

Report on the Institute and the International School

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Sommaire

- [I/ CHANGE IN THE TYPE OF \(...\)](#)
- [II. UNEVENNESS OF NATIONAL \(...\)](#)
- [III/ INVOLVEMENT OF NON-FI \(...\)](#)
- [IV/ THE FEMININE DIMENSION](#)
- [V/ EXPLOITING ACCUMULATED \(...\)](#)
- [VI/ RENEW AND STRENGTHEN \(...\)](#)
- [VII/ CONCLUSIONS](#)

I do not include in this report basic information concerning the Institute and its activities. That is provided in *Newsletter N° 0* which was distributed to all of you, (unfortunately only in English). Furthermore, there are many "former students" in this room who know the Institute from experience.

However, some points should be brought to mind :

- The Institute began to function in 1982.
- During the years 1982 to 1988, 13 sessions were organized using the system of 2 sessions of 3 months each, per year.
- The year 1989 was devoted to the reorganization of the Institute - library, publications, preparations for a new type of sessions, etc.
- We started holding one-month sessions in 1990. They are organized either around a central theme or are aimed at a certain region of the world. We shall continue with this activity and introduce the one-week annual economic conference in 1991.
- To date around 280 militants have participated in the 15 sessions directly organized by our institute (in the framework of our international educational schools). Also held on our premises were other types of meetings in which hundreds more militants participated (women or youth sessions, national or regional schools, sectoral meetings, etc).
- In fact, the Institute is now as much used for other meetings as it is for sessions of the international school. The annual calendar of activities is generally filled up and the building is in use most of the time.

It is impossible, because of time limitations, to present here a global evaluation of the activities of the last nine years. Nor is it necessary to come back on what was reported to the previous World Congress. We content ourselves therefore, with six specific topics before concluding.

1/ CHANGE IN THE TYPE OF SESSIONS

The three-month sessions (cadre educational schools) were not interrupted for political reasons. They were, and, will remain, very useful. Particularly because their duration allowed us to cover a wide range of theoretical, historical and political questions. We had to stop organizing them because we could no longer be sure that the staff required would be available.

At the moment, the one-month sessions are easier to organize, above all because they are much shorter (which also facilitates the participation of National Organizations — it is not always possible to free cadres for three months). Another reason is that, because the central themes vary, the one-month sessions require an ad-hoc team to take charge and thus the tasks are distributed among a larger number of comrades.

Having said that, the one-month thematic (or regional) sessions were not just organized because we could no longer provide the three-month sessions. They have also proved to be very useful. They allow us to respond to more varied or more specific needs than the three-month sessions do. For the same reason, we shall likewise begin to organize conferences of shorter periods (e.g., the one-week one on the world economic situation).

Ideally, we should combine the three-month, the one-month and the one-week sessions. At present, we do not have the means to do this. We hope that we can do it one day. In the meantime, we want to try to introduce general educational sessions one-month sessions which are not centered on a particular theme. We intend to do this in 1992 but still need to discuss the ideas and content more precisely.

Aside from the sessions already decided to be held in 1991 (Latin America, Arab Region, Women, maybe Western Europe, Economy) a number of proposals have been put forward for 1992 (see Newsletter N° 0). Choices must be made and thus discussion on this matter should begin at the coming USec.

There have also been discussions about “pedagogical” issues : duration, style of oral reports, accompanying materials, use of audiovisual materials, discussion methods, group work, etc. These are important questions. We must discuss them more collectively and in greater detail. We will also need the help of comrades who do this type of work (e.g., trade-union education, adult-education, organizers, etc.). A working session on these questions should be organized one day.

II. UNEVENNESS OF NATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

The participation of National Organizations in the sessions of the international school during the past nine years has been highly uneven - depending on the circumstances.

Some organizations sent participants to the sessions regularly (once a year, or even more), often including a high percentage of key cadres from the leadership. In these cases, one can think that a veritable cumulative effect is happening and that those organizations are capable of integrating the international school into their own national policy on cadre training.

Furthermore, this cumulative effect is felt back at the Institute : the political contribution of the National Organization to sessions grows and becomes more lasting. Progressively, the experience of those national organizations is better known and better assimilated at the international level - this is very important. In the final analysis, the political enrichment of the international school and of the “intellectual capital” accumulated by the Institute depends mainly on the contribution of National

Organizations.

Other organizations however, have participated irregularly and only in a limited way. Surely the contribution of those organizations to the exchanges and collective reflection within the framework of the international school will be limited accordingly. One fears that, in such conditions, the participation of these comrades will remain largely individualized and will not be collectivized at the national level.

This unevenness of national involvement in the life of the Institute and in the sessions should be corrected in the future.

