

Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)

GROUP AUTONOMY Discussion

EROL Note: These are unpublished internal document prepared by the CFB's component groups

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GROUP AUTONOMY - DRAFT RESOLUTION

1. The question of group autonomy essentially involves policy.
2. A main strength and distinguishing characteristic of the CFB is its attitude to policy - its determination to put ideology before organisation and its wholehearted opposition to 'instant policy' i.e. policy agreed with little investigation and lack of thoroughgoing discussion of concrete circumstances - policy having a purely organisational basis.
3. The negative tendency of the CFB approach is the excuse it provides for liberalism. This negative tendency is an aspect of our federal structure, but it is a question of political attitude at the federation level of organisation.
4. The problems posed in our past work are becoming more pressing as we move more and more from problems of internal form to questions of content, reflecting to greater and greater levels the external objective political situation. Obviously such problems can be resolved to only a limited extent by formal and organisational steps.
5. A political answer calls for all comrades grasp the essential political characteristics of the federation organisation. In particular the struggle between liberalism and democratic centralism must be understood. This is a key aspect of the federations' changing nature as it increasingly seeks and has to resolve the contradictions between ideology and organisation. This is the essence of advance to the party stage. It is an objective process.
6. With this understanding as a basis Federation policy must be decided on the basis of the fullest possible investigation within the political and organisational limits of the Federation at any given time. Once decided by simple majority of the Federation Committee, policy must be binding actively on all groups. There can be no right of disclaiming, and such a step should not be compatible with continued Federation membership.
7. Obedience to majority-agreed decisions has two aspects. It is a reflection of the level of discussion and conviction, and is also a test of party-building intent.
8. The liberal and incorrect use of abstention in voting must be fought against. This cannot be done ~~be done~~ by pious abstract statements, but must take place in each and every concrete circumstance. It must be shown to reflect laziness and lack of preparation and consideration on the part of comrades involved.
9. This statement should be discussed and adopted by the Federation Committee and circulated and thoroughly explained to the entire Federation.

Sean Mc Conville,
18th. September 1971.

NOTE

The positions of all Federation groups have been, or will be circulated. At present the Glasgow comrades are the only group other than ourselves to have prepared and issued a statement.

John Burbidge (Sec.)

All pamphlets and material relating to group autonomy can be borrowed from me or bought from New Era.

COVENTRY WORKERS ASSOCIATION

STATEMENT on Group Autonomy and the Federation.

If the present discussion taking place in the Federation is to prove fruitful, we consider it necessary to judge our progress against the declared aims and prerequisites for the formation of a party adopted at the founding of the Federation in September 1969.

Clause 3 of the J.C.C. Statement on the "Question of party building" states :-

"Such an organisation of groups must strive to attain a level where the following conditions for the formation of a party are achieved" :

- a) A politically advanced cadre force, with a good group of the ideology of Marxism-Leninism gained from a combination of theory and practice.
- b) A full analysis of the National and International political situation including the historical experience of the British Anti-revisionist Movement to date.
- c) A draft programme that would need to be fully discussed to ensure that it was fully understood by all the constituent parts of the organisation and would stand the test of time ; furthermore in the production of such a draft programme it would be necessary for a number of publications, statements etc. to be brought out.
- d) To have carried out as an organisation practical work upon which concrete evaluation could be made and practical conclusions drawn.
- e) To have proceeded in accordance with democratic centralism utilising fully the methods of criticism and self-criticism.

The document of Comrade Sean McConville published in September 1971, from which the present discussion stems, at no time uses as a yardstick, or even mentions the aims outlined above. Similarly it ignores the remainder of the J.C.C. statement on Party building which has as its central theme the achieving of the Leninist position of ideological unity, political unity, organisational unity and tactical unity, as the fundamental tasks necessary for the formation of a M-L Party. Recognition of the importance of these tasks is in essence the difference between the C.F.B. and the "instant centre" approach that has been prevalent in the international Communist Movement in recent years. In the introduction to the "Documents of the C.F.B. (M-L)" we say :-

"Elementary analysis clearly indicates that no strategy exists yet for socialist revolution in Britain. Without this strategy a "Party" is only a name and no such organisation can claim to be the vanguard of the working class. Strategy involves direction and makes possible correct tactics. A "vanguard" without direction is a tragic nonsense".

Also, towards the end of the same section we state :-

"It is not possible for Marxist-Leninists to divide their work, achievements and mistakes into "organisational" and "political" categories. The essence of our approach is the inter-relation of the two ; politics must command organisation but there can be no revolutionary politics without organisation".

Clause 5 of Comrade McConville's document states :

".....This is a key aspect of the Federation's changing nature as it increasingly seeks and has to resolve the contradictions between ideology and organisation. This is the essence of the advance to the party stage. It is an objective process".

