

Open Letter to the GIO from the CWO

Comrades

We are writing this as an appeal. It comes earlier and more brusquely than we would have liked but our hand has been forced by the irresponsible behaviour of an ex-comrade who mendaciously implied in his resignation that we were ignoring the issue of Comrade A.

In April when the CWO met and were given the details of what had been happening the first response was that the decision to admit A was “toxic”. There is no way the CWO would have knowingly admitted someone with such a past into the group. We explain why below.

CWO members feel betrayed at every step in this process. The GIO not only did not inform any of the ICT affiliates or the IB at the time (March 2013) but neither the GIO nor A told us when there were so many opportunities to do so, such as when A came to the UK and suggested we organise a speaking tour for him in November-December 2013, or when the IB sent a CWO comrade as delegate to Montreal in June 2014. Our delegate spent many hours alone with A discussing the political problems of the GIO, and how they could be resolved, but not once did he even hint at his past.

As it is, we only learned from A himself about this when he was due to arrive in Rome in November 2015 and even then we received a very brief, sanitised version of what had happened. We suspect he only told us then because comrade V, who had admitted him, had now decided to make the issue public. We knew the comrade had problems with alcohol and anti-depressants but we did not know that he was not even using email anymore hence did not reply to our enquiries. He lives his life on Facebook and it was there that in an act of irresponsibility and, according to his own confession, under the influence of anti-depressants, that he resigned from the GIO without telling anyone. He did however promise to bring forward a more coherent accusation but as we all know has failed to do so.

However we did not wait for his promised “dossier” but have been in contact with others in Montreal and from them we learned that A was told in a demonstration in Montreal around the time of his entry into the GIO that his presence was not welcome. Add to this the fact that he absented himself from the only public meeting our delegate held in Montreal, that he ran to the UK in late 2013 and that he then went on a course in New Brunswick for 2 years and we have a picture of a comrade who is continually running away. This has led us to question his account of what happened in the original incident. “Hurting” a woman means forcing himself on her and the subsequent tale of a blackout (which in one version he fails to mention) is hardly credible.

We think we (at first) and the GIO (still) have been incredibly naïve to not put all the evidence together to see that this is a comrade who is manipulating us all. He has not ever publicly put up a defence of himself, except when politically necessary, and what he has said shows remorse only for the damage it is doing to his reputation and not for the actual deed itself. He is ashamed but not sorry. This is not the picture of the repentant that the GIO statement is trying to convey.

The GIO statement itself is, to say the least, weak. In its first version it does not even mention that there were two accusations of rape by different women against A. Nor does it mention that he was also accused whilst in the NEFAC splinter of being a rapist (when asked by email he did not deny it but dismissed this as an accusation of a crazy feminist who accused all men of this). In the statement the GIO also correctly criticises itself for not issuing a statement about the expulsion of N for his brutal drunken attack on his partner but this was also an incident which we were not told about until just before the November 2015 IB meeting and yet it had occurred some months earlier. Whose idea was it to not issue a statement?

We do think repentance and rehabilitation of individuals is possible and desirable especially for crimes committed as minors. But it is the responsibility of the individual to take on this task not a communist organisation. This is particularly significant in issues which are about violence towards women. As we have already said in earlier mails the working class is over 50% female (but not represented in anything like that in left communist groups around the world). As a comrade stated earlier in our debates

“We can't build an organisation for the future if there's any doubt about the safety of women in that organisation and we can't start any building blocks for a communist society without the active participation of half the population.”

Communist organisations don't mirror capitalist society (as the GIO tried to argue in one reply). On the contrary they present a model of the behaviour in the communist society of the future and cannot afford the slightest whiff of behaviour (sexist, racist etc etc) which damages that model. Individuals coming to communism are perhaps different because they inevitably carry some of the reactionary mores of the old society but it is the task of the collective to banish these and maintain the principles of communism. When the GIO said that every communist organisation will be faced with taking on a person with a violent sexual past it did not face up to the central question. We don't do so knowingly and when we do discover such things, what do we do? We are clear about what we would do but the GIO does not seem to have understood what it is to be responsible for the defence of communist ideas and communist organisation.

