

I. General. The CFB is facing a serious crisis. We cannot continue, as we have been, limping from one problem to the next with no clear perspectives of the way forward, or of our commitment to the class struggle. At a time when the contradictions of capitalism are more acute than they have been at any time since the war, we must either change qualitatively or be condemned to irrelevancy and early collapse.

The forthcoming SGM is therefore a crucial one. We must examine our past record frontally and honestly. This is not time for petty recriminations or snide attacks, nor for the cosiness of friendship groups. We must fully commit ourselves to building the vanguard party of the working class, recognise our weaknesses and firmly oppose those erroneous tendencies that are holding us back. Only through such principled struggle will we advance to a higher level of unity and political effectiveness.

II. Group Assessment. Before analysing the perspectives for the CFB as a whole, we must realistically assess the weaknesses and strengths of the London Group.

Membership. The membership of the group is predominantly intellectual, and the members generally work in relatively isolated fields of work. This means that we have a particular responsibility to fight against any tendencies towards academicism and individualism. We must realise that these are the main dangers facing the group, and must welcome any criticism in this respect. These dangers will be overcome by collective discussion of individuals' work, and in general, through the method of criticism and self-criticism. Some advances have been made in this. It is vital that these continue, if we are to develop a thoroughgoing proletarian outlook, increase our range of contacts, and build the M-L movement in London. In particular, if we are to transform the class composition of the group, we must continue our work in the factory in west London, and must make use of shorter study courses concentrating on the central principles of Marxism-Leninism.

Mass Work. The weaknesses are reflected in our mass work, and it is through developing our mass work in a correct way that they will be rectified.

The main aim of our mass work in London is to build the party, by gaining experience in class struggle, developing contacts into members, developing and applying working lines. This most important area of London's work - on it hinges the development of the Party in this area. Our mass work must be understood as the principal aspect of the contradiction between the aims of the group and the actual level of our development. For us, as for the whole CFB, collective practice is primary.

The caucuses must build their work based on real collective effort, as has not always been the case in the past. This effort must be directed at propaganda in their field and at giving leadership to the activists involved. Caucuses must be the realisation of the capacity and conviction of the group to do this. We do not have the strength of either cadres or of agreed working lines to attempt to reach the "masses".

All our mass work must incorporate both immediate and long term aims. We need to understand the problems confronting the caucus now and also work towards understanding the future direction that field must take, its working line. The TU caucus has concentrated too much on its programme of leaflets at the exclusion of other work. It must give greater emphasis to its members' problems in trade union work and at

their place of work. And to carrying on study around the Coventry working line and the original criticisms we sent. This will combine the immediate and long term - giving greater conviction and capacity for collective practice.

The Ireland caucus should continue applying group's general line and the Statement on TOM work. Their propaganda should be aimed at giving a lead in London TOM and at helping to demonstrate (internally to the CFB) the errors in the present majority line.

The main weakness of the WL caucus has been the inability to carry on real collective work. While this reflects the fragmented nature of the movement as a whole, it also is the result of real contradictions in the caucus. Work must be done to overcome these contradictions, with more guidance from the group committee and more support from the group.

Study. While rightly guarding against the main danger of academicism, and seeing the need to develop our mass work, we must also avoid the opposite danger of denying the need for theory. The tendency towards empiricism, both in the group and the Federation, is one which we must learn to recognise and firmly oppose. We need to improve our theoretical level, not in opposition to our practice, in order to strengthen and develop it.

The group must also use study as an active means of developing and encouraging contacts and recruits. In the past we have had three levels of study for members and contacts. Namely, the local/informal discussion groups; the planned courses of study; and the national study for the CFB as a whole. In order to best utilise cadres and develop contacts and members, we must concentrate on the last two types, continuing our national study commitments and making use of shorter study courses in order to develop group members and more working class contacts, who grasp and practice the central principles of Marxism-Leninism.

Leadership. The leadership of the group has still not, since the last AGM, developed as a collective meeting regularly. This is essential if we are to carry out the tasks set in June and those in this Assessment. The whole group must ensure that the committee does in fact meet and is giving a lead.

