

SHINING JADE

A WORKBOOK FOR APPLYING CRITICISM
AND SELF-CRITICISM IN ORGANISATIONS



WHAT MAKES THE TIGER STRONG?
A DIET OF CRITICISM AND SELF CRITICISM, AND HOURS SHINING JADE

EXERCISE 26 : A TIGER WHOSE BEHIND ONE CANNOT TOUCH - 20 MINUTES

All of us have within us a tiger whose behind one cannot touch: a defensive part of ourselves.

If we allow this to become the whole character of the way we respond to criticism then we cannot do anything revolutionary in our lives. If we have this character as individuals then the organisation may take it on as a habit.

When a whole organisation becomes a tiger whose behind one cannot touch, it can have no real relationship with the people. We find this happens often when an organisation is being criticised and reacts with a certain kind of unproductive defensiveness.

Step 1: Draw an outline of a big tiger on the large sheets of paper. Draw everything but the tiger's tail. While the tiger is being drawn, others should be cutting strips of white and orange paper to act as the tiger's tail. Prepare one white tail and one orange tail per person. Pin the tiger on the wall.

keep reading for step 2 ...

CCTE is a Proletarian Internationalist organisation that assists comrades in communist, anti-imperialist and pan-African struggle in different parts of the world. We have members in North America, Europe and Palestine

Produced by Cat's Cradle Tiger's Eye, 2025
cctigerseye.com



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A Workbook for Applying Criticism and Self-Criticism in
Organisations

by

Cat's Cradle (Tiger's Eye)

First Edition, January 2025



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Fidel Castro feeding an elephant.

Preface

Dear comrade,

We are happy to offer this pamphlet as a starting block for the practice of criticism in communist organisations. One of the things we discover when talking with comrades across the movement and across the world is that organisations struggle to practise criticism and self-criticism, for a whole host of reasons. That makes sense, because it is very hard. Criticism and self-criticism is a vital practice of dialectical materialism that all Marxists struggle to master.

We have provided several things in this pamphlet:

1. Our analysis, put in as plain terms as possible, of how criticism and self-criticism should work.
2. Exercises that you can practise in your organisation which will help you work out together the character of criticism and self-criticism.
3. Exercises that you can practise in your organisation which are themselves ways of doing criticism and self-criticism (these are in an appendix).
4. A reader, made of excerpts from texts that we find particularly informative on criticism and self-criticism.

The most important things are 2 and 3. We cannot emphasise this

enough. If we could thump our fist on the table or jump up and down to emphasise it more, we would do it. But we are communicating to you through writing, so you will just have to imagine us thumping and jumping. There is no point having a good understanding of the theory of criticism unless you have a method by which to practise it. There is no point practising criticism if you are simply following instructions and if each member of the organisation is not conscious of what they are doing. So please, do not read the theory and leave the exercises to one side.

“Who are CC(TE)?”

Cat’s Cradle (Tiger’s Eye) is a Proletarian Internationalist organisation with members in Scotland, England, North America and Palestine. We run our own workshops and support comrade organisations to develop their pedagogical work.

If you have found this workbook useful, we encourage donations to comrades at the Thomas Sankara Centre in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, and/or Juventudes Revolucionarios-16 in Panama.

“Why exercises?”

We have learned through practicing both criticism and other kinds of group learning that open discussion is rarely all that useful to advancing a group’s activity. The exercise way of working through a problem is an alternative to discussion.

Below is our justification for this way of working:

Practically speaking, more people can write than speak at once. The advantages here are obvious; everyone is given the responsibility of contribution, and much more can be worked through in a small amount of time.

People who are meek or timid about speaking up in groups often have very important things to say. When we all write instead of talk, we can hear from them.

We find it is useful for people who talk a lot to practise not talking.

Discussion addresses a problem in a unidirectional way, with little space to address the problem from different angles except those that the

discussants originally bring.

It can be helpful for people to be allowed to write their private thoughts and reflect personally before the group begins figuring things out together.

When considering problems within organisations or problems of specific individuals, great care must be taken to ensure that the reflection taking place is constructive. We've found that one of the most effective ways to ensure this is by scaffolding the reflection using a clear plan with particular steps allowing the problem to be worked through in a highly structured way. We also find that exercises that ask us to do things like practise ways of working together are much clearer ways to learn than a discussion circle.

For more detailed breakdowns of all these ideas, have a look at our website www.cctigerseye.com.

1

Mistakes and Victories

“We have had many, many, many failures, so many mistakes. But the difference is that before, we would make 100 mistakes and we had zero victories. But now we may make 10,000 mistakes, but we have maybe 2, 3, or 4 little victories. We go forward!”

Thomas Sankara

Because the communist movement is dialectical, it proceeds through activities with uncertain results that create a new situation. Many of these activities will yield no results, or bad results, because it will become evident in hindsight that they were activities that did not change anything. We find that many communists are quite good at spotting the errors that other organisations make but not so practised at identifying their own. It is vital that the organisation makes a habit of regularly confronting its own mistakes instead of hiding them away.

It is often the case that individuals within a group will become conscious of a mistake but fail to bring their criticism to the group out of fear of undermining the confidence of the group or out of the desire to protect the reputation of the group. These are understandable concerns. We need to develop our organisations so that, in acknowledging the mistake, the group is injected with a clarity and energy that allows us to correct the mistake, giving our activity a direction that the group can feel

confident in because it arose through a rigorous and objective process of self-criticism.

Thomas Sankara said, “Only revolutions are willing to question themselves, only revolutions are willing to draw critical balance sheets of their struggle. By contrast, the forces of reaction spend their time singing their own praises and blowing their own trumpet, only to end in inevitable failure.”

Failures tend to increase relative to successes as the revolutionary process proceeds. This seems counter-intuitive. But as revolutionaries increase in skill, the conditions through which they move also increase in difficulty and in frequency.

The communist movement is not measured on a set of scales with the mistakes on one side and the victories on the other. If this were the case, the mistakes would vastly outweigh the victories. We are not idealists, weighing up our progress on a liberal balance of pros and cons, but Marxists who see our progress in terms of inertia and movement. Mistakes are just the slowing or the absence of movement. The victories move us forward.

“To carry on a war for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie, a war which is a hundred times more difficult, protracted and complex than the most stubborn of ordinary wars between states, and to renounce in advance any change of tack, or any utilisation of a conflict of interests (even if temporary) among one’s enemies, or any conciliation or compromise with possible allies (even if they are temporary, unstable, vacillating or conditional allies)—is that not ridiculous in the extreme? Is it not like making a difficult ascent of an unexplored and hitherto inaccessible mountain and refusing in advance ever to move in zigzags, ever to retrace one’s steps, or ever to abandon a course once selected, and to try others?”

Find ways to track your victories so as not to see only the errors. It is vital

Lenin, *No Compromises*

to appreciate small victories, not to ‘make ourselves feel good’ but in order to try to grasp at the correct line of activity. Even the smallest victories show us something of that path.

Just as tracking victories is not about making ourselves feel good, mistake identification is also not about making ourselves feel bad. All of these processes under the practice of criticism are driven towards finding the path towards revolution. For revolutionaries, this in itself should feel exciting, but that excitement feeling is itself not the point. Establishing feelings as the final factor which determines the character of criticism is incorrect, but feelings are a crucial psychological element which must be addressed, and you will find exercises to consider this in this workbook.

Finding the path forwards involves leaving some things behind us (old, stale ideas and practices) and finding some new things on the road. Those things we find might be things that we also ultimately leave behind, so we must go forward with humility, which means understanding and being explicit that there are many things we don't know.



A scene from the Cuban literacy campaign.

Exercise 1

Tracking Victories [20 minutes]

In an online chat (ie the chat box provided on Zoom or similar programmes for online meetings), or on small pieces of paper if you are together, ask the comrades in the organisation to write victories, big or small, that they think the organisation has achieved. They should try to think of the really small, tiny, minute things that they have noticed that other people might not have. And also the 'biggest' achievement in their eyes.

Now try to arrange those pieces of paper or those online comments in some way that makes sense - either aesthetically pleasing or philosophically sound. Online, you could use Jamboard or Miro. You might for example put similar achievements next to each other. Or try to organise them from 'biggest' to 'smallest'. Or chronologically. Talk with each other while doing it. You might, depending on time, do a few different iterations.

Then ask, for the organisation:

"What should be the process for submission of this kind of thing (a 'victory') to the record of the organisation?"

"How will the organisation arrange and archive victories in the future? It might help to think of things that are built up slowly by many small efforts amassed over time, like squares on a quilt."

"How do you imagine that revolutionaries in the past kept track of victories?"

Pick two that most people have heard of (ie Che and Lenin), and get everyone to suggest some ideas of what they might have done. People will have to use their imagination - everybody should be making things up, in more or less informed ways. For example 'I expect Che recorded victories in his notebooks by drawing a star next to the relevant text'.

Exercise 2

The Feeling of a Mistake [5-10 minutes]

For two minutes, each comrade should write in the chat box or on a piece of paper about a recent mistake they made, which can be big or small, political or not political. Then post it in the chat or put in the middle of the table for everyone to look at.

Now for two minutes, write how you felt immediately after the mistake was made, 24 hours after the mistake was made, and how you feel about it now. Post these three things in the chat or put in the middle of the table for everyone to look at.

Discuss as a group anything you notice from the reflections in the chat box. How do feelings about mistakes change as the person gets further from the mistake? What feelings are shared broadly among the group? What have other people written that you think is particularly important?

Exercise 3

Useless Political Activity [5-10 minutes]

For two minutes, each comrade should write in the chat box or on a piece of paper about some political activity they engaged in one time that seemed pretty useless. For example 'I used to be part of an organisation that sold newspapers outside a train station for 3 hours every Saturday' or 'I ran a workshop and nobody came' or 'I organised a huge protest that was meant to force an organisation to divest from Israel and it didn't, and everyone became exhausted'. They should then post it in the online chat, or put what they have written in the centre of the table for everyone to read.

Now each comrade should write for 2 minutes about an activity that people they know engage in or have engaged in that they consider to be pretty useless. Again, they should post in the chat box, or allow everyone to read.

Now each comrade should write for 2 minutes in the chat box about a type of activity that a famous revolutionary in the past has engaged in that seemed useless. These should be made up but with some plausibility. For example 'Lenin spent 10 hours finishing a speech to give to a room of hundreds of workers, and then lost his notes 5 minutes beforehand, and ad libbed a pretty rubbish speech.' Again, they should post in the chat box, or allow everyone to read.

Communists like to say that there is no blueprint for the struggle. Che Guevara expressed this by insisting that we must make the road by walking. CC(TE) expresses this in the objectives and aims of our organisation by saying that we want to teach people to make political judgments rather than to copy and paste revolutionary theory and strategy from other periods and other places into their own. Why do we make this claim?

As Marxists we try our best to be properly conscious of the specific conditions of our time and place and act in a way that is appropriate to these. We also try our best to live according to the principle that these actions—based on the analysis of material conditions—change those conditions and force us to “begin” the process again as a consequence.

Unlike a laboratory, where conditions can be abstracted from the overall social process of history and held in relative stability for the purposes of testing theories related to isolated problems, in our environment of constant transformation the revolutionary process requires creativity, adaptability and durability in the face of constant failures of greater or lesser significance. Because of the strong emphasis we place on this, mistakes are going to be more or less abundant throughout the revolutionary process and therefore we must train and develop our capabilities to confront them. Every organisation that is concerned with the revolutionary process needs to develop its own memory, it needs to be able to access its past successes and failures and synthesise them into a strategy of perpetual self-correction.

This is why criticism is not optional, but necessary. It is the method of constant refinement of the relationship between our theory and practice, based on an analysis of perpetually changing material conditions. Concretely, this means that there must always be criticism of each activity, with a view to developing the next activity. There must always be criticism of last year, with a view to next year.

Exercise 4a

Hiding Mistakes (Long Version)

[35-45 minutes]

This exercise is for understanding the effects of hiding mistakes on the people who hide them and on the organisation.

This exercise is best done in a large room with a lot of furniture (places to hide things), or in a building where participants have access to multiple rooms.

Step 1 [2 minutes]: On a slip of paper, write a mistake that you hid when you were aged 0-12. Write the age on the back.

On separate slips, do the same for mistakes between the following ages (You can adapt these age-windows slightly according to the participants in the room):

12-21

21-40

40-60

60-100

Step 2 [2 minutes]: Comrades should split into groups of around three. If you are in a building with lots of rooms, each group is assigned to one room, and they hide their slips of paper. Then the groups rotate round the rooms, so that each group is now in a room with another group's hidden mistakes. If everyone is in the one room it will get slightly more squashed. Assign each group an area of the room, then get them to hide their slips, and then rotate to another group's 'area'.

Step 3 [10 minutes]: The search begins! Each group looks for the slips that were hidden. Whenever someone finds a slip, they read the mistake out loud to their group. For each mistake, the group considers: what

could have been learned by others from this mistake if the mistake had not been hidden? There will likely be some debate over different circumstances, such as 'If this was the case, then I think people could have learned a lot if it had not been hidden.' These things are gold - make sure you write them down. They are the start of principles about mistakes that you can think about as a group.

Step 4 [7 minutes]: After 10 minutes, the groups reconvene taking with them all the mistakes slips they have found. They should share with each other the possible principles about learning from mistakes that they have deduced from their investigations. Then everyone should destroy all the mistakes slips together. This should take about 5 to 10 minutes depending on group size.

Step 5 [5-10 minutes]: Discuss the following questions in the group:

What is the difference between the mistakes you hid at different ages?

Why did you hide these different mistakes?

Do you feel more or less ashamed of hiding mistakes when older or younger?

What do you expect to happen as you grow older?

Variation: Where some people have experienced an age window and others haven't, the younger critics can imagine a mistake they will hide and write it down.

Exercise 4b

Hiding Mistakes (Shorter Version) [10-15 minutes]

Step 1: For 1 minute, on a slip of paper (or in the online chat box), write a mistake that you hid aged 0-12.

For example:

"I broke a teapot when in the house alone. I glued it back together and hoped no one would notice."

"oh oh oh I have a bad one. I drew a smiley face on the window condensation in primary school, the teacher mistook another pupil as the culprit and I let them take it, didn't own up"

"I forgot to take meat out freezer so I put it outside in sun."

On separate slips, do the same for mistakes between ages 12-21.

"I forgot to get off the bus at my stop and pretended that I had intended to travel into East Lothian."

"Something organisational - probably when responding to letters - I didn't send everyone a copy who signed up but put them in the spreadsheet to receive the next one."

21-40.....

"I have forgotten to do things I said I would do and then no one remembered I was meant to do it and I didn't say that I was."

40-60.....

60-100.....

You can adapt these age-windows according to the participants in the

room.

Step 2 [5-10 minutes]: Now discuss together or ask people to type in the chat:

What is the difference between the mistakes you hid at different ages?

Why did you hide these different mistakes? (This is good as a long list typed in the chat)

Do you feel more or less ashamed of hiding mistakes when older or younger?

What do you expect to happen as you grow older?

Exercise 5

Sharing Political Mistakes [15 minutes]

Step 1 [2 minutes]: Have each person think about a political mistake they feel they made at some point. Write it down privately on a slip of paper (it will be shared later).

Step 2 [6 minutes]: Put people into pairs so they can share their mistakes with each other. Have each pair take turns asking the following questions:

Have you ever made a similar mistake to mine?

Do you agree that it was in fact a mistake?

If you were interpreting it generously, where might you find parts of the activity that were not mistaken?

Is there a comrade you know who could learn something from my mistake?

Step 3 [2 minutes]: Write a one sentence proverb together about a lesson you learned from your discussion. Write it out on a sheet of paper.

Step 4 [5 minutes]: Come back together as a big group. Is the proverb worth sharing with the group? In other words, do you think your comrades here could learn from it? If so, read it out loud to the group. Ask people to indicate how much they can draw from the proverb, or whether they would need you to explain the mistake to learn properly.

2

Criticism as an Organisational Habit

In criticism and self-criticism we must deal with the apparent contradiction that we want to *make a habit of it* in one sense (it becomes normal, regular, familiar, expected, we get better at it, we value it as a part of our lives) and that we don't want it to become a *mere habit* in the bad sense (we do it without thinking, we don't apply any creativity to it, it becomes so normal we don't value it, we forget why we did it in the first place.)

It is easy to see how we can institutionalise the habit of criticism. Every writer on the subject has been clear that it should be done regularly (our organisation practises criticism weekly, as part of our meetings), and as a part of organisational activity (make time in the meeting for crit, make sure to schedule crit sessions after events). But how can we avoid this activity becoming formulaic?

Our solution is to encourage the constant development of exercises for criticism, so that the form of criticism changes each time. At the very least, have 10 forms of criticism that your organisation can cycle through. Change up who is in charge of criticism at each meeting. And change up who you are criticising if you are operating on our carousel

system. For example if Comrade R is receiving criticism from Comrade H, and giving criticism to Comrade P, next week she might be receiving criticism from Comrade W and giving criticism to Comrade S.

Analyse your criticism practices - criticise your criticism. If the criticism is becoming stale and formulaic, this should be noticed by members of the organisation and you should plan to do something about it. Keep track of criticism so that analysis is possible (such as in meeting minutes), and schedule time every few months to consider as an organisation whether your criticism is effective.

- Do members feel like they can change their actions based on the criticism they receive?

- Do members feel like their criticism is understood and acted upon?

- Is the organisation taking responsibility for changes that result from criticism?

- Is the organisation properly responsive to changes in conditions (ones of its own making and ones outside its control)?

After two and a half years of revolution in Burkina Faso, the local Committees for the Defence of the Revolution assembled for a conference of 1310 delegates. They were in session nonstop day and night to examine their work and practices. This was intensive criticism, with people who had never met each other before. The criticism in our organisations is likely not *intensive enough*.

3

Ways of Doing Criticism

It seems that it is the time for a brief description of some of the practicalities of criticism, which we will refer to many times in the workbook. We want to be clear that these techniques we outline here are by no means exhaustive, they are just the practices that we use and are most familiar with. For more clear examples of what we are describing, see the appendix we have provided.

The person who is in charge of the criticism might bring forward a particular subject area of criticism they would like to cover. For example, focusing on a particular task the organisation does ('induction', 'study groups', 'running workshops') or focusing on a particular quality that the organisation aspires to ('emulation', 'expressing ourselves clearly'). They might then ask everyone to reflect individually in writing on that particular thing. Then they might ask people to pass what they have written to the next person, and the next person writes a reflection on that, below it (or comments on a note in an online chat box). It could even be passed on again. This brings us to...

