

Report on recent dispute with Yugoslav leadership

In the months of November and December 2020 the International Secretariat was involved in a dispute which led to a severe crisis of the relationship between the International and part of the leadership of the Yugoslav organisation.

In this bulletin we provide a report of the disputed questions. They range from the conception of democratic centralism to our approach to the struggle against oppression and in particular how it applies to the Trans question, and in general the danger posed by the influence of alien class ideas, which was at the centre of the 2018 World Congress discussion around the document *Marxism versus Identity Politics*. Thanks to the in-depth discussion we had at that time throughout the International – which should be reproduced again and again in order to educate the many comrades who have joined since then – we have successfully exposed the false and reactionary implications of Identity Politics, Intersectionality and postmodernism in the struggle against oppression.

In this particular case, a layer of Yugoslav comrades fell straight into the divisive trap of Identity Politics by taking sides in the ongoing poisonous struggle between extreme trans activists on one side and radical feminist and LGB groups on the other, in favour of the positions defended by the latter. By overreacting against what these comrades regarded as dangerous concessions to subjectivism and Queer Theory, they ended up embracing the positions put forward by radical feminism towards the Trans question, thus giving in to the pressure of a sectarian and radical feminist milieu. The report explains the steps taken by the IS in dealing with this situation.

The dispute also revealed a lack of understanding of democratic centralism and Bolshevik methods of organisation on the part of a section of the Yugoslav leadership.

The discussion did not fully resolve these differences, but achieved a clarification of where the differences lie both in method and content, and saw a majority of the Yugoslav comrades (including a majority of the leadership) being convinced in the course of the discussion by the arguments put forward by the IS. The new leadership elected at the congress of the Yugoslav organisation is now working in close collaboration with the International in order to overcome the political and organisational shortcomings that were highlighted by the crisis. The documents exchanged in the course of the discussion are reproduced in this bulletin for comrades' information.

Timeline

On 10 November 2020 the IS requested that the Yugoslav Executive Committee take down from their website, pending further discussion to clarify the questions involved, an Open Letter they had signed and published on 8 November. The Letter, written by a group called the Lesbian and Gay Solidarity Movement in protest against the screening of the documentary "Little Girl" at the Free Zone film festival, was signed and supported by the Yugoslav organisation (by decision of the EC), together with some LGB, radical feminist and sectarian organisations.

The reason why such a request was made – which is an exceptional step – was that the signing of the Open Letter associated the Yugoslav IMT (and therefore the whole International) with one of the sides of an ongoing ugly rift between radical feminists and LGB groups on one side and extreme Trans activists on the other. This poisonous struggle is reactionary on both sides – polarising positions along Identity Politics lines. By signing that statement the comrades entered in a common front with organisations defending a transphobic position.

The decision to sign the Open Letter was carried out without consultation with FM, who is in charge in the IS for the follow up of the Yugoslav organisation. This was particularly negative because for months the IS had opened a discussion with the Yugoslav EC – and particularly with one of the EC members, comrade FS – on matters that were closely related. As a consequence of that discussion FS had committed in May to put his views on the Trans question in writing, but such a document was never produced.

The Yugoslav EC refused to comply with the IS request, stating their reasons in a letter to the IS (10 November), thus breaking with elementary principles of democratic centralism.

A discussion with the Yugoslav EC had already been agreed for Friday 13 November. On 12 November the IS issued a document explaining the reasons for the request and the political and organisational implications of the dispute. The discussion (with FM, FW and JM attending for the IS) lasted over 3 hours but failed to convince most EC comrades of why the Open Letter's line was wrong and harmful to the International. However, it fully clarified the point that this line was in sharp contradiction with that unanimously taken by the IMT at the 2018 World Congress with the document *Marxism versus Identity Politics*. The discussion also revealed a serious misunderstanding of democratic centralism on part of the majority of the Yugoslav EC. Nevertheless, it was agreed to give the comrades a couple of days to work out how to implement one of the following measures: a) to withdraw from the Open Letter and open an internal discussion to clarify the reasons for this step; b) to publish a carefully worded statement (agreed with the IS) where the Yugoslav organisation distances itself from the openly transphobic contents of the Open Letter; c) for the International to write a statement to that effect, to be published on the Yugoslav website. In spite of what had been agreed, the Yugoslav EC on Sunday 15 November reiterated their refusal to implement any of the above measures.

Given the situation, the IS demanded that the Yugoslav EC publish a brief disclaimer stating the IMT position on the Open Letter and requested a meeting of the Central Committee be convened to resolve the dispute. The CC was called for 27 November. On Saturday 21 November (11 days after the IS request to take down the Open Letter) the Yugoslav EC eventually carried out the IS demand to publish a disclaimer in the name of the International Secretariat of the IMT. However, the disclaimer was only appended at the end of the text in small print.

On 20 November, the IS issued a letter in preparation of the Yugoslav CC, to be read by CC members together with the previous IS letter of 12 November. Furthermore, on 24 November the IS submitted two brief resolutions for the Yugoslav CC to discuss and vote on, one affirming the CC to be in political agreement with the entirety of the document *Marxism versus Identity Politics* approved by the World Congress in 2018, and the second explaining how the handling of the dispute by the Yugoslav EC contradicted the most elementary principles of democratic centralism.

On 26 November – the day before the scheduled CC meeting – a document explicitly stating fundamental disagreement with the 2018 WC position was distributed to the CC by FS. During the CC meeting it was clarified by FS that he was presenting this document 'with the support of other EC members', but that the EC had neither discussed nor approved it. The document clearly stated a fundamental disagreement with the *Marxism versus Identity Politics* 2018 WC document and invited the CC to reject it altogether.

CC discussion (27 November and 3 December)

The 27 November CC meeting lasted for more than 5 hours. Ten out of the 11 CC members, plus FM, FW and JM (IS) and ET (IEC, Austria) attended.

The agenda was divided into three points: 1) Motion to withdraw and take down the Open Letter; 2) IS resolution on the handling of the dispute and Democratic Centralism; 3) IS resolution on the political position of the CC towards the 2018 WC *Marxism versus Identity Politics* document and the document submitted by FS.

In spite of allowing more than two hours of extra time on top of what had been agreed at the beginning of the meeting, it proved to be impossible to go through all the points of the agenda and a second CC meeting was therefore scheduled for 3 December.

1) The discussion on the first point dragged on for well over two hours. In the course of the discussion different positions emerged. Comrade AA (EC) announced he had resigned from the EC over sharp differences on how the dispute was handled by the majority of the EC. GM (the founder of the group, based in Vienna) and NS, raised sharp criticism of FS and of the position taken by the EC by signing the Open Letter and its conduct throughout the dispute, pointing out that the EC had lost all sense of proportion with wrong priorities and elevated a secondary matter to a principle, thus jeopardising the relations with the whole International. Another step was taken by DP (EC), who stated he had agreed with AA from the beginning that the Open Letter should have been taken down and that it had been a mistake not to abide by democratic centralism. The dispute clarified in his view the relation between different bodies of the International.

Other comrades were still not convinced by the IS criticism of the Open Letter. However, EZ (EC) agreed with hindsight that the decision not to take it down had been a mistake and that they should not have allowed themselves to get drawn into a sectarian swamp.

FS (EC) instead defended the content of the Open Letter, the political line taken by signing it, and all of the EC decisions, but conceded that he was in a minority and, on that basis, accepted that the Letter be taken down. Despite different opinions regarding the evaluation of the political question at the centre of the dispute, all CC members expressed themselves in favour of abiding by the request of the IS to take down the Letter.

2) The discussion on the IS resolution on Democratic Centralism took all the remaining time. During the discussion AA and NS denounced the EC for applying double standards on democratic centralism within the Yugoslav organisation and in relation to the International. They pointed out an earlier situation when the EC had demanded that a statement published on a Macedonian comrade's profile at the time of the Referendum be taken down due to a political disagreement. Although no explanation was given at first, the Macedonian comrades implemented the decision. A discussion was carried out later on and they were convinced of the criticism. They asked why the EC refused to apply the same standard to a demand put forward by the IS.

The discussion was then focused around FS's attempt to amend the IS resolution in order to remove where it stated that the EC should have consulted with the IS before signing the Open Letter, on the grounds that sections should not consult the IS on every matter. Furthermore, he proposed the deletion of the IS criticism of how the disclaimer was published as a footnote in small print. Both amendments were passed by a narrow majority vote.

FS's arguments triggered the intervention by former EC member, AA, who declared he could prove that there was a discussion in the EC internal list on how to publish the disclaimer in the least prominent way and in fact, the IS was right in accusing them of manoeuvring. In the tense situation that followed AA and another CC member walked out of the meeting in protest. This was later resolved and both comrades joined the following CC discussion on 3 December, but the rushed decision taken by the EC majority to remove them from the internal communication channels of the CC right at the end of the meeting prompted the polemic to spill into the internal messenger list used for communications to all members. This brought the dispute in front of the rest of the organisation in the most chaotic way. Eventually, it was clarified that all materials would be distributed and a full discussion leading to an extraordinary congress would be organised as soon as possible.

The IS resolution in its original formulation was eventually put to the vote against the amended version and was approved. The decision to take down the Open Letter from the Yugoslav website was carried out on 28 November.

