

RE-ORIENTATE THE LEAGUE FOR THE TASKS OF THE MOMENT!

We are confronted with a seemingly paradoxical situation. The RCLB is in crisis. It is floundering, attempting to establish itself on a new footing. There is a danger of disintegration, if not liquidationism. Yet the situation for revolutionaries in Britain is excellent. Lenin and Stalin showed decisively how the imperialist chain snaps at its weakest links. From this, we can deduce (and this is borne out by practice) that revolutionary opportunities occur, not only in the places where imperialism is weakest, but at times when it is weakest in periods of crisis, not boom.

This analysis is amply borne out by the situation in Britain today. The "you've never had it so good" boom is now nothing but a dim and receding memory. Britain has been worse hit than most of the major imperialist countries by the general crisis of imperialism; this is the result of a cumulative relative decline going back a long way. Industrial heartlands like the West Midlands are consequently becoming unemployment blackspots.

To overcome its crisis, the capitalist class has launched an economic and political assault on the working class and oppressed. By driving up unemployment, it aims to terrorise and pauperise the entire working class, to force down the value of their labour power, thus increasing the amount of surplus value they rob from the workers, and thus raise their profits. The fact that workers in Britain cannot then afford to buy the goods that they have produced is beside the point; British imperialism counts on being able to undercut its imperialist rivals in external markets. But it cannot extricate itself from its crisis for there is a general imperialist crisis in which it is exceptionally difficult for any imperialist state to achieve economic expansion; moreover, British imperialism's crisis is not just part of this general crisis but the result of a long period of relative decline which it cannot hope to slow down or stop (never mind reverse) without drastic action. British imperialism's crisis can only be resolved temporarily by fascism and/or war, or permanently by the proletarian revolution.

Defend and Extend Democratic Rights!

The economic terrorism of the ruling class cannot work without political terrorism; it must not allow the oppressed to fight back! So the pauperisation of the working class goes hand in hand with attacks on democratic rights, the most extreme ones being reserved at this stage for national minority peoples, in particular black and Irish workers: the Prevention of Terrorism Act, Nationality Act, Immigration Acts, Tebbit Bill, Criminal Trespass Act, the use of Conspiracy Laws, the "Falklands Factor", the attacks on street meetings, and so on. In these circumstances we must affirm that our key task in the class struggle in Britain today is to defend and extend democratic rights - not in a reformist way, but in a revolutionary way, not relying on the middle class but on the working class and the oppressed. We must defend now the rights that the class as a whole will need to exercise in the future.

The economic fightback is currently hamstrung by the domination of the working class movement by the labour aristocracy. By working on the question of democratic rights we unite in practice with those sections who are not under the ideological hegemony of the labour aristocracy. By challenging the British state on the "sacred" grounds of its "laws" we will point out to broader sections of the class one of the key roadblocks in their economic struggles: the total, unshakeable belief of the labour aristocracy in the right of the ruling class to rule, and their utter devotion to perpetuating that rule, which makes them reactionary, reactionary and reactionary. So, when we stress the political struggle for democratic rights, it is not because we regard economic struggle as unimportant, it is because we want to remove the roadblocks that currently prevent the working class in Britain from being not just a class in itself but a class for itself, in a full political and economic sense.

In the era of imperialism this must mean a class which has attained a scientific internationalist consciousness of the historic role of the oppressed peoples and nations and the international proletariat in carrying through the revolution to destroy the imperialist exploitative system and build a new social order.

If the labour aristocracy are the shit of capitalist society, the middle class socialists (an unpleasant child of the boom and the result of the failure to develop a firmly rooted British communism) are those who have set themselves the task of searching for golden nuggets in the self-same shit. Middle class socialism had a certain credibility when a well-paid professional job was assured after a student revolutionary fling, when a working class orientation meant rushing out to where the latest strike was taking place and rubbing shoulders with "real workers" on the picket line (or standing the colour television on an empty beer crate!), and when a show of militancy could fairly easily win the next pay rise. In this crisis it is shown to be a hollow fraud. Hence, the dramatic switch by the SWP from juvenile euphoria to senile despondency.

