

HIGH TIDE

Reg's Working Class Party

Throughout its history there were only a few times when the organisational skeleton of a national ML force was in the making: McCreery in the initial break from the CPGB led the first occasion. With the demise of the CDRCU, it was the launch of the CPB (ML), led by former Communist Party Executive member, Reg Birch that saw the beginnings of a national ML force unchallenged for almost a decade until the late 1970s emergence of the rejuvenated and "bolshevised" Revolutionary Communist League.



For the first half of the decade, it was the CPB (ML) that seemed the most promising organisation to make a political breakthrough. The project initiated by Reg Birch could draw upon a lot of goodwill. Birch, with a pedigree of both trade union and communist activity, offered the chance of gathering the best forces of the ML movement around the standard he had raised. Those who were already disgusted with the inward-looking squabbling, that seemed to dominate the activities of some groups, look forward to the opportunity for serious political work in trade unions and campaigns directed at winning working class support.

Reg Birch was an initial asset to the formation of the CPB (ML) and not without confidence, he announced:

“Small and new as it is on the British political scene the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist Leninist) is the only party which is genuinely a workers' party. It was founded by workers, serves only the working class and is unswervingly committed to the revolutionary task of smashing capitalism and all its institutions so that exploitation can be ended and workers can establish their own socialist state.”¹

He had the initial support of, not only his own engineering base, but also of probably the largest single organised Marxist-Leninist group in the country, the Association of Indian Communist, those Maoists of Indian origin resident in Britain. It was quickly lost when trying to force the issue of transforming a broad-based national minority organisation into an adjunct of the CPB (ML), the support of this experienced cadre group was never again to be aligned to any single Marxist-Leninist organisation.

¹ The Worker June 1970

Even criticism by dissident members would acknowledge that when the party was founded it was undoubtedly Reg Birch who was responsible for the successes such as they were. He played a vital role in attracting other working class communists to support the party. Unfortunately many of these had a too uncritical respect for him, and this combined with other bureaucratic, anti-intellect traits brought with them from the revisionist party allowed a clique to develop around Birch. The London Communist Group was credited with the main responsible for elevating the respect for Birch to the heights of a personality cult.²

The CPB (ML) reflected its leader with similar strengths and weaknesses: basically militant trade unionist, anti-intellectual in temperament and regardless of it professed allegiance to Marxism-Leninism, almost non-ideological, operating with a set of beliefs instead of theoretical analyses and political correction in the light of practice. The theoretical poverty of the organisation was 'well developed' in what was the largest Maoist organisation in Britain. However the Party was not without its share of intellectual talent whose names entered the public arena: 'Bill' William Franklin Ash, the writer, married to Ranjana Sidhanta Ash, freelance lecturer and writer of South Asian literatures, Roy Greenslade, an experienced tabloid news sub before going to Sussex University in 1974, and its share of teachers, Dorothy Birch and lecturers, Fawi Ibrahim at Willesden College of Technology, and the former LSE lecturer Nick Bateson.

At the Party's Second Congress in April 1971, the defining theoretical feature of the organisation was that it argued that there were only two classes in Britain. The "unanimously endorsed" line of the Second Congress of the CPB (ML) was "*The British Working Class and Its Party*". Being good trade unionists, CPB (ML) were likely to endorse a line that struggles "denigrated as 'economic' is as organic and necessary to revolution as the gun", argued that "trade unions poses a serious threat politically and economically to the ruling class...the economic gains of all types of struggles are temporary and in the long run illusory. The true gains are political and consist in the ideological clarity that can be won in such struggles."

Having identified the need for the "ideological development of the working class" there was a problem with the ideas promoted by the CPB (ML) most clearly expressed in its dogged insistence that there were only two classes in Britain. There were no intermediate strata or other insignificant factors to consider. The 'two-class analysis' of the CPB (ML) described the idea of "Middle Class" as a "very convenient fiction". As Chairman Birch would repeatedly stress,

In this most proletarian of countries the intelligentsia (if such a term is even appropriate in the most literate of countries) is proletarian in its conditions of labour even if only newly proletarian in its class practice (and scarcely proletarian at all in its ideological development)."

² See: "*The Absolute Decline' of the Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist*" 1976

Such simplistic assertions came to fruition in the theoretical poverty of arguing that in Britain "the oldest and most proletarianised of capitalist countries, all the intermediate classes left over by feudalism have been absorbed into the proletariat, as has the peasantry."³



Pivotal to the CPB (ML) strategy was the ideas contained- in the pamphlet "*Guerrilla Struggle and the Working Class*". Essentially it took the daily struggles involved in trying to survive economically under capitalism as evidence "that we admit the necessity of moving away".

The line did note that "the most backward aspect of trade unionism is shown in their creation, the Labour Party." Political hostility towards social democracy was an established point of political belief within the CPB (ML). Labour was said to have done nothing "politically but to betray its class origins" The complementary document of the Congress "*Burning Questions for our Party*" with its 'two-class analysis' was said to have "provided the Party's ground for calling on workers to go straight for a working class revolution."

At a time, when at its peak the CPB(ML) numbered a couple of hundred, and the organised Left in Britain was swamped by revisionist and trotskyst forces, there were delusions of grandeur -severe even for the standards of the ML movement. The membership of the CPB (ML) was told:

"All previous revolutions -Russia, China, Vietnam or whatever - will pale in significance. The achievement of a Socialist Britain will transform the world and truly put the seal on this epoch as that of revolution. It is in this light we should look at our Party."⁴

Self-confidence abounds in the young enterprise: November 1971, *The Worker* had a front-paged headline that read: 'USSR 1917, ALBANIA 1944, CHINA 1949, BRITAIN NEXT?'

At a national conference of the CPB (ML) in January 1970, grandiose claims were made by Birch that, "We are the first Party started by the proletariat, however few.... Our paper 'The Worker' is sought out by every Marxist-Leninist Party in the world and our party enjoys relations of fraternal equality with China and Albania."⁵

One-time Party member, Alexei Sayle has other recollections of *The Worker*:

³The British Working Class and Its Party :11

⁴ The Party In The Present Situation 1976

⁵ The Worker, February 1970

My wife (also a party member) used to try and reduce her enormous pile of papers by giving one each to her mother, father, brother and the cat, muttering that she'd put the three pence each in for them and they could pay her back sometime – they'd have nothing to do with this arrangement and each fortnight a violent scuffle would break out in the family's flat as they struggled to stuff the papers back on to her resisting form. (The cat would have kept and read his copy but he had serious disagreements with the party line on the neo-Syndicalists of Italy.)⁶

Jung Chang relates in her memoirs that sold millions of copies that:

No foreign publications were available except *The Worker*, the paper of the minuscule Maoist Communist Party of Britain, and even this was locked up in a special room. I remember the thrill of being given permission once, just once, to look at a copy. My excitement wilted when my eyes fell on the front-page article echoing the campaign to criticize Confucius. As I was sitting there nonplussed, a lecturer whom I liked walked past and said with a smile, 'That paper is probably read only in China.'⁷

A Conference on The Worker held in May 1970, set out the perspective that “we start where the workers of Britain are now in order to be able to communicate with them at all. We want to get to the dictatorship of the proletariat. But to set up goals without showing how they can be reached through the day-to-day-struggle, to use revolutionary language with no intention of beginning our revolutionary practice here and now in relation to the current situation is neo-revisionism”

As an organisation, the CPB (ML) never produced a theoretical journal but continued to issue a 'written by workers' paper, *The Worker*, on a monthly basis, sometime edited by Bill Ashe. So although nationally organised, led by a leading trade union leader, and having a workplace base in the engineering union, it suffered from being guided by a chauvinistic political line that made it impotent in terms of going beyond the dominant Labourist ideology of trade unionism.