3) On 3 December the Yugoslav CC met in a second session to discuss the two resolutions, the one put forward by the IS and indicating the CC's agreement with the 2018 World Congress *Marxism versus Identity Politics* document, and the one put forward by FS arguing for the rejection of the 2018 WC document. All 11 CC members attended this session, together with FM, JM and FW (IS) and ET (IEC). The discussion on the two resolutions was polarised. The IS representatives and other comrades intervened highlighting the reactionary implications of FS's approach of reducing the Trans question to false consciousness and mental illness. They also criticised FS's rushed conclusion of rejecting the entirety of the WC document by building a straw man of the IMT's position on the women's question and pointed out a number of serious blunders in FS's resolution. The discussion ended with a 6-5 vote in favour of FS's resolution with one of the EC members (DP) changing his position and supporting the IS resolution.

The CC also agreed to distribute all materials to all members and hold branch meetings with both sides of the discussion represented, in preparation of an extraordinary congress to be convened on 26-27 December.

The discussion in the branches started off with an incident. The CC majority immediately violated what had been agreed in the first branch meeting, that of the Banja Luka (BH) branch, which met in the absence of a representative of the CC minority. At that branch, 6 comrades supported FS's (now CC majority) resolution, while 3 voted in favour of the IS resolution. The other 3 branches in Bosnia, Serbia and Macedonia held discussions with both sides represented. The votes overall reflected a sharp division within the organisation where the majority of members supported the IS position but 12, out of the 26 members voting, supported FS's resolution.

However, one of the EC comrades, EZ, who had voted for FS's position at the CC and at the BL branch, had developed serious doubts on the position defended until then and disagreed with FS's decision to organise a secret closed group on FB with a number of comrades he thought would support his position (a de facto undeclared faction), thus violating the democratic rights of the rest of the organisation. EZ denounced the manoeuvre and intervened in the closed FB group explaining to the comrades involved why setting up the group was wrong and asking all of them to leave it, which they did.

The development of the discussion over the 6 weeks preceding the congress had shown clearly that some comrades, even in the leadership of the Yugoslav organisation, were taken by surprise by the dispute, but it also showed how some of them had been learning through the discussion.

The patient explanation of the IS positions achieved the aim of convincing a majority of comrades on several important questions related to the dispute by clarifying: a) the relationship of national organisations with the International and democratic centralism; b) IS's criticism of the handling of the dispute by the Yugoslav EC. As the discussion developed other questions also became clearer to a larger number of comrades: c) IS's criticism of the wrong political priorities being imposed by FS on the Yugoslav organisation due to adaptation to the political pressure of a sectarian LGB/radical feminist milieu; d) the explanation of our general approach on oppression and the Trans question and the wrong, formalistic method applied by FS to the question.

Extraordinary Congress (26-27 December)

The Yugoslav organisation had originally planned to hold a congress in December, but due to the disruptive impact of the dispute, the EC was unable to finalise the drafting of the congress documents. The extraordinary congress met on 26 and 27 December. FM, FW and JM attended for the IS and English translation was provided throughout the congress.

The congress opened in a tense mood. The first two hours were taken up by discussions on the agenda and procedural aspects. The approved agenda eventually consisted of 4 points:

- 1 - IS resolution on Democratic Centralism
- 2 - FS's (CC majority) resolution and IS resolution on 2018 WC document *Marxism versus Identity Politics*
- 3 - Secret closed group on Facebook
- 4 - Election of new CC

1 - The discussion on Democratic Centralism was introduced by AA (in support of the IS resolution) and FS (against). The discussion carried on for several hours, with AA, EZ and DP (EC) and other comrades arguing that the lessons of the mistakes committed by the Yugoslav EC in the dispute (that they now recognised and understood) should be fully learnt. On the other side of the argument FS, MM (EC) and a few other comrades justified the decisions taken and the way the dispute had been handled. It became clear in the course of the discussion that the defence of the EC's attitude and actions during the dispute was only upheld by FS, MM and very few other comrades.

The IS resolution was eventually carried with 20 in favour and 5 abstentions.

2 - The discussion on the Trans question was introduced by four leadoffs: EB (speaking in favour of FS/CC majority resolution), NS (against); FM (in favour of the IS resolution) and NT (against).

From the very beginning it became clear - to everyone's surprise - that EB was not defending FS's resolution, but arguing that the resolution had been rushed by FS, that it had been a mistake for the CC majority to endorse it, that it contained inaccuracies and furthermore that there had not been enough time for comrades to reach an informed decision on the disputed question, which had to be regarded as secondary but not unimportant. He then invited the congress to reject both FS's and the IS's resolutions, appealing for a period of further discussion.

The second speaker, NS, pointed out the reactionary consequences of reducing the trans question to a medical or mental health question and how it was wrong to be taking the radical feminist and LGB side in a dispute internal to the divisive logic of identity politics.

FM denounced the irresponsible attitude taken throughout this discussion by FS, which was confirmed by EB's intervention. This dispute was forced by FS upon the organisation to the point of almost breaking it apart. A 2-day extraordinary congress was convened to discuss the questions involved, but now FS's resolution, adopted by the CC majority, was being withdrawn by those supporting it, asking for more time. FM then explained the general approach of the 2018 World Congress document on how to fight oppression and how it applied to the Trans question, which should be approached carefully. He also pointed out how the scientific claims by FS were based on a reactionary interpretation of the Trans question from which the scientific consensus is clearly moving away, as the recent World Health Organisation's decision to discard the definition of gender dysphoria as mental disorder demonstrated. The WHO is not particularly advanced or progressive and had derubricated homosexuality from mental disorder only as late as 1990. In the last lead off, NT defended the content of FS's resolution almost to the letter.

The discussion showed that the line taken by EB had been agreed with FS, who intervened only towards the end of the session. While claiming he still defended his position, FS admitted that EB had convinced him that there were some mistakes and blunders in his resolution, therefore he invited comrades to reject both the IS's and his own resolutions while reserving the right to uphold his views for future discussion. This move was regarded by many comrades as a manoeuvre to avoid a congress decision. Some comrades who had voted in favour of FS's resolution in their branches argued against the 2018 WC document on the basis of defending what they considered as a consistent materialistic approach versus a concession to queer theory and idealism.

FS's resolution was unanimously rejected (27 against). The IS resolution instead was approved with 15 in favour and 12 against.

3 - The point dealing with the secret FB group was introduced by ZD versus FS. ZD explained that the method of secret factions is unworthy of a Bolshevik organisation and that if not corrected would lead to the formation of cliques. FS had resolved to create a secret closed group on FB to which he invited a selected number of comrades he presumed would support his views, excluding all the others. The group was eventually closed down only because EZ, who had been included by FS in the group, revealed its existence and invited the comrades who were part of it to leave it.

FS did not dispute the facts, but defended the method as a normal procedure when comrades are sharing the same interest or ideas on a certain question and are willing to exchange views about it, to refine their arguments, etc. A number of comrades objected by asking on what grounds the decision to exclude them from such a forum (which they had not been informed about) had been taken.

After a full discussion, a motion was proposed to the vote: "Do you agree it was wrong to form this group outside of the formal channels and behind the back of the organization?" 12 voted yes, 8 no and 5 abstained. This vote revealed a serious problem, which unless fully resolved has the potential of undermining the foundations of mutual trust between comrades. It also revealed that there is no real common understanding of democratic centralism and how a revolutionary organisation should function.

4 - The last point was the election of the new CC. FM intervened explaining that the Congress had expressed a majority, which should be reflected in the composition of the new CC. FM also invited FS to step down from the new CC because of his conduct throughout the dispute, which was unworthy of a leading comrade. FS declined by saying that it was up to congress to decide.

The method chosen for the election of the CC adopted at the previous congress was that of setting the number of comrades to be elected to the CC to 11. The CC would then be elected by having each member present at the congress voting for 11 names to be picked from a pool of candidates proposed by individual comrades during the session. In the end the nominations were about 20, out of which the 11 most voted would form the CC. The insistence by FS and other comrades supporting his position for congress not to elect former EC members AA, DP and EZ backfired. These comrades had played a prominent role in the organisation until then, but happened not to agree with FS anymore. The result was that FS and those that most prominently had supported him in this dispute failed to win enough votes and were not elected to the new CC.

Conclusions

A majority of comrades are now convinced that the IS intervention was necessary and were convinced by the arguments used in the discussion. The discussion successfully clarified where there is disagreement. The persistence of disagreement by itself would not necessarily be a problem and could eventually be absorbed, provided that the minority respects and abides by the decisions of the congress.

However, it also emerged clearly that there is no common understanding of even basic organisational conceptions and that the crude, formalistic and mechanical approach applied by FS on the Trans question is not limited to this issue but reflects on his general outlook.

This crisis had the potential of wrecking the long patient work supported by the whole International to build a viable organisation in the former Yugoslavia. What we have achieved is an important conquest: 30 comrades distributed in 4 branches across three countries (Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Macedonia), and very close contacts who are in the process of being integrated in Croatia and Slovenia.

The dispute highlighted problems that were pre-existent in the Yugoslav organisation, which over time had developed sectarian traits and a small circle mentality. This was understandable in the initial stages of its development, especially considering that the organisation had developed for years by conducting

patient propaganda work in a generally hostile environment. Over these years it developed under the influence and authority of FS, who played an important role in building the group, but also impressed his formalistic and sectarian method on the organisation.

