

## IN RESPONSE TO REORIENTATE

### THE LEAGUE

The aim of 'Criticise and Overturn..i' was to address itself to the establishment of 'serious and meticulous theoretical work in the League.' This was the second of the tasks that RTL set the organisation - the first being to 'go deep into the working class, to the poorest and most oppressed' and rally the vanguard through the anti-imperialist struggle for democracy.

However, C&O and the relevant passages of RTL are little more than inarticulate cries from the heart which identify at the most basic level that the RCL's theoretical work has been bad and still is, and that there is a need to change that. C&O does little more than identify the phenomenal form of the problem and fails to understand the real reasons why theoretical advancement has been unforthcoming. The most important point to grasp is that C&O for all its criticisms of the inadequacies of our previous theoretical work and its demand for a more purposeful, serious and meticulous theoretical work now utterly fails to address itself to the question which has dogged the organisation since its inception - What is theory and what is its relation to practice? An understanding of what constitutes Marxist theory or the Marxist method has been lacking in the CFB/RCL. Whilst we have utilised the writings of the great Marxist thinkers and have addressed ourselves to the question of theory and practice at one level, we have not subjected Marx's writings to a systematic study or critique. Whilst we have used the works of Lenin, Stalin and Mao and have drawn out of them aspects which have been useful or seemed to be of relevance to us, we have not situated those writings in their historical context or appreciated exactly the problems being addressed and we have assumed that their enunciations to be irreproachable.

In the last twenty years the practice of the Chinese revolution brought about an overt but partial critique of the practices of the Soviet Union and rejuvenated the thinking of the international communist movement. From enthusiastic beginnings ; , the new Marxist-Leninist movement took shape. Our ability to create a really revolutionary critical Marxism has unfortunately not occurred. The events of the last six years and the collapse of Marxist-Leninist organisations and Parties in Europe and America emphasised the fragility of our understanding of Marxism.

This experience is a sobering one and one which requires us to take a critical appraisal of our immediate past. In doing so we need to look at the body of thought which has influenced our thinking. Hopefully this paper will mark a beginning of that assessment.

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Theory is broadly speaking understood as a group of general propositions used as principles for the explanation of phenomena or a body of ideas which are conjectural. The relationship of ideas to material reality has resulted in heated debate through the centuries upon the question of science and the development of knowledge (epistemology).

Marx's epistemology marked a radical break from the philosophies which preceded him. For Marx, theory was intimately bound up with social practice and he showed how the two were linked. He showed that social practice was the origin of man's ideas and that ideas in themselves were a material force in society. He explained how man's ideas were shaped by historical circumstance and social conditions (in their broadest sense) and were themselves capable of changing historical and social circumstance.

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This paper was written as a hastily prepared reply to RTL and Criticise and Overturn in the winter of 1983. Some of the ideas have been presented to the Leeds branch of the RCL. I have appended a comprehensive source of references.

Instead of revising the text as a whole I merely draw attention by way of footnotes to statements and propositions which I now consider to be incompletely formulated or whose validity I am no longer sure.

We grow up in particular historical periods and in unique instances of the class struggle. We grow up into societies with prevailing concepts and ideas of how the world is ordered and changes. These factors influence our thinking and despite our very best intentions imbibe incorrect attitudes and ideas. The communist movement is not immune and has passed truths down the generations which are today considered dubious. Thus it is important to subject the ideas, notions, concepts and practices of the international communist movement to a critique - to situate them in their historical context and examine them to see how far they conformed (and to what degree) with reality and to identify the conditions that may have lead to misconception and error of judgement.

## MARX AND MATERIALISM

Marx's writing in 1845/46 outlined the first premises of the materialist method in *The German Ideology*. He explained that the first premise of human history is the existence of living human organisms which begin to distinguish themselves from animals by engaging in the production of their means of subsistence and thereby indirectly producing their actual material life - a mode of life.

The development of the division of labour in society and the ability to produce surplus subsistence resulted in a social division of labour accompanied by different forms of ownership, the division of society into classes, the development of private property and with it the state. The process goes on beyond the control of those individuals. These individuals are at once the conscious agents of change in society but this change occurs on the basis of conditions that are independent of their will.

Marx says,

"The fact is, therefore, that definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political relations. Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring about empirically, and without mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production. The social structure and state are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they appear in their own or other people's imaginations, but as they really are i.e. as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will."

and in dealing with the development of man's ideas goes on,

"The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of man, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as a direct efflux of their material behaviour. The same applies to the mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics etc of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc - real active man, as they are conditioned by a definite development of the productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology, men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process." (1)

Marx emphasises that the production of ideas is intimately bound up with the material activity of men conditioned by the development of the productive forces (2) and social relations corresponding to these. Later on in the text he discusses the division of labour in society between mental and material activity.

"Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears. (The first form of ideologists, priests, is concurrent) From this moment onwards consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it really represents something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the real world and proceed to the formation of 'pure' theory, theology, philosophy, ethics etc." (3)

It is this division of labour between mental and physical that allows the separation of ideas from practical activity and generates the premise for a purely contemplative view of the world. The criticism that Marx made of Feuerbach (and Feuerbach's criticism of Hegel) was to re-establish the link between consciousness and social practice. Marx emphasised that the sensuous world and

man's understanding of that world and society is the product of man's practical activity to change nature and man's social relations.

"He (Feuerbach) does not see how the sensuous world around him is not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and the state of society; and indeed, in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations, each standing on the shoulders of the preceding one, developing its won industry and intercourse, modifying its social system according to the changed needs"

and

"Certainly Feuerbach has a great advantage over the 'pure' materialists in that he realises how man too is "an object of the senses". But apart from the fact that he only conceives him as an "object of the senses", not as "sensuous activity", because he still remains in the realm of theory and conceives men not in their given social connection, not under their existing conditions of life, which have made them what they are, he never arrives at the really existing active man, but stops at the abstract 'man'. Thus he never manages to conceive the sensuous world as the total living sensuous activity of the individuals composing it,...."

(4)

The 'Theses on Feuerbach' which were to remain unpublished until 1888 concisely summed up Marx's rejection of Hegel and Feuerbach. (5) Marx states in the first thesis,

"The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was developed abstractly by idealism - which of course does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but does not grasp the significance of 'revolutionary', or 'practical-critical', activity."

In the second he states,

"The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question ... (and) ... dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking that is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question."

In the eighth thesis he says,

"All social life is essentially practical. all mysteries which lead theory to mystification find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice."

This leads to the final thesis (and most famous),

"The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."

Marx in making the link between consciousness and being removes the problem of their relationship from abstract speculation and scholastic contemplation to a question of science based upon experience and practical critical activity - practical human sensuous activity. Having established that man's ideas emanate from social practice and established Marx's insistence that man's sensuous practical activity transforms circumstance and can determine and alter his consciousness, we must examine the matter more deeply. Whereas there is unity between consciousness and being, this is not to say that there is an identity between them.