The trade unions as “schools for revolutionaries” were to focus all the activities and resources of the organisation in a determined effort to be good class fighters in trade unions, "organs of mass struggle". "The Party and the Trade Unions", adopted at the 4th Congress was emphatic: “There must be an unqualified acceptance that the class struggle is waged most effectively, solely so, through the trade unions who are the most advanced section of their class.”⁸

The CPB (ML) along with many other sections of the Left in Britain, saw workers voting for revolutionaries as shop stewards etc. as a conscious revolutionary

⁶ *The Observer Magazine* Sunday March 6 1994 p50

⁷ *Wild Swans* (Flamingo 1993) p621

⁸ An internal CPB (ML) document.

choice (rather than the fact that they might be good negotiators etc.) but explained away the predominance of right-wing, social democratic union leaders and full-time officials as if they did not truly represent the sentiments of a rank-and-file supposedly held back by the manipulation of these misleaders.

The organisation set as its task as: "nothing less than to change the ideology of our class; all it lacks is its own ideology, our task is to remove the confusion of thought which alone has held back the British working class for so long" .⁹

The relationship of unions to traditional marxist teachings on the subject were discussed in an editorial of The Worker of September 13th, 1979: It spelt out the view that Lenin's conclusion that "class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside the economic struggle" was the result of the immature development of the organised working class in Russia. It had not sufficiently well developed, said the CPB (ML), to generate revolutionary theory out of its own daily experience of class struggle, whereas "" Over 200 years of class struggle have given British workers a tradition of organisation, democracy, discipline, knowledge, an accumulated experience, all this the property of their mass organisation." ¹⁰

From its origins, the CPB (ML) held to a one-sided assessment that rejected Lenin and Engels before him, in relation to their observations about the effect of imperialism upon the working class in Britain. As the RCLB observed:

As early as 1971 (The British Working Class and its Party – adopted at 2nd Congress) the CPBML was not simply ignoring the revolutionary struggles of the Third World (in a 9 page document neither the Third World nor the anti-racist struggles nor the struggle in Ireland are so much as mentioned), they were revising Leninist theories of Imperialism in order to do so ¹¹

The blinkered view that defined white-collar workers, Professionals, teachers, policemen and such like as "workers" was achieved by isolating one factor, that there are those who sell their labour power and those who exploit the labour of others, from all other considerations. As for the national minority people in Britain, it regarded them as 'immigrant workers' whose most obvious positive feature is of course their class position as workers."¹² As a class analysis to guide revolutionaries it had no value, not simply because it did not correspond to the actual class structure or experience of Britain, but because it could not identify who were your friends, and who your enemies. It map out no strategy for revolution by identifying the priority areas of work; if all were workers then a trade dispute by journalists was on an equal level to that in Fords Motor Company: both were groups of workers struggling, the only possible difference in

⁹ An internal document of the CPB (ML), 'Dialectics' 1976

¹⁰ The Worker April 26th 1979

¹¹ Eurocentrism, the 'key link' in theoretical work, October No.3 Summer 1985

¹² CPBML Party School Document 1972

the CPB (ML) analysis would be the matter of size -which action would mobilise the most workers?

A critique by the Communist Workers Movement observed that:

the 'two class' line is notable as the one question on which it has attempted to justify theoretically one of its stands in its publications - perhaps an indication of the importance it attaches to this and of the opposition it has encountered in putting its line on classes forward. This was done in 'The Definitive Statement on the Internal Polemic: 1972-74'... Other attempts to justify this line appear in various other publications of the CPB (ML), mostly in passing, notably in 'White Collar -A Myth Destroyed, A Class Made Stronger' and 'Students Into Class Struggle'.¹³

The CWM critique cites the carefully selected references strung together to justify the assertion of the two class line and selecting quotations for support. As the CWM's demolition job on the metaphysics of the CPB (ML) pointed out:

The 'two-class' line was attractive to intellectuals who wanted socialism and wanted to identify with the working class, but who didn't want to remould their ideology or challenges their life style the Birch party just panders to these weaknesses.

Rather than transform their ideology and class stand, they save themselves the trouble by 'transforming' the working class so that it includes themselves! Its small wonder that they think it's 'reactionary' to talk of a 'middle class', and that Lenin was wrong about the Labour aristocracy!¹⁴

The CUA ML knew their Lenin better and ideologically demolished the economism of Birch's politics partly by reference to Lenin's own polemical struggle against Martynov, one of the Russian economists. Indeed, the conclusion drawn was that for the CPB (ML) to speak of economic struggle "as organic to revolution as" equivalent to armed political struggle clearly expresses a militant trade unionism but not in essence a revolutionary one.

...a political party which is content to tail behind spontaneous trade union politics is far from being a revolutionary party.¹⁵

It was a judgement widely shared within the Marxist-Leninist movement in Britain, and proven too often for the Party to offer much of a challenge as a "pole of attraction" for revolutionaries.

Most Marxist-Leninists groups, regardless of size, attempted to establish a theoretical publication to explain and promote their politics. What permeated

¹³ *The C.P.B. (M-L) - A New Revisionism*. CWM Internal document 1977

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ CUA (ML). *Economism or Revolution? A Critique of the Communist Party of Britain (ML) 1973*: 9

the consciousness of Britain's Maoists was the subjective emphasis in much of the Maoist propaganda that came from China in the throes of the Cultural Revolution. The concept of struggle to construct a new unity that would then be subject to self-criticism and struggle was one common in maoist circles, polemical interventions and a lively intellectual life was almost constant but :

“ Because the CPB(ML) has a complete contempt for ideological and political line it also refuses to criticise the lines of other communist organisations and indeed even to recognise their existence.”¹⁶

As far as the CPB (ML) leadership was concerned such ideological interventions and struggles were not necessary; the Party of the class had been born, the strategic line of “guerrilla struggle” lay down and it was the duty of others to rally to the standard.

¹⁶ Stockport Communist Group. The Way Forward in Re-building the Communist Party. Sept 1979: 10

1974 -- A revolutionary conjunction?



AUEW demonstration in 1973 against the Industrial Relations Act, Tower Hill, London, addressed by Reg Birch.

