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THE COMMUNIST FEDERATION OF BRITAIN (MARXIST-LENINIST)

The C.F.B. (M-L) is an organisation of Communists whose purpose is to help create the conditions to form a revolutionary party. The rising level of struggle against all oppression in Britain will not effectively challenge the ruling-class until the lessons of these struggles are widely understood by the working-class and its allies. A disciplined party guided by scientific socialism is needed to lead in this process of raising the struggle to a conscious political level.

No such party exists. The historical contradictions leading to the split in the international Communist movement in the early 1960's have not yet been resolved and the lessons applied to the actual conditions existing generally in Western Europe. Without this being done there will be no guiding political line and programme and no unity within the Marxist-Leninist movement.

The C.F.B. (M-L) is comprised of groups of Marxist-Leninists who have been working together since 1967 to aid in this vital task of forming a party. It has consistently worked to achieve this goal by combining two forms of political work.

FIRSTLY: We study the main problems facing the British people and the world revolutionary movement, applying the scientific socialist method developed by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao Tsetung.

SECONDLY: We engage in immediate struggles on the main issues of exploitation and oppression.

We believe that only in combining the lessons of both these forms of political work can a correct line be developed. Without such a guiding line and programme the struggles on all the vital and immediate issues will continue to demonstrate the treadmill characteristics of the last 150 years.

In developing this line we recognise the need to destroy the influence of social democracy, revisionism and Trotskyism - the main defeatist ideological trends which act to disarm the working-class.

We understand that as all these tasks are increasingly achieved it will become possible to build a mass revolutionary movement capable of withstanding ruling-class attacks and finally of overthrowing and smashing the present system and its State machine. The working class and its party will then implement its own dictatorship over the present employing class to build socialism and prevent the restoration of capitalism.

Our basic policy document is 'The Marxist-Leninist Movement in Britain; Origins and Perspectives' published in 1969. Readers wanting to know more about our policy and political work should contact their local group or the Secretary of the C.F.B.

Signed articles in M.L.Q. do not necessarily represent the political line of the C.F.B. (M-L)

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VOTE LABOUR IS TAILISM

CRITICISM OF THE NATIONAL C.F.B.
RESOLUTION ON THE GENERAL ELECTION WHICH WAS
PASSED ON 15TH SEPT. 1974.

In September 1974, the following resolution was passed.
(Paragraphs are lettered A to E for ease of reference.)

- A "The main purpose of our election campaign should be to demonstrate the essentially overt and covert bourgeois nature of the Tory and Labour parties respectively based on exposing their respective records.
- B At the same time we should point out the tactical advantages of a Labour Government in 1974.
- C 1. In office especially in the growing world capitalist crisis its working-class supporters will most easily be aided to dispel any illusions remaining about Labour's ability to carry out Socialist policies. It also provides opportunities to combat reformist illusions generally.
- D 2. Because Labour has been forced to accede to certain progressive demands of the labour movement relating to trade union legislation, statutory wages policy, the reopening of the question of the EEC, and developing opposition to private armies of the ultra-right.
- E For these reasons we will call for the return of a Labour Government in order to expose it."

The question of social democracy is one of major importance for the development of the Marxist-Leninist Party. Strong criticism has to be made of how the previous policy line on elections of four years standing was overturned with very little prepared debate.

The election had been anticipated for many months. That the line on elections agreed by the Federation in February should have been challenged explicitly so late in the day and with no advance notice is very bad. Undoubtedly the supporters of the former majority line (including the comrade writing this criticism) were very much at fault in not taking the initiative in the ideological struggle and in succumbing to the worldly wisdom of yielding and getting on with everyone. However the main fault lies with those who changed CFB policy on a major question without full and principled debate.

The actual content of the resolution shows the same weakness of principle. Its ambiguity, the way it combines elements from several different lines, its vagueness on the key questions and what is the overall emphasis of the resolution are characteristic of the opportunist tendencies that have not yet been defeated in the Federation.

Lenin's remarks in section Q of 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back' are relevant:

Lenin's remarks in section Q of "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back" are relevant:

'When speaking of fighting opportunism, there is a characteristic feature of present day opportunism in every sphere that must never be overlooked: this is its vagueness, its diffuseness, its elusiveness. The very nature of the opportunist is such that he will always try to avoid formulating the issue clearly and irrevocably; he will always try to find the resultant force, will always wriggle like a snake between two mutually excluding points of view, he will try to 'agree' with both and reduce his differences of opinion to slight amendments, doubts, innocently good intentions, etc, etc.'

ECLECTIC NATURE OF THE RESOLUTION

The resolution is constructed in such a way as to appeal to two quite different groups of comrades. For one group of comrades the resolution says that the 'main' purpose of our election campaign is to demonstrate the essentially bourgeois nature of the Tory and Labour parties.

The resolution however also opportunistically appeals at the same time to quite another group of comrades holding quite different views. Having said that the main emphasis should be to show the essentially bourgeois nature of the two parties, what it in fact puts emphasis on are the advantages of voting Labour. While actually voting Labour is not specifically called for, it is strongly implied; and although the alleged advantages are called merely 'tactical' there is nothing to show why they shouldn't be used as a strategic principle in every election down to the end of the bourgeoisie!

The resolution thus fudges the issues, appeals in a contradictory way to two radically different political stands and is an example of what Lenin called 'finding the resultant force' between two points of view - a statement that can win a majority vote but which cannot win clarity and unity.

Even within the section describing the alleged advantages of having a Labour Government, two quite different and mutually incompatible lines of argument are appealed to.

On the one hand, in paragraph C we have the expose Labour argument and the need to dispell any illusions about Labour's ability to carry out socialist policies. Apparently a frontal attack on the Labour Party. On the other hand in paragraph D the Labour Party is presented as the lesser evil, and we hear of the possibilities of forcing it into a relatively progressive position - a very different tune. It is obvious that both lines cannot be right, and leaflets drawn up with these contradictory specifications will waver randomly between the two different messages.

To examine the resolution paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraph A

"THE MAIN PURPOSE OF OUR ELECTION CAMPAIGN SHOULD BE TO DEMONSTRATE THE ESSENTIALLY OVERT AND COVERT BOURGEOIS NATURE OF THE TORY AND LABOUR PARTIES RESPECTIVELY BASED ON EXPOSING THEIR RESPECTIVE RECORDS."

We have already seen how this first sentence lulls the reader about what is the main emphasis -- an emphasis which in fact quickly becomes one on the need to vote Labour.

Paragraph B

"AT THE SAME TIME WE SHOULD POINT OUT THE TACTICAL ADVANTAGES OF A LABOUR GOVERNMENT IN 1974"

Having stated what the main purpose should be, the little phrase, "at the same time" provides the opening for a very different main emphasis. We quickly meet the tailist line of the working class depending on the Labour Party for its political perspective, although it is precisely this that the working class must now discard if it is to develop its own political party and seize state power. It is precisely this idea that led to the T.U.C. voting unanimously for class collaboration and the "Social Contract" just before the election.

The London Group argued in "Why the Election Matters" that the working class would be "asked to choose" and we must have something relevant to say to them on this choice. But who is "asking the working class to choose"? The bourgeoisie! Lenin punctures this false choice of the two party system of bourgeois democracy emphatically:

"To decide once every few years which member (or representative - D.B.) of the ruling class is to repress and crush (and fool) the people through parliament - such is the real essence of bourgeois parliamentarism."

That is what we should reply when the bourgeoisie tries to put us on the spot with their phoney "choice" of bourgeois parties!

Yet the rest of the resolution, by its detailed stress on the advantages of a Labour Government, by its omission of any reference to the dis-advantages of a Labour Government, and by the proportion of space devoted to this, makes it appear essential that we should choose, and choose Labour.

What is the chief weakness of the working class at the present? Is it that the Labour Party is not often enough in power? Or is it that the working class has no party independent of bourgeois ideology? It is a hundred times the latter. And our main message now must everywhere be to sum up the widespread disillusion in the minds of workers with the call, Stop relying on Bourgeois Parties!

"ADVANTAGES" IN BOURGEOIS PARTIES

What is the big discovery about the "advantages" of the Labour Party? For as long as there has been more than one bourgeois party in existence, one of them has always had and will inevitably have some slight advantages for the working class over the others. It would not be possible that in all respects they should present exactly similar disadvantages for the workers! Indeed the bourgeoisie would not be able to maintain its hegemony over the working class without at times appearing to be prepared to make certain concessions.

The Liberal Party has a policy of proportional representation which would make it easier in the future to get Marxist-Leninists into Parliament. Should we therefore for this of course purely "tactical" reason and for entirely "revolutionary" motives advocate voting Liberal?

The Conservative Party is more likely to keep Britain in Europe, develop the Common Market as a capitalist and super-power and challenge the present hegemony of the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. Should we therefore, for this important "tactical" reason (and we all know how wrong it is to spurn tactics), explain in our best "revolutionary" manner why it is progressive to vote Tory?

All at first glance so ridiculous that unfortunately the advocates of voting Labour will probably not see why they have an obligation to explain how their arguments can just as well be used to reach the above conclusions. For in fact all these examples are entirely consistent with the policy of the working class looking for limited advantages from one bourgeois party or another. All out and out right opportunism.

When will the likelihood ever end that the Labour Party will offer a few more reformist advantages than the other parties? How long, do we go on gesticulating (in ever so revolutionary a way) at the tail of bourgeois political parties!!

THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN OCTOBER 1974

That the resolution should have come now, * of all times, when the T.U.C. has been forced to adopt the "Social Contract" because of its inability to see beyond the possibility of a Labour Government, and its fear of putting an election victory at peril, shows that the argument about voting Labour is NOT based on tactical considerations but is the guiding star of a right opportunist strategic deviation.

In February the miners dared (unlike the proposers of the new resolution!) to put the interests of working class struggle

* Time of writing was February 1975 - Editor

before the dubious advantages of a Labour Government, and won a great victory. In September, as everyone including the Morning Star agrees, the T.U.C. was blackmailed into adopting the "Social Contract" by the fear of making Labour lose the election. At this time therefore above all it was essential for revolutionaries to fight vigorously for an understanding in the working class of the need to base our policy on the interests of the working class alone and not on any bourgeois party. But at this time a few dubious short-term advantages of a Labour Government were scraped together and presented as a tactical argument. If we are going to call on workers to vote Labour in such circumstances when will we not call on them to vote Labour? What is happening in this debate is absolutely clear: vote Labour is a strategy, not a tactic - a right opportunist strategy.

It has been argued that because it is a 'tactic' therefore we have on each occasion to evaluate the situation according to its immediate merits and without having to consider our previous decisions. In other words there should be no principles guiding our practical application of tactics!

The February 1974 CFB resolution on elections laid down a clear principle:

"Except under special cases, e.g. an immediate threat of fascism, probable splits among the ruling class, revolutionaries should not advise the working class to vote Labour."

If we are to develop policy consistently, it was necessary to argue in September 1974 either that the contradictions between the bourgeois parties really were of such magnitude as to be more than the usual Punch and Judy fraud, or that the February formula was wrong. What is not permissible is just to drop the February formulation with no argument at all on the grounds that each situation is a new and purely "tactical" one. This is empiricism and opportunism in the field of theory.