Our conclusion is that the A's presence in the GIO is incompatible with its stated purpose as a communist group and that he should be expelled. Some comrades think that even this might not be enough to restore the GIO's reputation and have suggested that the GIO dissolve itself and reform without those responsible for this mess. A new group might be formed which could then seek affiliation to the ICT.

If our appeal is rejected and the situation continues as it is the CWO will ask the IB to announce the disaffiliation of the GIO from the ICT. This has already gone on long enough and we can only maintain the trust of our sympathisers and supporters (who have been incredibly supportive so far) if we bring the whole business to a speedy and principled conclusion.

Internationalist greetings

Communist Workers' Organisation
October 16 2016

GIO Proposal to the IB to resolve the crisis in the GIO

We cannot say that we are very happy with the position of the CWO. Their letter sounds like an ultimatum.

But we decided to play our part. After all, it is us, the GIO that triggered this wave that overwhelms the ICT.

The letter of the CWO advanced the following arguments:

- "There is no way the CWO would knowingly admit someone with such a past in the group"
- The CWO feels betrayed by GIO for the non-disclosure of the aggressive past
- A witness said that A was not welcome in a demonstration and was absent from a public meeting because he was not welcomed and left Montreal for that and went to New Brunswick, so they were already fleeing.
- The version of A is not credible: the "blackout" is manipulative in that it does not denounce the act itself
- The first statement does not mention that there was a second assault
- The expulsion of N was never declared, why?
- GIO [CWO? Translator] supporters are of the view that Alexis is toxic and hinders the work of the GIO.
- It is the responsibility of the individual to repent and rehabilitate that of the communist organisation
- An organisation cannot be built if there is no security for women
- If one discovers an aggressive past one must exclude the member, communists must have a pure past
- Ultimatum: expulsion from A or otherwise requesting disaffiliation from of the GIO from the ICT.

Most of the CWO's arguments stand.

But the charge of manipulator does not hold. Alexis has already testified that he was accepted to the GIO with his past disclosed. It is not his personal fault, it is that of the GIO that underestimated the magnitude of this decision among activists of different groups.

In addition, the GIO refused to share it with the ICT by eliminating any information on the subject in its reports. We are now in a better position to criticise it. What was implied, if not taboo, was that this information was part of the private domain. This could be understood since there had been no charges taken by the police. But in front of the militants there was a fault and one did not see it. Yet it is well known that the oppression of women who are relegated to the sphere of the private (family, care, education of children, cooking, sexuality, household) is the cause of their oppression and radical feminists do everything to bring it back into the public and political realm.

The other assertion, that rehabilitation is only the responsibility of the aggressor, goes against any social principle. Of course the aggressor must himself want the process of repentance, otherwise he must be put out of the society. But rehabilitation, like any other human need,

must be taken care of by society. So much for the principle. For us communists, a comrade, in a rehabilitation process needs his organisation to succeed in his recovery.

It also says that the comrade is still fleeing from the consequences of his actions. Although he was obliged to withdraw from public events, he participated in the May Day demonstrations in the last two years without any retaliation from anyone. In addition, A is currently involved in a process of transformative justice with a professional of the method.

There remains a doubt. If one takes the case in legal way one can reasonably pose some questions. The feminist, V... B ... who put the bloody tampon in R's glass never explained her action. We contacted her and she does not want to say anything. Why then was it connected with the affair of Alexis? Did it target another person? This poses a question. But we cannot answer it except to note that Richard was the one targeted.

A. has resigned. At our meeting of November 12, 2016. He resigned to appease emotions and start on a basis of mutual trust. We realise that with 3 big errors in a row (the integration of a member with the violent past, moreover, towards women, the non-disclosure of this decision to the ICT and also the secret on the expulsion of another violent member towards his partner), this confidence between comrades and between groups was undermined.