This formulation used by Comrade McConville is very similar to the one above quoted from the "Documents", apart from when discussing ideology and organisation, he has substituted the word "contradictions", where the Document used the term "interrelation". Perhaps this change in terminology

continued over.....

explains how Comrade McConville can then propose his Clause 6 without any examination or evidence of progress of the C.F.B. in its laid down tasks for Party building. The Clause 6 mentioned states :

"With this understanding as a basis Federation policy must be decided on the fullest possible investigation within the Political and organisational limits of the Federation at any given time. Once decided by simple majority of the Federation Committee, policy must be binding actively on all groups. There can be no right of disclaiming and such a step should not be compatible with further Federation membership".

(writer's emphasis).

Where is the "fullest possible investigation" on the fundamental question of ending group autonomy as outlined in the remainder of the Clause?

Clause 9 concludes the document by the first proposed implementation of Clause 6. It states :

"This statement should be discussed and adopted by the Federation Committee and thoroughly explained to the entire Federation".

(writer's emphasis)

Brief though the history of the C.F.B. is, the document of Comrade McConville departs from the whole tradition of the anti-revisionist forces who have come together in the Federation on the basis of the Documents of the C.F.B. (M-L).

In its contribution to the discussion the West of England states :

"Surely sufficient development has occurred for there to be a real basis of trust between our constituent groups regarding seriousness and political commitment. This is our position, we are definitely prepared to submit to majority lines....."

The sentiments expressed by the West of England are very laudable but unfortunately do not provide the very essence of Marxist support, i.e. concrete objective evidence.

The C.W.A. consider that the contribution from the Glasgow Group is a serious contribution to the discussion, but in the last analysis fails because it seems to allow the unsubstantiated premise raised by Comrade McConville to dictate their conclusions. Hence the latter part of the statement appears to adopt a mechanical "time table" approach to the resolving of basic political questions. The Glasgow proposals allow for discussion and agreement by the whole of the Federation and only those subjects agreed at an S.G.M. to be binding on the Groups. This, of course, is in contrast to Comrade McConville's approach (see Clauses 6 and 9 of his document) but even then it is an acceptance of the basic premise raised and attempts to resolve it without relating to the accepted achievements necessary as outlined at the beginning of this document.

The C.W.A. consider that the acceptance of the already quoted conditions for the formation of a party is an acceptance that such a party can only work towards Socialism if it is based upon political reality and not upon the subjective wishes of individuals or groups. All Comrades are aware of the results over recent years of the heartfelt desires of Comrades being allowed to dominate over political acumen derived from an objective political assessment of the situation. The C.F.B., both in its method of work and in its type of organisation, developed out of the struggles with those opportunists (albeit well meaning) and out of the experiences of Comrades in many parts of the country who had the task of building the organisation that now exists out of the remnants left by these well meaning "instant party" people. Also in creating the C.F.B. we recognised the qualitative difference between anti-revisionism and Marxism-Leninism. Rejection of the "British Road to Socialism", of "Peaceful Coexistence as the main plank" of Khrushchev's "State of the whole People", is necessary but is not the same thing as achieving the five points outlined in the Statement on Party building.

Though the responsibility for evaluating our progress towards these five goals is rightly that of the Comrades who have raised the question of ending Group Autonomy, we feel it may be of some use if we attempted a brief examination of our work against the background of our avowed aims.

As a Federation, as distinct from the individual groups who may well exist even if the C.F.B. did not, we have very little experience. The most noteworthy achievements are the regular publications of Struggle and now of the M.L.Q. (at the time of writing two issues of M.L.Q. have appeared - at the time of the original proposals to end Group Autonomy, no M.L.Q. had appeared). Hardly any participation by the Federation has taken place on National campaigns or demonstrations. One National leaflet has been produced. It could hardly be claimed that more than the most embryonic type of work has been attempted on a draft programme. No analysis has emerged on the National or International situation. Neither has one yet appeared on the historical experience of the British Anti-revisionist Movement to date. The distance we are removed from the necessary "politically advanced cadre force" can best be illustrated by our refusal to allow even individual Comrades the right to criticise policies of the C.P.C. and Chinese Peoples Republic in the publications of the Federation. Surely no aspiring M/L Party could allow such a blind restriction on its work for nearly 12 months. We know of no Comrade in the Federation who is "happy" about all Chinese policies whether it be Pakistan, Ceylon, Yugoslavia, the buying of Concorde, of Boeing 707's, the disappearance of Lin Piao or the Nixon visit. We feel that a "politically advanced cadre force, with a good grasp of the ideology of Marxism-Leninism...." could not tolerate a situation whereby no matter what our analysis would bring, we would at the outset of the examination be precluded from any conclusions that might be critical of the C.P.C. ! An analysis of that sort must either be one conducted by non Marxist-Leninists or by Comrades so immature and lacking in confidence in their own abilities, that for them to contemplate such a fundamental step towards a centralist party as outlined in Clause 6 of Comrade McConville's document, is ludicrous !