TWO HISTORICAL TASKS

The whole idea of the Federation at this stage issuing to the masses supposed tactical calls of a very ambiguous and potentially highly misleading nature, before it has the organising ability to make those tactical calls a reality, has been fudged over.

Lenin drew a clear historical distinction which we shall ignore at our peril. In 'Left-Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder' (p. 98 Peking Edition) he wrote of the 'first historical task (that of winning over the class-conscious vanguard of the proletariat to Soviet Power and the dictatorship of the working class, a task which 'could not be accomplished without a complete victory over opportunism and social chauvinism', and the 'second historical task which 'consists in being able to lead the masses to the new position that can ensure the victory of the vanguard in the revolution'.

We have only to think of our size and our political immaturity in the CFB to be clear which historical task is at present placed in front of us - that of winning over the class-conscious vanguard.

How can we with our present size affect the results of an election? The present writer was once foolishly accused of opportunism for raising just this point. If the tactic is valuable merely as a tactic (as getting a Labour Government is, or should be), if it does not illustrate and illuminate other points in the course of striving for it (as it does not), and if it is open to dangerous misinterpretation, then how in all conscience can we present it to the working class, knowing that as a tactic it cannot succeed! The working class will understand that our tactic of voting Labour cannot succeed, and will conclude that we attach a strategic importance to trailing along behind the social democrats. We will therefore actually reinforce the hold of social democracy over the masses.

CANVASSING FOR LABOUR VOTES

Is the argument about the alleged desirability of a Labour Government genuinely based on practical considerations?

Some comrades who supported the new resolution opposed the policy of going round doors persuading people to vote Labour. Why? may we ask. If voting Labour on October 10th really was in the interests of the working class why should we be ashamed of persuading working people to vote Labour?

A government comes to power if it wins enough constituencies in an election; and a party wins a constituency if enough people on the day of the election go to the polling booth and cast their votes for it. If we want to see a government elected we must persuade enough individuals to go and vote for it. Did these comrades want a Labour Government returned or didn't they?

Why are they so squeamish about going to people's houses and arguing the line they advocate? Was it that they know the inconsistencies of trying to campaign for people to vote Labour with a policy whose main purpose is meant to 'show the essentially bourgeois nature of the Labour and Conservative parties'?

The practical aim of the vote Labour line is to procure the return of a Labour Government. In fact for an organisation the size of the CFB to procure the return of one government rather than another is a virtual impossibility. But if we are trying to be practical, with this supposedly very practical policy, there is just one way we might swing the result provided all other factors are favourable.

In the Evening Standard of Wednesday 16th October 1974

Robert Carvel, the bourgeois commentator, wrote of the 149 most marginal constituencies in England, Wales and Scotland where the outcome (of the election) must be decided. The remaining constituencies -- nearly 500 of them, cannot affect the result, whatever the political weather. If you live in them you are a voter. But really you are just a spectator. This is the system. Although the Labour Party needed only a 0.7% swing at the election it failed to win Brentford and Isleworth by a mere 232 votes. The London group was calling for the return of a Labour Government but it did nothing practical to procure it.

If the London Group had given out 10,000 leaflets in Brentford and Isleworth there is a good chance it could have persuaded 232 more people to vote Labour. Obviously to achieve this the leaflets would have had to be concentrated on the most advanced section of the working class and the one most open to our supposedly revolutionary line of argument - that section of workers already completely disillusioned with the Labour Party. If successful the campaign would have made the Labour majority one seat larger than it would otherwise have been, and several hundreds of workers already disillusioned with Labour would have been induced to vote for Social Democracy. Whether they would have understood the ambiguous arguments for doing so in a revolutionary rather than a reformist way is doubtful.

The Yeovil group of the CFB however did take part in electioneering. Such was the inconsistency of this 'very practical' procure-a-Labour-Government line that while the London Group failed to concentrate its efforts in swinging a couple of hundred votes in a marginal constituency in West London, the Yeovil group attempted to break a Conservative majority which turned out to be 7,379. Only 122 seats were won by the Conservatives with majorities larger than this. For Labour to take Yeovil would have implied a national result with a parliamentary majority for Labour over the Conservatives of 350!

What would be the concrete advantage of a Labour majority of 350 to the working class or the Marxist-Leninist movement? None at all. The only effect of the Yeovil campaign to vote Labour was therefore to get more people to pledge an impractical loyalty to the Labour Party, to look to the Labour Party as 'saviours from on high' who deliver, as it says in the Internationale.

THE VOTE LABOUR LINE WILL FRAGMENT

The unprincipled vagueness about the manner of carrying out the supposedly practical and very concrete vote-Labour line is a major weak spot on which its opponents must concentrate their attack. Under the impact of this attack we may expect its supporters to retreat significantly in two quite different directions.

One group of comrades will decline the challenge to engage in campaigns in specific marginal constituencies in order to return a Labour Government, and will admit tacitly or openly that the slogan 'vote Labour to expose Labour' is merely a way of tricking Labour supporters into reading critical propaganda.

Another group will admit that the practical execution of a plan by the CFB to obtain a Labour Government is at this stage indeed quite impractical, that the proposal is in fact not a tactic at all but a strategy. They will have to admit in other words the utterly tailist nature of their political position - their fear of attempting to sever the umbilical cord that ties the working class to the politics of the bourgeoisie.

Paragraph C

"I. IN OFFICE ESPECIALLY IN THE GROWING WORLD CAPITALIST CRISIS ITS WORKING CLASS SUPPORTERS WILL MOST EASILY BE AIDED TO DISPEL ANY ILLUSIONS REMAINING ABOUT LABOUR'S ABILITY TO CARRY OUT SOCIALIST POLICIES. IT ALSO PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES TO COMBAT REFORMIST ILLUSIONS GENERALLY."

In other words we should encourage the mass of workers to secure the tactical advantages a Labour Government is supposed to bring us in exposing social democracy!

We in the CFB pride ourselves on our understanding of the need to build the Communist party through mass work and of the need to practice mass work with the mass line. Mao expresses the mass line as follows:

"Take the ideas of the masses and concentrate them, then go to the masses, persevere in the ideas and carry them through so as to form correct ideas of leadership - such is the basic method of leadership." (Vol. III, P. 120)

It is clear that paragraph C of the resolution is completely at variance with the mass line. How can we go to a factory of workers and find any ideas present in their minds that could be crystalised into a call to make our tasks easier as Communists?

When Lenin called in 1920 for a campaign to support Henderson (not the Labour Party - the distinction is important for understanding the differences between 1920 and 1974) as a rope supports a hanged man, he was making a vivid polemical point. But such a polemical point is not a substitute for an analysis based on the mass line.

We of course consider whether particular slogans will help our work as communists, but we cannot base our selection of slogans simply on that. We must base our mass propaganda

on the mass line, on crystalising, spreading and popularising the most progressive demands already coming to the surface among the working class. In 1974 those ideas were that workers must rely on their own strength to achieve their goals. That is what we had to popularise.

MUST LABOUR BE IN POWER FOR EXPOSURE

Is it essential to the success of our exposure of social democracy to have a Labour Government in power? Of course not! The final sentence, "It also provides opportunities to combat reformist illusions generally", carries the argument to its absurd logical conclusions. Are we not surrounded with enough such illusions in reformist Britain that we have to spend time setting up additional Aunt Sally's to knock down! Almost every page of every newspaper has examples ready for us to pick up now and use to "expose reformism generally". The answer to the question, how do we expose social democracy, is very simple. GET ON WITH IT!

Those comrades who argue that the Federation should try to procure the return of a Labour Government should get on with developing a regular feature in "Struggle" illustrating by concrete examples the reformist dangers of the Labour Party. That is how to take up the question concretely at this present stage of our development.

PASSIVE VIEW OF THE WORKING CLASS

The advocates of voting Labour adopt a passive view of working class consciousness against which they wish to expose Labour. They fall into the trap of bourgeois democracy which presents governments as bodies that do things for a passive population. Instead of saying "our chains our own right hands shall sever", the vote-Labour tailists try to criticise the Labour Party in terms of whether they have been good or bad "saviours from on high" - in terms of whether they have or have not "delivered". They inevitably imagine it is particularly important for exposure of the Labour Party that the party should be put into power to illustrate how little it in fact does for the people. Labour, they say, is off the hook in opposition because it can promise to do what it likes and can freely criticise the Conservatives.

But this misses the whole point that as Communists we criticise the Labour Party in terms of what it does for the active mass movement - in terms of how much leadership and support they have given active struggles. What for example did Labour do for the Upper Clyde ship-workers struggle? What did its members really do to support the rent struggles at Clay Cross? That is the sort of question we want to ask.

There are far richer opportunities for exposing Labour in opposition in this way than when it can make excuses about the restraints of being in office and the responsibility of having to deal with "national" crises.

In fact if we continue to blunder into the trap of bourgeois politics and try to attack Labour in terms of what it "does" for a passive populace, we may very well find it is more difficult to expose a Labour Government that has power to bring apparent benefits to working people such as tax reductions and food subsidies.

The argument then that it is easier to expose Labour when it is in power is oversimplified and misleading. It is quite clear that we should in no way rely on Labour being in power for our work of exposure.

Indeed so desperate is the bourgeoisie to find ways out of its crisis that we should be prepared to fight vigorous battles on any political terrain - Tory government, coalition etc. This provides us with valuable training for ourselves and for the working class, and opportunities for winning important battles. Consider the success of the struggle of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders under the last Conservative government.

What is dangerous is to spread any idea that it would be a serious set-back if the Conservatives were to win an election. The vote Labour line feeds on and fuels this demoralising fear, when we should be fostering the attitude that with boldness and judgment the working class is capable of taking on the bourgeoisie in whatever guise it comes. If the Conservatives win the next election a vote-Labour line will leave the morale of the working class that much lower than it would otherwise have been.

LENIN'S "LEFT-WING COMMUNISM"

When Lenin wrote "Left-Wing Communism" the majority of the working-class in Britain still voted Liberal or Conservative: the Labour movement was the advanced edge of the most militant section of workers. Still in its progressive phase and not a bourgeois party in Lenin's opinion (as it definitely is now), Labour consisted of a broad front of a range of workers organisations intimately involved in active grass roots struggles. The federal nature of the constitution left the opportunist leadership still open to challenge and possible removal.

The key difficulty for Communists was, as Lenin argued, that they very often found it hard to approach the masses and even to get a hearing from them (Left-Wing Communism, Peking edition p. 90). It was therefore necessary to associate with all that was positive in the movement, and at the same time to struggle with the opportunists for leadership of the organisation, by constantly challenging them to show that their actions were in the interests of the working class. Lenin's belief in this policy was very much the result of his view that the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution had enormously increased the speed at which the working class could be won over to a revolutionary position - and his view

that an aggressive tactical policy in such circumstances was not only desirable but obligatory.

Accordingly the CPGB sought to develop a critical alliance with the Labour Party, the main purpose of which was not to fight parliamentary battles but to further the active mass working class struggle, a united front not of the top but from below.

