

In the CC document "Reorientate the League for the Tasks of the Moment" two inter-related tasks are put forward as key for the present development of the RCLB: "to go deep into the working class, to the poorest and most oppressed and rally the vanguard, through the anti-Imperialist struggle for democracy, in particular the struggles of black and Irish peoples" and "to do serious and meticulous theoretical work in order to build the Party on a solid basis."

The relationship between these two tasks should be clear. We cannot carry out 'disinterested' theoretical work which does not serve the cause of the most oppressed. We cannot carry out real theoretical work which is divorced from practice. At the same time they are "separate" tasks, and the present document is mainly concerned with the second of them - the establishment of serious and meticulous theoretical work in the League.

Before we can do this we must first criticise what is wrong with our theoretical work as it has existed to date.

The Manifesto and after

The key problem in the League's theoretical work has been our failure to grasp the stage of theoretical development which we are at. The formulation of a programme which sets forth the basic political line of a communist organisation and its strategy for revolution should be undertaken on the basis of sound theoretical work to establish what are the main tasks of the revolution in the country concerned. This must involve analysis of the concrete conditions, including the specific characteristics of that country. But the Manifesto adopted by the League at its foundation consisted of a series of general Marxist-Leninist "truths" and was not based on sound theoretical work. Nor was any serious attempt made in the early period of the League's existence to replace, or even deepen, the bald assertions of the Manifesto with real analysis or serious theoretical work. Instead, the League "replaced political struggle over real issues with a form of religious idealism known as 'ideological struggle'" ('Re-orientate the League....').

Although an attempt was made after the Unity Conference to break from this line of assertions of general 'truths' and dogmatic imitation of overseas Marxist-Leninist organisations, and as a result in some areas theoretical progress was made, no overall and decisive break was made with the approach embodied in the Manifesto. We continued to attempt programmatic work without a strong theoretical underpinning and, so, far from uniting us, our programmatic work has been a source of confusion and disarray. This is clearly shown by the Second Congress and its results.

Out with the old and in with the old

The 2nd Congress was regarded as the climax of a struggle - a struggle against a rightist line on party-building characterised by:

- a) a social-chauvinist line on Ireland and a relegation of the struggles of the most oppressed to a marginal position;
- b) a taillist and workerist line on the advanced and the struggle against opportunism which sought the advanced among the established 'left' forces and the orthodox trade union movement.

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These rightist lines were coupled with bureaucrat centralism and idealist contempt for theory.

Struggles (often disparate) broke on all fronts against these aspects of the rightist line, and a year ago it appeared that they had been successful. For all its faults and internal contradictions, 'Section 7' embodied important elements of an anti-imperialist line,

a clear and decisive break with the League's line on Ireland, and advances on the oppressed and on opportunism. Bureaucrat centralism was roundly defeated.

And yet, despite these successes, we did not make an all round political and theoretical breakthrough. The struggles were not consolidated into a coherent whole - the new lines on Ireland, Imperialism, etc. were not deepened throughout the whole organisation. The burning issue of Class and National struggle was left to simmer (or flare) while we continued our 'well-charted' programmatic path. We gained greater democracy, but in the absence of advanced theoretical work we did not know what to do with it. What had happened was that the new forces for change had been grafted on to an ancient and rotting stem of 'programmatic work'.

What is wrong with our 'Programmatic Work'?

The point of striving to understand the world is to change it. Our programmatic work must start from the real demands posed by the revolutionary movement, solve the outstanding theoretical questions which are holding up its progress and - in the hands of the advanced elements - become a material force. In Britain this is a particularly serious and important task because of the absence of a revolutionary theoretical tradition. In the old CFB there was an intellectualist and academic approach to theory, divorced from the demands of the movement. But when this came to be overturned it was negated one-sidedly, and replaced by a philistine, anti-intellectual attitude which denied the need for a more purposeful theoretical work, creating, moreover, a vacuum in which the rightist and reactionary content of some of the old CFB 'theory', particularly on Ireland, could maintain and intensify its sway, immune from the criticism it would have attracted in a healthy theoretical atmosphere.

