

# COLLECTIVE SUMMATION OF THE HISTORY OF THE LEAGUE OF REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE

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The following is a collective summary of the history of the [League of Revolutionary Struggle](#), a Marxist-Leninist group that was active from 1978 to 1990. It was written by a group of former cadre of the organization and is our best attempt at drawing lessons from our experience to inform present day revolutionaries.

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*We do not claim that Marx or the Marxists know the road to socialism in all its completeness. That is nonsense. We know the direction of this road, we know what class forces lead along it, but concretely and practically it will be learned from the experiences of the millions who take up the task. - V. I. Lenin*

## PREFACE

In writing this document we, the LRS History Group, intended to create a record of the League of Revolutionary Struggle (LRS) that will contribute important lessons for the ongoing movement for socialism. However, being a bunch of old communists discussing and debating with each other, we use the language of our time and it is easy to forget that neoliberalism has conducted a massive propaganda campaign in the decades since the 80s to discredit and erase our histories. In imperialist nations, this has been so effective that current social movements perceive previous successful revolutions in Russia and China only in terms of their mistakes and ultimate failed ideology rather than the collusion of imperialist powers to destroy nascent socialist countries. For the reader to fully appreciate the analysis presented here, it is absolutely necessary to be cognizant of how a lifetime of capitalist narratives has shaped our opinions by creating false historical assumptions that we never question. This has been very effective in imperialist nations and present-day movement vocabulary has been purged of Marxist terminology by design so as to eliminate any reference to this historical revolutionary period in the global struggle against capitalism. This disconnect effectively created a situation where current movement activists have had to create a new lexicon (e.g., 'Liberatory strategy,' 'intersectionality,' 'BIPOC') to describe the fight for social justice without the benefit of an understanding of Marxist political economy. Capitalism has thus crippled opposition to its rule by forcing the reinvention of the wheel and replication of past mistakes.-

If you are reading this and you were born in the '80s or later, the political language used will likely impede comprehension. However, in this version we chose not to deconstruct these concepts for fear of diluting their very specific meaning and defeating our goal of

providing a sharp analysis of lessons and guidance for rebuilding a left in this country. We instead have inserted references and links that provide background information that we hope will enable a better understanding of the points that are being made.

### **MLM**

The term **MLM** refers to the ideology that defined the LRS and is a reference to the teachings of Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, and Mao Zedong. Their theoretical writings have been commonly referred to as communism but we use MLM because it underscores the historic role of these revolutionaries who each made great advances in political theory that continue to guide us today. Marx is of course, at the core of revolutionary theory and his development of the concept of dialectical and historical materialism is the underpinning of the ideology that bears his name. Building on this, Lenin and Mao provided invaluable contributions that were drawn from the actual experience of having achieved the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism/imperialism in the Soviet Union and China and building socialism in these countries. A good place to start in learning about these great thinkers is [Basic Principles of Marxism-Leninism: A Primer](#). This doc as well as other publications, podcasts and study guides can be found at this [linktree](#).

### **Opportunism and revisionism**

We should be very clear that Marxism is not dogma. It is in fact the antithesis of dogma. It is often referred to as 'scientific socialism' because it explains a way of looking at the world and how it came to be based upon the ever-evolving material conditions. Marx sought to rid the world of capitalist exploitation and his analysis of the development of class society provides us with the tools to understand how to change it. And using those tools properly means appreciating the changing world through engaging with it and adapting how we can be instrumental in shaping its future direction. This is the opposite of dogma. Yet there are misguided interpretations of Marxism that have historically occurred and been harmful to revolutionary movements. These are generally referred to as '[opportunism](#)' and can be deviations from the 'left' as well as the 'right.' While both of these are dangerous distortions, if unchecked, right opportunism can easily go down the path of revisionism. [Revisionism](#) is essentially the abandonment of revolutionary socialism that has led to the restoration of capitalism in the [Soviet Union](#) and [China](#).

### ***Liberalism***

In this doc, the term 'liberalism' is used in the Marxist sense and likely does not mean what you think it means. It is not referring to a political leaning that is counterposed to conservatism nor is it the classical liberalism of the enlightenment. It is best described by Mao Zedong in '[Combat Liberalism](#)' where he explains that it is an individualistic trait of capitalist culture that discourages honest communication and meaningful discussion and debate - things that are essential to the development of a revolutionary organization.