Newly-emerging Forces

But if the crisis is burying certain political forces, it is acting as a midwife to others. Virtually unsupported by the organised working class in Britain, the Irish people and their vanguard, the Provisional IRA, have faced the might of the British Army for 13 years and, far from being defeated, continue to score important victories. In Britain there are thousands of working class people with direct family connections to that struggle. Events during and since the Hunger Strike have shown that they will not remain in the Prevention of Terrorism straightjacket forever (the development of solidarity work in Glasgow, the votes for Bobby Sands in the GLC elections, the formation and rapid growth of the Irish in Britain Representation Group, the development of forces such as the Wolfe Tone Cumann in SF (Britain), etc.).

Like the Irish people, black people in Britain have fought heroically and protractedly but with little support from the rest of the working class.* The events of 1981-82 show what a powerful revolutionary force the black people of Britain are: the New Cross Day of Action, the Brixton Uprising, the July uprisings, the Bradford 12 trial and campaign, the fight to bring Anwar Ditta's children here, the numerous struggles against deportation, etc.

The struggles of black and Irish people in Britain are a bridge. One of Lenin's greatest contributions to Marxism was his insistence on the need for a revolutionary alliance between the working class in the oppressor countries and the masses in the oppressed nations. In writings such as "Imperialism and the Split in Socialism" he showed how the labour aristocracy had driven a wedge between these two mighty forces, thus rendering a great service to imperialism. The Communist International founded by Lenin saw one of its greatest tasks as being to remove that wedge.** Today that process has gone a stage further, and in some of the most important theoretical contributions of Asian communism, including the Theory of Three Worlds, and the Juche Idea, it is cogently argued that this is the era when the oppressed nations are standing up to assert their independence, and that this is the main form taken by the world revolution at present. The Chinese comrades argue that it is necessary for the oppressed nations to do this more vigorously because of the weakness of the revolutionary movement in the imperialist countries.***

Marx viewed the proletariat's class struggle as one in which it could not liberate itself without liberating the whole of humanity. Applying this principle creatively to the era of imperialism, it can be seen that it is the oppressed peoples and nations which incarnate this characteristic of the class struggle most fully, since the whole exploitative system is built upon them, and in particular upon their workers and peasants. There is a point of junction between national struggles and the present issues of struggle posed to the wider working class in Britain. This has to do with the fact that most national minority people are workers, but this fact

in itself does not furnish the full explanation. The essential point is that they have the potential to inject into the broader working class struggles an element arising from their national demands which, in turn, draws on their continuing links with the countries of the third world, or parts of Europe (Ireland, southern Italy, etc.) with conditions broadly akin to those of the third world. The national minority peoples' struggles cannot be reduced simply to class struggle (though in the final analysis they are indeed a form of class struggle) for they are forms of struggle in their own right which have a role autonomous from that of the majority working class but which can also introduce a more dynamic revolutionary trend into it.

In Britain the black and Irish workers are the most subjectively rebellious and revolutionary because of the situation of double and super-exploitation which they face. On the one hand they still retain their ties to Ireland or countries of the third world and, not infrequently, to the revolutionary movements there (as shown by the influence of Naxalbari on the IWA, of the liberation movements in southern Africa on sections of the black youth, the concern for Palestine amongst Muslim peoples, or even the influence of the "cultural revolution" on the Overseas Chinese, e.g. Malayan Chinese students). Thus, in a sense we can say that the struggles of black and Irish workers in Britain form a part of the main revolutionary force in the world today, internalised to the imperialist heartlands. At the same time, they are a part of the British working class! Their conditions of life and relationship to the means of production make this so. The key importance of the double oppression they face is that they confront British imperialism economically and politically. Where black and Irish workers lead today the rest of the working class will have to follow. This is why we argue that they are a bridge - a bridge by which the British working class will gradually become able to join the mainstream of the world revolution. Black and Irish workers are the vanguard of the British working class. Communists must unite with, support, defend and build that vanguard!