The C.W.A. puts forward the following proposals for consideration by the Federation as a conscious attempt to move towards the aims accepted at the founding of the C.F.B.

- 1) Maximum concentration on the work of the M.L.Q. Active encouragement for "collective" articles to appear from Comrades who are not necessarily members of the same group. An acceptance by the editorial board of M.L.Q. that the journal will encourage open and frank political polemic. Personal abuse to be discouraged.

"If there were no contradictions in the party and no ideological struggles to resolve them, the party's life would come to an end".
(Mao).

- 2) Greater emphasis on bilateral meetings of groups to follow up points raised either in M.L.Q. or internal Federation documents. Also to encourage individuals to attend group meetings other than their own. A commitment on C.F.B. Committee members to attend as many meetings of Groups other than their own as possible.
- 3) An acceptance of more central discipline and direction on educational policy. Where possible study and discussion to continue until the rudiments of an agreed line has been reached throughout the Federation. We must attempt to overcome the "limbo" situation we have reached on "Social Democracy", Foreign Policy of a Socialist Country", "Ireland", "Stalin" etc.
- 4) Wherever the C.F.B. Committee wishes groups to discuss particular issues or to take a particular study course, it should attempt to produce the written reasons of why it collectively considers it necessary.
- 5) A periodic examination by the Committee of the Federation's progress towards the five aims and at least an annual secretarial report to the whole Federation evaluating the progress.
- 6) Political discouragement for Groups to disclaim. This to be achieved by emphasising points 2 and 3.

- 7) Frequent issuing of Federation leaflets. If time allows and the impact of topicality is not lost, the contents to be as widely discussed as possible, e.g. Racism, Common Market, Rent Act etc.
- 8) At least twice a year a Nationally advertised public meeting and rally of the Federation. Probably held in London.

The above political tasks are within the present organisational ability of the Federation. The achieving of those tasks would create political conditions that would require structural changes to enable us to move forward to the creation of a M.L. Party capable of leading and at the same time genuinely reflecting a revolutionary movement capable of overthrowing capitalism and establishing Workers' Power.

COVENTRY WORKERS ASSOCIATION

October, 1972.

POLITICAL UNITY AND GROUP AUTONOMY

Note: An impression has been created amongst the groups and single members of the CFB, particularly those newer members that the Glasgow Group has changed its position in relation to Group Autonomy, programme and some other vital problems facing the Federation today. The following document, originally circulated in June 1972 and in a slightly amended form in July of the same year shows that our present positions are the continuation of the lines stated in this document. The document, raised for the first time the question of unity round a programme, 'Policy Statement' and a 'Programme for Immediate Tasks' etc.

GLASGOW GROUP, Feb.'74

Cde. Sean McConville's resolution to end the right to disclaim any CFB decision was desired to give vent to a supposedly qualitative change in the CFB. In this document, we intend to examine whether the political developments since the adoption of the "Origins & Perspectives" in '59, publication of the 'Struggle' later in the same year and adoption of the constitutions in '71 have actually brought about the necessary change, and if not, how we propose to tackle the problem:

The degree of centralism is a measure of political unity and therefore higher levels of the former can only be achieved through achieving higher levels of the latter. During several debates in the CFB on vital issues the component groups have often found themselves widely separated from one another. The organisational unity based on 'anti-revisionism' has been thrown to the test of time several times as the Marxist-Leninist movement has passed from the stage of opposition to revisionism to that of the preparation for revolutionary theory and construction of a strategy for the building of a revolutionary party in this country. This was evident during the discussions on General Elections in '70 and on Pakistan in '71. The debates on Ireland have shown that the groups and individuals are often on opposite poles.

What are the factors responsible for this present inappropriate level of unity? In our opinion these are:

- A) THE GROUPS ARE COLLECTIVELY NOT AWARE OF THE EXACT LEVEL OF THEIR PRESENT UNITY, AND THERE IS NO SYSTEMATIC METHOD OF ATTAINING HIGHER LEVELS.

No discussion has ever taken place to estimate the level of our present political unity since the adoption of the O&P. Yet we had an opportunity to do so in the first SMG, in Cde Sam Mauger's secretarial report. We must state to the working class and the Marxist-Leninist movement where we stand in relation to any radical change in the national and international political situation. We must frankly state our differences and inadequacies and make an appraisal of the agreed as well as the conflicting issues. With such a document, complimentary to the O&P, our disunity will see a perspective without which the present unity would appear unjustly opportunistic. It is only the initial level of unity in the ideological and political sphere that will determine the tasks ahead and which are to be carried out in a systematic manner.