### ***The national question: cultural nationalism vs revolutionary nationalism***

One of the things that distinguished the LRS from other contemporaneous left organizations in the US was its perspective on what was referred to as the '*national question*.' This defined one of the fundamental aspects of the political work of the

organization and reflected the similar alignment of the groups that came together to form the LRS. They were mostly involved in struggles for self-determination of what we called oppressed nationality communities (today they would be referred to as People of Color, or POC).

The writing of Stalin on the [National Question](#) was most influential to the LRS and came to be the basis for our work in communities of color. The LRS took to heart Stalin's warnings about **cultural nationalism**, a form of nationalism focused on unique aspects of a particular culture to differentiate and seek exclusivity rather than common cause with the working people of other nations. It seeks to overthrow the oppressor nation only so that its own ruling class can take their place. In contrast **revolutionary nationalism** takes leadership from the working class and supports the struggles of the working people of all nations against their ruling class. Moreover when disconnected from a physical location, common language, and stable community, cultural nationalism becomes the cultural chauvinism that led to the establishment of the 'state' of Israel. [Internationalism](#) is the stance of the working class while cultural nationalism is the stance of the national and petit-bourgeoisie that seek only to advance their own interests. Internationalism seeks to unite and resist while cultural nationalism seeks to differentiate and divide.

### ***Rectification***

The subject of rectification takes up a good portion of this document and it is important to be clear on the significance of the term to a revolutionary organization. The process of rectification is one in which an organization recognizes grave errors that have been made and implements a process of criticism and self-criticism in a systematic way at all levels in order to educate all cadres about the erroneous practice. Rectifications have historically been a part of almost all revolutionary socialist parties. Capitalism would like to depict these internal political struggles as negative examples of Communist authoritarian rule but the truth is almost the exact opposite. For a Marxist organization, ongoing struggle to achieve political alignment is essential to being able to provide political leadership to the revolution. When this type of struggle fails to be practiced then serious errors can be made that require organization-wide rectification. This process ensures that all learn from any errors that were committed so that mistakes are unlikely to be repeated. When has this ever happened in capitalist political systems? Yet this has historically happened in almost every revolutionary movement - take [China](#), and the [Philippines](#), for example. The ability of a society to engage in a self-critical analysis of its practice is a basic feature of Marxism and will doubtless be an ongoing part of our socialist future.

We hope that this overview and reference materials will provide sufficient background to the analysis of the history of the LRS. A basic understanding of revolutionary theory and the long history of revolutionary movements to defeat capitalism is essential to the comprehension of the lessons from the experiences of the 70s to the present. Without this understanding, we can easily succumb to the capitalist narrative of the 'failure of Communism.' Yet if we truly grasp the ideology of Marx, then we know that there is no charted path to defeat capitalism and with each successive struggle, we better

understand the enemy and we learn valuable lessons from both our victories and our missteps and defeats. History and our social practice must be our guide for the inevitable transition to socialism as our only choice to avoid [“regression into barbarism.”](#)

## INTRODUCTION

The LRS History Group was formed informally in 2016 by a group of former cadres of the League of Revolutionary Struggle, a Marxist-Leninist organization that was active from 1978 to 1990. We came together originally to document the unwritten history of the organization in order that the legacy of the League not be forgotten. However, the group’s perspective has evolved and its focus has expanded to looking at our history as one that is part of a continuing process. We realized that we still align with the Marxist historical materialist perspective that the trajectory of capitalist society points toward revolution and its transformation to socialism.

This document is intended to reflect that view and was written from our perspective that the history of the LRS should be looked at as a valuable lesson that can serve as a guide to shape the direction of an ongoing revolutionary movement. The LRS was active for over ten years before it dissolved, and while the organization no longer exists, the movement lives on and this period was but one chapter of a book that is still being written.

That being said, it is very important to note that this work is not intended to be a comprehensive history of the League. It is beyond the scope of this document to present a catalog of the work that was done and provide a thorough analysis of the significance of our accomplishments. For that, we direct you to the [Unity Archive Project](#) or the historical documents that are held at academic institutions. We present a summary of the most significant features of the League that enabled it to become one of the most impactful organizations of the New Communist movement. At its height, the LRS was among the largest organizations of the left at more than 3000 members and was located in several states and both coasts.

