

obituary?

Wildcat

Spring 1988

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We print below what amounts to a self-obituary by the Wildcat group. The situation is still unclear, it not being inconceivable that the group will rise from the ashes in some form or another before too long — and we will comment in more detail when the full facts are at our disposal.

It should be stated at the outset that nobody in the revolutionary movement should take any pleasure at the disappearance of another organisation, particularly as it seems to involve militants abandoning politics altogether. The CBS rejects any notion of a ‘Darwinian’ survival of the fittest.

The death of Wildcat can be ascribed to several factors:

1. One opportunist regroupment too many.
2. The difficulties every group in Britain has experienced in surviving a particularly quiet period in the class struggle, accentuated by Wildcat’s problems in re-orientating their activity after the defeat of the Miners.
3. A failure to take seriously the issues raised by the CBS on the question of organisation; dismissing our work on monolithism and non-sectarianism as obvious and our analysis of the decline of the ICC as pointless.

Readers will note that the Statement refers to intense debates within Wildcat on various issues — was anyone outside the group aware that these differences existed? Why weren’t the debates made public so that the rest of the movement could join in? How did Wildcat come to fake positions and deal with minority views?

We take heart from the stated desire of the ex-Wildcat members in Manchester to find some way to continue political activity. We hope to continue Joint work with thorn, offer them space in the pages the Bulletin and invite them to participate in the process of political regroupment in Britain.

March 1988

Dear Comrade(s),

This letter is being sent to you with the agreement of 3 of the last 4 surviving members of the Wildcat group. It effectively marks the end of the ‘old’ Wildcat and announces our intention to work together in a reorganised way under a new title (yet to be decided) along with some ex-members of Wildcat and other revolutionary communists.

Although throughout its existence Wildcat has generated continuing political interest — as witnessed by a steady stream of requests for literature, offers to distribute our journal and leaflets, reproduction of our original material, and regular correspondence from this country and abroad — none of this managed to materialise in the form of active membership. The group never exceeded a membership of about 12 at any one

time, and losses of membership over the last couple of years eventually reduced us to just 4 people, located in 4 different cities.

As with many similar small groups the reasons for people leaving were a mixture of the personal and political. Some suffered demoralisation and exhaustion following our intensive activities during the defeated miners' strike. Others, committed to an 'activist' orientation for the group, became tired of seemingly endless internal debates over what they regarded as, at best, secondary issues. Equally, a few thought the discussion and debate within the group very inadequate. Added to this were the usual working class problems of employment, housing, unemployment and so on. Also there was the exaggeration of personal conflicts engendered by the hot-house atmosphere of a tiny political group.

Changes in the way Wildcat was organised — forced on us by circumstances — also contributed to the demise of the group. In its early days the entire membership was concentrated in the Manchester area. This encouraged a high level of active participation, accountability and fruitful discussion among all members. It also made possible the thriving local (but not localise) collective intervention in the class struggle which we regarded as essential to the group's political development. We hoped that similar groups would emerge in other parts of the country, and that 'Wildcat' would grow through joining up with such groups after a period of joint discussion and activity. It was this approach that prompted us to promote the 'Intercom' discussion journal and conferences. As it turned out, however, Wildcat became a 'national' organisation more through accident than by design: some members left the Manchester area, new members joined from other parts of the country, and there was the fusion with the Stoke-based 'Careless Talk' group, some of whom later moved to Nottingham. Thus within a fairly short period of time our resources became very thinly-spread, and the effect of this dispersal of our forces was to put great strain on the organisation as a whole. Members delegated to carry out certain tasks often did so without a sufficient sense of responsibility to the group as a whole, the internal communication of information about activities and political discussions was frequently inadequate, and many political disagreements which might have been resolved or at least clarified face-to-face degenerated into sterile slanging matches when forced to be conducted through written polemics. In short, the all-important task of effective collective intervention in the class struggle became more and more difficult to carry out.

Having said this, it is necessary to record some of the more important political differences which have arisen during the last couple of years.