We must develop a greater understanding of the function of leadership, and combat erroneous ultra-democratic ideas both within the group and in the CFB. The committee has a responsibility to devise policies and to develop and use cadres well. Attention should be paid to the development of individual members of the group with special reference to women members. It must give bold, but not rash leadership and must win conviction for correct policies and lines. Its members must overcome individualist modesty and see their job as an objective necessity for building the Party. The leading positions in the group should be held by the most politically advanced members of the group.

National Perspectives. During this crucial period in the development of the Party, the London group must fight against any regression by the CFB. This can best be done by - building the group locally, strengthening the inter-group links in mass work and consolidating the work on the Programme. We must build our contacts, giving the group a genuine base from which to work. The Invitation meetings will be an essential part of this. Joint meetings to discuss mass work should be arranged with other CFB groups. The group must give all assistance to those members involved in the work on the Programme.

At our last AGM we recognised that we can best build

the CFB by building the London group. We have quite correctly attempted to reverse the position of the group at the last SGM as an intellectual service industry to the Federation. For the first time the group has an identity of its own and a real potential for development. We must however avoid the danger of small group mentality. We do not build the London group as an alternative to the CFB, but in order to strengthen it. We must continue to assume national responsibilities, and to fight for the development of national lines and policies. Most importantly, we must intensify the level of struggle against incorrect ideas and so help to build the CFB into a strong and militant organisation of the proletariat.

III. Perspectives for the Federation.

Our Main Task. Our main task is the development of collective and unified practice around agreed policies, and the ending of federalism in order to build the vanguard Party.

A developing Marxist-Leninist Party has to achieve a full understanding of certain major strategic and theoretical points. One example of this is the analysis of classes. The task of providing a correct analysis of classes in imperialist Britain is of the highest importance. Such an analysis, rooted in our theoretical and practical involvement in class struggle, will provide an understanding of the political terrain essential to the Party which will become the general staff of the working class.

Federalism is an unsatisfactory but necessary stage through which the British M-L movement has to pass. It is the result of a recognition of areas of political ignorance within, and differences between, the component groups and the fact that these need to be overcome in the course of developing a democratic centralist organisation. At the same time, federalism provides the organisational form for maximising the interchange and polemic between different groups, and thus an arena in which the struggle for a higher unity level of can be carried through.

This unity will not of course develop spontaneously, but only through constant, deliberate and conscious struggle between different lines and continual appraisal of our collective practice. In the final analysis, the CFB will progress or fragment depending on whether it unifies its practice. Without such a unified practice there is a mere collection of activities in the localities and an academic debating group at national level.

London still stands by the line against the continued existence of groups' autonomy, put to the last SGM by the Committee. We hope that all groups will reappraise the arguments used then in the light of our most recent problems. This next SGM has, however, been defined as an interim one and we will therefore concentrate on recent events, though we want to make it clear that we see the roots of many of our present problems in the failure to resolve this question of how to develop collective and unified practice around agreed lines.

quotes | **The Main Obstacles to Advance.** This problem has often been posed as an administrative or organisational one. It is not. It is a question of political will, and our failure to develop is a result of political weaknesses which stand in the way of qualitative change. The main negative characteristic of the Federation is Liberalism. This manifests itself in all our work, and in many ways. The small group mentality which places the cosiness of the family circle above the need to develop a disciplined organisation, the ultra democratic tendency which denies the importance of leadership, are both forms of liber-

alism. In particular it denies the importance of struggle. Thus policies are agreed but not implemented, because no political conviction has been won through struggle. At other times matters are allowed to slide, and contradictions papered over in last minute compromises. On the other hand, the failure to deal directly with erroneous tendencies leads to the development of ultra-leftism and sectarian arrogance. All of these tendencies - and particularly Liberalism - must be rigorously combatted.

The Failure to Carry Out Policy. At the last SGM a number of policy statements were agreed, and since then we have agreed policies and outline policies on Ireland, on the last election, as well as on nationalisation and the dangers of racism and fascism. Before the last SGM we had, as a Federation, nothing to say about Britain and the immediate political problems that face the working class. Now that we have something to say we must examine what in fact we have done.