However we also pay attention to the problematic aspects of the organization that led to its demise. The intention of this approach is to illustrate the many manifestations of a fundamental error of failing to pay proper attention to ideology in a rigorous way that would serve as a check to subjectivism and [empiricism](#). For the League, this unfortunately led to right opportunism. In the last section of this paper, we discuss this and offer an alternative approach to organization building that will avoid the mistakes of the past.

## THE NEW COMMUNIST MOVEMENT

As Marxists, we understand that we must have an all-sided view of things and that the material world is constantly in motion. Therefore, to have an objective analysis we must examine not only the material conditions at the time we experienced them, but we must

also consider how they were changing in relation to the times. The LRS and its antecedent organizations came into existence in the 60s and 70s, but we were active throughout the period of the 80s. With this framing, we should recognize that the nature of capitalism and imperialism was changing in very dramatic ways. There is a dialectical relationship between those changes and the progression of revolutionary movements at home and abroad, and for us to understand the history and ultimate demise of the LRS, we must be informed by this context. The emergence of revolutionary organizations in the 60s and 70s was in large part in response to the international situation where a conflict emerged between the two socialist nations, the USSR and China. At the same time, US imperialism was flexing its muscles in Southeast Asia and engineering a war in its desperation to stop the spread of communism and expand its global economic hegemony. These were all factors that were a part of the complex circumstance of the growth of decolonial and socialist movements internationally and the domestic emergence of [anti-revisionist](#) revolutionary organizations that rejected what were seen as betrayals of Marxist ideology by the Soviet Union and the CPUSA. This was to become known as the New Communist Movement. It was a movement that made its mark in the creation of a very vibrant period that was characterized by great social upheaval as well as great government repression.

The political work of the organizations that came to form the LRS were firmly rooted in struggles of oppressed nationality communities and for the most part were mass organizations that became revolutionary because of their experiences in fighting for social change. This was unlike much of the rest of the 'left' who were mostly white and privileged; or if they were POC, they were [cultural nationalists](#). Of the organizations that called themselves communist, they were often led by an intellectual elite with no real grounding in mass work but were willing to declare themselves the 'vanguard' party - which to them meant that they are the designated leaders of the revolution and all others must join them. The class nature of these self-described vanguards was to corrupt their revolutionary politics and they were often characterized by white chauvinism in the form of sectarian attacks and an inability to work with other groups in a collaborative and non-hierarchical manner. Despite this, the collective impact of all the organizations of the New Communist Movement was to spearhead a revolutionary critique of capitalist society and imperialism that would lead to great civil unrest and scare the crap out of the ruling class.

## The Unique Character of the LRS

The League was distinctive among U.S. Left organizations for several reasons: It was primarily composed of oppressed nationalities, with a leadership predominantly made up of women of color. *Additionally, it had a higher percentage of working-class members compared to other groups in the new communist movement.* Below are some of the distinctive traits of the LRS:

- **Strategic Alliance:** The LRS emphasized the importance of a strategic alliance between oppressed nationalities and the multinational working class, viewing this as crucial for revolution in the U.S. The organization recognized the rights to self-

determination for oppressed Black and Chican@ nations, sovereignty for indigenous peoples and independence for colonized territories.

- **Formation and Membership:** The LRS was established through the merger of several groups, including the August 29th Movement (ATM), I Wor Kuen (IWK), Revolutionary Communist League (RCL, formerly the Congress of African People or CAP), and others. With over two dozen districts, including one in Hawai'i, more than 85% of its members were Black, Latin@, and Asian Pacific Islander, an unprecedented demographic for any U.S. multi-racial Left organization. The vast majority of the members at the time of the formation were of working class origin.
- **Organizational Culture:** The LRS fostered an environment that supported the leadership of people of color, particularly women. Leadership bodies, including the Central Committee and National Executive Committee, were predominantly composed of POC women.
- **Community Engagement:** Most of the mass work of the LRS focused on communities of color, with white members actively engaging in anti-racist practices and supporting the organization's stance on the [national question](#).
- **Cultural and Language Equality:** The LRS promoted cultural and language equality in its operations. [Unity](#) newspaper was available in English, Spanish, and Chinese, and meetings included interpretation for non-English speakers. LRS events also reflected this commitment to diversity.
- **Childcare:** The LRS prioritized inclusivity and participation by providing free childcare, a policy largely developed by women cadres from I Wor Kuen (IWK) and the Congress of African People (CAP). This initiative aimed to ensure that women could fully engage in the organization's activities. Childcare services were available seven days a week, and all members, including leadership, were expected to assist with childcare. The approach to childcare was designed to be creative and cooperative rather than purely custodial, although this policy was not uniformly applied. In practice, participation was not evenly applied. Of note, our childcare system has been one of the most interesting items to younger activists!
- **Administrative and Operational Infrastructure:** The LRS had a relatively developed administrative, publications, and operational infrastructure. The LRS had administrative and [publications](#) offices, with some districts having their own office. The LRS had a significant number of cadres who worked full-time or part-time to carry out the work of the organization. This included members of the National Executive Committee, District leadership, Publication staff. To our knowledge, students did not participate in this.
- **Community and Social Activities:** It should be noted that for many members of the organization, there was a strong sense of community. *"Members, their families, and supporters frequently engaged in social activities that extended beyond political celebrations like International Women's Day and May Day. Events such as picnics, parties, New Year's and birthday celebrations fostered closer relationships among members and provided a vital outlet for stress relief from revolutionary work."* The caveat to this is that this was not universally true for all districts of the organization - a point that will be addressed later in this document.