The outcome of the congress is positive because we achieved clarity on the issues discussed and now an important layer of comrades in the leadership and the ranks of the organisation can see and understand why that method is wrong. Many comrades have also learnt important lessons on why we need democratic centralism and the heavy price the organisation can pay for losing a sense of proportion.

The new leadership, the CC and the EC are more than willing to work together with the International in order to correct and overcome these misconceptions in the next period and are doing so with enthusiasm and confidence.

The main priority of the new leadership is now to turn the organisation outwards, while re-examining critically and correcting some of the methods implemented in the building of the organisation. Thus, the comrades who have coalesced around FS during the dispute can be absorbed into the general work of the organisation and the mutual trust that has been damaged by the incidents outlined above can be restored. In order to achieve this, it is essential that all comrades abide by congress decisions. As a first result of the work of the new leadership a new issue of the magazine has been published and the preparation of draft documents for the congress is being finalised.

Comradely,

FM for the IS

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Open letter to the Free Zone festival on the occasion of the screening of the documentary "Little Girl"

Stop transitioning children!

The Free Zone Film Festival has unequivocally affirmed itself as an important meeting place in our environment, which seeks to "open space for debate, promotion, review and understanding of human rights and related issues, social phenomena and problems in the world and the region." Precisely because of the culture of dialogue and engagement on the most important topics of social and political importance, we consider deeply problematic the fact that a film about one of the biggest modern scandals of medicine - transition, ie medical experimentation on minor children - is shown without any critical review.

The documentary "Little Girl" by director Sebastijan Lifšic, in this year's festival repertoire, deals with an eight-year-old boy whose mother is subjecting to a process of social transition, demanding that the environment and the school "accept" him as a "girl". The decision is made under the influence of currents that encourage the dangerous, wrong and unproven idea that it is possible to be "born in the wrong body" and which treat every form of gender maladaptation as something that needs to be corrected and ultimately treated medically. It is impossible to separate the body from a person and be born in the wrong body. The so-called "affirmative" approach to children diagnosed with gender dysphoria ignores decades of research and knowledge in the field of child psychology, in which it is known that experimenting with gender roles is a natural part of growing up. Studies dealing with gender dysphoria in children show that most children overcome it with psychotherapy until adolescence, and they consider the affirmative approach as very harmful to physical and mental health. In addition to the fact that this documentary one-sidedly and insincerely presents this issue, it is especially dangerous that it presents inaccurate information about medical procedures that already harm a large number of children in the world: puberty blockers, or hormone therapy that stops the natural flow of psychophysical development in adolescents. This documentary is presenting these as a miraculous "cure" and as a completely naive and reversible therapy. On the contrary, many health institutions are of the opinion that this is neither a harmless nor a reversible therapy, but a procedure that permanently disrupts the psychophysical development of the individual, which is why the British NHS has launched an investigation into clinics and programs that "treat" children. Unfortunately, the Free Zone Festival did not decide to accompany the screening of the film with a discussion whose participants could offer different, but relevant and empirically supported perspectives for this insufficiently present topic in public discourse. Instead, the discussion on the medicalization of children will be reduced exclusively to an affirmative position presented to the public by Lina Gonan, which will focus on "repression of trans people" and "the process of legal recognition of gender in the Balkans."

An eight-year-old child cannot and should not make a decision on whether to be put on the path of social transition, and then undergo a procedure that will "stop" puberty and healthy, natural development of his body. It is obvious in the film that these decisions are made by a mother who openly admits that she "always wanted a girl". As we could see in the BBC Newsnight report and as feminist and LGB, as well as medical groups prove over and over again, such decisions of parents are often motivated by homophobia (it is better and more acceptable to have a trans daughter who would be "straight" than a gay son) or misogyny (girls, under the pressure of social misogyny, are convinced that transposing into a man will make their lives easier). The report, which consulted a number of doctors who left the British GIDS (Gender Identity Development Service) program in recent years for ethical reasons, concludes that "transitioning" children is essentially a medical experiment on children with various problems that medicine cannot adequately solve: depression, trauma, eating disorders and autism, all the way to homosexuality, which must not be treated as a problem, nor medicalized in any way.

Medical, hormonal, and then surgical, "correction" of children's bodies, and under the influence of a misogynistic and homophobic society, is nothing but child abuse and experimentation on children. The camera of director Sebastijan Lifšica actually paints a very good portrait of a mother who abuses her child: she gives answers instead of him, emotionally blackmails him and extracts the sentences she wants to hear. We hope that the audience will watch this film in as many numbers as possible and get acquainted with this issue. However, realizing that the topic in it is treated extremely one-sidedly and with incorrect information, we demand that the Free Zone Festival show this film with the fence that:

- 1) No one can be born in the wrong body;
- 2) Puberty blockers are not a safe or reversible therapy.

We also demand that the Free Zone Festival organize an accompanying discussion on this film, which will focus on the topic of child abuse and transitioning, and which will be led with the participation of interlocutors from different perspectives.

November 8, 2020

Women's Solidarity
Lesbian and Gay Solidarity Network
Femrevolt
Marx21
Marxist Organization Reds
Feminist collective "Las Usurpadoras"

Statement of the EC of MO „Reds“ regarding the request by the IS of the IMT to take down the Open Letter Against the Promotion of Child Mutilation Practices

Dear comrades of the IS,

Further to your demand from 10th November 2020, calling us to take down the article titled [Open Letter to the Free Zone Festival concerning the Viewing of the Documentary Film „Little Girl“](#), published on our website, *Crvena Kritika*, on 8th November 2020, we have decided not to comply. The reasons for this decision are multiple.

Firstly, we see no way in which the Letter violates the political line of our International or any key tenet of Marxist theory or scientific approach to the world and we have not been given any reason to believe the opposite.

Secondly, the Letter has already been sent to all Serbian mainstream media and shared by us (8th November) and other signatories (always with our signature present alongside others') far and wide, all over Yugoslavia. Some of our Facebook posts of the letter have already initiated discussions, which are ongoing in different Facebook groups. Taking it down would be highly damaging to our reputation and it is likely that our contact work would suffer serious blows and setbacks.

Thirdly, the Open Letter is in accordance with the position agreed upon by both our CC and our Congress concerning identity politics, gender ideology and other alien class ideas. This position was reached through extensive discussions, which involved a considerable amount of literature and allotted time, not just during Congress, but during various branch meetings that preceded our Congress, as well.

Finally, and most importantly, this demand is in stark contradiction with what we have been previously told by comrade FM, when comrade FŠ asked that the article of British section, titled [Tories attack trans rights at the height of the pandemic](#), be taken down until the question of the International's relationship to the transsexual question is resolved. We have not received any clarification as to why these two approaches aren't contradictory or why the contradiction is justified.

We are always open to criticism and to hearing new arguments and we would be more than happy if the Letter ushers in a period of comradely discussion on this matter of increasing importance and urgency. However, as we have never in the past been subjected to any kind of top-down arbitrariness by the structures of the International, and are, hence, not used to removing our articles without valid and logical reasons, we believe that we are not just within our democratic rights, but also duty bound to oppose inconsistent behaviour by the leading body of our organisation.

This decision was reached by a unanimous vote of the Yugoslav EC.

Comradely

Filip Šaćirović

for the Executive Committee of Marxist Organisation „Reds“

10th November 2020

A Reply from the IS to the Yugoslav EC

At the beginning of the week it was brought to our attention that you (the Yugoslav leadership) had signed a statement which you published on your website about a French documentary film to be shown in a film festival in Serbia.

The French documentary (Petit Fille) presents the way a family deals with a little boy who says he is a girl. The statement, drafted by the Lesbian and Gay Solidarity Network and signed by a number of radical feminist and sectarian organisations argues that the subject matter of the film is “one of the biggest modern scandals of medicine” and that this amounts to “medical experimentation on minors” and describes the film as a “a very good portrait of a mother who abuses her child”. Furthermore the statement signed by you very clearly states that “no one can be born in the wrong body”.

This follows in the line taken by the organisation which drafted the statement, the Lesbian and Gay Solidarity Network which says in [its founding statement](#): “We advocate for LGB organizing based on our minority status, one that wouldn’t seek numbers in coalitions with *heterosexuals who attach to the abbreviation through identities which are in no way grounded in material reality*,” and “hormone and surgical interventions meant to ‘fix’ one’s body are just new and more perfidious forms of the same old conversion therapy.” This is an organisation which clearly states that transgender people do not exist and that “uncompromisingly fights” against the right of transgender people to transition. That cannot be described as anything else than transphobia and bigoted prejudice. These ideas are present in the statement you signed and they are in contradiction to the democratically agreed position of the IMT.

You published the joint statement on your website, which is publicly seen as an IMT website. This, therefore, has implications for the whole International. The wording and the arguments raised in the joint statement clearly contradict the position of the International on this question.

It was considering all the above, that the IS on Tuesday, November 10 requested that you remove the statement from your website, and that we proceed to an internal discussion between the IS and the Yugoslav EC, which was already agreed to take place on Friday, 13 November. Instead, you rushed to organise a EC meeting where you unanimously voted to reject our request without giving time to the IS to state its position.

Where does the International stand on this question?

In your reply you say: “we see no way in which the Letter violates the political line of our International or any key tenet of Marxist theory or scientific approach to the world and we have not been given any reason to believe the opposite.”