The early 1970s were a time of heightened class struggle that raised for some the possibility of a developing revolutionary situation. That assessment was widely held on the Left -and in the light of the revelations around the 'Wilson Plot' by disgruntled MI5 officers (Peter Wright et al.) some on the political Right thought likewise. There had been an intense union struggle against "In Place of Strife" and the Industrial Relations Act between 1968 and 1974, the Miners' Strike and implementation of a three-day working week that broke the conservative government led by Edward Heath. The AUEW had often been in the fore-front of industrial protest, having been threatened with union funds being sequestered by the courts in 1974. The CPB (ML) had issued the warning that the Industrial Relations Act was

"... a major step in the move from bourgeois democracy to the corporate state. It is a step dictated by the weakness of British capitalism, not by its strength. But that the ruling class would consider so rash a step is also proof that the trade unions have been failing the working class. They have been content to live with capitalism. They have tried to stand still and have inevitably been pushed back. They have betrayed the Tolpuddle martyrs and all the other workers who have fought and suffered for the realisation of working class strength through organisation.

Now the truce is over. We in the CPB (ML) welcome the forthcoming struggle. Neither we nor the workers whose party we are have ever feared conflict."¹⁷

In 1974 the CPB (ML) reflected this mood and campaigned against working class participation in a General Election on the slogan 'Don't Vote -Prepare for Revolution'. The CPB (ML) later proclaimed that "the ignorance and social democracy of the class are the chief negatives, indeed the only reason for the continued existence of capitalism. "¹⁸

Revolutionary ideology was conceived as resulting from the lived experience of capitalism itself as the political line of the CPB (ML), its very essence, was that revolutionary class consciousness would develop out of the economic struggle that workers faced daily: "We are a land of perpetual and all pervasive corruption because of the capitalism which is even in our own mind as social democracy...Although the working class espouses social democracy it does not believe in it. It uses social democracy as a coward's castle. They are advanced enough to be so cunning. "¹⁹

Birch's belief, that British workers had an unmatched record of persistence in struggle and of manoeuvre without surrender, was shared throughout the organisation. There was a consistent, even if flawed and self serving perspective promoted by the CPB(ML) with regard to working class struggles:

"It is no accident," began an editorial from The Worker in January 1973, " that the engineers, who most consistently applied in their conflict with the employers the tactics of guerrilla struggle as formulated by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist Leninist) should have provided the strongest political resistance, on behalf of the entire working class, to the corporatisation, of the state. Nor is it a coincidence that in this union leadership, which aroused engineers to factory-based actions all over the country and brought half a million engineers into industrial action by stating that workers would not stand idly by while their funds were raided by the bosses court, there is a marxist leninist member of the Executive, Reg Birch, Chairman of the CPB (ML)"

¹⁷ *The Worker*, "Kill the Bill – Smash Capitalism!", December 1970

¹⁸ Congress '76 :16

¹⁹ *The Worker*. July 30th 1975

The CPB (ML) milked Birch's union position to bolster its own claims to be the party of the working class. In the engineers struggle it saw "a model for British workers in the coming year of struggle." thanks to the "example of a marxist leninist lead" provided by Reg Birch.²⁰ Years earlier, at the 1967 TUC Congress in Brighton, a telegram arrived addressed to 'Red Birch'. His visits to Albania and China that year, and their tacit endorsement, and the proletarian character of the BMLO and CPB (ML) based on North London engineering workers led others to think likewise. It was a position long held by Birch and his supporters:

Birch's 1966 address for election to the post of Executive Councilman for Division No. 7 said, "the high standard of integrity of our members, their militancy and courage has ensured that we the AEU have led the working class in Britain." He continued, "the prosperity and stable economy of this country depends on engineers. British engineers are second to none. If we are not to fall behind, not to become a third rate 'tourist' country, we as a union must ensure that this skill, this labour, is used efficiently, economically and rewardingly. Only thus as a nation will we survive. The new industrial revolution to bring real prosperity to the working class can only be won by you brothers and sisters."²¹

In accordance with custom and practice, Reg Birch, being the senior member of the AUEW Executive Council was nominated in September 1975 to serve on the TUC General Council. The Times noted at the time of his nomination that Reg was "well known for his sardonic sense of humour, he is the engineers' negotiator in a number of important industries and was prominent in leading the 1971 Ford Strike."²² Birch was secretary of the Ford National Joint Negotiating Committee. Birch was again to gain national prominence during the strike at Heathrow during 1977 when he attempted to get the strikers back to work.

The *Daily Telegraph's* chief industrial correspondent, Blake Baker recalled that "for many years some commentators have depicted him as a dangerous revolutionary, leader of Britain's Maoists, a visitor to Peking and Albania. Those who know Reg well hold him in general affection, and know differently. They also have a very high opinion of his intellectual quality and negotiating abilities, also his honesty. Something of a maverick, Reg's negotiating abilities have been gladly acknowledged by employers desperate for a break in the deadlock."²³

From its inception the CPB (ML) had a narrow philistine grasp on the importance of class that restricted it to the level of militant trade unionism. The whole approach was workerist investing the class as a whole with redeeming virtues that belittle the serious task of a scientific understanding of class relations. The Birch-led Party failed to acknowledge that such a task was necessary: the two-class line of the CPB (ML) had frozen class structure in Britain into them and us.

²⁰ The Worker January 25th 1973

²¹ WORKERS, MAY 2010 ISSUE

²² The Times 25.June 1975

²³ The Far Left. Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1981 p90

The CPB (ML) held to a non-dialectical assessment of the role and nature of trade unions within capitalist production, and maintained a faulty appreciation of the need to bring revolutionary politics to the working class. They had a chauvinistic rather than Leninist understanding that would not go beyond the thought that trade unions were essential "agents of the board day-to-day struggle to defend class interests."²⁴

What the CPB (ML) sought to draw out of the daily economic struggle was "the conscious recognition by all of belonging to the working class and of the necessity of the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism."²⁵

The CPB (ML) had no strategy of injecting revolutionary politics into the working class through campaigns and demands outside of the factory, the organisation recognised class struggle in one dimension, as if the working class had no struggle to wage outside of where they work, or could be mobilised on demands other than those directly related to their work experience. This approach was modified in the wake of the attacks on the institutions of the welfare state in the 1980s but too late to revive the organisation.

The CPB (ML), by limiting activity to the economic arena, failed to challenge the very bourgeois ideologies that it said held back the class. Social democracy was a creation of the trade union experience transposed to the parliamentary scene. Quite clearly it did provide short-term material gains that had a disproportionate effect on the life experience of working class people, thus the identification of the Labour Party as the 'mass party' of the working class. To challenge that idea, and the well entrenched organisational structures, on its own terrain -in the unions -without the additional ammunition provided- by broader campaigning on issues of anti-imperialism, racism and women's liberation struggles to expose the Labour Party's position, and undermine the appeal of social democracy was not undertaken by the CPB(ML).