*“The essence of who we are and what we have stood for can be best seen through our work and accomplishments. We were proud to participate in the Watsonville cannery strike, Jesse Jackson’s historic 1984 and 1988 presidential campaigns, in the student movement of the ‘80s and the fight for educational rights, in the Eleanor Bumpurs Justice Committee, in the movement for redress and reparations for Japanese Americans interned by the US. during World War II, in the anti-apartheid and divestment struggle, in the fight for immigrants’ rights and language equality, in movements for political empowerment for people of color, in struggles for workers rights, against plant closings, and for better wages and working conditions, in the movement for women’s rights and equality, in struggles to defend affirmative action, voting rights, and other gains of past struggles, and in countless other issues and struggles of these past 12 years.*

*In all of these struggles, we contributed our energy and skills, as well as a political perspective and vision. We have stressed the importance of empowering the grassroots so that their voices and demands would be heard, and so that movements would hold accountable elected political leaders and others. We have helped build strong multi-racial coalitions at times when racism polarized ethnic groups and obscured their recognition of their common interests, while we also promoted respect for the autonomy and independence of various nationality groupings. And, during the Reagan years, we worked with people from all strata of society to help build a progressive united front that could take on the right wing and resist the attacks on the progress of the past 30 years.*

*Through these efforts, we have helped to unify and strengthen the mass movement in important regions of this country.”*

- excerpt from “Statement on the Dissolution of the League of Revolutionary Struggle”

## **IDEOLOGICAL WORK AND ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICE**

The ideological work of the LRS in this discussion simply refers to the adherence of the organization to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong (MLM) thought. This adherence necessarily involves practices to reinforce this understanding and use it to guide all of the political work that we did both in the conduct of the mass work and in how we established the internal infrastructure to support that work. The strength of this ideological work was at its peak at the time of the formation in 1978. This was the culmination of a long period of principled political struggle with multiple Marxist-Leninist organizations that then agreed to merge into a single pre-party formation.

The initial formation of the League was driven by brilliant and charismatic leaders that were well-schooled in MLM. In the effort to unite ML groups to build a vanguard, as groups were brought in, organizational leaders continued to be part of the leadership of the now merged formation. This made sense as it was necessary to initially preserve the inherited infrastructure.

As time went on however, the problematic nature of these structural decisions began to manifest. Having an entrenched leadership was in contradiction to collective functioning where we require an atmosphere of comradely struggle to debate ideas and approaches to arrive at the best decisions. Despite the stated policy of electing leadership, appointed leaders would become an accepted norm throughout much of the organization and compromise our ability to integrate ideological study among members. When leaders are appointed then it is a contradiction with democratic practice and leads us down the path of voicelessness and unquestioned authority. Collective engagement and decision making then are not a part of our social practice as we have not integrated it into our internal structures. And when theory does not get translated into practice then Marxist dialectics will not be grasped and liberal practices will take hold. Appointed leaders were less likely to be held to collective accountability and this created an unhealthy organizational culture. Attention to study and summing up became objectively less of a priority over time.