The major statements on the international and national situations have been published and that is all! No campaign has been mounted involving sales of the relevant MLQ, following this up with meetings where we can propagate our line and learn from criticisms made by our contacts. Although a considerable number, over 200, have been sold in London (mainly through New Era, and to a lesser extent through Collett's) we have been inhibited from such a campaign both because of disagreement with certain formulations in Section B, and because of the lack of any consistent drive from the CFB nationally.

The previous SGM did little to ensure that collective CFB decisions would mean very much, because each group could choose whether it wanted to apply any given line at any given time. This in our view, made the testing and improvement of any line through collective practice extremely unlikely. It was for this reason that we abstained on the final and crucial Emergency Resolution. Nevertheless, we made it clear that in that resolution's definition of the major political tasks to be undertaken, we were in complete agreement. Further, all groups agreed that the question of the programme and its immediate development must be in the centre of all our activities, (see MLQ 7, final paragraph of the Introduction). As groups stated that they needed a fuller understanding of the meaning and implication of this programmatic work, we went along with the idea of a short intensive study course. But now, nearly nine months after the original proposal from Coventry, and nearly four months after the course was agreed, we understand that Glasgow and Leeds have not yet started and that Liverpool have discontinued the course. To agree such an explicit and binding paragraph as that referred to in MLQ, and then seemingly forget all about it, can only be characterised as liberalism of the most extreme kind.

The same can be said of the GM on publications which is now emerging as one of the more academic and unreal in the CFB's history. Firstly, some groups behaved anarchistically in failing to send in promised articles and thus killing Struggle well before the planned GM which had been agreed to decide its fate. Then at the GM, groups voted to restart Struggle in a new form using our own press. Straight-away afterwards some groups which had voted 'politically' for Struggle said that they had neither the political, cadre or financial resources to carry the decision through. We must say that to the extent that groups were not prepared to provide these necessary resources but approved the publication in general, they were being irresponsible. We reaffirm our

belief in the need for a clearly written monthly review of events which can popularise and develop our policies and allow us as a national body to give a political lead at a time of severe crisis. For this, national and local leaflets and broadsheets - useful as they are - cannot be a substitute. Our contacts in London have frequently remarked on the absence of Struggle, and have rightly seen this as a backward move. We hope the SGM will reaffirm the decision on Struggle and more importantly, will win real conviction to carry it through.

Of course MLQ has been held back by the same lack of finance and political commitment to its production. For example, we do not understand how a group can produce its own theoretical journal as a result of criticism of MLQ, and then withdraw its serving member on MLQ, without offering a replacement.

In general, we believe that our publications have taken a step backwards and that this has been a result of a 'mountain-stronghold' small group mentality, liberalism and a lack of leadership.

The Failure to Develop Polemic. However, we are not only faced with a liberal and ultra-democratic attitude to decisions arrived at. There has also been an even more serious failure to develop polemic.

The failure of groups to reply to our open letter sent last April, has hindered the progress of healthy polemic in the CFB. We can see that there is some justification for groups not replying fully on those points which are subject to further investigation, though even here groups should have explained whether they agreed with any or all of these formulations. On the other questions, such as the comparative strength of the US and USSR, the rate of degeneration of Eastern Europe, Chinese foreign policy and most important, the relationship of internal to external contradictions. On these, it is quite wrong for those who supported these formulations to refuse to say why, still more to regard our requests as 'provocative' - as Glasgow has alleged at the last (Nov.) NC. To be prevented from amending such formulations at the last SGM was bad enough. To then be prevented from debating them in the following year, after they have been passed by a narrow majority and may well now be only minority viewpoints, is indefensible. Especially by those who claim they place ideological unity first. Coventry's original draft of this Section B was so different from the last minute Glasgow document, that it is clear, as those groups accepted at the time, that the approved section was a rather hasty compromise. We do not object to this: a compromise similarly had to be reached at the GM on the General Election. What cannot be accepted is if this is then stated to be a 'majority line' on which no further debate will be encouraged or developed. We ought to add that one of the notable faults of the whole of the CFB has been an ultra-left tendency to argue about formulations without making a concrete analysis of that aspect of the real world under discussion.

This error is particularly clear in the past period when some comrades have not only refused to take part in open struggle on the issues mentioned above, but are now making little or no contribution to the working groups investigating the main controversial issues.