#### IDEOLOGY AND SCIENCE (6)

(The development of class consciousness)

For Marx, ideology or false consciousness appears not as a pure invention of a consciousness which distorts reality nor as a result of an objectively opaque reality which deceives a passive consciousness. Ideology arises from the 'limited material mode of activity' which produces both contradictory social

"Revolutionary communists do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement. Their theoretical conclusions merely express in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes." (9)

#### MARXISM AFTER MARX

The dominant tradition within the international communist movement has been Bolshevism and the Third International and for the British ML movement the works of Lenin and Stalin have been used as important source material for us. We have drawn upon the experience of the Chinese Revolution. The CPC under MaoZedong made criticisms of the Third International back in the 1930s and made an overt attack upon the premises of modern revisionism in the 1960s. The polemic in the international communist movement between the CPSU and the CPC gave birth to the ML movement of which we are part. The effects were contradictory. Firstly it was invigorating as a critique of Bolshevism and its descendant modern revisionism but in so far as it was only a partial critique of the Third International it left untouched a number of premises within the body of the theoretical contribution of the classic writers which we will outline below and which I think constitute problems for us today. The demise of the Marxist-Leninist movement in the West must be related to the specific national problems of the component parts but can also be traced to the theoretical underpinnings of the movement. To understand the present 'crisis of Marxism' within the ML movement we need to look right back into the history of the international communist movement.

#### THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL

It has been pointed out by a number of authors (10,11) that the Marxism of the Second International differed substantially from the conceptions of scientific socialism as enunciated by Marx himself. The reasons put forward include, the unavailability of Marx's early writings, the legacy of Engels (12) and how much the theoreticians of the Second International imbibed from the dominant bourgeois philosophical systems prevalent at the time of scientism and positivism. The result was a vulgarised and pauperised Marxism. The theoretical revisions of Marx's method were then encapsulated into the revisionist politics of the Second International.

The type of Marxism of the Second International prevalent at that time

- i Elevated Marxist theory into an all-embracing system articulating universally valid social laws which had the validity of natural law. The result was a naturalistic, mechanistic and economistic interpretation of social development guided by an inevitable necessity ie a metaphysical concept of social development.
- ii Vulgarised Marx's conception of science and divorced theory from practice and the historical experience of the working class. It replaced the relationship between being and consciousness with a 'theory of reflection' and reduced the activity of the working class to the necessary working out of immanent naturalistic laws which would inevitably lead to socialism. It banished class consciousness as a result of class experience.
- iii Gave credence to the idea that revolutionary theory is the product of the intelligentsia and not of the working class struggle.

Colletti (op cit) indicates the changes that occurred in the development of society at the time of the Second International which led to the revisionism of its principal theoreticians and he also shows how Lenin made a decisive break with their ideas and concludes that the most effective answers to Bernstein (a leading Second International theoretician) can be found in reading Hilferding and Lenin since they formulated arguments specifically to oppose the principal revisionist arguments of that time.

Whilst the Marxism of Lenin and the Bolsheviks made a break with the Marxism of the Second International by virtue of a concrete analysis of the class struggle on a world scale and had come to a much better and scientific understanding of reality, their break with Second International Marxism was not complete.

(NOTE: A useful contribution to this line of argument was advanced at the 3rd Congress by comrade R on the question of Eurocentrism. I think that it would complement some of the ideas being advanced here.)

A residue of the vulgarised Marxism passed into the formation of Lenin's thought (and the Bolsheviks including the Third International(13)). In doing so it has acquired a legitimacy which has persisted to the present despite the critique made by Mao in his writings dealing with the Chinese revolution and in his philosophical works.

This residue of Second International Marxism was partially corrected by Lenin (see below) but remains nevertheless. Such a thing should not be regarded as a 'failure' or lead us to despair,

"For Bolshevism is not a quiet academic doctrine polished and consistent. It is the product of class struggle; and a product, moreover, bearing the hallmarks of that 'emergent communism' Marx wrote of in his Critique of the Gotha Programme. Its roots lie in the working class; but like that class, it is 'in every respect' branded with the scars of the capitalism which nurtured it." (14)

The fundamental point is that the works of the Marxist writers must be subject to a critique. They must be analysed with regard to the problems they were attempting to solve and the specificity of the historical circumstances in which they wrote. This does not in any way detract from their stature as great leaders of the international communist movement.

## LENIN

Lenin's earliest writings in polemic against the Narodniks emphasise social development as a historico-natural process guided by economic necessity which submerges the subject's consciousness and will to a social movement independent of human practice. Socialism becomes inevitable because of the the working out of the inherent laws of capitalist development, which have the status of natural laws and is not due to the culmination of class struggle. Consciousness is equated with a reflection of economic conditions and practice becomes the instrument of economic necessity. Lenin's concepts lay squarely within the orthodoxy of Second International thought. The debate with the Narodniks however was over the possibility of capitalist development in Russia. Lenin proved to be right in his assertion that capitalism would develop in Russia.

Lenin's subsequent polemics with the Legal Marxists and Economists saw him break in some respects with the orthodoxy. Whilst he accepted the idea of a succession of historic socio-economic stages (slavery, feudalism, capitalism and then socialism) within the concrete practice of the Russian revolution he opposed the notion that the working class should learn from the school of capitalism and support the bourgeoisie. Rather he said that the working class should push forward with the aim of establishing a democratic dictatorship in alliance with the peasantry (15) This heretical idea (and one in which he was joined by Trotsky) was a major break with the orthodox thinkers.

"What is to be done?" written in 1902 contains residues of the Second International which are important for us to realise since they have passed into our theoretical armoury. Firstly, this text remains firmly entrenched in the Second International in that Lenin repeats Kautsky's formulation that the 'vehicle of science is not the proletariat but the bourgeois intelligentsia' (16) by saying that

"The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophies, historical and economic theories, that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals. According to their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia." (17)

This entirely revises the concepts of Marx and Engels who saw revolutionary theory (scientific socialism) as being intimately bound up with the social practice of the working class and summing up their class struggle. It is this schism between the intelligentsia as the originators of scientific socialism and the working class movement that underlies the idea that revolutionary consciousness must be 'injected' into the class struggle from outside.

