

## ELEMENTS OF A SUM UP OF THE WCP

### Introduction

To build a new ML organization on a solid footing, we need to have an appreciation of history. This paper is a first attempt to assess the experience of the WCP. It makes no pretensions to be an exhaustive sum up, but raises some points linked to our present understanding of the role and problems of ML parties. It should be read in conjunction with other texts from caucus members treating specific aspects of the work of the WCP: the woman and national questions and the attitude to the left. This sum up is the first part of a larger text on the kind of party we want to build. The second part, which will appear in a subsequent issue of the Bulletin, will attempt to evaluate and begin to update the ML theory of the party in the light of the experience of the WCP and the international movement.

This paper is based on debates around the draft text, "What kind of revolutionary party do we need?" and on discussions in the committee on the sum up of the WCP of the Montreal caucus. However, this version has not been discussed by the caucus as a whole, and thus represents only the views of the authors.

### Contributions not to be overlooked

We believe that it must be recognized that ML parties have played an important role in leading peoples' struggles from a stage of spontaneous revolt to become a conscious organized force capable of changing the system. Path-breaking revolutions have (Russia, China), and are now being made (Philippines) in this way.

Looking back on our own history, we feel that the consolidation of a Marxist-Leninist current around the Canadian Communist League (predecessor of the WCP) was a definite step forward for the revolutionary movement, enabling a break with the spontaneism, confusion and fragmentation, as well as the reformist and revisionist trends that dominated the left at the time. The CCL made significant progress in clarifying elements of revolutionary strategy and political line that were the source of much confusion and mistaken positions in the left:

- . understanding that Canada is an imperialist country where socialist revolution is on the agenda and not a national liberation struggle against U.S. imperialism, that the principal contradiction pits the working class against the Canadian bourgeoisie;
- . understanding the nature of the Soviet Union today as a revisionist and social-imperialist power;
- . identifying the major task as the creation of a revolutionary party based on Marxism-Leninism, composed of the most

conscious working people.

Over the years, The Forge provided many insights into the burning issues of the day, analyzing the contradictions and class forces behind events, whether it be the economic crisis or the danger of war, and presented valuable perspectives to advance peoples' struggles. These contributions were not an accident, but were the result of attempts to apply Marxism to problems of revolution in our country.

The CCL, and later the WCP, undertook the crucial task of spreading Marxism-Leninism in the working class through the immersion of its militants in progressive movements. Specifically, in the labour movement, the strategic goal of class unionism and our analysis and practical work offered a radical orientation not seen for decades since the CP abandoned Marxism.

These were some of the positive features that led to the growth of the League and then the WCP. The party's actions, its positions, its dedication to fundamental social change found a sympathetic response in various sectors of the population, thanks to the work of party activists who developed orientations that answered peoples needs and aspirations.

In short, the WCP, like other ML parties, was an attempt to bring working people and revolutionary ideas together, to offer a long-term and overall outlook to the many separate battles against the system. To some this may sound like repeating the same old platitudes, but for us, they are basic ideas that have too easily been forgotten in the current crisis and are still worth fighting for.

To highlight these aspects is not to gloss over the many major errors, problems and conceptions foreign to Marxism that afflicted the WCP, nor does it imply that the WCP was "overwhelmingly positive". The debate over the sum up is only just beginning, but one thing stands out clearly for us: whatever the final balance sheet, the short experience of the League and the WCP, even with all its flaws, does show that an organization based on Marxism-Leninism has a vital role to play in clarifying revolutionary strategy and in spreading socialist ideas in the working class.

#### Errors in theory and practice: conception of the party

We recognize that historically, ML parties have had many problems, and that the WCP fell into a good many of them. The conception of the party, relations with people and groups outside its ranks, and the attitude to Marxism, have all been marked by serious failings. We will look briefly at these questions in turn.

