
MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED TO THE SECRETARIAT
OF THE PROVISIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE
BRITISH MARXIST-LENINIST ORGANISATION.

by A. Manchanda: dated Feb.24. 1968.

"The attitude a political party adopts towards its own mistakes is one of the most important and surest criteria of the seriousness of the party and how it in practice fulfills its obligations towards its class and the toiling masses. Frankly admitting a mistake, disclosing the reasons for it, analysing the conditions which led to it, and carefully discussing the means of correcting it - this is the hallmark of a serious party; this is the way it performs its duties, this is the way it educates and trains the class and then the masses."

-- LENIN

At the outset, I express my regret that owing to serious breakdown in my health and acute financial crisis, I have failed to make my full contribution to the early preparation of the various draft documents. To add to this, we have been facing a serious situation in the Association of Indian Communists, which got split as a result of the influence and direct interference of the revisionist leadership of the Communist Party of India.

It would have been a crime if we had not devoted time and energy to our responsibilities in the Association of Indian Communists and the Indian Workers' Association. However, despite all good intentions, I still have to overcome my illhealth, which is making my work more or less sporadic. This weakness must be overcome without delay.

Since September 17, 1967, when the Provisional Committee of the British Marxist-Leninist Organisation came into being, five months have elapsed, with some achievements. However, it is important to check up whether we have been able to carry out the tasks which we set before us for the building of a genuine Marxist-Leninist party in Britain; and to discuss the weaknesses in order to take the necessary steps to overcome them.

In the following, I have attempted to pose very briefly some of the serious problems and weaknesses in our work, for the serious and sober consideration of the Secretariat and Provisional Committee.

I. ON UNITING ALL MARXIST-LENINISTS

In the II-point document, entitled "Immediate Tasks for the British Marxist-Leninist Organisation" (adopted at the Sept. 17, 1967 meeting at Conway Hall), we set as the first task to "unite all the Marxist-Leninists who can be united" on the basis of the Statement of Fundamental Marxist-Leninist ideological, political and organisational principles (also adopted at the Sept 17 meeting).

In the first meeting of the Provisional Committee at Reg Birch's house on October 14-15, we again repeated our promise to get in touch with all Marxist-Leninist groups to win their co-operation.

But for Cde. Ted Roycroft's meeting with the Camden comrades, no serious attempt has been made to win other groups. Unfortunately, in our practice, we have not only adopted a rigid attitude to other groups, but in fact have been quite hostile to them.

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Although/point II, we had accepted that the "various groups shall continue to function as such" till they decide to dissolve, we in practice questioned their functioning.

For example, with regard to the JCC which had existed and functioned before the Provisional Committee.

I must criticise myself that I shared this rigid attitude in the Secretariat.

Instead of suggesting and conducting on our initiative mutual discussions to overcome differences, we used commandism. Without providing any concrete practical alternative of carrying out activities in which the groups in the JCC were involved. But for the discussion with the Camden and Oxford comrades, we never attempted any more contact with other groups.

When I suggested that we should visit Coventry, Oxford, Bath, Scotland, to meet the Marxist-Leninist groups to iron out our differences, I incurred the displeasure of Comrades Reg and Dorothy Birch. They were very angry that I had met with comrades in Coventry and Oxford groups. Not only Reg was not ready to to and meet these groups, on the plea "we have no money or time," but frowned upon my willingness to meet the comrades in other towns to win their co-operation. Comrade Dorothy was very angry why did I meet the Batesons. She even resented the fact that the comrades from other towns even invited me for discussion on our common problems.

Reg, in the meeting of the P.C. on January 7, 1968, on our behalf gave an undertaking that a pre-congress conference shall be convened, inviting all Marxist-Leninist groups, in order to win their participation in the national congress. It seems that this undertaking has also been thrown overboard.

The root cause of this attitude lies in the petit-bourgeois arrogance that "we are going to organise the Marxist-Leninist party", hence others should fall in line and come rushing to us as supplicants. This was evidenced at the fantastic suggestion that we should have a standard reply-letter for those who make inquiries and approach the P.C. on the issue of forming the M/L Party. The fact is that those who claim to be the leaders must have the modesty to win others by persuasion and discussion. We must recognise that most of the comrades in other groups, but for the exception of a few, like Baker, are honest and have repudiated the revisionist treachery of the Khrushchev renegades and the CPGB.

Many of these groups have been conducting anti-imperialist activities on Vietnam, friendship with China and on tenants' struggles, besides their normal trade union activities. They have not been just "discussion groups" as has been suggested. We must accord due respect to others if we wish to be respected.