Paralleling the idea that the bourgeois intelligentsia brings scientific socialism to the working class is the conception that there are different class based ideologies. (18)

"Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology being developed by the masses of the workers themselves in the process of their movement, the only chance is either the bourgeois or the socialist ideology..." (19)

In his analysis of 'spontaneity' Lenin states

"The history of all countries shows that the working class..."

own efforts is able to develop only trade union consciousness...." (20) and this accords entirely with Kautsky's position which he quotes at length, and he states,

"There would be no need for us (the need to bring theory into the working class) if consciousness arose from the class struggle." (21)

and adds that the reason why the spontaneous movement moves along the 'line of least resistance' ie in succumbing to bourgeois ideas, is that,

"For the simple reason that bourgeois ideology is far older than the socialist ideology; because it is more fully developed and because it possesses immeasurably more opportunities to be spread." (22)

These theoretical errors are mitigated somewhat by other concepts throughout the rest of the work where Lenin insists on a concrete analysis of concrete conditions, and in the practice of the Bolshevik party itself, which led Lenin to revise his ideas. The text however must be read within the context of the polemic between the revolutionary social democrats and the Economists. The failure to understand the historical context in which it was written would lead to a misunderstanding of the main thrust of the work which was to oppose the limited and narrow concentration in political work on purely economic issues. Lenin wanted all manner of issues of vital relevance to the working class struggle to be disseminated and he opposed the idea of politics being left to their representatives.

The close connection of the Bolsheviks with the concrete practice of the Russian masses enabled them to weld theory with the practice of the revolution. Lenin was to point out that Bolshevism itself had to learn from the concrete class struggle as it unfolded in manners which surprised them. But for the international communist movement and our own movement today emphasis is placed upon Lenin in "What is to be done?" and not in his subsequent writings - those of 1917 or later. (23)

"The highly remarkable feature of our revolution is that it has brought about dual power. This fact ~~must~~ be grasped first and foremost: unless it is we cannot advance. We must know how to supplement and amend 'old formulas', for example those of Bolshevism, for while they have been found to be correct on the whole, their concrete realisation has turned out to be different. Nobody previously thought or could have thought of dual power." (24)

and in 'Letters on Tactics' Lenin says,

"My answer is: The Bolshevik slogans and ideas have on the whole been confirmed by history, but concretely things have worked out differently: they are more original, more peculiar, more variegated than anyone could have expected.

To ignore or overlook this fact would mean taking after those 'old Bolsheviks' who more than once played so regrettable a role in the history of our Party by reiterating formulas senselessly learned by rote instead of studying the specific features of the new and living reality."

and he continues later in the same text

"For the present, it is essential to grasp the incontestable truth that a Marxist must take cognisance of real life, of the true facts of reality and not cling to a theory of yesterday which like all theories at best only outlines the main and the general, only comes near to embracing life in all its complexity." (25)

Lenin was arguing for an end to tired formulae, an end to the idea of a succession of natural stages in societies development and for a concrete analysis of the peculiarities of social development and the class struggle. Instead of straight-jacketing reality into theories, theory must develop from reality.

In drawing the conclusions from the experience of the Russian revolution and examining the revolutionary trends in the rest of the world, Lenin explicitly rejected the notion of models of development and the Second International idea of the historico-natural progression of society through definite stages,

"It hardly need be said that a textbook written on Kautskyan lines was a very useful thing in its day. But it is time, for all that, to abandon the idea that it foresaw all the forms of development of subsequent world history. It would be timely to say that those who think so are simply fools." (26)

Having outlined the basic tenets underlying the relationship between theory and practice in *What is to be done?* and his writings of 1917, and how Lenin's view changed, and how his critique of one aspect of Second International thought ie naturalistic economic determinism was replaced by a demand for specific analysis of how the class struggle actually unfolds, we must point out that the question of the relationship between party and the masses and the origin of scientific consciousness still remained an outstanding problem for solution. The fact that it was not looked at in any detail by the Bolshevists must be seen as the basis for the problematic relationship between party and masses in subsequent stages of the revolution during socialist construction. (27)

#### MAO: HIS CONTRIBUTION TO MARXIST THEORY

It is the contention of this author that Marxist theory is the expression of the working class movement's class struggle - its practical critical activity to transform social reality. Marxist theory can only develop in the closest connection with the working class movement and it is a false conception that theory is brought into the working class from outside and that the revolutionary party is the bearer of that theory. It is equally erroneous to assume that working class struggles give rise only to trade union consciousness or that since bourgeois ideas are dominant or of long standing that the working class will inevitably submit to those ideas. It should be understood that the practical critical activity of the working class gives rise to a critique of bourgeois ideas which is in itself contradictory. The activity of the working class gives rise to ideas which embrace scientific and revolutionary concepts and ideological concepts.

The purpose of the vanguard party is to take part in the working class struggle and elucidate scientific socialist/revolutionary theory in alliance with the masses, drawing upon their practical experience and systematising that experience. The writings of Mao on the question of epistemology, the relationship between the party and the masses, re-establish the original concept of Marx that

"The theoretical conclusions of the communists is in no way based upon ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered by this or that universal reformer.

They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from an historical movement going on under our very eyes." (28)

The three texts - *On Practice*, *On contradiction* and *Where do correct ideas come from?* - have been important in the life of the CFB/RCL. These texts re-establish the concepts elucidated by Marx on the relationship between thought and being and the dependence of consciousness upon mass practical critical transformation of social reality. For Mao, theory is not introduced into the class struggle from without and the Party is not seen to be composed of a group of 'universal reformers'. The masses are not regarded as incapable of transforming social relations or capable only of developing trade union consciousness. Mao says that communists must learn from the masses and transform themselves in order that alongside the masses they can systematise the positive experiences of the masses and reintroduce these systematised ideas into the class struggle. The party is to be seen as a servant in the process of the transformation of social relationships but it is the masses themselves that must do it. Hence Mao's insistence on style of work, methods of leadership and his elaboration of the 'mass line' in guiding communist work. Mao's writings are thus a critique of the experiences of the Russian revolution, the practices of the Comintern and socialist construction in the Soviet Union. He also points out most emphatically the importance of making a critical analysis of Chinese conditions and he opposed the mechanical transplanted of foreign experience to Chinese reality. He also stressed the importance of an analytical approach to summing up the historical experience of the Chinese revolution.

"On the question of what attitude to adopt in studying our historical experience... in dealing with questions of Party history we should lay stress not on the responsibility of certain individual comrades but on the analysis of the circumstances in which errors were committed, on the content of the errors, on their social, historical and ideological roots, and this should be in the spirit of 'learning from past mistakes in order to avoid future ones' and 'curing the sickness in order to save the patient' in order to achieve the two-fold objective of clarity in ideology and unity among comrades..."

2. Treat all questions analytically; do not negate everything." (29)

This is perhaps the most useful point at which we should return to the questions raised by C&O and RFL.

