

restricted circular

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW



occasional internal bulletin
of

Revolutionary Communist League of Britain

C O N T E N T S

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Defending the indefensible.

This is the second of an occasional internal bulletin designed to circulate correspondence, and record of meetings with international contacts, making available their analysis and comments on international topics.

Often the result of bi-lateral meetings, these articles are for information and direct quotation is not advisable. There may be unacknowledged disagreements, thus articles should not be considered as official RCL positions. Circulation is restricted to League members unless otherwise advised.

Any correspondence or reports for inclusion in this bulletin should be sent to the London Branch.

Comments welcomed.

The excerpts that follow are from an interview with Comrade Armando Liwanag, chair of the CPP. It is taken from Ang Bayan of July 7, 1987. In the course of the interview, the comrade states : " No revolutionary movement including that in the Philippines can become victorious in isolation. In the era of imperialism, it is only through the vigorous and mutually supportive interaction of the world's revolutionary forces that they can advance and win greater victories."

Q: What have been the advantages and disadvantages derived by the CPP from the open and bitter debates and divisions in the international communist movement since the 1960s ? How do you propose to enhance the advantages and overcome the disadvantages ?

AL : Among the major advantages is the emphasis on the correctness and justness of revolutionary armed struggle in many countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, including the Philippines. Since 1960, the people in more than a dozen countries have won national liberation through revolutionary armed struggle, without having to take direct advantage of an inter-imperialist world war...

... But I would not go so far as to say that armed struggle is immediately possible and necessary at all times for all countries. Due attention must be given to concrete conditions in every country which determine the appropriate forms of struggle. Furthermore, no single party or revolution in one country can be regarded as the exclusive model or center for the proletariat and people all over the world.

Among the major disadvantages in that the international communist movement (ICM) and socialist countries have been unable to take full advantage of the ever-worsening crisis of capitalism and maximize support for the national liberation movements. Consequently, the revolutionary struggle of the Filipino people has not been able to get as much international support as it should, especially from other communist and workers' parties which are either in power or out of power. Also, the CPP has not been able to extend direct support to and coordinate with more progressive forces for concerted international actions against imperialist aggression, intervention and war preparations.

It is a sad thing that the open and bitter debates and divisions have also resulted in violent confrontations beneficial to the US and the reactionaries. It is high time for all communist and workers' parties to restrengthen the unity of the international communist movement.

To keep and enhance the advantages and overcome the disadvantages, the CPP takes the independent position of consolidating relations which it has with stable and serious parties; expanding relations with ruling parties in socialist countries and all avowed ML and anti-imperialist parties and organizations elsewhere; and promoting anti-imperialist unity and the proletarian spirit in the ICM through a series of bilateral relations of friendship. Under the guidance of MLism and proletarian internationalism, the CPP establishes and develops relations with foreign parties on the basis of national integrity, independence, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, full equality, mutual respect, mutual support and mutual benefit.

Q: What drives or impels the CPP to expand its relations with other Communist and Workers' parties abroad ? Will not increased foreign support militate against self-reliance ?

AL: ... It is US imperialist intervention and aggression which makes it urgently necessary for the CPP and the entire Filipino people to seek the broadest possible international support for their revolutionary struggle. The people need moral and material assistance more than ever because of the escalating barbarity and destructiveness of the enemy.

While I frankly speak of the need of the CPP and the people for international support, it should also be recognized and stressed that they extend support to fraternal parties and the people's of the world by carrying out the Philippines revolution. Our victories are also the victories of revolutionaries and peoples the world over. The revolutionary struggle led by the CPP contributes to the advance of the revolutionary theory and practice of the world proletariat. To the extent that we are capable of, we also extend the most concrete and the most direct forms of support to revolutionary forces abroad.

Self-reliance can be maintained and even enhanced with the increase of international support. The support that comes must merely supplement and yet amplify the capacity of the revolutionary forces and the people to expand and intensify their struggle. Thus, even if international support becomes larger, it remains small or becomes smaller in proportion to the people's overall self-reliant efforts.

The CPP will never ask for support it does not need, cannot receive and absorb and cannot reduce in proportion to the total increased, self-reliant effort of the revolutionary people. After all, it is the Filipino revolutionaries who do the fighting and the dying to achieve victory in their just cause ...

Q. What is the relationship between MLism and proletarian internationalism on the one hand and the three levels of relations that you mentioned ?

AL: As a matter of fundamental principle, the CPP upholds and adheres to MLism and proletarian internationalism in developing international relations. All these relations must be helpful to the advance of the revolutionary struggle of the Filipino people and promotive of the world revolutionary process.