Like many parties, the WCP was strongly influenced by J.V. Stalin's approach to the party. We uncritically absorbed Stalin's notion of the monolithic party, the "general staff" of the working class, run like an army with its members totally unified in thought and deed, marching in step under the "infallible wisdom" of the leadership and kept in line by the

cadres. We shared Stalin's vision of democratic centralism which put extreme emphasis on centralism and considered democracy more or less a formality, a luxury that could seldom be afforded, rather than a strategic necessity to develop political line, correct errors, and give party members real control of their organization.\*

Internally, a monolithic unity of views was stressed that smothered debate and denied the existence and legitimacy of different views among Marxists. Those who raised criticisms or challenging questions were branded as "trouble-makers" and isolated with heavy-handed methods of struggle. Far from resolving contradictions, this approach only covered them up or sent them underground, weakening and often blocking the struggle to correct mistakes and erroneous ideas.

The extreme concentration of power, knowledge and information in the hands of the leadership (the self-contained "vanguard within the vanguard") and a rigidly hierarchical structure stifled inner-party democracy, encouraged elitism and disdain for people among the leadership. The result was to reproduce in the party forms of oppression of women, workers and nationalities that permeate capitalist society such as the sexual division of labour. In effect, such conceptions and practices were forms of bourgeois ideology that negated the application of the mass line.

The conception of the party as the sole supreme revolutionary centre and the mechanical view of the tasks of party-building led to several kinds of errors.

Revolution was considered not far around the corner if the party could be built at break-neck speed. This subjective vision combined with youthful activism encouraged a frenzied pace of work, putting tremendous strain on members, especially women and workers, harming family life and sometimes health, and restricting time for study, debate and reflection, thereby further hampering democracy within the party.

There was an opportunist tendency to see building up the party as the ultimate goal, over and above the interests of the struggles of working people. For example, the WCP program talks of the need to develop a program of demands for immigrants. Why?-- to win these groups to the party, not because it is a perspective to advance their interests. We rushed to develop a program of women's union demands, not first and foremost because of its strategic importance but because, tactically, the party's prestige was at stake. There was the constant drive to produce, more members, more newspapers sold,

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 \* A subject worth examining is our specific historical route to Marxism through the influence of China's Cultural Revolution and the period of the 'Gang of Four'. For some thoughts on this, see the article by the Norwegian party, AKP(ML), "The historical weaknesses in Western Maoism".

etc., a push to make short-run gains in the party's influence which tended to overshadow the basic objective of communist education.

Another manifestation of this deformed notion of the party's role was the penchant, especially in earlier years, to seek hegemony over popular groups, trying to impose our orientations and, in some cases, creating our own "more perfect" organizations while ignoring existing and genuinely popular movements. This is not to deny the importance of putting forward a Marxist viewpoint in progressive movements nor the need in certain conditions to create new organizations to advance peoples' struggles. What we are criticizing here is the opportunist conception that boils down to trying to substitute the party for the struggles of working people, forgetting that it is the people who make revolution. The party is only an instrument to advance the cause of the oppressed and not an end in itself. An ML party can play a leading role only in so far as it is able through its involvement in class struggles to develop clear and effective orientations and long-term options for the progressive and revolutionary movements that can win people's support.

Our conception of the party (and the rigid approach to Marxism discussed below) fostered extreme sectarianism towards other progressive groups. The WCP proclaimed itself the true revolutionary centre, the only "authentic left" with the "correct line" on everything. As for the rest of the left we had only contempt: As was said in the political report to the founding congress of the WCP, "To unite this confused assortment would not help in the least the revolutionary struggle!" (p. 25). While it was correct to conduct polemics with anti-Marxist positions within the left, in practice this meant trying to smash and eliminate other groups and impose our views at all costs. Basically, we failed to grasp the fact that the struggle for socialism cannot be won in our country without the contributions and unity of progressive forces, and that answers to the problems of revolutionary strategy can only be developed through debate and confrontation of different ideas and tendencies.

#### Attitude to Marxism

The WCP was strongly marked by a dogmatic and non-dialectical approach to Marxism, by mechanical materialism and economic determinism bequeathed by Stalin to the communist movement.