### THE CFB AND THE MARXIST-LENINIST MOVEMENT

The unification of the CFB and its merger with the CUA and the enlargement of the RCL with comrades from ELMMLA, CWM and BWA, it was hoped would provide a sound nucleus of revolutionary communists who would be able to rebuild a working class revolutionary vanguard party. The process of unification of the fragmented ML movement reversed a trend of disintegration and seemed to be the beginning of the end of small circles. At that time the path forward for party building looked relatively straight-forward. Actual developments have not fulfilled our wishes and it is of paramount importance that the RCL sums up its history in the spirit of learning from past mistakes in order to avoid future ones.

C&O makes a criticism of the Manifesto of the RCL, the programmatic work of the organisation and its theoretical work. It makes some correct points and contains some valuable insights but they are insufficient to carry the whole thrust of the argument contained in it. Overall it presents a superficial analysis of the League's history. It does not analyse the origins of the ML movement, its problems and the manner in which the CFB arrived at its party building line. Nor does it comprehend how the CFB/RCL tried to solve its predicament and how the solution turned the RCL into the organisation which it became. It is not that intention to exhaustively examine this process but we will make an effort to outline the background to the League's programmatic work and how it conceived theory.

The ML movement grew out of the Sino-Soviet split. The issue is a little more complex in so far as in Britain and elsewhere the orthodox Communist Parties had slid into reformism. This coupled with an insight into the practices of the CPSU and a radical critique of these practices in the form of the socialist road of the People's Republic of China, seemed with the creation of the ML movement to have re-established a genuine revolutionary Marxist tradition guided by the advanced theoretical contribution made by Mao and the CPC.

In Britain, the ML organisations were fragmented into local circles and were incapable of principled polemic to unify themselves into larger organisations because of narrow sectarian attitudes. The accomplishment of these groups could be written on the back of a postage stamp. The CFB formed in September 1969, was committed to a federal road of party-building. It published a newspaper and a theoretical journal but internally was a reflection of all the worst aspects of the ML movement. The CFB's achievements were small and by 1974 its lack of theory and political unity coupled with an unprincipled internal life brought it to the point of collapse - a situation presaged by the cessation of publication of its newspaper. (30)

From the CFB's chaos there emerged a struggle for unification of the organisations. The struggle which began in March 1975 culminated in February 1976 with the unification of the CFB into a democratic centralist structure and with an orientation which regarded party-building as its central task and it actively sought unity with other ML forces. (31)

The outcome of the Third Conference of the CFB was the vindication of the line of 'active ideological struggle'. (32) The refurbished CFB purged of its five main ideological errors proceeded to develop lines on social democracy, nationalisation, opportunism, soviet social imperialism and industrial base-building. The organisation for the first time in its existence carried out synchronised practical work.

These were heady days. The line of 'active ideological struggle' was vindicated because for the first time in the history of the ML movement the process of fragmentation had been reversed. The foundation of the RCL by the unity of the CFB and CUA into a single organisation, with members of ELMMLA in attendance, the adoption of a programmatic document, a theoretical journal and a newspaper 'Class Struggle' and a

(NOTE: Mao uses the term ideology in two ways. 1. In the classic Second International sense and 2. to describe the philosophical basis of errors.

Comrades may disagree with me on this point.

unified practical activity were an impressive list of achievements.

These successes must be seen in the light of the background of failure on the part of the ML movement as a whole. Our successes blinded us to our shortcomings and our fragile understanding of Marxism led the new organisation to perpetrate new errors. These errors were impossible for us to see immediately. It was the practices of the RCL, its internal democracy and our failures, coupled with struggle over lines which forced upon us a reappraisal which is still incomplete and is long overdue.

#### THE MANIFESTO

The CFB was characterised by the autonomy of its component circles. They pursued different political lines and engaged in a variety of political activities. Part of the struggle for unity in the CFB centred around the need for practical activity to be guided by political line and hence for theoretical work to be conducted by the organisation. The adoption of political lines after the unification of the CFB in the form of individual policy documents was seen as inadequate. Our sights were set on a more comprehensive programmatic document which would unify our lines and have a much more developed overall appraisal of the requirements of the British revolution and place it in a world context. The Manifesto adopted by the RCL at its foundation was seen as a stage in the development of a Programme for a future party.

The Manifesto crystallised a number of concepts floating about in the organisation at that time.

- i A coherent statement of position on the national and international class struggle and a guide to the tasks of British communists.
- ii The terse language used in the Manifesto was deliberate. It was to be simple and direct so workers would not be baffled by jargon. Also the lines of the organisation were clear and could not be misconstrued. This would enable us to draw clear lines of demarcation between ourselves and other ML organisations (for the purpose of unity struggles).
- iii The Manifesto would guide our practical activities and could be tested in practice and changed if necessary.
- iv The Manifesto was not considered to be the Programme. We had sufficient understanding to realise that that time was far off and required considerable work. However we saw it as an embryonic pre-programme document, ie a start in the right direction.

#### THE MANIFESTO AND MARXIST THEORY

Before looking in more detail at C&O's appraisal of the failures of the League's programmatic work after the adoption of the Manifesto it is in fact instructive to look at the CFB/RCL's conception of what constituted theoretical work.

C&O maintains that

- i The key problem of the League's theoretical work has been our failure to grasp the stage of theoretical development we are at.
- ii The Manifesto was based on a series of general Marxist-Leninist truths and was not based upon sound theoretical work and 'nor was any attempt made in the early period to replace or deepen the bald assertions of the Manifesto with real analysis or serious theoretical work".
- iii programmatic work must involve analysis of concrete conditions including the specific characteristics of that country
- iv our programmatic work has been the source of confusion and disarray
- v the old CFB had a philistine and anti-intellectual attitude which denied the need for more purposeful theoretical work

These observations made by C&O are to this authors mind correct but the document makes no analysis of why? and does nothing to clarify what theoretical work should entail other than it would be purposeful.

A key text used by the CFB during its unity struggle was Lenin's What is to be done?. It was widely read in the organisation and was known nearly by heart by some comrades it seemed. The work seemed of direct relevance to the CFB in that particular phase in our development.

"Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement. This cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation with the narrowest forms of practical activity." (33)

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The unification of the CFB and its merger with the CUA and the enlargement of the RCL with comrades from ELMLA, CWM and BWA, it was hoped would provide a sound nucleus of revolutionary communists who would be able to rebuild a working class revolutionary vanguard party. The process of unification of the fragmented ML movement reversed a trend of disintegration and seemed to be the beginning of the end of small circles. At that time the path forward for party building looked relatively straight-forward. Actual developments have not fulfilled our wishes and it is of paramount importance that the RCL sums up its history in the spirit of learning from past mistakes in order to avoid future ones.

C&O makes a criticism of the Manifesto of the RCL, the programmatic work of the organisation and its theoretical work. It makes some correct points and contains some valuable insights but they are insufficient to carry the whole thrust of the argument contained in it. Overall it presents a superficial analysis of the League's history. It does not analyse the origins of the ML movement, its problems and the manner in which the CFB arrived at its party building line. Nor does it comprehend how the CFB/RCL tried to solve its predicament and how the solution turned the RCL into the organisation which it became. It is not that intention to exhaustively examine this process but we will make an effort to outline the background to the League's programmatic work and how it conceived theory.