III/ INVOLVEMENT OF NON-FI ORGANIZATIONS

What was new in 1990 was the presence of Eastern Europeans (Poland, GDR, Hungary) during the March session - about transitional problems. In July 1990, the East Germans even organized their own educational school on our premises. Some of these East European militants have got closer to the FI, or have even integrated within its ranks - others have not.

There has been a real involvement of organizations not belonging to the FI, nor even to its sphere of influence, since 1983. On more than one occasion, representatives from those groups comprised up to 20% of the total number of participants in a session. In most of those cases, the organizations concerned do not define themselves as Trotskyist, but, rather, come from Maoist or semi-Maoist, semi-Castroist or even composite traditions (result of fusions).

While most of these organizations have come from Latin America, others have come from Asia, Africa, Western Europe, and, recently, from Eastern Europe.

The involvement of non-FI organizations in the international school has been very enriching. It confirms the possibilities that exist in this domain. It illustrates concretely what can be done today and which was impossible yet to be done during the 1970s.

Nevertheless two problems should be emphasized :

- The Institute should not be the only *regular* contact of a non-FI organization with our movement. Regular follow-up should be assured by bodies of the International and by the sections of the country or region concerned. This is not always being done at the moment.
- A certain number of important organizations that we ought to be able to integrate into the activities of the international school have not yet participated in any of our sessions. We hope that many of them will be present during the Latin American session in May-June 1991.

Finally, the participation of FI sympathizing organizations must have helped these organizations to strengthen themselves, helping to consolidate their process of integration into our International. But here too, participation in the activities of the Institute cannot substitute for the regular follow-up which needs to be done by international bodies and sections from the region.

IV/ THE FEMININE DIMENSION

Five aspects of this question should be stressed :

1. Participation in sessions. The proportion of women comrades has averaged from 20 to 30%. This is below the percentage of female members in our sections. However, the global percentage should not be allowed to hide the fact that feminine participation has been very uneven depending on the countries : very significant for certain National Organizations, (almost) none for others.

2. Integration of this theme into the content of sessions. At the beginning, we did not give the “woman’s” question the *minimum*, indispensable, place in the educational reports of the three-month sessions. Later, we introduced the theme *as such*, at the beginning and at the end of the session. We did look into *integrating it within the reports dealing with different topics*, but this has proved too difficult. This difficulty reappears in the one-month sessions. Plainly, a lot still has to be done in this field.

This said, a European Women’s School is held annually in the Institute’s building. The first International Women’s Seminar, of one month, is planned for September 1991. This should help the overall improvement of the content of sessions to be organized in the future.

3. Problems of everyday life. The sessions provide an occasion to experience collective life day in and day out - and, moreover, international collectivity. Particularly during the longer three-month sessions, this can raise all sorts of difficulties (cultural, etc.). One of these difficulties has quite obviously been the “male problem”, which at times was posed acutely.

More generally however, sessions have been an occasion to reflect on the everyday nature of relationships of inequality and oppression, up to revolutionary milieus. From this point of view, the functioning of a women’s commission during the long sessions has been very important (as well as for allowing the exchange of national experiences and the deeper discussion of the theme among women comrades).

4. Publications. It is a grave matter that we have not yet been able to produce a CER-NSR on this theme. It is vital that we publish in the coming period several “women’s” *Notebooks*. Hopefully the Women’s Session in September 1991 will help in this. Preparation for this seminar has already given rise to the publication of 4 *WP* preliminary works. Others are planned. Even if very late, this is a good start . The effort has to go on.

5. Permanent Staff. There is a general problem in all our organizations regarding the sexual division of labor which also applies to the Institute. Three comrades comprise the permanent staff, one woman and two men (A fourth person, a woman, helps us part-time, and does not have over-all responsibility for running the Institute). The functioning of the permanent staff reveals clearly the sexual division of labor problems for the technical support work is usually done by the women.

Repeatedly, during the years 1982-88, the equilibrium of tasks of the permanent staff during the 3-month sessions was broken by prolonged overwork. Each time the female member of the permanent staff found herself prisoner of the “daily management” (provisions, follow-up of kitchen teams or cleaning teams, etc.), — and the male members “prisoners” of political tasks. Here too, the durable integration of women in leadership teams depends largely on our capacity to ensure *collective functioning*—and thus our ability to produce the conditions that allow for such functioning.

V/ EXPLOITING ACCUMULATED INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL

Over the years, we have accumulated significant “intellectual capital” at the Institute ; in the form of publications, taped reports, photocopied reading materials and a rich, multilingual library of more than 14000 titles. It is important to exploit this “intellectual capital”. To do this it is necessary to :

1. Strengthen collaboration with those in charge of education. A reciprocal and beneficial "influence" occurred between the Institute and some national education commissions, but a lot remains to be done. Collaboration with a bigger number of education commission heads should be strengthened and stabilized.

