

(Towards a programme and a speedy end to Federalism)

1) The formation of the CFB out of the Joint Committee of Communists reflected a by the comrades involved that a more formal and more political structure than that of the ad-hoc JCC was necessary if significant progress was to be made towards unifying the Marxist-Leninist forces in Britain. The adoption of a federal approach to party-building was a FORMAL recognition that political unity must precede organizational unity as was a healthy rejection of the revisionist approach of the CPB(ML). The publication of 'Origins and Perspectives' in the summer of 1969 formalised this conception of party-building and seemed to herald a new stage in the struggle for a Marxist-Leninist party in Britain.

2) Regretably this promise has not been fulfilled and the Federation has made no progress towards creating the conditions for the formation of a party. From its inception the Federation has found it hard, if not impossible, to achieve any sort of political unity between the constituent groups.. In nearly six years of hard and dedicated work we have passed resolutions on socialist foreign policy, on Ireland, on three general elections and at the last SGM we adopted statements on the national and international situations. Apart from internal policy resolutions on 'Correct Methods of Work' and on publications that is the SUM TOTAL of our progress towards political unity, and the unity that we have on these statements is purely formal. Apart from the Socialist Foreign Policy resolution (which is academic and unrelated to our work) not one policy statement is being accepted and implemented by all the groups. London have disclaimed on the national and international situations and opposed the Ireland policy, whilst Liverpool have opposed (and Glasgow and Leeds not accepted) the last general election policy (Coventry opposing our policy on the 2 previous elections). Significantly our policy is on the TACTICAL question of the election only, there having been total failure to reach agreement on the far more important question of our STRATEGY towards social-democracy.

3) That this is an unacceptable situation, and one that can only lead to the eventual death of the Federation, is recognised by all the groups. Over the past two years a polarization has been taking place in the CFB over the correct way to overcome this problem and we are now in a situation where the Federation is in a state of crisis. The two tendencies in the Federation may be characterised as the political and the organizational. On the one hand Glasgow (and later Liverpool) have identified the problem as one of a lack of political unity and have correctly insisted that such unity must precede organizational unity and have consistently criticised the Federation for its failure to put politics in command. On the other hand London and West of England have recognised the lack of political unity but have made purely organizational suggestions to overcome the problem, culminating in the proposal that group autonomy should be abolished before any political unity had been achieved (West of England even suggesting that 'trust' was sufficient basis for such a development).

4) The latter approach must be firmly rejected and recognised as a revisionist and bureaucratic method of work, and one that has characterised the work of the Federation from the start. It is revisionist because it has placed organization before politics and it is bureaucratic because it has built committees and procedures which have held things back, rather than built links and shared experiences which would have encouraged development. At the time of its formation the Federation adopted a structure which was more appropriate to a democratic-centralist organization than to a Federation. A unified group constitution was adopted, a bookshop established, an editorial board of an 'agitational' newspaper set up, and, at the last SGM, a grand and unreal organization of national and executive committees, both of which are paralysed because of the group's disagreement over purpose and function. At the same time there has been a consistent failure to make any steps towards achieving political and ideological unity; political unity centred around COLLECTIVE INTERVENTION in the class struggle or ideological unity on our assessment of the state of class struggle in Britain and the world. It is this consistent failure to place politics in command, not any 'lack of leadership' which has led to the Federation's failure. It is this failure which we must firmly reject at this SGM.

5) The tasks of this SGM then are to isolate the main tasks for the Federation in the next period and to take the necessary political measures and adopt the correct organizational forms to achieve those tasks. The tasks are;

- a) building bases in the localities,
- b) achieving collective practice of all the groups,
- c) building ideological unity,
- d) attempting to unify the Marxist-Leninist forces,
- e) drafting the programme for action.

single

ALL of these tasks are inter-related and dependant on each other.

6) We must recognise that in the immediate and near future the main task of the groups will be in the localities, directed towards building a local base. This is not a manifestation of 'small group mentality', it is rather a sober and objective assessment of our stage of development. We have neither the cadres, political lines, bases in the working class or support from the working class to make national interventions in class struggle or to give leadership in such struggles. The strategy that each group adopts for this task must be PRIMARILY the task of the individual group, basing its method of work and overall strategy on its own resources and on its analysis of local conditions. Exchanges of experiences in national caucuses should though help the groups to avoid the situation where one group has repeated the mistakes of another, simply because there was no way to exchange experiences.