The official position of the IMT is clearly expressed in the document *Marxism and the struggle against alien class ideas*, which was passed unanimously at the World Congress in 2018. In it we read the following:

“Sex is not something that people have consciously determined or invented. It was a product of evolution. The idea that sex can be determined artificially by human volition is both arbitrary and philosophically and scientifically false.

“The fundamental sexual division is between male and female. This is naturally determined by the reproductive process. This in turn carries within it the germ of the division of labour, which at a certain stage becomes the basis of class divisions in society. The subjugation of women to men, expressed in patriarchal family relations, coincides with the beginnings of class society, and will only finally be eradicated after the abolition of class society itself.

“Marxists fight for the real emancipation of women and all other oppressed sections of society. But emancipation cannot be achieved merely by imagining that there is no such thing as gender. One can imagine oneself to be anything one pleases. But in the end, one is compelled to accept material reality over the mental meanderings of philosophical idealism.

“Among the innumerable weird and wonderful variants of Queer theory (we should not really dignify this as a theory at all) there appears to be a common thread: firstly, it presents gender (and even sex) as a purely social construct, denying all biological and material aspects. The next step is to create in the imagination an almost infinite variety of genders, from which everyone is free to take their pick.

“We do not deny the fact that in addition to male and female there are intermediate forms, which have been known for a very long time. In pre-Columbian America, such people were regarded as a special social group and treated with respect.

“Modern science enables people to change their sex and this should be available to any person that requires it. It goes without saying that we are totally opposed to any form of discrimination and intolerance towards transgender people. Nor do we have any objection to anyone identifying as they please. However, by presenting this as a means of changing society, we end up with the idea (highly convenient for the ruling class) that emancipation is purely a question of personal lifestyle choice.

“We see the negative effects of this kind of thing in the ugly splits and bitter feuding between some radical feminists and some trans-right activists. Such developments cannot be said to serve the fight against oppression in any sense, shape or form. They are thoroughly reactionary and must be combatted.” [our emphasis]

We clearly emphasised that our task is not to side with either of the two extremes in this poisonous debate. Our basic position is that we are opposed to all forms of oppression and this includes that of trans people. Defending gays and lesbians against oppression should not be transformed into an oppression of trans people by denying their rights.

However, by strongly taking sides in this poisonous “debate” between two factions – neither of whom has a correct position – the Yugoslav leadership has placed itself in precisely the position we warned against in the 2018 World Congress document.

By stating that one cannot be born “in the wrong body” (a phrase carefully chosen by the authors of the Letter because it is often used by trans people to express how they feel about their situation) what is implied here is that people should not be allowed to transition, and that any idea of transition is motivated by homophobia or misogyny. This position is openly defended by the authors of the statement on their website. You are, unwittingly or not, falling into the trap of identity politics. We know that you do not support the extreme position supported by the writers of the appeal, but by bending the stick too far, you end up giving credibility to reactionary prejudices dressed up in “progressive” garb.

If you had said, for instance, “we are worried that the film is one-sided and we would like an even and balanced discussion of the issues raised”, that would have been one thing (the question would still remain of why our organisation should get involved in such a campaign). But the statement isn’t just asking for a debate, it is emphatically pushing for a particular point of view in that debate. And that point of view clearly comes across as transphobic.

Priorities

We believe the Yugoslav EC has lost a sense of proportion in getting involved in this debate in such a manner. There was no need to sign a joint statement with those groups, and with that content. If the comrades felt that they needed to issue a statement on this question, they should have issued one under their own name and in line with the agreed positions of the IMT.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the IMT is a revolutionary Bolshevik organisation that sets itself the aim of winning over the working class to the programme of world socialist revolution. Signing a statement jointly with a number of sectarians - and to be honest, with transphobic outlooks - is not the way to achieve that goal. It was therefore with frank disbelief that we read your reply.

The first question that comes to mind is: is a united front with a group of various sectarians on the fringes of the working class movement of Yugoslavia what we need to get involved in today? At a time when the workers are faced with extreme difficulties, why waste our time in endless “debates” on such matters and with a position that ends up placing us in the camp of reaction?

For petit bourgeois sectarians such issues are a substitute for genuine struggle. A hysterical atmosphere is created around a nonissue – and everyone is presented with an imperious demand: “are you for or against?” These are the issues that have obsessed the sectarian grouplets that infest the fringes of the movement and constantly sow disruption, internal conflict, crises and splits.

Since the sects are organically incapable of conducting a serious struggle in the real world, they thrash about in this swamp, until they eventually drown in their own mess. It is sufficient to cast a glance at the lamentable state of the sects everywhere to understand the truth of that statement. It would be fatal for us to make any concessions on this question. But that is what we are being invited to do here.

We do not take sides with sects

This is not just a Serbian or Yugoslav phenomenon. On the one hand we have the extreme trans faction, on the other hand, the extreme radical feminist faction, both of whom are engaged in a venomous conflict, exchanging insults and even worse things. This poison has even begun to affect parts of the Labour movement, where it plays the most reactionary role.

Of course, we live in capitalist society and come under pressure from alien classes. It is true that some comrades – a tiny minority particularly in the student milieu - have bent to the pressures of the petit bourgeoisie and have deviated in the direction of identity politics and queer theory. This also is a retrograde trend, which we must combat by all means at our disposal. But in combating a petit bourgeois deviation, it would be fatal to swing too far in the opposite direction.

We regret to say that the Yugoslav leadership on this question have done precisely that. Under the guise of combatting petit bourgeois identity politics, you have gone to the other extreme, which opens the door to transphobia. This has the most negative consequences and, if not corrected, the position of one small group could discredit the IMT as a whole.

What you can and cannot do

In arguing why you cannot agree with the IS’s request you say: “Secondly, the Letter has already been sent to all Serbian mainstream media and shared by us (8th November) and other signatories (always with our signature present alongside others’) far and wide, all over Yugoslavia.”

We understand that by withdrawing from the statement, you will have some problems. But whose fault is that? We have repeatedly warned you not to take contentious issues into the public domain through Facebook and other social forums. Now you have taken it one step further, by issuing a joint state with sectarians that openly contradicts the position of the IMT on your website.

Comrade FS has for years periodically gone on social media with provocative statements on this or that with the clear aim of pushing for an exchange in the public domain. And despite our protests he repeatedly did this. We have been here many times. FS would provoke (or be dragged into) an ugly debate on social media, after which we would request that he cease to use such methods. He would abide by the request, after lengthy discussions, only to revert to type and do it again.

If there is one thing that you cannot accuse the IS of is impatience. This has gone on for years. Now, however, you have taken it one step further. It is no longer the provocative behaviour of one comrade we are dealing with here. The whole leadership has been dragged down this road of open and public conflict with the democratically agreed positions of the International. Instead of making progress towards agreement, which is all the IS wanted to do, it seems we are going backwards.

Having taken this mistaken step, you now find it difficult to extricate yourselves. But we think it is absolutely necessary for you to do so, and we are prepared to help you find a way of doing so. The comrades must ask themselves what is more important for you: adhering to the democratically and collectively agreed position of the IMT on this question or remaining part of a united front with assorted sectarians and petit bourgeois radical feminist and LGB groups.

You say that your political line has been determined by discussions at your National Congress and Central Committee. Does that mean that the decisions taken by a national group in Yugoslavia can override the decisions of the World Congress? That would precisely be a concession to nationalism and the federal conception of an International, which is in flagrant contradiction with the most elementary principles of Bolshevism. We are sure that if a local branch of the Yugoslav organisation were to adopt a position publicly in contradiction with the nationally agreed positions the leadership would not merely shrug their shoulders, but would demand adherence to the organisation's line. Not to do so would imply that there is no party structure and anyone can wake up one day and come out with whatever idea they have thought up.

Let us make the position clear. The IMT is not a loose federation of national organisations where anyone can unilaterally change the position of the organisation and say what they like whenever they feel like it. The fact that here we are not dealing with an individual or a local branch, but a national group within the IMT does not change the matter.

By having taken into the public domain a position that contradicts that of the IMT, the matter ceases to be an internal affair of the Yugoslav group and becomes a matter affecting the entire International. You state that to withdraw your statement would create problems for you. Are you not aware of the fact that by keeping up that statement you are creating a problem for every section of the International? Which comes first, the interests of a national section or group or the interests of the International as a whole?

You make a reference to an article that appeared on the British website, which FS demanded should be pulled down. The decision on such a matter is an important and exceptional step, for the elected bodies of the International to decide, and the IS weren't convinced by the arguments given.

Democratic centralism

As for the accusation of "top-down arbitrariness by the structures of the International", this is very far from the truth. If the International Secretariat can be accused of anything, it should be that we have been excessively patient in our attempts to try to persuade comrade FS in terms of the content of his statements, but also in terms of his unacceptable behaviour.

For years we have tolerated the undisciplined and provocative conduct of this comrade, hoping that eventually he would see sense. We have been extremely patient. But there are limits to all things. This later affair takes things to a much higher level.

The IMT is a revolutionary proletarian International. Internally we guarantee maximum democracy and freedom of criticism, with the right to present different points of view. But such rights are expressed in a structured manner, with time for debate and discussion, after which decisions are taken where the majority decides. It is not a discussion club where anyone can come along and express any opinions they choose on any subject without reaching any conclusions. That is precisely a petit bourgeois method that is popular in student seminars, but which has nothing to do with Bolshevism.