Collective study and collective assessments are essential parts of a revolutionary organization that enable strong political unity and engagement, and individual as well as collective accountability. This led to increasing levels of subjectivity that allowed a mechanical approach to the work to prevail and a liberalism that fostered unquestioning reliance on leadership. A type of [empiricism](#) developed where cadre focus was on their immediate individual political priorities in the mass work. Lower level leadership were also infected by this in their reliance/dependence on higher level leadership and tendency to focus on their individual leadership roles relative to the areas of work they led.

This may also have been a factor in the unevenness that developed from district to district. Without the rigor and discipline that would have resulted from greater focus on collective alignment, differences were allowed to proliferate. The disunifying effect of this would leave the organization vulnerable to a misguided leadership that ultimately engineered the dissolution of the organization.

#### • ***Breakdown in practice of democratic centralism***

Democratic centralism was seriously compromised and centralism overcame democracy. There was uneven practice on implementation of decisions and decision-making. Systematic training and orientation of cadre to educate and enable their political development, take leadership, and consolidate internal life was not a consistent practice. The consequence of this is that important decisions about the political line and priorities of the organization were made by a small executive committee of national leadership, often without consultation with broader membership.

This was also true of our National Congresses. Congresses assessed the previous three years of LRS work, presented an analysis of the current political situation in the U.S., proposed political line, priorities, and goals for the coming three-year period, and elected a new national leadership. While organization-wide discussions were held at all levels of LRS prior to the Congress, there was very little actual debate or dissent at the Congresses themselves.



Participation in elections was another area where stated democratic policy was not reflected in practice. The policy was for cadres to elect leadership at all levels of the organization: unit leaders by unit members, district leaders by district members, and national leadership by LRS Congresses. This varied widely depending on the District. In fact, the practice was so inconsistent that many were not even aware of a stated policy or even the existence of Congress.

There is a clear line here between the weakness in ideological consolidation, the consequent liberal practices that developed unchecked, and the breakdown in the collective life of the organization. Democratic centralism cannot be sustained in a meaningful way unless there is a healthy culture of struggle and reflection with the ongoing goal of iteratively challenging our theory by putting it into practice.

- **Liberalism compromises democratic decision-making**

*“We stand for active ideological struggle because it is the weapon for ensuring unity within the Party and the revolutionary organizations in the interest of our fight. Every Communist and revolutionary should take up this weapon.*

*“But liberalism rejects ideological struggle and stands for unprincipled peace, thus giving rise to a decadent Philistine attitude and bringing about political degeneration in certain units and individuals in the Party and the revolutionary organization”*

*- Mao Zedong in Combat Liberalism*

Liberal practices became so endemic that serious errors in policy decisions were implemented without challenge or significant oversight. Arguably, the biggest political issue that is now almost universally acknowledged to be incorrect was the policy on homosexuality. The line was that any non-straight person (this pre-dated current terminology for LGBTQ communities) was not eligible for membership; “queer” was equated with the corruption of “bourgeois democracy and bourgeois decadence”.

Disagreements on what was to be known as the ‘Gay Question’ were raised by several cadres at different times but no real discussion or dissent was allowed by the Chairperson and the National Executive Committee. It will thus never be known if this homophobia was a consolidated view. Ultimately, the LRS Chairperson allowed a policy on LGBTQ membership of “don’t ask, don’t tell”. This was not, however, the outcome of real democratic discussion and did not represent a repudiation of the very-wrong line held by the LRS on this question.

The fact that others in the national leadership of the LRS did not really challenge the prohibition on democratic discussion of this homophobic line and practice was

extremely problematic and a reflection of serious political errors where leadership was not to be questioned. This suppression of discussion fostered the gradual growth of a destructive culture of liberalism that would harm collective practice at all levels of the organization.

#### • *Local initiative vs centralized control*

Despite the overarching centralism, local cadres often exercised considerable initiative in deciding how to implement the LRS' work, operating within the broader framework of organizational priorities. While democratic centralism appeared effective at the base level, it was often constrained by top-down leadership that dictated the main political line and goals. However, such constraints were not equally imposed on all districts. This was greatly impacted by the physical distance from the Oakland headquarters, or 'Center,' of the organization. The logistical challenge of regular meetings with districts far from the Bay Area enabled a certain level of independent functioning. While this may seem like a good thing, the reality is that the strength of a revolutionary organization should lie in its ability to carry out strategy and tactics in a cohesive and disciplined way.