Thus Willie Gallacher, chairing the 6th Conference of the CPGB in May 1924, spoke warmly of the progressive trade union movement demanding "that the General Council (of the TUC) shall be invested with power, and shall become a General Staff capable of marshalling the whole working class army if and when occasion demands it". By contrast parliamentary procedures were very much of secondary importance: "Any Labour Government earnestly desirous of serving the workers must be ready at any moment of crisis to scrap procedure and openly identify itself with the workers, throwing itself energetically into the struggle as a part of the Labour Movement organised to combat capitalism".

But the favourable possibilities did not develop in the hoped for way. The opportunist leaders of the Labour Party quickly became entrenched in power and turned what had been subjectively a working class party into a bourgeois political party - another version of the Liberal Party. The revolutionary tide ebbed and the Communists were actively excluded from the Labour Party. Meanwhile the Communists, who had originally found it difficult to get a hearing from the working class, had built up a workers press with a mass circulation of over 50,000. Under such circumstances the former policy became a tailist one and after a few years was dropped by the Communist Party in favour of a more long-term strategy.

"DISAPPOINTMENT" VERSUS "EXPOSURE"

Lenin did not argue that the tactic he was advocating should be pursued until Henderson was fully exposed but until the majority of workers were disappointed in him. He wrote (L.W.C., Peking p. 87) "thirdly we must bring nearer the moment when on the basis of the disappointment of the majority of the workers in the Hendersons it will be possible with serious chances of success to overthrow the government of the Hendersons at once." Disappointment, not exposure. Exposure, i.e. popular analysis and criticism from a Marxist stand, is something that Marxist-Leninists have the responsibility to do; but disappointment in the Labour Party is something that comes about by experience.

And precisely the majority of the workers are now disappointed in the Labour Party. Nor are Communists now obliged to associate themselves with the party in order to get a hearing from the masses, as was the case in 1920. Lenin's tactical arguments of 1920 therefore no longer apply.

Widespread disappointment is unmistakable. Labour's total vote fell markedly in the February 1974 election (despite the fact that it won). Its vote has never again attained the level achieved in 1951. The disillusion of the voters is seen in the much greater readiness with which they move from one party to another, and above all in the growth of alternatives to the two big bourgeois parties. Workers shift their votes readily now because they are no longer confident that any bourgeois party has anything long-term to offer them.

Those who argue that the situation with the Labour Party is the same today as it was 50 years ago are mechanically mistaking the name and form of the party with its political content, and are not concretely analysing what roles it played in the class struggle then and what roles it plays now.

Paragraph D

"2. BECAUSE LABOUR HAS BEEN FORCED TO ACCEDE TO CERTAIN PROGRESSIVE DEMANDS OF THE LABOUR MOVEMENT RELATING TO TRADE UNION LEGISLATION, STATUTORY WAGES POLICY, THE RE-OPENING OF THE QUESTION OF THE EEC, AND DEVELOPING OPPOSITION TO PRIVATE ARMIES OF THE ULTRA-RIGHT."

THE "LESSER EVIL"

The arguments for voting Labour in paragraph D are totally inconsistent with the arguments in paragraph C, thus illustrating again the opportunist nature of the resolution. We now receive a number of "advantages" of a Labour Government which in the very previous paragraph were described as "reformist illusions" that had to be exposed to the working class! Paragraph D is in fact nothing other than the abject "lesser evil" argument.

Four years ago it was universally accepted in Marxist-Leninist circles that the "lesser evil" argument was the height of tailism. To vote Labour could therefore only be advocated in terms of the ingenious "vote Labour to expose Labour" line.

But concrete analysis of Lenin's arguments in Left Wing Communism has made it difficult to argue a case confidently on the basis of this work in 1974. Therefore without clearly rejecting the former position, the lesser-evil line was opportunistically added on to make it more plausible, despite the inconsistencies of the two lines.

Paragraph C talks essentially of exposing Labour; paragraph D without a blush talks in effect mainly about the need to keep the Tories out. In other words it is not necessary to take a clear stand on anything - just combine

completely divergent approaches in a single resolution and allow comrades to take their pick according to circumstances.

Plausible acrobatics such as these will set us back a long way in the struggle for clarity and unity of purpose in the Federation.

Not only does paragraph D lead us openly into the tailism of the "lesser-evil" line but its arguments about the Labour Party being forced to accede to certain progressive demands drag us down towards the idea of forcing the return of a Labour Government committed to socialist policies (like the Trotskyist "Workers Revolutionary Party").

The resolution refers to only two types of activity that the working class can engage in - 1. to vote, 2. to force progressive demands from the Labour Party! These in practice are its political horizons for all the verbiage about "exposure". We shall make good bedfellows with the revisionist "Communist Party of Great Britain" and the Trotskyist W.R.P.! Such lack of clear-cut principle is the result of a vague and diffuse style of inner party struggle which, if unchallenged, will lead us to waver and stumble into full-blown right opportunism.

Consider the concrete examples of supposed advantages of a Labour Government as given in paragraph D. Over the question of "private armies" the paragraph spreads the reformist illusions which we were supposed according to paragraph C to be combatting. Instead of talking about the armies of the British state, which at this very moment are harrasing and intimidating working people in Northern Ireland, the resolution concentrates on the nine-days wonder of the "private armies". And instead of making the revolutionary point that the working class must rely on its own forces to overcome the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, we have the reformist idea of relying on the government. A strange way to combat reformist illusions! This clause must be totally and explicitly rejected.

Take also the clause about the illusory advantage a Labour Government is said to bring in connection with the EEC. Had the working class by threat of a general strike forced a referendum on the EEC such a development would have enormously strengthened the revolutionary movement. But to get people trooping into the polling booth asking for it as a reform from above harms the development of revolutionary consciousness. This passage is another example of the characteristic error of tailism of placing confidence in the bourgeoisie and its representatives. What will prevent them getting off the hook about the EEC is not a large Labour majority in parliament. It is the militancy of the active working class movement.

BOURGEOIS CONCESSIONS

At the Special General Meeting of the CFB held in 1974 we adopted the following statement on the British situation, based on the argument of Lenin's:

"The British ruling class still uses its other tactic, that of 'liberalism', of reforms and concessions, to confuse and disarm the people. This deceives a section of the workers and is an important cause of reformism and revisionism within the working class movement."

Where is there a statement of this in the resolution about the reforms and concessions that the Labour Government will bring?

Certainly there are differences between reformist bourgeois parties and openly reactionary bourgeois parties. The question is how do we exploit those differences?

Firstly, unless differences are so great as to amount to a choice between bourgeois democracy and fascism, we must say clearly in our propaganda that they are very much less important than the contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Contrary to the claim of bourgeois democracy that changes in the fortunes of political parties bring significant changes in the real world, we must insist that bourgeois party politics reflect, they do NOT determine, the shifts in the class struggle outside parliament.

This point must be got over again and again. Why for example did Wilson, Campbell Adamson of the C.B.I. and Edward Heath all find themselves obliged publicly to disown the Industrial Relations Act? It wasn't the size of the Labour majority in February (Labour got a smaller percentage of the vote then than at any other time since 1931) - it was the result of the direct mass working class struggle outside parliament.

At the time of the February election the bourgeoisie was significantly urging the Conservative Party not to take retaliatory action against the miners or other unions if it won the election, but to follow a conciliatory policy broadly similar to the one the Labour Government in fact followed after it came to power. On the morning of the vote the Financial Times wrote in its editorial column:

"But our support (for the Conservatives) is strictly conditional on the assumption that they will not take any further steps likely to divide the country; that they will distribute the burden of sacrifice fairly and protect the weak as far as possible."

This is why the clause in the discarded February CGB election resolution is such an important principle - that except under special circumstances, e.g., an immediate

threat of fascism etc., it is wrong to advise the working class to vote Labour. That is why it was wrong of the proposers of the new, vote-Labour resolution to sidestep this key argument.

We should certainly in our propoganda deal directly with the apparent advantages for the working class in Labour compared to the Conservatives, and explain that these are to a small degree founded on reality, but it is of the essence for us to argue that these advantages are utterly unreliable and very limited.

WORKERS FIRST OR LABOUR PARTY FIRST

The structure of British bourgeois politics is such that repeatedly there is a contradiction between the electoral interests of the Labour Party and the interests of the working class. Unionists are often forced to choose which they will put first. One of the ways the bourgeoisie maintains its political control is by implying both crudely and subtly that workers had better put the interests of the Labour Party first otherwise Labour will lose the next election. This successfully plays on the fears of the reformist trade union leaders the sort who on 25th September 1974 inserted a big advertisement in the Morning Star saying:

"REMEMBER
TO ENSURE A FAIR DEAL FOR ALL
WE CAN ONLY RELY ON A LABOUR GOVERNMENT"

- this type of opportunist union leader consequently reins in his followers and tries to restrain strike action for fear of jeopardising the election.

One of the key positive features in February 1974 was that the miners specifically refused to be caught in this trap. They did not put the Labour Party before their class interests, they continued their strike, held firm, and it was the capitalists who were the first to waver.

By contrast the events of September 1974 saw a successful return of the old bourgeois weapon, and a unanimous vote for the "Social Contract" resulted at the TUC. In addition several strikes (Ford, building workers) were curbed in order to avoid "damaging Labour's election chances".

Whenever this dilemma occurs it is therefore vital that we should give a firm lead to the working class to put class interests before those of the Labour Party. How can we do so with the new vote-Labour line? That we should have chosen this time above all to drop our clear out call for the working class to fight independently of the Labour Party is deplorable.

ARE LABOUR PARTY REFORMS IMPORTANT?

Granted that Labour, as the reformist bourgeois party, will always offer a few reforms and concessions more than the

Conservatives, do we stress that these are important or that they are insignificant? The latter, again and again.

Even less should we campaign for the success of these reforms as D.J. argues in MLQ 7 in a passage that incredible to say, actually calls for us to campaign for the nationalisation of North Sea oil:

"it is imperative that the Marxist-Leninist Movement is seen by the forces who have fought for the inclusion of such a clause in the Labour Party Manifesto to be campaigning for the Labour Government to carry out its pledge."

Challenge, possibly. Campaign, never!

The whole history of the degeneration of working class organisations into opportunism is one of the overestimation of short-term advantages compared with the long-term development of the movement.

Paragraph E

"FOR THESE REASONS WE WILL CALL FOR THE RETURN OF A LABOUR GOVERNMENT IN ORDER TO EXPOSE IT."

Here the final sentence completes the line presented in paragraph C of the resolution.

We need only note further in connection with paragraph E that the duty of Communists to continue exposure (i.e. critical analysis) of the Labour Party month in and month out right down to its demise, is used at the end of this resolution as a "revolutionary" excuse for continuing indefinitely to vote for a Labour Party that has long since incurred the deep disappointment of the working class.

In summary then the resolution is a grotesque and unprincipled combination of divergent political stands. There are substantial contradictions between paragraph A and the rest, and between paragraphs C and D.

Despite its correct opening paragraph, it fatally implies a view that the only significant action the working class can take is

- 1) to vote
- 2) to force Labour to accede to progressive demands

It says nothing about the most hopeful and crucial development in Britain today - the increasing development of working class action independent of the bourgeois political parties.