The League's programmatic work which descends directly from the Manifesto has never been satisfactorily explained or justified. Yet it represents a whole philosophy which is fundamentally METAPHYSICAL and PHILISTINE. However brilliant our individual insights, however advanced our mass work, our programmatic work cannot guide us. It has become an irrelevancy.

IT IS PROFOUNDLY METAPHYSICAL

It divides reality into convenient chunks - 'The International Situation', 'Class Analysis', 'The National Question', 'Women', 'Party Building' Such divisions are not in themselves wrong but, having divided reality in this way, we then proceeded to separate it into airtight compartments, and to treat important questions in isolation from each other. As a result our theoretical work, as exemplified in the work on a programme, has had no coherence, no guiding thread or orientation. We know, at least in words, that this inner coherence must come from our analysis and understanding of advanced and decadent imperialism, and that our orientation must be anti-imperialist. But this has been lacking from our programmatic work. Unless and until this is rectified our programmatic work will remain not merely ineffective but also prey to backward and revisionist ideas.

We have been metaphysical in another way, too. By isolating our 'programmatic work' from the actual world of class struggle - substituting instead our logical plans and agendas - we have effectively ignored the demands of that real world. We have studied questions because they were 'on the agenda' or next on the list, not because they were contradictions crying out for resolution. So, during 1982, the whole organisation was half-heartedly mobilised to study the international situation, but the burning issue - in society and within the League - was something else - the forces for change which emerged during 1981, the relationship between class and national struggle, the nature of 'anti-imperialism'.

There have been struggles against this undialectical approach to theory, but overall we have been content to proceed chunk by chunk, compartment by compartment, with the vista before us of the ultimate chunky PROGRAMME.

IT IS DEEPLY PHILISTINE`

Our general line on programmatic work has been that it is fairly easy - mix some half-grasped dogma with some half-summed up practice, and you have a programme. A simple matter - perhaps 6 months' work!

Yet, we never do it, 'simple' as it is, and despite our nonchalant contempt for the historical experience, both positive and negative, of the international communist movement. Why is this? It is because writing a programme for an advanced, decadent Imperialist society is not a simple matter. It is not simple because we do not have the basic theoretical underpinning on which to base our analysis. Without the hard work - both theoretical and practical - which will establish that underpinning we will have no analysis, and we will have no programme.

IT IS CHRONICALLY LIBERAL

We have believed that programmatic work is not merely simple, but also gentle - an ascent from the lower to the higher in an atmosphere of calm scientific detachment. We have shrunk back from clear cut struggle over questions of political line. Therefore, despite some progress, contradictions and struggle are too often articulated in personalised forms - verbal assassination, sound and fury, signifying nothing.

What are the results of our Programmatic Work?

The results of this line on programmatic work are most visibly seen in our main guiding line at present - Section 7. As we have argued, this did mark some progress - in overturning the rightist deviation. But it is extremely piecemeal, disjointed and contradictory. It has proved impossible for the CC to amend and ineffective as a guiding line, since it contains two or three different lines on precisely those key questions which we have identified - class and national contradictions, the nature of the advanced, the relationship between party-building and mass work. In short, for all its good points, it encapsulates all that is wrong with our programmatic work.

The same is true, but doubly so, of the work of the Classes Commission which submitted its draft text to the CC in the Summer. Its brief was to work from the existing texts on classes and amend them (an academic, metaphysical brief!). The result - rather like the original 'programmatic document' - is a hodgepodge. More than this, the text relegates the national question and the role of national minorities to a peripheral aside. It is a worthy piece of writing which does not address itself to the burning issues, the real movement going on before our eyes.

And what of Section 3 - our main theoretical concern of the past year? We still hold that this document has important strengths, and marks a recognizable advance on what had preceded it. It is within the camp of the 'new forces for change'. But as part of our overall system of programmatic work it too suffers from the effects of that system. For all its good points it does not have a clearly understandable guiding thread. More than this, **IT WAS THE WRONG DOCUMENT AT THE WRONG TIME**. Important as the issues raised in Section 3 undoubtedly are, they were not the issues of central importance to the League or the developing class struggle. Section 3 was produced according to a predetermined timetable, not according to what was actually required. It suffers as a result.