Our dogmatic approach blinded us to the importance of striving to develop Marxist theory to meet the realities of our society-- its history, traditions of the progressive movements, and above all, the specific conditions of the struggle for socialism in a rapidly changing, highly industrialized country. Instead of seeing our progress on questions of revolutionary strategy (compared with the relative confusion in the left) as a solid starting point to the long-term process of understanding the laws of the Canadian revolution, we brag-

ged that our line was correct and practically complete except for details. For example, it was held that once the principal contradiction was known (proletariat-bourgeoisie), then revolutionary strategy was more or less clear and we needn't bother about that question any more. We unilaterally emphasized the principal contradiction to the point that other strategic questions such as women's oppression, the Quebec national question, or U.S. imperialism, were treated as having little importance. This mechanical and simplistic approach was a major factor behind the chauvinist positions of the WCP.\*

Another serious problem underpinning the errors on the woman and national questions, and the neglect of other crucial issues, was a narrow economic conception of Marxism and class consciousness. There was a strong tendency to limit or reduce revolutionary consciousness to the domain of relations between workers and capitalists and the state. In the WCP there was much talk about one form of economism-- limiting agitation to the economic terrain. At the same time, we overlooked, and thus fell into, another form of economism that has been very prevalent in the socialist movement--ignoring the strategic importance of understanding and fighting actively all forms of oppression as it affects all classes and social groups, whether it be sexism, racism or imperialist domination, and in all spheres of society from political to cultural and family life. Without this broad outlook, Lenin warned, workers (or communists for that matter) can not achieve genuine revolutionary consciousness, and capitalism cannot be brought down.

The relationship between economism and dogmatism, and the errors in our conception of Marxism must be investigated much more fully; however certain preliminary conclusions can be drawn. The ossified approach to Marxism prevalent in the WCP and many other parties, not only led to mistaken positions on some questions, but overall, it has led to the stagnation of Marxist theory, particularly in the imperialist countries. It has led to the failure of the socialist movement to address and find correct solutions to a whole range of questions and new situations facing revolutionaries today.\*\*

If we forget that the "living soul of Marxism is the concrete analysis of concrete things", and instead reduce it to a set of general principles, a doctrine that is revealed in the classics or carved in stone in the statutes of the Third International, then no wonder Marxism has stagnated. With such an approach, it is not hard to brush aside the complex issues

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\*For a critique of the WCP's chauvinism on the Quebec national question, see the article in this Bulletin.

\*\*See "The theoretical weaknesses of Western Maoism," and D. Bourassa's text on the crisis of socialism.

raised by new developments in the capitalist system or the problems in socialist countries with ready-made formulas. How familiar we were with the dogmatic approach that tries to bend and select the facts to fit the line and arrogantly refuses to entertain the possibility the party might be wrong, instead of the scientific attitude of seeking truth from facts and openness to criticism and self-criticism.

If the answers are already known and we have them, then it is easy to fall into sectarian contempt for the questions and views of feminists or other progressives, or ignore the advances in scientific research. It is hardly surprising also that political study in the party put the accent on the assimilation of conclusions found in selected and often summarized texts, instead of seeing the confrontation of Marxism with different ideas as the very motor to develop Marxism, and the only way Marxist science can be grasped and become a weapon in the hands of the oppressed.

This spoon-feeding of predigested truth, together with the monolithic suppression of debate and the elitist notion that only the leadership was capable of developing the line, had the most dire consequences for the party and its members. It held back the potential for ordinary members, especially workers and women, to progressively master Marxism. Thus it perpetuated dependence and passive acceptance of the "wisdom" of the leadership and weakened members ability to identify and struggle against errors in the party. Objectively, it accentuated contradictions between a few "thinkers" and the many "executors", between leaders and the rank-and-file, men and women. Overall, we feel these conceptions severely weakened the party to cope with the current crisis.