The line of the International is decided by a World Congress, made up of delegates elected by all the affiliated sections, which also democratically elects the international leadership. All national sections are expected to abide by the decisions taken by the World Congress. If we do not accept this basic principle then there is no international organisation.

The highest body of the international between world congresses is the IEC, and between meetings of the IEC, the International Secretariat - elected by the IEC - has the responsibility of ensuring that these decisions are carried out.

If you have differences with the International on any question, you are free to raise them through the normal internal channels. We have never refused to discuss any question with the Yugoslav comrades, as you are all well aware.

By refusing to take down the statement, by leaving it on a website which is recognised as the IMT website in the former Yugoslavia, you are de facto imposing a line on the IMT contrary to what was agreed at the 2018 Congress. The IS is not adopting a position of "top-down arbitrariness". On the contrary, as we have amply demonstrated here, we have been extremely patient and flexible over many years. What we are doing is defending the agreed position of the whole International.

In your letter you say that you took the decision to reject the request of the International Secretariat following a discussion of the EC. But we would like to point out that no representative of the IS was present at that meeting to put the case of the International. Consequently, the members of the EC have only heard one side of the argument. That is hardly a satisfactory or democratic way of proceeding.

We ask the comrades again to reconsider the decision, and we are very willing to participate in the discussion with you on any questions you care to raise. A meeting between representatives of the IS and the Yugoslav EC has been organised to discuss this situation, and we look forward to reaching an agreement. In any case, whichever way the discussion goes, we will submit this whole question to the IEC, which will review the position in January and take any decisions it considers necessary.

With comradely greetings,

The IS, 12th November, 2020

IS – Open letter to the CC of the Yugoslav organisation

[Note: this document should be read together with the IS letter to the Yugoslav EC of 12 November. There we analyse the content of the Open Letter signed by the Yugoslav EC and explain why we oppose it, and we also point out how that statement contradicts the line of the IMT which was democratically and unanimously agreed at the 2018 World Congress]

A unilateral decision

On 9th November, we were surprised to hear that the Yugoslav leadership had signed a joint statement, written by the Lesbian and Gay Solidarity Network and signed by a number of sectarian, radical feminist and LGB organisations in relation to a documentary dealing with the case of a young boy identifying as a girl.

This was a unilateral decision taken by the Yugoslav EC. At no time were we consulted about this step, which – as ought to have been evident – has significant implications for the whole of the International. The comrades should have been aware of this, as the question of transgender people is dealt with in the 2018 World Congress document and comrade FS, who disagrees with some of its formulations, had exchanged views with the IS about it and had agreed, after a meeting involving the whole EC, to put his views into writing for further discussion.

As you probably know, we asked the Yugoslav EC to take down the statement from the website, in order to allow us time to discuss the issues involved. On 10th November they refused, arguing in a letter to the IS that “Taking it down would be highly damaging to our reputation and it is likely that our contact work would suffer serious blows and setbacks.”

On Friday, 13 November, comrades FW, FM and JM of the IS participated in a lengthy discussion with the Yugoslav EC. Despite the insistence of the comrades that the position taken did not present a transphobic point of view, the discussion was not satisfactory, but most comrades recognised that the line taken in the appeal was not the one agreed by the World Congress and that something had to be done to rectify the position taken.

The IS put forward different options to the comrades on how to do it, recognising that it may pose tactical problems, and it was agreed that the Yugoslav EC would meet separately over the weekend to work out the details on how to do that. An explicit invitation to consult, should there be any questions arising, was made to the comrades by FM at the end of the meeting.

However, on Sunday the IS received a very brief statement by the EC reiterating the position taken by them on 10 November: “On the meeting on 14th November 2020, EC of MO Crveni has decided not to take down The Open Letter to the Film Festival Free Zone in relation to the documentary *Petite Fille*, published on 8th November 2020 on the web-site *Crvena kritika*”.

This conduct has very serious implications. If we were to permit the continuation of the situation, we would be making an unacceptable concession to an entirely false view of what a Marxist International is, and above all, what it is not. We are not a loose federation of national groups, but a disciplined revolutionary proletarian organisation, based on the principles of democratic centralism.

Neither are we a discussion group, where any individual or group of individuals are free to express any opinion that occurs to them on any subject, and immediately carry it into the public domain. The line of the International is determined by the World Congress on the basis of a democratic discussion, where all sides of the issues can be debated and voted on. And it goes without saying that the majority decides, and the minority must accept the decisions agreed.

The IS has been extremely tolerant over a long period of time, attempting to patiently convince comrade FS of the error of his ways. We have held many meetings with the comrade where we entered both into

the merit of the issues he has been raising and into the method he has adopted, but these attempts have proved fruitless.

There are limits to all things. Without any consultation or communication, we were presented with the latest incident. When a part of the IMT defends publicly a position in contrast with the line decided by the World Congress and to the detriment of the whole International, that takes the question to another level.

By their actions, the Yugoslav leadership have shown a complete disregard for the most elementary principles of democratic centralism and proletarian internationalism. This alone would be sufficient to condemn the position taken by them.

However, it would be a mistake to treat this question from a purely formal point of view. We have to deal with the political content, and this has considerable importance for the whole International.

We believe that the comrades have shown a fundamental misunderstanding of the Marxist approach to the question of oppression, which was dealt with comprehensively in the document approved by the 2018 World Congress.

We will try to explain the reason why their political position has been developed on the basis of a mistaken and undialectical method, reaching conclusions that are fundamentally wrong, and represents a potential danger to the whole International.

Alien class ideas

Revolutionaries do not live in a vacuum. We live in class society, and inevitably come under the pressure of alien classes and alien ideas. It is an essential part of our work to identify and combat these pressures.

In recent years we have recruited a lot of comrades from the student milieu, where bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideas are rife. Because of the low level of understanding of Marxism by some of these comrades, some of these alien class ideas have occasionally been reflected in our ranks.

It is our duty to combat these ideas with every means at our disposal. This struggle, however, has to be conducted in a disciplined and structured way. If that is all the Yugoslav comrades wish to say, we would have no objection.

When the comrades draw attention to certain erroneous ideas that have unfortunately appeared on Facebook concerning identity politics, they undoubtedly have a point. They point to a number of false ideas that have occasionally come into the public domain from a handful of rank-and-file comrades in different sections. They say that these ideas represent an alien petty bourgeois tendency and have declared their intention to fight against it. The Yugoslav comrades think they have detected a concession to alien ideas in our position on oppression.

The problem we have here is that the method followed by FS to carry out this struggle in the public domain on social media has not helped to resolve any problem, but has led him to enter into conflict with a few individual comrades of different sections in an escalation of mutual provocations. This has forced the IS on several occasions to approach the leadership of more than one section to call on the comrades involved to desist from such mutually hostile discussions publicly on social media.

We attempted to channel the discussion along the correct lines. An *internal* discussion with the Yugoslav EC on the question of queer theory and our position on the Trans question was opened months ago. Back then, comrade FS committed to putting his views in writing, so that we could have a structured debate on this question through the appropriate channels of the organisation. Unfortunately, to the present day, he has not delivered what he promised.

Even the most correct idea, if it is carried to an extreme, can turn into its opposite. We think that this has been unfortunately the case with some of the leading comrades in Yugoslavia. As we have already stated,

we believe that this is the case in particular with comrade FS, who has been harping on this subject for a long time, engaging in quite fruitless polemics with comrades from other sections, and expressing himself in terms that can only be described as extremely provocative. Around these exchanges a mood of mistrust and antagonism has developed on both sides, without helping to the slightest degree to reach a clarification of any of the contentious issues.

The mistake was firstly, the manner in which this was done by engaging in a sort of provocative guerrilla tactic on social media instead of using the proper channels and ensuring a discussion which would raise the level, and secondly, replying to these views in an extremely crude and one-sided way, which bent the stick too far in the opposite direction, landing comrade FS perilously close to the camp of reaction on this question.

The pressure of alien ideas does not only come from the petty bourgeoisie. There is also considerable pressure from bourgeois, clerical and reactionary forces, as well as the pressure of backward elements in the population. These can be expressed in nationalist, chauvinist, xenophobic, misogynist or homophobic prejudices. To this list, we have to add transphobic prejudice.

We cannot afford the slightest hint of this in any of our sections. That must be made absolutely clear, and there must be no ambiguity about it.

Unfortunately, by entering into what amounts to a programmatic bloc with a motley variety of sectarian, radical feminist and LGB outfits, the Yugoslav comrades have put their name to a document written by these elements, which clearly has a transphobic agenda.

The petty bourgeois

The petty bourgeois elements who like to portray themselves as radicals are constantly engaged in all manner of obscure “debates” on this or that issue pertaining to gays and lesbians and trans people, etc. In fact, these so-called debates invariably degenerate into vulgar slanging matches, with one side hurling insults and abuse at the other.

This kind of activity has nothing remotely progressive about it. It is deeply divisive and harmful to the cause of the oppressed people it purports to defend. The only ones who gain from such hooligan activities are the reactionaries, who sit back and smile as they see the progressive movement degenerate into endless bickering, splits and even physical violence.

The radical feminists dedicate their energies not to actually fighting against the oppression of women (or lesbians), but to virulent attacks against trans-women, arguing about whether they are “really women” or not and that somehow, they are a threat to women’s rights.