The carousel is one of our primary techniques in all the work we do, not just in criticism. It involves writing something and passing it to the next person in the circle. Online, you have to imagine a circle (you have to write in the chat 'Ilknur passes to Rosie, Rosie passes to Scott, Scott

passes to Benazir’).

We use the carousel in criticism as follows: Firstly, the group should recognise and agree about the “level” on which the criticism is about to occur. By levels, we mean the unit that is being observed. Is the criticism going to pertain to a thing that the group did together, criticism of another person in the group, self-criticism, or criticism of the whole group in general with regard to a given activity that has just been completed. It should be identified collectively which level the carousel will be applying itself to. Each person should be giving the criticism they make to the next person in the circle. It should never be general, it should always be based on the level agreed to. Once this criticism has been offered, it’s good to allow the person who received it to write some reflections on it, if there’s time, which can be handed back to the criticiser. You can even then allow them to write a response.

Recalling criticism and self-criticism

It is useful periodically to run exercises around comrades’ memories of criticism they have been given in the past, or memories of criticism of the organisation as a whole. This allows reflection on whether anything has changed.

The role of devising the criticism exercise, and facilitating the criticism, should be rotated.

4

Categories for Criticism

As we have mentioned, criticism has to be carried out on the basis of the activity and organisation of the group. **This becomes exponentially more difficult the less such activities and organisation are defined.** For example, if the group has a requirement that members come to a weekly meeting, late or non-attendance can reasonably be criticised. If it does not, it is not clear that there is any shared organisational principle on which criticism can be based. Similarly, if an organisation has declared its activity to involve mass work with people unengaged in political activity, then its failure to do so can reasonably be criticised by members. But if it just has a 'vibe', then a member will find it difficult to explain what they find amiss in the organisation's activity, which some members will find perfectly fine.

Of course, organisation and activity should be in an almost constant process of change, being redefined slightly week by week, and redefined more substantially over the course of months or years, as new things are discovered, new mistakes made, and new victories encountered.

What kinds of things might be good subjects for weekly criticism? We're motivated by the principle of all-rounded development. We think one-sided development is a consequence of the division of labour in capitalist society. When we're thinking about good subjects for criticism,

we should try to imagine the most developed and well-rounded collection of skills and characteristics a comrade could have that are in line with the objectives and aims of the group. From a big list like this, we can then begin to notice and recall which of these characteristics or behaviours we feel we've ignored lately in favour of a lot of emphasis in the development of others. In other words, we can see how we're developing one-sidedly in any given way, and then correct for it.

In each comrade

Individualism

Attitude to difficulty

Attitude to learning and study

Ability to change and develop

Attitude towards criticism

Attitude towards others being wrong

Attitude towards being wrong yourself

Ability to notice things

Ability in emulation

Attitude towards shyness or outgoingness

Attitude towards communications and attendance

In the group as a whole

Administrative efficiency

Relationship with the People

Ability to transform itself

Clarity of short term strategy

Clarity of medium term strategy

Ability to respond to criticism from outside

Nature of relationships with other organisations

Capacity to carry out the organisation's key objectives

Ability to function without the input of certain members

Ability to counter challenges

Enthusiasm for documenting its own experiences and reporting

We cannot define all these things for you - they will be different for each group. We were even nervous about writing a list at all, but we wanted to give you some starting ground to work from and improve on.

Exercise 6

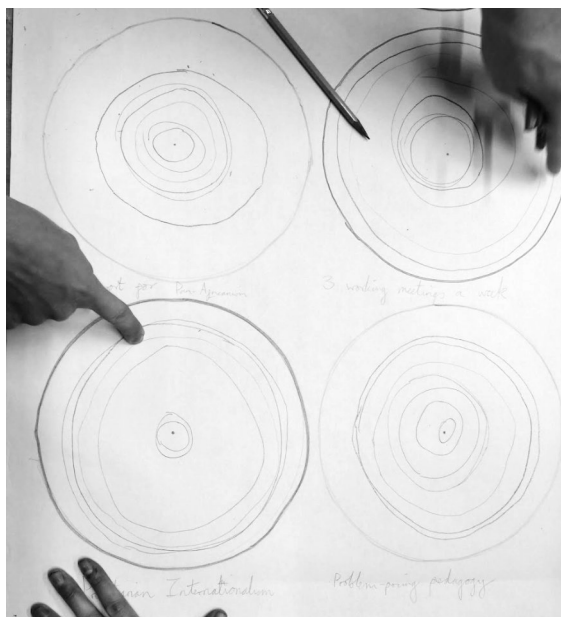
Principles of Activity and Organisation [30 minutes]

Explicit Principles:

As a group, for about 5 minutes make a list of the explicit principles of activity or organisation on which your group operates. These might be taken from constitutional or administrative documents, from the way you present yourself to other groups or to the masses, or from organisational habits that have become so consistent that they have set a kind of precedential rule.

For each principle, ask each person in the group to draw a circle next to it which represents how divergent the opinions in the group are of what this principle means or entails. For example, if the organisational principle is 'We take minutes at every meeting', a comrade might draw a small circle if they believe that everyone has a similar idea of what that means. But they might draw a large circle if they think that the idea of what constituted acceptable minutes is divergent. For example, if the concept is 'elephant' then everyone would draw a very small circle, as they understand that each member of the organisation has a similar idea of what an elephant is. But if the concept was 'proletarian internationalism', then perhaps one comrade draws a small circle because he thinks this was recently discussed and clarified in a meeting, but another comrade draws a very large circle around his small circle because he has noticed some very divergent ideas of what this means.

For example, in the bottom left circle above, two people thought that everyone in the organisation sort of agreed what proletarian internationalism was and entailed. Four people all agreed (with each other) that there were quite divergent ideas of what proletarian internationalism meant in the organisation.



Now ask the group: do we need to take further steps to make clear what any of these things mean to the group? Which of the circles worry you? Discuss for 5-10 minutes.

Implicit Principles:

As a group, make a list of the implicit principles of activity or organisation on which your group operates. These might be ways that members of the group usually act, or words/adjectives that are used regularly to describe the activity of the group.

Again, ask the group members to draw a circle next to these ideas indicating the breadth of understanding.

For each principle, discuss why they haven't been made into explicit principles.

5

Differences in Understanding

When we say that criticism should be based on shared understandings of the activity of the group, we also recognise that the group is not going to think the same way about everything. We expect that the group will have different views and understandings contained within it.

It is up to each organisation to determine the limits of disagreement within the group. CC(TE) takes a democratic centralist approach, which is to say, it monitors where lines need to be taken, and where activity needs to be agreed upon and makes those decisions democratically. Once the decision has been made, those who disagree with the decision have to abide by it. It is easy to understand the necessity for a shared line when it comes to questions like 'will we materially support this revolution' or 'will we hold our annual conference in September or April'. We see how there can be disagreement, even significant disagreement, in other areas without real problems arising - they will arise only when those areas become relevant to the political action of the group.

This all becomes more complicated in the realm of criticism, because criticism tends to be about the way in which an action is carried out and whether it aligns with the way that the group interprets the relationship between theory and practice. It can become rather subjective - even a seemingly scientific criticism like 'I think that your approach to mass

education involves too much introduction of theoretical concepts at an early stage in the process' is invoking a number of things that the other comrade may disagree with - they may believe that the concepts are not so theoretical, or that it is not too early a stage, or that they are invoking the concepts in a way that is easily understood. The key point here is not to get bogged down in analytic definitions, but to return to the shared aim of the two comrades, and allow a discussion between them about their understanding of how the activity relates to the strategy of the group.

We are aware that some groups operate with much broader disagreements. We are still working out how (if?) such groups can practise criticism and self-criticism. It appears to us that if the group disagrees on some very fundamental tenets of communist organising (for example, the destruction of individualism) then it will be hard for the group to undertake this practice. But at the same time, we want to find a way through this. We realise that someone who is new to a group is not going to have a high familiarity with the theory at play and should come to an understanding of the theory through the practice of criticism rather than being told to isolate themselves from the group and read a number of theoretical texts. For such a new person, it is vital that comrades are able to explain themselves in criticism, showing how they have worked towards a criticism from their understanding of the organisation's strategy, activity, and theoretical underpinnings.

Comrades should not ideally be coming at the criticism from their own personal political or moral philosophies that are not shared by the group, or if they do so they should at least be explicit about it - e.g. 'I believe that it's important never to interrupt anyone' rather than invoking some pretence at a universal principle 'Everyone knows that it's important never to interrupt anyone.'

When there are disagreements in the group, they should not be allowed to become 'factionalist'. A minor part of an organisation should be able to organise on the basis of a disagreement with the majority for the purpose of presenting their case during the making of a decision. But this should not create a situation where that sub-group becomes a permanent feature, with its own system of organisation over and above that of the central group. Criticism is an emergent factionalism in disguise when the same group of people raise the same criticisms over and over again, against the same people. If this situation is arising, then the group as a whole needs to confront the issue, and make a democratic decision on the sub-groups' position.

6

How to Criticise

Criticism is ordered, it is not a chaotic mud-slinging party. Criticism should take a particular form, it should never unfold randomly in a group chat. It should be done in a specific time, and place, and it should have a format and a clear drive towards resolution of the problem. It should not be an opportunity for people to talk round and round about their woes and complaints. If people feel confident that criticism will happen in an ordered, appropriate way, they will feel less like they have to bring criticism to the group in an ill-considered and fast way, using other channels.

This is why there is a certain level of patience that is necessary for criticism. Even when we have noticed a mistake and feel very strongly about it, we might have incomplete information about the conditions which led to the mistake on one hand, and an unsettled attitude in our personal dispositions on the other. It is not helpful to fire off our complaints as they arise in our head. This is dangerous in an era where organisations rely heavily on group chats for communication and immediate communication is possible at all times. On the other hand, we understand that sometimes conditions require that things be handled in a timely manner. If we let too much time pass and allow ourselves to settle down for too long, lose our alertness and forget details of events, the criticism will be similarly hobbled. Ultimately, the more

the organisation can develop a regular, formal manner of criticism, when criticism does occur incidentally in these less-than-ideal circumstances, we will be much more resilient to work through any bumps and bruises that arise.

We can't choose random and unrelated things to criticise one another for (i.e. the way we dress), they must be things related to our activity and principles. It might be helpful to bring along to criticism bits of your own organisation's principles or its constitution as touchstones for reflection. Touchstones play an important part in criticism because they provide a criteria for understanding why a comrade's mistake is damaging to the activity and operation of the organisation. The purpose of criticism should always be to reach a higher level of unity and a more advanced level of activity.

Exercise 7

Complaints Circle [15 minutes]

This is an exercise to explore what happens when criticism is delivered in an unstructured manner without listening to each other. It is an exercise that requires the group doing it to already have a lot of trust in each other, and it is probably not ideal when the group contains some 'old friends' and some newer members. But in a group that is comfortable doing it, it's a very funny exercise, and a soft way of getting the group to acknowledge between them 'what really matters'.

For 2 minutes, get everyone in the group to think of some real complaints they have about the organisation, ranging from the tiny to the pretty small. They should be things that most people are aware of as small problems.

Now ask people to talk at length, and over each other, about all their complaints, piling them on top of each other. Encourage them to use phrases like 'That's NOTHING compared to the problem we have with...' or 'If you think that's bad, wait til you hear what I have to say!' Do this for about 2-3 minutes.

Afterwards, ask people what the main feelings in the room were. Then make a list together of the conditions that need to be in place to listen and respond to each other's complaints. This should take 5-10 minutes. Has the group learned anything about criticism from this exercise?

Exercise 8

When to Deliver Criticism [15-30 minutes]

To figure out when to deliver criticism, it is useful to understand how the people in the group feel about things that happened in the past at different intervals from them. When is the best time to learn from your successes and mistakes? Is it the next day? The next week? The next month? It might be different for different people.

We propose you try this exercise which involves making a graph of the interplay between memory, emotions, discussion, ability to contextualise, ability to analyse. Allow each person in the organisation to chart the highs and lows of these separate things, using colours of pens which designate them. Then have a good look at what has been drawn, and decide what it means about the correct time for criticism.

Step 1: Draw a horizontal timeline (axis x). At the start of the line, write an event that the organisation engaged with - the event should be at least a month in the past. It could be a workshop, a protest, a strike, a meeting. Then draw little marks along the x axis. One representing 'Immediately Afterwards', one for 'The next day', one for 'One week later', and one mark for 'One month later', in that order.

Now, turn the timeline into a graph by drawing a vertical line (y axis) up from The Event. The y axis is a spectrum going from 'not at all' at the bottom to 'very much so' at the top.

Step 2: Now you're ready to use the graph. What this graph is for charting is how the different characteristics of memory inform our actions. There will be five characteristics, and each characteristic should be taken one by one and have its own pen colour by which it can be identified. The characteristics are as follows, and can be added to the bottom of the graph just like this [see following page for example]:

I remember the details of conversations that happened (Red)

I feel sharper emotions connected to the event (Yellow)

I can place the event in the context of some other relevant activities (Blue)

I have spoken with people (friends, family, or comrades) about the event (Green)

I feel like I have the ability to analyse the event (Purple)

If your meeting is online you could use a programme like Miro.

Step 3: Each participant will draw a line indicating the relative strength/weakness of a characteristic through time. So for example, every participant may take turns drawing Characteristic 1 with a red pen. Comrade A remembers the details of conversations very intensely but quickly forgets them, so her line will begin near the top of the graph and steeply drop. Comrade B remembers details of conversations less well after the event, but those details he does remember he can recall for a long time afterwards - his line may start lower down the graph but drop or remain steady much more gradually. The participants would then draw out Characteristic 2 with yellow. Each comrade should take about 3 minutes charting the 5 characteristics

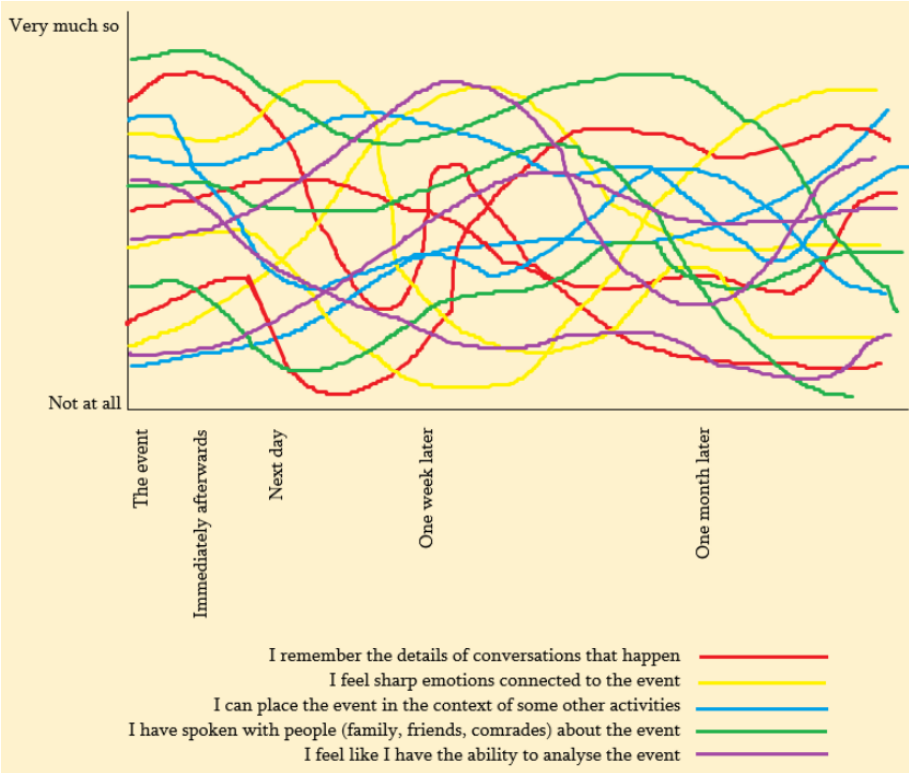
Step 4: As you can see from the example image below, the result might be quite chaotic. Allow yourselves a little time to enjoy and laugh together about your handiwork.

Step 5 [1 minute]: Each person picks a line they drew. Each person follows the line along the horizontal axis and stops at any point they like. If the group has particular times or characteristics they wish to investigate, they can agree to pick the same time and/or characteristic.

Step 6 [3 minutes]: Each person recalls themselves back to that time, focusing on the characteristic, and writes in a few sentences the kind of criticism they would have delivered. This does not need to be shared.

For example, if the point in the graph is 'one week later' and 'I feel sharp emotions connected to the event', the person would recall themselves to one week after the event, focusing on what their emotions were like, and write the kind of criticism they would have delivered. This is a 'sampling' stage to initiate reflection, do not worry about trying to capture everything.

Step 7 [5 minutes]: Now discuss as a group when you think is the right time to criticise the event, based on what you have drawn.



Exercise 9

Criticism Triangle [5 minutes]

In the Vietcong (an organisation that had a very highly developed concept of criticism) the unit of organisation was the trio. Your group are going to consider together: What is a good role for the third person in criticism? I.e. the person who is neither the criticiser or the criticised.

Step 1: Arrange a trio of comrades into a triangle. Call one comrade 'A', one 'B' and the third is 'C.'

Step 2 [2 minutes]: Looking at a recent report, or a recent activity that A and B were involved in, Comrade A should offer criticism to Comrade B. They should say some things that they think were good and some things that they think could be improved on. Comrade B should listen, and respond if they want any clarification, after they have listened and thought about it.

Step 3 [2 minutes]: Comrades A and B should then turn to Comrade C and ask how it felt to be the third one. Did Comrade C feel compelled to intervene at any point? When would be an appropriate time for such a thing? Did Comrade C learn anything from the interaction, either that they make the same or different mistakes as Comrade B, that they could be criticised more or less in the manner of Comrade A, or that they should receive criticism more or less in the manner of Comrade C?

Now see if you can figure out why the unit of operation for the Vietcong was three.

7

Delivering Criticism

We must remember that organisational criticism takes place within the context of an already existing community of people and their activity, and the quality of those relationships as they stand at the time of criticism matters greatly to the way in which it all shakes out. Measures have to be taken so that everyone involved in critique is as confident as possible in their comrades' intentions and attitude toward the organisation. All comrades must genuinely believe that they belong to the organisation and that the others also do - it will be incredibly difficult to pull off in a group that is already suspicious of their standing with others. The suspicion with which a criticised comrade views criticism can be reduced to a minimum if things are already in place to remind them of their worth, capabilities and potential for change. The criticising comrades must demonstrate objectively their commitment to participating in the rectification of the errors by becoming unified with the criticised comrade in their process of transformation and correction.

