

S.B. No. 1 (Flimsy)

Special Report

SUBJECT  
Big Flame

Reference to Papers  
15/60

METROPOLITAN POLICE  
IF REQUIRED, REFER TO [REDACTED]  
FOR DETAILS OF HOW THIS INFORMATION  
WAS OBTAINED. [REDACTED] FILE REFERENCE  
SPECIAL BRANCH

2 September 75  
Day of 19

1. The following information has been received from a reliable source: [REDACTED] Privacy [REDACTED] Privacy
2. "The London group of the 'Big Flame Ireland Commission' met on Wednesday 20th August 1975 at the home of [REDACTED] Privacy [REDACTED] Privacy. The meeting lasted from 6pm until 10.15pm, was attended by 16 persons and was chaired by 'Rick', a member of South East London TOM. [REDACTED] Privacy [REDACTED] Privacy
3. Little of value to the group was discussed. However, members of the Women in Ireland group had, at the previous meeting, been asked to prepare a short talk on the current situation in Northern Ireland. This was introduced by [REDACTED] Privacy [REDACTED] Privacy and continued by [REDACTED] Privacy [REDACTED] Privacy [REDACTED] Privacy. Most of the talk consisted of quotations from both the national, Irish and left-wing press. Certain discussion followed and, it was the general feeling of the meeting, that if Marilyn REES continued to release detainees then the convention was liable to break up at any time; in any event the bi-partisan policy on Northern Ireland was in jeopardy. [REDACTED] Privacy [REDACTED] Privacy quoted an example of the suppression of news in the 'bourgeois' press. He said that a photograph had appeared recently in an Irish paper which showed agent provocateurs from the Scots Guards leading a group of rioters in Belfast. The identical photograph had appeared in the Guardian with the front part of the photograph, i.e. that of the provocateurs, blocked out. He said that he had contacted the Socialist Worker but they had shown no interest in printing both photographs. [REDACTED] Privacy [REDACTED] Privacy said he hoped that they would appear in a forthcoming Big Flame publication.
4. The second item which was discussed at length was a draft document prepared by [REDACTED] Privacy (attached), assisted by [REDACTED] Privacy [REDACTED] Privacy which assessed the present condition of TOM and included certain proposals for the changing of the TOM constitution at the next National Delegates Conference. It was eventually decided, however, that the group would make no fundamental recommendations to the TOM delegates conference, since many present thought that a newly formed group should not spend its initial energies on this form of document. Perhaps at a later stage when the group found its identity then such proposals could be made. It was left that a composite of branch reports would form the basis of a Big Flame Ireland Commission document to be presented at the conference. [REDACTED] Privacy [REDACTED] Privacy [REDACTED] Privacy said that Big Flame itself would be submitting a document on constitutional changes within TOM and it was up to individuals present to support such a document, though there was no mandate for them to do so.

BOX 500



Draft document on TOM

Praise and attribution

These notes have been prepared in order to help concretise the discussion about TOM. They come, as yet, mainly from the experience in London. (Then piece on who's produced it)

ugh!

Assessment of the present state of TOM

Any assessment of TOM must be as honest and rigorously critical as possible, attempting to be constructive whilst recognising the real difficulties of building a broadly-based movement on the question of Ireland.

Since the IWC strike of May '74 interest in events in Ireland has grown significantly, both among the left in Britain and among the people as a whole. If a recent opinion poll is to be believed something like 50% of the population want the troops out of Ireland, mostly, as we know, for the wrong reasons. If TOM is to make a real impact in the coming months we have a duty to judge TOM both against this general movement of opinion and against its own history.

TOM, from a strong position after the May 11 conference of 1974, has increased the number of its branches (to about 36) and has established itself as the left focus for work around Ireland. This is part of our achievement so far. However by TOM's own principle criterion, that of splitting the Labour movement and winning substantial sections of the Labour Party and Trade Union movement to a position of Troops Out Now and Self-determination for the Irish as a whole, it has, as yet, made only limited headway.

It has to be recognised as fact that over the past year TOM has failed, for the most part, to broaden its base locally and nationally. The branch members mostly comprise people long-active in TOM and committed to revolutionary politics in one way or another. What's more, activity in branches is low and some branches have possibly gone into decline. TOM nationally and locally is dogged by disputes which are petty when considered next to the task of building TOM and of establishing a broad TOM feeling in important sections of society.