The ML movement grew out of the Sino-Soviet split. The issue is a little more complex in so far as in Britain and elsewhere the orthodox Communist Parties had slid into reformism. This coupled with an insight into the practices of the CPSU and a radical critique of these practices in the form of the socialist road of the People's Republic of China, seemed with the creation of the ML movement to have re-established a genuine revolutionary Marxist tradition guided by the advanced theoretical contribution made by Mao and the CPC.

In Britain, the ML organisations were fragmented into local circles and were incapable of principled polemic to unify themselves into larger organisations because of narrow sectarian attitudes. The accomplishment of these groups could be written on the back of a postage stamp. The CFB formed in September 1969, was committed to a federal road of party-building. It published a newspaper and a theoretical journal but internally was a reflection of all the worst aspects of the ML movement. The CFB's achievements were small and by 1974 its lack of theory and political unity coupled with an unprincipled internal life brought it to the point of collapse - a situation presaged by the cessation of publication of its newspaper. (30)

From the CFB's chaos there emerged a struggle for unification of the organisations. The struggle which began in March 1975 culminated in February 1976 with the unification of the CFB into a democratic centralist structure and with an orientation which regarded party-building as its central task and it actively sought unity with other ML forces. (31)

The outcome of the Third Conference of the CFB was the vindication of the line of 'active ideological struggle'. (32) The refurbished CFB purged of its five main ideological errors proceeded to develop lines on social democracy, nationalisation, opportunism, soviet social imperialism and industrial base-building. The organisation for the first time in its existence carried out synchronised practical work.

These were heady days. The line of 'active ideological struggle' was vindicated because for the first time in the history of the ML movement the process of fragmentation had been reversed. The foundation of the RCL by the unity of the CFB and CUA into a single organisation, with members of ELMLA in attendance, the adoption of a programmatic document, a theoretical journal and a newspaper 'Class Struggle' and a

(NOTE: Mao uses the term ideology in two ways. 1. In the classic Second International sense and 2. to describe the philosophical basis of errors.

Comrades may disagree with me on this point.

Lenin's stress upon the importance of theory was telling since we were young and had not come to terms with other trends of thought; we had little practical experience and our theoretical understanding was extremely weak and we realised 'the role of a vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory'.

Comrades who put forward the view that we needed to do more practical work and draw our theory from that received a severe rebuttal in the form of another quote from Lenin

"Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes. To repeat these words in a period of theoretical chaos is like wishing mourners at a funeral 'many happy returns of the day'." (34) and labelled the 'error' of these comrades as one of empiricism. (35)

Having now identified the need for theory to guide our practical work, the question was where to obtain it. A reading of Mao indicated that knowledge comes from two sources: direct and indirect experience. (36) Since we had little of the former we had to utilise the experience of the international communist movement and so we dipped into texts by Lenin, Stalin, Mao, Dimitrov, sources from the Third International and from the CPC. In doing so, we acknowledged that the mechanical adoption of foreign experience was anathema to Marxism and recognised that it was 'necessary to integrate the universal truths of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the British revolution.' (37)

So on one account C&O is definitely incorrect in so far as the CFB's identification of the need for theory was firmly attached to an understanding of the stage of theoretical development we were at ie square one and this was related to the same stage of party-building we were/are at: the first historical stage - that of winning the class conscious vanguard to party-building.

The second count that C&O is wrong about is that we held the historical experience of the international communist movement in contempt eg

"Yet we never do it, 'simple', as it is, and despite our nonchalant contempt for the historical, both the positive and negative, experience of the international communist movement." (38)

As argued above, I have said that we in fact held the works of the international communist movement in awe and were not able to subject them to a critique. Certainly the CFB did not have this attitude but then C&O displays no better understanding either. (39)

A correct observation however that was made by C&O is that the Manifesto was not based upon sound theoretical work and that little was done in the early period to deepen the bald assertions of the Manifesto. We shall come to the reasons for this below. It is true that the Manifesto was based upon hasty and superficial theoretical work but the point from which to start any appraisal is that it was our first attempt to get political lines down on paper and a 'coherent' statement of our position. This is not to make excuses for the inadequacies of the Manifesto but to provide a framework for understanding why it took the sketchy form it did. The more important question for us to delve into is why, if the CFB/RCL had a commitment in writing and a tacit understanding throughout the organisation of the need to extend and deepen theoretical work and to integrate Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the British revolution, it did not happen. What were the reasons and circumstances which prevented this taking place?

The reasons why we were unable to really forge ahead with theoretical work and deepen our grasp of the specific conditions in Britain and to correct some of the glaring errors within the Manifesto are numerous, but, before considering 'The Manifesto and After' it would be as well to go back a stage and look at other aspects of the struggle for unity in the CFB, because these are of direct relevance to the development of theory in the CFB/RCL and the type of organisation that emerged from the Third Conference.

#### THE STRUGGLE FOR UNITY IN THE OLD CFB

The old federal CFB was comprised of autonomous branches pursuing independent political lines and uncoordinated political activity. These branches sent delegates to a National Committee which was not empowered to instruct the local branches. The newspaper of the CFB carried conflicting political lines on any one topic. This arrangement made for a weak, unprincipled, undisciplined and opportunist organisation.

The struggle for unity within the CFB was with the aim of building a democratic centralist organisation with an authoritative leadership and with branches which

carried out a common political line in coordinated practical work. Five main ideological errors were identified in the organisation and 'active ideological struggle' was the prescription for ridding ourselves of them.

#### a. Ultrademocracy and lack of leadership

The old CFB placed the branches above the National Committee. This meant that no coordinated national policies were forthcoming from the NC. The need to have a central body composed of the strongest cadres in the organisation who would not merely be delegates of branches but leaders whose principal function would be to work for the interests of the CFB as a whole was central to overcoming the malaise in the CFB. Branches would carry out the centrally decided policies of the new central body.

The principal tasks of the leadership are, firstly, working out policies, and secondly, setting tasks and assigning priorities to use cadres well. The EC will do this by boldly winning conviction for its correct policies and proposals and by urging the lower levels to combat ultra-democratic errors by showing a willingness to understand and implement." (40)

The whole tenor of this passage emphasises what was to become the principal error in the new CFB - commandism and assertion that the leadership was right. There was a need for leadership for sure but the arguments surrounding the need for it tended to emphasise the fact that these 'leading comrades' were 'the firmest in their class stand' and 'best at boldly(sic) applying Marxism-Leninism to concrete practice' and that they would 'boldly win conviction for its correct (sic) policies and proposals' and that the lower levels should show willingness to 'understand and implement.' Despite the more detailed texts which were to appear on the principles of Democratic Centralism (41) and the insistence that democracy and centralism were aspects of a single contradictory entity, the new CFB started life as heavily centralist and democracy was stifled. The few warning voices at the Third Conference who pointed out the inherent dangers went unheeded in the prevailing euphoria of the rectification-unity process.