2. Improve pedagogical and documentation services. The material distributed to participants (course outlines, reading material, etc.) have greatly improved over time. It is meant to be collectivized, and especially to be used by commissions/education heads. The pedagogical material can be further improved by expanding it (reading notes, analytical bibliographies, etc.). Computerization of the library card catalogue, which is indispensable for the library's rational usage, has begun. This should allow us to produce subject/author bibliographies of what we possess. To computerize all the material we have takes a lot of time, we can only do it progressively. At the current level of our resources, we can unfortunately only slowly, and even then partially, ameliorate the pedagogical and documentation services that the Institute offers.

3. Once again to regularize the publication of the *Notebooks* and widen their distribution. Over the last two years, we have had great difficulty in producing the Notebooks. This was related to J's return to the US (he took charge of the publication from 1986 to 1988), and also to other problems, primarily the difficulty to obtain original manuscripts or completed translations ready for publication. Those, many, who have committed themselves to submitting manuscripts or translations should remember that we need their writings by the deadlines agreed.

Recently, the publication of the *CER* in French began again ; two issues have appeared, a third is in process. It is a very serious matter that the *NSR*, in English has not begun again to come out. Its publication should resume in the coming three months. We are in the process of reorganizing the over-all work on the publication of the Notebooks, in French and English, and their publication should again be regularized during this year. For the other languages, publication remains occasional and depends on the sections concerned.

We should take the opportunities given in the revival of the *CER-NSR* production to engage into a new effort of diffusion. To do that, it is important that National Organizations help make them known. It would be useful aside from press publicity, to have the Notebooks sold by leftist bookstores. This allows for bigger sales, and more importantly, for getting us known to new potential readers.

4. Use better the Working Papers for genuine collective elaboration. Since the publication of the *WP-IIRE* began in 1986, 15 issues have come out. They are primarily sent to comrades who work on the subject dealt with and are not for sale. For financial reasons, and also taking into account their use, diffusion relatively remains limited. The aim of the WP is above all, to keep the effort of collective international reflection going. They reproduce transcripts of reports given during educational sessions or seminars. Thus, non-published works within our milieu are made known. They allow for discussion of unfinished studies. They help in the preparation of sessions. Most of all, they should arouse commentaries and exchanges thus helping the authors to improve their work, notably in view of subsequent publication, in the form of a Notebook or otherwise.

The *WP* are thus produced *to be commented on*, not just to be "consumed" by those to whom we have sent them. They are conceived as a *tool for dialogue*. Unfortunately, only rarely do those who receive the *WP* send us their commentaries. This confirms and reflects the poor tradition of collective work within the International. It is a big weakness, especially for communists ! With the activities of the Institute in general, and with the publication of the *WP* in particular, we want to contribute to strengthening the truly collective character of our effort of elaboration and international education. In the present period, this seems to us to be a very important goal .

VI/ RENEW AND STRENGTHEN THE SUPPORT THAT WE NEED

Since 1982, we have often benefited from a multiform, militant support given by the students and national organizations. *This support, and this goes for all aspects, absolutely must be renewed and strengthened in the coming years.*

1. Political resources. Which means, first of all, strengthening the political contribution of the International, the National Organizations, and the collaborators to the Institute's activities. In light of the wide range and complexity of the problems posed by the historical period we are in, this support is absolutely indispensable for updating, adapting and renewing our educational policy.

2. Documentation resources. For the same reasons, we have to ameliorate and update our library's resources. We only have very limited financial means to do this. We depend therefore largely on donations. In the coming issue of the *Newsletter*, we will publish our specific needs in regard to this matter. We do need a wide range of publications. Let us immediately give some suggestions. Pierre Frank donated his library to the Institute, through his testament. This has helped us preciously . Other comrades can anticipate such testamentary donations. Periodicals and series of journals are as useful to us as are books. Finally, we would like to gather typed manuscripts, unpublished university writings, little-known articles in journals, etc., which reflect everybody's effort of elaboration.

3. Computerized and audiovisual materials. Ad hoc donations made it possible for us to improve our system of processing and producing texts (acquisition of a laser printer, computer programmes, etc.) as well as pedagogical aids (an overhead projector...). This has made it possible to improve the quality of the readings and lectures, as well as to come out with the Working Papers. Still, much remains to be done in this area.

4. Human resources. Many have given us a hand and this is still needed, now and in the future : electrical work, carpentry, painting, heavy jobs ; classification of books, journals, and papers ; written transcriptions of oral reports ; translations of texts and of the Working Papers, etc. All these mean substantial aid both in terms of improving the quality of services we offer and in terms of reducing maintenance costs of the building. We always need a helping hand on such things.