The consequences of the GM on Ireland show similar weaknesses. There was again the tendency to use a majority in an administrative way, and refuse to show in detail where the minority line was, in the majority's view, incorrect. It is not therefore surprising that the debate was often conducted in

an uncomradely way. We believe it will be very important at the next SGM to approach all positions, majority and minority, fraternally and seriously, and consciously use the struggle between different lines to build unity.

We do not ask that one form of liberalism be substituted for another: policy debates must be sharp and clear. But the ultra-left tendency of treating all political differences as irreconcilable, is one that has severely damaged the M-L movement in the last ten years.

Small Group Mentality. The unsatisfactory, compromise solution arrived at by the last SGM, meant that no collective policies or practice could be developed. Furthermore, the role of leadership was denied, and instead the groups took upon themselves a number of unrealistic tasks. When this became apparent - instead of questioning the basis on which the compromise was arrived at, several groups began to regress even further. They started to counterpose national tasks and responsibilities to the necessity for building bases in the locality.

There is no way in which local work can be done, building a base as Communists, without having a positive line on those issues raised in the sections on the international and national situations. Those who counterpose local work to national policy making, saying that we must build bases first, are separating into different compartments what must be a unity. Without international and national policies there can be, for Communists, no local bases: without local bases, policy making is a mere academic exercise.

The same is true of our failure to make progress on working lines, especially the Trade Union working line. This delay has been most disappointing. It is another example of the danger of relying on any one group to make progress nationally. The two key aspects of the CFB's work, as defined by the Emergency Resolution, must become, in our opinion, the responsibility of the national leadership and not of any one group. This should be regardless of where particular drafts were initiated. By this we mean that once a draft has been produced of a working line or any main policy statement, it should then be regarded as the property and responsibility of the national leadership - the NC and the EC. They must then make certain that proposed amendments and alternatives are not just left with one group, but are carried through by the NC. The fact that little progress has been made on the TU line after more than six months is another reminder of what happens when decisions are "put back to the groups". The purpose of having a national leadership, whose main responsibilities are national, is exactly to overcome this kind of delay.

The Negation of Leadership and Ultra-Democracy. The question of developing a leadership, consciously and carefully, has always been a vital one for revolutionary organisations. The Leninist stress on the importance of leadership has always been attacked by Menshevik and other liberal tendencies. The criticism has always been raised of those who stress the need to develop experienced and capable cadres - that this is merely a subjective desire manifested by the arrogant autocratic and bureaucrat individuals in the movement. The fact is, however, that the development of cadres is second only in importance to that of the political line of advance. And without the conscious development of cadres the CFB will make no progress. It is natural enough that the CFB, with its decentralised beginnings in the JCC - described in paragraphs 46 and 59 of the

2nd SGM Report - should be backward in developing cadres. But there is still an important tendency within the CFB that seems to work on the principle that an organisation which is relatively small and inexperienced cannot realistically discuss the question of leadership. This often leads to the rejection of the idea itself or of a mechanical view that leadership is something that can just be acquired or transferred like an item of clothing.

Within the NC, since its inception, there has been a constant battle on this question. On the one hand there are those who want the NC develop primarily as a national leadership as defined in paragraph 158 of the Report, and secondly, to act as a representative assembly of the views of the groups. Of course, the first could only be done in the process of carrying out the second, but its need to develop into a genuinely national collective body, working on behalf of the whole Federation, is stressed. The alternative, primarily representative view, has been put by those who have tended to oppose any decision being made before it has been referred back to the groups. In other words, these comrades have been unwilling to interpret group views when a decision had to be made, unless their group had known more or less precisely what the options were before the NC. Nevertheless, we believe some progress has been made on this issue and there have been significant occasions where the NC has agreed to make a decision on the basis that members would fight for it in the groups, rather than acting like limp post-boys who can only pass on previously dictated messages. Similarly, this has been linked with an improvement in London, as in other groups, in the preparation for the NC meetings, which enables the NC not only to merely represent group views, but to create a higher unity. This ought to be the purpose of NC discussions and polemic.