To sum up, one of the most important tasks for successfully convening the national Congress for the founding of the M/L party is to make all-out effort to win our M/L comrades and groups who are not in the P.C. This task should be taken up without any delay. If we uphold the Thought of Chairman Mao Tsetung, then we must resolve the contradictions among the people and our fellow M/L comrades by positive efforts and struggle to win unity.

II. RE: THE PREPARATION OF THE DRAFT PROGRAMME AND POLICY RESOLUTIONS

As indicated in point 6, (II-point document), what to say of organising "discussions and conferences all over the country for the preparation" of draft documents, not a single political discussion has been organised even in the P.C. All ideological and political issues are being referred to the "commissions."

So it seems, instead of having detailed discussions on important ideological and political questions and raising the political level of all of us and to attain basic ideological and political unity, all such matters are being left for the Congress. The general low level, the heritage of the revisionist past, is demonstrated by the fact that there is lack of any understanding of the fundamental difference in the strategic (programmatic) and the tactical (day to day policy) tasks. Two attempts to raise this issue for discussion were frustrated.

Somebody had a strange idea that by using the EBC method of tape-recording of the spontaneous reactions of the workers, to the present situation, one could produce a programme.

To clamp down any political discussion, the old revisionist adage has been repeated, "Our industrial comrades get bored with political discussions."

So how shall we build a political party of the working class without holding political discussions among our industrial comrades. Political discussion

should not be the monopoly of some intellectuals. Anyway, it is an insult to the intelligence of the working class that they can't discuss political and ideological questions.

To sum up, we must get involved all our comrades in political and ideological discussions, of course, regarding the issues facing our Congress and the day to day struggle of the working class. Otherwise national Congress shall just be a formality, and not a historic landmark for establishing the vanguard party of the working class, consisting of politically conscious communists.

III. DAY TO DAY STRUGGLE OF THE WORKING CLASS & THE CONGRESS

Point No. 8 (11-point document) states: "Up till the national Congress, the Secretariat shall help in co-ordination and assisting the various associated Marxist-Leninist groups and individual members in taking active part in the day to day struggle of the British working class and the people, in accordance with the statement of the minimum programme and policy of the British Marxist-Leninist Organisation."

Chairman Mao says, "Put politics first; Put politics in command."

While preparing for our national congress, we should not ignore discussion on one of the foremost issues of the world. "The heroic Vietnamese people's war against U.S. imperialist aggression and for national salvation and tasks of the British M/Lists; very significant remarks were made, reflecting the political attitude of some comrades, eg.

(a) Reg, "Lack of time for discussion, comrades have the copy of the document, they can read it at home," - so no time for political discussions.

(b) Dorothy Birth, "A.E.U. comrades are engaged 7 days in the week fighting the bosses; hence no A.U.E. comrade could be spared for Vietnam and national liberation work." - as if fighting imperialism is not fighting the bosses.

(c) Reg and other comrades, "We shall find some other comrades who are not engaged in A.E.U. work for the national

liberation commission."

(d) Reg's comment to me: "Our industrial comrades get bored with political discussions."

(e) Reg, "Working on Vietnam is not all that important for the building of the Party. Anyway, the British working class has not been involved in the various activities organised by the students."

At the first meeting of the National Liberation Commission, again on the pretext of preparing for the Congress and for lack of time, it was suggested that the organisational work on the BVSF be postponed. Though in the meantime, one public function of the BVSF should be organised before the Congress. For this, I, as the Secretary of the BVSF shall make the necessary arrangements.

At the P.C. meeting, on February 11, Comrades Ranjana and Bill Ashe, out of their continued subjective attitude, brazenly denied that such a decision was taken at the National Liberation Commission.

The whole revolutionary world has been hailing the great victories of the Liberation Armed Forces and the people of South Vietnam. I, along with other members of the BVSF have been elated with such epic victories and felt that we should organise a public celebration meeting without delay. Accordingly, I booked the hall on the first available day.

Instead of appreciating the significance of this major historical development in the people's war of Vietnam, Ranjana and Bill Ashe attacked the initiative to arrange a public meeting to express our solidarity with the Vietnamese people, on the excuse that they had not been consulted.

The pity is, Reg also incorrectly supported this attack for booking the hall without consultations, contrary to facts and principles.

(a) was the decision to arrange a public meeting to celebrate the great victories of the Vietnamese people incorrect politically?