We have tried to identify the anti-Marxist ideological conceptions underpinning many of the errors and problems in the WCP. We do not claim that this is the sole cause of all errors but we do feel it is the fundamental factor behind the crisis that exploded in the WCP and other ML parties. Specifically, our contention is that a dogmatic, mechanical materialist and economistic deviation, characteristic of much of the communist movement since Stalin, has led to the stagnation of Western Marxism, namely the failure to confront the crucial problems and questions raised by the revolutionary struggle in the eighties and to push forward the development of Marxism to solve them.

The WCP's ossified approach to Marxism gave rise to both leftist and rightist errors. Examples of rightist errors abound: from the various forms of economism to the opportunist obsession with tactical gains and aggrandizement of the prestige and influence of the party. Although for years the party leadership denied the existence of leftist errors, they flourished nevertheless: sectarianism, frenzied activism, trying to dominate popular groups and imposing "socialist platforms", etc. While the debate will continue as to whether left or right errors are primary, what is the most important is to criticize and transform the common ideological roots that give rise to both types of errors.

### Social Basis of the Problems

From a Marxist viewpoint ideological conceptions do not just fall from the sky but have social roots, reflecting the outlook of particular classes or social groups. Clearly the origins of the party, and the new communist movement in general, in the youth and student movements, among the radicalized petit-bourgeoisie, has left its imprint. Although many workers joined party ranks, the class composition of the leadership and much of the cadres was petit-bourgeois. The higher the level in the party structure the less workers were to be found. The same can be said for women and oppressed nationalities, especially Quebecois.

There is no question that the social composition of the party leadership and top cadre, largely petit-bourgeois, male and, at the highest level anglophone, reinforced the three chauvinisms. Many of the errors are characteristic of petit-bourgeois ideology: the dogmatism of intellectuals divorced from production and peoples' struggles who seek truth from books, who see their knowledge as capital and the key to a privileged position, a tendency to vacillate between extremes of the left and right, between sectarianism and slick opportunism between activism and pessimism, and so forth. Similarly, the predominance of male cadre and the "male" conception of cadre was a basis for chauvinism in the party/

At the same time it would be a dangerous over-simplification to see the problem as being just the class origin, sex and nationality of the leadership. For example, can we reduce the errors of chauvinism on the Quebec national question to the rule of the "McGill Anglophone clique" when In Struggle, with a predominantly Francophone leadership, held similar if not more chauvinist positions than the WCP? All classes and groups are affected by the dominant ideology of ~~the~~ capitalist society. And furthermore, many of the most serious errors have deep historical roots in the common experience of the international revolutionary movement.

Changing the social composition of the leadership by putting workers, women and oppressed nationalities in the driver's seat is clearly one of the crucial measures that must be adopted to prevent the degeneration of revolutionary parties (discussed in Part II, forthcoming). But it is not enough and by itself will not solve the problem. The most important challenge is to put Marxism-Leninism back in the driver's seat, to root out and transform anti-Marxist conceptions and manifestations of petit-bourgeois and bourgeois ideology, to develop the science of the revolution to make it a powerful weapon in the hands of the oppressed.

### Putting the Mistakes in Perspective

While emphasizing the errors and failures of the WCP in order to draw lessons to avoid the problems in the future, at the same time we should not throw away dialectical materialism and forget to put the mistakes in perspective. First, it is important not to lose sight of what was Marxist in the WCP, as do those people who dismiss it as a "typically Stalinist" organization that just oppressed working people. We believe Stalin's errors must be incisively criticized. But to consider the WCP as plain "Stalinist", to identify Stalin as the source of all evil, and to equate "Stalinism" with Marxism-Leninism - this is tantamount to rejecting Lenin's contributions to Marxism and dumping Marxism itself.

Second, the errors should not be seen as absolutes dominating the party to the same degree at all times. In fact, especially in recent years, dogmatism, sectarianism and economist conceptions were under increasing fire as practice confronted the WCP with the complexities and unanswered questions of revolutionary strategy and criticisms of people we worked with. Comrades in different areas of work began to struggle to correct our errors. This was possible precisely because party members tested theory in the practice of deep involvement in peoples' struggles.