Teachers

The long-running disputes amongst teachers and the period of school student strikes and demonstrations saw a number of different responses from members of the group. While all members of the group supported the students' actions, there were differences

in our attitudes towards the teachers. With the exception of one member, all agreed that teachers were part of the working class. Some members considered that teachers' role was a contradictory one involving social control & conditioning *and* genuine education (albeit within the restrictive framework of the capitalist state). This view regarded teachers as a backward section of the class, yet still capable through struggle — particularly during periods of widespread and intensive class struggle generally — of challenging both their own exploitation and their role as soft cops. Other members, on the other hand, regarded this prospect as too dim and distant to have any practical bearing on our interventions for the time being, and emphasised the teachers role as soft cops as the primary one in determining our response. They argued that pupils could no more support the demands of their teachers than prisoners could support the demands of screws. At the same time they saw strike action by teachers (or screws) as being useful since it broke down the structures of control and often allowed pupils (or prisoners) to take their own action.

Riots

The group as a whole was invigorated by the outbreak of major urban riots in the British cities and analysed them as an important part of the class struggle. We all expected that riots would re-emerge as an element of future struggle but differed on the significance of such struggle and its importance in relation to workplace struggle and other forms of working class community struggle such as rent strikes, mass squatting etc. One member regarded riots here and abroad as more significant even than the Polish mass strikes or the French rail strikes, primarily because of their violent confrontational nature. In opposition to this some members emphasised that riots were unlikely to provide a basis for wider mass confrontation, since they were geographically limited and sporadic in nature. Others considered that as riots were part and parcel of the broader class struggle any attempt to separate them from strikes and decide which had greater value was divisive at a time when links needed to be made. The significant role of riots in the miners' strike and at Wapping coupled with the wave of prison riots in Britain seemed to make this balancing-out act particularly inappropriate. Internationally the resistance to capitalist austerity measures seemed to take the form of both riots and strikes and at high points of struggle the separation between these two forms tends to disappear.

Reactionary Sections of the Working Class

The group has always been concerned to address itself to the realities of the class struggle rather than simply repeat revolutionary slogans and this led to a re-examination of the perennial calls for working class unity in situations such as

Northern Ireland and South Africa. Some members more or less wrote off, as permanently reactionary, the Protestants in N. Ireland and the white workers in S. Africa until after the communist revolution itself. In this situation, it was argued by at least one member, our propaganda should be specifically addressed to the ‘most oppressed’ section of the working class e.g. the northern Catholics in Ireland. In the case of N. Ireland this approach was rejected but over S. Africa the issue was rather fudged (viz. the headline ‘All Power To The Black Working Class’ in Wildcat 9), perhaps because from this distance the gap between black and white workers did indeed seem so unbridgeable.

Workers’ Democracy

Wildcat had always argued for the generalisation of class struggle through mass assemblies, workers’ councils, delegate strike committees, etc. We were clear that such ‘forms’ of struggle did not guarantee success or the movement of the struggle in a revolutionary direction, but were opposed to elitist and conspiratorial methods of organisation that consciously excluded the mass of workers from participation in the struggle. In this we were also concerned to point out the connection between today’s struggles and the future communist society where social affairs would be decided either by consensus or ‘democratic’ decision-making through society as a whole. And yet clearly some actions in the present-day class struggle such as the miners’ hit squads had to be organised by small minorities with, at best, only the passive support of other miners involved in the struggle. Also, it often happened that the mass assembly would take reactionary decisions or even hand over authority to outside groups. In such situations it seemed necessary for militant or revolutionary minorities to reject the authority of the mass meeting and try to organise in other ways. It was recognised that the process of class struggle was a contradictory one, requiring militant minorities to take action themselves *but always* with a view to drawing in larger and larger sections of our class. In this process workers’ councils etc were essential and had to be argued for, even if at a later date, when the struggle subsided, they became empty shells and a fetter on the progress of further struggle. The evolution of our views had been aided by a challenge to the concept of “workers’ democracy” in the Workers’ Playtime article ‘What Distinguishes Wildcat’ in ‘Intercom’ 5. Although certain views were mistakenly attributed to the group in this article, it nonetheless produced a lot of discussion in the group, forcing us to make our position clearer. Eventually a certain level of agreement was reached on the relationship between militant minorities and the mass movement (see *Capitalism and its Revolutionary Destruction*), yet a conflict between the “workers’ democrats” and the “anti-democrats” remained. Some of those opposing democracy did so on the basis of a critique of democracy as an *atomising force*, an accountancy of opinions which goes hand in hand with commodity production. The community of struggle which arises against the attacks of capital must attempt to abolish the separa-