No

There is however a contradiction between building local bases and building a national Marxist-Leninist movement; although as the London group have said "the best way to build the CFB nationally is to build the local group". It is and will be easy to one-sidedly concentrate on either type of work to the detriment of the other and the temptation will always be there to reject national work in favour of local work - the 'small group mentality' will always be a danger at our current stage of development. We must overcome this problem dialectically; if the development of a national organization is seen to be an integral part of the development of the groups and their local bases then the tendency and attractions of the 'small group mentality' will be far less.

To many groups the Federation has seemed irrelevant to their local work, it has been little more than a far-away committee where one or two of their members go for an academic chat once a month, in fact a debating forum. The way to integrate local and national work and advance the prospects for success in both is build a collective practice of all the groups in our various fields of work; trade unions, women, tenants, students, anti-Imperialist work, Ireland, anti-Fascism etc.. Out of these will come the working lines that will enable us to make COLLECTIVE INTERVENTIONS in these struggles and which will become an integral part of our programme for action. The national body of the Federation must also become related to the needs of the groups; instead of the talking shops that the EC and NC are now it must become the central body for achieving political unity on our politics of intervention, centred the working lines and for developing ideological, and later political unity, on matters like the state, social-democracy, nationalization, Trotskyism ect..

7) At a national level the achievement of a collective practice of all the groups must become the SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF OUR WORK. The organizational form that will achieve this will be the national caucuses based on the major areas of work that groups are involved in; trade unions, women, students etc.. The national caucuses will be the MAIN ORGANIZATIONAL FORM of the CFB. Their task will be to enable the Federation to take advantage of the experiences of ALL the groups in their particular areas of work, to draw up a working line on these experiences (in the light of their knowledge of Marxist-Leninist theory) and eventually to create a national collective practice and a collective national Marxist-Leninist intervention in their sphere of work in order to test the line in practice and to establish a NATIONAL MARXIST-LENINIST POLITIC.

N.G.

It is of prime importance that working lines are based on the experiences and knowledge of ALL the groups. At the moment each group is so small, and their experience so limited, that it would be a gross error TO GENERALISE ON THE EXPERIENCE OF ONE GROUP. It is wrong that only Coventry were initially responsible for a working line on trade unions when their experience is, on the whole, limited to one industry and to one type of worker. The drafting of the line would have been considerably enriched by the experience of Yeovil, London and Liverpool. It is similarly wrong for Glasgow to be alone responsible for the line on students (to the exclusion of Leeds).

The national caucuses must not be seen as debating forums or as aggregate meetings of all Federation members involved in one area of work, but as an essential part of the Federation's work and its development of a programme. Therefore they must work in a strict and disciplined way, with a clear objective of producing a working line and starting a

collective practice as soon as possible. It must be recognised that NOT all groups will participate in all caucuses and that not all caucuses will have representatives from all groups.

The caucuses will have one delegate from each group (where appropriate) and will invite participation from non-Federation individuals and groups. The caucuses will though recognise that their prime responsibility will be towards the Federation and they will therefore elect a convener from amongst the Federation members.

Within one month of this SGM the new central body of the Federation will meet and, on the basis of information supplied by the group delegates will decide what national caucuses will be set up and will suggest to the groups which caucuses they should participate in. Within one month of this meeting each national caucus will have a n inaugural meeting.

8) The task of building ideological unity is of no less importance than that of building a collective practice of all the groups. The ideological unity that does exist is on the level of anti-revisionism, rather than that of Marxism-Leninism. The formation of the CFB was an organizational attempt to overcome the POLITICAL problem of making the qualitative change from anti-revisionism to Marxism-Leninism, and in true Federation tradition no political measures were taken to effect the change. The result has been political stagnation and the maintenance of a fragile unity on the basis of anti-revisionism. Whenever attempts to heighten ideological unity are made, such as the recent policy resolution on nationalization, even our current level of ideological unity is threatened.