It displays the right opportunist error of tailism.

Mao describes tailism as follows:

"Tailism in any type of work is also wrong, because in falling below the level of political consciousness of the masses and violating the principle of leading the masses forward it reflects the disease of dilatoriness. Our comrades must not assume that the masses have no understanding of what they themselves do not yet understand. It often happens that the masses outstrip us and are eager to advance a step when our comrades are still tailing behind certain backward elements, for instead of acting as leaders of the masses such comrades reflect the views of those backward elements and moreover mistake them for those of the broad masses." (Vol III p 266)

A fierce ideological struggle against this right opportunist deviation on the subject of elections must be waged in the C.F.B.

D.B.

SPONTANEITY, PARLIAMENTARISM AND THE LABOUR PARTY

The stand Marxists should take towards the Labour party has been a permanent source of polemic from the first days of the Labour Representation Committee, forerunner of the party, formed in 1900. A central question for revolutionaries from the inception of Marxism has been how to win the working class from reformism and its allegiance to bourgeois democracy, to independent political organisation. Undoubtedly the formation of the party represented 'the first step on the part of the really proletarian organisations of Britain towards a conscious class policy and towards a socialist workers party'. (1) Evaluating this 'first step', as well as its limitations, is what I intend to take up below. The current discussion in MLQ 7,8 & 9, has shaped this article into three areas. These being: the characteristics of Labour policies in capital's economic crises; the connection between social democracy and the organised working class - the extent to which this modifies and distinguishes Labour Government policy from Tory; finally, the origin and strength of social democratic ideas within the working class, class consciousness and the struggle for their destruction.

MLQ 8&9 carried NR's article 'The Labour Party and the Crisis of British Capitalism', where he argues that Labour Party policy is the most rational and farsighted bourgeois solution to the underlying problems facing British capital. Its central theme being that state capitalism is best served by the National Enterprise Board guiding Labour's nationalization plans, combined with state intervention in the private sector. Seeing these policies in this light, NR then seeks to set the reformist illusions of the working class in this context, identifying Labour's programme as the main danger to the working class.

Developing a generalised account of the contradictions generating capitalist crisis enables NR to bypass its concrete expression in the political and ideological struggles within the labour movement. Similar inaccurate generalisations characterise the conclusions drawn from existing bourgeois alternatives. An important example of the former criticism; 'Inflation is the medicine, rather than the disease, which is lack of investment and low profitability'. (p.13). It is implied that inflation is manufactured under govern-

(1) Lenin, Collected Works (4th enlarged Russian Edition, Volume 15, p.235. 'Meeting of the International Socialist Bureau', 1908. (See Notes).

ment control. This is simply untrue. Healey's projected budget deficit is turning out to be much higher than anticipated. For a period the term 'stagflation' was employed to describe capitalism's predicament, now this has turned into a full-blown recession, with inflation through April, May and June, running at around 35%. Inflation has been generated by the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, it is now part of them, certainly not their medicine, as held by Keynes. (2)

We are in agreement concerning the collapse of business confidence and the subsequent reduction in investment which is a consequence of inflation undermining prospective returns on capital to the extent that through the recession, profits are virtually certain to sink below the level sufficient to maintain the current volume of capital. In this situation British imperialism is certain to go to the wall, in a world of increasing capitalist competition, without massive state intervention. The severity of the crisis is not then at issue, but it is important to be accurate about successive government policies and what they seek to resolve. We must reject NR's crude account of the period leading up to the Tory government's defeat by the miners, as well as the mileage gained through contrasting successive Tory and Labour government styles. It is worth remembering that the Tory's relativities machinery produced the settlement, marking a tremendous victory for the miners, which would have been achieved, as many bourgeois commentators noted, whoever won the election.

LABOUR AND THE CAPITALIST CRISIS

What is the distinction between Labour and Tory policies in government? Both act for the bourgeoisie, yet there are important distinctions for revolutionaries. But first, what of the illusions thrown up by the revisionists and Trotskyists of the right, plus those characterised by NR's leftism? DJ (in MLQ 7) drew attention to the vital division between the mature Marxist-Leninist analysis of social-democracy and the means of achieving the victory of communist principles among the working class, and those of the rightists. After listing the positive gains of the 1973 Labour Party Conference, he writes;

"These policies are not presented here as vehicles of achieving workers' power, because indeed they are far removed from that, nor are they presented as issues around which we should campaign to make social-democracy and parliament work in the interests of the working class but as a basis from which we can show the inability of social-democratic policies and methods to make any inroads into the control of state monopoly capitalism. (My emphasis).

(2) See Notes, no.2

Both articles in the last issue disagreed with this reading of the Labour Conference decisions, arguing that in many respects these policies were at best double-edged - with nationalization posing for NR nothing 'which either helps the struggle for socialism or improves the position of the working people'.

Nationalization provides a useful illustration of the respective levels of unity, as well as the distinctive lines taken in this discussion towards the broader question of destroying social democratic ideas in the working class. The revisionists of the Communist Party boldly proclaim that committing the Labour government to large scale nationalization 'would ensure that it was not the mixture as before, but rather that it made a real start in finishing with capitalism once and for all...It is not nationalization which needs to be ditched, but the right wing policy of harnessing the public sector to the private sector.' ('Public Ownership and Control' 1973, pp.14-15). The total confusion of this analysis is firstly, over the class character of Labour's proposals; secondly, in relation to the state through which 'publicly' owned industries operate with the pre-determined question of the principles of commodity production - that is production for profit, not use. (The question of the pricing policies between the 'two sectors' remains a secondary feature - a formal point of whose balance sheet these industries' profits are to appear on. Although false pricing policies are an important point which can be used to drive home the lessons of the bourgeoisie's preference to conceal and preserve the mysteries of exploitation).

There is agreement on the significance of growing state intervention in the economy and that this trend has existed since the break-up of laissez faire capitalism. A trend independent of specific governments and parties, rather than an expression of the 'progressive tendency of the general rate of profit to fall' and the bourgeoisie's resort to growing state expenditure as an attempt to neutralise this through ever increasing taxation, government bonds, and deficit financing. (3). This is an important point since it situates divisions in and between the Labour and Tory governments as a matter of form - anyway, state capitalism grows. These divisions were usefully summarised by remarks by Benn and 'The Times' last year. Outlining the government's proposals, in this case for shipbuilding, Benn observed; "It was clear that the industry would be unable to compete effectively in the world market unless there were changes in management methods and working practices allowing a more efficient use of resources and unless there was much investment and modernization, funds for which were unlikely to be available from private sources." (My emphasis). While 'The Times' editorial read; "Mr. Benn believes he has the answer in state monopoly...Private enterprises can survive,

(3) See Notes, no. 3.

given aid when normal capital markets shy at the risks, alongside partially or fully publicly owned groups, whose record with freer access to taxpayers money has been mixed, to say the least." (1.8.74). While the last point on capital access is not true, there is an appreciation that there has to be state intervention. Whether such people choose to admit it is another matter.

Are these differences significant for Marxist-Leninists? Unlike both PJ and NR, and my own position in MLQ 1, I now believe they are. The demand for nationalization without compensation provides us with much wider opportunities when raising fundamental questions embracing the principles of commodity production, the function of the bourgeois state, in stark contrast to the social democrats politics. It provides an arena for posing communist politics to vast numbers of organised workers, particularly the advanced and active section of the class in opposition to Labour's variation on the old state capitalist theme and the mystical positions held by the Trotskyists and revisionists, besides the more concealed state intervention advocated by the mainstream of the bourgeoisie. We must clearly distinguish between the possibilities posed for revolutionary propaganda and agitation within the nationalization demand, and the mystified links between private and 'public' capital preferred by the Tories. It must be recognised that the Labour party, and to an even greater extent, the Labour government, is advocating a core of 'publicly' owned industry, assisted by the 'cost plus' suppliers of that industry (beside the service function assumed by state owned industry towards the rest of the economy). We must vigorously support demands for the total nationalization of specific industries, stressing the motives behind Labour's present approach (i.e., the continuing commitment for relatively autonomous 'publicly owned' corporations, secret decision making and obscuring the function of capital), its wish to avoid provoking thought among the mass of workers about the roots of commodity production - who creates and who appropriates surplus value, its consequences, that of competition, the clash between the socialised forces of production and the private ownership of the means of production etc.. (4).

The existing form of state capitalism obscures the laws of capital and the realities of class exploitation. The demand for nationalization creates an agenda with wide possibilities for focusing struggle towards the heart of the system - production for profit as opposed to use - creating improved conditions for building the ideas, politics, and organisation, for a real revolutionary socialist movement. It widens the fight against redundancy and rationalization - as already noted, stepping-up exploitation is the main factor behind growing state intervention - throwing the rational of the bourgeois state and social democracy into very sharp

(4) See Notes, no. 4.

relief. To those comrades who feel this policy is too sophisticated, that really the differences within the bourgeoisie are of no significance, Lenin poses some difficult observations for your 'purism':

"The divergences between the Churchills and Lloyd Georges - with insignificant national differences these types exist in all countries - on the one hand, and between the Hendersons and Lloyd Georges on the other, are quite minor and unimportant from the standpoint of pure, i.e., abstract communism, i.e., Communism that has not matured to the stage of practical, mass, political action. But from the standpoint of this practical action by the masses, these differences are very, very important. (My emphasis). To take account of these differences, to determine the moment when the inevitable conflicts between these "friends" which weaken and enfeeble all the "friends" taken together will have completely matured - that is the crux of the matter, the whole task of the Communist who wants to be not merely a class-conscious and convinced propagandist of ideas, but a practical leader of the masses in the revolution. The strictist devotion to the ideas of Communism must be combined with the ability to effect all the necessary practical compromises, to manoeuvre, to make agreements, zig-zags, retreats and so on, in order to accelerate the coming to, and loss of, political power by the Hendersons (the heroes of the Second International, if we are to speak not of individuals, the representatives of petty-bourgeois democracy who call themselves Socialists) /DB please note/ to accelerate their inevitable bankruptcy in practice, which will enlighten the masses precisely in the spirit of our ideas...History generally, and the history of revolutions in particular, is always richer in content, more varied, more many-sided, more lively and "subtle" than even the best parties and the most class-conscious vanguards of the most advanced classes imagine." (Left Wing Communism - an Infantile Disorder (FLP. Peking 1965) pp.99-100).

To make what I am saying absolutely clear. State capitalism is dominant in Britain. It assumes a number of forms, of which nationalization is one. There are various structures bourgeois nationalization may assume. The demand for nationalization as formulated by the Conference decisions of the Labour party presents Marxist-Leninists with favourable opportunities in waging the battle against concepts of social democracy, and for Communist ideas and policies, among the

best organized and most class-conscious workers. Only by being leaders of the demand for total nationalization of major industries can we maximise political strength of the class and destroy every kind of reformism at source. Creating a wide realisation of the tasks of revolution - smashing the entire bourgeois state and building a socialist system strengthened by the political experiences of the proletariat fighting the ideological core of capitalism, resisting increased exploitation through 'rationalization' and its attempts to restore profitability.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN LABOUR AND THE ADVANCED WORKING CLASS.