The three levels of relations are distinct from each other even as they are interrelated and integral. Each distinct level has its own characteristics and therefore demands distinct approaches.

At the level of party-to-party relations, the CPP does not require its foreign counterpart to agree to the CPP stand, viewpoint and method on issues. But the CPP can open and develop friendly relations. On the basis of such friendly relations, the CPP can start to develop fraternal or comradely relations with communist or workers' parties.

At the level of people-to-people relations, it suffices that friendly or anti-imperialist relations are started and developed even if there are as yet no relevant party-to-party relations or even without any prospect of relevant party-to-party relations. It is enough that there is friendly, anti-imperialist or progressive cooperation.

At the level of country-to-country or state-to-state relations, the N.D.F. or the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG)... can establish relations with national liberation movements and with any state irrespective of ideology or social system.

Q. Can you further explain national integrity, independence, equality mutual respect, mutual support as the guiding principles of CPP in developing friendly relations with parties abroad ?

AL: National integrity means that the CPP acts according to the sovereign rights and interests of the Filipino people and that it is responsible for the revolutionary movement in the Philippines by applying the universal theory of MLism on the concrete conditions of the Philippines.

Independence proceeds from the national integrity of the CPP. It means that the CPP does not expect and does not allow itself to be dictated upon by any foreign entity and refuses interference and intervention of any kind in Philippine affairs and in domestic party matters under any guise.

Equality means that the CPP is not higher or lower than any party even if there are bigger or smaller parties as well as parties in power and out of power. To arrive at any consensus between the CPP and any other party, they must have equal basic rights and obligations. To arrive at any practical agreement, there must be mutual understanding of each other's situation and capabilities.

Mutual respect means that the CPP and another party respect each other's national integrity, independence and equality. Mutual support means that the CPP must extend support within its capabilities to the other party as it seeks support from the other party within its own capabilities. Of course, if there is mutual support, there is mutual benefit.

... The CPP takes the prudent line of building friendly and fraternal relations with the other communist and workers' parties through a series of bi-lateral relations. In this regard, the CPP does not demand anything which is harmful to the relations of the other party with a third party. Neither does it submit to any demand which would harm its own relations with a third party and the broadest interests of the Filipino people's revolutionary movement.

...

Q. What are the guiding principles in country-to-country or state-to-state relations? What is the attitude of the CPP to the fact that socialist countries have relations with the Philippine reactionary government?

AL: Countries and states irrespective of ideology and state system can have relations under the general policy of peaceful coexistence. The five principles of coexistence define the framework of state-to-state relations.

Socialist countries can have diplomatic and trade relations with the Philippine reactionary government under the general policy of peaceful coexistence of states irrespective of ideology and social system.

The NDF of the Philippines can also establish and develop relations with national liberation movements, united front organizations and pertinent state organs in socialist and other countries. There is no insurmountable obstacle to these relations.

There are instances in history when two governments in one country have relations with governments abroad. For instance, the Soviet Union had relations with the Kuomintang-Chinese Communist Party government as well as with the government of the northern warlords in China in the 1920s.

The time will come when the People's Revolutionary Government shall be able to enjoy at least the recognition of its status of belligerency and would expect socialist states to relate accordingly with this people's government. Of course, the best thing that can happen is for the revolutionary movement to win total victory and establish the People's Democratic Republic of the Philippines.

Q. Are you now in the process of establishing party-to-party relations with the ruling parties in Eastern Europe and elsewhere? How do you override the ideological and political differences since the 1960s?

AL: Yes, we are now in the process of seeking and establishing relations with the ruling parties in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. It is high time that the CPP does its part in strengthening anti-imperialist unity with them and taking advantage of the crisis of the world capitalist system.

The ruling parties of Eastern Europe can be of great help to the Philippine revolution as we try to be of help to them through revolutionary struggle against US imperialism. To start with, we have a common No.1 enemy in US.

These ruling parties of Eastern Europe have been of great help to the national liberation movements and the newly-liberated peoples. They have helped movements and governments consisting of communists and non-communists. It would be ironical if the CPP or they would refuse to establish relations; and if the CPP-led Philippine revolution does not get any support from them.

I see no insurmountable obstacle to the establishment of friendly and fraternal relations between the CPP and the parties in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. There are no direct bones of contention between the CPP and any one of them. The basis of friendly relations is the common struggle against US imperialism. When friendly relations are established fraternal or comradely relations can begin to grow.

The CPP considers as matters belonging to history those differences in the past arising from disputes between certain parties. We cannot afford to engage in endless open ideological disputes which can only benefit US imperialism, our common enemy.