1981 will come to be seen as a crucial year for revolutionary politics in Britain. The grave was dug for middle class socialism and the emerging vanguard announced its existence. Not only did it announce its existence, but it began to coalesce and to begin to lead other sections of the class.

The heroic sacrifices of the hunger strikers saw a major development of the national liberation struggle in Ireland. In Britain uprisings spread to over 30 towns and cities, with areas such as Upper Parliament Street in Liverpool 8 and Railton/Mayall Roads in Brixton actually becoming out of bounds to the servants and agents of the British state for days at a time. Two spectres haunted the ruling class:

Would unity be developed between the black and Irish peoples, effectively meaning a second front for British imperialism?

Would sections of the broader working class begin to follow the lead of the vanguard?

The answers were provided. The conscious political leaders of the black communities were open supporters of the IRA; even an opportunist paper like the "Caribbean Times" sees it as being in its interests to support the Irish people. In St.Paul's, Bristol, the youth said, "We are the black IRA." Balaclava helmets and petrol bombs were copied from the Irish. The Republican Movement declared its full support for the black people's struggles. A representative of the UBYL went to the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis and received a tumultuous welcome. White English unemployed youth eagerly responded to the lead given by their black contemporaries. In some towns to which the uprisings spread there was hardly a black face to be seen (e.g. Maidstone). A sterile ACAS negotiating session holds no particular attractions if you've never had a job and don't suppose you ever will. How would-be revolutionaries react to these developments will be the acid test of their success or failure.

A Challenge for the RCLB

The RCLB was thrown into a state of confusion by the events of 1981. Conceived of as little more than a fraternal organisation of the CPC in Britain per se, it had been unable to break with the revisionist and opportunist domination of the British communist movement which had existed for decades, despite certain positive developments such as the Zimbabwe Campaign, the work of the Irish Commission and the beginning of Ireland solidarity and anti-racist work. The League had been unable to apply the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought to the concrete realities of the British revolution. Groaning under the dictatorial old leadership, potentially good comrades were diverted into struggling over what were essentially side issues.

In particular, the old League replaced political struggle over real issues with a form of religious idealism known as "ideological struggle". This - the corner-stone of the League's "party building" line was little more than moralistic self-cultivation in isolation from the class struggle. The League's theory was a dogmatic rehash of carefully selected aphorisms from "Beijing Review", quite incapable of explaining the dynamics of the British revolution. Its internal life was hidebound, super-centralist and stultifying. Its practice divorced the majority of members from the revolutionary forces in British society. Small wonder then that in such conditions openly revisionist and social chauvinist ideas were able to flourish and that the League was unprepared for the events of 1981.

"The peasants' revolt disturbed the gentry's sweet dreams."

"In a very short time, in China's central, southern and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants rise like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back. They will smash all the trammels that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will sweep all the imperialists, war-lords, corrupt tyrants and evil gentry into their graves. Every revolutionary party and every revolutionary comrade will be put to the test, to be accepted or rejected as they decide. There are three alternatives. To march at their head and lead them? To trail behind them, gesticulating and criticising? Or to stand in their way and oppose them? Every Chinese is free to choose, but events will force you to make the choice quickly." (Mao Zedong, "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan")

Ten brave young Irish hunger strikers and the "youth of no property" gave us a choice: Did we or did we not support the oppressed when they rose up? This should be a simple question for revolutionaries. Not for the RCLB! Based on a dogmatic and mechanical application of Lenin's revolutionary line for early industrial Russia, we had placed all our eggs in the basket of industrial base building.