By way of a few examples, we could mention work in the trade union movement where our understanding of the necessity of unity as well as struggle with social-democratic currents in the united front evolved considerably. This permitted party activists to play a very positive role in the workers' movement. In the anti-imperialist, peace and anti-racist movements, and in our work with non-party intellectuals, sectarian orientations were gradually changed. A more open attitude to the independent left (mainly in English Canada) was adopted. The Forge began to reflect different debates with progressives. Changes were in the works and these seeds of a new direction are a solid starting point for the future.

However, these changes in practice were often made despite resistance from the WCP leadership. Struggles may have gone on behind the closed doors of the Political Bureau and the Central Committee, but for far too long the leadership blocked open discussion and a serious sum-up of the criticisms from many members isolated in different areas of work and regions. They failed to lead the party in a frank self-criticism that would have laid the groundwork for a radical break with our errors.

The blockage was particularly acute with respect to criticisms about the conception of the party and internal operation, and the



three chauvinisms. In the months before the crisis broke wide open, the study on socialist democracy and Stalin did fuel questioning of the lack of democracy, monolithic attitude, rhythm of work and so forth among members but significant changes did not occur on these questions before the crisis exploded in the fall of 1982. Criticisms mounted of the party's attitude to the feminist movement and the denial of the problem of male chauvinism in the party. Similarly, criticisms were raised about chauvinist positions on the Quebec national question. At the same time, the leadership was still keeping a lid on things, maintaining in its Political Report (first version) that the WCP was "solid, dynamic and strong". By the time the issues began to be put squarely on the table (with the revised Political Report, Chapter 3) last summer (1982), the problems had been dammed up too long, and they burst out in a torrent of dissatisfaction.

Certainly a lot more remains to be examined concerning the various aspects of the sum-up of the WCP. The points raised are necessarily partial and preliminary. We have concentrated on aspects central to the role of the party, in order to draw some lessons about the type of revolutionary organization we wish to create. But before turning to this question (Part III), it is important to clarify our analysis of what has happened since the crisis unfolded last year and the collapse of the WCP.

### From Crisis to Liquidation

We believe that given the particular errors of the WCP, the general problems of the socialist movement and the stagnation of Marxism, it was inevitable that the crisis would hit the party. These are the basic causes behind the crisis that exploded in the WCP and other ML parties.

However, the causes of the outbreak of the crisis are one thing; what happened since is another. We do not think that the crisis, profound as it is, should necessarily have led to the total collapse of the WCP. We feel that a closer look at the complex dynamic of events since last fall will reveal that the collapse of the WCP was not the unavoidable fate of a "typically Stalinist" party or the inevitable consequence of the crisis in the communist movement, as various people claim.

Some say that our errors were so serious and the crisis of Marxism so earth-shattering that the WCP (and the rest of the communist movement, for that matter) was bound to collapse. We do not agree. Revolutionary parties have made errors whose consequences were far more serious than the WCP's and survived to tell the tale. For example, in the late '20s and early '30s the Chinese Communist Party lost 90% of its members, killed, the disaster brought on by major errors by the Party. The crisis raised fundamental questions about the applicability of Marxism to conditions in feudal and colonial China, questions just as far-reaching as the ones we face today. What prevented the crisis from turning into a total defeat for the Chinese revolution was the response of revolutionaries like Mao Zedong and other party leaders and members. Mao did not blame Marxism for the problems and inadequacies of Chinese revolutionaries, and throw in the towel. In the chaos and widespread disillusionment of the crisis, he fought to analyze and sum up the errors of the party, while

defending what was positive and Marxist in the party's line and practice, thereby spurring the development of Marxism-Leninism to solve the problems of the Chinese revolution. Furthermore, what was equally crucial was that Mao's contribution was not the product of a lone genius. At first he was in the minority and isolated, but he fought with others to build a movement of party members at all levels to overcome the crisis.