Criticism is a difficult thing to do. It's an advanced activity. It is something that everyone involved in a revolutionary movement should learn. Its mode depends on the character of both the person delivering the criticism and the person receiving it as well as the overall culture of the organisation. The aim should be to avoid demoralising the person receiving it - that is to say it doesn't take away their morale, it doesn't deflate them as far as possible (achieving this is in the hands of both the critic and the person receiving criticism). Have a look at the Chris Searle

excerpts in the reader, and see whether you can distinguish between demoralising criticism and criticism that improves morale. Who is responsible for making it so? At the same time, we try to be wary of becoming overly careful with our comrades' egos - it's clear that if we become excessively timid in an attempt to avoid demoralisation, then our criticism will never hit the mark, and we will always deliver criticism which falls just slightly short of the truth. Criticism should mould confident comrades. Confidence means both resilience when faced with our shortcomings and humility about our own achievements and talents.

Exercise 10

No Demoralisation, No Ego-protection [15 minutes]

This exercise is designed to help us think about how to deliver criticism in a way that doesn't demoralise the person receiving the criticism, but also doesn't pander to protecting their ego.

Step 1: Split the group into pairs.

Step 2 [1 minute]: Each pair should identify a fictional character that they both know. This could be someone from a TV show, a cartoon character, someone from a book, and so on. Write the character's name down.

Step 3 [5 minutes]: The pair should first think about in what ways this character might become demoralised for any reason, and write a list. Then the pair should consider in what ways that character might have an ego and write a list. For example, Super Mario might become demoralised if you said he jumps around and yelps too much, and is always goofing off and furthermore, he has a really small vocabulary. On the other hand, one of the ways his ego might be constructed is from being widely notorious for being Luigi's more capable brother.

Step 4 [5 minutes]: The pair should then write a criticism to the character imagining that they have consistently failed to carry out tasks that they said they would do. The criticism should be framed in a manner that both avoids demoralisation but also avoids ego-protection as far as possible. They should distil the criticism into two or three sentences, and then share it with the group, without sharing their reasoning process. The rest of the group then comments (preferably in writing such as in the meeting chat or using small sticky notes) on good or bad things about the mode of delivery of the criticism. Did the pair manage to walk the tightrope between demoralisation and ego-protection?



A communard in Venezuela holds a pamphlet of Hugo Chavez's televised criticism and self-criticism of the Bolivarian revolution known as the Golpe de Timón.

Artful Delivery

Criticism is an art and a science. As we've written more about below, we need to be clear and precise with our comrades in order to avoid indecipherable generalisations or hollow compliments and platitudes. And we must love one another and criticise from a place of collective improvement; this requires emotion and having a steady hand when it comes to the words you use, your manner and your tone. We can not be sharp and direct without being sensitive and alert to our own behaviour and that of our comrades. When new to it, people will be clumsy in delivering criticism, and they need to practise it to discover their artfulness at doing it.

Exercise 11

Irredeemable Mistake [5-10 minutes]

Step 1: Each comrade should be assigned one other person, in a carousel.

Step 2 [1 minute]: Now they must describe (by talking) one of their favourite things that comrade ever did. But the critic should use a tone and use physical mannerisms that reflect how they would be acting if the thing they are describing was an irredeemable mistake rather than a very good memory. They can do so in just a few sentences.

For example, 'Sandy once made me a cake in the shape of a giraffe, [turns and glares], and ...

Step 3: After everyone has gone, discuss what elements of tone, language and manner used in the group were most effective in making the mistake seem irredeemable.

Exercise 12

Wanting To Be Liked, and Fear of Ostracisation [10 minutes]

As a group, make a list for about 5 minutes of the reasons for liking someone that you think are 'surface-level'. Then make a list of the reasons for liking someone that you think are more meaningful. Discuss what the difference between these two lists are.

For 2 minutes, write privately about a situation where you pushed someone out of a group, consciously or subconsciously. Don't share this with your group. Now share with your group about how you feel about this now (you can anonymise the person), using the following form:

Did you still dislike the person?

Did you do anything you are ashamed of?

Have you forgiven the person? Have they forgiven you?

Leave these as yes/no answers or with very short bits of expansion. Destroy your private writing. Listen to what everyone else in the group says. Over the next few days, people should commit to some private reflection on their considerations, especially whether you fear the other people in the group disliking you or pushing you away.

Exercise 13

Your Experience of Criticism as a Child

[this can be done alone, or writing privately in a group]

Write privately about a time you were criticised as a child but you didn't really understand why or what you had done wrong.

Do you understand now? What were the reasons it was unclear?

Can you deduce from this any principles of how to have clarity when you are delivering criticism?

Exercise 14

Criticism Poetry

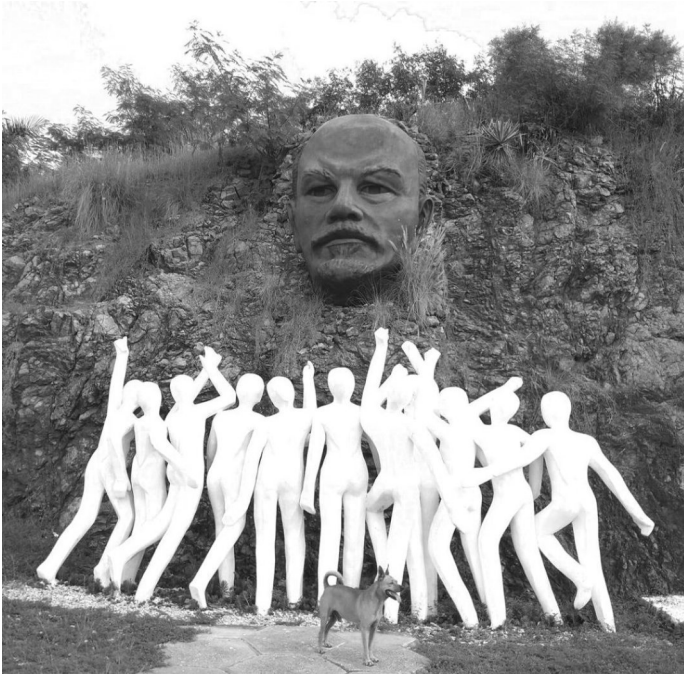
Each person in the group should paste into the chat one of their favourite poems (or an excerpt from it if it is long). It is good if not all the poems are political poems.

Now in a carousel system, each person should write criticism of the person to their left, but they are only allowed to use words and phrases from all the poems. Then, they should pass the criticism to the person to their right, whose job is to make it more poetic by any means. Then the completed poem should be read aloud to the person who was being criticised. You can also easily do this in a group online, you will just need to have a good idea of who is passing to who. Each turn should last no more than a minute.

After you have finished, ask people:

How did it feel to be writing the criticism?

What did you notice from the necessity to interpret the criticism you received?



A public art installation in Cuba

Fear of being too negative

A pernicious feature of individualism is fear of being too negative. This comes from the implicit or explicit sense that when we criticise, it is total and final (when in fact, criticism is something constantly in process; it is never a finished product). The weight of handing down such a severe judgment on our comrades can hobble our willingness to give criticism when it is necessary. We know that there is a good impulse buried in there: respect and love for our comrades. But when we start to think in this way, we mischaracterise organisational issues for personal ones, assign these to the comrades in question and feel nervous to tarnish their sense of self. This is made all the more complex when that timidity originates in a fear-for-self: worry that a similar kind of criticism might be levelled at our own errors. These tendencies will cause us to soften our criticism in ways that make it too general and even shallow or dishonest. We should combat this tendency. This is not easy to do and we have not yet developed a clear way to do it, however you can try something like this:

Exercise 15

Write Like Lenin [15-20 minutes]

It's normal to feel timid in criticism - we want to take care of our comrades and we are worried about being disliked. The problem is, when you criticise timidly, your meaning is not clear. Timid criticism can also come across more aggressively than clear criticism. Timid criticism can take longer and doesn't always have a clear end-point or a sense of resolution. We all have some timidity and we should all learn to overcome it how we can.

Step 1 [3 minutes]: In the form of discussion, ask the group to say the names of some topics that they're quite confident in speaking about now but were not in the past. Not everyone has to say, just see if a few people have examples. When someone says, then ask them to say how they came to clarity and confidence on that thing.

Step 2 [2 minutes]: Now give everyone a sheet of paper, and ask them to think of and write about a criticism that they know that another comrade has but is timid about presenting to the group. Tell them not to share this with the group, and then to destroy it afterwards.

Step 3 [5 minutes]: Hand out this excerpt from Lenin, and take it in turns by paragraph to stand up and walk around the room reading it aloud, as if you are Lenin at the drafting phase. Read emphatically.

"The refusal of Martov and Popov to stand for election immediately introduced an atmosphere of squabbling into a Party struggle between Party shades. On the very next day after the Congress, Comrade Glebov, thinking it incredible that the unelected editors could seriously have decided to swing towards Akimov and Martynov, and attributing the whole thing primarily to irritation, suggested to Plekhanov and me that the matter should be ended peaceably and that all four should be "co-opted" on condition that proper representation of the editorial board on the Council was guaranteed (i.e., that of the two representatives, one was definitely drawn from the Party majority). This condition seemed sound to Plekhanov and me, for its acceptance would imply a tacit admission of the mistake at the Congress, a desire for peace instead of war, a desire to

be closer to Plekhanov and me than to Akimov and Martynov, Egorov and Makhov. The concession as regards “co-optation” thus became a personal one, and it was not worthwhile refusing to make a personal concession which should clear away the irritation and restore peace. Plekhanov and I therefore consented. But the editorial majority rejected the condition. Glebov left. We began to wait and see what would happen next: whether Martov would adhere to the loyal stand he had taken up at the Congress (against Comrade Popov, the representative of the Centre), or whether the unstable elements who inclined towards a split, and in whose wake he had followed, would gain the upper hand.

We were faced with the question: would Comrade Martov choose to regard his Congress “coalition” as an isolated political fact (just as, *si licet parva componere magnis*,^[1] Bebel’s coalition with Vollmar in 1895 was an isolated case), or would he want to consolidate this coalition, exert himself to prove that it was Plekhanov and I who were mistaken at the Congress, and become the actual leader of the opportunist wing of our Party? This question might be formulated otherwise as follows: a squabble or a political Party struggle? Of the three of us who on the day after the Congress were the sole available members of the central institutions, Glebov inclined most to the former answer and made the most efforts to reconcile the children who had fallen out. Comrade Plekhanov inclined most to the latter answer and was, as the saying goes, neither to hold nor to bind. I on this occasion acted the part of “Centre”, or “Marsh”, and endeavoured to employ persuasion. To try at this date to recall the spoken attempts at persuasion would be a hopelessly muddled business, and I shall not follow the bad example of Comrade Martov and Comrade Plekhanov. But I do consider it necessary to reproduce certain passages from one written attempt at persuasion which I addressed to one of the “minority” Iskra-ists:

“ . . . The refusal of Martov to serve on the editorial board, his refusal and that of other Party writers to collaborate, the refusal of a number of persons to work on the Central Committee, and the propaganda of a boycott or passive resistance are bound to lead, even if against the wishes of Martov and his friends, to a split in the Party. Even if Martov adheres to a loyal stand (which he took up so resolutely at the Congress), others will not, and the outcome I have mentioned will be inevitable....

Step 4 [2 minutes]: Take a pre-cut slip of paper and write out your comrade’s criticism in the style of Lenin. Try to make it as short and clear as possible.

Step 5 [3 minutes]: Talk about what you learned about assertiveness and timidity through doing this exercise, without mentioning the criticism or the comrade in question.

Step 6: Together, destroy everything you have written.

Exercise 16

Sugary Criticism and Bitter Criticism, A Culinary Exercise

Step 1 [3 minutes]: Write about a small mistake the comrade across from you has made in the group. This criticism will be delivered to them. Write it the way that you would say it to the comrade, addressing them directly. Then copy this statement.

Step 2: The comrade to your left is going to write an intensely sugar-coated version of what you just wrote. The comrade to your right is going to write a harsher and more direct version. Everyone in the room should receive something to sugar coat from the right and something to harshen from the left, keep track of which one you are responsible for sugar coating and which you are responsible for making harsher. Take about 2 minutes on each turn.

Now the three versions should be delivered to the comrade being criticised. That comrade should provide an assessment of which elements of each are useful.

Being Particular

Here are some vague compliments:

Comrade Y works very hard

Comrade D is always friendly

Comrade A is nice

Comrade M is creative

Just as with criticisms, compliments are pretty useless when they are general and vague. You should be helpful and sincere by articulating the concrete details of what you're referring to. If you do this, you're likely to discover the negative aspects among the positive, the positive aspects among the negative, or the aspects which could be improved and made even better in the future. For example, if you want to tell a comrade that they worked very hard during a day of pamphleteering, you should describe where you saw them working hard and what they did. Recall the details. While doing this, of course your comrade will feel the sincerity and be encouraged by having done well in a way that has been recognised by the organisation, but together you can also locate the pieces of this memory where a good job could have been done even better, where other comrades could have emulated better, or where a different approach might be needed in other situations.

Criticism For Deeds, Not People

Most people will be familiar with the idea that you should criticise actions rather than people. Consider the following examples:

‘When you spoke to Dylan after his mistake got the comrade arrested you were shouting a bit and he was frightened - I don't think his becoming scared was useful, and it will not give him a constructive attitude to mistakes or to criticism.’

‘You have anger problems and you need to deal with them - having an angry person in the organisation is unhelpful’.

We all can recognise that the second criticism here is not expressed in a helpful way. The person receiving this criticism is being cast into a mist, asked to tackle some great personality flaw, and will likely feel condemned and helpless.

But let’s think about this a bit more. We should not bury our heads in the sand - we know why we have a tendency to express criticism in the second way rather than the first. It is because when someone acts, they do not select from a large menu of possible actions available to them that is the same for every person. We know that we have tendencies to act in certain ways, based on our past experiences and the way that we learned to act. We know that the comrade in the example is probably repeatedly angry in circumstances that don’t warrant it (unless the situation with Dylan was an exception because they had become unusually upset or overwhelmed).

So how do we avoid a situation where we are pretending to criticise the action but in fact notice a wider tendency in the comrade that we are not acknowledging?

There are a few answers to this.

- The comrade is not stupid. When you criticise their particular actions, and their actions were in character, they will probably realise that they are acting as part of a general tendency they have.
- The comrade needs to start somewhere. It is much more useful to analyse a particular situation than to generalise across a range of situations. Otherwise, the criticised comrade will probably feel the behaviour being addressed has occurred at different times in wildly different contexts and that the criticiser is leaping to conclusions.
- The joint understanding of a wider tendency should be built up through a series of criticisms. Once several criticisms have been made, you can say to the comrade ‘looking back through our past conversations, I notice three events which seem to bear similarities. We have tried to find ways to assist you with these things as an organisation, but I think we are not succeeding in doing it, because the mistake is being repeated - it seems like it is a really hard thing to alter. Do you also notice the similarities between these mistakes, and what can we do

about it?’

- Remember that the aim is the struggle for communism, not the correction of each others’ flaws. We need to struggle knowing that we are all flawed, and have big things we need to change. Even if those flaws are causing big problems, and need to be fixed or mitigated, nobody is going to be able to proceed at all if they cannot first laugh at themselves and each other, and remind each other of the ultimate basis in supporting each other to struggle.

Exercise 17

Noticing Things and Not Saying [10 minutes]

If you notice something a comrade is doing, and you understand it to be an error of some kind, should you ever not say? This exercise is designed to help us think about that.

Step 1 [2 minutes]: Write on paper or in the chat about an example you are happy to share where you have avoided criticism of a comrade. In hindsight, should you have said something? Then share what you have written with everyone (by pressing enter, or allowing everyone to read).

Step 2 [3 minutes]: Think of all the possible reasons why you might have a criticism but not say, such as 'the comrade was under a lot of stress' or 'I was under a lot of stress' or 'I didn't know how to articulate it' or 'the problem seemed minor'. Everyone in the organisation should write or type in the box and press enter after each example. Keep going until you feel like you have covered all the bases. Don't analyse whether you would be correct or not not to say. Some of the reasons will be ones that everyone recognises as 'bad reasons' but it's good for them to be openly acknowledged in the organisation.

Step 3: [3 minutes]: What outcomes would tell you that your decision not to say anything had been a good decision and what outcomes would show you it had been a bad decision? Have a brief discussion about this.

Exercise 18

Indulgent Criticism [6 minutes]

Imagine that your friend has asked you to read over their job application or some other piece of writing. You read it over, and it looks fine, but you feel that they will appreciate it if you make a couple of corrections. So you change a word to make it sound a bit more formal, and you split one sentence into two to make it slightly punchier.

Now imagine you are doing the same thing in criticism. You have been asked to criticise the group or an individual in the group, and so you take the same approach. You find something clever to criticise, to prove your ability to find problems and errors and speak about it.

Step 1 [2 minutes]: Individually, write about what you would criticise in your organisation if you were treating criticism in this way - not as an attempt to find greater unity and make your organisation ready for revolution, but as a pernickity combing through of every possible fault in the attempt to make a perfect organisation and perfect comrades.

Step 2 [4 minutes]: Now as a group, discuss principles for what to criticise and how to find things to criticise based on the negation of what you have written. Do not share what you have written with the others, and indeed ceremoniously destroy these pieces of paper before you end the exercise.

Exercise 19

How Do You Feel About the Other People in Your Organisation? [10-15 minutes]

You can do this exercise alone, or you can do it by everyone writing privately in a group and not sharing what they write.

Scenario 1: Think of a comrade who you have recently felt frustrated with..

Scenario 2: Think of a comrade who you've recently felt a lot of affection for...

For each comrade, write:

- Something you are at the moment likely to over-correct in this comrade, ie something that you might criticise them for that is a bit too fussy or detailed, or that you are likely to be over-confident about.
- Something you are at the moment likely to feel nervous about criticising in this comrade.
- Something you are at the moment likely to perceive accurately and clearly in this comrade, ie something that you will be good at delivering criticism on.
- How you think your capacity to criticise this comrade will develop over time.



14th December, 1994. Hugo Chavez's first visit to Cuba shortly after his release from prison in Venezuela.