The radical petty bourgeois, rather than concentrating their efforts on uniting all oppressed layers in society, always find some issue, such as the abolition of nuclear weapons, the environment, women’s liberation, gay liberation, trans rights and others – all legitimate causes – which they then separate out, turning each one into a single issue campaign, taking it to the extreme and then demanding that everyone else must abide by their particular interpretation of the problem.

Whenever they take up an issue, in the hands of the petty bourgeois, it immediately assumes an extreme and hysterical character. The demand is instantly raised: “are you for or against?” And anyone who dares to object is immediately subjected to a barrage of abuse. This is unfortunately the situation we have when radical feminists line up against trans activists, and vice versa.

This does not contribute one iota to the genuine liberation of the various oppressed layers in society. On the contrary, it only serves to sow division and actually weakens each of these movements.

The sects invariably become embroiled in senseless polemics and endless arguments about these questions. This is merely a reflection of the unstable nature of petty bourgeois politics and organisations. Inevitably, they end in crises and splits.

The sectarians, radical feminists and a section of trans activists spend all their time in such futile, destructive and pointless “debates” which amount to pitching one section of the oppressed against the other, instead of uniting in the common struggle against the right wing and the ruling class.

Now, unfortunately, the Yugoslav EC comrades by their actions have fallen into this trap, and not only refuse to be helped out of it, but evidently would like the whole International to follow their path.

The trans-and anti-trans fanatics argue furiously over the question as to whether trans people are “really” women, or “really” men, etcetera, etcetera. By signing what amounts to an anti-trans statement drafted by one side of an unedifying brawl, the Yugoslav leadership has taken sides in this sorry “debate”.

We have said that, in putting their name (and, by implication, the name of the IMT) to a statement written by sectarians and radical feminists and LGB anti-trans organisations, they have entered a united front with them. Actually, it is even worse than that. What we have here is more than a united front. It is a programmatic bloc with elements that are entirely alien to the IMT and everything we stand for.

When comrade FS invites us to jump into this poisonous sectarian swamp, we must politely but firmly decline his invitation. This nonsense has absolutely nothing to do with the traditions of proletarian revolutionism, Leninism and Bolshevism. And we want nothing to do with it.

The Bolsheviks and oppression

The Bolshevik party always based itself firmly on the working class. Above all, Lenin stood implacably for the sacred unity of the working class, and opposed tooth and nail every attempt to divide the class and its vanguard party.

Lenin argued that the proletariat should stand at the head of the nation, as the sole genuine defender of the rights of *all* the oppressed, the women, the Jews and all the oppressed nationalities.

In his 1902 text, **WHAT IS TO BE DONE?** Lenin is very clear on the question of fighting tyranny and oppression in all their manifestations:

*“...the Social-Democrat’s ideal should not be the trade union secretary, but **the tribune of the people**, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects; who is able to generalise all these manifestations and produce a single picture of police violence and capitalist exploitation; who is able to take advantage of every event, however small, in order to set forth **before all** his socialist convictions and his democratic demands, in order to clarify for **all** and everyone the world-historic significance of the struggle for the emancipation of the proletariat.”*
(Lenin, What Is To Be Done?, [III Trade-Unionist Politics And Social-Democratic Politics](#)).

Lenin, thus, on the National Question argued for the right of self-determination. But that was only one side of the question. The other side was just as important. Lenin stressed that under no circumstances does the defence of the right of self-determination imply a defence of bourgeois or petty bourgeois nationalism. Quite the contrary, in fact. In **CRITICAL REMARKS ON THE NATIONAL QUESTION** Lenin expressed himself in categorical terms on this issue:

“The awakening of the masses from feudal slumber, their struggle against all national oppression, for the sovereignty of the people and the sovereignty of nations is

*progressive. Hence, it is the **bounded** duty of a Marxist to uphold the most resolute and consistent democracy on all points of the national question.*

***"The task is mainly a negative one. But the proletariat cannot go beyond this in supporting nationalism, for beyond it begins the 'positive' activity of the bourgeoisie striving to fortify nationalism."** (Our emphasis.)*

A little later he adds, for the sake of greater emphasis: "Fight against all national oppression—yes, certainly. Fight *for* any kind of national development, for 'national culture' in general—certainly not." (Ibid.)

Again, in **THE RIGHT OF NATIONS TO SELF-DETERMINATION**, Lenin emphasises that our attitude to national oppression has a negative character. That is to say, we are opposed to all forms of national, linguistic or racial oppression. *But he was very well aware that one oppressed nationality can very easily become an oppressor in relation to other oppressed people:*

*"That is why **the proletariat confines itself, so to speak, to the negative demand** for recognition of the right to self-determination, without giving any guarantees to any nation, and without undertaking to give **anything at the expense** of another nation." (LCW, *The Right of Nations to Self-determination, February-May 1914, vol. 20. Our emphasis*)*

This could hardly be any clearer. In another work Lenin writes of the harmful influence of nationalism in the workers' movement:

*"The conclusion is that **all liberal-bourgeois nationalism causes the greatest corruption among the workers and does immense harm to the cause of freedom and the proletarian class struggle.** It is all the more dangerous because the bourgeois (and bourgeois-serf-owning) tendency is hidden by the 'national culture' slogan. In the name of national culture—Great Russian, Polish, Jewish, Ukrainian, and others—the Black Hundreds reactionaries and clericals, and also the bourgeoisie of all nations, do their dirty work.*

*"Such are the facts of present-day national life, if it is examined from the standpoint of the class struggle, and if the slogans are tested according to the interests and policies of classes and not from the viewpoint of vapid 'general principles', declamations and phrases." (LCW, *Critical Remarks on the National Question, October-December 1913, vol. 20. Our emphasis*)*

There is a precise analogy between Lenin's position on the national question and the attitude of Marxists towards oppression in general. The basic principle is quite clear. We fight against all forms of oppression, whether national, linguistic, racial, gender, or anything else.

But this NEGATIVE attitude towards oppression – a necessary condition for uniting all the oppressed and exploited for the revolutionary overthrow of the existing social order – does not at all signify any concessions to the prejudices of one group or another. Any such deviation represents an abandonment of the proletarian class standpoint and a betrayal of the revolutionary cause.

Things can turn into their opposite

History furnishes us with many examples of a formerly oppressed nation that becomes an oppressor nation. A very clear example is the United States, which began as an oppressed colony of Britain, but became transformed into the most powerful and reactionary imperialist state on earth.

On a smaller scale, the small nations of the Balkans were oppressed by the Ottoman Empire, but as soon they gained formal independence, the rapacious national bourgeoisies of each state became aggressors engaged in predatory wars of conquest against their neighbours in the bloody Balkan wars that preceded the great imperialist slaughter of World War One.

It goes without saying that Lenin and the Bolsheviks did not take sides in these reactionary wars, which had no progressive content whatsoever. In his articles on these wars, Trotsky characterises the Serbian, Bulgarian, Greek and Rumanian bourgeois as imperialists. Yet they all pretended to be the innocent victims of aggression.

We draw your attention to this fact because it has always been a characterization of the pseudo-Trotskyist sects that infest the margins of the workers' movement, that they constantly demand that we take sides in this or that war or conflict. They make these ultimatum demands in the most arrogant and imperious manner, as if to refuse would imply some kind of betrayal.

As a matter of fact, it is they who constantly betray the most elementary principles of Leninism and proletarian internationalism. Abandoning the proletarian class standpoint, they enter on the slippery slope of petty bourgeois politics, or even open reaction. It is a very serious mistake to imagine that always, under every circumstance, we are obliged to take sides.

The breakup of Yugoslavia coincided with a sharp factional fight inside the CWI, which ended with our separation from the Taaffeites and the creation of the IMT. During a debate in Spain, comrade Ted Grant was heckled by one of the majority, who shouted "Where do you stand on self-determination for Croatia?" To which Ted replied: "You mean do we support the Ushtase or the Chetniks?" That reply was sufficient to reduce the heckler to silence.

In Quebec, the French-speaking majority was always oppressed and discriminated against by the Canadian Anglophone authorities. But as soon as the bourgeois nationalists came to power in Quebec, they immediately passed laws that violated the linguistic rights of the Italian minority, and so on.

Now we have the madness of identity politics, which has been enthusiastically embraced by all sorts of petty bourgeois radicals. The IMT has decisively rejected this reactionary and divisive ideology, which only serves to sow chaos, confuse, split and disorient the movement and thus weaken the fight against oppression.

Following the example of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, we today oppose all forms of oppression, but we do so in such a manner that all the oppressed layers are brought together in one united struggle, with the working class at the head of that struggle.

Just as with the National Question, as outlined above, you can sometimes find some sections of an oppressed layer, albeit a tiny minority, such as some women and some gay people, moving from oppressed to oppressor, as in the case of the radical feminists who attack trans-women. We will not be a part of this!

Does it "really" matter?

If one asks the right question, it is possible that one might receive the right answer. But if you ask the wrong question, you will invariably receive the wrong answer. This is exactly the case in the present discussion.

The endless arguments about whether a trans woman is "really" a woman, or whether you can be "born in the wrong body" do not interest us. Such so-called debates only serve to divide and distract attention away from the real issues.

The question that must be asked is the following: does an adult person have the right to dispose of their body as they see fit?