NR challenges us to explain how the 'vote Labour to smash Labour' line is relevant to workers such as the nurses and civil servants (p.19), adding that our position 'panders to the backward consciousness of a minority of industrial workers'. This innocent question demonstrates a characteristic failure to accurately locate the basis of social democracy in the class struggle. Social democracy remains weak among sections such as nurses and civil servants because they have only recently begun to organise and struggle against the employer. Industrial workers present a different tradition. One which has grown out of their early and persistent confrontations with capital. The current economic crisis of capitalism is indeed throwing wider sections of the population into the economic struggle, but it was the highest development of the spontaneous struggle, 'the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation that Lenin characterised as trade unionism. 'Trade unionism does not exclude "politics" altogether, as some imagine. Trade unions have always conducted some political...agitation and struggle.' ('What is to be done?' p.37 FLP(peking) 1973). The formation, growth, and continuation of the Labour party represents just this consciousness. It is the best organised and most active members of the class, outside the Marxist-Leninist movement, who most systematically display these features. It is these elements who still actively identify with the Labour party, the struggle for democracy and the implementation of conference decisions, who in fact present the greatest potential for communist ideas because of their experiences and connections.

The Manifesto of the Labour Representation Committee observed how capital dominated every aspect of political life at its formation in 1900, that this power was responsible for significant encroachments on trade union organisation (the 1901 Taff Vale judgement being an example), 'the time having therefore come for wage earners to be organized to support trade union principles and ideas by political methods' ('Parliamentary Socialism' p. 18 Miliband, Merlin Edition 1973). Trade unionism means the ideological subjection of

workers by the bourgeoisie, while at the same time to recognize the division between capital and labour, but in a way which perpetuates the wages system - the system of commodity production. Why does the spontaneous movement lead to the domination of bourgeois ideas? Lenin noted that "the working class spontaneously gravitates towards Socialism, but the more widespread (and continuously revived in the most diverse forms) bourgeois ideology nevertheless spontaneously imposes itself upon the working class still more". ('What is to be done?', p.51.)

The significance of the class instincts of the British trade unions preoccupied Engels in his criticisms of the Social Democratic Federation in the period surrounding the formation of the Independent Labour Party, which for a short while appeared to present, in many respects, wider prospects for the advance of Marxism among the working class movement than the lifeless sectarianism dominating the Social Democratic Federation. Writing on the admission of the Labour Party to the Socialist International in 1908, Lenin summarised Engels' position towards the independent organisation of the British working class in the mid-1890's, arguing that the same features prevailed at that time.

"For a number of years Engels strongly insisted that the British Social-Democrats, led by Hyndman, were committing an error by acting like sectarians, failing to link themselves with the unconscious but powerful class instinct of the trade unions, and by turning Marxism into a "dogma", whereas it should be a "guide to action". When there exist objective conditions which retard the growth of the political consciousness and class independence of the proletarian masses, one must be able patiently and steadfastly to work hand in hand with them, making no concessions in principles but not refraining from activity right in the midst of the proletarian masses" (Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 15, pp.236-237).

With the collapse of the Communist Party into opportunism during, and after, the Second World War (see 'Revisionism and the British Anti-Revisionist Movement' MLQ 3, pp.3-5, plus p. 29, note 15), and the political and economic stabilisation of British capitalism from the late 1940's through to the mid '60's, there were undoubtedly objective conditions retarding political development among the working class. This is certainly no longer the case. The political disarray of the Marxist-Leninist movement has meant the spontaneous surge toward socialism has been largely disorientated by the social democrats and their ideological parasites - the revisionist and Trotskyist organisations. This is to be expected given the traditions of reformism, especially strong in Britain.

The Labour government's policies, now that the economic crisis of British capitalism has really become acute, are displaying the limited options of the bourgeoisie, threatening the fabric of the party once again. These divisions must be used by us. They represent a fundamental clash between all that is positive in the Labour party and much of the trade union movement and the solid bourgeois prejudices of the leadership and much of the rank and file in both. Reformism in these conditions has no room to manoeuvre, being especially prone to a vigorous challenge from Marxist-Leninists. As DJ correctly wrote; 'If we as revolutionaries first stand aside from these struggles for trade union direction and consciousness, we will allow the forces of reaction and class cynicism to gain domination'. (MLQ 7 p. 8). We must work right in the midst of the struggle against the traitors to the working class, using this arena as a basis for winning the mass of advanced workers away from the dead-end strategy of social democracy, thoroughly demonstrating the ideological roots of this episode in the history of the Labour party's commitment to parliamentarism and the norms of the bourgeois state. (5)

Given the total domination of trade union politics in the working class movement since the demise of the Communist Party into another segment of social democracy, comrades arguing that Lenin's advice in 'Left-Wing Communism' and elsewhere is no longer valid should reflect on just what has qualitatively changed since 1920. There has been no sustained campaign by Communists using these tactics for at least 32 years. Despite many errors, particularly over the function of parliament in the bourgeois state, the CPGB did make real gains when applying this line. It is clear that there has been no qualitative change in the consciousness of the British working class since Lenin's time, and there cannot be without conscious Communist intervention at every level of the class struggle. The creations of the spontaneous class struggle recur, the existence of any number of Labour governments cannot alter that in themselves.

J.B.

(5) See Notes, no. 5.

NOTES

1. To clarify what Lenin meant by the 'first step' towards a socialist workers party, I have selected the following extracts. "That by separating in Parliament (not during the elections! not in its whole policy! not in its propaganda and agitation!) from the bourgeois parties, the Labour Party in Britain is taking the first step towards socialism and towards a class policy of the proletarian mass organisations is indisputable."

"...hundreds of thousands of British workers, who undoubtedly respect the decisions of the International but have not yet become full socialists would ponder once again over the question why they are regarded as having taken only the first step, and what the next steps along this road should be." (Ibid, pp. 235-6).

2. A clear illustration of the current contradictions of capitalism is provided by the following table on the Growth of Consumer Indebtedness in the USA.

	1946	1955	1969	1973	1974*
A. Disposable income of the households	160.0	275.3	629.6	903.7	860
B. Mortgage debts for freehold homes	23.0	88.2	266.8	465.9	600
C. Consumer debts	8.4	38.8	122.5	173.5	200
D. Total private debt of the households	31.4	127.0	389.3	649.4	800
<u>D as a percentage of A</u>	<u>19.6</u>	<u>46.1</u>	<u>61.8</u>	<u>71.8</u>	<u>93</u>

A consequence of the credit-led boom is the increasing proportion of income required to service debts. With inflation in Britain outstripping interest rates, prospects for further credit induced expansion are zero. In fact through the growing depression, profitability is receiving harder blows in industrial (operation at lower capacities) and financial fields. Links between the two now are almost total (expressing the end for Keynes's theory of limitless credit-inspired growth). This operates both in the domestic markets of imperialism, as well as through trade with the neo-colonies.

Source: Mandel, 'New Left Review', 90, p.9.

* These figures are estimates.

3. NR provides a satisfactory explanation of the law of the falling rate of profit (MLQ 8&9, p.14), yet it is as well to remember that capital is not limited to seeking compensation for this factor. Its central dynamic is the quest for maximum profits. This gives a vicious twist to international capitalist competition. There is also vital agreement between us best summarised by Lenin; "The banking magnates seem to be agreed that state monopoly will steal upon them from an unexpected quarter. It goes without saying, however, that this fear is no more than an expression of the rivalry, so to speak, between two department managers in the same office; for, on the one hand, the billions entrusted to the savings banks are in the final analysis actually controlled by these very same bank capital magnates, while, on the other hand, state monopoly in capitalist society is merely a means of increasing and guaranteeing the income of millionaires in one branch of industry or another who are on the verge of bankruptcy. Furthermore, the "proximity" of such capitalism to Socialism should serve the genuine representatives of the proletariat as an argument proving the proximity, facility, feasibility and urgency of the socialist revolution, and not at all as an argument in favour of tolerating the repudiation of such a revolution and the efforts to make capitalism look more attractive, an occupation in which all the reformists are engaged." 'Lenin On Imperialism, The Eve of The Proletarian Social Revolution' FLPH (Peking); pp. 72 & 75.
4. By private ownership of the means of production, Marxists are not referring to juridical ownership i.e., whether the means of production are individually, corporately, or state owned. Rather, economic ownership. The fact that in capitalist society the bourgeoisie as a class have real economic control - the power to determine what is produced and to dispose of the products obtained, thus they 'exploit the direct workers by extorting surplus value from them in various forms'. (Poulantzas, 'On Social Classes', NLR 78, pp. 28-9).

There appears to be confusion over the terms state capitalism and nationalization. The former being an element of capitalism, the other element being private capitalism, while nationalization is a juridical matter, a form state capital may assume. It is wrong to narrow this concept to the matter of formal state ownership (NR implies this when interpreting the 'essence' of Engels on the bourgeois state - see p. 20). State monopoly capitalism (imperialism) is the highest stage of capitalism being reached in Britain by the end of the 19th. Century. We should remember that bourgeois political power through its state determines and regulates every aspect of capitalist society; throughout the economy as well as the superstructure. With the advent of monopoly capitalism the function of the state was developed to the stage of active intervention in the economy - in the previous competitive stage its role was largely confined to the provision and back-up of a legal framework for exploitation.

5. Both PJ and NR raise the allegation that such an approach displays the capitulationist politics of Trotsky's 'transitional programme'. This is surprising given PJ's analysis of Mandel's classic Trotskyism towards the Soviet Union in MLQ 8&9, which also applies to the mainstream Trotskyist position on the nationalised industries. This sees them, to some degree or another, as in a limbo between capitalism and socialism. What we are in fact saying is that given the rapidly deteriorating crisis of British capitalism, even the modest programme of reforms promised by the Labour Party have no prospect of enactment through a reformist strategy. As Marxist-Leninists we have to use this and the overall failure of reformism in the history of the working class to illustrate the necessity of the revolutionary road to the majority of class conscious workers who still owe allegiance to social democracy.

CRITICISM OF THE CFB STATEMENT ON THE WORLD SITUATION

In MLQ 7 we published our statement on the International situation. This was an attempt to set out systematically our view of the main contradictions in the world today, and as such represented an important step forward. Without such analysis even of a preliminary character, the Marxist-Leninist movement will not be able to make progress. Consequently it is all the more important that when such a document appears, Marxist-Leninists must make all round criticisms of it, noting its good points and weaknesses, in the attempt to improve it.

The statement resulted from polemic at the second Special General Meeting of the CFB in 1974. As the introduction to the statement showed however, a number of points were blurred and confused. It argued that:-

"And while we recognise that the US and USSR are the two main enemies, differences arise as their relative strengths and weaknesses. It is agreed that the Soviet leadership is Social Imperialist in Lenin's sense of the term, although since a substantial minority do not accept the 'social-imperialist' characterisation of the Soviet State, such a characterisation has been dropped from the statement. A large minority do not agree with the statements made about internal and external contradictions and thus does not accept some implications regarding the rules of socialist democracy drawn in this document. There are differences on the question of relative rates of degeneration in the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries." (Introduction to the Statement on the World Situation, MLQ 7.)