Sometimes our feelings help us to understand what needs to be done in an organisation, and what needs to change. Other times, our feelings can be a poor guide. For example:

- When a desire for revenge stemming from an earlier criticism motivates subsequent criticism.
- When positive or negative feelings about a person motivate our analysis of their activity.
- When we tend to choose to work closely only with people we get on well with.
- When we become unreasonably defensive of others, particularly our friends.

Confrontation and Generalisation

There is a popular liberal concept of friendship that is premised on 'unconditional support and affirmation' that makes conflict an impermissible component of friendship. During criticism, this materialises in a tendency to remain general in our words and descriptions of activity and behaviour, for fear of naming directly a comrade, their behaviour and the organisational consequences.

Generalities cannot be understood properly - they require people to cast around looking for a particular to pin the generality on to. Without this understanding, there is no way for us to change the way we act because we have no criteria. Criteria can only be found in understanding the particular details of a thing. If you want to stop your egg from always sticking to the bottom of the pan it's not enough to conclude 'this pan is shit!' Your pan might certainly be crap, but you might also learn that there's too much heat or not enough oil. This combination of details is why the egg might be sticking to the pan. Identifying these details is necessary for changing the way things might happen going forward.

We would never believe ourselves to be 'nervous' about addressing the problem of the sticky pan, we would consider knowing these details as a necessary part of the process: the process of keeping a friendly relationship between the egg and the pan. The same is true for considering the details of the relations between comrades within one and the same organisation. We must therefore combat this skittishness.

8

Criticism and Assistance

Love of our comrades is the blood of criticism. This means that criticism falls short if the person giving it fails to learn the manner of correction with the person receiving it. The criticiser must participate in the correction of any practice of the criticised. This principle of ours has been won through the practical experience of learning how to implement criticism in our own organisation. It has become the point of departure for our recent habits of criticism because we recognised that these woo-woo sounding ideas of struggling-against-ourselves require not just commitment but actual participation in the practical and day-to-day transformation of our comrades and ourselves. This process, shared between two or more comrades, becomes a spiral of self-transformation and transformation by-and-for another. Stepping back to appraise this as a unity from the point of view of the whole organisation, it is apparent as an objective process by which the collective itself learns from its errors and corrects them.

What is assistance? It is very easy to say: “mistakes are the responsibility of the group, not the individual.” But it’s not so easy or common to actually put this into practice. Assistance is when the criticiser helps the criticised correct something. When the criticiser recognises something incorrect in another comrade, or in the organisation, they assume part of the responsibility for it. So the error becomes collective instead of individual not only in word, but in deed. The aim is that eventually the

criticised come to feel that criticism carries this collectivity in an objective way, so that the reflex to become defensive or sad or angry at receiving criticism fades away as they experience their comrades participating in the rectification process on an equal footing with them.

How might this be practised?

They may arrange time with the comrade to tackle the problem.

They may recommend reading and study, and then follow the course of study with the other person.

A comrade may propel another comrade into situations that they know they avoid out of discomfort or fear, or set up situations where they know that the comrade will have an opportunity to correct the mistake. This should be done carefully with attention given to context, for example it should not be tested in a high-stakes scenario or in a situation where that comrade might be particularly uncomfortable. It also requires a great deal of mutual trust built over time or circumstances. You should know the comrade well enough that they will appreciate the push. It's helpful for comrades to have these kinds of conversations with each other before the situation arises so that they can support each other ably.

For example, Comrade R noticed that Comrade T tends to avoid learning languages, due to finding it excessively difficult. Comrade R could simply make an ideological argument as to why Comrade T needs to overcome this problem. But in many cases, the ideological argument will be insufficient, and instead Comrade T needs to be materially assisted to learn the language, to practise regularly, to be held accountable.

It is important that no single individual in the organisation is too often in this role of assisting others, or that they omit themselves from this process of being aided by their comrades to correct their own mistakes.

Exercise 20

Changing Is A Family Affair [15 minutes]

Hand out a sheet of paper with the following prompts printed on it with space for writing. Allow 3-5 minutes for responding to each one. Important note: the questions below should be considered with regard to people who are not in your organisation. They could be former members, or members of previous organisations. The point of this exercise is not to deal directly with a particular comrade's shortcomings, it's to consider the organisation's habits of criticism and its responsibility toward assisting its members in general.

Step 1: Think of a time when you have lost faith in a comrade's ability to resolve an error. What made you believe that the problem was irresolvable?

Step 2: What kind of assistance did you or the organisation give to this comrade that was intended to address the problem?

Step 3: What might the organisation have done differently to collectively address the problem? List as many practical examples as you can.

9

Drawing Lessons

One of the biggest problems we face in our organisation is drawing lessons from criticism and constantly implementing them. On the face of it, there is huge potential for learning from criticism. This is because, when Comrade A criticises Comrade B, every comrade in the organisation can draw lessons from the criticism. When Comrade A self-criticises, every comrade in the organisation can draw lessons from the criticism. There are almost no points of criticism that do not apply to most individuals in an organisation, in one way or another.

The trickier thing is how to draw lessons from criticism. First of all, we must recognise that it's very difficult to change, and that cadres in an organisation are likely stretched very thin. For example, in CC(TE) we have experience of comrades repeatedly self-critiquing for a poor attitude to study. The lessons deriving from it are things like 'make a study plan' (one of the comrades in our organisation has a meticulous study plan, and as a result is one of the most knowledgeable, despite being one of the youngest). Perhaps there have been some changes made as a result of this lesson, but overwhelmingly, members have found it very difficult to wholly reform their approach to study. Far more impactful has been the collectivisation of this activity - the establishment of study sessions, or the requirement of necessary study in order to complete organisational activities. So we recommend that when you draw collective lessons from criticism and self-criticism, you

should attempt to implement them collectively rather than making it a requirement on every individual. This will not always be possible, but where it is you should do it.



Alfabetização by Agostinho Mutemba (1980)

Exercise 21

Lessons [10 minutes]

Step 1 [2 minutes]: Each person should write on a 'lesson we learned from our mistakes this year'. It could be big or small. Put all the 'lessons' together.

Step 2 [5 minutes]: Now, together, mark up the lessons according to the criteria:

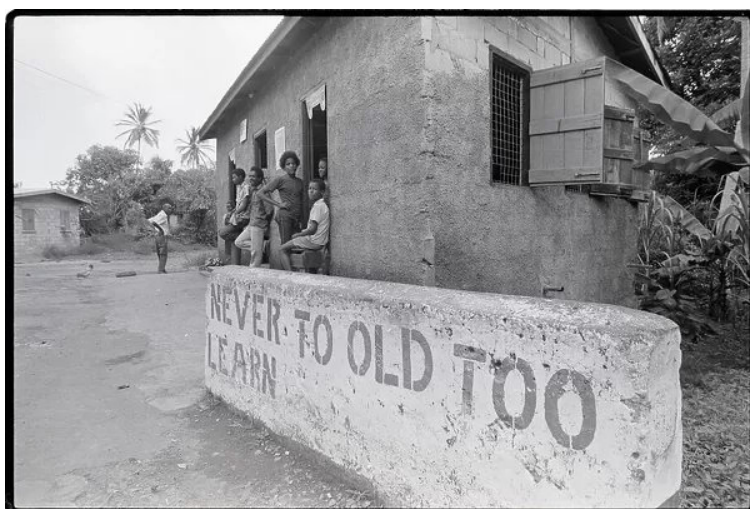
We should make sure that new members know about this lesson

We should remind ourselves of this lesson so we don't forget

We should tell other communists about this lesson as it might help them

We should make this lesson public so that people can see that we respond to our mistakes.

Discuss why you have marked them up in this way.



Grenada.

Punishment and Forgiveness

It is almost a truism on the Left to say ‘we don’t agree with punishment; ‘we believe in forgiveness’, ‘the capitalist state should not incarcerate people’, and so on. But we all know that these things in theory are one hundred million times simpler than they are in practice. We know that not only will our words and actions sometimes carry a punitive force as we respond to our feelings of being hurt or harmed, but that sometimes they will have a punitive effect regardless of how little punishment is contained within the words, because we go about our lives expecting punishment. While it’s important for organisations to avoid punishment, be wary of where it might creep in. Comrades should do regular self-criticism about where they believe they might be punishing others. Comrades should learn to forgive others for punishing them and forgive themselves for punishing others.

Denying that people can change

We must not attribute poor habits or attitudes to qualities that are fixed or inherent to the person. One of the foundational preconditions for criticism is to believe that people are always changing. We all know stubborn or even (gasp!) dogmatic comrades. But even they change. If we deny that people can change then we’ve ruled out the entire meaning

and purpose of criticism right from the beginning.

Sometimes, headstrong comrades are not as unchanging as they appear but rather we have not properly investigated all of the different ways that they have changed that might be lying beneath the surface.

Considering the example of learning and study, we all know comrades who are underdeveloped and have difficulty making a habit of studying in order to learn new things, and therefore make more mistakes than usual. We need to remember we all make mistakes and no one will ever transcend the necessity of learning. We were once underdeveloped, too, and in the eyes of many others we are underdeveloped still.

“Forgiveness is a process in which, we have come to believe, there is room for us to experience all the contradictions: ‘I don’t hate and yet I do hate’. These are real, daily feelings in all of us. Those who forgive invest all their feelings, including the contradictions, in the future. This means the forgiveness does not negate, but rather includes, all of what we have experienced, which is why re-remembering is so important. We cannot forgive if we attempt to block out or erase hostile feelings. We cannot be forgiven if we do not see that we are in wrong-relation to persons whom we are, thereby, injuring. The willingness to forgive or be forgiven is rooted in genuine humility. None of us, and none of the people to whom we believe ourselves responsible, lives without feeling hatred and hostility toward someone at sometime, maybe toward many people much of the time.”

The Amanecida Collective

Exercise 22

Court Of Self-Forgiveness [10 minutes per person]

Step 1 [2 minutes]: Everyone gets in a group, and they are called the jury. Everyone in the jury writes about “feeling guilty” about something they did and then puts the writing in a bowl. People might feel more or less comfortable sharing these things. If they prefer, they can just write about the feeling of guilt in a way that is as specific as possible without revealing the character of the action they feel guilty about.

Step 2 [2 minutes]: Taking turns, someone gets up from the jury and takes the stand, where they draw a guilty feeling (not their own) out of the bowl and read it to themselves and then has to make a statement to the jury about the feeling. They should internalise it as their own feeling and present it honestly as guilt that they feel. They can ‘editorialise’ if they want to.

Step 3 [3 minutes]: The jury should then talk together about how the person can forgive themselves for the mistake. The person on the stand should not make it easy for them - they should push back if they feel that what the jury is saying is inadequate and they still can’t forgive themselves, they shouldn’t just nod and agree and say ‘thanks’.

Note: The jury should also discuss whether they agree, the same way a jury would. There should not be one person on the jury who is explaining how the person should forgive themselves and the others just sitting back silently. If someone in the jury disagrees then they should argue among themselves and come to a conclusion together, or conclude that they don’t agree.

Step 4 [2 minutes]: When the jury decides that they have done everything they can, they should ask the person on the stand ‘Do you feel prepared now to consider the ways you can forgive yourself for this,’ and the person on the stand should answer honestly, with as much nuance as they like. Then the jury should dismiss the person on the stand and thank them for talking with them about it, and the person

should thank the jury.

Exercise 23

Forgiving Others [15 minutes]

Step 1 [2 minutes]: On slips of paper, describe a mistake you've made in a sentence or two. The mistakes will be anonymous - depending on the size of the group people may or may not realise it's your mistake. Think about a mistake where you didn't act like the person you'd like to be. This should not be a mistake of political strategy, rather one about personal fallibility.

Note: Do not include any of the consequences of this mistake, and do not include any reasons why you think you might have made the mistake. For example:

I kept working at an institution and told myself it was good political work when I knew it wasn't.

I get frustrated at the students I'm teaching when they don't critique in the way I want them to.

I needed to criticise the comrades and I'm afraid of confrontation.

Step 2 [1 minute]: Put all the mistakes in a bowl and draw out one that is not your own. Now come to think about it as your mistake, using your imagination, or memory, or anything that helps. Make the mistake in the bowl a mistake that is your own. This is now your mistake. You probably have made a mistake of this nature, or something like it, at some point - so it should be relatable - see if you can get beyond that to really feel that it is yours. Ask yourself when you have made a mistake like this.

Step 3 [1 minute]: Now, reflect on your mistake, why it was a mistake, and what you might do differently. Think through these following prompts to help you:

Think about the context of the mistake.

Why did you make the mistake?

What happened because of the mistake?

What didn't happen because of the mistake?

How did you feel when you realised the mistake?

How did others feel about the mistake?

What did you learn from the mistake?

Step 4 [1 minute]: Now combine in groups of three or more. Stand in a circle. In one sentence each, share your mistake, (being sure to share it as realistically as possible as your own.)

Step 5 [3 minutes]: After this, together think about all the mistakes your group has made. Focus on the person to your left, think for a moment about whether anyone in your political life has ever made a mistake like this? How did you treat them? Did you forgive them? Tell the person on your left about it and go round the circle.

Step 6 [5 minutes]: Now, we're going to play a game called *Describe It Again* to explore the words we use when we forgive one another.

One person starts, Person A. Turn again to the person to your left, remembering the mistake they just told you about and say what you would say to forgive them. Then, the person to the right of Person A, will forgive Person A for Person A's mistake again using the words and tone they think is appropriate to forgive that person. Carry on this way around the circle until everyone has been forgiven.

While this goes on, someone should keep a list of words that were used commonly in the forgiveness. Put them in the centre of the circle. These are now 'banned words'. This is to help us clear away words we tend to rely on, which may have become cliches, tropes and have lost meaning. Describe It Again helps us make new meanings.

So now, go around the circle in the same manner practising your forgiving but this time you cannot use the words on the list. If there is time, do a third round, with another set of banned words.

11

Self-criticism

Self-criticism is an interesting beast. We are listing here some of the things that we might turn to when we look for self-criticism (we are listing these without judgement, we think these are normal, not necessarily good or bad).

- Things that you are disappointed in yourself about
- Things that other people have criticised you for
- Recurring errors or mistakes that you see yourself do again and again
- Something you feel guilty about
- Things that felt bad
- Things you have been avoiding
- Things that you did in a rushed or uncareful way

These sorts of thoughts are normal, and some of them will guide you towards good self-criticism. But self-criticism requires you to stand back a little from yourself and understand your actions from the point of view of the organisation and the revolution. The point of view of self-

criticism should be: In what ways could you support the organisation or the revolution more effectively?

Exercise 24

Identifying the Most Important Self-Crit [20 minutes]

Step 1 [1 minute]: Get in a group of three, a criticism triangle. Give everyone a different colour marker or pencil.

Step 2 [5 minutes]: Everyone should write responses to the following prompts - they will share their responses with each other.

What are recurring errors or mistakes you see yourself do again and again

What is something you feel guilty about?

What are things you have been avoiding?

What are things you did in a rushed or uncareful way?

Step 3 [2 minutes]: Now everyone should give their responses to the comrade to their left and ask them to underline the ones that they think are the most important.

Step 4 [2 minutes]: Rotate the papers again and repeat (if already underlined the comrade should add another line).

Step 5 [2 minutes]: Rotate again so that everyone receives their paper back. Now everyone should think about which ones of their own they think are the most important? Underline them.

Step 6 [3 minutes]: Ask these questions to everyone now: What are you going to do about the ones that weren't underlined? Are any of them completely irrelevant or completely overblown? Does the importance of each match your emotions about each thing? If not, what will you do about it?

Step 7 [3 minutes]: Now ask these questions: Which ones received the

most highlighting? Have you felt guilty about them? Do you have a strategy to address these self-criticisms?

We want to respond to criticism with clear self-criticism wherever possible. But old habits die hard sometimes and it might be instinctive for us, for example, to make excuses for ourselves in self-criticism, to not notice or refuse to make an honest effort to look for and identify our own shortcomings or to respond how we believe we are expected to respond, rather than with a genuine critical thought that expresses a real self-critique.

When sending this workbook around for review, it was pointed out to us that the self-criticism section was mysteriously short. This point is well-taken and we've added a few comments since then. But we also want to point out here that the topic of self-criticism appears throughout this workbook in many of the sections under different headings. For example, Exercise 2 relies on self-criticism, Exercise 8 would also likely generate self-criticism. In the section called *Ways Of Doing Criticism*, we talk about it as well. You will find more examples. The very distinction between criticism and self-criticism is a bit of a funny one, but it could be said that good criticism would contain self-criticism by definition. But this doesn't eliminate the need for most communists to focus on and train in self-criticism distinctly.

Self-criticism implies self-transformation. Self-transformation is not to be understood as something that is personal. We do not change ourselves under any circumstances outside and apart from society. In revolutionary groups, we hope that when we say 'self-transformation' it is understood that we are not talking about personal growth in the sense that is ubiquitous in our culture (we write this from the imperialist countries). Paulo Friere talks often about self-transformation as it relates to the process of learning. It is easy for people to read him with a liberal interpretation of these concepts, where learning is in the service of empowering the individual as an autonomous unit. But for people doing revolutionary work, self-transformation has more to do with improving our abilities to confront the contradictions between ourselves as individuals and the collective that will necessarily arise as social individuals acquire experience and knowledge at differing rates and with different breadth and depth. Criticism and pedagogy are fused in the dialectically related process that dissolves the separation of social life and the individual.

The person receiving criticism must understand this as fully as possible. They must find a way to understand their self-transformation as a relationship between the organisation and themselves. This involves subjugating themselves more and more to organisational life, which is

only possible or reasonable if you think that your organisation's cause is the cause of humanity. We emphasise this, because without this, self-transformation is very difficult. Let us think about some of the barriers to 'self-transformation' understood through the liberal individualist lens:

- "I have habits that are hard to break, because they have become a standard part of my life."
- "The transformation required of me involves giving something up for some future goal that always feels outweighed by my immediate needs."
- "It would be easier to change if there were social pressure to change but there is not."
- "There is social pressure to change but I have found good ways to avoid it."

Liberal and capitalist society has self help books that try and help you jump over these hurdles. Lots of little tricks. Some people become followers of this. But most people run into the realisation that there is simply an extremely limited capacity for change under the individualist model.

For most people, real change in themselves occurs when they become committed to real change out there. When we commit to regular criticism within the organisation, we are able to become more familiar with the kind of self-transformation required of us to struggle according to communist principles.



Exercise 25

Changing Ourselves [5 minutes]

You can do this exercise alone, or you can do it by everyone writing privately in a group and not sharing what they write.

Step 1 [1 minute]: Think about a time when you have, deliberately, changed something about yourself quite substantially. Examples might be when you have altered your activity (changed your routine) or altered your feelings (overcome some resentment or sadness).