Experiences have adequately proved that the only organisation in Britain which is anywhere near to a strategy for building a revolutionary party is the CFB. Yet it cannot be denied that spontaneity rather than a designed strategy is still the prime motive force in the CFB's efforts of party-building. This spontaneity is to be replaced by a planned programme. We reject the idea that the Federation cannot have a programme and with the adoption of such we

complete the tasks of forming the party. By programme we mean "a set of tasks to be accomplished during a particular stage of the movement and the party-building, on the basis of an understanding of the current domestic and international political situation". The completion of a set of tasks will give rise to another set of tasks for the next higher stage.

At the moment the main issue that divides the CFB from the rest of the Marxist-Leninist movement in this country is the strategy of party-building. But as the question of preparation for revolutionary theory & strategy comes to the forefront, it is likely that there will be re-orientation of the Marxist-Leninist forces along political lines. There will then be a pressing need for a programme since it is only a programme that can be the basis of political unity.

"to define the border-line between party and anti-party, there is the party programme, the party's resolutions on tactics and its rules...."

(Lenin-Party organisation and Party literature, 1905)

The underlying principle in the above statement is applicable to the present M)-L movement as well. (see suggestion 'a').

B) AN ERRONEOUS METHOD OF RESOLVING POLITICAL ISSUES HAS PREVENTED THE GROWTH OF OUR UNITY.

Political lines cannot be deduced through exchange of academic documents. The documents must be based on an investigation of the existing knowledge of the problem through practice and developing the knowledge through further practice. Where do correct lines come from?.

"They come from social practice, and from it alone.....in their social practice men engage in various kinds of struggle and gain rich experience, both from their successes and from their failures".
(Mao).

The initial investigation must produce a "working line" (interim line) subject to further investigations. The initial investigation will reject 'instant lines', the working lines will reject academic exercises. The working line can only be based on the common denominator amongst the groups. To give an example; The CFB has a policy on trade unions. None disagrees with it. Further investigations (by Coventry/Liverpool) may result in disagreements or to a better understanding of the existing line. But without this present line it would have been impossible to intervene in the present industrial struggles and to write almost half of the articles in 'Struggle'. Without this line it would have been impossible to issue the first and so far the only leaflet, commonly produced by the groups-the leaflet on the Industrial Relations Bill.

To give a negative example: The Irish situation has been an extremely crucial issue for more than two years. The CFB has not even attempted to intervene in the struggle in any form and in fact damaged its credibility by publishing conflicting articles on such a burning issue. Many of the articles have been academic and not based on the principle 'No investigation, no right to speak'. Only Glasgow and Coventry (to the best of our knowledge) have attempted to take part in the struggles with 'working lines'. On our own behalf, we are continually testing our line in practice.

We have tried to demarcate between 'instant lines' and 'working lines'. We emphasize that an investigation must precede any policy and this can be done through the monthly CFB committee meetings. To do this the Federation committee is to be elevated to the level of a political executive committee. It must hold meetings to discuss exclusively political and ideological issues at regular intervals and if possible this should be done in conjunction with the journal committee. (See suggestion 'b')

c) A MECHANICAL CONCEPT THAT PARTY-BUILDING CAN GO ON INDEPENDENTLY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE REVOLUTIONARY THEORY AND SOCIALIST STRATEGY.

The construction of a strategy for party-building goes hand in hand with that for the socialist revolution. To be more precise, it is impossible to build the former without at the same time building the latter. The converse is academic exercise, since party is the tool for the revolution. According to the present concept in the CFB, the development of revolutionary theory and socialist strategy can wait and we can continue the preparation for revolutionary party. This is the non-dialectical opposite of the non-dialectical ICO theory which maintains that party-building must wait until revolutionary theory has been developed in the British Museum library. More dangerously, the CFB is content with the fact that nobody else in Britain has got the socialist strategy (See Sam Mauger's speech in London forum).

As we embark on developing the theory and strategy we will inevitably find ourselves in conflicting positions. Under such circumstances the consciousness brought from immediate struggles will help us to link the present and the future. It is only this link that can really bind us today, provided we begin the development of theory and strategy from immediate practice.

(See suggestion'd').

With the publication of an agitational-educational paper the Federation started a new stage, a qualitatively new course of development. Further progress in the process was hindered due to lack of a theoretical journal. With the publication of the MLQ, we have started another stage, providing a concrete scope for systematic theoretical development. The launching of the MLQ, now coupled with the Struggle must mark therefore the beginning of the end of group autonomy. After the adoption of our proposed policy document and programme on immediate tasks there will be no case for group autonomy in its present form.