The response to the crisis in the WCP was somewhat different, first and foremost that of the leadership. The letter of the Central Committee that triggered the crisis, scapegoating the WCP chairman for all the problems, showed just how little the leadership as a whole understood the crisis. One group around the top leaders of the Political Bureau, who bore the most responsibility for the party's errors, became the major target of criticism and were quickly isolated and discredited. Meanwhile, the reaction of another leadership group around the "CC Caucus" was to quietly abandon Marxism-Leninism and work actively to destroy the party (we say "quietly" because the CC Caucus never publically proclaimed their anti-Marxist line). Under the slogan of "all power to the rank and file", this group manipulated the real problems and legitimate anger of party members to fan confusion and then abandoned ship crying "liquidate the 100% reactionary", "fascist" WCP.

Events since the fall (the Quebec Conference, the Congress, legal suit for \$32,000, etc.) have revealed that this group organized to systematically attack and sabotage efforts by party members to save and rebuild the party. In the early months of the crisis, however, ordinary members like ourselves were in the dark about the struggles within the leadership. All we experienced was a complete breakdown and paralyzation of the party, frustration and chaos that made genuine democratic debate impossible. Powerless and fed up, many members quit, some condemning the WCP while others left because the party had ceased to function.

It is not because so many party members quit that the WCP collapsed. This is the effect and not the cause; no one has the right to blame the victims - rank-and-file members, especially women, workers and Quebecois - whose anger understandably led them to decide to leave. That so many left, among them many comrades who still adhered to Marxism-Leninism is because the consciously opportunist liquidationist current gained the upper hand and were able to propel the crisis to even graver proportions, with no way out in sight.

The Struggle Against Liquidation

In retrospect, many comrades are coming to the understanding that there were big problems with the way we waged the struggle against the liquidationist current. To date the sum-up of this struggle remains rudimentary, but a few points should be raised to further the debate.

The major thrust of opposition to the liquidationist tide was the "Caucus of 75", in which many of us took an active part. The aim of the caucus, to save and transform the party, attracted many members who wanted to halt the slide of the party into oblivion. The strategy was to unite as many people as possible around a "minimum basis of unity", and after this was achieved, then to begin debate on the basic questions raised by the crisis - type of party, Marxism, etc. The strategy turned out to be seriously

flawed.

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First, we overlooked a basic point: that if the goal is to save and transform a Marxist-Leninist party, how can this possibly be achieved if we don't defend the valid tenets of Marxism-Leninism and stand up and demarcate with anti-Marxist ideas that became rampant as the crisis developed? Individuals here and there dared to speak up only to be left to hang on their own and be isolated in the rancorous atmosphere that prevailed at the time. The point is that the crisis seemed so sweeping that we failed to grasp the urgency of bringing together Marxist-Leninists as a group. We finally learned this lesson after the party had been effectively dissolved at the January 1982 Congress.

Second, we failed to understand that it is impossible to build real unity, minimum or otherwise, without struggle and debate. Every time a criticism was raised of some aspect of Marxism or Leninism, instead of debating the issue, we put the question aside to be debated in the future after "unity" had somehow been realized. This is not a Marxist approach. In fact it led to greater and greater concessions to non-Marxist, social democratic conceptions that welled up in reaction to the problems of the WCP. It meant that we never were able to hit the liquidationist current head on and expose it politically as an incorrect reaction to the crisis in the party.

Third, by failing to demarcate clearly with anti-Marxist ideas, we covered up basic differences within the minimum basic caucus (Caucus of 75 - Ed.), with those who were in favour of dissolving the WCP and creating a transitional organization. When we finally broke with our liberalism, formed ML caucuses and began the debates after the Congress, it became increasingly clear that some people, while wishing to remain in some sort of organization to debate the future course, did not want to save and transform a Marxist-Leninist party but wanted to destroy it. In their text, "Pour en finir avec le PCO" (To finish with the WCP - Ed.), the leading lights of the "Proletarian Caucus" in Montreal salute the end of the WCP as a victory. Their only concern is that the ML Caucus is still around to perpetuate the "Stalinist" line of the WCP. They go so far as to compare the WCP and the ML Caucus to the counter-revolutionary party ruling the Soviet Union today. As they put it: "...In the hands of some people, it (Marxism - Ed.) can be transformed into its opposite, like in the USSR, Poland, and here on a reduced scale with the WCP and the defenders of the basic line of the WCP, the ML Caucus." (Our translation)