But such a national perspective will not become general until the EC is willingly given more responsibility in the manner envisaged in paragraph 157 of the Report. A small and young organisation like the CFB is necessarily lacking in experienced cadres. This has been shown by the number of times when policy drafts of one kind or another have heeded to be prepared, and we have either failed to find anyone or we have loaded it onto someone who is already unable to complete the tasks he/she has adequately. An EC that does not have the benefit of the maximum of the experience and ability available, and does not represent the most significant trends in the CFB, must be an unsatisfactory body. Here the refusal of Glasgow to allow TS's nomination to go forward, has hindered the EC's development. In the present concrete situation, it has guaranteed continuous and negative suspicions to fester in the approach of the same comrades to the EC. Linked to this is the shackling of the NC meetings by the frequent insistence of discussing at length, small items of EC proposals, at the expense of the larger and more important areas of policy.

The most glaring example of this wrong approach, was the refusal to give the EC the responsibility for drafting the overall political report to the coming SGM, to be put through the NC to the groups. To restrict the EC to an organisational clearing house for matters of detail - a 'dross collector', as it was explained - is to negate any idea of the development of the executive committee as the leading dore of the Federation. The alternative adopted, of all six groups drafting their own, separate political analyses and

reports is a return to some of the worst days of the JCC. It is a guarantee of considerable political confusion, because of the lack of coherent structure and will necessarily lead to groups experiencing severe frustration. They will see important points ignored, in the welter of different ideas and proposals at a mere two day meeting. Surely it should be commonplace for a revolutionary organisation, that reports are produced from the centre and amended as necessary by the groups or branches. It was for this that the EC was set up - to prepare reports and policy proposals. In fact the last SGM would not have had the coherence and purpose it had, without the original Committee report, which either represented the views of some comrades, or alerted others to what they considered errors, and allowed them to prepare alternatives or amendments.

We believe, therefore, that the NC should be more clearly defined as the national, leading body and not as an occasional collection of mandated delegates. In addition, the EC should be strengthened to carry out its duties. And as in the leadership of the groups, the EC should be composed of the leading comrades in the Federation.

Conclusion. When we have considered other group reports, we will be drafting a policy resolution to go before the SGM, along with those from other groups. But we are stating clearly here and now that the CFB has a future only insofar as it agrees to make significant progress towards developing a democratic centralist organisation which not only discusses Communist policy, but practices it in a unified and disciplined way. There will obviously be genuine disagreements about the pace of such progress. But there can be no compromise on the principle that such progress must be made now, that collective decisions can no longer be flouted as SGM, GM and NC decisions have been, and through such action, the present mood of pessimism can be dispelled. The CFB has built up considerable experience of the problems of building a Communist Party in Britain. The potential exists for such experience to be developed and enriched, or to be fritted away by trying to recover the comfort of small friendship groups, which can occasionally exchange experiences at such 'talking shops' as the old JCC.

1975 is going to be a year of crisis for the bourgeois system and for the working class. As the imperialist exploitation of the third world countries is increasingly being rejected by the latter, pressures on profits and wages will intensify and with that so will the class struggle. Whether this period ends with the establishment of Fascism, or with a socialist revolution, will depend on the ability of Communists to overcome the immediate problems, grasp the correct line and develop inseparable links with the working class. Lenin's slogan in his fight for the development of the Bolsheviks, and in his advice to all those building Communist organisations in Capitalist Europe, is as correct now as it was then - "In its struggle for power, the proletariat has no other weapon but organisation."

The key question for the CFB is how we build unity in a principled manner, to overcome the differences that exist, and enable us to fulfill our duty as Communists in what is objectively an increasingly serious situation. We hope that in the period before this crucial SGM, groups will study certain guidelines used by Mao Tse-Tung and the Chinese Communist Party.

"The democratic method of resolving contradictions among the people (is) epitomised...in the formula 'unity-criticism-unity'. To elaborate, it means starting from desire for unity, resolving contradictions through criticism or struggle, and arriving at unity on a new basis.... The essential thing to start from is a desire for unity. For without this desire for unity the struggle is certain to get out of hand. Wouldn't this be the same as 'ruthless struggle and merciless blows'? And what Party unity would there be left?...!Learn from past mistakes to avoid future ones and cure the sickness to save the patient'."

(On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People, Ch.1, Sel. Read.355)

It is in this spirit we have made these criticisms and will be making our proposals.

London Group
26/1/75.