The new leadership of the CFB was super-secretive in its activities. It suddenly produced political lines for the rank and file to implement. Dissent or lack of understanding of line led the rank and file to be assailed by reasons for its inadequacy commensurate with the leaderships wiseness. The constant emphasis on the qualities of leadership as bold, firm and proletarian in its outlook and a rank and file whose exemplary qualities were its willingness to implement the lines of the centre created a divide between the thinkers and the doers. Problems that arose between the centre and the branches were resolved by 'bold criticism and self-criticism' which in fact meant that the centre constantly assailed the rank and file with 'ideological exhortations which stifled creativity and initiative among the rank and file and which made the comrades in branches feel guilty and inadequate for not living up to the expectations of the leadership.

#### b. Active ideological struggle and the campaign against intellectualism

The main ideological errors of the old CFB were identified as liberalism, small-group mentality, ultra-democracy, empiricism and intellectualism. Each of these errors did in fact have a material basis in the practices of the old organisation, and active ideological struggle was seen as the method by which they were to be eradicated. C&O is indeed correct when it says that the CFB/RCL replaced political struggle over line with a form of 'religious idealism.'

'Active ideological struggle' was seen as a means for strengthening unity in the CFB and for strengthening the individual cadres by ridding ourselves of non-proletarian baggage, but what it did was create an atmosphere within the league which made cadres unsure of themselves since they were trying to cultivate an idealistic vision of a good communist outlook, conduct and style of work. Instead of cadres becoming tempered within the class struggle over a period of time and in contact with the masses, this form of religious fanaticism created a self-flagellating sect of communist automata who were completely unrealistic in their outlook, who criticised one another in internal feuding and created animosity and fear in internal relations. It prevented problems being discussed rationally and differences between comrades indicated that one must be wrong and there then followed a sterile self-searching in the pursuit of weakness and personal error. Differences between comrades had to be resolved quickly in the interests of unity.

Of all the errors of the old CFB, combatting intellectualism was particularly destructive because it rapidly became confused with a campaign against cadres from a

middle strata or university background. As I have said above these errors were related to real problems in the old CFB but whether they really did correctly appraise the situation is debatable. It was recognised that an academic approach to Marxism which was separated from the real desires and requirements of the class struggle was of no relevance whatsoever and we did recognise that cadres within the organisation were mainly from intellectual backgrounds and had no real connection with the working class. Study around this problem led us to the fact that intellectuals were important in the development of revolutionary theory but had a 'vacillating nature' and required to remould themselves in order to serve the working class. The remedy for 'intellectualism' was two-fold. Firstly, the combat of it by active ideological struggle and secondly, by transforming the class character of the organisation by volunteering for base-building ie taking working class jobs. An examination of what was understood by intellectualism is instructive. (42)

The errors of intellectualism included:

- i not taking a clear proletarian stand
  - ii denying the existence of class struggle
  - iii divorcing theory from practice
  - iv taking on an impractical number of tasks and being unable to carry them out
  - v believing what is real is in the mind alone
  - vi not wanting to sing the Internationale
  - vii not writing simply and speaking concisely,
- and all were related to class position - being a member of the 'intelligentsia, the stratum between the working class and the bourgeoisie.

Thus a comrade from a middle strata job or background could be accused for a whole variety of different reasons of being intellectualist. Despite the fact that overcoming intellectualism required comrades 'from the intelligentsia being ready to 'go through a long period of remoulding and learn modestly from working class comrades', in fact, as with all of the ideological errors, the campaign was fierce and errors were to be overcome by diligent and swift soul-searching and recanting. There was no such thing as patience, just a philistine attitude from some quarters.

The corollary of this was that intellectual comrades felt guilty about their class position, or their interests in events and things which were not on the CFB leadership agenda. These were manifestations of non-proletarian tendencies which required to be suppressed (ie self-censorship). Coupled with the tendency mentioned above that the development of the political line was the prerogative of leading comrades this did have a deleterious effect upon our programmatic work and upon democracy within the organisation.

#### THE MANIFESTO AND AFTER

The unification of the CFB into a 'democratic centralist' organisation, the development of political lines of guidance, a unified practical activity, a theoretical journal which appeared regularly and a successful struggle with the CUA and the formation of the RCL which had as its founding document, the Manifesto, plus a newspaper, Class Struggle, vindicated the line of active ideological struggle.

The success of this strategy laid the basis for our subsequent errors. The organisation became bureaucratic centralist, the Manifesto went largely unamended, our understanding of the Marxist method instead of deepening became less profound, we remained reliant on the CPC's analysis of world events and continued to brandish our social chauvinist lines in public.

It was the successes that we had that made us immune to criticism from outside and bred arrogance and self-righteousness within us, and blinded us from a self-critical attitude towards ourselves and our serious shortcomings. Our successes compelled us to carry on in the same manner. We did so until contradictions within the new organisational structure, our internal democracy and unification with the CWM forced upon us a change.

#### THE SECOND CONGRESS AND BEYOND

C&O regards the Second Congress as The culmination of a struggle against a rightist line in party-building characterised by a

- i social chauvinist line on Ireland and a relegation of the struggles of the most oppressed to a marginal position
- ii a tailist 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.

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

Bureaucratic Centralism was said to have been roundly defeated.

The result of the Second Congress it is said marred by the adoption of Section VII embodied 'important elements of an anti-imperialist line' (viewed from the perspective of the RFL line on who constitutes the vanguard and its attitude to party-building), 'a clear and decisive break with the RCL's line on Ireland and advances on the oppressed and opportunism.' The shortcomings of the Congress lay in the fact that 'we did not make an all-round political and theoretical breakthrough' and 'lines were not consolidated into a coherent whole'.

As argued above the same or similar claims could be made about the First Congress, ie, breakthroughs and shortcomings were apparent. Whereas the document C&O can start to make an assessment of RCL life in positive and negative terms at the time of the Second Congress (when the present CC were elected) they display a complete lack of understanding of our earlier history.

Firstly, in making a comment on the appraisal of the Second Congress it is necessary to outline a few events which were influential in the RCL.

1. Soon after the founding of the RCL, the leading role of theory (theory is primary over practice) was replaced by the formulation 'practice is now primary, although theory is still important'.

This was an indication of how limited our understanding of the relationship between theory and practice was. The relation between them is expressed in mechanistic terms. Little was done in the study of the problem. The matter received some attention at the History Conference but the debate was strait-jacketed within the formulation adopted by the founding congress.