Since, as we are all aware, we don't have time on our side we cannot afford to be lax in a critique of ourselves, or to be so wrapped up in our own internal problems that we fail to recognise any failings of our own. Although TOM dominates the work on Ireland for the left in this country, and this is our achievement, it has failed to hegemonise, in any real way, the broad feeling in the country or even the left, whose commitment remains sporadic by and large. In trying to find possible better ways of working we cannot afford to lapse into searching for scapegoats or into sectarian hostilities - whether directed to individuals or to organisations.

We do not regard sectarianism as the cause of any of TOM's failings. We think sectarianism is a symptom which has its cause in the failure of TOM to develop and grow, and in the related problems we've experienced with the way decisions are taken and the fact that the strategies which we adopt, both nationally and locally, are often confused or badly thought out.

So there are 2 areas, closely linked, which we will look at: (i) decision-making in TOM, and (ii) strategy for TOM's local and national work. In these we won't attempt to go through all the problems and possibilities but attempt to outline, with concrete examples, a general theory about how TOM might develop.

#### Labour Movement Conference

A great many people in TOM put a great deal of work into the Labour Movement Conference. What we're principally worried about is the fact that after the conference TOM, as it is structured, made little constructive self-criticism and we failed to use the discussion of the conference to improve our methods of working.

The Organisers' Report from the conference, far from being constructive, concentrated on slugging off left groups and individuals, implying that these were responsible for any failings on the day. In fact, as the Standing Orders Committee report states, (and the SOC report was 'accepted' by the LCC only in what amounts to being a minority position) the main problem at the conference itself stemmed from the introduction into the conference of a lengthy and complex motion.

There are we think many similar examples in TOM's recent history. It is not the point to go into these, listing every conceivable detail as a piece of 'hard' evidence. For us the most important aspect is that it is now becoming increasingly difficult for anyone to raise criticisms of TOM without being slugged off as "sectarian" or with some highly personalised attack. We think that most people in TOM are aware of this trend. There are unfortunately many examples and they can't all be the figments of sectarian imagination.

We are going to propose as an answer to one area of problem facing TOM certain organisational and certain constitutional changes. At the very least we hope that such changes, if accepted, would serve to make clear to all members of TOM exactly where decisions are taken and how they can participate in those decisions. We think that at the moment it is virtually impossible to answer this last question except in the negative sense that, first no power at all lies outside London, and, second, that in London power does not rest primarily in the branches.

First, we'll try to describe the situation in decision-making as we see it, and make certain proposals.

Second, we'll look at TOM's overall strategy attempting to outline from our own experience in various differing TOM branches a method of working which would help to build TOM locally as part of building TOM nationally.

Third, we'll offer concrete proposals for the immediate future.

Fourth, we'll discuss proposed constitutional changes, including a draft for a new constitution, and a proposal for the introduction of Standing Orders for TOM which will be a flexible adjunct to the constitution

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Appendix

List of material for possible inclusion in sections 1,2,3,4, as outlined in the last paragraph on p.2.

1. Decision-making:

- i) CC, NCC, WCC, MDC - CC as a political committee - Does TOM need a political committee?
- ii) question of a proposal for (limited) national affiliation to a consultative body.

2. Strategy:

- i) Blacks, Irish, Women, Students, Labour Movement, working class in factories etc., community,

3. Proposals:

- i) Another pamphlet needed?
- ii) Explanatory leaflet, petition, anti-recruiting leaflet?
- iii) Secretariat
- iv) Fundraising

4.A. Constitutional Changes:

- i) How to ensure active group and members (in Standing Orders?)
- ii) How to start groups, on what basis should they be ratified and by which body. (in standing orders?)
- iii) Strict limitation on number of national officers with ex officio votes.
- iv) What offices should there be - with ex officio votes and without ex officio votes (ie except as delegate from branch)
- v) Question of "Labour Movement" in present constitution - redefine? omit? Put in Standing Orders?
- vi) National affiliation
- vii) structure of decision-making
- viii) Majority needed for standing orders changes and bodies which can change them.

B. Standing Orders:

- i) Qualification in branches before being allowed to vote for or stand as a delegate ( eg., say, 6 meetings attendance, paid up, support for activities.)
- ii) Mobility between branches - residence/job/study qualification?
- iii) Motions to be in in, say, 4 weeks in advance for NCC and MDC.
- iv) Motions to be simple, and where more than one point is made to be broken down. Compositing to be done in advance by steering committee of NCC and MDC. These would be circulated.
- v) No more discussion in branches after NCC decision on activities
- vi) Regular delegates to MDC? Or one regular out of 2?