We must recognise that the adoption of a democratic-centralist style structure has impeded the development of ideological unity. The concentration on organizational forms of unity instead of on political forms (national caucuses etc.) has arrested the development of unity between the groups and prevented the Federation central bodies being other than talking shops.

The majority of time at the NC is spent discussing organizational problems (bookshops, trips to Albania etc.) instead of political matters. Where political discussion does take place it is academic and unreal; academic because much of it is conducted in abstract theoretical terms and it is unreal because there is no clear idea of the purpose of the discussion or of what can be done with any policy that emerges from the discussion.

In future the central body of the Federation must be primarily concerned with the development of policy. Organizational details must be delegated where possible (e.g. New Era books to the directors, MLQ to the editor) and kept to a minimum elsewhere. The central body of the Federation shall be a political committee (PC), consisting of one delegate from each group. The tasks of the PC shall be;

- a) co-ordinating the overall work of the Federation, esp. the national caucuses
- b) developing ideological and later political unity on the basis of the statements on the national and international situations, and
- c) drafting the programme for action.

A central body of this nature is essential if the Federation is ever to leave the stage of Federalism. The national caucuses, whilst essential, cannot conduct the vital task of providing overall ideological and political leadership. The PC shall supervise and co-ordinate the work of the national caucuses in co-operation with the caucus convenors who shall submit monthly reports and who shall attend at least four meetings a year of the PC. The working lines, when finished, shall become the property of the whole Federation.

We must recognise that we have been liberal and ultra-democratic in the past and have neglected the vital task of developing a collective leadership for the whole Federation. "The existing habit of issuing lengthy study lists and assuming that somehow the entire membership will have the time to digest that list and thereby grasp the problem involved is an ultra-democratic approach. Here is a field where we can test whether a leadership is developing or not" (Glasgow resolution on programmatic work). The PC must start to initiate, develop and agree lines centred around a) the working lines and b) the national and international situations.

If the Federation is going to make a qualitative change the PC must be given rights to make decisions which are binding on the whole Federation. The delegates must become real delegates, empowered by the groups to take decisions that they will accept. Leadership cannot develop, nor can the Federation, whilst decisions of the central body are constantly overthrown at group meetings. With the emergence of political unity through national caucuses and collective practice the COMMITMENT TO ACCEPT THE AUTHORITY OF THE PC WILL ALSO EMERGE.

MLQ will play a vital role in the development of ideological unity and its role should be as agreed at the OCT. 174 GM on publications. It will be the organ of the PC, who shall be responsible for its planning. There will be no editorial board except for an editor who shall attend meetings of the PC as a co-opted member.

* 9) The CFB recognises that we are only a part, a minority of the broader Marxist-Leninist movement. Although the CFB will have a central role to play in the formation of a Marxist-Leninist party, there are many sincere and good Marxist-Leninist groups and individuals outside the CFB with whom we strive to reach unity. The prospects for bringing other groups onto the Federation would have been considerably enhanced if the Federation had placed politics in command; the current organizational structure of the Federation is such that groups think that they would be joining a party not a Federation, with all the attendant obligations that that would entail. In future the only commitments that groups who wish to join us will have to make will be a) an agreement with our basic party-building strategy b) to work in one or more of the national caucuses c) to send a delegate to the PC and d) make a financial contribution. k

At its first meeting the PC will discuss which groups and individuals it should approach on this basis, and then send them a copy of all SGM materials and offer to open discussions with them.

In consultation with the PC the national caucuses will approach groups and individuals to participate in their caucus; the only obligation placed on them will be to accept Federation leadership of the caucus and to implement the working line when agreed.

* 10) The CFB recognises that group autonomy is an impediment to the struggle for a higher level of unity. After this SGM all groups will ~~have~~ have to accept the PRINCIPLE of the eventual ending of group autonomy, and to accept in PRACTICE each step of its ending. Refusal to do either will not be compatible with continued membership of the Federation. Group autonomy will be ended bit by bit, culminating in the establishment of a single unified democratic-centralist organization on the basis of a programme for action.