SO WE SUGGEST THE FOLLOWING:

- a) The secretary will produce a draft on the present national and international political situation and project the question of party-building in that background (the basis of the speech at the London University forum should be an important component of this document). The document will be finalised in the next SMG. This will be the major policy document of the CFB, on the agreed issues, and complementary to the O&P. It will set out the agreed and the controversial points on the conflicting issues. This policy document will guide the work of the CFB in the fields of agreement and adopt a programme for these fields: trade union, tenants, students, racism, General Elections, Ireland, Vietnam and important national liberation struggles in the British colonies/neo-colonies. The fields mentioned here but lacking an agreed line are to be settled at or before the next SMG. There will be no right to disclaim in these issues after the SMG.
- b) 1. Planned General Meetings will be undertaken to settle the conflicting issues, each meeting producing a common line by a 2/3 majority with no rights to complain. In the case of a failure to obtain such a majority, attempts will be made to adopt a line based on Maximum agreement (working line). If this is politically impossible, groups will be allowed to pursue their own lines until another General Meeting.
 - ii. All urgent political issues (e.g. military brutality in E. Bengal, internment in Ireland, torture in Sudan etc.) will be settled in the CFB committee by a simple majority. The secretary and the chairman will have the right to issue statements under the name of the CFB, in the Struggle and elsewhere even before a committee meeting but

it will be desirable that attempts will be made to contact the committee members.

iii. The CFB committee will hold two-day meetings every second or third month, one day being devoted exclusively to discuss political and ideological issues.

iv. All matters of organisation will be settled by a simple majority in the CFB committee meetings.

c) The journal committee will be directed to plan and prepare documents on the following:

I. i. Origins of revisionism-Social Imperialism.

ii. "British Road to Socialism".

iii. Trotskyism.

2. iv. British Imperialism today.

v. British state.

vi. Class-structure in Britain.

vii. Social Democracy in Britain.

viii. Common Market.

Glasgow Group.

July, 1972.

GROUP AUTONOMY
Liverpool Statement

What essentially began as a discussion on the chairman's resolution has now developed into a discussion on a crucial issue to the C.F.B., that is the question of ideological unity and determination of policy in relation to group autonomy. An important point on this question as Coventry rightly point out is the need to consider the question of group autonomy against the background of the conditions for the formation of a party that were declared in the J.C.C. statement in 1969, and to judge our progress against these declared aims.

To begin with it is necessary to deal with the point that Glasgow raise at the beginning of their statement - that is, that "the groups are collectively not aware of the exact level of their present unity." We believe this to be a very important point and before we can go on to agreeing on methods of how to determine policy we must know firstly, on what issues we are agreed and at what level this agreement is. and secondly we must draw up a programme of what we believe to be the most important issues with which we must deal in order to attain a greater degree of unity. The clarifying of our present level of unity and the drawing up of the programme of the ideological and political issues that need to be dealt with will have to be done by the C.F.B. Committee, whilst obviously involving the whole of the C.F.B. Here too, the M.L.Q. can play a very constructive role by the journal committee being directed to plan and prepare documents on given topics, as suggested by Glasgow, but exactly what topics would have to be decided by the C.F.B. committee following from the drawing up of the programme of the issues to be dealt with.

Further, we agree with the secretary when he says that "the general approach of the C.F.B. which is and should continue to be to approach political issues separately and deal with them one by one", whilst we agree that urgency should not be a criteria for deciding policy we certainly feel that some sort of general time-scale should be decided on.

Coventry's proposals (2), (3), (5) and (7) would greatly assist us in our ideological work - we feel that number (3) isn't specific enough. "central discipline and direction on educational policy" should take the form of an education officer or education sub-committee.

On the question of the determination of policy - should this be done by the C.F.B. committee or general meetings? - most people who have produced a statement have supported one or the other though nobody has actually said why policy should be determined by the C.F.B. committee, or indeed why policy should be determined by general meetings. We believe that at the present stage of ideological development of the C.F.B. that policy must be determined by general meetings. Whilst there has been much development towards the conditions for the formation of a party as stated in the J.C.C. statement, there is still a great deal of confusion regarding our present level of ideological unity and until this confusion is cleared up, and until far more unity has been achieved we believe that no significant steps can be taken towards the party stage and hence responsibility for determining policy must remain with the general meetings. Hence we agree entirely with the proposal for determining policy in the London group statement.