Step 2 [1 minute]: Write a list of these things you changed in one column.

Step 3 [2 minutes]: Then in the other column, write a list of the motivations that allowed you to make those changes, specifically thinking about who or what you made those changes for. Some of these motivations might be 'bad', for example to do with personal vanity, greed, or fear of someone. Try to also find examples of what you consider to be 'good' motivations.

12

Receiving Criticism

The person receiving criticism needs to develop the capability within themselves first of all to be able to find criticism difficult (feel it to be destructive of themselves in some way) but not to respond quickly or defensively and later to not experience criticism as something negative even when it implies something big needs to be changed. This will take time. But one of the ways this can begin to be learned is by observing others (especially senior figures) responding to criticism. There are not nearly enough written records of comrades receiving criticism with grace, so please, if you witness this, take the time to write about it and share it around.

Exercise 26

Defensive Response [10-15 minutes]

This is an exercise for understanding and identifying defensive responses to criticism.

Sit in a circle. Imagine that you have just done some sort of action together as a group, such as running a workshop. The first person should turn to the person on their left and offer some small and reasonable made-up criticism of the pretend event, of the order 'I think you should have waited until John was sat down to start the workshop'. The person receiving the criticism should pretend that they find this criticism difficult, for whatever reason (maybe the workshop was running behind, maybe they disagree with it, maybe they feel guilty about it, maybe they don't think it was their fault). Instead of responding with the reason, they should respond with another criticism, but this time a slightly more unreasonable one, of the type 'You never pay attention to workshops running on time'. Then the second person should turn to the person on their left, and the process is repeated - reasonable criticism with a slightly terse response which is an unreasonable criticism. Each exchange should last up to a minute.

Afterwards, the participants should do some analysis. Based on the acting in the room, what would they, if they saw this play out in real life, think that the reason was for the people responding with unreasonable criticism. Once you have reached some concepts (like for example, 'defensiveness', 'fragility') go deeper into it - (why was the person defensive, why was the person fragile, and so on).

Exercise 27

A Tiger Whose Behind One Cannot Touch [20 minutes]



Materials:

Pens

Scissors (2-3)

Markers

2 big sheets of paper

White paper and orange paper

All of us have within us a tiger whose behind one cannot touch: a defensive part of ourselves. This is to be expected, but we know that if we allow this to become the whole character of the way we respond to criticism then we cannot do anything revolutionary in our lives. If we have this character as individuals then the organisation may take it on as a habit. When a whole organisation becomes a tiger whose behind one cannot touch, it can have no real relationship with the people. We find this happens often when an organisation is being criticised and reacts with a certain kind of unproductive defensiveness.

Step 1 [5 minutes]: Draw an outline of a big tiger on the largest sheets of paper you have available (unless those are really large - you know what we mean). Draw everything but the tiger's tail. While the tiger is being drawn, others should be cutting strips of white and orange paper to act as the tiger's tail. Prepare one white tail and one orange tail per person. Pin the tiger on the wall.

Step 2 [5 minutes]: On another big sheet of paper next to the tiger, write out recent criticisms that the organisation and individuals in the organisation has received in the past 6 months. Everyone writes quietly, building a big list. These should be both explicit and implicit criticisms.

Step 3 [3 minutes]: Participants read through the list and identify the criticism they feel most defensive about, writing it on a white tail. Then identify the criticism they feel the organisation is defensive about, writing it on an orange tail.

Step 4 [5 minutes]: While these reflections from Step 2 are absorbed, play two rounds of 'pin the tail on the donkey' apart from this time it's 'pin the defensiveness on the tiger's behind'. The first round everyone will pin their white tail to the tiger. The second round everyone will pin their orange tail to the tiger. If you are unfamiliar with this game, you need to blindfold the person and get them to attempt to put the tail in the right place.

Sometimes criticism you receive is incorrect and you know it. The principle of the criticism could be wrong. The person criticising could have misunderstood your personality or motives. Sometimes someone might say that you ignored or didn't think about something that you did pay attention to, you just decided to deal with it in a different way. When this kind of criticism occurs, it's fine to acknowledge that at least part of it is just false. But don't be really hasty (don't be the tiger whose behind one cannot touch). Think about these questions:

- What has the person noticed that is the basis of the criticism?
- Do I agree that this thing is a problem?
- Where do I think the problem arises from?
- Whose responsibility do I think it is to handle the problem?
- Is it important to explain to the comrade why I think their criticism is incorrect? When would be the best time to explain? (probably, straight away if you feel you have a good understanding, or later if you feel you need more time to reflect).
- Has the comrade brought the criticism with a generous spirit? Do I object to the criticism or the manner of delivery? If the latter, how can I help them learn a better manner over time?
- Who would be the best person to talk to about my doubts or disagreement with the criticism?
- What can I find in the criticism that is still something valuable for me to learn? le how can I take what's good from the criticism?

Exercise 28

5 minutes, 5 days, 5 months [10 minutes]

People say, “time heals all wounds.” We know that time itself is nothing, what people do with time is what matters. We heal our own wounds and each other’s wounds by changing the way we act and think in

“Isolated individual endeavour, for all its purity of ideals, is of no use, and the desire to sacrifice an entire lifetime to the noblest of ideals serves no purpose if one works alone, solitarily, in some corner of America, fighting against adverse governments and social conditions which prevent progress.”

Che Guevara

the wake of a conflict. Over a period of time as we get more opportunities to reflect and analyse a past event, we can include a broader perspective, think about it with fresh ideas. Another thing that happens over time is that people we come into conflict with will have had a number of opportunities to display different sides of their character to you, helping you understand them better and consider a past conflict with them anew.

Think about a criticism you received in the past that made you feel bitter. Write about the following, privately. Later, people can share things they noticed with the group if they like.

How did you feel about the person giving the criticism 5 minutes after it was delivered?

5 days after it was delivered? 5 months after it was delivered?

In hindsight did you respond to the criticism in a way that you are satisfied with now? What might you want to remember about your response?

13

Individualism

Struggling against the self is a principle that is understandably tricky for those who live and work in societies that cherish individual achievements and encourage the endless search for the discovery of our individual qualities. Today, the implicit philosophy of capitalist society tells that the aggregate total force of all the earth's individual people following their own self-interest will result in a generally ubiquitous Good society. This was the explicit philosophy of liberalism in its origins.

Sometimes it can be that comrades 'give up' many things for the struggle, such as material wealth, 'an easy life', the potential for family life and so on. After they have done so, there is a further obstacle, because in this case the next place that someone will turn to for wealth is the 'inner wealth' of themselves. This is individualism, not of the form of gluttony or greed, but of the form of reverence for the self. Ernesto Cardenal said that revolutionaries 'must pass over our own personalities, put aside all personal pride and all individualism, fight not for our own interests but for those of other people.'

We can learn about the kind of journey that someone might go on to understand this by looking at the experience of comrade martyr Che Guevara. We apologise for the long excerpt here - we've tried to keep these mostly to the reader, but here we thought it was worth quoting at length, and if you read it we hope you will see why. Che wrote:

“Because of the circumstances in which I travelled, first as a student and later as a doctor, I came into close contact with poverty, hunger and disease; with the inability to treat a child because of lack of money; with the stupefaction provoked by the continual hunger and punishment, to the point that a father can accept the loss of a son as an unimportant accident, as occurs often in the downtrodden classes of our American homeland. And I began to realise at that time that there were things that were almost as important to me as becoming famous or making a significant contribution to medical science: I wanted to help those people.

But I continued to be, as we all continue to be always, a child of my environment, and I wanted to help those people with my own personal efforts. I had begun to make some notes to guide the conduct of the revolutionary doctor. I began to investigate what was needed to be a revolutionary doctor.

However, aggression broke out, the aggression unleashed by the United Fruit Company, the Department of State, Foster Dulles- in reality the same thing- and their puppet, called Castillo Armas. The aggression was successful, since the people had not achieved the level of maturity of the other Cuban people of today. One fine day, a day like any other, I took the road of exile, or at least, I took the road of flight from Guatemala, since that was not my country.

Then I realised a fundamental thing: For one to be a revolutionary doctor or to be a revolutionary at all, there must first be a revolution. Isolated individual endeavour, for all its purity of ideals, is of no use, and the desire to sacrifice an entire lifetime to the noblest of ideals serves no purpose if one works alone, solitarily, in some corner of America, fighting against adverse governments and social conditions which prevent progress. To create a revolution, one must have what there is in Cuba - the mobilisation of a whole people, who learn by the use of arms and the exercise of militant unity to understand the value of arms and the value of unity.”

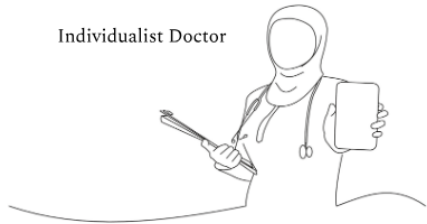
Exercise 29

Revolutionary Doctor [10-15 minutes]

Revolutionary Doctor



Individualist Doctor



Can you illustrate the images with some of the feelings and thoughts of each doctor, using Che's description? What would be their slogan that they would write on the board they are holding?

Remember when you are doing this exercise to think about what Che said. The individual endeavour doctor is not a bad person, they do not have duplicitous aims, and they may well be a socialist in some ideological sense. But they have not found how to apply their work to the struggle. Avoid treating this exercise as 'good doctor', 'bad doctor'. The individual endeavour doctor has not yet understood how to bring their work to the service of collective struggle, and their situation is probably comparable to the situation of many of the people reading this workbook. The revolutionary doctor is in an exceptional situation.

All of the revolutionary theorists of criticism and self-criticism have come from the starting point of 'individualism', and this is something that can be lost on revolutionaries today. In the West, the concept of individualism is a very messy concept. There is a range of literature that critiques capitalism in terms of its effect on the human psyche and morality, Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* being the obvious example of a text that became wildly popular for its damning indictment of a certain style of 'individualism'. It is evident to us that the critique of capitalist individualism that derives from this kind of scholarship can lead in several directions, some of which are themselves individualist.



A kindergarten student in Havana poses in a doctor costume.

The person who criticises capitalism 'because it forces me to be a wage slave' and supports a revolution on the basis that 'I want to be free to work as I want to' is still allowing individualism to persist. The person who stands up and makes speeches about an atomised society but whose main reason for doing so is personal glory, is still operating from individualism. It seems, then, that understanding individualism is vital if we want to practise criticism correctly: this was certainly the position of people whose writing we read eagerly - Che Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Samora Machel and Frantz Fanon - and we do not see any reason to believe that the conditions under which they made this judgement don't still pertain.

A very tiny amount of individualism can completely smother revolutionary virtue. This might be analogous to how the Catholics think of pride. You can be the most virtuous person in the world, undertaking acts of love and generosity, and yet if you come to feel that

those acts make you better than everybody else and begin to act from self-love or pride, then we cannot any more call you virtuous. All of your revolutionary activity, if it becomes self-serving, becomes no longer revolutionary - instead it is a reproduction of your own self-value at the expense of the community.

So where might you see individualism?

- Comrades are not willing to muck in on tasks that do not have a clear author, or that won't result in recognition and praise. Comrades object to not being named as the author of common tasks.
- Comrades are incapable of following democratic centralism, not because they feel so strongly about the issue that they must split with the organisation but because they can't bear to be overridden and follow the will of the group.
- Comrades repeatedly shun organisational work they agreed to in order to pursue personal leisure or activities which lead to personal gain. What about personal study? We acknowledge that sometimes there arise complex tensions between the organisation's practices and a comrade's personal study habits in which the reading materials are not theoretically disagreeable in themselves. This is related to the next point.
- Comrades guard contacts and resources (including their own theoretical and studying resources) from the organisation, unwilling to share them.
- Comrades fail to mention people they worked with on a project when they are speaking to people outside the organisation, presenting the work of the organisation as more 'their work' than it really is.
- Comrades clearly 'like the sound of their own voice' and speak at inappropriate length, to the detriment of other comrades.
- Comrades have a kind of 'fear for the self' which prevents them from participating in more risky activities (whether risky to their person or their reputation.)

As you can probably see from the above, individualism will be present in any organisation. We want to stress that it is also present in ours; in the spirit of this section, we are constantly fighting this. We make these

observations not from a position of moral superiority, but from one of self-critique as much as anything else. Individualism is always worth talking about, and it is always worth making procedures and practices in your organisation which reward collective work rather than individualism. Even when something is going well in the organisation, it is worth talking about individualism, and its associate, pride. This point is closely associated with the concept of ego and is significant enough to treat in its own book. We are considering (but not promising) to produce something like this in the future.

One of the most common places for individualism to arise in organisations is in study and learning. Ideally, study should always feel like it is for the benefit of the group. It is a huge waste of time and resources for comrades to treat things that they learn (the product of their labour) as their own private property. For many organisations, thinking about the approach to study and learning can be a good place to begin the study of individualism.

Exercise 30

New Study Guide [25 minutes]

Part 1

Step 1 [5 minutes]: Give everyone in the group a piece of paper and instruct them to write down in chronological order all of the things they have read over the last 12 months in a big list with spaces between each title. So, for example, the book, or the speech, or pamphlet they read in January would be at the top and the one they read in December would be at the bottom.

Step 2 [5 minutes]: Now, in the space between each title, tell them to try to recall what considerations they made after finishing the book above that led them to read the book below it. Tell them that they might feel unable to remember these decisions, that is fine. It's also fine if the list isn't in perfect order.

Step 3 [5 minutes]: Everyone should pass their list to the person to their left. With their comrade's list, people should now read the list and afterward, at the top, write down what problem they believe the comrade was trying to explore with their studies when considered as a total programme.

Part 2

Step 4 [5 minutes]: Now the whole group together should put a new piece of paper on the wall. At the top put a problem that your organisation has, decide on this together. Now still with the whole group, decide on one book, pamphlet, article, or other resource you should study to begin solving this problem. Write it under the problem at the top. This is your new study guide.

Step 5 [2 minutes]: Pick one person in the group who will agree to read this thing and afterward will write about what they learned under it, including the things they still do not understand. Under this, decide on the next book, or article, or pamphlet together that will advance the investigation. Pick a new comrade to volunteer to do the studying for

that one.

Step 6: Repeat until every comrade has something to study.

Exercise 31

Collective Study [15 minutes]

Step 1 [1 minute]: *Theme Posing*

Ask someone in the group to share a burning question. Something that keeps coming up in their day to day political work. For example 'Is it useful when talking to strangers on behalf of the organisation to start by asking about their housing problems?'

If no one shares quickly, a facilitator should chime in with an example.

Step 2 [2 minutes]: *Suggestions*

Now we will give everyone two minutes either to suggest some reading or some way to learn about this, or write 'I have no suggestions' (Do this in the online chat or on slips of paper)

Step 3 [3 minutes]: *Reflections on suggestions*

Now we will type how useful we each think our own recommendation was. If you had no recommendation (or you feel the recommendation wasn't very useful) write about how you might be able to find or come up with something useful in the future. (Do this in the online chat or on slips of paper)

Step 4 [2 minutes]: *Helpful comrades?*

Do you think there is someone, perhaps a comrade of yours, that you could ask about this burning question? If so, explain why you think that person might be able to help. (Do this in the online chat or on slips of paper)

Step 5 [2 minutes]: *Future you*

When will you next confront this question in your own political work? Will you remember to reflect on it at the time and to tell your comrade about the things you thought? (Do this in the online chat or on slips of paper)

paper)

Step 6: *Discussion*

How can the organisation better collectivise the investigation of problems?

Exercise 32

The Development of Morality Through Struggle [15 minutes]

Step 1 [5 minutes]: Ask everyone in the group to write down moral principles that they have developed through their experience in this group. These principles do not need to be entirely new things, but can be developments or reassessments. For example, someone might write:

In the last few months I have been re-assessing the importance of generosity to my comrades. I found that comrades in this group were generous towards me when I needed help with a task, and I have been thinking about how I show generosity towards them, and particularly towards new members.

Step 2 [5 minutes]: Now everyone should write about moral changes that they believe they may undergo through continued experience in the group. These might involve for example things that they are unsure about that they expect to be clarified with further work. Or they might involve new situations that the group expects to encounter.

Step 3 [5 minutes]: Now the group should discuss the question ‘What ways can we see from our reflections that we have learned to develop the morality of struggle?’

Fear for self

Individualism is linked to fear for the self. This is not a terrible sin. Fear for the self can lead to all kinds of pernicious actions, but it is something that we expect to find in all people. The fear manifests differently depending on what in particular it pertains to:

Fear of loss of money or property, or of loss of work (financial stability).

We see this kind of fear most commonly when it comes to jobs. Commonly, people will say that they cannot complete certain political work because it is a risk to their jobs. Recently, a comrade told one of us his definition of solidarity. He said that it is when you take some harm to yourself to try to mitigate or avoid harm to another. In the context of having jobs, people have to make decisions about what is tactically useful (being unemployed might make a cadre less effective), but they should not draw a red line at risk to their career.

Fear of loss of reputation or of being shamed, shunned or ostracised.

This kind of fear for self leads to silence. The person or people who develop this fear don't want to write anything, publish anything, meet new people, meet old people. They try to create a safe bubble where they are free from criticism. If you are engaged in the type of political work where bringing more people into the organisation (or into the communist movement, in general) is one of your objectives, this is especially damaging.

Fear of loss of time, and associated friendships, relationships, hobbies.

Similarly to the question of jobs, communists make decisions about the risk to these things in proportion to the benefits of the political work they are doing. Some will make large 'personal' sacrifices in order to complete the political work, others will maintain a balance between personal life and political work. The problem occurs when people construct their political and personal lives as two great conflicting forces, nurturing constant resentment about the loss to their personal life caused by the necessity of political work. In some of our comrades' experience for example, this fear is one of the most pervasive maladies of activists and leftist organisers.

Comrades will make different judgements about the way that they will balance their lives. It is up to your organisation to decide what kind of

commitment it deems acceptable for different levels of membership; the only advice we can give is that it seems to us that in most organisations it is crucial to have a level of membership that requires a commitment that most 'ordinary' people will find acceptable, but that in order for an organisation to operate effectively there will normally be a very high commitment demanded of a section of the organisation.

Fear of loss of self in the organisation.

In an organisation that is operating well, there will be huge potential for individual contributions to the organisation. But there will equally be a huge force of collective work, and a necessity to submit oneself to the organisation. Classically, this manifests itself in the concept of democratic centralism, which commands that you must follow the will of the group even if at the point of the decision being made you aired your own personal disagreements. For some people, following the will of the group can feel like losing the self. It is vital that the organisation finds ways of teaching and learning through experience about the character of the self in the collective.