However, his resignation does not resolve deeper questions.

- 1- Is the GIO to be dissolved?
 - 2- The rehabilitation of comrades
 - 3- The oppression of women regarding our programme, our statutes and our attitude on this issue

1. Dissolution of the group

The dissolution of the group would have the advantage of erasing the reputation of the GIO among the militants and of allowing it to relaunch communist work here under another name. But with the same activists. The same ones who made the decision to hide the past of A, and N. And D. was part of that decision. This is tantamount to reviving a company under a new administration. So it's not a good idea. The GIO must take stock.

2. The rehabilitation of comrades

That will have to be looked at. Transformative justice when it can be applied, supposes not to leave the comrade alone with himself. His community must keep him in his fold. To supervise him in his rehabilitation, make him acknowledge his wrongs and convince him to participate in his reparation. This may apply to violence against women but also to all kinds of crimes that are accused of the working class for all sorts of good and bad reasons.

3. The oppression of women in our programme, our statutes and our attitude on this issue.

We consider that our approach to women's oppression is deficient. The current crisis in the GIO makes us aware of it.

The section on the oppression of women in "For Communism" merely surveys the subject and does not guide us for what needs to be done now. The origin of the oppression explained by

Engels is contested and there is no pronouncement on this debate. If the origin of the oppression of women brings us back well before the accumulation of wealth, monogamy, the emergence of the state and social classes (the last scientific studies shows this) it means that the socialist revolution will not automatically regulate oppression. And therefore, one can not make this struggle a secondary issue. The debate on this issue must therefore be revived in the programme, the statutes and our attitude (for example, harassment and violence against women activists is not private, a women's committee should be set up at least at the level of ICT as a non-mixed pole of regroupment).

As the CWO has argued, this issue poses greater centralism of certain aspects of the organisation such as the statutes; Membership requirements for example.

We have already asked whether the situation of the GIO had already occurred in the past in an ICT group or before its founding. We did not get an answer. How does a group in its statutes deal with harassment and sexual violence? I imagine that similar situations have occurred in the history of the Communist Left. It would be interesting to know in which cases we expel some comrades and in which cases they are deemed worthy of their rehabilitation. There are surely precedents.

We ask you to work with us on this course, because it is the real issue in this crisis. It is no longer about A, or N, nor R, nor even the GIO. The transformation of individuals, rehabilitation, repentance, reparation is what is at stake. I do not think that it is necessary to throw a group in the trashcan, when its regroupment [by which he must mean the ICT - Translator] does not know the way to repair the fault. Apart from the solution of throwing everything in the rubbish bin education is also an avenue, ours is about Marxism, it must also be about other aspects of exploitation, especially towards women. Transformative justice is the key to unraveling a stalemate that will help us to welcome women activists into our groups.

D
For the GIO.
13-11-2016

ICT IB Response to the GIO's Proposal to resolve its crisis

Comrades

Thank you for your response to the CWO Open letter which was sent to you as an "appeal" (see opening and final paragraphs of their Open Letter) not as an ultimatum. It does though require decisions to be made and the IB is deeply worried by some of the arguments and vague conclusion of your Proposal which does not seem to take account of the seriousness of this sad affair for a communist organisation.

You may consider that A revealed all when he joined the GIO but to ICT comrades he revealed nothing. For all the comrades who hosted him, supported him and went out to get people to attend his meetings this felt like a betrayal. You also keep only referring to one accusation against A when we know there are at least three (and this without going into the

fantasies of RS). Furthermore, whilst we could accept his excuse for reticence that he was sincerely ashamed, once the admission was made we were looking for a robust defence of his past from A. However he simply repeats (with minor inconsistencies) the same minimal account of what he claims happened (as in his letter to Common Cause). And in all these accounts there is not one word of remorse for the person he traumatised. We would have expected as a minimum a document addressed to either the rest of the ICT or his accusers.