Underlying the mistakes we made was a confusion about the nature of the struggle. On the one hand, there were the basic causes that precipitated the crisis, the specific errors of the WCP and the general crisis of Marxism and the socialist movement. On the other hand, once the crisis broke, everything was thrown into question including all the basic and valid tenets of Marxism-Leninism. The most acute and immediate danger became the threat of liquidation of Marxism-Leninism itself. To rebuild a revolutionary party, our fundamental and long-term challenge is to develop Marxism and overcome the errors and problems of the past. But it will be impossible to accomplish this difficult task unless we first demarcate from the assorted non-Marxist and reformist conceptions. Otherwise it won't be Marxism we "develop", but a new hybrid of social democracy.

- written by some members of the Sum-up  
Committee.

## ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR ELEMENTS OF A SUM UP...

In any sum up of the WCP, it is important to return and review in what context the organization was founded. Below, we will briefly review the situation in the early 70s when the CCL(ML) was being formed, and attempt to sketch some of the reasons why it was such a break with the past and why it corresponded to a definite need in the left at the time. We concentrate on Quebec.

To begin with, the 60s had seen a tremendous surge in mass progressive movements here in Quebec and around the world which continued into the 70s. Powerful revolutionary liberation struggles with Marxist-Leninists often in leadership roles had surged forward from Cuba to Vietnam to Algeria. They had won world-wide support, led to huge anti-imperialist movements in the Western countries, and had helped reveal the role of the imperialist forces, particularly the USA, but also of the rising superpower, the USSR. In the U.S., the Black power movement had shaken the ruling class.

The women's movement had made tremendous strides world-wide during the period, and the student and youth movement had shaken the advanced capitalist countries, particularly in 1968.

The struggle for socialism and Marxism was growing. Socialist China, for example, had managed to overcome the treason of the Soviet ruling class, and of the traditional CPs in eastern Europe and elsewhere. The cultural revolution and Mao Zedong and the CPC helped inject new life into Marxism-Leninism. From China came ideas on the role of the masses in the struggle for socialism, the ideas on the restoration of capitalism in the USSR and an analysis of modern revisionism, along with the division of the world into three -- ideas based on an application of Marxism to China and the world situation which inspired many a progressive.

In Quebec, the national struggle had seen a tremendous upsurge in the 60s. Progressives popularized the slogan of independence and socialism. Tens of thousands of people were mobilized in struggles such as "L'opération McGill Français" and the battle against Bill 63, which gave free choice to parents in the language of education and which many francophones saw as a further step towards their assimilation. And of course there was the "Front de libération du Québec" (FLQ).

As the 70s got underway the women's movement in Quebec produced publication such as the "Manifeste des femmes Québécoises" and the journal "Québécoises debouttes," to name just a couple.

The early 70s also saw a major radicalization of the workers movement. There was the La Presse strike, the 1972 common front strike, United Aircraft, Canadian Gypsum and Firestone. The three major union centrals produced anti-capitalist manifestos -- "Ne comptons sur nos propres forces" from the CSN, "L'Etat rouage de notre exploitation," from Louis Laberge's QFL, and the CEQ's "L'Ecole au service de la class dominante." Behind this was a resurgence of the push for a "political organization of workers." Left in disarray.

But while there may have been important advances for the mass movements in Quebec and elsewhere during the early 70s, the progressive left at this time was totally unprepared to play its role in the struggles. The left was badly splintered and lacking political unity. Important political questions remained unanswered. The PQ was growing and assuming an hegemonic role in the national movement.