(b) Even if a decision had not been taken in any Committee (which of course is not true) and if I, as the secretary of the BVSF had failed to take the initiative to organise such a function, should not other comrades have advised

me to organise such a function? Their failure and attack on me only shows either their lack of political understanding regarding our international proletarian duties; or simply they put their own selves first rather than proletarian politics and attacked me to carry on their old feud.

I am glad that after some persuasion, Reg did agree to take part in this function.

We all know that the world events and the availability of halls do not depend upon our convenience.

IV. ECONOMISM V. POLITICAL STRUGGLE

At the Secretariat meeting on Saturday, January 27, I suggested that we review our work since the formation of the P.C. and that we should seriously examine the criticism which had been made by the various comrades and groups whether in the P.C. or outside.

When it was pointed out that we should initiate involving the workers in the Vietnam solidarity movement and to start with the A.E.U. comrades, and raise the struggle from the economic to political level, there was a lot of resistance from comrades Ted Roycroft and Terry Thomas. I was told that I did not understand the situation in the A.E.U.

According to them:

(a) for the ordinary British workers, their struggle for wages and hours was more important than Vietnam which is "a far removed thing."

(b) "There is a big wall between our politically conscious A.E.U. comrades and the ordinary workers."

(c) There is a long tradition of economism in the trade unions.

(d) In order to maintain the confidence of the workers, our A.E.U. comrades have to work efficiently. "We can't afford the luxury of getting involved in other activities like Vietnam."

(e) In any case, whenever opportunities arise, our comrades do talk about Vietnam and expose the subservience of the Labour Government to the United States. We have a resolution before the national executive council on Vietnam, and we shall see what we can do on this issue.

A heated discussion ensued, in which the attitudes of various comrades, already referred to, were quoted. But after all

the discussion, it was agreed to take the following steps, on my suggestions:

1) That in order to achieve a unified understanding of the whole working class struggle in Britain, there should be regular joint reporting about the work being carried on various fronts, A.E.U., Indian workers, tenants etc.

ii) That in order to overcome economism on the industrial front, we should show in our propaganda the basic relationship of the struggle for wages etc. and the struggle against the bourgeois state structure, whether represented by Tory or Labour parties, as well as the subservience of British imperialism to U.S. imperialism and the attack on the working class.

That it is becoming more and more impossible, in the present deep crisis of British imperialism, to defend the economic interests of the British working class and their trade union and democratic rights, without waging a simultaneous struggle against the system of exploitation and the stooges of capitalists, the social democrats and the revisionists, as well as the trade union bosses.

(iii) In order to get the A.E.U. comrades involved in the Vietnam solidarity movement, the A.E.U. comrades with the help of others would bring out a leaflet for the A.E.U. branches, showing the relation of the struggle for wages and the struggle of the heroic people of Vietnam against U.S. imperialist aggression.

We should break the shackles of routinism and stranglehold of bureaucratic machine of the trade unions, in order to politicise our work on the industrial front.

It seems a whole hell let loose, since I dared to raise the weaknesses on the industrial front, especially the A.E.U., in particular the economist attitudes of our leading comrades.

Comrades Reg and Dorothy, along with their two sons had kindly invited me to a wine pub on the Camden High Street on Saturday Feb. 3rd. On the basis of a report from Cde. Ted Roycroft, both Reg and Dorothy pounced upon me for "harrassing" the A.E.U. comrades like Ted and Terry, on the issue of economism, in the Secretariat

meeting. Reg indulged in abusive language.

I told these comrades that our relations are based upon political principles and we were not setting a mutual appreciation society. Why could we not seriously examine our weaknesses, without getting subjective about the criticism made?

While one appreciates the loyalty of A.E.U. comrades for Reg, which has emerged out of common struggle in the trade union movement and in opposition to the revisionist CPGB, if we have to build a political movement and the party of the working class, then we should put our political principles in the forefront - only thus we can really carry out our loyalty to each other, and not by either glossing over our weaknesses or to become subjective when serious criticism is made of them.

It is indeed very fortunate to have the loyalty and support of one's family in the political, public life, but any friendly criticism from the comrades should not be taken as a personal attack.

Since that day in the pub, some A.E.U. comrades have adopted a very hostile attitude to me. The Ashes, who have never been very friendly, seized the opportunity to get their pound of flesh.

Does it mean that any justified criticism is taboo, and one of the fundamental principles of the development of the revolutionary movement and the Communist Party - criticism and self-criticism, - are no longer valid in the formation of the Marxist-Leninist Party?