You try to foist on us the principle that we don't accept the idea of repentance and rehabilitation. We might when we are convinced about it but we are not convinced here. The longer this affair has gone on the less we have heard from A and there has been too much evasion for us to make a judgement. You cannot have restorative justice unless all is revealed. A communist organisation is not a court of law. We are not condemning the young man to so many years in gaol. We are simply saying that a communist organisation (especially a small one) cannot carry the burden of someone who as a reputation for past sexual aggression towards women. How can the GIO seriously present itself as an organisation of the working class when it contains such people? How credible can it be to half the working class who would know that they might not be safe in such an organisation? We feel you continually underestimate this in your determination to stand by a bad decision to which none of the remaining members of the GIO were party.

You also say that you raised the question of whether any of the groups of the ICT had experience of this sort of thing but had received no reply. The CWO delegate thought he had informed you previously that the CWO and ICT are firmly opposed to anyone who abuses women in any way. This position is basic and long-standing. Many years ago the CWO discovered that a member of the organisation was not a rapist, but was a serial sexual predator. We discussed this amongst the members and, though we were not unanimous, we immediately called for the "comrade" to come to a meeting to explain himself (there were other, more serious charges, as well about actions he had taken which endangered another comrade) but he refused to come and disappeared. As we understand it A was admitted, not after a proper enquiry by the whole group, but after a cosy chat with one comrade who thought his own reputation in Montreal was so great that he could cover for him. It then became a *fait accompli* and a condition for all new members who joined that they accepted this original decision. Such individualistic arrogance has no place in a communist organisation and has completely undermined the coherence and credibility of the GIO.

Towards the end your Proposal demonstrates that you are still trying to avoid the real issue. When you write:

It is no longer about A or N or R nor even the GIO

you are simply muddying the waters. Yes, there will have to be work done on how we organise, on our position on women and sexism, on statutes etc BUT the immediate issue is the question of what kind of organisation can harbour someone with a past of sexual aggression. Once that primary question is answered we can go on to look more widely at everything that has arisen in the course of this episode.

And what you write in order to deflect us from that issue does the ICT a great injustice.

When you write re the struggle for sexual equality

And therefore, one can not make this struggle a secondary issue.

what are you doing but repeating what is in *For Communism*?

www.gis.blogsport.de

We fully support the idea (it is already in our original statements) that *The debate on this issue must therefore be revived in the programme, the statutes and our attitude (for example, harassment and violence against women activists is not private, a women's committee should be set up at least at the level of ICT as a non-mixed pole of regroupment).*

But it would have to be at ICT level since the GIO currently is the only group in the ICT which does not have women members despite having once had a lot of women sympathisers. To keep talking about defending comrades who have failed to speak up for themselves is not going to alter that.

It is time to break with the past (and not just because of this affair). The GIO has behaved for too long like a group of individual activists who paid lip service to ICT positions. It has cost it members in the past (although it is only with the unravelling of this issue that we have learned all this). There are many good comrades in Canada who are prepared to join and/or work with a group which truly reflects ICT politics and the politics of the Communist Left. Now is the time to give them the opportunity to make that new beginning. You can now start that process in earnest but we cannot even begin the process of explaining our real position towards women with the current reputation that the group carries. The GIO should be dissolved and the process of creating a new grouping should begin.

For the new group to be re-affiliated to the ICT certain conditions would have to be met,

- The new group needs to have a new name but cannot simply be the GIO with a different name. The only continuity would be in the person of the one comrade who did not make the decision to admit A, who was not party to a conscious attempt to hide from the ICT delegate who was in Canada in June 2014 the real truth.
- All other GIO members should have to reapply individually for membership of the new organisation.
- None of those who took the decision to admit A and conceal his past from the ICT should be readmitted
- None of those with a past which does not conform to communist norms should be readmitted.
- The question of rehabilitation of comrades who have a past which does not conform to communist norms should be postponed until the new group is fully established and in a stronger position, and should then be decided in conjunction with the ICT.

Internationalist greetings

JW
CB
JD

The delegates of the IB from the GIS, the PCInt and the CWO