tion between decision-making and action — a separation the “anti-democrats” felt was institutionalised by the tradition of workers’ democracy. Much of the conflict within the group wasn’t helped by one of the “anti-democrats” who saw everything in terms of a clear-sighted minority fighting the state *despite* and against the mass of the working class which was dominated by ruling class ideas. This last position tended to distort the discussion away from elaborating a critique of democracy and towards balancing minority action against mass action. As with the question of riots versus strikes this was again a false opposition.

We can briefly outline the area of agreement we have reached on this issue as follows it is the position of the working class within capitalism which forces them to take action in the past workers councils, mass assemblies and factory committees have emerged as *organs of struggle*. The weakness of these organs has been the extent to which they reduce themselves to organs for “democratic self-management” of enterprises or to “parliaments of the working class. At any given time it is usually only a minority of the working class which is in struggle. They don’t struggle because they are more “conscious” than other sections of our class but usually because they are more under attack. Consciousness emerges through struggle as we become aware of the terrain of struggle and the nature of our enemies. The role of revolutionaries in all this is to promote links between these struggles internationally and promote/participate in *and spread* those actions which are seen as the greatest threat to the maintenance of capitalist social relations. Minorities may be the spur to action but it is mass struggle alone, eventually encompassing the vast majority of the working class, which will overthrow capitalism.

Whilst all the group’s members did not divide up in exactly the same way on every one of the issues described above, there was a tendency for a split to occur in which members found themselves sharing the same side as more or less the same collection of other members whenever a disagreement occurred. Thus, although this necessarily brief outline of the political differences which arose within the group can not do full justice to the evolution and progression of our views and all the subtleties and shades of opinion on each issue, the same members who, for example, dismissed the teachers’ strikes as politically irrelevant were also likely to place a greater value on the significance of riots, reject calls for class unity as abstract sloganeering, and emphasise the positive role of minority action in pushing forward the class struggle. Facing the ‘faction’ which took this line were the other members of the group who emphasised the ‘opposite’ point of view on each of these issues.

Thus, whatever our agreement on basic communist positions, the differences of opinion outlined above, combined with the personal and organisational difficulties described earlier, made practical collective activity increasingly difficult, and forced us to reluctantly conclude that the group was no longer viable.

The three members who have agreed to circulate this ‘obituary’ intend to continue working together along with some sympathisers and ex-members in the production of leaflets and the publication of a communist journal. The journal will be more open

than ‘Wildcat’; articles will still be discussed collectively but they will no longer try to reflect the views of the whole group. Hopefully this will lead to a more fruitful process of written discussion. All contacts and subscribers have been sent a copy of this letter. We will keep you informed of our future activities and welcome contributions and participation. We can be contacted at:

Box W, c/o Raven Press, 75 Piccadilly, Manchester, M1 2BU and
Box W, c/o 180 Mansfield Road, Nottingham

The fourth member can be contacted at BM Wild, London. WC1N. This member may or may not continue to publish in the name of Wildcat. Please note that this contact address is used by other revolutionary communists besides the individual referred to above. The following publications are available from the Manchester and Nottingham addresses:

CLASS WAR ON THE HOME FRONT £1–50
CAPITALISM AND ITS REVOLUTIONARY DESTRUCTION
LENINISM OR COMMUNISM (by Jean Barrot) 25p
WHAT IS COMMUNISM (by Jean Barrot) 70p
COMMUNISM no.4 (GCI) — *from Notts address only*

N.B. Please send *blank* cheques, postal orders, cash etc. as we *do not* have a bank account in the name of ‘Wildcat’.

The Ted K Archive

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Issue 13 of Communist Bulletin.
<www.libcom.org/library/communist-bulletin-issue-13-spring-1988>

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