Many outside of the CPB (ML) opposed to the CPB (ML)'s line often focused on its economism that coloured its theory.²⁶ Former members observed:

The CPB (ML) claimed to be the party of the working class was rightly ridiculed as the decline in the proportion of industrial members coexisted with a rise in the proportion of students. Of the claim that the CPB(ML)'s newspaper, *The Worker*, was written 'by workers, for workers', the CWM observed: it could be written by lawyers, soldiers, Home Office officials or the TUC General Council and according to the Birchites' class analysis it would still be written by workers !²⁷

²⁴ *The Worker* January 30th 1975

²⁵ *The Worker* January 16th 1975

²⁶ See: Communist Unity Association (ML)'s pamphlet 'Economism or Revolution' 2nd ed 1973 and the initially internal criticism of the breakaway Communist Workers Movement, 'The "Absolute" Decline of the CPB (ML)' 1976.

²⁷ *The C.P.B. (M-L) - A New Revisionism*. CWM Internal document 1977

In the light of the desire to put Britain next on the revolutionary agenda, the Finsbury Communist Association observed that about a hundred people had (in 1971) attended a public meeting to hear, Dorothy Birch, a leading CPB (ML) member report on a trip to China. FCA asked:

“Where is the industrial base that Birch boasts of? Six years ago we were told that it consisted of 70 engineers. Then that there were 50 engineers and then that no less than 30 engineers had actually attended a meeting.”²⁸

The CPB (ML) operated secretly, from its inception the CPBML consider they were waging an underground "guerrilla war" against British capitalism, but using industrial struggle in place of armed struggle. According to the estimate of one expelled grouping, it had "a maximum of around 300 members in the mid-70s" and judged it to "have made no discernible impact on the working class."²⁹ It did have a national presence, running four bookshops, and they could stage public events (at Conway Hall in central London) that gave the impression, even in the early 1990s, of being hundreds rather than tens. They were entrenched within the Trades Councils, successful in securing high up union positions for their members or very close sympathisers in British trade unions. Even when long associated with the party, such as Fawzi Ibrahim, they did not declare their political affiliations when standing for union positions, including executive leadership posts in the teaching and civil servant unions. This was also true of its activity in Student politics in the 1970s/80s when its activists stood as "independents" elected as Student Union Presidents (e.g. Polytechnic of Central London - Clare Bullock - and Middlesex Polytechnic – Ruth Ben-Tovim) .

The CUA (ML) was unstinting in its condemnation of the CPB (ML)'s political activity:

In fact, the CPB (M-L), after restricting the struggle to the trades Unions, promotes a sell-out line in trade union struggles themselves. Obviously conditions often demand limited action, and it is incorrect to court massive defeats in ill-prepared or premature mass strikes. But the CPB (M-L) trade unionists glorify such defensive, unfortunately weak, actions as offensives, and consistently adopt an opportunist policy of tailing behind spontaneous actions. They have no communist policy of leading struggles, particularly the struggle against the labour aristocrat bureaucracy in the trade unions and their social-democratic or revisionist influence.³⁰

The CPB(ML) for much of its effective existence superficially saw the need to cut away from the spider's web of social democracy, it demanded an ideological rejection and ending of support for the Labour Party, but could only offer the alternative of "taking your place in the class struggle along side us, the CPB(ML)".

²⁸ Finsbury Communist 83, December 1971

²⁹ Nottingham Communist Group. *Red Star* No.4 October 1980:6

³⁰ Communist Unity Association (Marxist-Leninist), *Imperialism and the Struggle for a Revolutionary Party* (1974)

Its blinkered view that a political left was non-existent was a fatal flaw in the attempt to relate to, and arouse class forces. The CPB (ML) would not give any supportive recognition to any non-trade union movement it did not influence, and as the policies of the largest ML organisation in the 1970s was against such broad movements, they find no place within the pages of The Worker or the politics of the CPB (ML). This isolationist stance cut off the CPB (ML) from the transmission belts for recruitment that the boarder campaigns provided, and contributed to its decline. At a time when the economic attack on the working class -an attack began by the Labour government of the mid-1970s -went beyond factory closures and had a political dimension in wider society, the CPB(ML) had no notion of alliance-building, drawing together other forces.

On the 7th anniversary of the founding of the CPB (ML), the editorial of The Worker declared:

“Revolution, the only alternative to everlasting wage slavery, has been put into the perspective of the working class as a practical possibility. The CPB (ML) makes it a practical possibility by formulating for the working class a revolutionary line -that is to say, a concentration in, theoretical form of the world wide experiences of workers in revolutionary struggle to be applied to the specific conditions of Britain... ..The revolutionary line shows at once why the fight for better pay and jobs is not enough and also how that daily fight as the recruitment and training ground for our class forces is linked to the revolutionary overthrow of the system that exploits us.

The CPB (ML) has made a study of the Capitalist crisis and its real cause. We, the working class, are the ultimate cause of crisis. Our fight to defend what we have gained through concerted struggle over pay and conditions and trade union organisation... ”³¹

1976- Absolute Decline

“We remain here in our island home which we must defend against all invaders, whether they come in military or financial guise ...Now that the bourgeoisie have no further use for British nationalism it is for us workers who have developed it down the centuries to liberate it, to liberate that spirit of Britain which is the genius, skill, courage, intelligence and imitative of the working people of Britain.”³²

The CPB (ML) had a psuedo-Churchillian tone to its pronouncements, fond of reflecting that Britain possessed the oldest working class. This line of reasoning

³¹ The Worker April 17th 1975

³² The Worker June 26th 1975

was developed to argue that because Britain was the first capitalist country it is the locus, in capitalism's general decline, of its gravest internal contradictions³³

"The crisis of World Capitalism is absolute - absolute decline"³⁴ proclaimed the CPB (ML)'s at its Fourth Party Congress held at Easter 1976; its conclusion was that: "the ruling class seeks our destruction because they have proved incapable of living with us. Fear impels them to act."³⁵

The theme dominates the politics of the CPB (ML) from, 1975 onwards: the belief that the capitalist ruling class was showing itself willing to destroy Britain in order to destroy the organised working class. "What Hitler could not force on the British their absorption in a vast European political and economic cartel, the British capitalist have treacherously brought about themselves."³⁶ Thus the CPB(ML)'s anti-Common Market campaign of 1975 characterised the European Community as a conspiracy against the working class in Britain:

"By collaborating with the European governments, they hope to dissipate and contain the militancy of British workers which the employers have found increasingly difficult to contain on a purely national basis."³⁷

Such a perspective, in an analysis reeking of chauvinism, was not a short step from a nationalist stance of a calling for import controls to defend British workers. It demonstrated that the lack of theoretical understanding within the CPB (ML) leadership meant the organisation acted without an understanding of trends and problems within the imperialist world system.