The point is to establish anti-imperialist unity, gather as many points of agreement as possible and look forward to further developing friendly and fraternal relations. We would be breaking our necks if we keep looking back to the past. It would be quite messy for one party to demand that the other party makes some public self-flagellation.

Because of their different conditions, communist and workers' parties have different views on the world situation and the situation in particular countries. To open and maintain friendly and fraternal relations, these parties must collect points of agreement, reserve points of disagreement and increase mutual understanding.

If any party wants to understand any theoretical problem, it can do so within its own confines, or if the other party is willing, within the discreet venue of bilateral party-to-party relations. Friendly and fraternal relations will certainly put an end to the open debates and conflicts beneficial to and gloated over by the imperialists.

Q. What can you say now about previous CPP declarations that certain parties are revisionist and that certain countries are social imperialist rather than socialist and practice global or regional hegemonism ?

AL: Those previous declarations belong to history in the same way that the declarations made against the CPP by other communist and workers' parties belong to history. Let history and our current studies prove the correctness, partial correctness or incorrectness of such declarations. So much water has passed under the bridge in more than two decades of disruption. Since a few years ago, the CPP has voluntarily ceased to apply certain terms or labels to other parties.

Only the CPP can examine and re-examine its previous declarations. We are now in the process of summing up our experience in international relations during the seventies and up to the present. We try to study all major pertinent questions and actual developments in the world situation and in the ICM. Our independent studies and conclusions will be aided by discussions with and learning from other communist and workers' parties with which we have relations.

Theoretical discussions regarding other parties are now kept within the confines of the CPP. The most important thing is for the CPP to uphold and promote its internal revolutionary unity; maintain its independence in the ICM; and not to allow debates and splits within, between or among other parties to divide the CPP.

In the course of developing bilateral relations with another party, the CPP does not take the position or attitude of settling old accounts. Neither does it expect the other party to take the position or attitude of settling old accounts.

However, if the other party insists on discussing old accounts, the CPP will still put the stress on discreet bilateral discussion on such matters and giving full play to anti-imperialist unity and a new and higher level of mutual understanding.

...

Q. How do you handle such questions as the Vietnamese forces in Kampuchea Soviet forces in Afghanistan and Soviet troops along the Chinese border ? Would not certain parties demand that the CPP take a stand to their liking ?

AL: The current stand of the CPP is to encourage and let the parties directly involved in these questions settle them in a peaceful way through negotiations. Conflicts between socialist countries have taken too long and have exacted some serious toll on themselves, the ICM and the revolutionary movements like that of the Filipino people.

The CPP will not exacerbate the conflict between other parties by helping inflame passions. We want the US and the reactionaries to stop being delighted by conflicts of socialist countries and communist and workers' parties.

On fundamental issues, the CPP has the right and duty to make a stand on international issues and express views different from those with which it has friendly and fraternal relations.

At the same time, the CPP is more interested than ever in collecting points of agreement on a bilateral basis with other communist and workers' parties than in collecting points of disagreement on questions beyond bilateral relations.

...

Q. Towards the CPP's drive to expand its international relations, what is the attitude of the parties or small groups that have arisen for the first time in the sixties and proclaimed themselves as adherents of M-L-MZT ?

AL: Those that have been successful in their revolutionary practice understand the needs of the CPP and the Filipino people; and recognize that the CPP can best perform its internationalist duty by leading the Philippine revolution to total victory and availing itself of all domestic and international factors in favour of the Philippine revolution. There are also the dogmatists who keep on debating, splitting and liquidating their parties or groups over theoretical and international questions, divorced from revolutionary practice in their respective countries.

Q. In what way does the CPP regard Mao Zedong ?

AL: The CPP has high regard for Mao Zedong as a great communist thinker and leader of world significance for having made the most comprehensive and profound critique of the semicolonial and semifeudal society and for having led to victory the new democratic revolution among hundreds of millions of people in so huge a country as China and laid the foundation for socialism there.

The CPP has a special high regard for Mao Zedong because of the light he has provided on the problems of imperialism and feudalism and on the road of armed revolution for the completion of the national-democratic revolution and the establishment of socialism.

The CPP owes a lot to Mao Zedong. Mao Zedong Thought is a major part of the great treasury of Marxism-Leninism. But the basic principles and lessons we learn from abroad -- from all the great communist thinkers and leaders -- can only be as useful and valuable to the CPP as it can make its own concrete analysis of concrete conditions and win its own victories in the course of revolutionary practice.

...

SOLIDAIRE, the newspaper of the Parti du Travail de Belgique (PTB) has opened its pages to contributions from inside and outside the PTB on the question of the Soviet Union. Last December, Ludo Martens, president of the PTB wrote that it was quite possible to enter into a dialogue with the Parti Communiste de Belgique (PCB) during the rethinking on the analysis of the Soviet Union.