It is essential then that polemic over these issues be continued, with the aim of achieving unity. It is for this reason that the London Group have submitted this criticism of the Statement, whilst being in general agreement with it.

TWO SUPER POWERS AND THE CLASS NATURE OF THE SOVIET UNION.

In the section of the statement headed 'Imperialism', the United States is clearly labelled as 'the most aggressive enemy of the peoples of the world' and the USSR as the 'next most powerful'. But in a subsequent paragraph, the document argues:- 'Thus strategically the two combined are

the main enemies of the world's peoples. Tactically one or the other will be the dominant hostile force depending on the specific situation in different countries and areas of the world."

The two formulations are clearly contradictory, insofar as the first one, regarding the paramount position of the USA, is rendered meaningless by the second. If the USSR 'tactically' is the main enemy of certain peoples, depending on geographical proximity, the existence of spheres of influence, patterns of economic domination etc., then the USA cannot be the main enemy of the world's peoples in general. It is clearly the case that the main enemy of the peoples of Eastern Europe is the USSR, for example.

What the document argues is that the USA is the main enemy in general, because of its overseas investments, and military strength. Thus the document ignores the class nature of social imperialism, and fails to analyse realistically the balance of military forces. Clearly, overseas investments themselves do not transform any Western Imperialist nation into a greater threat to world revolution than is the USSR, yet most of these nations have more overseas investments than the USSR does. Regarding the military balance of forces, the situation is not one of obvious superiority of the USA. The annual publication of the Institute of Strategic Studies gives the following information. The USSR has more nuclear missiles but the USA more warheads, the USSR more submarines but the USA almost a monopoly of aircraft carriers, the USSR more planes but the USA more long-range bombers, the USSR more troops and tanks (according to Peking Review 1974 No. 3 p.8 - these are concentrated in Europe). These figures in themselves are not conclusive, but the existence of the Strategic Arms Institute Talks in themselves demonstrate that the two superpowers themselves consider that they are roughly in balance. More telling, the admission of a US admiral recently that the mobilisation of US forces during the 1973 Middle East War was a reaction to the fact that the USSR had obtained an overwhelming advantage in that area, shows that the assumptions of the World Situation Document are far from accurate.

Military strength is not the deciding factor however. Political factors internally and externally decide on the possibility of the use of military hardware. This is why an understanding of the threat posed by the USSR is of great importance. In the CFB we are agreed on the nature of the threat posed by the USA. Indeed this is true of the left generally. The revisionists however make great play of the question of the 'struggle for peace' and use this as a mask for the reactionary activities of the USSR on a world scale. It is essential that we are equipped to expose this particular tactic. An essential basis for this is an understanding of the meaning of 'social imperialism'.

Social imperialism, "socialism in words, imperialism in deeds," does not necessarily follow the same laws as the imperialism of the US, Britain etc., but it is nevertheless a form of exploitation of weaker nations, and is a response to the need for resources other than those available within the USSR. It rests primarily on bourgeois concepts of an 'international division of labour', 'equal' terms of trade, 'tied loans' etc. Other articles in MLQ, notably in no.6, and the present issue go further into this question. Indeed the Statement on the World Situation itself goes into the details of Soviet exploitation on a world scale. How much more opportunist then, that we should fail to give the phenomenon its real name, and that we should not struggle for unity on this question!

We are not merely drawing demarcation lines over the use or non-use of names; the phenomenon of social imperialism rests on the basis of the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union. There is thus a great difference between speaking of 'Soviet Revisionism' which characterises an earlier stage in the degeneration of the Soviet Union, and speaking of Soviet Social Imperialism, which sets the phenomenon in its true context, and gives due importance to the threat posed by the USSR. To equivocate on this question is to equivocate over the class nature of the USSR.

For Marxist-Leninists, the Soviet Union must be either capitalist or socialist - there is no third category, although the Trotskyists have tried to invent one(1). Our assessment does not depend on categories of legal ownership, laws of inheritance etc., but on the relationships to the means of production; whether or not the masses have real control of the use of means of production and appropriation of the product of their labour, control of planning etc. State ownership is neither here nor there especially when the masses are excluded from administration and decision making. These are the factors we consider when polemicising over this question. If comrades reject the arguments already advanced (2) then let them enter the polemic and explain why.

THE PRIMACY OF INTERNAL CONTRADICTIONS AND THE FOREIGN POLICY OF SOCIALIST COUNTRIES

In the section of the Document headed 'Socialist Camp' we read, "Strategically, the internal contradictions are prime and therefore tactical attitudes towards bourgeois states must serve the interests of the internal progressive forces."

Although it is generally true that internal contradic-

(1) See the article 'Mandel and the Soviet Economy' in MLQ 8/9 and the review of Birchall's book in the same issue.

(2) See articles cited in Note(1).

tions are the most central for the working class and party of a particular formation, it is not always so even here. In the case of Britain during the war against Fascism, for example the situation was such that the international situation demanded a united front against Fascism (3). A similar situation arose for the Communist Party of China when the Japanese invaded.

More significantly, this statement, in the context of discussion of the foreign policy of socialist countries, implies a criticism of the foreign policy of the Peoples Republic of China - but opportunistically avoids stating it openly. This the Statement ignores the general strategic line of Chinese foreign policy, which we have always taken to be correct, and also ignores the elementary fact that what is primary for a state where the working class holds state power and is able to enter into diplomatic relations with states of a different social structure, may be secondary for the oppressed working class of a capitalist country. The relationship of internal to external contradictions is determined by analysis of the order of importance of contradictions in the world today. For us the main enemy is clearly our own working class - strategically, the aim is the taking of state power. The situation is quite different for the Communist Party of China whose strategy at the diplomatic level is to oppose the two super powers in their attempts to achieve world hegemony. The fruits of this strategy are clear for all to see; if comrades look at the statements of the Chinese UN delegation, at the statements of the Non-Aligned Nations Conferences, or merely note the changes in the balance of forces within the United Nations itself it is clear that the non-aligned nations are increasingly following an anti-imperialist and progressive path, a path to which China increasingly gives a lead.

This policy follows that laid down by the Chinese themselves (4) The statement on the World Situation on the other hand, is vague and imprecise on this point. It ignores what the CPC have said about their policy, and in essence falls into left opportunism in its assessment.

CONCLUSIONS

In general we support the positions expressed in the Document on the World Situation. We have however attempted to identify a number of errors, to draw demarcation lines and reopen polemic on a number of points. In general, the errors result from an opportunist blurring of central points, and it is essential that such opportunism be eradicated from the CFB.

London Group

(3) For continued polemic on this question, see the critique of Birchall already quoted, and the 'Response to SM' in this issue.

(4) "Peaceful Coexistence: Two Diametrically Opposed Policies", December 1963. Editorial Depts. of 'Peoples Daily' and 'Red Flay'.

'Unite the People, Defeat the Enemy'; Peking Review, no. 35, 1971.

'Whence the Differences', collection of CPC statements.

NEITHER ADVENTURISM NOR OPPORTUNISM - A REPLY TO SM

SM's review article in MLQ 8&9 of 'Workers against the Monolith' by Ian Birchall of the 'International Socialists' is an excellent criticism of Trotskyist ultra-leftism and it correctly attributes these errors to the fundamental philosophical error of idealism - the approach of the 'general principle'.

However the authors of this reply wish to take issue with SM in one particular aspect of his general criticism, the aspect of his critique of the Trotskyist approach to united front tactics. As SM points out, the fundamental error that Trotskyists fall into is their inability to correctly analyse the specific contradictions in a given situation and to analyse those contradictions in the light of a general theory. Thus for Trotskyists everything is reduced to the contradiction between Labour and Capital and they fail to see that alliances between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are correct in certain circumstances.

According to SM:

"A central feature of 'leftism' is its failure to understand real united front policies: a consistent opposition to the Marxist approach of 'uniting all those who can be united against the main enemy'." (1)

Quite so! And a central feature of opportunism is the entering into of UNPRINCIPLED alliances with people who are really your enemies. The practice of the modern CPGB abounds with this type of opportunism - obvious examples are their lauding of the 'left' Labour MPs and their whole concept of the 'anti-monopoly alliance'.

A united front is, as SM says, the policy of 'uniting all those who can be united against the main enemy'. But this begs the question of who the main enemy is. No doubt the revisionists could use this formula to justify their unprincipled alliance with the 'left' Social-Democrats on the grounds that they can be united against the main enemy - who for the revisionists are the Tories, not the bourgeoisie.

(1) MLQ 8&9 - SM's review article of 'Workers Against the Monolith' by Ian Birchall

The application of united front tactics requires a rigorous use of Marxism by carefully analysing all the contradictions in a given situation and then deciding which contradiction is principal, and which are secondary. Unless this is done then the 'left' adventurist and Trotskyist error of treating secondary enemies as principal, or the right opportunist error of treating principal enemies as secondary are easily fallen into. We believe that in 1941 the western Communist parties fell into the second error.

SM is correct when he says:

"As so often, the Trotskyist alternative was based not on a concrete analysis of the situation but on mere comparison, an analogy; in this case with the first world war". (2)

Apart from being based on analogy their methodology is another illustration of the 'general principle' approach; in this case the 'general principle' that alliances between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie are always impermissible. OUR approach is to make a concrete analysis of the 1939-45 war and then use the theory of Marxism-Leninism as a guide to defining the appropriate policy. This is the methodology of Marxism and such a methodology can only lead to the conclusion that the war was principally an imperialist war and that for once the Trotskyists were right. As SM says:

"The timeless dogmatism has often been compared with that of a stopped clock. Like that clock it can hardly help being right on occasions".

The 1939-45 war may correctly be seen as a continuation of the war of 1914-18. In both wars states which had only lately entered onto the path of imperialism (principally Germany) were fighting for a redivision of the world against well-established imperialist states (principally Britain and France) who were fighting for the maintenance of the status quo. Because of this we shall look first at the first imperialist world war, the line taken by Marxists in that war and compare that line to the lines of 1939-41 and 1941-45, taking due account of changed circumstances.

The development of imperialism from around the time of the turn of the century led to the logical culmination of the first imperialist world war. A war which Lenin described in the following terms:

"Herein precisely, lies the specific feature of imperialist war, war between reactionary-bourgeois,

(2) Ibid

historically obsolete governments, waged for the purpose of oppressing other nations. Whoever justifies participation in the present war perpetuates imperialist oppression of nations. Whoever advocates taking advantage of the present embarrassments of the governments to fight for social revolution champions the real freedom of really all nations, which is possible only under socialism." (3)

As in 1939, the outbreak of war in 1914 threw European socialists into confusion. Most European parties (including the German, generally considered to be the most advanced in the world) supported the war. Only a few individuals such as Luxemburg, Liebnicht and Gallacher opposed the war.. And of course in Russia the Bolshevik party as a whole carried out a principled and resolute struggle against social-chauvinism. Lenin's analysis of social-chauvinism was:

"Social-chauvinism is advocacy of the idea of the 'defence of the fatherland' in the current war. Further this idea logically leads onto the abandonment of the class struggle during the war, to voting war credits etc.. Actually, the social-chauvinists are pursuing an anti-proletarian, bourgeois policy; for actually, they are championing not the 'defence of the fatherland' in the sense of fighting foreign oppression, but the right of one or the other 'great powers to plunder colonies and to oppress other nations. The social-chauvinists repeat the bourgeois deception of the people that the war is being waged to protect the freedom and existence of nations, and thereby go over to the side of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat." (4)

For Leninists then there can be no case for supporting one's 'own' imperialist bourgeoisie in an imperialist war. Lenin urged socialists to work for the defeat of their 'own' ruling classes and to turn the war into a civil war:

"The reactionary character of this war, and the shameless lies told by the bourgeoisie of ALL countries in covering up their predatory aims with 'national' ideology, are invariably creating, on the basis of an objectively revolutionary situation, revolutionary moods among the masses. It is our task to help the masses to become conscious of these moods, to deepen and formulate them. This task is correctly expressed only in the slogan; convert the imperialist war into

(3) Lenin - 'Socialism and War' - Published in 'Lenin on War and Peace' FLPH, Peking.