There were notable exceptions, particularly concerning support for Jesse Jackson's presidential campaigns in 1984 and 1988. Discussions at both national and local levels, primarily led by LRS African American leadership, allowed for a more democratic engagement on this issue. Once the decision to support Jackson was made, all members participated in the implementation, representing a positive instance of democratic centralism in action, despite many feeling isolated in their efforts to execute the decision.

#### • *Leadership Structure and Participation*

As mentioned above, stated policy indicated that LRS members elected leaders at all organizational levels—unit leaders by unit members, district leaders by district members, and national leaders through Congresses. That there was no systematic training/orientation to this fundamental organizational policy resulted in a large number of cadres who were unaware of it and therefore were incapable of holding the organization to account when it was not implemented.

Therefore, given that there was no consolidated political perspective about how leadership is defined in an ML organization, unhealthy practices grew in this vacuum. Leadership positions demanded substantial time commitments. Members were expected to dedicate a specified number of hours to political work each week, and leadership roles often necessitated even more time. This expectation contributed to issues of fatigue and burnout—though the term was not commonly used—and placed additional responsibilities on the family members of leaders. Had there been proper attention paid to ideology, these broadly implemented requirements might have been adapted to take into consideration the capacity of each individual cadre. If this had been done then the actual practice of implementing a level of organizational discipline might have been a goal that could have been realized without the high price that we inflicted

upon members. Cadre morale, revolutionary optimism and dedication would surely have been elevated and retention would have improved.

While national leadership was not mandated to engage in [mass work](#), some members chose to do so; however, that this was not a general practice actually compounded the problem of a growing [empiricism](#) where mass work was not consistently summed up with reports informing higher levels of the organization. Lacking this information, organizational decisions from national leadership would become more disconnected from the actual material conditions that cadre experienced on the ground. This disconnect was exacerbated by the fact that once appointed to national leadership, individuals were rarely removed from their positions.

Though most leadership roles included minimal stipend support from the organization, this often placed financial strain on the spouses of leaders, further complicating their ability to fulfill leadership responsibilities. Dues calculations were intricate, accounting for a baseline living level and adjusting for various factors such as heating costs in the Northeast and high living expenses in certain cities. Lacking any formal oversight over these issues, they became more and more problematic over time. Had there been a healthy organizational culture, every collective unit would have been able to discuss this situation and work to find solutions.

## DISSOLUTION

The analysis of the preceding section provides some examples of the consequences of weak ideological practice and how this created a situation where the organization would be increasingly vulnerable to right opportunist errors over time. The initial unity of the organization that was born out of the struggle to unite the left created a formation that had a political alignment that was reflected in the work. Failure to reinforce this ideological unity and systematize it by formal training and regular assessments would result in the gradual infiltration of petty bourgeois perspectives and right opportunism.

The political work of the organization became more and more centered on electoral politics and student organizing was more centered on elite universities. This would at times come at the expense of working in oppressed nationality struggles and would eventually lead to the abandonment of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought and the descent into reformism. The organization was ill equipped to check this deviation due to the weak development of ideological unity that had been problematic for years, plus the empiricist practice of blindly following leadership directives.

This all came to a head when the chair of the organization was in the middle of a personal crisis and pushed forward the liquidationist view that completely abandoned Marxism-Leninism. A sham process of ‘democratic’ debate ensued that was completely tainted by the subjectivism and liberalism that had become so rampant in the organization. The liquidationist view was presented as a majority perspective and that there was a minority opposed. This was acknowledged to be an unresolvable contradiction that resulted in the formal dissolution of the organization. The ‘minority’

view was in fact held by a significant number of veteran cadres but no process was allowed for formal debate and discussion in the organization.

## **Lessons from the LRS dissolution and how it could have been prevented**

Capitalists would have you believe that the demise of the LRS and the diminishing significance of the organizations of the New Communist Movement was something intrinsic to communist ideology. This could not be further from the truth. It was in fact bourgeois ideology that was the corrosive element that led to the demise of the LRS. The deliberate intervention by US imperialism of direct and indirect military intervention and CIA covert operations combined with the collusion with other imperialist powers to impose economic sanctions would quell the revolutionary upsurge of the 60s and 70s. Nascent revolutions were never allowed to establish socialism as they were forced into the global capitalist market economy to survive. The revisionism of the Soviet Union and China and the rise of neoliberalism and a well-financed propaganda campaign would sway domestic social movements away from Marxism and lead to a rise in the popularity of anarchism.