The distinctive politics of the CPB (ML) was encapsulated in three editorials that appeared in The Worker in 1975. The New Year editorial proclaimed "1975 – A CRITICAL YEAR FOR THE WORKING CLASS". The normal pride in the class was tinged with frustrated exasperation:

Workers in Britain have the longest history of resistance to capitalist exploitation. They have not hesitated to take on the government itself when it has customarily intervened on behalf of employers. They have an unmatched record of persistence in struggle and of manoeuvre without surrender. And yet, in spite of this, as long as they fight within the capitalist arena according to capitalist rules, they cannot prevent crises nor can they maintain their hard-won standard of living when crises occur. They can even find themselves, due to the particular incompetence of ruling class and government in Britain falling behind fellow workers elsewhere who are less well-organised and less wise in the ways of class struggle.³⁸

³³ The Worker January 24th 1977

³⁴ The Worker May 3rd 1976

³⁵ The Worker May 3rd 1976

³⁶ The Worker June 12th 1975

³⁷ The Worker May 29th 1975

³⁸ The Worker No.1 January 16th 1975

The organisation, little more than six years old had established a political touchstone expounded upon in a presentation by Party founder-Chairman Reg Birch published as "The British Revolution". The options were clear – the political analysis of the leadership provided the perspective ahead; it was capitalism in crisis and since bourgeois democracy requires a two-party system, now that there is only one we can see the extent of the decay. From this situation can only emerge two political forms -a triumphant working class led by the CPB (ML) or fascism.³⁹

In an editorial proclaiming, CPB (ML) – FOR AN INDEPENDENT BRITAIN, argued that:

"Nationalism is older than capitalism. It is the essential genius of working people who in a particular place over a considerable period of time have developed their peculiar skills and arts for the enrichment of life both materially and spiritually. The bourgeoisie used this nationalism to build their capitalist nation state -just as they used working people to defeat feudalism and then disenfranchised them. Now that the bourgeoisie have no further use for British nationalism it is for us workers who have developed it down the centuries to liberate it, to liberate that spirit of Britain which is the genius, skill, courage, intelligence and initiative of the working people of Britain."⁴⁰

Other fallacious positions were based on equally faulty allusion as when, speaking in 1976, Birch observed: "The situation in Britain is very reminiscent of the Weimar Republic before Hitler."⁴¹ The social tensions within Britain were not so acute as to split society into armed fractions contesting for street power; the British state maintained its control, and the occasional eruption like Lewisham in the following year (1977) was not the sustained daily contest of the late Weimar period. The social conflict did not have the intensity of Chile a few years earlier. The fractious Left in Britain was hardly organised for a sustained offensive. But the CPB (ML) led by Reg Birch did reflect a perspective that heightened class struggle, the contest for power, was seen building since the 1971 Industrial Relations Act, miners' strike and three day week of 1973. The headlines in 'The Worker' saw Britain heading for a fracture point.

The apoplectic de-industrialisation of Britain, accompanied by attacks on trade unions and living standards of the working class informed the political propaganda from the 4th Congress onwards. Increasingly the rhetoric was turned up as Britain was regarded as in a period of absolute decline. This was a message reiterated relentlessly over the coming years: in a speech in December 1979, Birch explained:

"In the general decline of capitalism, Britain, as the oldest and first, is the first to be in an accelerated decline. This means that all the problems sharper than

³⁹The Worker No.14 July 30th 1975

⁴⁰The Worker No.12 Jun 26th 1975

⁴¹The Worker No.24 December 20th 1976

almost anywhere else, are thrust upon our working class. The reforms achieved in the development of capitalism as a quid pro quo cannot be sustained in a period of absolute decline. It is not just that capitalism is declining but also that which it created and is also its mother and father, bourgeois democracy, is fast disappearing.”⁴²

The Party had warned that the “alternative is corporatism, fascism counter-revolution. We cannot go back to a relatively democratic bourgeois rule with occasional crises.”⁴³

As the ruling capitalists were regarded as unpatriotic, then every struggle against factory closure took on for the CPB (ML) the character of a struggle for national liberation against an international monopoly-capitalism dominated by the US: “In fighting for themselves, workers are also fighting for Britain as a political entity which the ruling class has abandoned.”

This position was not informed by any recognition of the existence of national minorities and a multi-national working class, let alone consideration of questions of three nations contained in one British state structure. Such considerations would be condemned as anti-working class, and the CPB (ML) indeed argued against devolution in the late 1970s as a step to the break-up of the British working class.

Initially, the CPB (ML) shared the almost unanimous view on the revolutionary left in the mid-1970s that the main danger laid in a Labour-inspired corporate state. A very stark vision of the future was held by the Party in which disaffection with the parliamentary parties might provide a breeding ground for fascism - unless the working class went on the offensive.

“Our Party, the only party of the working class, comes of age at a time when the Labour Movement is in process of awesome and dangerous change....Must our battle-scarred class after all its toil-worn history be left to starve among a pile of ruins. The "now" of the revolution must be put in the sharpest way”⁴⁴

In assessing the contemporary situation, Birch pointed out that a counter-revolution had already begun “with the consent of the masses of the people, led by social democracy and the Labour Government.”⁴⁵

He continued in a stream of deluded consciousness that called upon trade unionists to oust “those elements seeking to blunt and pervert them into instruments of class collaboration and capitalism.” Speaking of the civil disorder warned against by the Labour administration of the time “ Birch said:

⁴² The Worker No.47 December 6th 1979

⁴³ The Worker No.24 December 20th 1976

⁴⁴ The Worker May 3rd 1976

⁴⁵ The Worker October 28th 1976

"Let us see to it that those 'riots in the streets' make it impossible for them to go on exploiting us. Let us remember that we are the ones who made the guns. We must make sure that they are pointed in the right direction. The army consists of 'squaddies' too."⁴⁶

Nine months later the CPB (ML) were calling for workers to "Direct All Struggle To Revolution."⁴⁷ This was a hollow call, it was grossly premature bearing no relation to the level of struggle in the country and the CPB (ML) did not possess or advocate a strategic line of advance.

The economic crisis was taken as the opportunity to restructure British industry, cutting back on the traditional heavy industrial sectors and reinvest elsewhere, against a background of rising unemployment that undercut trade union influence and power, these "schools of revolution" rooted in, what Birch described as, "the revolutionary understanding that at this stage of working class struggle we have no other organisations for defence or attack but our unions."⁴⁸

In the euphoria of the rejection of the Labour government/ TUC agreement, the wage restraint of the "Social Contract", the CPB (ML)'s advice to reject social democracy was taken by the Party's leadership to be a sufficient rallying call. It had been saying the same thing since the Party's formation in 1968. Since that time, the absence of any revolutionary analysis that bore a direct relationship to the material reality of British society meant that such a call was mere posturing. Disregarding the fallacy that an organisation declining in numbers, and shortly to lose three branches in a major split, regarded itself as the "only" working class party by defining the petty bourgeois intelligentsia as 'working class', the CPB(ML) set itself the revolutionary task of destroying the Labour government and, with it of destroying capitalism. "We owe no loyalty to those whose own loyalty is to our enemies, monopoly capitalism."⁴⁹