2. The Redfern Affair. This was an indication that furious struggle over political line was occurring at the centre whilst the rank and file were oblivious to it. The way in which the matter was resolved ensured that one debate of the politics happened. The affair was conducted in secrecy and resolved by organisational means. This event requires to be looked at by the present CC.
3. Rank and file criticism of the leadership grew at the April Conference and the History Conferences as the practices of the SC were publicised. Rank and file criticism ensured that the History Document was never adopted by the RCL and 'pressure of work' ensured that it was never discussed again. Rank and file calls for the extension of democracy were made in this period and criticisms of commandism directed towards the centre.

The Second Congress of the RCL was convened in a chaotic atmosphere and the CC was criticised for its lack of preparation. This congress was marked by the fact that the rank and file had emerged from its slumbers and were combative, argumentative and critical. For the first time open political debate was conducted throughout the organisation and of particular note was the manner in which the debate between the adherents of the line of Free National Development and the Anti-Racist/Anti-Fascist platform was conducted. Also debated was the question of democratic centralism and the centre's commandist leadership came under heavy attack.

C&O is incorrect in its judgement that prior to the Second Congress the RCL had a tailist and workerist attitude on the question of who constituted the advanced and is wrong to say that we sought the advanced among the 'orthodox trade union movement.' and confuses the issue that we sought the advanced among the 'established left forces'. (see appendix A)

The question of workerism seems to be an important area for discussion. Since writing this paper I have reconsidered the criticism and consider that elements in it are correct. However, the question of whether or not we should work in the established trade unions and whether we should engage in base-building is not the key to understanding workerism.

It is correct to say that the RCL's social chauvinist line on Ireland was defeated and the relegation of the struggles of the national minority peoples to a marginal position was ended. The development of an understanding of the question however did not take place on the CC but in the ARAF sub-committee. Bureaucratic Centralism was only temporarily overcome and it surfaced with a vengeance as RTL was foisted upon the RCL. The question which is begged is why we have a tendency to this sort of behaviour.

#### i. Section VII

The success of the congress did not achieve a breakthrough in all areas of RCL life. Its effects were quite uneven. The conference document tells all. It was extremely piecemeal, disjointed and contradictory. It reflected not only a partly successful struggle with our chauvinist past but also the fact that we had made an incomplete break with it. (46) It marked also a divide between an exclusive base-building strategy and our desire to diversify practical work. It also indicated that we had not come to terms with important questions such as opportunism, facism, democratic rights, women, the national question who constitute the advanced elements and party-building strategy. Many of the concepts of the First Congress made their way into the document and many of the concepts have currency today. Not only was our theoretical and political confusion amply demonstrated by Section VII but we must point out that the rank and file had not had any real opportunity to discuss the questions properly due to the poor organisation of the congress and the chaotic manner in which amendments were dealt with.

#### ii. our well charted path

##### A. What is wrong with our 'programmatic work'?

Our original conception of programmatic work saw the need to provide a coherent set of political lines to guide our practice. The Manifesto was drawn up at a time when we had no plan or policy. It was developed in a period of withdrawal from practical activity behind this was the notion that theory was the product of the intelligentsia, and had to be introduced into the working class by the vanguard. The programmatic work which descended directly from the Manifesto was aborted partly by the enunciation of the line that 'practice was primary' and so systematic programmatic work ie going through the various paragraphs it contained and amending them or developing new lines did not occur. When C&O says that programmatic work has never been satisfactorily explained or justified it is not only untrue but C&O does not even bother to seek an answer. The important point raised by C&O is the relevance of our past way of dealing with our programmatic work and makes specific reference to the way in which we abandoned Section VII with all its contradictory lines and went on to the International Situation.

##### B. The demands of the real world

Whereas C&O does not define what revolutionary theory or what is its relation to practice with any precision, or make a critique of our previous understanding, it does however state that we have isolated our programmatic work from the 'actual world of class struggle' and have 'effectively ignored the demands of the real world.' Initially our theoretical work did attempt to deal with the real world and our initial insights were a good start (in part). The events in the real world however rapidly overtook us and we did not subject our own work and practice to a summing up. We were therefore unable to adjust our work to the requirements of the class struggle.

##### C. The results of our programmatic work

Our programmatic work has not been the reason for the present crisis. The reason resides at a much deeper level. We have a weak grasp of Marxism. We have yet to establish the relationship between theory and practice. We have been unable to build a stable leadership, our democratic centralism has been a farce, criticism and self-criticism was been lacking. This has paralysed us and meant that we have been unable to develop line, discuss politics without getting involved in puerile and self-mutilating struggle. The result has been an inability to develop our programmatic work, an inability to get to grips with the realities of the class struggle and our inability to keep members or to gain new recruits.

## RTL - THE WRONG DOCUMENT AT THE RIGHT TIME

The RCL does indeed have problems and they are deep rooted and the solution to the mess that we are in lies with the entire membership. Therefore it would have been advisable for the entire membership of the organisation to contribute to a debate over the nature of our problems and how to decide them. The CC could have arranged a systematic appraisal of all areas of the league's work, ie its history, theoretical problems, the practice of the organisation, democratic centralism etc but instead we got a panicky document RTL and a virtually useless back up sheet C&Q. RTL is a most peculiar mixture of Marxist jargon and rhetoric sitting on a garbage heap of half-baked theory and ideas mingled with attractive pieces of populist claptrap.

Two further steps back

RTL sharpened the divisions in the RCL and has confused us rather than enlightened us. We should proceed to look at RTL which was discussed at the weekend school.

NOTE: PART TWO is a reply to RTL and will follow this document.

### APPENDIX A: BASE BUILDING

The assertion that the RCL pursued a taillist and workerist line on who constituted the advanced elements is based upon the rhetorical assumption that RTL has genuinely identified who the advanced are - the Black and Irish workers - and ipso facto our previous concentration on the industrial working class must have been workerist and taillist.

In the first instance it is quite ludicrous to assume that without serious analysis and with theoretical justifications based upon the flimsy and tenuous concept of the 'bridge' as advanced in RTL that we know exactly who constitute the advanced elements or the vanguard. This question requires much more analysis and serious debate in the organisation before we pass judgements. It requires that we are able to distinguish exactly what is meant by the term vanguard (as included in RTL) and what we understand by advanced (a problem which has arisen continuously in the CFB/RCL and which has been defined differently in a variety of articles and documents of the RCL). In my own mind advanced elements of the working class may emerge from any quarter of the working class and this needs to be distinguished from an identification of which classes or fractions of classes or sections of a community are particularly advanced politically or who are particularly active politically or whose struggles are of particular importance at a precise time. But to go back to the base-building strategy of the CFB/RCL.