(4) Ibid

civil war...it is impossible to foretell whether a powerful revolutionary movement will flame up during the first or second war of the great powers, whether during or after it; in any case our bounden duty is systematically and undeviatingly to work in this direction." (5)

Unfortunately only the Bolshevik party was able to act successfully on this advice and so the imperialist powers lived to fight another day and in 1939 the second imperialist world war broke out. What it is necessary to do now is to analyse the differences in circumstances between 1914 and decide if the line of 1914 was still applicable in 1939. What were those differences? Firstly that one group of imperialist powers (Germany, Italy and Japan) were Fascist powers and that the opposing group (Britain, France and later the USA) were bourgeois democratic in character. Secondly that a socialist country existed. This latter factor could not affect the nature of the war until 1941 when the German imperialists invaded the Soviet Union.

For SM, the fact that Britain was fighting a Fascist country and was itself a bourgeois democracy means that the 'contradiction' between bourgeois democracy and Fascism was principal and that (by implication) the contradictions between British imperialism and the oppressed nations and between the British bourgeoisie and proletariat had become secondary. SM doesn't argue this he merely asserts it. Perhaps he believes it to be self-evident, but it certainly isn't so to the authors - NOR WAS IT TO THE COMINTERN IN 1939. In his spirited defence of the Comintern line of 1941 onwards SM conveniently ignores the fact that the Comintern line of 1941 argued that the war was an imperialist war and should not be supported by the Communist parties and the working people. In November 1939 the Comintern said:

"Three of the richest states-England, France and the USA-hold sway over the most important world routes and markets. They seized possession of the main sources of raw materials. In their hands are huge economic resources. They hold over half of mankind in subjection. They cover up the exploitation of the working people, the exploitation of the oppressed peoples, with the false phantom of democracy, so as to more easily deceive the masses.

Fighting against their world supremacy, and for their own mastery, are the other capitalist states, which came later onto the path of colonial expansion. They want to divide anew, to their own advantage, the sources of raw materials, food, gold reserves, and the huge

masses of people in the colonies. Such is the real meaning of this war, which is an unjust, reactionary, imperialist war." (6)

Those who would support the war are answered as follows;

"Workers! Don't believe those who wave the flag of national unity. What can there be in common between you and those who profit by the war? What unity can there be between exploited and exploiters?

Don't believe those who are calling upon you to support the war under the false pretext of the defence of democracy. What right to speak of democracy have those who oppress India, Indo-China, the Arab countries, who keep half the world in the chains of colonial slavery...the lords of Britain maintain reaction on all the five continents of the earth." (7)

Those who, like SM, support the line adopted in 1941, have a duty to explain why the first line was wrong, (or, if both were right, to explain that). The line was changed immediately after the invasion of the Soviet Union by the German imperialists. Now it could be argued that the duty of all Communists was then to support their 'own' country's war effort against the Germans, a war to defend the Soviet Union. But this line isn't argued; the line that is put is of a 'war against Fascism', a 'war in defence of democracy'. If that were the case then it was also so in 1939! In fact of course the two lines are irreconcilable, the second one being born out of the CPSU's subordination of the interests of the working people and oppressed nations of the world to the state interests of the Soviet Union.

What then were the main contradictions in the world in 1939? They were;

- 1) Between the imperialist powers and the oppressed nations.
- 2) Between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the imperialist powers.
- 3) Between the imperialist powers.
- 4) Between the imperialist powers and the Soviet Union.

(6) Comintern statement of 11th Nov. 1939 - 'On the Occasion of the 22nd. Anniversary of the October Revolution'. (This and all the other Comintern documents referred to are to be found in 'Documents of the Communist International' - Vol 3, edited by Jane Degross).

(7) Ibid.

After the outbreak of war in 1939 the contradiction between the imperialist powers became the most acute on a world scale. For the oppressed nations of the world the contradiction between themselves and the imperialist powers remained principal and for the proletariat in the imperialist powers the contradiction between themselves and the bourgeoisie remained principal

The line that the 'contradiction' between bourgeois democracy and Fascism was principal is superficially convincing. But what does the adoption of this line mean in practice? It means subordinating the struggles of the proletariat and the oppressed nations to the interests of the British and French (and later American) imperialists.

For the working people of Britain and France it meant that the struggle for socialism should be postponed simply because the British bourgeoisie was fighting an imperialist rival. The fact that the imperialist rival was Fascist does not significantly alter the case. The line of the bourgeoisie that the war was being fought in 'defence of democracy' was so much sand thrown in the eyes of the workers, just like the crap about 'gallant little Belgium' and 'Prussian Militarism' in 1914. In the words of Dmitrov;

"The older generation of workers who experienced the first imperialist world war, well remember how at that time the press of Britain and France sought day in and day out to prove that the governments of those countries were waging war only 'in defence of democracy' against 'Prussian militarism', while the German press, in their turn sought to convince people that the war was being waged against 'Russian Tsarism'. In actual fact, however, as is well known, what was taking place was a struggle between two groups of imperialists for the repartition of the earth." (8)

Marxists accept that there is a difference between bourgeois democracy and Fascism, although the difference is quantitative, rather than qualitative. Fascism is the face that capitalism wears in it's death throes, with the mask of bourgeois democracy thrown aside. In the struggle against Fascism the working class cannot enter into a united front with the bourgeoisie because there is no qualitative difference between them because bourgeois democracy and Fascism are both FORMAL aspects of capitalism (individual members of the bourgeoisie may of course be won over to a broad front against

(8) Comintern statement of 11th. Nov. 1939 - 'On the Tasks of the Working Class in the Imperialist War' - Dmitrov.

Fascism, as Fascism can be against the interest of individual capitalists). The only way that the working people can liquidate the threat of Fascism is by the overthrow of the capitalist system; therefore to talk of the 1939-45 war as an 'anti-Fascist' war is sheer sophistry. As Dmitrov said;

"The Communist parties must rapidly reorganise their ranks in accordance with the conditions of the war, purge their ranks of capitulatory elements, and establish Bolshevik discipline. They must concentrate their fire against opportunism, expressed in slipping into the position of 'defending the fatherland', in support of the fairy tale about the anti-Fascist character of the war, and in retreat before the acts of oppression of the bourgeoisie." (9)

A far more serious betrayal by the Communist parties was their betrayal of the nations oppressed by imperialism. In demanding that the oppressed nations give 'up their struggle for independence (as the western parties did) for the duration of the war the western Communist parties lapsed into gross social-chauvinism. Irrespective of their subjective feelings about 'fighting Fascism', objectively they were supporting their 'own' imperialist bourgeoisie in their efforts to maintain their exploitation of the colonies. In reality the Communist parties and working people of the imperialist powers were fighting for the continued enslavement of the colonial peoples and for their own continued exploitation by capitalism.

We believe that the correct line for the western parties in a situation where

"The bourgeoisie are doing everything to compel millions of people to go to war and die for a cause that is alien to them. But the proletariat, the working people have nothing to defend in this war. It is not their war, but the war of their exploiters. It brings them suffering, privation, ruin and death. Were they to support such a war, they would be merely defending the interests of their enslavers and oppressors, would be supporting capitalist slavery." (10)

would have been that of revolutionary defeatism, of turning the imperialist war into civil war. This line should have been carried out even in the event of German occupation. We say that the French CP were wrong to engage in armed resistance against the Germans-- as Lenin said: "A revolutionary

(9) Ibid.

(10) Ibid.

class cannot but wish for the defeat of its government in a reactionary war, cannot fail to see that its military reverses facilitate its overthrow". To fight foreign occupiers is only justifiable in national liberation wars, to fight them in imperialist wars is to support your 'own' imperialist bourgeoisie and their rape and plunder of the colonies. The fact that the invaders might be Fascist is a secondary question and in any case fighting them on that basis assumes a qualitative difference between Fascism and bourgeois democracy. The general line of revolutionary defeatism put forward by Lenin in the 1914-18 war REMAINED CORRECT in the 1939-45 war. This line was in fact the line of the Comintern in 1939-41;

"The imperialists of the warring countries have begun the war for a new partition of the earth, for world domination, dooming millions of people to destruction. The working class is called upon to put an end to the war after its own fashion, in its own interests, in the interests of the whole of labouring mankind and thereby to destroy once and for all the fundamental causes giving rise to imperialist wars." (11).

In summary then the war started by two groups of imperialist states in 1939 was a straight imperialist war and the fact that one group was Fascist and the other bourgeois-democratic was irrelevant. The Communist Parties and the working people could not possibly justify supporting that war and in fact should have taken advantage of the acute contradictions to overthrow the capitalist system and liberate the colonies. This was the general line of the Comintern from September 1939 to June 1941 when the German imperialists invaded the Soviet Union.

Clearly the invasion of the Soviet Union introduced a major new factor into the war. But as we have already argued the Comintern, the CPSU and the western parties didn't argue that the war was a war in defence of the Soviet Union, but rather a war in 'defence of democracy', an 'anti-Fascist war'. We have already shown that these formulations were social-chauvinist. SM argues that the policy of 1941 was a policy of;

"...supporting the interests of the Socialist Soviet Union on the one hand, and of the working class in both the Fascist countries and the western democracies on the other..." (12).

The truly extraordinary thing about this statement, and indeed of SM's whole defence of the new Comintern line, is that no-

(11) Ibid.

(12) MLQ 8&9 - op. cit

where does SM consider the question of the relationship of the 'western democracies' to the oppressed nations. We suggest that this is because any examination of this relationship will reveal the utter opportunism of the Comintern line of 1941. If in imperialist countries the Communist parties and the working people support the imperialist wars of those countries then they cannot do other than support the predatory aims of their 'own' imperialist bourgeoisie.

SM does not distinguish between united fronts in imperialist countries and united fronts in countries oppressed by imperialism. In the latter a united front of classes takes place under the direction of a Marxist-Leninist Party, with the objective of defeating imperialism and then starting the struggle for socialist revolution. In the former, as the proletariat do not have state power, any united front in an imperialist war can only objectively be an unholy alliance of bourgeoisie and proletariat for the purpose of maintaining the enslavement of the colonies. SM says of Birchall that he has;

"...no understanding of correct united front policies because of a leftist error of believing that the only progressive force at anytime is the working class, that all enemies can be fought at once, and that any other approach is to compromise 'principles'". (13).