The national caucuses will produce working lines based on their collective practice. The lines will then become the property of the groups, who will discuss and amend them as necessary. The PC will discuss the lines and if they are accepted by a 2/3 majority of the groups ~~eligible~~ eligible to vote then all groups will be expected to actively implement them. There will be no right to oppose or disclaim.

Similarly, the PC will develop and extend the debate on the issues contained in the national and international situation statements and will vote on each issue of policy. As on the working lines a 2/3 majority of all those eligible to vote will mean that the policy will be binding on all groups, again there will be no right to oppose or disclaim.

These two elements will form the centre of the programme for action, which will have

a) policies designed to enable the Federation to actively work in and intervene in and ATTEMPT to give leadership in all the areas of struggle covered by the caucuses and

b) a preliminary, but comprehensive, Marxist-Leninist analysis of the situation in Britain and the world and a clear understanding of the problems faced by the proletariat and its allies throughout the world.

The publication and implementation of the programme for action will ~~mark~~ mark the end of the Federation and will establish a single, democratic-centralist organization, composed of all the constituent groups of the Federation and any single members and will inaugurate a new stage in the struggle for a British Marxist-Leninist party.

Liverpool group 23rd. February 1975.

National Constitution.

X p. 1 elements

A) Introduction.

The CFB recognises that it's adoption of a unified group constitution and an elaborate Federal constitution were manifestations of revisionism in the Federation. Subsequent steps of the same nature were the publication of a national agitational paper and a Federation bookshop. The national structure became party-like and the groups like branches.

The correct way forward is the abandonment of these hall-marks of revisionism and the establishment of organizational forms which suit the tasks of the next period. The EC, and existing constitutions are abolished, recognising that they are inappropriate to our current stage of development.

Although the opening of a Federation bookshop on the basis of New Era was incorrect, now that it is a going and viable concern it would be even more incorrect to abandon it.

We recognise that the abandonment of some of the original names of the constituent groups of the Federation and their adoption of the title of a local group of the Federation was also a reflection of revisionism and is now an obstacle to other groups joining the Federation. Henceforth groups may (if they wish) use their original or existing titles.

B) Federal Constitution.

I) Membership of the Federation is open to groups who;

- a) accept the party-building strategy of the Federation,
- b) participate in the work of at least one national caucus,
- c) send a delegate to the political committee,
- d) pay a levy of £1 per member per month to central funds, and
- e) have at least three members.

2) Individuals may be admitted to the Federation at the discretion of the political committee. All such members must work in a national caucus.

3) Group constitutions are a matter for the groups themselves, the only REQUIRED article of group constitutions is that the group is a democratic-centralist organization.

4) The BASIC bodies of the Federation are the national caucuses. They shall co-ordinate and lead the work of the groups in their respective fields.

The caucuses are composed of one delegate from each participating group and such individuals and non-Federation group delegates as the caucus, in consultation with the political committee, shall invite to participate.

The caucuses shall elect a convenor/chairman who shall be a Federation member.

5) The central body of the Federation shall be the political committee (PC). It shall give leadership to the Federation, shall co-ordinate the work of the caucuses and develop a programme for action arising out of the working lines and the development of our current understanding of the situation in Britain and the world.

6) The PC shall consist of one delegate from each group of the Federation. It may co-opt non-voting members. It shall elect from it's members a Chairman, Secretary, Vice-Chairman and Treasurer. The editor of MLQ shall attend as a non-voting member.

7) The PC shall meet at least 12 times a year for two days, spending at the most one day on business and at the least one day on policy.

When necessary it shall convene an extended meeting on the PC, MLQ editor and the national caucus convenors.

8) The PC shall have the authority to take policy decisions on a 2/3 majority of all those eligible to vote. Such decisions are binding on all groups.

9) The PC may decide on the basis of a simple majority that a general meeting of the entire membership is necessary to decide policy. At such a meeting a 2/3 majority of all those groups entitled to vote (on the basis of one vote per group) shall make the decisions binding on all groups.

10) The PC shall submit political and organizational reports at least once a year to the whole CFB.

11) The PC shall review regular reports of the groups and of single members and make necessary recommendations to guide them.

12) This constitution shall be reviewed at the time of the publication of the programme for action.