If the answer is yes, then it is undoubtedly the right of an adult person to take the necessary steps to change their sex or gender, if they so wish. And nobody has the right to prevent them from doing so. Of course, there is no question of children taking such a drastic step, before they are mature and able to make that decision. All this should be done under the guidance of competent doctors and psychologists.

If that is what the Yugoslav EC are trying to say, there can be no difference between us. But the statement that they signed says a good deal more than that – and that is the problem.

They are asking us to join them in lining up with a particular standpoint – an anti-trans standpoint – which we refuse to do. Is it really necessary for us to enter into this kind of senseless discussion? It is not necessary at all!

Of course, we do not for a moment doubt the sincerity of the comrades in Yugoslavia when they put forward their views on this question. But we are duty-bound to point out that these views are profoundly mistaken, and if not corrected, can lead to very reactionary conclusions. And as we know, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Anyone can make a mistake. But when a mistake is made, a serious Marxist leadership will correct it, and learn from it. If that is not done, what begins as a small mistake can become a far bigger mistake, causing endless problems, crises and splits in the organisation.

A very negative role in all this has been played by comrade FS, whose constant insistence on this question – almost to the exclusion of anything else in recent months – has bordered on obsession. He has now carried this to a very dangerous point, where it threatens to undermine the relationship of the Yugoslav organisation with the International itself.

Comrades! It is not too late to pull back from the brink. We are willing to discuss all the disputed questions with you, in the hope of reaching an agreement. We are also determined to carry out the struggle against alien class ideas on all fronts. But the present intransigent attitude displayed by comrade FS and his supporters represents a serious obstacle in the path of reaching agreement and safeguarding the unity we all desire.

In the name of proletarian revolutionary unity, we urge you to give careful consideration to the points raised in this and in the previous letter of 12 November. We believe that the congress should take place as planned, and given the character of an emergency Congress, at which all the disputed questions can be debated, with the presence of members of the IS, as well as other interested members of the IEC.

With comradely greetings,

The International Secretariat

Workers of the world unite!

London, 20 November, 2020

Proposed resolution on the position of the IMT on Identity Politics (by IS)

The Central Committee of MO Crveni agrees in its entirety with the position adopted by the World Congress in 2018 in the document "Marxism vs Identity Politics". We agree with the document when it states:

"Among the innumerable weird and wonderful variants of Queer theory (we should not really dignify this as a theory at all) there appears to be a common thread: firstly, it presents gender (and even sex) as a purely social construct, denying all biological and material aspects. The next step is to create in the imagination an almost infinite variety of genders, from which everyone is free to take their pick.

"We do not deny the fact that in addition to male and female there are intermediate forms, which have been known for a very long time. In pre-Columbian America, such people were regarded as a special social group and treated with respect.

"Modern science enables people to change their sex and this should be available to any person that requires it. It goes without saying that we are totally opposed to any form of discrimination and intolerance towards transgender people. Nor do we have any objection to anyone identifying as they please."

Furthermore, we agree with the position taken in the same document that our task is not to side with either of the two extremes - the radical feminist and LGB activists on one side and a section of extreme trans activists on the other - in this poisonous debate. Our basic position is that we are opposed to all forms of oppression and this includes that of trans people. We should never fall into the identity politics trap of pitting one oppressed layer against the other.

Defending women, gays and lesbians against oppression should not be transformed into an oppression of trans people by reducing the question to one of mental illness or even of denying their material existence. This idea comes dangerously close to the camp of reaction which deals with trans people in the same way that gay people have often been treated throughout history. We totally reject this reactionary approach and defend the right of trans people to live their lives freely as they wish.

Proposed resolution on democratic centralism (by IS)

The CC of MO Crveni accepts the principles of Democratic Centralism where there is maximum internal democracy and comrades can express their opinions through a democratic process. However, once having thoroughly debated a position, the elected delegates at the World Congress vote and take decisions. That is what happened with the document Marxism versus Identity Politics, unanimously approved at the 2018 World Congress. The majority position on any question is binding on all sections until it is modified by the leading bodies of the International (IS, IEC and World Congress).

The Central Committee of MO Crveni is of the opinion that the EC should have consulted with the IS before committing to signing the Open Letter on the screening of the documentary "Petite Fille". The EC should have removed it from the website immediately, as soon as the IS requested it, regardless of their opinions on the content, pending further discussion.

It also notes that, having failed to take it down, there was an unacceptable delay in the EC abiding by the second request of the International Secretariat to publish a disclaimer making it clear that the International does not agree with the content of that statement. It took 11 days since the request to take

down the statement was made and 8 days since the meeting of the EC with IS representatives on 13 November to finally publish a disclaimer from the IMT.

Furthermore, it notes that the IMT disclaimer was published as a footnote in small print at the end of the statement, in effect burying it from sight, which amounts to a manoeuvre and an open defiance of the request of the IS.

The CC agrees that in future, members of the Yugoslav IMT, and in particular its leading figures, will not defend publicly in its publications or on social media a position on these or other matters that contradicts that of the democratically agreed positions of the International. When in doubt, the IS should be consulted.

Proposal for the resolution of CC of MO "Reds" on the IMT document "Marxism vs. Identity Politics" (by FS)

The CC of MO "Reds" is in disagreement with the document "Marxism vs. Identity politics" and the position agreed on at the 2018 WC. We believe the document put forward a string of offhand, imprecise and unscientific assessments, which are not in accordance with the philosophy of historical materialism and which contradict basic facts from the domain of history and biology.

The document speaks of women's oppression "coinciding" with the beginnings of class society. Marxism and history teach us that it was no "coincidence" what so ever, but a unified process which stems from the division of labour and development of the means of production to the degree that allows the emergence of surplus and individual property.

The document speaks of the woman being oppressed through "patriarchal relations" in the family. Marxism and history teach us that the family needn't be patriarchal for the woman to be oppressed within it. It is true that there are remnants of patriarchal relations all over the world. They are present to the extent to which remnants of social relations that preceded capitalism are present, and they survive due to combine and uneven development. However, the bourgeois family, which formed in developed capitalist countries, i.e. countries whose bourgeoisie had a revolutionary role, has no patriarchal, but monetary relations.

The oppression of women has persisted in the bourgeois family, surviving patriarchal relations for two main reasons. The first is that women entered capitalism with a far weaker economic and social standing compared to men. The second is that every society which has individual property over the means of production puts the woman in a weaker position compared to man due to her role in the procreation process, as she is the one that gives birth and remains with the child, most often not having the luxury of just making the child and walking away, which is always available as a possibility to men due to their sex.

The oppression of the woman and her subordination to man in every class society aren't consequences of some arbitrarily assigned social status, but consequences of very clearly defined biological characteristics, which make the woman vulnerable in every social system based on the individual possession of the means of production, i.e. in every class society. The fact that every class society knows oppression of women based on sex does not mean that every class society oppressed women in the same way. Suprahistorical structures, such as the patriarchy, only exist in the clouds of feminist "theory", and not in the real world. Patriarchal relations are a real historical and social phenomenon, but they are a different form of oppression than bourgeois monetary relations, which Marx and Engels noted in the "German Ideology". Engels speaks very precisely about *paternal lineage*, and not "the patriarchy" in his work "Origins of the Family, Private Property and State", exactly because he recognises one aspect of class society, based on the sexual dimorphism of the human being, and not parallel supraclass and suprahistorical structures.

For this reason, CC of MO “Reds” believes that the positions on women’s oppression put forward in the article are imprecise and wrong, formulated by using feminist terminology and feminist reasoning, and as such we cannot support them.

The document also puts forward a string of inaccurate and mutually exclusive statements on the relation between sex and gender, as well as the question of transgender people. The document informs us that “The fundamental sexual division is between male and female.” The fact that we are having this discussion in the first place shows that this wasn’t just a poor choice of words, as many of our comrades charitably assumed initially. The division into male and female is not a “fundamental division between the sexes”, but the *only* division between the sexes.

The only sexes in existence are male and female. There are no intermediary forms, or any transitional forms between the male and the female sex. Even in the various vases of hermaphroditism it is always clear not just which glands are male and which are female, but also which part of an ovotestis gland is male, and which is female. Referencing the beliefs in the opposite by pre-capitalist societies of pre-Columbian America is not a valid argument for the discussion on biological facts. Beliefs and traditions of primitive societies do not have the same weight as scientific facts confirmed by experiment.

Sex is not a matter of identity, but of biological reality of a living thing. Various animal species have male and female specimens, even though none of them has ever identified as anything. If some person does not identify with their sex, it may be the right of that person, but such identification is false because it obviously contradicts verifiable reality. It is correct that the causes of non-identification with one’s own sex haven’t yet been sufficiently explored. However, from that one cannot conclude that self-identification with the opposite sex is correct. On the other hand, based on everything biology does know today, one can conclude that the identification of a person of a certain sex with the opposite sex is incorrect. The body is no vessel “in which we are born”. To claim otherwise would be to assume the existence of the soul, regardless of how one might wrap it into other dualist concepts, which have the same meaning, but avoid using openly religious terms. This is why we claim that nobody can be born in the “wrong body”.