We reprint below a circular issued by the Central Committee of the PTB in June 1987 designed "to clarify certain aspects of the PTB's position".

BELIGUM : Concerning Marxist-Leninist Unity

Firstly, It is a question of putting general principles into practice in the context of the current revolutionary movement.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks remained part of the Second International of 1903 until 1914/19. Although the 2nd International was already dominated by the revisionists, in the pre-1917 context Lenin had to remain and influence the genuinely socialist elements as much as possible. It was thanks to this policy of unity up to the very end that Lenin was later able to unite all the genuine revolutionaries in the Third International.

Our position in 1968 was that the split between MLs, led by Mao Zedong and Enver Hoxha, and the revisionists was of the same nature as in 1919.

But what was to happen then ?

The majority of those parties declaring themselves to be ML in 1968/70 have degenerated or disappeared: some of these parties/organizations were led by petty-bourgeois elements, revisionists, anarchists or agent provocateurs. Some communist parties which rejected a certain number of revisionist theses, refused to take sides at the moment of the split: Korea, Romania, Vietnam. Later the Albanians attacked the Chinese party on a totally un-marxist basis and thus contributed to the division of the ML forces in the world, then already weak. In addition a considerable number of revolutionary organizations founded upon MLism, have emerged in the 3rd World unconnected to the "Great Debate" of 1963 between China and the UssR.

At a world level, we are thus faced with a very complex situation with ML forces of very diverse origins, some of which are developing right-opportunist positions and others left-opportunist positions.

In this complex situation we have to pursue two aims which have always been those of the communist movement : the defence of revolutionary principles and the criticism of opportunism on the one hand and the maintenance of unity and fighting of scissional tendencies and division.

So we cannot found unity on arbitrarily fixed positions.

We take Mao Zedong thought as a basic principle, but we cannot demand that unity be based on this principle: we respect the Party of Labour of Korea, which does not take Mao Zedong thought as a fundamental principle. We are engaged in a struggle of principle against revisionism, but can we impose our idea of revisionism on all other parties ? Mao Zedong always considered the Romanian party to be ML; but what fundamental difference is there between that party and the Bulgarian one, the Hungarian party ? At the end of his life Mao Zedong decided to resume party-to-party relations with the Communist League of Yugoslavia. Enver Hoxha showed great hostility to Mao Zedong thought: does that mean we should have refused to have relations with the Party of Labour of Albania ?

Secondly, We would like to make a few remarks about the concept of revisionism itself.

A communist party can be destroyed by right-wing revisionism, but also by left wing revisionism. We, European MLs, seem to have underestimated the influence of left-wing revisionism such as was spread in China by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four.

Even when laying the foundations of the 3rd International, Lenin did not have to fight only right-wing revisionism but also left-wing revisionism, which provoked divisions and splits, which cut itself off from potential allies and from the masses.

Between 1970-77, our party developed basically through the struggle against rightwing revisionism, but we also had to criticise the leftwing revisionism (dogmatism,sectarianism,idealism) of UCMLB. From 1977 to 1980 we carried on a rectification campaign within the party against sectarianism and dogmatism. During this campaign we studied the 3rd International's experience of struggle against leftwing revisionism, something we had paid little attention too.

We noticed that several ML organizations carried out on a "struggle against revisionism" in such a way that they went from one split to another or made uniting with other ML organizations impossible. In most cases these organizations have disappeared as a significant factor in the political life of the country and they have practically no contact with the progressive masses.

At the end of his life Mao Zedong said: " We must practise marxism and not revisionism, work towards unity and not towards division, be frank and loyal and not weave intrigues." Mao had extremely serious conflicts with Wang Ming and Li Li san but nevertheless defended the position that they should stay in the Central Committee of the Party.

We think that the history of the Communist movement since 1948 clearly proves that the different ML parties must at all costs avoid splitting on the basis of debates which turn basically on the acceptance or the denunciation of the policies of another party.

Parties split in 1948 into supporters and opponents of Tito; parties split in 1956 over whether or not to support Khrushchev's position on Stalin; in 1963 parties were divided into pro-soviet and pro-chinese factions; parties collapsed in 1967 because some members supported Maō, others Liu Zhaoqi; in 1976 there were heated discussions in some parties between supporters and opponents of the Gang of Four; in 1978 parties split into pro-Chinesev and pro-Albanian elements.