Again, on the contentious issue of the right to disclaim those people and groups suggesting ending the right to disclaim have given no reason why we should take such a step. A majority in Liverpool believe the right to disclaim should be continued. Whilst we agree with London that there are many disadvantages to the right to disclaim - the main one being that it can hamper the C.F.B. committee in developing any real power or leadership, - we don't believe that a sufficiently high level or degree of unity exists as yet in the C.F.B. to justify such a step. The right to

disclaim has existed in the C.F.B. from the beginning (though only used once), presumably because of the varying histories, levels and political attitudes of the various groups that made up the J.C.C. and the C.F.B., and because of confusion in and political immaturity of the anti-revisionist movement at that time. In order to justify the ending of the right to disclaim do those people advocating such a step imply that ~~there~~ there has been such a significant development of the ideological and political unity of the C.F.B. to justify it? Obviously none of us believe that the right to disclaim will last forever; the disagreement arises as to what level we can seriously end it. We believe that the right to disclaim can only be ended when ideological unity has been achieved on a very minimum of issues; for example: The origins of revisionism; social imperialism; C.P.G.B.; the British state; the class structure in Britain; social-democracy in Britain, to name but a few, though obviously it would be up to the C.F.B. as a whole, together with the C.F.B. committee to determine which are the most crucial issues facing us.

For ourselves we are quite aware of the need to put the interests and needs of the C.F.B. before those of the group and we have shown in the past that we are quite willing to do so as we see our group as an integral part of the C.F.B.; but whilst this sentiment is of great importance it is actual political and ideological unity that will determine our advance to the party stage.

A minority of comrades in Liverpool disagree with this attitude on the right to disclaim and are in agreement with London's position.

Whilst we are prepared to argue our case on the right to disclaim we are prepared to accept the majority decision within the C.F.B.

Liverpool
November 1972.

Statement of the London Group on Group Autonomy

We must start by saying that the London Group would be prepared to accept certain steps towards greater centralism along the lines proposed in the Chairman's original resolution, but we also recognise that this may not be the feeling in every other group of the Federation.

Federalism is the expression of the stage we are in at present and any move towards centralism does not mean that federalism is at an end, although every correct action taken in ending the autonomy of the groups also moves us a step nearer the party stage and a step away from the previous stage of loose connexions between the groups.

One of the main problems at present is the relationship of the Federation Committee to the groups. At the SGM the Federation Committee was given powers to take decisions by a two-thirds majority, and it was agreed that the delegates would fight for the decisions of the Federation Committee back in their groups. However it became by and large accepted that this power to take decisions applied only to administration of internal Federation affairs, and essentially the Federation was left with no method of deciding policy (in the sense of publicly-proclaimed policy concerning political events outside the C.F.B.). In addition the continued right of disclaimer by groups robs the Federation Committee of any real power or leadership since it can only prove harmful to take policy decisions, and then to find a group disclaiming them subsequently. Similarly the freedom of the groups to refuse to implement decisions relating to internal affairs reduces the power and usefulness of the Federation Committee (for example consider the implementation of the decisions about studying Group Autonomy and Ireland).

One of the most important tasks facing the CFB therefore is to convince all groups of the necessity of putting the needs of the Federation as a whole before those of the individual group. We do not feel that the Yeovil document takes this point into account: whereas we should not shirk from "struggle and acute controversy" we must recognise that our aim is also to make sure that non-antagonistic contradictions do not become antagonistic ones. It would be easy to push through a line with majority agreement that would in all probability split the Federation and this we are sure nobody would wish to do. We believe that all member groups wish to develop the Federation and build towards a party, and therefore we feel that the disagreement about abolishing the right to disclaim, which is the main difference arising out of the Chairman's resolution, is based more on what stage it would be correct rather than if it would be correct, to abolish it.

We do not think there can be any major differences within the Federation on the first five points of the resolution - the main differences being over points 6 and 8.

On the question of abstention, which is the lesser of the two stumbling blocks, we do not think it can be settled simply by making it compulsory to vote. Again this concerns the attitude of the local groups fundamentally: if a group has not itself discussed a problem thoroughly this can lead to its representative abstaining on the Federation Committee. Although it must be stated that there are times even with our present organisational set-up where abstention has been taken as the easy way out, in the end it is political conviction rather than enforcing rules that will be decisive in overcoming this weakness.

Proposal about formulating policy

Our views on the correct way to formulate policy at this stage are as follows. From time to time policy on a specific subject should be studied and discussed in the groups and in the light of these discussions the Federation Committee should then draft a policy document which should be circulated to the groups and open to amendment. Finally the draft policy proposals should be presented by the Committee to a General Meeting which would have the power to make it Federation policy by a two-thirds majority.

On subjects where all groups agree to it, the Federation Committee itself should have the power to decide Federation policy by a two-thirds majority.

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Concerning implementation of Federation policy by the individual groups, we believe that there are three possibilities: A) that the groups continue to have the right to disclaim Federation policy (and of course also not implement it). B) that they would have the right not to implement it but would not be permitted to oppose it in public. C) that they should carry it out actively (and of course also support it publicly).