Medu Art Ensemble, Unity Is Power (1979)

Exercise 33

Collective Writing

“Collective writing is a revolutionary business. We have begun to see this. It is revolutionary in its process and vision. No one can control or guarantee the outcome of such writing. No one can expect to enjoy individual accomplishment in the ways all of us have learned to recognise as meritorious - that is, when one person’s talent, insights, or genius stands out above all the others. The enjoyment of collective writing is in realising the intellectual and spiritual vitality of that which is born together and in which each of us has played a critical part. In a very real sense, each of us is brought into their talent by the others. And so we began this writing project on the assumption - at first more theoretical than practised - that any attempt to transform creatively the social, political, and spiritual character of our lives must be steeped in corporate vision and collaborative work.”

-Revolutionary Forgiveness: Feminist Reflections on Nicaragua

Collective writing isn’t going to solve all the complexities of individualism. But it’s a place to start. Try using collective writing in the organisation when you are:

Writing a letter

Writing an article

Writing a theoretical text

Writing a summary or criticism of something you’ve done

Writing a press release

Investigating a problem together

Ways to write collectively:

Open a google document or Cryptpad, and write some subheadings. Ask people to contribute at their leisure, stopping every 20 minutes to discuss what is there. Encourage comments and pictures.

Split the piece of writing into sections. Have each comrade work on a different section for two minutes, then seamlessly move down a section and continue where the last comrade left off. Continue doing this until you have one full round or more.

Criticism in ‘Western Struggle’

As communists, we desire a transformation of consciousness that comes about through the practice of revolution. But in countries like the USA, it would be absurd to expect this to take place when our struggle is not the war, when instead we are still operating in the ‘school of war’ as Lenin called it.

The organisation that is not engaged in a life-or-death struggle is not sufficient to teach the way of destruction of what Fanon called “mediterranean values” - that is clean, liberal, slick common philosophy (have a look at the reader). Those organisations involved in war are classically militias, though they can also be other organisations. Those involved in the ‘school of war’ are ones that those in the global north are most familiar with: in these countries people have never got out of school. These organisations are labour unions, tenant organisations, they are the forms of organisation of the communist parties in the Global North, Western anti-imperialist groups, and so on. Those of us who have been fated to work in these latter kinds of struggles but who learn from revolutionaries like Fanon desire the same pedagogical outcomes that are possible in the former kinds of struggle (revolutionary war of liberation).

In the war itself you cannot abandon your post at any cost less than the risk of death. As Fanon says, ‘the interests of one will be the interests of

all, for in concrete fact everyone will be discovered by the troops, everyone will be massacred—or everyone will be saved’. In the struggle where these conditions do not prevail, where the “stakes are lower” the conditions act on us with different forces and therefore we are subject to them in different ways. The tenant unionist can simply opt out of the struggle and retreat into life because the stakes are not death, to put it in ridiculous terms in order to lay stress on the point. The consequences of this fact are extremely significant with regard to education. We cannot simulate the conditions of war in our little “schools of war”. Our conditions do not themselves teach values of collective interest.

Fanon is very clear in describing capitalist and imperialist ideas, things like:

Narcissism - Clarity - Beauty - The Triumph of the Human Individual - Our own Subjectivity - Individual Thought - Egoism - Recrimination that springs from pride - Wanting to have the Last Word - Looking out for Yourself - Calculation - Unwonted Silence - Concealment.

For communists not operating in the school of war, we cannot totally destroy these things. But we must take it upon ourselves to understand them, weaken their structures within our organisations where we can, and set up the conditions where we can replace the capitalist life with the life of struggle. We can seek among the people the culture that we believe can supercede a capitalist form of organisation:

Friendship

Community

Non-specialisation and collective work

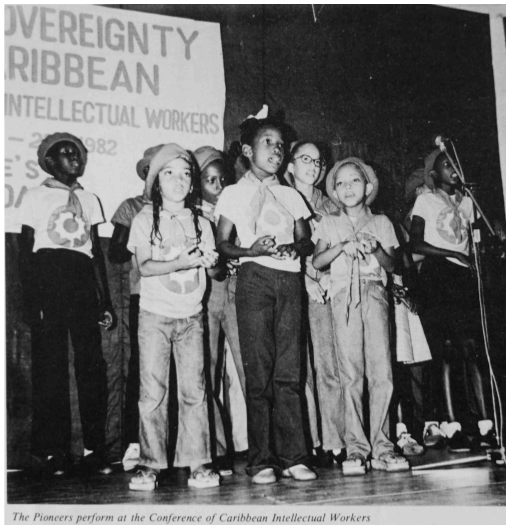
Practices of collective self-criticism

What would you add to this list?

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Criticism and Organisational Structure/Structure of the Left

[Please go straight to the exercises on the following page.]



The Pioneers perform at the Conference of Caribbean Intellectual Workers

Exercise 34

Sharing Daily Life and Criticism [10 minutes]

Scenario 1: Imagine a comrade who you work with very closely. You regularly end up cooking meals together, having each other sleep at your house to get the work done, travelling together, planning small aspects of life together, and so on. You are used to talking with each other about all kinds of things.

Scenario 2: Imagine a comrade who you work with, but who you don't know that well. Perhaps you regularly get together in meetings with this comrade, and assign work tasks to each other, but you have never had to, for example, go to the shop and decide what you're eating for breakfast.

Step 1: For each scenario, write for 1-2 minutes on each of the following prompts:

Something you are likely to over-correct in this comrade, ie something that you might criticise them for that is a bit too pernickety or detailed, or that you are likely to be over-confident about.

Something you are likely to feel nervous about criticising in this comrade.

Something you are likely to perceive accurately and clearly in this comrade, ie something that you will be good at delivering criticism on.

How you think your capacity to criticise this comrade will develop over time.

Step 2: Samora Machel said that comrades would be best at criticism if they shared their daily lives together. Having completed this exercise, do you agree with him? Would you make any qualification? If you agree, how should communists approach scenario 2, which is perhaps one of the more common scenarios outside a revolutionary situation. Should they try and make it more like scenario 1, or is there something else they can do?

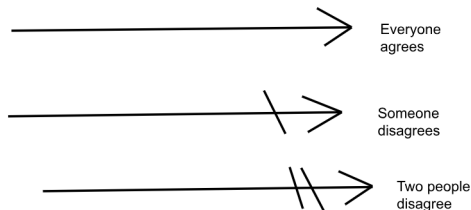
Exercise 35

Spaghetti Arrows [20 minutes]

This exercise is about the different directions that criticism can go. You should do it in groups of three or four (otherwise there are too many arrows and long queues to draw them).

Step 1: Hang up the chart underneath this exercise on a wall (print or draw it as large as possible given the number of charts you need to produce. If you can only do it printer-paper size that's ok). You will need four charts per group. We're going to use arrows to indicate the direction that criticism should go. The arrows should always be going to the right, but they might be going from the bottom of the left column, to the top of the right column. So that there is a big plate of spaghetti made of arrows at the end.

Step 2 [5 minutes]: On the first chart, everyone should draw arrows that connect groups on the left to the groups on the right that they think are appropriate forms of criticism (for example, if you think it's appropriate for the masses to criticise the whole organisation). If someone has already drawn a line where you were going to draw one, you don't need to draw it again. But if someone has drawn a line and you disagree with it, draw a line through that line near the arrow-head.



Step 3 [5 minutes]: On the second chart, everyone draw arrows in a different colour - these represent criticism that is easy to get in your organisation - ie you can get this sort of criticism basically on demand. Use the same principle of no double arrows, and use crosses where you disagree.

Step 4 [5 minutes]: On the third chart, everyone draw arrows in a different colour, these represent crit that is hardest to get in your organisation. For example, you might want criticism of your organisation from other organisations - but they are all cagey and you have no idea how to implement it.

Step 5 [5 minutes]: On the fourth chart, draw arrows in a different colour, which indicate criticism that you feel currently operate in your organisation, making use of dashed-line for a 'sorta' category.

Step 6: Have a look at your spaghetti charts together and discuss what you have found.

Criticism and Induction

How might someone new feel when they hear about criticism? Probably nervous. It's important to explain to them that we use the word criticism because we mean something strong and powerful, not because we mean something scary. We could use words like 'analysis' or 'recap' or 'performance overview'. But these would not get at the severity of the process needed - severe in its expectations on individuals and severe in its effect on capitalism and imperialism.



Mural art in Mozambique (1983)

Exercise 36

What's Scary, What's Strong and Powerful? [25 minutes]

Take as many pieces of paper as there are comrades. Below you can see three headings. Write one on each piece of paper. If there are three comrades, you'll have one of each. If there are six comrades you'll have two of each. If there are five comrades, you will have two of them and one of the other. You get the idea. Give one sheet of paper to each comrade.

Birth (from perspective of the mother)

First day of school

First kiss

Step 1 [3 minutes]: Everyone should begin writing or drawing for 45 seconds about what the strong and powerful feelings are in this moment? Then everyone should pass the paper to the person to their left. Then for another 45 seconds the person should do the same on the new piece of paper they have (probably now with a different heading.) Then they should do this one more time. So there will be three descriptions of strong and powerful feelings under each heading.

Step 2 [6 minutes]: This time everyone should begin writing or drawing for two minutes about what the scary feelings are at this moment. Then everyone should pass the paper to the person to their left. Again repeat another two times.

Step 3 [12 minutes]: Discuss each of the examples in turn for 4 minutes each: how would you advise a friend or someone who hadn't experienced this before how to stop the scary ones becoming dominant?

Step 4 [4 minutes]: Now imagine that a comrade is nervous about delivering or receiving criticism for the first time. Get one person to pretend to be that comrade. The other people in the group should offer

advice, bearing in mind the character of the advice they offered in the other scary/strong/powerful situations.



We also know that there should be parts of the revolutionary process that make us nervous and uncomfortable. If we can't practise these feelings, we're not going to be fit to carry out the other activities required of us, many of which need much higher patience, sacrifice, strength, conflict and so on. So the inductee should understand criticism as part of their revolutionary training in general.

People will feel nervous about criticism until they do some. Until they complete an exercise and laugh together and hear each other talk about their vulnerabilities and things they are not sure about. People will also make lots of mistakes when they begin criticism. Others in the organisation should be generous towards them. Our comrade Inem once told us that when she joined her organisation, criticism was required at every meeting. When she began, she said it was very difficult and she was timid and clumsy. But now, it is organic and feels much more apiece with the other day-to-day practices of being a revolutionary.

This is because it is a skill like any other and it must be practised.

Recently, one of our comrades was climbing a mountain with her brother. Her brother recently had a scary experience on another mountain, and he sometimes gets fear of 'exposure' (fear of heights when scrambling on hands and feet). Sometimes they would reach a hard section, and he would have to stop, because he had the heebie jeebies. However, they noticed that when someone else caught up with them and passed them, he felt able to carry on, then having seen that person do the tricky manoeuvre. People learn socially. When we watch other people going into 'frightening' situations with playfulness and excitement, we find it easier to take on the same attitude. One man who passed the two climbers was joking, and climbing over an edge 'pretending' to fall, making comical 'Aaaaaaa!' noises of falling, while showing that it was completely safe and laughing. This man either intuitively understood this principle of teaching and learning, or he had come to understand it over years of helping nervous people to overcome fears. Here you can see the importance of emulation in our communist organisations, and the need for a developed, self-aware and self-critical cadre.

You might ask your inductee to run criticism within a few weeks of them joining. They probably won't do it very well, but that's ok, it's the quickest way for them to learn.

Why Can't Groups Respond to Criticism Sometimes?

Sometimes one member of the group notices dissatisfaction in the group or a disconnect between the group and the masses. Often in these cases, the group cannot respond to criticism because:

- They are scared to damage the ego of somebody they are reliant on.
- They want to desperately cling to someone or something they consider to be institutional or foundational about the group
- People can't cope with the attack on another they identify with.

What other reason can you think of? Can you think of any examples of such a group?

Exercise 37

Splits! [20 minutes]

But I'm scared the group will split! An exercise in unresolved problems.

Step 1 [3 minutes]: In groups of three, imagine a scenario where someone or a group of people have done something that needs to be criticised, otherwise it will happen repeatedly. Try to imagine this situation with as many details as possible, saying who the people are, the group's activity, a brief history.

Step 2 [5 minutes]: One person in the three should then write a story of what happens if it is criticised the first time it appears.

The second person should write a story of what happens if it is criticised after 2 months.

The third person should write a story of what happens if it is never criticised.

Step 3 [10 minutes]: Compare stories. Talk with each other about what kinds of problems will eventually cause the breakdown of the group if they are never raised. Talk about whether you agree with how it would play out.

Odds and Ends

Severe Situations and When Criticism isn't Possible

Sometimes when we talk about criticism with comrades, they immediately start talking about a big bust-up. They bring to mind situations where there were severe disagreements in the group, and the group split. Or ones where there was a huge dominant personality in a group who refused to work things out with others, and the group ended because they were dogged in pursuing their own idea of the strategy.

We have talked above about bringing criticism before things get to a really bad stage. And we have talked about how to build your group so that there is an atmosphere of criticism, humility and emulation. But we want to be clear - *these practices are not going to resolve differences in line and approach that simply mean that groups can't work together, and they are not appropriate in the case of a comrade who refuses to listen to or respond to criticism.* In the latter case, you don't need criticism, you need a disciplinary procedure. In the former case, you need to be explicit about your differences and make a clear and open choice about whether and when and in what way to continue working together.

Criticism Archive

For any organisation, it's important to keep track of its own history. Criticism is no exception. CC(TE) strongly promotes exercise-based learning and criticism and therefore a dated log of the exercises which explain clearly what problems are being dealt with should be kept. Additionally, a record of the results should be included, this might be notes or observations from a discussion or the written responses that were generated.

From time to time (regular intervals would be best, perhaps every 6 months), the organisation should commit its criticism efforts toward reflecting on the process and making assessments as objectively as possible about the relationship between the criticisms which have been undertaken and the group's development of consciousness and level of work. This is another way of saying that the relationship between theory and practice should be regularly calibrated, and our principles should be updated or negated.

Our own Self-critique about the Way we Practise Criticism

In the spirit of this workbook, we wanted to share some of our own self-critique about the way we practise criticism. This might be useful to you in knowing what our limitations are, and where you might discover things (or might have already discovered things) that we don't yet know. Or it might be useful to you because you might find that you also encounter the same problems in your own organisation, and it could be helpful to see the ways that we too have struggled with this.

CC(TE) limitations in criticism

- We do not do a great job archiving our criticism. Not only does this make it harder to evaluate the course it has taken, it also makes it hard for us to compile anything we've learned about the exercises we use, the modes and techniques. Additionally, this kind of "forgetting" of our history makes it difficult to recognise the principles we are establishing and how. In our weekly cadre reports, we are expected to reflect on the previous week's critique. But we are wishy-washy on how much effort we give to this from week to week, cadre to cadre.
- In the last year we've proliferated a lot of techniques and exercises for criticism, but haven't repeated them for practice much to see what holds more or less well.

- Our formal criticism is largely restricted to a weekly 5-10 minute session. While we do practise criticism outside this time, it's not habitual or systematic. At least some of us are not yet at the stage where, upon identifying an error, we have the clarity that looks something like: 'I need to make a (self-)criticism with the group/person, and I know how and when to do it.'

- We have not made a strong effort to track our development in this way, not at a personal level or the collective level. As we write this, the authors can recall clear efforts of correction and rectification of their own errors identified in criticism. But without an open organisational process for recalling these, we cannot be sure if these corrections and rectifications are more or less only subjective feelings. In other words, it's not clear if the changes one has felt they have made in response to critique have materialised objectively in one's patterns of work, the way one acts toward their comrades, etc.

- We have not worked out a sufficient way of arranging criticism that moves from the general membership up toward the cadre, or vice versa. We suspect this stems from a more general difficulty we've had organising the general membership in relation to the cadre, we have not suitably worked out the induction process (i.e. how to bring new members into the work). The particular character of CC(TE)'s work has left us with many questions about the division of work in the organisation that we are still in the process of figuring out.

- We have not yet worked out exercises for engaging in effective inter-organisational criticism.

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Conclusion

Knowledge does not move progressively without interruption, it stops, it trips, it looks around; it camps for a while at different stages, sometimes it looks backward for things it forgot along the way and has to retreat. Sometimes it makes big leaps over fallen trees on the path.

Criticism is a skill which has a special ability to transform the past errors of a group into its future successes. But, 'only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits.'

Eventually, we reach new knowledge. We will likely need to update this book in a second edition of revisions, corrections, omissions and new discoveries. We would find it incredibly useful to hear your thoughts on what is here, with any critical suggestions. This is not a platitude - we don't do those! If you have found any of this useful and want to assist us in some way, give us some criticism! Please email us at questions@schoolofmanyquestions.com.

All that remains for us to say is, good luck with your endeavours. We write to you with love and admiration, and we are glad to join you on the road we are making by walking.

Appendix

How We Do Our Criticism

In this guide we have given you lots of exercises in ‘meta-criticism’, that is to say, exercises that help you think about criticism in your own organisation. Sometimes these exercises are themselves helping you do a little bit of crit - they bring out criticisms and mistakes - but often they are deliberately formulated to avoid getting to the heart of the criticisms you have in your organisation.

We have avoided doing an exhaustive description of how to do criticism itself, mostly because we hope that from the material provided here you can come up with your own ways to do it. But we realise that it would be a bit mean to leave you with no examples at all, so we have provided here some of our criticism formats, which you are welcome to use, modify, mutilate, to your heart’s content.

There are many variations on how exercises can take shape. We tend to think there is a certain relationship between the content of an exercise (i.e. what problems and questions it is trying to explore) and the form (i.e. how we go about it). Instead of reciting these here, we will now direct you to our website, www.cctigerseye.com, where the most elaborate description of our theory of exercise-based pedagogy exists. But please keep in mind, these theories are works-in-progress and their descriptions there are anything but perfect and certainly not final.

Criticism Type A

Comrade Z brings a subject forward for discussion, and the group 'Describes It Again'.

Let us imagine that Comrade Z has noticed a deficit in the way that the group prepared for a meeting and held a meeting. Let us say it was a meeting with the leadership of FRELIMO.

Subject: *Our Meeting with the Leadership of Frelimo.*

Each comrade then types in the chat box or writes on paper for three minutes about their assessment of this meeting, what was good and what was bad.