The capitalist lies would so discredit the left that even the lexicon would change so that terminology used among progressive-minded people would be purged of its Marxist content so as not to be associated with this period (e.g., 'collective liberation' vs 'revolution'). Social movements continued to fight capitalist oppression but what was once a radical movement became a fight for reforms through non-profit organizations.

Remarkably, the LRS was actually growing during this period of the rise of neoliberalism largely because of the solid organizational practices and integration with the masses that characterized the predecessor organizations that combined to form the League. But unfortunately, the inherent weaknesses described above would eventually take their toll. The ideological unity of the organization was at its height at the time of the merger, but unfortunately, the struggle to achieve political unity was arrested at that time. This was a mistake. The merger process was a major step toward a collective process of struggle that sought to align left forces to a common perspective about how to win revolution that involved study, practice, and criticism. Once the merger had occurred it should have been recognized that ideological study, reflection, and criticism needed to be an ongoing practice. This practice should have transformed from being one intended to unite different organizations to instead being a process to consolidate every cadre in the merged organization to a common understanding of political line and ideology.

But how would this have taken place? For one thing, rigorous ideological study should have been formalized and maintained as a regular scheduled requirement for all cadres, regardless of tenure. The process of internal political education could have been overseen by a commission/body specifically dedicated to that function. This commission would be responsible for organizing a curriculum of training and study materials and oversee the implementation throughout the organization. It might also have ensured that

regular sum-ups, assessments and criticisms were generated from every major endeavor within the various mass work areas. Regular reports would be required of the districts to determine the rigor of adherence to these practices and actions would be taken if necessary to correct liberalism wherever it was encountered. Below are ways that such a formation might have addressed the problems that the League experienced:

- ***Entrenched leadership***

Had the policy of elected leadership been enforced then this would have allowed for a check on the growing subjectivism of unquestioned obedience/reliance to higher bodies. But this alone would not have been sufficient. Regular reports and self-criticisms would have created a culture of consistent struggle and collectivity that would act as a counter to the liberal practice of reliance on leadership to have all the answers. Monitoring and oversight of this practice should be a priority for a revolutionary organization as a means of ensuring the correct application of democratic centralism.

Were weaknesses to be identified, appropriate remedies would be recommended such as a study and review of relevant works like [“Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership”](#) and [“Combat Liberalism.”](#) The problem would be taken very seriously and follow-up undertaken to ensure that every cadre in the appropriate region would have undergone the rectification and had a thorough understanding of the error.

- ***Corrosive Liberalism***

This oversight over ideological alignment and practice that would inform leadership bodies would have been a check to the spread of subjectivism in the organization and might have prevented the deep structural problems that the League experienced. As correct practice of the mass line became understood with respect to both internal functioning as well as mass political work, accountability measures would have been instituted to ensure that no political questions or directives would pass scrutiny without thorough debate to achieve political unity. The collective knowledge and experience of the entire organization would thus create the accountability that would help to prevent the spread of incorrect ideas and policies. Of course, it is not dialectical to assume that all errors will be prevented from occurring. But if we have created the practice of consistent sum ups and analyses then every decision within the organization and consequence in social practice would be seen as lessons that would strengthen our organizing work.

- ***Petty bourgeois subjectivism and right opportunism***

Proper attention to ideological development would have continually reinforced the understanding of the class nature of the revolutionary movement and an awareness that overthrowing capitalism will require ongoing personal transformation. This awareness would have created a vigilance against the spread of petty bourgeois thinking and the abandonment of working class leadership. It is very likely that the class origins of the chair of the League played a role in the abandonment of ML ideology and that the promotion of a liquidationist line was self-serving and impacted by class privilege. But

as Marxists, we do not lay blame on a single individual. The dissolution was the culmination of weaknesses that had been developing unchecked for years.

Identification of this ideological contamination would have triggered a critical review of how this impacted our political strategy and steps could have been undertaken to correct these tendencies and educate cadres about the need to wage continuous struggle and self-critical reflection. For a revolutionary organization to get to the point of abandoning ML, these class influences would have had to have consolidated into a distinct right opportunist perspective.

- ***Regional divergences and unsustainable practices***

Ideological adherence with respect to liberalism in methods of leadership would have meant the investigation of divergent tendencies in the organization and the institution of measures to achieve political alignment. The investigation would either identify and make corrections regionally or discover different approaches that might require adjusting overall political strategy.