Our Industrial Orientation

Our industrial base-building was an attempt to break with the general practice of the great bulk of the British left, which essentially concentrated any activity among "the working class" on the existing, overwhelmingly social-democratic trade union activists and the trade union bureaucracy. It was also an attempt to begin the class transformation of the League into an organisation proletarian in both line and in the bulk of its membership, through integrating with the working class and "going lower and deeper to the real masses". This was positive in terms of the old CFB(M-L) in that it was a step away from middle class socialism, but it had a negative aspect in that it involved dropping the anti-imperialist work the Federation had been doing; anti-imperialist work was identified with middle class socialism because no attempt had been made up to then to build a working class anti-imperialist movement. The fundamental questions of political line had not been resolved correctly; the correctness or incorrectness of work done in any particular field is determined, first and foremost, by the political line guiding and being promoted through that work; there is no virtue in promoting reactionary politics in any area of work.

But this project was flawed both as a concept and in implementation. The League failed to grasp properly the imperialist character of British society, which must provide the starting point for establishing by what criteria we should determine who the advanced are - those with a relatively strong grasp of Britain's imperialist character who have begun to fight this monster. And these elements are mainly concentrated among the black and Irish peoples, whose collective struggles have overwhelmingly taken place outside the workplace (with notable exceptions like Imperial Typewriters and Grunwick's).

Hence, when a relatively small number of League members began working seriously to build industrial bases, they were doing so in places where the advanced elements were very few, were scattered and unorganised, and where it would take years of work to overcome this problem - and even then our ability to make a marked impact in the class struggle in Britain would not have been greatly improved. In short, making industrial base building the sole mass work task of the League was a serious misuse of our limited resources. The vanguard forces were not correctly identified, our cadres were not deployed so that they could unite with these forces and help build them up.

This line was also crucially flawed in that the League's line on the struggles of black and Irish people was downright reactionary, in that it marginalised and slandered them. The League did not engage in Ireland solidarity activities until just before the Unity Conference, and it only began anti-racist work a little while before that. Thus, it was not able to bring a strong anti-imperialist line into the workplaces where it was organising - a line which was vital for rallying and organising the advanced there. Nor could it work with the advanced elements it found or was building up in industry outside the workplace, where they could have been developed politically a lot faster.

In the end, we've made a relatively small number of good contacts in industry, but achieved little more; the results have been negligible compared to all the work that has been put in.

Wedded to an industrial base-building line that refused to recognise the cause of the degeneration of the working class movement in Britain, that therefore did not see the need to do sound and deep theoretical work (i.e. not spout dogma), which saw the struggles of black people and of women as peripheral, and which actively opposed the Republican struggle in Ireland, the RCLB was not in shape for the events of 1981. Those events, and their aftermath, threw the RCLB into a crisis which is reaching its peak. Using dialectics, we must have the courage to see this is a good thing! Human beings have a great capacity to ignore reality. We need not have been thrown into crisis. We could have continued as a small sect working in half a dozen factories and sending periodic letters to the CPC. That we have sat up, started to think and to change shows that there is hope for us yet.

What were the bases for change?

1. The oppressed rudely forced themselves onto our agendas.
2. We claimed adherence to Mao Zedong Thought, a profoundly revolutionary ideology emanating from the Third World.
3. The CWM and BCA were considerably less tarnished than the old RCLB and had a number of notable achievements to their credit, e.g. the BCA's links with national minority organisations in Birmingham and work begun by CWM on building links with Marxist-Leninists in Ireland and the general anti-imperialism of its paper.
4. Certain comrades and certain units in the League were struggling in different ways for a more thoroughgoing revolutionary line.
5. The widespread and largely successful struggle against the dogmatism and super-centralism of the old leadership of the League provided the conditions where there could be a receptive audience for anti-imperialist politics and practice.

6. In theory and in practice, the RCG had made major contributions to the development of a revolutionary line for Britain.

So, now we can see that the "seemingly paradoxical situation" described in the opening lines represents a process containing a dialectical unity of opposites. The subjective revolutionary forces (the Marxist-Leninists) are struggling to unite themselves with the objective revolutionary forces (the vanguard of the class). To paraphrase Mao, we have a choice, but events are forcing us to choose quickly.

