equally dishonest. In the hope of ensuring a debate of the political issues at stake free from all resort to invective of an organisational character, the RCT has proposed to the RCG in our letters of November 27 and December 20, 1976, that a meeting be held to resolve the question of property. Comrades of the RCG, we are still waiting to hear whether you do or do not agree to this proposal! However, the RCG in this its latest letter shows that it has no intention of resolving the question of property in a comradely fashion. Instead, drawing out the logic of the method of slander it now relies upon, it demonstrates that the RCG now uses the question of property simply as an excuse to prevent all political debate:

'Comrades of the RCT, we wish to make it clear to you that we are quite prepared to have a public political debate between our two organisations as soon as this question of personal belongings is settled and as soon as you have returned property belonging to the RCG and RCG Publications. The test of your political conviction is whether you can accept such a challenge.' (Letter, p2)

Pompous challenges cannot disguise the RCG's contempt for 'political convictions'. Thus it is only a little surprising to find that the RCG has now adopted the standard of 'property' as its criterion for judging a grouping's 'political convictions', and the profit-and-loss account of the businessman as its test of political credit.

This same contempt for political debate is expressed in the document 'Once again on Democratic Centralism'. Here we are treated to a barrage of petty points but offered no political argument. In reply to our charge that cde. Yaffe's document was foisted undemocratically on the Political Committee and the organisation, the RCG resorts to the tactics of a pedant. Those comrades who recognise the important contribution which the old RCG made to the development of a revolutionary tradition will be glad to be reassured that cde. Yaffe's document outlining a completely new perspective for the RCG was presented to some PC members not 24 hours before it was imposed on the organisation but 36! They will also be relieved to know that the document was not to have been imposed on the organisation without discussion. Far from it! The majority faction of the Political Committee would of course permit discussion - that is, once the perspective had been adopted and the three Political Committee members expelled.

Among this morass of trivial points there is just one novel feature. Not content with its original charge that 'Chauvinism has almost overnight manifested itself in our group over the South African question' (Statement on the expulsion of a chauvinist grouping in the RCG...p1) the RCG now thunders out the charge of imperialist economism. Yet again the RCG resorts to the tactic of 'the big lie'. Scratching around for some evidence for its absurd charge, the RCG focusses on the following sentence

from our Public Statement:

'The RCG has consistently argued that a precondition for giving effective solidarity to the struggles of the oppressed is to confront chauvinism in Britain.' (RCT, Public Statement, p3)

The recognition that in an imperialist country such as Britain the struggle for proletarian internationalism, real solidarity with the struggles of the oppressed, forces revolutionaries to confront chauvinism in the labour movement at home was basic to the political method of the RCG. It was for this reason that while we were still members of the RCG we opposed the decision of the majority faction of the Political Committee to bar RCG members at the recent Anti-Apartheid Movement conference from intervening to challenge the chauvinist views of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

How does the RCG go about proving its charge of imperialist economism, then? The RCG's own argument is indicative of its political level:

'Indeed if the solidarity is to be effective, chauvinism in the British movement must be confronted - but that is not a precondition for our support. To place such preconditions on support for national liberation movements is precisely what Lenin characterised as imperialist economism...'(Once again on Democratic Centralism, p5)

Rather than take up the position which we quite clearly advanced - namely that chauvinism must be confronted at all levels, AAM conferences not excluded, if solidarity is to be effective, the RCG prefers to invent a position for us. Stooping to the level of a charlatan, the RCG substitutes the word 'support' for 'effective solidarity' to accuse us of holding to a position utterly different to the one we actually argued. Through this crude distortion, the struggle against chauvinism in Britain is transformed from being the only basis for effective solidarity to being the prior condition for supporting national liberation movements at all. Such is the 'Leninist' content of the RCG's charge of imperialist economism. Instead of any serious debate of the political issues underlying the split, the RCG is content merely to deliver the crudest distortions of our arguments. Comrades who had been won to respect for the struggle the RCG once waged for principled positions within the working class movement, comrades who had been expecting at last to be given some political justification for its actions by the RCG, must remain disappointed. They will want to know precisely why, since the RCG now claims to agree with the RCT that chauvinism must be confronted if solidarity is to be effective, were RCG members barred from attacking the chauvinism of the Communist Party of Great Britain at the recent AAM conference? They will want to know precisely what 'support' for the liberation struggle of the South African masses were the gagged RCG members able to give when they were prevented from challenging the chauvinist arguments which are the actual barrier to effective solidarity.

Having proved itself unable to counter our Public Statement with one political argument, having shown its contempt for democratic debate in the movement, the RCG brushes the dust off the volumes of Lenin on the shelf to find some one principle to justify its actions - and finds it in the 'principle' of democratic centralism:

'Whatever the provocation (imagined or real), however bureaucratic the leadership (sic), the only path revolutionaries can take to defend democratic centralism and to win support for a certain political perspective is to fight inside their organisation along the lines laid down by the Constitution. This the three (PC) members refused to do. They did precisely what Lenin attacked other sections of Social-Democracy for in 'One step forward, two steps