The October crisis in 1970 heralded a period of real crisis and re-appraisal in the Quebec left. Dead end options such as terrorism, reformism and the peaceful road to socialism were dealt powerful blows.

The FLQ was more or less destroyed in the October 1970 events and with it the dream that somehow urban terrorism -- divorced from a mass movement could provide a solution to national and class oppression. Soon after, even Che Guevera went down to defeat in Bolivia.

Reformism and electoralism were smashed by the show of force of the Canadian state in 1970. The Front d'action politique (FRAP), for example, which had tried to pull together progressives on a Montreal-wide level to oppose Drapeau in the 1970 elections with a reformist, electoralist platform (which called for power to the wage earners -- "le pouvoir aux salariés) was destroyed in the events of the fall of 1970 and split into numerous tendencies at its May 1971 congress.

The peaceful road to socialism was hit hard by events such as the tragic overthrow of the social democratic government of Salvador Allende in Chile, where the fascists under Pinochet took control in a bloody CIA-backed coup.

At the same time the question of the PQ was on the agenda -- to give this party critical support and back it in the struggle for independence as some proposed, or to build a new political force which could advance the struggle against national oppression and for socialism. A growing number of progressives saw a real need to link the class and national struggle. (this was combined with a noble desire to unite Quebecois and English Canadian workers in a united struggle for socialism against the common enemy).

Many groups and organizations developed in the period proclaiming to be Marxist, socialism and professing a real desire to draw the lessons of the last period and to break with reformism, terrorism, electoralism and Soviet-style revisionism, all the while breaking the stranglehold of the PQ on the national movement.

These included Comités D'action politiques (Caps) like those in St. Jacques and de Maisonneuve and groups such as APLQ and Mobilisation. It was in 1972 that Charles Gagnon, formerly one of the ideological leaders of the FLQ, produced his "Pour un parti prolétarien" which pronounced in favour of Marxism-Leninism. He went on to found the group In Struggle.

In October 1974, the Mouvement révolutionnaire des étudiants du Québec produced the brochure, "En avant pour la création d'une organisation marxiste-léniniste (Towards the creation of an ML organisation)" A new anti-reformist and anti-revisionist Marxist Leninist movement was beginning.

Soon divisions in the CAPS gave birth to the Cellule Militant Ouvrière and the Cellule Ouvrier révolutionnaire, which eventually joined with the MREQ to form the League.

These Marxist-Leninists realized that there was a crying need to break with the fragmentary situation in the left and to create an organization in which there was political unity and a capacity to orient the struggle and to end the divisive, spontaneous view of advancing towards socialism which had existed. Relying on the experience of the past few years especially and by applying Marxism-Leninism to the situation in Quebec and Canada, the founders of the CCL(ML) were able to provide some important breakthroughs on problems which had gone unanswered for too long.

The idea of a viable workers organization with a relatively clear statement of principles and program, which applied Marxism to the Canadian and Quebec situation and which put forward the need not to revise or reform the Canadian state, but to destroy and build a socialist state in its place, and which had the capacity to unite and orient struggles struck a chord in the divided and disoriented progressive movement and dozens and eventually hundreds of progressives were drawn into the Marxist-Leninist movement.

A democratic-centralist party which had a clandestine wing and placed importance on the question of security also definitely appealed to progressives and workers who had seen what had happened to groups such as the FRAP which underestimated or discounted the role of the bourgeois state. It was clear for people in the left that an organization had to protect its members and sympathizers.

The enthusiasm with which many progressives took up and joined the Marxist-Leninist movement was thus the result of intense debate and political struggle between several political alternatives. The League and eventually the MCP was thus born in a period of upheaval and questioning with the proud objective of advancing the progressive and workers movement towards liberation and socialism. It was a child of the times, with its strengths and weaknesses.

But it was necessary, and it was a step forward. To want to go back to the disorganized and disoriented situation which existed in the early 70s is not a new point of view. Understanding what went wrong with the MCP and correcting and building a new viable M-L force, now that's new.

Jack