The CPB (ML)'s two-class analysis wrote out of existence any concept of a 'labour aristocracy' or intermediate strata that would defend collective bargaining without regarding it, as did the CPB (ML), as a commitment to a revolutionary perspective. The obsession with trade unions was such that one reader, echoing the line of The Worker, stated at a time of fast growing fascist movement in the 1970s: "If racist thugs threaten to intimidate our class brothers we shall use trade union discipline as our means of dealing with them."⁵⁰ Far from following Maoist dictums to strategically despise but tactically take serious the threat, the opportunity to make contact with the thousands mobilised by the anti-racist struggle and Anti-Nazi League was never undertaken by the CPB (ML) who acted in the spirit that Brecht wrote of Hitler: "Do not rejoice in his defeat for the Bitch that bred him is still on heat." (Arturo Ui)

⁴⁶ The Worker October 28th 1976

⁴⁷ The Worker August 29th 1977

⁴⁸ The Worker September 26th 1977

⁴⁹ The Worker September 5th 1976

⁵⁰ The Worker October 22th 1977

The Party's Chairman's contribution, entitled "The British Revolution" held on July 4th 1975, argued that there were only two possibilities - a triumphant working class led by the CPB (ML) or fascism. In impeccable logic, as the Party had declared a revolutionary situation in 1974, then failure would be because of the success of counter-revolution. The almost exclusive attention given to trade union activity meant there were few reserves, in the CPB(ML)'s understanding to call upon; if the unions were beaten, then following the logic of the Party the class was beaten.

The Fourth Congress, Ian Williams and the founding of the CWM

" The Party is forging a unique style which sets us apart from all other political' bodies - a positive defined by a series of negatives: no broad fronts, no 'YCL', no quotation as substitute for thought, no personalities, no martyrs, no press or TV splashes, no pouncing on the Party, no debts or debtors. Anything less is unworthy of the class."⁵¹

That description, delivered with a sense of pride, was given at the 4th Congress of the CPB (ML) held in 1976. From its London origins, the CPB (ML) established branches throughout the country but it was a much centralised structure. In the 1970s a directive went out from the Party Centre (Bellman Books) that no propaganda, not even a leaflet advertising a local meeting, should be produced in the name of the party without prior approval by the Secretariat – the CPB (ML)'s day-to-day controlling body. And under no circumstances was any propaganda on Ireland to be issued without Secretariat's expressed permission; although unadulterated reprints from the 1974 CPB (ML)'s pamphlet "Ireland -One Nation" was allowed

The extent of central control was evident in a C.C. member's description that "maturity comes when the branch is so close to the line that it can act independently" until that time, the branches were expected to do what they were told. . Earlier in the year, the CPB (ML) had made a reference to the relatively late start of its political renewal amidst the revisionist challenge:

The background of the emergence of our Communist Party of Britain (ML) was a furore of international and internal polemic. Here in Britain it was late beginning mostly because of a long improper understanding of the meaning of democratic centralism.⁵²

⁵¹ CPB (ML) Internal Document 'Notes on Organisation and Party Growth' point 5

⁵² The Worker May 3rd 1976

When Liverpool branch tried to raise the question of a local member's suspension from the Central Committee, they were told by the Secretariat that "the branch is not called upon to discuss such matters."

The characteristics that had come to dominate the inner workings of the CPB (ML) were a crass and distorted concept of (voluntary) discipline and the abuse of member's political commitment. The leadership, in their warped operation on exercising leadership, stifled initiative and autonomous life of the branches in the name, but not spirit of leninism. As Manchanda , before Williams, observe that within Birch's organisation, there was a tendency to curtail any push to raise political and ideological issues, and not just those thought contentious : "To clamp down political discussion, the old revisionist adage has been repeated, "Our industrial comrades get bored with political discussions."⁵³

The leadership took the ludicrous; position that nobody could leave the Party without their say-so. So if a member "drifts away", the 'Branch "will not allow him to cease membership even if he so wishes. In such a case they may have to grant leave of absence and keep the situation, under review."⁵⁴

At the 4th Congress of the CPB (ML) in 1976, Secretariat member Ian Williams voted against adopted of the Congress resolution and was threatened with suspension unless he "recanted". He had strong credentials as a pole of attraction for those wary of the direction and politics of the organisation: as executive member of the National Union of Railway workers and firmly based in Liverpool, Williams commanded respect. As an YCL member he had broke with the Communist Party then he had led a Merseyside Communist group into the CPB (ML). He had been on the party's delegation to China as "a callow 21-year-old".⁵⁵ He had an impressive political pedigree, a Central Committee member offering the possibility of an alternative leadership within (and outside) the CPB (ML).

The suspension of Ian Williams came when he voted against the Congress document. He was asked by Party Chairman, Reg Birch to recant. Williams stood firm against the pressure of the London-based Party Centre to accept and promote in full the line. In a letter to Reg Birch (dated July 6th 1976) he wrote:

". . . I accept the line but consider the Congress document to be a hopelessly inadequate exposition of that line. As a communist it would be shameful to expect me to change my position as a result of threats or pressure.

Similarly my vote at congress, which was a direct result of your advice as Chairman that "any reservation whatsoever" should preclude voting for it. .. I am not aware that the Party has been called upon to vote again on the document therefore I see no way in which I can now vote for it even if my principles allowed. "

⁵³ Memorandum February 24 1968 . RMLCL Proletarian Line (1977): 24

⁵⁴ C.P.B (ML) Internal document "Notes on Organisation and Party Growth 1976 p14

⁵⁵ Ian Williams , The night Zhou was drunk under the table
<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/KJ02Ad01.html> Oct 2 2009

According to an anonymous dissident account of the 4th Congress, the Congress document was "unaltered in not one jot" after 100+ speeches pre-Congress and at the Congress. By accepting the document, the Party leadership --elected as a list, not individually submitted for re-election --who produced the document had to be accepted. The assessment notes: "This is now the third time that precisely the same 'old soldiers' etc, have been allowed to re-appointed themselves."

The solidly entrenched leadership team around Reg Birch was named as Nick Bateson (who Birch had singled out for praise as "our organiser") John Heywood, Fawji Ibrahim, Gill Dawson, Keith Turner, Dave Blundell and Mike Johnson. Long standing C.C. member John Hannington had been unceremoniously dumped from the leadership.

Nick Bateson had, at a C.C. meeting, said that the CPB (ML) was going to be the first genuinely monolithic party in the world. In the internal critique of the party circulated by those in the three branches that reconstituted themselves as the Communist Workers Movement, pointed out that Bateson "may well be right -a monolith is a block of stone which has remained in the same place for years, ungrowing, unmoving and unchanging except for the effects of erosion. This is the most accurate description of Bateson and his colleagues at the centre."⁵⁶

The Central Committee of the CPB (ML) was expected to meet at least six times a year, with the responsibility invested in the Secretariat for the running of the organisation. It was a declared principle that the C.C. would not tolerate "deviation once a decision is made (not even in silence)." Williams took exception to a concept of democratic centralism, which he described as, taking "unanimity as a condition of party membership, especially a unanimity which is enforced by such unconstitutional and undemocratic methods..." Ian Williams concluded his letter to the party chairman with an indictment of the deadened grip of bureaucratic homogeneity:

"I am a communist, a member of the CC of CPBML, not a jesuit up before the general for heresy. You will remember that Galileo 'recanted' and afterwards said, 'but it still moves'

I will not abandon the principles I arrived at as a communist for any position the worth of which would be devalued by that very dereliction of principle."