Section 7 marked an important transitional stage because, in its very contradictory nature, it reflects the need to go deeper into the pressing issues of the day. In grappling with these contradictions, the CC began to get the message. At the same time, a very sharp polemic was waged on the CC to criticise the irrelevance of the Section 3 text for failing to embody in a living way the outstanding issues of the contemporary world, and this also served as a catalyst for our growing understanding of the strategic weakness of programmatic work as conceived hitherto.

The issues which fell within the brief of the classes commission and Section 3 were important in themselves (who to unite with, relation of international and internal struggles, etc.) but were put forward abstractly, without the orientation of seeking to change the world, so much of the work was sterile and directionless.

Such, comrades, is our progress towards a programme - three texts which fail to pinpoint the central issues because they are not based on a clearly established theoretical core, not related to the demands of the real world. As a result - and who can deny this? - they are irrelevant, and largely ignored by the movement and our members alike.

The wider and longer-term effects of this line on programmatic work are also clear to see - in the contradiction lying at the heart of the RCLB's development, or lack of it, between on the one hand the excellent objective situation and on the other our subjective failings and weaknesses.

- For all our bold words we have found it impossible to put theory in command because our theory has been a non-theory. It has been piecemeal, 'easy' metaphysics. It can command nothing. The theoretical and practical level of the League overall, including its leading bodies has remained low. Collectively we are just not a dynamic force in British politics.
- There are sharp divisions in our ranks which we find it difficult to clarify. There is disillusionment and confusion in our work.

Two steps backward, one step forward?

We are determined to survive, overcome our weaknesses and go forward. There are no 'easy' solutions. We must be resolute in reorientating our work and priorities to our actual requirements.

If we are to progress we must first take a step back.

- A. We must criticise and reject our current 'theoretical work' as a system. This does not mean that the work we have done so far is wasted. We have made some impact and breakthroughs in developing our political line, we have grasped the need to do deep theoretical work. Let us look at the strong points that have emerged - some work of the ARAF Committee, the Ireland Commission, the CS Editorial Committee, some work by individual CC members and on the SC, some of the work of the Women's Commission. Let us keep any investigations carried out. But overall let us take a new direction. Part of this process must be continued criticism of the League's existing programmatic work, a process begun in this document.
- B. We must go back a stage and seek to establish the THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS which will unite us and provide the basis for future theoretical work. Our starting point must be the basic orientation of the CC document "Reorientate the League ..." which seeks to establish the essential condition of our unity. Having done this we can begin to deepen our analysis - using 'October' as a vehicle for theoretical work on the main questions posed by that orientation.
- C. We must actively combat liberalism and metaphysics on theoretical questions. We must not shy away from fierce struggle over line where necessary. But this must be comradely struggle with the aim of reaching unity, and we make no concessions to individual arrogance, indiscipline, subjectivism and verbal gangsterism.
- D. Our work must be streamlined to give the main questions the priority they require. We must limit ourselves to essentials according to quite rigorously defined priorities. Only in this way will we be able to carve out the time that we need but so sorely lack.

The next few months

The League is approaching a critical period. We call on comrades to unite round the new orientation of the Central Committee. This will involve hard thinking, some emancipation of the mind, struggle and determination.

This critique of programmatic work does not emerge from a void. It arises from the experience of the past year, and it is related directly to the line of "Reorientate the League ..."

Our starting point must be that document. It is put forward now for study, struggle and amendment. Our aim is to unite all who can be united around that document at a National Conference to be held in the New Year. Once we have established such clear unity, and have a clear guiding line we will be able to deepen our understanding of the key questions. To do this we will use the Theoretical Journal, Day Schools and conferences, commissions and study groups to raise the theoretical level of the League. We will develop and strengthen our mass work, linked as it will be to our main priorities. We will build CS as the scaffolding of the party. We will strengthen both our discipline and our internal democracy. In short, we will be on the road to building a united and effective vanguard party.

The Manifesto and after

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6.10.82

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