OUR POSITION CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING THREE POINTS :

1. A party should never split on the basis of a debate among sister-parties or within another party. By defending "purity" within other parties, some organizations have gone from one split to another and have ended up by disappearing altogether. Where then is the ML line that has been so valiantly defended ? Differences can exist within the party on outside debate but they must always be considered as second-order differences and must never occupy the centre of the stage. The main ideological struggles must turn on our own revolutionary practice at national and international level.
2. We must show great prudence in our judgement of other ML parties. It is often impossible for us to gather sufficient information and documentation to be able to make a definitive judgement of the contradictions within other parties. In general, we cannot know of all the differences which exist within other parties, and it is only with great difficulty that we can pinpoint the reality hidden behind certain ideological currents. We do not know enough about the economic, social, political and cultural realities in relation to which the different lines take on their true meaning. We can state our position while maintaining a certain reserve.
3. The label of "revisionism" has usually served to introduce an idealistic and metaphysical work-style which has nothing in common with communist ideology. Once such and such a party, let us say the Korean party, is declared to be 'revisionist', it is no longer necessary to study, to do research or to make practical analyses. In theory we should follow the debates and the experiences in the economic, political, cultural, philosophical, academic etc. fields in order to make practical distinctions between what is correct and what is incorrect, between what is marxist and what is revisionist.

In the question of revisionism we can distinguish two quite different problems.

FIRST of all there is the question of revisionism in the imperialist world. There we are on good grounds: the Communist movement has 140 years of experience of struggling against opportunism, the basic characteristics of capitalist society and the laws governing proletarian revolution are well-known, we ourselves have direct experience in this field. We can therefore declare on a well-founded basis that the European Communist parties have a right-revisionist political line.

Nonetheless we have to admit that most struggles against revisionism in Europe were undertaken on a false basis, since the majority of ML organizations have disappeared.

In addition we have to study the analyses, the policies and the tactics, the practice of the communist parties in a dialectical materialist way, so as to separate what is revisionist, what is opportunist and what is correct or partly correct. Lastly, some communist parties are very complex entities and it is not impossible that revolutionary factions or potentially revolutionary factions can be found in them. The hypothesis that genuine MLs in Italy must (also) work inside the PCI cannot be dismissed.

SECONDLY there is the problem of revisionism in socialist countries. There we are not on firm ground at all and we must be very prudent. First of all because the experience of socialist construction is very recent, because not all the laws of this construction have already been clarified and because the possibility of a restoration has not been completely and scientifically analysed. And lastly because we ourselves have no practical experience in the matter. In the Thirties certain "left-wing communists" and the Trotskyites made "definitive" analysis of Stalin's revisionism, declaring that a bureaucratic and dictatorial caste had taken power, that this caste was fighting revolution both within and outside the USSR and that it would inevitably lead the USSR to defeat in the case of world war etc.

History has shown that these were unwarranted generalisations from the observation of certain mistakes, errors and weaknesses; the reality was infinitely more complex and they had been blind as to the possibilities of a diversity of development patterns within the Communist movement. The method used by quite a number of Maoist organizations and the concept they put forward were not different from those of the Trotskyites. It is in any case very difficult to get to know the reality of socialist countries, but the label of revisionism has had the result of dispensing us from the effort necessary for getting to know this reality.

If it is undeniable that there have been revisionist ideas and practice in most of the socialist countries, it is no less certain that there have been analyses, scientific work and political decisions inspired by MLism. Certain reform plans in Eastern Europe sprang from objective analyses of problems and contradictions within the economic system whose pretence had to be recognized even if certain of the proposed reforms had to be disagreed with. Where can a revival of MLism spring from in Eastern Europe? Is it not probable that a communist tendency will develop within the parties against the revisionist tendencies in the party? Can a regrouping of genuinely ML forces be realistically forecast outside and against the party? Have not numerous changes of majority, reversals of situations already been seen? Solidarnosc is a popular movement but can we be sure that socialist forces will obtain its leadership and not the Church, the fascist extreme right or CIA agents?

An important part of the Marxist movement judged in 1963 that degeneration in the East European countries, in Cuba and in the USSR could be declared to be total and irreversible. The MLs of our countries could support this point of view.

But now that all the socialist countries, except Albania, declare these affirmations to have been over-hasty and ungrounded, we have to take their point of view into account.

We have known Communists who have taxed the Cultural Revolution with being leftwing revisionist, and others who say that today capitalism has been restored in China, while both have turned away from the complex economic and political realities of China. Proceeding from a position of Communist solidarity, we have always studied the Chinese experience with great attention; during the Cultural Revolution we learnt certain things that were valid and we also learnt how to understand certain left-wing mistakes, at the present time we can observe positive developments in the economic field in China and we are also learning how to understand right-opportunist tendencies.