This proved the impetus for a split in the CPB (ML): There was never any public explanation by the CPB (ML) of the loss of Liverpool, Birmingham and Coventry branches or the issues involved in the split. Like the previous loss in 1975 of eight Nottingham-members who re-constituted themselves as the Nottingham Communist Group, silence was maintained, and the monolith facade preserved.

Formed in 1976 when three branches split away from the CPB (ML) , Ian Williams led the Communist Workers Movement's break as its National Secretary. But by late 1978 Williams 'dropped out of active participation in the CWM as his commitment became

⁵⁶ The "Absolute Decline" of the Communist Party of Britain Marxist- Leninist 1976 p2

more focused on his trade union activity. He formally resigned in August 1979 from formal membership:

"This is entirely a personal decision, and does not merit a polemic. I have been in the political 'wilderness' with ML groups for 12 years, with ever decreasing effect, and cannot see my way to staying any longer. I still think that if any organisation has any hope of success it must be the CWM or heavily CWM influenced."⁵⁷

Despite these words, Williams went on to join the Labour Party. His departure from the CWM rankled some; it came after a long period of inactivity and absences from the organisation. One ex-comrade observed many years later:



And shortly before he decamped from the CWM without a word of explanation or even a decent good bye to his friends and comrades he was instrumental in purging Molly Sayle, life long communist and mother of the comedian Alexi Sayle, for refusing to support Pol Pot. Perhaps word of such talents had reached his new masters in the notorious Merseyside Mafia of Labour's right wing.⁵⁸

By October 1985, Williams was involved in a new grouping the Merseyside Labour Coordinating Committee unflattering "'described by the Trotskyist enterist organisation Militant as "a small band of discontented petit-bourgeois without real roots in the area...the principal source used by the majority on the DLP (District Labour Party) inquiry to justify expulsions."⁵⁹

Williams was a local opponent of Militant who, in "a typically-acid-tongue attack", wrote humorous articles for the weekly political magazine, *The New Statesman*. An activity not welcomed by the 'Millies'. His rightward drift saw him speak out as a leading advocate of Liverpool Labour Left in *The Guardian*: "distressed as anybody by the antics of Derek Hatton and Militant". The former railway guard and Riverside Labour Party activist who helped found 'Liverpool Labour Left', an ad hoc alliance amongst non-militants in the mid-80s sought to reclaim the political debate.

Derek Hatton, deputy Chair of Liverpool Council and leading Millie told him in a brief telephone call: "You'd better be careful next time I see you. You're a bottle-less, spineless little bastard, Williams. And I'll get you."⁶⁰

⁵⁷ CWM Internal Bulletin No.11 Sept.1979

⁵⁸ Anecdotal source March 24 2004

⁵⁹ Taffe & Mulhearn. *Liverpool - a city that dared to fight*. Fortress Books 1988:361

⁶⁰ Ian William's personal statement to the Labour party NEC enquiry into the activities in Liverpool Labour Party, quoted in Kilfoye, Peter (2000) *Left Behind: lessons from Labour's Heartland*. London. Politico's Publishing

In the early 1985 he had a six month scholarship to India and worked as a freelance writer contributing articles to Tribune and New Statesman amongst others. Militant crowed that Ian Williams was "quite at home amongst the literati who were supposed to read the New Statesman, The Guardian and Tribune, which he regularly wrote for, but he was utterly rejected by workers in Liverpool...Removed by his (railway) union branch as a delegate to the body the NEC (National Executive Council) set up to replace the DLP."

His hostility to ineffectual squabbling Trotskyist sects was still evident in a review of a biography of Trotsky, he asks: what was left of Trotskyism but the failed predictions, the ability to hold a deep belief, with quasi-religious fervour, in a secular idea in the face of all advice and empirical evidence to the contrary?⁶¹

CONSOLIDATION IN THE 1970s

The initial failure to unite the anti-revisionist forces into one organisation had resulted in the failure to significantly challenge meant that, as in other industrialised countries, there was little notable influence in the working class. Britain's Maoists were a minority tendency in the creative political constellation of the Left. The CPB (ML) proved throughout the decade to be a failed opportunity to rectify the stunted development of the Marxist-Leninist movement.

Its principal rival for the designation of "leading centre" was the Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist). The CFB (ML) was essentially the reconstituted JCC, still politically stunted by its insistence on organising as a federation of groups. As a result, it lacked a coherent leadership to weld the organisation into an interventionist focused force. It published a monthly newspaper *Struggle* starting in December 1969 and a theoretical journal the *Marxist-Leninist Quarterly*. Its credentials were enhanced when it threw off its (anti-Leninist) federal party building approach at its Third Conference in March 1976. Not before a split in 1971 had seen the expulsion of two London members who formed the Communist Unity Organisation. They had suspended after a long period of struggle within the CFB (ML) over questions of line, ideology and organisational form and the lack of progress in the CFB (ML) in establishing a democratic centralist organisation. The focus on these issues was to dominant the political life of the CUO.

In 1973 the CUO became the Communist Unity Association (Marxist-Leninist) (CUA) as the result of a fusion with the equally small Marxist Leninist Workers Association, a remnant from the RMLL led by Manchanda. The new organisation still consisted of two branches, one in London and the other in Grimsby. The CUA produced *Workers'*

⁶¹ (An Ex-Maoist Looks at an Ex-Trotskyist: On Irving Howe's *Leon Trotsky* at http://www.logosjournal.com/issue_6.3/williams.htm)

Ian Williams went to make his career as a journalist and author, during the 1989 election, he contributed speeches for Labour Leader Neil Kinnock- reputedly the powerful "I'm the first generation of my family to go to university" address .

Unity, 4 duplicated A4 paper that saw 235 issues published, ceasing in July 1977. There were a number of well-regarded polemical theoretical pamphlets. Particularly influential was “Imperialism and the struggle for a Revolutionary Party”; a critique of the Communist Party of Britain (ML) called “Economism or Revolution?” and “Broad Fronts and United Fronts...an analysis”.

Although it had only nine members – including Mike Earle and the Dixon brothers– at the time of *Unity*, many of CUA’s leading members were prominent in the leadership of the new organisation. An internal assessment of the RCLB, written for its contentious History Conference of 20th April 1980, judged:

The CUA was committed to both Party building and mass work. In general its political stand combined adherence to the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism with an objective assessment of the actual situation better than any other Marxist-Leninist group in the early 70’s.

This was a tacit admission that, in the original split of 1971, it was the minority that had been in the right. Certainly former CUA members had a greater respect and political capital within the early years of the RCLB because of that political history. The RCLB’s ‘Draft Internal Statement’ noted that the “CUA contributed substantially to the process of forming the Manifesto of the RCL, particularly in the emphasis on the imperialist nature of Britain and the need to combat opportunism.”