Oversight might have identified overly centralized leadership practices that enforced discipline in a coercive way and bred the empiricist practice of rigidly holding cadres responsible for tasks and financial obligations without regard to personal circumstance. Collective struggle sessions that objectively amounted to bullying would have been identified as serious errors and appropriate studies would be mandated as corrective actions. Being part of a revolutionary organization is a voluntary commitment and organizational practices should be focused on “curing the sickness to save the patient.” There is a dialectic between bureaucratically applying a one size fits all coercive policy and the liberal practice of adapting a policy in an objectively individualistic way such that it is not a policy at all.

Organization-wide training could have been implemented on the correct practice of criticism/self-criticism. This is the basic weapon of Marxist-Leninists. It is what enables us to learn from our mistakes and build the democratic life of the organization; but this can only happen when we focus on the political issues and do not lash out at comrades in a personal way.

## **CONCLUSION**

*The LRS experience is but one part of the long history of revolutionary movements and is an important contribution to our understanding of how to avoid the pitfalls of the past and win socialism.*

As Marxists, we understand that the road to socialism is not a straight path. And this is necessarily true because while we know the destination, there are many obstacles to overcome. But like a river flows to the sea, there is no doubt that we will find that path and eventually reach our destination. As we look back on the road trodden, we should



be able to clearly see the missteps, the better alternatives, and the double backs needed to move forward. Should we encounter similar obstacles today or in the future, we are much better equipped to overcome them.

The New Communist movement was born out of the anti-revisionist movement and national liberation struggles in the 60s and 70s and while it drew inspiration from the success of anti-imperialist and decolonization victories, it was also hindered by a rejection of previous historical experiences that might have informed a growing revolutionary upsurge. The history of struggles against left and right opportunism that resulted in successful revolutions in Russia and China should have otherwise enabled a sharper perspective on avoiding these pitfalls. We often refer to being in the 'belly of the beast' or the 'imperial core' and the challenges that the left has faced here is a very clear example of this. The prosperity in this country that has been paid for by the fruits of US imperialism have in part been in service of buying off the exploited classes and compromising the left with petty bourgeois perspectives.

The LRS was able to resist these tendencies to a great extent because of its origins in the oppressed nationality movements and its predominantly working class composition. The ideological grounding that developed by being firmly rooted amongst the masses and engaging in struggles for empowerment and self-determination enabled rapid growth of the organization in the early years. However, the petty bourgeois tendencies and lack of ideological struggle opened the door to right opportunism and the eventual abandonment of Marxism-Leninism and subsequent descent into reformism.

This is directly analogous to revisionism in the Soviet Union and China leading to the restoration of capitalism in these countries. What started out as incredibly inspirational accomplishments and rapid success at defeating imperialism and building socialism turned within a few years due to ideological corruption.

The dissolution of the LRS was a great setback for the revolutionary movement in the US. Had these problems been identified and a rectification undertaken, the organization could have emerged stronger than ever and been in a position to lead the movement. That this did not happen was in no small part due to the concerted efforts by US imperialism to destroy newly liberated countries as they attempted to build socialism and the massive propaganda campaign to then lay blame for their decline on communism.

Yet, the record of accomplishments of the LRS and the lasting legacy of the mass organizations that they helped build is testament to what could have been built upon had the implosion not occurred. The unity and commitment of LRS cadres enabled significant contributions to the New Communist Movement, especially in labor struggles and the leadership of oppressed nationality movements. Notable achievements included building nationwide union caucuses, leading labor strikes and strengthening community organizations, engaging in critical educational justice struggles, developing a robust cultural presence, with contributions from figures like Amiri Baraka.

As we now take a critical look at the experience of the LRS, these accomplishments should be seen as an ***affirmation of MLM***. Using this same lens, we can also see how a weak ideological practice could be so destructive to a revolutionary organization. If we are to rebuild a left movement, the experience of the LRS must be seen as a cautionary tale and object lesson. History continues to validate the essential correctness of MLM and the rigor of our adherence to its basic theory and practice is the only way that we can create the organization that we need to defeat capitalism.

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## APPENDIX

[Statement on the Dissolution of the League of Revolutionary Struggle](#)

[LRS FAQs](#)

[The Encyclopedia of Anti-revisionism Online](#)

[League of Revolutionary Struggle \(Marxist-Leninist\), Early Years](#)

[League of Revolutionary Struggle \(Marxist-Leninist\), Later Years](#)