We do not say it is always the case, but we have often noticed that those who stick the "revisionist" label on China are blind to the practical problems facing China. Blind to China's positive experiences they are over-critical, read books not to understand but to glean a few sentences that will be singled out as proofs of the crime of revisionism.

THIRTLY we think that the history of the ML movement since 1968 shows that there is a link between leftwing revisionism and rightwing anti-communism. In our document "The Crisis in the Revolutionary Movement" we showed that the notion of "revisionism" and "state capitalism" was first put forward by the Mensheviks and by rightwing Catholic writers against Stalin. As soon as the accusation of revisionism takes place of continuous study, based on dialectical materialism, of socialist society, the basic position adopted is one of hostility, in other words it is the enemy's class-position that is adopted. So we drift into anti-communism in exactly the same way that the Trotskyites do. We will say that the children of peasants and workers do not get into universities in China, that only the children of the bureaucratic bourgeoisie go to university. And when these children of "restorers" demand more democracy we will say that they form the leftwing in revolt against the new bourgeoisie.

Since 1980 bourgeois propaganda has deliberately put the emphasis on those aspects of reform in China which allow it to back up the notion of a "return to capitalism", with the aim of undermining the confidence of communist activists. The arguments used by the bourgeoisie and by certain "maoist" tendencies to fight socialism in China scarcely differ from one another. In the case of many "Maoist" organizations which have collapsed, we have noticed that the scattered activists have completely turned away from the communist cause. The Declarations of Moscow in 1957 and 1960 affirm as their first principle for relations among communists : solidarity, support and mutual aid. This is valid even if a party judges another to be following an opportunist line. The Belgian communist party had without a doubt a notoriously opportunist policy in 1938. Nevertheless it was the duty of the other parties to give the Belgian party their solidarity and to bring it their help and support. Even if the Chinese Communist Party commits certain rightwing errors today, it is infinitely more revolutionary than the Belgian party of 1938.

IRELAND : Sinn Fein on the Manchester Martyrs Commemoration

On the eve of the 1987 Manchester Martyrs Commemoration Sinn Fein issued a press release announcing its withdrawal from the event. The first item is the text of that press release; what follows is a letter sent to the secretary of the organizing committee from Sinn Fein.

1. Press Release 20.11.87 Re: Manchester Martyrs Commemoration

Sinn Fein has decided to withdraw from the Manchester Martyrs Commemoration to be held in Manchester this weekend.

We were reluctant to send a speaker to the march in the first place, because we believe the best interests of the Irish people are best served by people campaigning on the basic demand for British withdrawal and self-determination for the Irish people. We had intended to use the opportunity to make our position clear. We believe the slogans and demands of this commemoration restricts its potential appeal.

Given the action of the police in denying free speech and banning the march, we feel we would have been backed into a corner and forced to defend the march, whilst we were not happy in the manner in which it was organized. We believe we have no other choice but to withdraw.

2. Letter to Secretary of M.M.C. 18.11.87

On behalf of Sinn Fein I would like to make the following comments on the organization of the Manchester Martyrs Commemoration:

Sinn Fein believes that:

1. British withdrawal and self-determination for the Irish people is the correct political position to take in Britain regarding the Irish question.
2. Armed struggle is not the issue. Of course if individuals support the armed struggle, that support is obviously welcomed by us, but it must not become a campaigning issue. It is incorrect for individuals or organizations to demand support for the IRA and use it as a condition for sometimes working with other groups. In this case it is wrong to call on support for the IRA as a pre condition for support for the march.
3. Sinn Fein considers support for a British withdrawal and self determination as a progressive stance on Ireland. If this support transcended into the Tory party, we would welcome it. At the moment there are a number of Labour MPs who are progressive on Ireland. We have in the past and continue to have a healthy relationship with these people. We are often criticised for attaching undue importance to the Labour Party and are told that the Labour Party won't secure a British withdrawal. This accusation is arrogant. The eventual withdrawal of troops will not be decided by events in Britain but will be attributed to the IRA and the Republican Struggle.

We believe that the slogans and demands of this commemoration restricts its potential appeal. It is our opinion that if the march had been organized around the demand for a British withdrawal and self-determination for the Irish people, it would have appealed to a much wider audience and consequently would be of much greater benefit to the Irish National Liberation struggle.

We hope you take these comments aboard in the comradely spirit in which they are offered.

Addition clarification of Sinn Fein's position on solidarity work in Britain can be gleaned from an interview Gerry Adams gave in September last year to an American leftist journal "Forward Motion"

Q. In recent years, a section of the British Labour Party left, largely associated with Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone, Claire Short and others, have come to a deeper appreciation of the nationalist struggle in the north of Ireland and in fact have endorsed Irish self-determination in calling for total British withdrawal from all of Ireland. How to do assess the strength of this trend in Britain ?