This reflection then gets passed to the person on their left, so that each criticism has been passed round the circle. If meetings are online, then of course you need to make clear how the carousel works because people are not physically in a circle.

The next step has a number of options, which range on a scale from Describe it Again to Transformation.

So, for example, with the criticism that you now have (that was written by another comrade) you could be instructed to:

- Describe the Criticism Again in your own words or from your own perspective
- Describe the criticism again without using any words from the original criticism
- Make the criticism more specific
- Write the things that should be done in future based on the criticism
- Highlight the parts of the criticism that are most serious
- Relate the criticism to some of the theoretical work or to the constitution of the organisation.

Depending on time, this process could then be repeated, the criticism then being passed again to the

left and the next comrade doing something else with it. Or, it could be passed back to the first comrade, and they respond in some way.

At the end everyone should read through everything that has been done, and people should draw out any reflections or resolutions from it. We should be clear here that each step in this process should be very fast. The whole thing can be over in 5-10 minutes, and that might be necessary depending on the length of your organisation's meetings. If crit is taking 20 minutes, that's stretching it, unless you have designated a special session just for crit. This is why we rely not only on writing, but on allotting short times for writing. People will get used to this, even if at first they get stuck. They will get used to the idea that they can share half-formed thoughts and not worry about it, because everyone is doing it.

OR

Criticism Type B

In this example, members of an organisation are working from individual reports written by members of the organisation who submit them each week. This is one of the primary vehicles for criticism and reflection in our organisation (weekly member reports, written to a specific format). You don't need to do this in your group, but one way or another criticism requires some kind of raw material to work with that isn't just vague feelings about an organisation or organisational work. For us, this material is provided in weekly reports but for you, it might be achieved in another way. The only thing we use other than reports is a common memory of an activity that everyone in the group was recently involved in - so for example if everyone there ran a workshop and is able to reflect on the contributions that all the other comrades made to the workshop. The group is either together physically or online, in either case they should be considered as being in a circle, as described above.

The group should allot 5 minutes for reviewing the report that was written by the comrade to their left in the circle (if this is occurring online, write out the rotation, for example Bernadette read Sakib's entry, Sakib read Jaime's entry, etc.) If you are working from a common memory rather than a report, then rather than reading Bernadette is going to have to recall and jot down things that they remember about Sakib's contribution to that event (ie 'Sakib was very welcoming to participants, gave the closing speech, spent most of the time with these people, did the work preparing the AV equipment).

The facilitator of this exercise should instruct the participants to look for specific things in the reports or the memory. These things should be prompted by certain problems the facilitator has been thinking about, has been noticing or curious about themselves. For example, the facilitator might be feeling that they or another is really struggling to keep up with their studies, so they could instruct the group to read the entry from their comrade or recollect an event paying special attention to the recent habits of study of that comrade.

After reading, the comrades should be prompted to carry out some kind of criticism process of the person they have been considering. They could be any number of things. Here is an example where people were instructed to give advice to their comrade - you can see that B is advising A and writing in A's column, A is advising L, L advising D, and so on.

	B	A	L	D	M	E	N
Reading and study	You are looking for more recent material - couple of tabs I have open at the moment are this and this .	Read "Conversations" by Lenin Return to the Indian study materials and pursue further Indian communist studies	Read Something on democratic centralism Any investigations of Kenya would help me and N			French deep dive	Read about some other experiences of education of young people (like perhaps Black Panther ones, anything you can find) and note similarities and differences to your summer school experience.
Teaching	Try to scribble down the three things you would teach in a pedagogy course - ie the exercises you would run to try and induct someone in the pedagogy we do.		Plan dinner with F	Write down the problems that Freire, Cabral, and McColough are addressing. Identify the shared ones and see if you share any of these. Sketch a 20 minute exercise that addresses the problem.	Work towards the building of a single day pedagogy workshop at the school for general members	Meet with N + L, try to run a third iteration of youth clock workshop with Sudanese comrade	
Other activities	Thanks for being in touch with I.			Dedicate a bit of time to summarising some of the problems of consciousness/struggle that we are currently encountering. Write a list of who we could ask about these problems. Even people who aren't ideal - the ten best people to ask.			Try to find time to talk through in person the summer school either with another CCTE member or someone else while they take notes.

Advice is one (maybe rather advanced) way to do it, but there are many other things that can be done with the reflections on the report or memory. The comrade could note recurring problems. They could state some things they think are missing from the report. They could offer assistance. They could say what doubts come to mind based on their observations of the other comrade. They could appraise how far the comrade is acting according to the stated activity of the organisation. There are really an endless number of possibilities here.

What the endless number of possibilities means is not 'leave it open' but 'be specific' about what the comrades should be doing, otherwise you will end up with too wide a range of results, and vague criticism. You can

change it all up week to week. So think about what you think would be really useful, and get people to do that.

A Criticism Reader

Amílcar Cabral

One form of struggle which we consider to be fundamental... We refer here to the struggle against our own weaknesses... Our experience has shown us that in the general framework of daily struggle this battle against ourselves - no matter what difficulties the enemy may create - is the most difficult of all, whether for the present or the future of our peoples.

Ho Chi Minh on Revolutionary Morality, 1958

The prime criterion of a revolution is a resolve to struggle all one's life for the Party and the Revolution.

Born and brought up in the old society, we all carry within ourselves, to varying extents, traces of that society in our thinking and habits. The worst and most dangerous vestige of the old society is INDIVIDUALISM. Individualism runs counter to revolutionary morality. The least remaining trace of it will develop at the first opportunity, smother revolutionary virtues, and prevent us from wholeheartedly struggling for the revolutionary cause. Individualism is something very deceitful and perfidious; it skillfully induces one to backslide... To shake off the bad vestiges of the old society and to cultivate revolutionary virtues, we must study hard, and educate and reform ourselves in order to progress

continuously. Otherwise we shall retrogress and lag behind, and shall eventually be rejected by the forward-moving society.

Revolutionary morality does not fall from the sky. It is developed and consolidated through persevering daily struggle and effort. Like jade, the more it is polished, the more it shines. Like gold, it grows ever purer as it goes into the melting pot.

Categories for Criticism, Grenada 1982

1. Discipline - consistent political work
2. Ideological level - including attitude to study
3. Work performance - including professional approach, ability to supervise and guide, technical and professional job skills
4. Relations with the masses - including the question of being an outstanding example
5. Character/Integrity - including respect for the working class, cooperativeness, modesty, self-criticism, honesty, arrogance, and timidity
6. Analysing ability - including ability to cope with difficult situations, judgement, appreciation of strategy and tactics, overall leadership qualities.
7. Dues, attitude to Party and State property
8. Functionality - general performance as a cadre member

Mario Roberto Santucho, *Notes on Revolutionary Morals*

FEAR FOR SELF

The frequent and material prolongation of any manifestation of individualism is fear for oneself. The comrade who conserves features of individualism tends, consciously or unconsciously, to preoccupy himself

with his own person more than with the organisation; the ultimate justification of the individualist and his point of reference for all his projects and desires, is himself. The individualist can sincerely struggle for the Revolution, but wishes personally to benefit from its fruits. He is consumed consciously or unconsciously by the fear of losing his life or being seriously physically or mentally injured. The individualist will tend to be weak when he finds himself in difficult moments, in which the work of many people over a prolonged period of time is involved, when it is his decision whether to advance or retreat under enemy fire, when it is his decision whether to co-operate or remain silent under torture or when confronted with the real or apparent threat of death.

What in daily practice appear as minor defects in apparently exemplary comrades, will be revealed in those moments in all their magnitude, as the true cancer of any organisation, the flaw that can lead even well-intentioned revolutionaries to disaster.

THE CORRECTION OF INDIVIDUALISM

There is no set prescription that will alleviate individualism. We will extract the best methods of correcting this evil based on the revolutionary practice in the heart of the masses. However, there are some basic guidelines which arise from experience already acquired. In the first place, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the true role and dimension of individualism in the revolutionary ranks. We must not treat this problem lightly, but must maintain a strict and permanent vigilance together with all comrades, particularly with those comrades in the leadership. Second, we must enforce the constant proletarianisation of the organisation and of each comrade, as we have previously outlined. Third, the constant exercise of criticism and self-criticism around every aspect of activity, keeping in mind individualism and its diverse manifestations as a practical and particular aspect. We must point out two aspects of the question of criticism and self-criticism. The whole world recognises in theory the value of this great revolutionary guideline, but it is not always utilised correctly in practice, and comrades fall into one of the two following deviations: sometimes criticism is used as a weapon of personal attack, to criticise those comrades whom we wish to slander; while other times, we will remain silent regarding the errors of others, in an effort to avoid having our own errors pointed out. Sometimes one is guilty of both deviations at the same time: , .ie second deviation with our friends, and the first with other comrades. The same thing occurs when one is the object of the criticism. It is common for comrades to become angry or upset when

criticised, and attempt to counter with other criticisms or to find fault with the criticism. It is therefore necessary to create an atmosphere conducive to criticism and self-criticism. exercising it on a daily and systematic basis without waiting for the problem to hit us on the head before we deal with it.

It is interesting to note what the Vietnamese do with respect to this. Burchett says in 'Why the Viet Cong is Winning', The basic organisation of the Vietcong is the trio. Each day every trio meets and analyses the day's activities. These meetings generally consist of criticism and self-criticism sessions. Meetings of this sort are held every week, at the squad level, every two weeks at the platoon level and monthly at the company level. It is also useful for every comrade to place emphasis on self-criticism before beginning his criticism.

Thomas Sankara

We visit Libya often. Not long ago, I met Colonel Qaddafi. We discussed many questions and made some mutual criticisms. We're also ready to engage in self-criticism when we feel the criticism is well-founded and should prompt us to change our position. Just as we invite Libya to do the same. Among revolutionaries we should engage in criticism and self-criticism. This doesn't mean Libya is perfect, because nothing is perfect in any country of the world. And this gives rise to discussions. So our relations continue to be as they have been, and have even taken on a new aspect with this form of mutual criticism and fruitful debate. (August 1984)

Here we are after some hard work. Here we are after a special kind of test, the first of its kind, in the course of which the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution voluntarily and consciously agreed to take a critical look at themselves. They have been in session nonstop day and night, in the spirit of criticism and self-criticism, in order to examine the work they've done over the two and a half years of revolution in Burkina Faso. This principle is a victory in itself. Victory in the sense that only revolutions are willing to question themselves, only revolutions are willing to draw critical balance sheets of their struggle. By contrast, the forces of reaction spend their time singing their own praises and blowing their own trumpet, only to end in inevitable failure. (At First National Conference of CDRs, 4 April 1986)

Fidel Castro

Whenever I have to criticise a comrade, the first thing I do is try to protect him, to keep the criticism from being destructive, so it won't demoralise him and so, while serving as an example for the others, it commits and stimulates him.

Grace Lee Boggs, *organisation Means Commitment*

Revolutionary criticism and self-criticism is based, first and foremost, on the dialectical concept of development through collective and protracted struggle. It involves the clear recognition that in every situation there is a contradiction which requires a choice between two roads, that no one is immune from making a mistake or wrong choice, but that the entire group, the individual making the mistake, and indeed everyone concerned with revolutionary struggle, can learn from the mistakes and wrong choices that have been made by the individual or group. Moreover, the recognition, the examination, and correction of mistakes and weakness all provide additional energy for the advancement and acceleration of revolutionary struggle. This is the dialectical concept of the 'dynamic of error.'

In order for this 'dynamic of error' to develop the group must be united by certain common principles and ideas. All the members must be committed to common perspectives or a common ideology, they must share common standards, must be committed in time, and they must share a fundamental recognition of the role that struggle itself plays in developing. Without these common principles, criticism/ self-criticism cannot rise above subjectivity and get to the essence of what is wrong in any particular situation, i.e. the objectivity of the mistake.

Essential to the concept of objectivity is the recognition that the mistake is not just an accidental one i.e. that it is not unique to the particular individual or to the particular occasion. On the contrary it probably relates to the particular historical environment or to the social background of the individual involved, e.g., intellectualism, technocratism, male chauvinism, permanent rank-and-file-ism. This objectification enables the entire group to raise its consciousness and help others with the same background to be on the alert against specific weaknesses.

Subjectivity assumes many forms e.g. the protection of one's feelings over others; fear of hurting feelings or discouraging people by pointing out their mistakes; attacking those who hurt your feelings by criticism; fear of taking issues with others, not pointing out the person who makes a mistake or not pointing out a mistake at once but waiting until the persons involved are less emotionally caught up in their mistakes and then dealing with the question only as an abstraction and therefore without the sharpness which enables the maximum lessons to be learned by all concerned.

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Hesitating to take issue with or criticism of the leaders; hesitating to criticise themselves for fear of undermining confidence in the organisation (emperor protection); 'selling' ideas to others rather than discussing and debating issues in such a way that members can make responsible choices; making excuses for oneself or for others when mistakes are made (not enough time, something else came up, conditions beyond our control, etc) this being 'understanding' and 'sympathetic' rather than demanding on oneself and others.

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

In the colonial countries where a real struggle for freedom has taken place, where the blood of the people has flowed and where the length of the period of armed warfare has favoured the backward surge of intellectuals toward bases grounded in the people, we can observe a genuine eradication of the superstructure built by these intellectuals from the bourgeois colonialist environment. The colonialist bourgeoisie, in its narcissistic dialogue, expounded by the members of its universities, had in fact deeply implanted in the minds of the colonised intellectual that the essential qualities remain eternal in spite of all the blunders men may make: the essential qualities of the West, of course. The native intellectual accepted the cogency of these ideas, and deep down in his brain you could always find a vigilant sentinel ready to defend the Greco-Latin pedestal. Now it so happens that during the struggle for liberation, at the moment that the native intellectual comes into touch again with his people, this artificial sentinel is turned into dust. All the Mediterranean values—the triumph of the human individual, of clarity, and of beauty—become lifeless, colourless knickknacks. All those speeches seem like collections of dead words;

those values which seemed to uplift the soul are revealed as worthless, simply because they have nothing to do with the concrete conflict in which the people are engaged.

Individualism is the first to disappear. The native intellectual had learnt from his masters that the individual ought to express himself fully. The colonialist bourgeoisie had hammered into the native's mind the idea of a society of individuals where each person shuts himself up in his own subjectivity, and whose only wealth is individual thought. Now the native who has the opportunity to return to the people during the struggle for freedom will discover the falseness of this theory. The very forms of organisation of the struggle will suggest to him a different vocabulary. Brother, sister, friend—these are words outlawed by the colonialist bourgeoisie, because for them my brother is my purse, my friend is part of my scheme for getting on. The native intellectual takes part, in a sort of auto-da-fe, in the destruction of all his idols: egoism, recrimination that springs from pride, and the childish stupidity of those who always want to have the last word. Such a colonised intellectual, dusted over by colonial culture, will in the same way discover the substance of village assemblies, the cohesion of people's committees, and the extraordinary fruitfulness of local meetings and groupments. Henceforward, the interests of one will be the interests of all, for in concrete fact everyone will be discovered by the troops, everyone will be massacred—or everyone will be saved. The motto look out for yourself, the atheist's method of salvation, is in this context forbidden.

Self-criticism has been much talked about of late, but few people realise that it is an African institution. Whether in the djemaas of northern Africa or in the meetings of western Africa, tradition demands that the quarrels which occur in a village should be settled in public. It is communal self-criticism, of course, and with a note of humour, because everybody is relaxed, and because in the last resort we all want the same things. But the more the intellectual imbibes the atmosphere of the people, the more completely he abandons the habits of calculation, of unwonted silence, of mental reservations, and shakes off the spirit of concealment. And it is true that already at that level we can say that the community triumphs, and that it spreads its own light and its own reason.

Sekou Toure, *Afrika and Imperialism*

We must be very vigilant, we must fight as well as we suppress all racial or religious discrimination; we must reorganise the Party, strengthen it and make its structures more dynamic and functional. We must teach the militants constant political and ideological education and make as well a permanent and honest self-criticism in the political and military leadership.

We must know how to create enthusiasm, how to maintain and develop it constantly in the masses. We must strengthen unity between the fighters on one hand, between fighters and leaders on the other hand. We must widen the debates, make them democratic, multiply contacts at all levels. We will be able then to solve rapidly internal contradictions. For it is the constant practice of political democracy, it is constant practice of social justice, it is the constant respect of equality of the militants without any distinction of race, religion and sex, it is self-criticism and objective criticism, it is final primacy of national interest and the pre-eminence of the people which together constitute the basis of revolutionary progress and efficient means of the solution of all internal contradictions.

It is not by denying a concrete problem that one makes it disappear; it is by finding a solution to it. For a Liberation Movement it is the internal front that must prevail over the exterior front just like the armed struggle will have more importance than diplomacy, for any negotiation that is not based on a decisive reality is likely to lead to regretful compromises that, in turn can lead to compromission.

The constant fidelity to the revolutionary morality, the regular practice of self-criticism and constructive criticism, the capacity to resolve the alternative contradictions, that characterise all the active, social life, the unconditional devotedness to the cause of the people, the choice of revolutionary truth in the suppression of opportunism and of selfishness, the character of incorruptibility, the will and the firmness in the management of public affairs, constitute for any movement of struggle the determining causes of victory, of its progress and its blooming.

Lenin, Notes of a Publicist

Let us picture to ourselves a man ascending a very high, steep and hitherto unexplored mountain. Let us assume that he has overcome unprecedented difficulties and dangers and has succeeded in reaching a much higher point than any of his predecessors, but still has not reached the summit. He finds himself in a position where it is not only difficult and dangerous to proceed in the direction and along the path he has chosen, but positively impossible. He is forced to turn back, descend, seek another path, longer, perhaps, but one that will enable him to reach the summit. The descent from the height that no one before him has reached proves, perhaps, to be more dangerous and difficult for our imaginary traveller than the ascent—it is easier to slip; it is not so easy to choose a foothold; there is not that exhilaration that one feels in going upwards, straight to the goal, etc. One has to tie a rope round oneself, spend hours with all alpenstock to cut footholds or a projection to which the rope could be tied firmly; one has to move at a snail's pace, and move downwards, descend, away from the goal; and one does not know where this extremely dangerous and painful descent will end, or whether there is a fairly safe detour by which one can ascend more boldly, more quickly and more directly to the summit.