5. Financial resources. Last but not least, we absolutely must find new financial sources. *The usual financial source that provided for the Institute's existence over the past 9 years is now drying up.* The way things are going now, we shall be able to continue our activities for a few more years, but not more. *It is therefore indispensable that we find new financial resources.*

This is not a question of "capturing" the financial resources of the International or National Organizations, but of creating our own financial sources.

We must combine all sorts of donations : small, medium and big ; occasional and regular ; individual and institutional ; intended for the general functioning of the Institute or to any of its specific activities (Women's session, Third World session, European session,...). It is necessary to pay special attention to finding big and regular funding for the Institute's over-all functioning. But it is certain that we can only meet the needs by combining all types of donations, from the smallest to the biggest. It is a comprehensive effort that we urgently need.

Today, it is not easy to find new financial resources. The supply is diminishing. And the demand for Marxist study and education is also declining. We should therefore try to win the support of persons/institutions who wish that something continue in this field ! Different elements should be able to help us obtain such support. The Institute has existed for nine years now. That proves the

seriousness of our initiative, it is not a random project. On our scale, the annual budget of the Institute is surely large, but it is very small compared to the normal cost of this type of initiative, which is proof of our efficiency and our militant seriousness. Our institute links to and welcomes a range of “non-FI” organizations, some of them quite well-known. This is proof of our “openness” and usefulness (still partially potential) for the revolutionary left as a whole.

Militants or organizations can themselves contact potential donors or ask us to do so. Whichever the case, we are ready to inform donors regularly the use to which their donations are put !

We are convinced that it is possible to find new funding that will permit the Institute to durably continue its activities. But we should be able to count on the active help of all National Organizations concerned. To know what possibilities there are in different countries. To know also the institutions that could help finance specific seminars (Women, Europe, Third World...) such as the EEC commissions, etc. And also to know the best way of contacting them. A National Organization can also sometimes have an official national body finance the costs of sending a participant to a session. We are surely ready to furnish the necessary papers for this.

6. The seriousness of financial commitments. It is not only necessary to find new resources, it is also necessary to reduce costs as much as we can. We are thinking of a way to reduce staff expenses without reducing our activities through the reorganization of publication of the *CER-NSR*. Furthermore, all the types of help previously described contribute to the reduction of our running costs in a significant way, without reducing the quality of our services, hence their importance. It is also for this that *National Organizations indeed need to assume their financial responsibility when they send participants to one of our sessions or when they organize their own meetings on the premises*. This contribution is politically justified. But it is also a key element of our budgetary equilibrium.

VII/ CONCLUSIONS

1. A new period, a change of policy. Over the past nine years, we had as a motto : “to live happily, live discretely”. We gave special priority to legitimate security concerns. *These concerns remain legitimate and should not be forgotten*. We would like to emphasize this. In particular, we have to take into account the situation of participants living under repressive regimes in their countries. Now, in order to widen our basis of support, and to renew our financial sources, we must make ourselves known.

We are and we shall definitely remain a militant institute. We do not hide it ! Even better, it is in this name that we look for support. But it can be important for our own work of elaboration as much as to convince others about our seriousness, to push for seminars or conferences with institutions or university journals.

Aside from our activities, we have to have our permanent staff and our collaborators better known. It may be good to form an “advisory board” composed of “personalities” ready to help us find financial resources and other forms of support.

2. Ways of campaigning for help. To reach these goals, we will be producing two new publications.

We will publish annually a “programme of activities” which will draw up a balance sheet of activities of the past year and which will present our plans for the coming period. The 1991 “programme” will also include a general presentation of the Institute and its first nine years of existence.

We will also publish a *Newsletter* intended for “friends” of the Institute. Its function will be to create an active support network through information on our current activities and plans in discussion, on the help received and sought, on the progress made and difficulties encountered. The *Newsletter n° 0* which was distributed here to you, contains information which will be found again in the “1991 Programme”. (However, it was hastily prepared in time for this Congress. It is truly a pilot issue and should not be used publicly . For this, wait for the publication of issue no.1).

This *Newsletter* will be sent to organizations and individuals, to all those who commit themselves to help the Institute regularly, whatever be the form of this help (which can be political, militant and material aid without necessarily being financial). These “friends” may also receive Working Papers that interest them. It will of course be important to produce the Newsletter in three languages (Castillian, French, English), but our means are limited. We will therefore begin first with English and we will see later if we can produce it in other languages.

3. An experience to safeguard, the responsibility of National Organizations. The evaluation of the first nine years of activities of the Institute is not exempt from problems, errors, difficulties and weaknesses, - far from it. Despite such difficulties, it has been very positive. It shows especially that an International can offer something out of the reach of any national organization. Here is something particularly important today.

But the future of the Institute is in question. Without the help of the national organizations, we will be unable to maintain our activities longer than a few additional years. In order for us to continue this initiative, we face, therefore, new responsibilities.

P.-S.

* This report was originally written under the pen name of « Roman ».