Gerry Adams:

Well, it is very hard to quantify the actuality of support in Britain for the right of the Irish people to self-determination. One could say it's a minority pursuit, and I think that would be fairly accurate. This notwithstanding, in every poll carried out in Britain in recent years, the greatest majority of those polled have indicated they want Britain to leave Ireland.

There might be a few people in Britain with a pro-gressive attitude on the issue, but nonetheless, an increasing number of people are just completely sickened or tired of the issue. It's hardly surprising that that's the case, because the British people are not told what's happening here. There is an historic relationship between Britain and Ireland. There is latent racism and jingoism, and there is a successful and ongoing effort by the leadership of the main parties to keep a lid on the situation by making information about it unavailable in England. People aren't informed at all of any of the issues...

While people in Britain, such as Ken Livingstone, who was recently elected a Member of Parliament from London, have taken fairly courageous stands, I don't think it's any accident that he has gone from success to success. I know he is a very able, talented and principled politician. But anti-establishment and unpopular as it may appear, his stand on Ireland was not so unpopular as to deny him a seat in the British Parliament.

Our attitude towards things in Britain ? I think it was Marx who said that a people or a nation which enslaves another cannot itself be free. We hold to that view. Any attempt to arouse working class consciousness or mobilize the working class in Britain is doomed to failure while the working class is part, albeit reluctantly, of a conspiracy to enslave the people of this part of Ireland ...

... the technology which has been perfected here is going to be used there. I think that has been seen on numerous occasions... So it's in the interest of working people in Britain - not even because it's the correct anti-imperialist position on the issue but just in terms of survival - to free themselves of this colony.

... we have never asked people outside Ireland to support the armed struggle. It would be far better if they did, but that isn't the business we're about. We ask people to support the right of the Irish people to national self-determination, to support a strategy of de-colonization...

(On the status of the I.R.S.P and INLA, Adams replied "they have no future role to play". He says of the feuding that wrecked the IRSP last year: "It was in my view a sad, bloody climax to a decline in an organization which never really got off the ground, which probably was greater in reputation than it was in reality." Adams dates this decline from the assassination of Seamus Costello, "one of the best leaders that ever came out of the Irish resistance". Of IRSP, "It has been too loose in its recruitment. It has allowed counter-revolutionary elements and criminals elements into its ranks, and it has been of no assistance at all in the general struggle.")

Thirty years ago, the progressive journalist Wilfred Burchett wrote that French colonialists had taken three separate states, inhabited by people of different history, culture, speaking different languages, using different written scripts, then rubber stamping them -- Indochina.

Essentially the same position is promoted under the pretext of anti-imperialist solidarity in Irwin Silber's Kampuchea: the revolution rescued. It unintentionally provides an instructive exposure of a peculiar version of "internationalism" which acts as an apology for Vietnam's continuing occupation of Kampuchea and its dominance in Laos.

There is the recognition that "marxists oppose the forcible imposition of relations of inequality on oppressed nations and view the struggle for self-determination principally as the struggle for equality." But Silber creates a traversy of internationalism by arguing that the permanent community of interest between workers of different countries means that the democratic rights of nations should never be given primacy over the workers interests as a class. The shadow text of Silber's argument is that that class interest is to be decided by the leading party. On a regional level, his position is the promotion of the Workers Party of Vietnam as the vanguard of, what Silber describes as, "the Indochinese revolutionary process"; on the world scale, that role is attributed to the Soviet Union's ruling party.

Kampuchea: the revolution rescued provides no new information hitherto unavailable, but after a one month trip in 1984 its author seeks to offer a theoretical framework to understand and justify recent Kampuchean history. Silber's writing clearly shows one who has been absorbed into an ideological agenda set in Moscow. He operates in a framework in which "the anchor of the revolutionary process in Indochina has been and continues to be the Vietnamese revolution".

The Vietnamese occupation, Silber argues, is not simply preferable to the exercise of Kampuchean political sovereignty, but is an act "assisting" (not overthrowing) the Kampuchean revolution. He condemns Kampuchean insistence on independent analysis and action, treating as heresy the argument that the Khmer revolutionary process should have an autoumous existence, and not be dependant or secondary to the Vietnamese revolution.

Silber charges the Kampuchean revolutionaries with elevating the question of the Kampuchean revolutionary process to the level of "sacred principle" in opposition to his own 'reasonable and correct' guidance that communists have to determine the concrete policies according to the world struggle against imperialism.