Unlike Birchall and most other Trotskyists the authors of this article do recognise the need for compromises with class enemies in certain situations. Obvious examples from our epoch are the principled compromises made by the Chinese and Vietnamese comrades with their national bourgeoisies in their common struggle against imperialism. That, is a principled compromise.

"There are different kinds of compromises. One must be able to analyse the situation and the concrete conditions of each. One must learn to distinguish between a man who has given up his money and fire-arms to bandits so as to lessen the evil that they can do and to facilitate their capture and execution, and a man who gives his money and fire-arms to bandits so as to share in the loot." (14).

We would suggest that the compromise made by the Comintern and the western parties with their 'own' imperialist bourgeoisie against the German imperialists was the latter type - an unprincipled compromise, a lapse into opportunism

(13) Ibid.

(14) Lenin- 'Left Wing Communism - An Infantile Disorder'.

and social-chauvinism.

Now let us examine the Comintern statements of May Day 1942 (the first to be issued after the invasion of the Soviet Union);

"May Day 1942 comes in a year of great historic decisions. This year May Day is more than a day when the working class reviews its forces. It is a day of mobilization against Hitler in a life and death struggle...

The issue at stake is not only the destiny of any one nation or any one class. The liberty and independence of all nations are at stake. It is a question of saving them from the mortal foes who are thrown into a fury at the very sound of such words as the rights of man, liberty and democracy...

The workers of the whole world and the nations are determined once and for all to win a lasting and durable peace and seek only to destroy Hitler fascism... For a whole generation May Day was a day when the worker fortified his faith in his own strength and felt himself at one with his class brothers, a day when he felt conscious of belonging to a mighty militant body. The significance of May Day 1942 is incomparably greater; this year it is a day of rallying all people, all honest men who cherish freedom for the struggle in defence of their decent existence, for the sacred liberation war against Fascism, for the cause of all mankind." (15).

The change in the politics and language since the statements of 1939 is truly remarkable. Instead of the forthright Marxist analysis and urging of the class war of Lenin, we read (in the case of the authors, with nausea) of the 'rights of man, liberty and democracy' of 'honest men who cherish freedom' and of 'the cause of all mankind'. This is all so much humbug and cant! The class war has ended and we are all (the imperialist bourgeoisie included) 'honest men who cherish freedom'. Probably the most significant thing about the document is that (long before Kruschov) the Leninist concept of

(15) Comintern statement of May Day 1942.

liquidating war by liquidating imperialism is turned on its head and instead a 'lasting and durable peace' is to be achieved by defeating 'Hitler Fascism'.

How does SM imagine that the Communist Parties and working people could, in a principled fashion, support the Soviet Union's war effort by supporting their 'own' bourgeoisie's war effort. Nowhere does he explain this in concrete terms. Like the rest of this section of his article it remains an unsubstantiated assertion. In reality of course it couldn't be done - the principal effect of supporting the war effort was, as we have shown in this article that of supporting imperialism. Obviously the war effort of the Soviet Union was considerably helped by the western power's war effort, but this could not in any way justify the principal aspect of supporting an imperialist war.

SM says;

"The period covered is of key importance to Marxist-Leninists, but in our work to more fully understand it, far from receiving help from the Trotskyists, we will have to continuously combat their errors." (16).

We agree that we will get no help from the Trotskyists in understanding the period but we will have to go far beyond SM's simplistic defence of our past history if past errors are to be isolated and learned from. Marx once said that history repeats itself, the first time as farce, the second time as tragedy. We have had the farce - the Comintern line of 1941. The tragedy might be yet to come - the growing contention between Soviet social-imperialism and US imperialism in Europe might bring a very nasty chicken home to roost!

N.R. & J.T.

A CRITICISM OF ERICH FARL'S ARTICLE

'IS THE USSR AN IMPERIALIST COUNTRY?'

This article is divided into 3 main sections - 1) Methods of analysis, 2) The USSR and Comecon, and 3) The USSR and India. The most important section is the first. It is the rejection of the Marxist-Leninist approach that is the cornerstone of the incorrect 'theories' of Erich Farl and the International Marxist Group (and of course Trotskyism in general). This is combined with a failure to see the reality of national exploitation in practice, which can be seen very clearly in Farl's treatment of India. Here Farl explicitly takes a thoroughly bourgeois line in defence of Imperialism.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS - TROTSKYISM OR MARXISM-LENINISM

Lenin's 'Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism' is an excellent example of correct methods of analysis. Lenin concretely examines the real development of the means of production, and the relations of production within the advanced capitalist countries, monopolization, merger of finance capital with industrial capital etc; he concretely examines the real economic, political and military relations between the advanced capitalist countries and the colonial and semi-colonial countries of the world, and as a result of that investigation, marshals together the basic features of Imperialism at that time. Thus revealing the essence and contradictions of 20th century Imperialism. This analysis was and is a crucial theoretical work in the development of Marxism-Leninism. Nevertheless Lenin points very clearly to the danger of regarding this analysis as a set of rules:

"Without forgetting the conditional and relative value of all definitions in general, which can never embrace all the concatenations of a phenomenon in its full development, we must give a definition of Imperialism that will include the following five of its basic features:" (1)

(1) Lenin, 'Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism', Progress Publishers, p. 85.

The Trotskyists of course, as always, forget the 'conditional and relative' value of all definitions. As Lenin said of Trotsky: "All his theses are based on a 'general principle', an approach which is in itself fundamentally wrong." (2). Lenin's theses on Imperialism are a concentration of reality examined in the dialectical theoretical framework. They are a summation of the generality of Imperialism at that stage, but that is not all. Also contained in that pamphlet are many examples of the particularity of Imperialism:

"Unlike British colonial Imperialism, French Imperialism might be termed Usury Imperialism, In the case of Germany we have a third type..." (3)

Thus reading Lenin on Imperialism as a whole we see analysis of the particular as well as of the general. We see a concrete analysis summed up as a set of theses, that reflect the reality of the class and national liberation struggle.

By contrast Erich Farl follows the traditional Trotskyist method - transforming Lenin's conditional and relative basic features' into five unconditional and absolute general principles (though he does admit them to be 'incomplete'). He proclaims that they do not fit the external relations of the USSR. Therefore not only is the USSR not any type of Imperialism, it is not even a specifically analysed Social Imperialism. There are two mistakes, a) method and b) in fact. Social Imperialism is in fact in many of its features the same as other forms of Imperialism, including the export of capital (see Section 3).

What does Farl have to say about method?

"The Chinese positions on Social Imperialism differ from those of Cliff (International Socialists) in that they do not take as their starting point the definition given by Lenin." (This is supposed to be bad!)

EXACTLY-like Lenin, the Marxist-Leninists take as their starting point LIVING REALITY : the living reality of national oppression and exploitation, and they examine it in the light of its historical development, using dialectical materialism.

USSR AND COMECON

"The use of world market prices inevitably introduces an inequality between the countries involved, because of the unequal degree of economic development of each...thus international

(2) Lenin, 'Collected Works', Vol 32, p. 22

(3) Lenin, op. cit., p. 63.

trade between the 'socialist' countries involves a continuous drain of value from the poor countries to the rich countries".

Farl, here recognises one aspect of the relationship between the USSR and the other member countries of Comecon. He also states what he thinks a socialist relationship should be;

"The international coordination and planning of investment, aid, interest free loans etc. to permit the economically less developed countries to catch up with the more developed ones".

So Farl clearly thinks that the Relationship is not a socialist one. So what is the relationship within Comecon? He does not say. We will have to assume he sees it as a 'transitional' relationship. This article is not intended as an analysis of social Imperialism, but it is important that some points be made that Farl has 'overlooked'! Through Comecon there is a 'socialist (sic) international division of labour'. In practice this means that the USSR is the only Comecon country with a broadly developed economy. The other countries are deliberately developed in a one sided way; either as a particular concentration of heavy goods, or raw material production, or as an agricultural producer. Thus all the countries are dependent, and becoming increasingly so, on the USSR. Through Comecon the USSR also controls much of the capital of Eastern Europe. Thus investing at home, and in Eastern Europe, as well as having a surplus to invest abroad. This export of capital, outside of Comecon not only makes a profit but also often ties, through the agreement, the recipient country to accept further ties to the USSR, which can be economic, military or political.

Within Comecon the system as a whole combines to increase the economic political and military strength of the USSR, at the same time as placing the other Comecon countries more and more under the domination of the USSR. Economically the share of the USSR in the industrial production of Comecon rose between 1960 and 1970 from 69.5% to 76%. Militarily and politically the experience of Czechoslovakia is example enough, although such activity continues at lower levels consistently. (For examples and analysis of the economic workings of Comecon see MLQ 6 and Albania Today, May/June 1974). Thus Comecon does not only let the economically less developed countries catch up" but it further increases the oppression and exploitation of Eastern Europe by Social Imperialism.

USSR AND INDIA

Farl's total misrepresentation of the difference between 'aid' and Imperialism on this question shows again a total departure from Marxism-Leninism and a betrayal of the Indian people in their struggle against Imperialism;

"The arrangements under which the USSR buys products made in India are not necessarily a measure of subordination at all. Indian governments have long sought to safeguard the economic development of the country by arranging to pay for their imports in non-convertible national currency obtained either in India itself or in exchange for Indian products."

According to Farl this;

"...does not show that what is involved is Imperialism, quite the contrary".

But does such an arrangement mean that it is not a question of 'subordination'? All it shows is that what commodities are exported from the USSR, including military weapons as well as commodities, are in effect exchanged for raw materials and goods produced with cheap Indian labour. And what about the export of capital? The export of capital from the USSR to India, including of course that 'non-convertible national currency' that Farl thinks is so decisive, has led to the USSR gaining a stranglehold on Indian industry. Farl gives the figures himself;

"The USSR has become India's second biggest creditor, to the tune of 10.22 thousand million rupees since 1955...the USSR controls 30% of steel production, 35% of oil refining, 20% of electrical production, 60% of power station equipment, 85% of heavy industry production, 75% of production of electric motors, 80% of oil prospecting and extraction, and 25% of aluminium production."

Do these figures not show the reality of the relationship between the USSR and India? The profit made from this export of capital, are either reinvested in India, thus ensuring an even higher degree of subordination, or are returned to the USSR in the form of raw materials, produced with cheap labour in Soviet owned industries. The increasing dependence of India on the USSR is reflected in the development of USSR military presence and a growing political influence. All this is explained away by Farl, because the USSR has to be paid 'for their imports in non-convertible national currency'! Farl constantly refers to this relationship as 'aid'! Perhaps the similar relationships between India and America or Britain are also 'aid'.

Where does Farl talk about the occupation of East Bengal, by India with the backing of the USSR? Or Indian expansion of national minorities again with USSR backing? Nowhere.

Farl's article, most explicitly shown in the section on India, is nothing more than a betrayal of the struggle against Imperialism around the world. It is an apology for Imperialism, peddling the usual bourgeoisie 'theories' of 'Aid'.

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