Our Tasks

What is to be done? We must establish a political basis for unity in the League. This must be founded on taking the decaying imperialist character of Britain as a starting point, must recognise the vanguard role of the most oppressed sections of the working class, and must unconditionally support the oppressed when they rise up. Members of the League must uphold this in words and deeds. This does not constitute an argument for monolithic unity; there are many debates to be had inside the League, but debates between communists. There is no place for revisionist and social-chauvinist ideas in a communist organisation. We must recreate a tightly-knit, highly disciplined Bolshevik-type organisation. This can only be done if we establish a political basis for unity and have a healthy and flourishing internal life. The words of our Constitution that members of the League "dedicate their lives to the struggle for communism" must be more than mere words.

This is more than ever necessary when we are at the stage of rallying the vanguard. We must adopt the Leninist standpoint: "Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement." To be in a position of forever trying to "win the conviction" of those whose conviction is not for winning is another recipe for doing nothing. We must decide our programme and implement it. Membership of the League is purely voluntary. Those who volunteer to be its members must carry out its work in a disciplined and dedicated way on the basis of rigorously defined priorities. Our tiny forces will only make an impact if they work in a co-ordinated and disciplined way (look at the RCG!). Those who can't do this are more trouble than they're worth.

We have two separate inter-related tasks: to go deep into the working class, to the poorest and most oppressed, and rally the vanguard through the anti-imperialist struggle for democracy, in particular, the struggles of the black and Irish peoples. To do this entails building fighting anti-imperialist organisations from which the cadre will come forward to be trained as Bolsheviks. The other task is to do serious and meticulous theoretical work in order to build the party on a solid basis. The crux of this theoretical work has to be the unsolved question of how to make revolution in an advanced imperialist country; the relationship between national and international class struggle, between class and national struggle.

In both these tasks we must take up, apply and fuse three great revolutionary traditions: Irish Republicanism, Black Power and Asian Communism. These are the theoretical foundations of the bridge that the national minorities provide for the British working class. All three have a presence in the vanguard. All three help link our struggles to the frontlines of world revolution. Asian Communism links us to the greatest extant achievements of mankind: the liberated socialist countries of China and Korea. Revolutionary communism can show the common thread (the communistic essence) of these three movements.****

To lead the mass, we must rally the vanguard. If the vanguard is to be rallied, it has to be united. The uniting and linking of these forces and these elements of communistic ideology is precisely the element that has to be "injected from the outside" into the objectively existing and developing class struggle by the communists. Our insistence on the existence of a vanguard

within the class does not mean that we have forsaken the need for communist leadership, for a Party. But we have to earn that leadership from the vanguard. If we bring our middle class baggage (in terms of ideology and stand) with us, they will soon tell us where to get off.

The oppressed have no future under capitalism. (Here it seems even the Sex Pistols were in advance of us!) Great possibilities exist for at last building a real communist movement in Britain. Let us make the most of those possibilities! Let the Marxist-Leninists take their stand with the oppressed and work with one heart and one mind to build a revolutionary Bolshevik Party that will have the unerring aim of burying evil British imperialism for ever!

SC
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* For historical background, see A. Sivanandan, "From Resistance to Rebellion" ("Race and Class", Vol. XXIII, Nos. 2-3) and M. Williams, S. Palmer, G. Clapton, "Racism, Imperialism and the Working Class" (Revolutionary Communist No. 9).

** See in particular the documents of the IIInd Comintern Congress (in "The First Four Congresses of the Comintern"), the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East (1920), the VIth Comintern Congress, Stalin's "Foundations of Leninism" and relevant works by Mao Zedong.

*** See Renmin Ribao editorial, "Chairman Mao Tse Tung's Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds is a Major Contribution to Marxism-Leninism".

**** See the juxtaposition of Connolly and Kim quotes in the CS article "RCLB Greets Eritrea".