Thus the Kampuchean revolutionaries are condemned as "ultra-leftists" for launching the armed struggle in the 1960s; it might have jeopardized Vietnam's relations that permitted staging and rear base areas in Kampuchean territory. In effect, he asks marxists to tailor their domestic activity to the needs of others, and at the expense of their own revolutionary advancement.

Specifically, Silber commends the need and interests of Vietnam on a regional level as the overriding concern for revolutionaries in the region. Why he identifies the Vietnamese revolution, as against any other revolution in the region, as "the cause of the international proletariat" lies in his wider political allegiance.

It is towards the Soviet Union that Silber looks for a lead. When he argues that socialism can (and implies is) developing as an integrated world system, he assumes that the lengthy process of intergrating national economies and over-coming national distinctions has begun. He is arguing not for a "federation of free people" but Soviet hegemony over the international communist movement.

While the Soviet Union proudly boasts that without its participation "no issue in world politics can be solved", Silber reinforces the image of a bi-polar world of superpower contention. His politics is dictated by imaging that the Soviet Union alone determines the course of history, that it will decide the fate of humanity. National specificity counts for nothing in this scheme. Any policies that are divergence from the scriptures Moscow lays down are blasted as "nationalist deviation". There is the failure to see that Hanoi's actions share the same root as Washington's in "Indochina": perceived national interest. The Kampuchean revolutionaries, in Silber's eyes, have offended by failing to accept the pivotal role of Hanoi in the Kampuchean revolution. It is no surprise that Kampuchea: the revolution rescued was well reviewed in "Vietnam Courier" as it endorses its dominance over an Indochinese Federation.

It is a very distorted internationalism that acknowledges nine attempts between 1975/78 "to oust Pol Pot group from party leadership" by an opposition associated with, if not all assisted by, Vietnam as selfless aid. Silber argues that those who uphold the notion of national sovereignty have fetishized, and defends essentially bourgeois national forms, are blind to the political stakes in the international class struggle. He endorses the doctrine of "limited sovereignty" which gives the Soviet Union the role of arbitor of what is good for socialism. Vietnam, as a loyal ally, holds proxy power in relation to the revolutionary struggle in the region. Specifically, Silber claims that Hanoi's military invasion of Kampuchea "represents a necessary defense of the Indochinese revolution" which he sees as "victorious as a qualitatively single process on a common battlefield, it unfold(ed) through distinct national form". He uses the convenience of geographical proximity to lump together different revolutionary strands for the benefit of one party involved.

The installation of a regime so obviously dependent on Hanoi offered no prospect for a long-term solution. After ten years of occupation Kampuchea is not pacified. Guidance from Vietnam remains unacceptable to the Kampuchean people; the violation of Kampuchea's national sovereignty and the struggle to defend it, has intensified Kampuchean patriotism. Liberation imposed by bayonets of others has proved once more to be against the interests of the working class movement while satisfying the state interests of Vietnam.

Silber's justification that threads its way throughout his book was answered over forty years ago with the dissolution of the Third International in May 1943. Citing the political maturity of communist parties, the increasing complications in domestic and international relations, it was noted that "any sort of international centre would encounter insurperable obstacles in solving the problems facing the movement in each separate country."

Zhdanov's report at the establishment of the Communist Information Bureau in 1947 was candid:

"The dissolution of the Comintern once and for all disposed of the slanderous allegation of the enemies of communism and the labour movement that Moscow was interfering in the internal affairs of other states, and that the communist parties in the various countries were acting not in the interests of their nations, but on orders from outside..."

The existence of international capitalism or of socialisms in many countries has not weakened the importance of the nation-state in international discourse. Silber underplays the national specificity encouraged by the very nature of the national democratic struggle against colonialism. He undervalues the contribution made to an unfolding world revolutionary process by the struggles of the oppressed peoples and nations of the world. His understanding of world realities is frozen in an analysis made redundant and indefensible by historical developments, for his is rooted in a distorted assessment of the tasks of communists to the world revolutionary process.

Silber's analysis flows from taking as its first premise the concept of the Soviet Union's ruling party as the "leading" party. In a manner reminiscent of "What's good for General Electric is good for America", Silber then looks at the actions and policies of the Soviet Union.

Flying in the face of the polycentric developments in the international Communist movement, accelerated by the recognition of divergent forms of transition to socialism, Silber dismisses the essential lesson of revolutionary experience: that the only truly effective posture from which revolutionary communists can work is that of independence.

Kampuchea: the revolution rescued is but the latest in a long harmful line of justification for another's foreign policy that betrays proletarian internationalism.

* Contributed.

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