While no one in the London group favours A. (the continuation of the right to disclaim), opinion is divided between the other two possibilities. A narrow majority favours C (the obligation to carry out policy actively), on the grounds that only this way will it be possible to test policy in practice and in the light of that practice reassess it in due course and eradicate its faults. The minority favours B, the principle that groups would not be allowed to oppose Federation policy publicly.

London 17th October 1972

GROUP AUTONOMY - DRAFT POSITION OF THE C.F.B. (WEST OF ENGLAND)

The C.F.B.'s approach to party building distinguishes us from all other Marxist organisations with national pretensions.

"If there is to be revolution, there must be a revolutionary party." (Mao, Quotations page 1).

We assert in 'Origins and Perspectives' that leadership and organisation can only develop "from the practical experience of constructing policy and applying the mass line." By saying this we correctly stress the connection between preparation for a party, and party building, this is the dialectical approach to the question. Any other approach can only amount to mere posturing.

Our approach lays emphasis on methods of work - we insist this means an ideological grasp of developments - enabling us to move ahead. Agreement on the need for a party is quite distinct from applying our theoretical and practical knowledge to resolving the problem. We have moved so far in this process, however to insist at this stage for the right of groups to issue disclaimers, to place group interests above the complex preparation and struggle for a party, is in our opinion a negation of all our recent work. The resolution as it stands correctly raises our organisation to a higher level, it should not be seen in isolation - as a bolt out of the blue - but as a higher stage in the process the C.F.B. undertook, of preparing the foundations for the party. We detect an attitude that organisation is separate from politics, organisation is in fact the means by which political decisions are first of all formulated, and implemented. The resolution points to the dangers of liberalism, which tends to characterise the pre-party stage historically. Surely sufficient development has occurred for there to be a real basis of trust between our constituent groups regarding seriousness and political commitment. This is our position, we are definitely prepared to submit to majority lines, as we were during the debate on the last general election. We are equally convinced as to the federations ability and its developing methods of handling problems, for us to agree with the simple majority procedure throughout the organisation. In our conditions 2/3 or other variations would most likely continue certain liberal methods we have in avoiding decisions. The Liverpool comrades amendments seem to advocate a continuation of things as they are; "Policy will normally be arrived at by continuous debate until unanimity is reached. A 2/3 majority will be required when a vote is taken, in exceptional circumstances." While the original resolution in clause two stresses our very existence is on the basis of a determination "to put ideology before organisation" and our "wholehearted opposition to 'instant policy' i.e. policy agreed with little investigation and lack of thoroughgoing discussion of concrete circumstances - policy having a purely organisational basis." It is nonsense to imagine that the C.F.B. can develop without struggle and often acute controversy, necessarily policies and tactics must be decided by concrete analysis and discussion, however it will prove impossible if we are to maintain what we consider to be a liberal attitude of wishing to please everyone within our organisation, before

taking the initiative outside. As Mao points out "Opposition and struggle between ideas of different kinds constantly occur within the Party; this is a reflection within the Party of contradictions between classes and between the new and the old in society. If there were no contradictions in the Party, and no ideological struggles to resolve them, the Party's life would come to an end" (Quotations 260). The objective political situation is developing daily, our often dilatory attitude to resolving problems is becoming politically more and more expensive. While we recognise this to be principally an ideological question - the attitude of the individual and the group to the central task - the creation of a genuine Communist Party. We consider providing we strengthen ideology, and continue to emphasise the importance of correct methods of work, it is possible for contradictions, often sharp, to be handled within the framework of the C.F.B. while either a minimum agreed policy is practiced, or where a fairly detailed line has been formulated. The essential question here is whether the individual, the group, or increasingly, the minority within the C.F.B. as a whole, is sufficiently developed ideologically for it to submit to the majority line understanding that the organisation can be right or wrong on a particular issue, or indeed several, if the majority are wrong that is important. But what is even more important is the construction and development of the Party. Particular policies can and will be corrected providing the organisation continues to base itself on dialectical materialism and is involved in all levels of struggle. Failure to appreciate the overriding importance of this task, of preparing the foundations, of building the Party, is the dividing line between Marxism-Leninism and as Lenin says the intellectual anarchists.

To sum up, we support the resolution as it stands, understanding the underlying problem is that of the ideological development of the entire federation. We consider the resolution should be agreed at the general C.F.B. meeting in September. It is our opinion that although there are variations in our individual and group levels ideologically, in our circumstances, these proposed organisational developments are the means by which this situation can best be rectified.

C.F.B. (West of England).

For study list see attached sheet.