The document “Marxism versus Identity Politics” is mistaken when it says that “modern science enables people to change their sex”. The sex of the human being is impossible to change. Hormonal and surgical interventions, which are styled “sex change” for practical reasons, can have a cosmetic effect and make a person’s appearance resemble the opposite sex, but the person’s sex remains the same. A trans woman remains a man, and a trans man remains a woman, regardless of their appearance. Tissues used in cosmetic surgery to alter body parts and make them resemble the genitals of the opposite sex do not change their nature when their purpose is surgically changed.

The introduction of the concept of gender, as something distinct from sex is just an ideological attempt to bridge over the glaring contradiction between empirical reality and subjective self-identification of a number of people and to avoid recognising that the issue at hand is one of mental health. It is impossible to understand gender as something separate from sex. Even the very word “gender” etymologically points us towards the act of giving birth. Gender is impossible to conceive or to name without referring to sex, while the understanding of sex doesn’t require the concept of gender at all (except in the grammatical sense). The concept of gender, apart from the inability to name it without referring to sex, can’t even be easily defined, except by going down the rabbit hole of subjectivism. If gender is different than sex, then it can manifest itself only 1) via reproducing gender roles and behaviour patterns typical for some gender, or 2) verbally, where a person informs us of their gender.

If 1) is the case, gender roles and behaviour patterns typical for a gender are *traditional* gender roles and *traditional* behaviour patterns – or else they wouldn’t be recognisable to the rest of society. Centuries long (possibly even millennial) struggle of women for their liberation has always been a struggle against imposed traditional behaviour patterns and traditional gender roles. To state that being a woman is being

of the female gender or female “identity” would, thus, would mean that for centuries women have struggled – not to be women. To state that a person can be a woman if they behave “as a woman”, a man if they behave “as a man”, or even “non-binary” if they don’t fit into the traditional gender roles and behaviour patterns would mean that men stop being men and women stop being women if they dare oppose traditional norms. This is the position with which reactionaries would have no problem agreeing and which has the agreement, not at all accidentally, of Iranian mullahs and the Serbian Orthodox Church. The question of who is and who is not a real woman and what makes a woman is inseparable from the struggle for women’s liberation. From the answer to that question are derived answers to the question of access to women’s safe spaces, such as shelters, women-only public transportation carts in countries where the sexual harassment of women is widespread, toilets and the like. The reason for which women today need certain separate areas is the fact that most women face potentially dangerous situations as soon as they leave their homes (and some cannot avoid such situations even when they are home). These dangers aren’t related to how a woman identifies herself, but to how society treats the woman – on the basis of sex. It is no wonder then that women will be very concerned with defining categories in which they belong. Someone might dispute our critique of 1) with words such as: “But non-binary or transgender (not necessarily transsexual) people do not deny the right of women who stand up to traditional norms to still be women”. Thank you kindly, but this is not about rights and wishes, but about reality – about objective circumstances and the question *whether to not fit into traditional gender roles means to be in discrepancy with one’s sex or not?* If yes, such a position implicitly states that millions of women aren’t really women and that millions of men aren’t really men, but unconsciously “non-binary” or “transgender”. If no, then it’s clear that there is no such thing as “non-binary” and that transgenderism is a question of distorted self-perception and an issue of mental health. One cannot simultaneously believe two mutually exclusive things.

Case 2) opens the question on what does gender even represent. If the gender identity isn’t tied to sex, or for the set of traditional roles and behaviour patterns, then we are talking about some undefined subjective feeling or, in the best case scenario, a set of personality traits, which have nothing to do with whether a person is a man or a woman. Subjectivism of such an understanding of gender is glaring enough and we shouldn’t waste any more words on it.

Both cases we listed show that the concept of gender, as separate from sex, is philosophically and scientifically untenable and that men and women aren’t genders, but sexes of the human being. Scientific and political implications of claiming the opposite, or of any relativisation of these notions would have – and in some countries they already do have – very negative consequences for the position of traditionally oppressed layers of society, primarily that of women and homosexuals. If man and woman are genders, not sexes, then the logical conclusion that imposes itself is that there is no such thing as *same-sex* attraction, that sexual orientation is about being attracted to a gender. From there we are coming to a dangerous and homophobic conclusion that homosexuality is a matter of some fetish, or even transphobia. Depathologising transsexualism and transgenderism, i.e. claiming that those are not the issues of mental health, necessarily pathologises both homo- and heterosexuality, because attraction to a *sex*, be it same or opposite, is reduced to the level of fetish, while attraction towards the same or different *gender* is normalised, i.e. attraction towards traits which needn’t even be sexual.

And yet, throughout the ages, or even millennia, there have been men who have behaved like women and have been treated like women, as well as women who have behaved like men and have been treated like men. What’s more, there is strong historical evidence that various societies had more than two genders, genders that didn’t correspond with the male or the female sex. We mustn’t shut our eyes before this fact. If it is clear that there are only the male and the female sex and if it is clear that gender cannot be separated from sex, then how do we explain this fact, which apparently contradicts our claim? The answer to this is question is the answer to the question of how Marxists should define gender.

Gender is the social perception of sex. Gender is the framework within which a community assigns people their role in the social division of labour, based on their sex. A strict and rigid division of labour was the necessary precondition for the survival of primitive societies. In order to meet basic needs, everyone had to know their place. However, natural processes don't always unfold to meet human needs. The necessary number of people involved in one kind of labour inside a primitive society didn't always correspond with the available number of people who were allowed by custom to be involved in that kind of labour. Besides that, the existence of homosexuals, as well as people born with sexual development disorders, made it additionally difficult to have a neatly imagined division into male and female forms of labour. Primitive societies solved this contradiction by assigning new genders to these exceptions. Did they believe that these new genders corresponded to some new sexes is something the current science of history doesn't tell us clearly. We don't know to what extent these genders were considered real, and to what extent were they recognised as a necessary and relatively humane compromise for life in such societies. However, this isn't important, because reality is not real "to me" or "to you", but exists independently of our perception. Genders might have been totally real and totally natural in the eyes of primitive societies, just like ghosts, faeries, nymphs, titans, gods etc. What matters is that science has since then advanced to the point where it can experimentally determine that there are only two sexes. And this is the basis on which Marxists should form a political position on the relation between gender and sex. Unfortunately, the document "Marxism versus Identity Politics" doesn't do that, but makes concessions to the thing it claims to be combating.

CC of MO "Reds" is aware that the social position of transsexual and transgender people all over the world is not just difficult, but life threatening. Those people do not only suffer discrimination in the work place and during their efforts to find work, but are a target by very frequent and bestial physical assaults by transphobic and reactionary groups and individuals. Apart from that, many transgender people don't encounter understanding for their condition with the people they expect to be closest to them – their families and circles of friends. In the majority of world countries, these people have no adequate access to healthcare. As communists and members of the IMT, Reds unambiguously stand in defence of transsexual and transgender people from any form of oppression. This is clearly stated in our Programmatic Foundations document.

However, a population's oppressed position is not sufficient reason to embrace the world view prevalent in that population, or even the way in which that population sees itself. Disagreement with someone's self-perception and world view is not oppression, not even when it makes the person feel oppressed.

Oppression does reflect on the emotional state of a person, but it is not determined by the subjective attitude of that person. To feel oppressed is not the same as to be oppressed. Being oppressed is a position within society and oppression is a social relation which can objectively be noticed and analysed. To use words which offend someone, for whichever reason, is not oppression. Some words can evoke memories of a history of oppression or draw one's attention to their current state of oppression – they can reduce one to their current oppressed status. Such words are insults, they are humiliating, but merely speaking them is not an act of oppression, unless there is a material relationship of oppression present. If the opposite were the case, religious fundamentalists could rightfully complain of their horrid oppression in secular states and schools which teach biology based on Darwinism. What's worse, accepting that words are a mechanism of oppression plays into the hands of identity politics and intersectionalist relativisation of class relations, as it implies that we are all both somewhat oppressive and somewhat oppressed.

For these reasons, CC of MO "Reds" rejects the claim that affirming the biological reality of sex and the social reality of sex-based, not "gender-based" oppression, is in any way an expression of oppression of transgender or transsexual people. We consider the claim that the recognition of the fact that nobody

can be born in the wrong body is an expression of transphobia to be emotional blackmail and a harmful relativisation of violence to which transgender and transsexual people are exposed, as well as its causes.

MO “Reds” do stand for the unity of the working class under the banner of Marxism, and that also means under the banner of materialism. Working class unity is not achieved when well-intentioned people join hands and start dancing kolo and singing, but by basing our line on scientific foundations. Will everyone always agree with those foundations? No, they won't. Will there be workers who, due to various subjective feelings of religious and idealist nature, won't wish to become Marxists? Sadly, yes. However, the goal of communists isn't to recruit every single worker in the world, but to build a vanguard party, a party of educated Marxist cadres, which will place itself on the forefront of a mass workers' movement.

This party, of course, always has room for transgender and transsexual people. Our organisation is not closed to the people who suffer from mental health issues, as long as those people are sane and intellectually functional. Since transsexualism is not necessarily tied to sanity, or to intellectual capacity, there isn't a single obstacle for any transgender or transsexual person, who agrees with our programme and with the world view of historical materialism, to join us. It goes without saying that Reds should treat all people who aren't our political opponents decently and address them respectfully. In accordance with that, it goes without saying that transgender and transsexual people in our ranks, as well as those we work with, should be addressed in the grammatical gender they find most comfortable when spoken with.