

Provisional Committee of the BMLO

A Communist Party in Britain Now!

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On the 15th October, 1967, a meeting was held at Conway Hall by Reg Birch, member of the Executive of the A.E.U. and ex-member of the E.C. of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Those summoned were representative a group of Marxists individuals, delegates from various anti-revisionists bodies and trade unionists. The purpose of the meeting he explained, was to set up a provisional Committee which would go to work immediately to form a communist party.

Without a revolutionary party, Marxist Leninists in organisation, method of work and it is impossible to lead the working class in over throwing the imperialist ruling class and getting an end to the capitalist system of exploitation. Such a communist party in Britain is about 50 years overdue; the so-called "Communist Party of Great Britain" [indistinguishable] not even claim to be revolutionary and has long since given up any pretence of leading the working class in militant struggle.

But having done without a communist party so long, what was the urgency now?

1. A crisis facing British imperialism, brought about by the rising tide of liberation movements in the colonial and semi-colonial territories. It is only a question of time before a national coalition government is formed to impose the naked rule of monopoly capitalism on the British people. Exploitation of workers at home and abroad is clearly being intensified.

The beginning of fascist attempts to split the working class and suppress its organs of resistance are already apparent. It is thus a matter of systematic urgency to establish a communist party which can unite the working class in opposition to these developments.

2. The world revolutionary movement against imperialism headed by the United States, a movement guided by the thought of the greatest Marxist Leninist of our age, Mao Tse-tung and spearheaded by the heroic fighting people of Vietnam, must be carried into the very homelands of capitalism. There is no better time than now for launching a revolutionary party committed to opening a new front in this anti-imperialist struggle right here in Britain and so enlisting British workers under the Marxist banner “workers of the world unite”

But wasn't the way in which the Conway hall meeting was assembled on the initiative of one individual arbitrary? Wasn't there something arbitrary about the setting up of the Provisional Committee?

A revolutionary party of the type proposed and organised by Lenin is very different from other political parties. It has certain characteristics which set it apart from all other groupings – the degree of individual commitment, the relation between leadership and rank and file including mutual criticism and self-criticism, the practice of democratic centralism and, in all its work, the application of the mass line. These characteristics must be present from the start. It cannot begin as some other kind of political organisation and then change or grow into a Marxist-Leninists revolutionary party. Since it is a party of a new type, it represents a sharp dialectical break with previous forms of organisation and thus appears arbitrary to those who still think of politics in bourgeois terms – just as revolution itself appears arbitrary to those who aren't making it.

Some of those at the meeting represented groups which with varying membership have been in existence for several years. They had quite correctly broken with the revisionists 'Communist' Party of Great Britain, had formed their own discussion circles, had issued journals and

tried to maintain contact with other anti-revisionists in order to keep the Marxist flag flying. They did not all see why they should accept this invitation from Reg Birch to join in the work of establishing a communist party in Britain now.

While their action in breaking with the CPGB, particularly after it endorsed the betrayal of socialism by the revisionist leadership of the Soviet Union was right, these anti-revisionist individuals and the various groups which they formed had certain inevitable short-comings from the point of view of further political development.

1. Their approach to the problems facing Britain was more theoretical than practical and this split between theory and practice led to sterility and endless factionalism. The search for 'theoretical purity' involved a constant breaking part and re-combining of individual elements, accompanied by an animosity toward each other which ought to have been reserved for the class enemy.
2. Any work actually done by these groups tended to be local in nature and they were thus unable to function on the scale necessary for grasping the long-term, general interests of the working masses in order to raise the level of their political consciousness. Such parochial activity often generated incorrect political understanding in which secondary contradictions loomed larger than primary.
3. Without any mass contact these groups were unable to relate any understanding of the nature of British imperialism to the actual experiences of British workers and thus win them for a revolutionary, anti-imperialist perspective in solidarity with workers and peasants in colonial and semi-colonial territories.
4. A small-group mentality was generated which inhibited the revolutionary boldness of operating at a national level. The cosy local cabal became all important and the interests of the working class generally were forgotten in the immediate interests of the group, leading to opportunism and a social democratic style of work.
5. Lack of the discipline which only a party can give resulted in anarchy and spontaneity. There was a failure to develop any real leadership –

indeed, any idea of leadership was rejected in favour of individuals enjoying the luxury of being each his own Marxist genius. This situation has lately been exploited by charlatans and fools with the consequent loss of potentially good comrades who became disillusioned and dropped out of the movement altogether.

Still, it has been asked, would it not have been possible for these groups to form a Marxist-Leninist party in time by coming together in some form of federal structure?

A revolutionary party is not that kind of body. It is not something to which groups or individuals affiliate and then drift out of again as it suits them. Over the last four or five years numerous attempts of this sort, all doomed to failure, have been tried. No doubt this experience of failure was a necessary preliminary to the formation of a Marxist-Leninist party; but the trial and error period is over. The actual founding of a communist party has to be a positive step right away from the negative, anarchic arena of mere anti-revisionism.

Such a step will be welcomed by all those who broke with revisionism, not to indulge themselves in the licence of going their own way, but to begin sincerely in the company of comrades subject to the same party discipline the arduous task of taking to the masses the revolutionary theory which, once it has gripped them, will become a material force.

But why Reg Birch?

Leadership is necessary for the founding of a Marxist-Leninist party. Dispensing with a leader altogether is spontaneous, Trotskyist conception. Expecting a leader to develop gradually in the course of activity till he can be voted into office by the rank and file is a social democratic conception. Without a leader no start will ever be made.

Here in Britain such a leader must belong to the working class with experience of both class struggle and inner-party struggle. He must have an understanding of British imperialism and have proved in personal contacts and activities his proletarian internationalism. His qualification for leadership must rest on the impact he has already made on industrial comrades, winning them for a revolutionary perspective of militancy and international solidarity which enables them to form the nucleus of the new party. Having appreciated the need for a revolutionary party of the working class now, he must have the confidence and audacity to raise the standard around which can gather the cadres committed to a clean break with the muddled political past and determined to set their foot firmly on a revolutionary road for Britain.