GROUP AUTONOMY

obviously, specific texts are not easy to find. there are pieces which comment on many of the issues involved. the following are not necessarily in order of importance:

lenin- 'what is to be done'? chapter IV, section F- 'local and all russian work' (II OR I2 pages). and chapter V- 'the plan for ~~an~~ all russian political newspaper'.

though quoting two chapters, i feel that comrades ought to be acquainted with as much of the article as possible.

lenin- 'one step forward, two steps back', sections ~~Q~~
the new isk~~a~~ opportunism in question~~s~~ of organization'
R/ something about dialectics, etc.

lenin: 'quotations,' revolutionary proletarian party of a new type'
history of the c.p.s.u. (b) 1951 eng edition chapter II (38 pages)

sections of chapter VI, 'from marx to mao tse tung'- george thomson.
PLUS 'What is a Marxist-Leninist Party?' 'MLQ' No 1.

this topic and decision represents not only an important policy occasion, if utilized properly it can be a real opportunity for us to educate ourselves and clarify issues concerning our organization. although less than a month remains i hope that all ~~xxx~~ groups will have held at least two political discussions on the topic before the ~~en~~real meeting. the resolution itself, and 'origins and perspectives' should of course have been read by everyone attending.

sean m'conville

4-3-72

Statement on the Discussion on Group Autonomy by
the Secretary of the Federation Committee.

In the light of the debate that has taken place so far in the Federation I would like to make certain comments and suggestions in addition to those made in the statement of the London Group, in the preparation of which I took part and with which I am in agreement.

When discussing group autonomy and its relationship to constructing the policy programme that is the priority for the CFB, it is important to distinguish clearly two types of policy making.

Firstly the general approach of the CFB, which is and should continue to be to approach political issues separately and deal with them one by one. By this I mean that, for example, on the issue of "Ireland" we should in a planned way conclude our present study programme and then proceed towards deciding our policy in the way proposed in the London group statement on Group Autonomy. Where agreement on such a two-thirds basis cannot be obtained the CFB Committee should define the areas of difference and set in being a new procedure to hammer out which line is correct. Where such two-thirds agreement is obtained but still individuals or groups are not convinced then the agreed policy should be our public position, but debate should continue within the CFB. This of course includes using M.L.Q., with the proviso previously decided by the M.L.Q. Committee of adding a rider on behalf of the CFB agreed policy. (I would also say here, again taking the example of Ireland, that those groups who claim to have a policy on this subject have a duty to explain what it is and show what analysis led them to their conclusion.)

The second type of policy making is the approach which Coventry appear to be attacking, exemplified by Glasgow in their proposals a) and b) on page 3 of their document. This in essence supports the rapid creation of policy on a whole range of issues simultaneously. I, like the London group, would unreservedly oppose such an approach. Nor is it right to base a correct approach on "trust" of other groups. As for the sentiments expressed by Yeovil, although they are important they cannot be the basis for deciding policy.

I agree with Coventry that "concrete objective evidence" must be the basis for building our policies on the main issues facing the CFB. Nevertheless it must be pointed out that Coventry say nothing about the conditions under which they would be bound by a policy decided by the CFB.

Conclusions

1. The only way to build the components of a socialist strategy for the CFB is the proposal that is underlined in the London group statement on Group Autonomy. This must be applied vigorously and must dominate the CFB's work in the next period. In the Chairman's Draft Resolution, points 1 - 5 and point 7 lay the correct approach. Only by applying this approach will we move towards the accomplishment of the tasks set in "Origins and Perspectives". The main point of difference with the Chairman's proposals is that I, like the London group, believe it is General Meetings that should finally decide policy, not the Federation Committee.
2. In general we should accept proposals 1,2,3,4,5,7,&8 of the Coventry document and urge their implementation. But if that was all that was agreed we would still be left in the foreseeable future in the "limbo situation" to which Coventry refer. Coventry make no proposals for deciding and carrying out policy on contentious issues. Their proposals on their own, would only add to the "limbo" issues, not resolve any of them nor allow the policies to be tested in practice. (It is not clear what are the implications of Coventry's point 3, second sentence. Does this mean that when it is not "possible" to continue discussion a majority line should be agreed? What then about the minority?)
3. The Glasgow definition of "working lines" in section B) p.2 is valuable, and I also agree on the need to test such lines in practice as it is necessary for the rest of the CFB to know what such lines represent and how they were arrived at. I do not believe we are at a stage where anything

remotely approaching proposal a) could be considered. Nor do I believe that urgency can be the criteria for deciding policy as outlined in their section b (ii), anymore than the urgency of the need for a party allows for its creation.

On the other hand I support their proposal b.(i) as being very similar to that of the London group, as well as proposals b.(iii) and b.(iv). Proposal c) is vital but it should be seen at this stage as one of commissioning articles from individuals as a stage towards the necessary discussion and polemic which will involve the CFB as a whole in the formulation of policy on each of these issues.

As all groups (except Liverpool) have circulated statements on this subject I propose we should now hold a General Meeting on this matter in December. I suggest it should be entitled "On deciding and testing policy".

24th October 72.