Our arrival at the line of exclusive concentration of our resources on industrial base-building and our withdrawal from all other forms of political activity has a particular history. Firstly, there was the broad front work which the CFB was engaged in which brought us into contact exclusively with other left organisations; our reading of the Marxist classics (What is to be done?); an association between the degeneration of the CPGB into the parliamentary road and its abandonment of base-building and noting the practice of the CWLB in industrial cell building.

Our theoretical justification in industrial base building lay in

- i our desire to rally the working class and not intellectuals and students
- ii our conception that working in large factories and being exploited at the point of production made the working class susceptible to communist ideas
- iii Lenin referring to the period in Russia from 1894 to 1901 said

"At that time, indeed, we had astonishingly few forces (so did the CFB), and it was perfectly natural and legitimate then to devote ourselves exclusively to activities among the workers, and severely condemn any deviation from this. The whole task then was to consolidate our position in the working class." (43)

and in a work written at the same time he said

"Our work is primarily and mainly concentrated on the factory, the urban workers.

Russian social democracy must not disipate its forces; it must concentrate its activities on the industrial proletariat, which is the most susceptible to

Social Democratic ideas...the creation of a durable revolutionary organisation among the factory, the urban workers, is therefore the first and most urgent task that confronts Russian Social Democracy and it would be unwise indeed to allow ourselves to be diverted from this task at the present time." (44)

This compelling advice was contrasted with our practice of doing broad front work

among the libertarians and Trotskyites, and there seemed to be overwhelming reasons why we should concentrate our forces on the industrial workers instead of intellectuals and opportunist elements. In entering our phase of base-building we had a strategy of 'going lower and deeper into the proletariat' and utilising the mass line to rally the advanced workers. We did not have a strategy of addressing ourselves to the trade union leadership and our position of working within the orthodox trade unions was to avoid the leftist error of avoiding or boycotting them. We worked in trade unions with the desire to 'turn them into fighting class organisations.' As for the assertion that we sought to rally the advanced from the established left forces, it is not clear what C&O means by this. We did address ourselves to other ML organisations (however clumsily) but we did not expect unity with opportunist left organisations. The accusation of workerism which implies that we uncritically accepted the working class and its backward ideas is untrue as well because we always had the idea of practicing the mass line and overcoming their backward ideas. These misconceptions of the authors of C&O are nothing but red herrings. The point I wish to make here is that the base-building strategy needs careful summing up. It is hoped that such a summary will be able to assess

- i whether or not our conception of base-building had any value and whether or not it will be useful for us to do it in the future when we draw up plans to work among the majority white working class.
- ii what factors were responsible for it not being successful
- iii why did the ISC consider the gap between members and non-members or the organisation too large for working class contacts to bridge
- iv was it correct of us to place all our efforts on the industrial workplace in the first place. If not then why not? And why it is as RTL says people could have been developed more quickly politically outside the workplace in view of the fact that the organisation had bad political lines anyway. (45)

#### REFERENCES

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Note by ideology Marx here refers to illusory consciousness which has a material basis. This differs from the notion of ideology as represented by subsequent Marxist writers as ideas which have a class basis.
2. For a more detailed analysis of what Marx's conception of social relations and productive forces see Corrigan et al: Socialist Construction and Marxist theory - Bolshevism and its critique. Chapter 1. Hereafter SCMT MR Press 1978
3. German Ideology p51-52
4. " " p62-64
5. Marx Theses on Feuerbach in
  - i German Ideology op cit
  - ii Marx:Engels Selected works p28 L&W 1968
  - iii Issues in Marxist Philosophy Vol 2: Materialism Harvester 1979, Wal Suchting, Marx's theses on Feuerbach: Notes towards a commentary (with a new translation)
6. Jorge Lorrain: The Concept of Ideology Hutchinson 1979  
This text discusses Marx's concept of ideology and how it was revised by subsequent marxists. He also discusses the various interpretations of the meaning of the term ideology used by other writers.
7. German Ideology p64
8. SCMT p17
9. Manifesto of the RCL Section A para 6 which is a paraphrase of a passage from the Manifesto of the Communist Party ( see 28 below)
10. From Rousseau to Lenin: Studies in Ideology and Society Lucio Colletti NLB 1972
11. SCMT p28
12. " p45
13. SCMT discusses this question. It is of importance to note the similarities between Lenin, Stalin and Trotsky in their fundamental conceptions.
14. SCMT p47
15. Compare SCMT with Mavrakis 'On Trotskyism' for different analyses of this.
16. Lenin What is to be done? p37 FLP 1973
17. Lenin op cit p37
- 18 see note 1 and 6
19. Lenin op cit p48 \*see footnote p48
20. Lenin op cit p37

21. Lenin
  22. Lenin op cit p50 \*see footnote p50
  23. SCMT Corrigan at all look at the changes that occurred in Lenin's thought and whilst not concluding that his reading of Hegel was instrumental in his change of position they argue that it was of important is finally freeing himself from 'abstract, cut and dried theory that was an obstacle to concrete analysis' p37 Quote from LOWY. Lowy postulates a break in Lenin's writings coinciding with his reading of Hegel and the completion of the Philosophie Manuscripts.
  24. Lenin The Dual Power
  25. Lenin Letter on Tactics
  26. Lenin Our revolution
  27. An issue of relevance to this problem is the nature and role of the state. We cannot dwell upon this here but the reader is referred to SCMT
  28. Marx The Manifesto of the Communist Party
  29. Mao Our study and the current situation
  30. See Revolution No 1 'Build the Revolutionary Communist Party to lead the revolution' CFBML 1976
  31. Revolution No 5 Call to the British Marxist-Leninist movement CFBML 1977  
Compare this with 'Take the Bolshevik, not the Menshevik road to party building'
  32. Resolution of the Third Conference of the CFBML Revolution 1 1976
  33. Lenin What is to be done? p28
  34. Lenin op cit p27
  35. see Resolution of the Third Conference and 'Build the Revolutionary CP'
  36. Mao On Practice
  37. Constant reference was made in CFB/RCL publications on the need to integrate Marxism-Leninism with the specific characteristics of the British revolutionary. eg Revolution 1 'Introducing Revolution' and 'Build the Revolutionary CP..'
  38. C&A) p3 para 2
  39. The need to subject the writing of the major Marxist thinkers to a critical reading is of major importance to us
  40. Resolution of the Third Conference. para N
  41. Revolution 4
  42. Build the Revolutionary CP... and two articles in Revolution 2 October 1976 'Combat intellectualism to transform the class stand of the CFBML' and 'On the intellectuals' by Enver Hoxha.
- Appendix A: Base building
43. Lenin What is to be done?
  44. Lenin The Tasks of the Russian Social Democrats
  45. RTL p5
  46. October Vol 1 No 1