It would hardly be natural to suppose that a man who had climbed to such an unprecedented height but found himself in such a position did not have his moments of despondency. In all probability these moments would be more numerous, more frequent and harder to bear if he heard the voices of those below, who, through a telescope and from a safe distance, are watching his dangerous descent, which cannot even be described as what the Smena Vekh people call “ascending with the brakes on; brakes presuppose a well designed and tested vehicle, a well-prepared road and previously tested appliances. In this case, however, there is no vehicle, no road, absolutely nothing that had been tested beforehand.

The voices from below ring with malicious joy. They do not conceal it; they chuckle gleefully and shout: “He’ll fall in a minute! Serve him right, the lunatic!” Others try to conceal their malicious glee and behave mostly like Judas Golovlyov. They moan and raise their eyes to heaven in sorrow, as if to say: “It grieves us sorely to see our fears justified! But did not we, who have spent all our lives working out a judicious plan for scaling this mountain, demand that the ascent be postponed until our plan was complete? And if we so vehemently protested against taking this path, which this lunatic is now abandoning (look, look, he has

turned back! He is descending! A single step is taking him hours of preparation! And yet we were roundly abused when time and again we demanded moderation and caution!), if we so fervently censured this lunatic and warned everybody against imitating and helping him, we did so entirely because of our devotion to the great plan to scale this mountain, and in order to prevent this great plan from being generally discredited!"

Lenin, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

Their narrow circle mentality and astonishing immaturity as Party members, which cannot stand the fresh breeze of open controversy in the presence of all, is here clearly revealed. It is the mentality so familiar to the Russian, as expressed in the old saying: either coats off, or let's have your hand [ie. either you're perfect or I'm going to fight you]! These people are so accustomed to the bell-jar seclusion of an intimate and snug little circle that they almost fainted as soon as a person spoke up in a free and open arena on his own responsibility. Intellectualist individualism and the circle mentality had come into conflict with the requirement of open speaking before the Party.

[Note to the reader: keep reading! You don't need to know the names, parties or political issues in the next section to understand Lenin's point.]

Can you imagine such an absurdity, such a squabble, such a complaint about "false accusations of opportunism" in the German party? There, proletarian organisation and discipline weaned them from such intellectualist flabbiness long ago. Nobody has anything but the profoundest respect for Liebknecht, let us say; but how they would have laughed over there at complaints that he (together with Bebel) was "openly accused of opportunism" at the 1895 Congress, when, on the agrarian question, he found himself in the bad company of the notorious opportunist Vollmar and his friends. Liebknecht's name is inseparably bound up with the history of the German working-class movement not, of course, because he happened to stray into opportunism on such a comparatively minor and specific question, but in spite of it. And similarly, in spite of all the acrimony of the struggle, the name of Comrade Axelrod, say, inspires respect in every Russian Social-Democrat, and always will; but not because Comrade Axelrod happened to defend an opportunist idea at the Second Congress of our Party, happened to dig out old anarchistic rubbish at the Second

Congress of the League, but in spite of it. Only the most hidebound circle mentality, with its logic of “either coats off, or let’s have your hand”, could give rise to hysterics, squabbles, and a Party split because of a “false accusation of opportunism against the majority of the Emancipation of Labour group”.

Mao, Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing

What is scientific never fears criticism, for science is truth and fears no refutation. But those who write subjectivist and sectarian articles and speeches in the form of Party stereotypes fear refutation, are very cowardly, and therefore rely on pretentiousness to overawe others, believing that they can thereby silence people and win the day. Such pretentiousness cannot reflect truth but is an obstacle to truth. Truth does not strike a pose to overawe people but talks and acts honestly and sincerely. Two terms used to appear in the articles and speeches of many comrades, one being ruthless struggle and the other merciless blows. Measures of that kind are entirely necessary against the enemy or against enemy ideology, but to use them against our own comrades is wrong. The comrades who in the past loudly advocated ruthless struggle and merciless blows against comrades who occasionally made mistakes did so because, for one thing, they failed to make any analysis of the persons they were dealing with and, for another, they were striking a pose in an effort to intimidate. This method is no good, no matter whom you are dealing with. Against the enemy this tactic of intimidation is utterly useless, and with our own comrades it can only do harm. It is a tactic which the exploiting classes and the lumpen-proletariat habitually practise, but for which the proletariat has no use. For the proletariat the sharpest and most effective weapon is a serious and militant scientific attitude.

Samora Machel, Establishing Peoples’ Power to Serve the Masses

Number 5 of «Estudos e Orientações», texts originally published during the armed struggle for national liberation. These were re-issued and extended after independence. This text was produced in November 1971, during the reorganisation of one of FRELIMO’s educational centres, and first published in 1979.

Our statutes, in laying down the working methods of FRELIMO - from Chapter VII, paragraph (a) - give a series of points which can be summarised as follows: free discussion, the submission of the minority to the majority, collective responsibility, and criticism and self-criticism as regards work and behaviour.

Political democracy is based on collective discussion, on a collective solution of our problems. Each and every one of us is expected to express his views on how best to serve the people in each specific situation. Each and every one of us is responsible for the life of our organisation, for the development and consolidation of the struggle and the revolution. Each and every one of us has a duty to develop our political line creatively by drawing on the rich experience we have gained in political and armed struggle against the enemy, by transforming society and mobilising nature's laws on behalf of collective progress.

Mistakes that are made, whether individual or collective, and violations of our politics line and discipline, should serve to educate us. The lessons we learn from these mistakes should be discussed by the masses, so that they can acquire this new experience. Violations of our line and breaches of discipline should be the subject of discussion and public criticism by the masses. In so doing, on the one hand, we use our mistakes to deepen our political consciousness and, on the other, we put the defence of our line and discipline where they belong, in the hands of the people.

Just as a person must feed himself daily so that his body is able to cope with his tasks and difficulties, so does unity need daily sustenance. Collective living, work and study, criticism and self-criticism, and mutual help are the food, salt and vitamins of unity. Members of the leadership should not therefore live separately from one another, each absorbed in his own private world, only coming together when there is a meeting.

With due allowance, of course, for the tasks each one of them has, and the fact that they have to travel about, the members of the leadership ought to make an effort to live together, to know one another better in day-to-day life and to understand each others' failings, so as to be in a better position to offer mutual correction. Working together, producing together, sweating together, suffering the rigours of the march together and overcoming the challenges of the enemy and the environment creates strong bonds of friendship and mutual respect. It is not by words that we are bound together, but by the many activities we share when

serving the people; it is unity fed by sweat and suffering and blood that binds us together.

So when we feel that a companion is falling behind, we must make an effort to help him progress.

Our aim is to advance like the waves of the sea, advancing together and leaving no one behind in ignorance or error; to organise political, scientific and literary studies so that we can jointly rise to the situation and avail ourselves of the techniques that will equip us to overcome difficulties; to use criticism and self-criticism frequently, as much to rectify our working methods as to correct individual errors and deviations.

However, we must be wary of making criticism and self-criticism a pious routine, a kind of confessional where we admit our sins, are absolved, receive penance, and then prepare to repeat the same acts.

FRELIMO, *Democratic Blueprint for Education*

‘Between the two sectors, teachers and students, there must be regular discussions of the victories and weaknesses registered in the course of work, so that the necessary lessons for collective progress can be learned.

This process of working together implies a permanent opening for criticism and self-criticism, individual and collective. When we work together, criticism and self-criticism must not be confined to strictly scholarly aspects. This would be an error because the mission of the school goes beyond scientific instruction - it is to educate, and education is a global process.

Collective work, exchanging experiences, criticism and self-criticism therefore become the totality of activities of the centre and the life of each one. It is through this process that we manage to obtain a true knowledge, a knowledge founded on a common effort, in a practical demonstration of the values and limitations of each one.’

Chris Searle, *'We're Building the New School'*, Mozambique

The end of the first term is approaching, and a general meeting is called to analyse the problems that arose in it. Every student, teacher, and school worker is summoned to attend, and the meeting is chaired by Comrade Rui. With a thousand people in the gymnasium it is still less than half full as Comrade Lamas, the Political Education teacher, starts off some communal singing. Then we stand to sing the International-

a new Mozambican version that the entire school has been practising during the run-up to May Day. Jose Alberto gestures to me, standing with my turma, and asks me to lead the singing. I come forward and sing the first line as loud as I can, and soon the huge roar of a thousand Mozambican voices is with me.

Rui explains the purpose of the meeting - to expose and analyse our defects, and search for collective solutions to apply to them next term. He says that each Turma representative must be prepared to summarise the respective turma's problems in turn. He begins by calling upon the representative of the first turma in the fifth year. The tiny representative is nervous and tongue-tied, and can only mutter a few inarticulate words. Rui then calls upon the Turma Director, a young teacher, and he too has very little to say. Rui criticises them both for their apparent inability to transmit their problems to the rest of the school, and then calls upon the group representatives of the same turma. Can any of them speak clearly and confidently about their turma's problems? One by one they stand up and try to address the meeting, but they are all either too reticent or completely overawed.

Now Rui asks the entire turma to stand up. They do so. He asks, 'Isn't there one of you who can address this meeting?' One boy comes forward to the front of the assembly. He lifts his fist and shouts 'Viva Frelimo!' and then 'Viva the organised school!', and the other students respond and then listen as he lists the examples of slackness, indiscipline, and bad organisation that he can recall throughout the term. Rui calls the undisciplined students that the boy mentions to the front of the assembly and asks them whether their colleague's criticisms are true. They can only stumble out a few embarrassed words. The rest of the turma confirm that these students have often disturbed the general organisation of the class, and suddenly many of the students who did not speak before are putting up their hands and bursting into words.

Rui goes through many classes in the same way, and the meeting lasts all

afternoon and for three hours the next morning. As it gains pace, more and more students are actively participating and volunteering contributions. There is great unevenness in the eloquence of the different turma representatives, but some have penetrating criticisms of the defects in their organisation and commitment. Pupils are openly criticised for noisiness, individualism, falling asleep in class, and fighting. Two boys come forward when called, still scowling at each other. They have been enemies all term, their representative says, and Rui makes it clear that such behaviour is a form of divisiveness that the school cannot tolerate. They must mend their differences in a collective spirit with the rest of their turma. Each time the undercurrent of noise at the meeting grows too loud, Rui raises his fist at the end of a long arm and shouts 'Viva a disciplina!' The students respond 'Viva!' and are silent again.

Teachers do not escape the general criticism. Pita, the President of the Directive Commission, is criticised by some ninth-year students because they say they cannot understand the way that he teaches geography. He replies to the criticism. He says that he understands the difficulties, but the teaching of geography has changed since Independence, and they must understand that. Now it is not rote learning about the cities and rivers of Portugal, or a study of Portugal's colonial possessions in the Far East. It is economic geography, and an approach that is far more intellectually demanding. He reminds the students that the New School must offer a completely revolutionary form of pedagogy, and they must all collectively struggle to master it. Rui says the problem must be put before the Pedagogical Section that has just been formed for their consideration. Another teacher, the P.E. instructor Taibo, is openly accused of insulting students by using local dialect slang expressions. Taibo can't escape the criticism and has to admit it, and Rui's public criticism of him brings a huge burst of applause from the students. When another teacher begins a speech by referring to 'My pedagogy . . .' Rui firmly interrupts him: 'In Mozambique we have no my pedagogy, we only have our pedagogy,

One turma in the seventh year receives a lot of attention, provoked by the self-criticism of his turma made by the representative in a long, prepared speech. 'Viva self-criticism!' declares Rui, and the discussion of this one undisciplined turma becomes a general debate. Traore, one of the Guinean comrades, is the new Director of this particular turma, and in his forceful and emphatic beginner's Portuguese he gives a long homily to the assembly on the need for discipline in national reconstruction - something, the students already know, that he and his

comrades know a great deal about. 'You are children of the African Revolution as well as the Mozambican Revolution', he cries out, and the students are all listening, the bonds of African unity tightening inside them. Traore gets a massive cheer as he sits down. A little later he is on his feet again, this time speaking in French, with Jose Alberto translating, line by line. He speaks at length, quoting his own President, Ahmed Sekou Toure. 'It is revolutionary discipline that will remake your country', he says, 'and the same discipline will create literacy amongst your people. He who cannot read or write is an invalid. You must take your knowledge to give literacy to your People. The People are all', he continues, quoting his President. 'If the life of a man goes from one to a hundred, the life of the People is infinite'.

Now we must come to a collective decision on what should be done with the undisciplined students - who by now have built up a little crowd of doleful faces standing behind Rui. The meeting decides that they must deepen their consciousness of their indiscipline by doing some manual work. They are instructed to come in the next day and clean the gymnasium toilets, which Rui learns - much to his chagrin - were missed out in the last cleaning session. There are some dissenting voices at this judgement - two teachers say that such a measure is unsanitary and unhealthy, to which Rui replies that it is even more so to leave them the way they are. Another teacher suggests we should examine the causes of students falling asleep in their lessons. This is generally agreed, as is Ribeiro's suggestion that a subcommittee of the Disciplinary Section be formed to look into the causes of indiscipline in the school.

The meeting ends with all present standing to attention to sing the Frelimo Anthem. It is sung powerfully and sonorously, as if the singers are digesting the lessons of the meeting.

[The following is about a different moment. Bad Criticism.]

Today we received a surprise visit from the Provincial Governor...

After hearing five short reports from the turma representatives, he launched straight into his criticism. [The governor then criticises the graffiti he has noticed, the school is unclean, he thinks that students shouldn't have long hair.] We listen quietly to all this. There is not one kind word or gesture of encouragement. The Governor punctuates his criticism with intervals of vivas: 'Viva the Revolutionary School!' 'Viva the Organised Student', but his angry words pour all over us. 'This is June 16', he says, 'Why aren't you commemorating the massacres of African

people at Mueda and Soweto?' [A teacher explains that those activities are scheduled for the weekend, and the governor responds that it seems that the activities are badly organised and that nobody is prepared.]

All this is very fierce and unremitting criticism. I begin to think and chew it over as the Governor continues. Now, it seems to me, a school is like a person, a huge person with the collective sensitivity of more than a thousand human beings. It is also a great house of Youth - particularly here, where most of the teachers too are very young, only a few years older than the students. Like humans, the school can take criticism, and can advance through the insights it brings. Criticism and self-criticism are its lifeblood, without them it would wither, regress, and degenerate. But, accompanying criticism there must be encouragement too, support, words of succour and love - failing which the recipient of criticism withdraws, becomes limp, loses morale. A welter of cold words will not help its advance.

On our School Newsboard at the school entrance there is a giant figure of a peasant child painted by a student, with the rights of the child written in bold letters beneath it. Next to this there are on the board nearly one hundred contributions in verse and prose by the students themselves on the theme of childhood and solidarity with all the world's children. The Governor picks out one drawing that he doesn't like without saying anything about those that he does like. The drawing depicts a child wearing European clothes. How do they reflect Mozambican culture? he asks the Commission. But he says nothing about the positive, collective force expressed by the other contributions to the newsboard.

After he goes we all feel breathless and downcast in the gymnasium. I look at the Commission, three young men: they look shattered. I notice Rafael, the youngest member, 19 years old and running a school of 1,500 students with his two colleagues. He has put in 16 hours a day for the last six months. Now he sits dejected, with tears in his eyes. His work seems devastated, torn apart.

But having been knocked down, we're soon on our feet again, such is the surging energy of the New School. The next two days will see us taking the Governor's criticisms to our heads and hearts. We systematically clean every room and corridor in the school. Every line of graffiti disappears, and the toilets shine with a gloss they've never known before. The litter on the school grounds is collected and burned, the rocks and stones lying around the holes dug for the fruit trees are put

into piles. As we do this work we seem to grow closer together. Gaps have been closed up between the Commission, the teachers, and the students. We move on further, more firmly clasped together.

[After this blow of poor criticism, there is the beginning of a return to a better process of criticism in the school.]

What is different from last week's experience with the visit of the Party man is that a genuine debate is being opened up, and real, thick issues between people are emerging with some kind of honesty. There is no haranguing or hectoring, no verbal bullying. The students, one by one, are put on the spot. They have to speak. Some are reluctant and timid - but there is no reference to undone buttons or waist-length shirts. We are getting inside each other. I feel a sudden sense of pride in being a teacher in this school as Ribeiro, Pita, and Rafael talk to the students. They reach right into them by pointing to the exigencies of the time and place in which we all live. How can they act in this way when their People are suffering from malnutrition and are dying of hunger in some places? When their People have no clothes? When their People can't read or write? When are they really going to take this in, to come to grips with the problems of the country and work side by side with the People to solve them? Who else in this time and place can perform this task but them?

At this very moment the Revolution is exigent, they are involved in a struggle of class. This is the historical task that only they can accomplish. 'Bene, what is your father?' 'A railway worker.' 'Armando, yours?' 'A peasant, Comrade Teacher.' 'Raul, yours?' 'A peasant.' 'Jose Maria, yours' 'He is dead, Comrade Teacher.' 'Rita yours?' 'A primary school teacher.' 'Joao Americao, yours?' 'A peasant.' 'Rafael, yours?' 'A peasant.' 'Celestinho, yours?' 'A peasant, Comrade Teacher.' 'And yet the behaviour of all of you is worse than that of the great landowners who exploited your People for centuries — and my People too' declares Ribeiro. 'My father is a worker in Portugal. Now don't you see this?'

Some students are clearly beginning to feel shamed and penitent. Ribeiro is reaching them, his words have gone right inside them. Pita asks them, one by one, 'What do you think we should do to raise your consciousness, bring you to an awareness of your responsibilities towards the People?' Some of them begin to suggest remedies: 'We need to be disciplined, we need to go to a political centre where we can begin to change our attitudes.' At least five students answer like this, as if it is the thing that they think they would be expected to say. But they say it

sincerely and voluntarily, as if their thoughts and minds are being sounded.

Rafael, from the Commission, gets up. He is 19 years old, the same age as many of the students he is addressing. He speaks with a sudden eloquence and passion that arouses the wilting attentions of the tired listeners. 'It is no good suggesting that a month's or two months' political education course is going to really change you. There is no machine that can transform you into a new person. It can't happen that way, so automatically. Comrades, it is a process! You can only change by a process Only by work and through work, and by analysis and understanding of your errors while you work, can you change. You must work to transform the country and the lives of the People. Through this work you begin to change yourselves. Nothing and nobody can do it for you!

The Commission reject the suggestion of a political course as a substitute for change and transformation of consciousness. Only by working together and transforming the school will you transform yourselves!' underlines Pita. And for me, the five hours have been as lightning. I have been observing and learning from my colleagues, all of whom are much younger than me. I feel as if I have been exposed and supported simultaneously, as if I too must begin to know myself again as a teacher.