The Internationalists

From its inception onwards, the English Internationalist trend, although acknowledging the initial work to re-build the party undertaken by McCreery, had a self-appointed role as keepers of the 'true faith'. They regarded all other Marxist-Leninist groups that emerged in the sixties and later as variants of modern revisionism acting as “an important agency for the bourgeoisie in the Marxist-Leninist communist movement in Britain, in its attempts to split and disrupt the movement and especially in its attempts to prevent the rebuilding of the genuine party of the proletariat.”⁶²

Always consciously a movement with international links, that trend was more influenced from overseas, principally by the Internationalist organisations that culminated in the Communist Party of Canada (ML), than events within the ML movement in Britain. Those outside of the Internationalists were seen by them as irrevocably lost to genuine revolutionary activity, while their own ultra-left posturing, extreme even by ML standards, created an exclusion zone for dialogue or political co-operation.

The transformation into the English Communist Movement (ML) did little to alter the class composition or political orientation of the organisation which remained petty-bourgeois intellectual based. They probably had a core membership nearer 50 at their height at the start of the 1970s. The split in 1974 saw the departure of at least a dozen

⁶² Report to the First Congress of the RCPB (ML) p222

or so activists (mainly students from the Third World) and the remaining organisation only had its London base and a branch in Birmingham with a bookshop in Handsworth up to early Eighties. By then the branch was a three-person affair but then that was reflective of a lot of branches that ML organisations claimed.

The general impression was of an organisation not recruiting but losing its 1960s membership. Moving from its Sussex University base, early on a centre was established at Progressive Books and Periodicals, 569 Old Kent Road, London SE1. From here, the newspaper, *Workers' England Weekly News*, and the journal *Communist England* was produced. For a time in the early 1970s a daily news release was produced with the by-line -*All the News that serves the Proletarian Socialist Revolution*. But such a claim was seldom met as the resources and influence of the organisation could not sustain such a production schedule; and the circulation figures never warranted a daily dose of the Internationalist's views and analysis. Of longer duration was *Workers Weekly* first distributed on March 27th 1971 at a demonstration about Ireland. It was the main propaganda vehicle for the trend for the next forty years.

With its founding on March 24th 1972, the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist) (CPE (ML)) may have considered itself "the party" but it was a minority within the movement, and had not broken out of its student base. Seek Truth to serve the people was the publication of the Progressive Intellectuals Study Group and first issued in November 1971. Its two day conference on 4/5th December 1971 had been attended by over 100 and spoken to by representatives of the English Communist Movement (ML). January 1972 (Issue No.2) launched a call to "set up centres of propaganda for Mao Tsetung Thought in the universities and colleges" and develop a reserve of cadre for the ECM (ML). The instruction was issued to "smash the decaying cultural superstructure of imperialism". Unfortunately the following and last issue (no.3) in November 1972, reported the study group dissolved itself and became the English branch of the 'Necessity for Change' Institute of Ideological Studies that had been inaugurated in Trinity College, Dublin on December 30, 1967 by Hardial Bains.

The CPE (ML) the organisational successor to the English Communist Movement, did maintain a party-led national minority organisation, and used its cadres where white comrades could not easily operate. One such area was the attempt through MASS - Malaysian and Singaporean Students- Movement to take command of the Malaysian and Singaporean student organisations active in Britain on the interests of overseas students in Britain and human rights issues in South East Asia, such as freedom for political prisoners of the Communist Party of Malaya.

MASS was eventually isolated after it severely disrupted the genuine students organisations "by attacking activity on anything other than China or armed struggle as reactionary and generally acting like the worst followers of Lin Piao at the height of the Cultural Revolution."⁶³

The Old Kent Road bookshop provided a contact address for "Afro-Asian Solidarity" news release of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Movement which reproduced

⁶³ Internal Communication of the CWM 1978

material of the Communist Party of India (ML) led by Mazumdar. There was a close, if not incestuous relationship with Indian Progressive Study Group (England) who produced "Naxalbari Zindabad!" National minority revolutionaries had played an important role in the early years of the Internationalists trend in Britain. They formed a numerically important component of the anti-revisionist and emerging Maoist movement but largely retained an autonomous existence from the party-building endeavours of other in Britain.

The rapid change in organisational titles could not disguise that frenzy activity did not equate with growth and political influence. Nor could it hide the student orientation of the organisation. As former General turned academic, Richard Clutterbuck observed, it was "mainly university based, has a record of physical attacks on visiting speakers at Universities."⁶⁴

The Canadian political allies reported on the activities of their English counter-parts breaking away from a "peaceful march" as it entered Trafalgar Square: "A fighting force of over 100 followers of Chairman Mao stormed Canada House in London. The demonstrators carried large colour portraits of Chairman Mao and waved the treasured red book of his quotations. They denounced the fascism of the lackey Trudeau regime and expressed firm conviction that the revolutionary struggles of the Quebec and Canadian people will triumph."

The People's Canada Daily News writes of a battle raging for over an hour in Trafalgar Square to the sound of "Down with fascism!", "Long Live Chairman Mao!", "waging tit for tat struggle, 26 policemen were put out of action...unjustifiably arrested, 65 revolutionary men and women continued to denounce the police and fascism of the decadent English ruling class."⁶⁵

The CPE (ML) was instrumental in the 1973 disruption of a lecture by then then-director of the Psychological Department at Maudsley Hospital. Professor Hans Jurgen Eysenck, infamous for his racist views on the nature of intelligence, was also professor of Psychology at London University.

He was less than a minute into his speech when, as the bourgeois press reported," a girl rushed to the platform and began punching him around the face and body. Immediately behind her were two young men who dragged him to the floor and assisted in the attack."

Eysenck "was pulled to the floor in the LSE's new theatre when he was attacked by a group of about 26 people. He was punched, kicked and spat on. His spectacles were broken and the side of his nose cut before, shocked and bewildered, he was dragged clear by members of the student executive". An executive member of the CPE (ML) and a print worker, Paul Rowe, was later identified as responsible for the attack on Eysenck. CPE (ML) reinforcements from Birmingham were alleged to have assisted in this piece of 'propaganda by deed'.

⁶⁴ Britain In Agony Penguin Books 1980:355

⁶⁵ People's Canada Daily News Vol.1 No.36 November 7th 1970 p3

That impetuous impression of the organisation had been underlined when, in December 1972, a police raid on the CPE (ML)'s National meeting in London, uncovered, according to press reports, "bullets". The CPE (ML) told another story:

Whilst increasing fascist legislation, the monopoly capitalists are also stepping up their harassment of working people and progressive organisations. In the last couple of years, large numbers of progressive people have been harassed, intimidated and attacked by the British police. Last December, some supporters of the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist) were attacked by the London police and planted with drugs, ammunition, explosives and have been committed to trial at the Old Bailey on concocted charges. Comrade Lindsay Hutchinson, an active supporter of the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist), is at present serving a five year sentence on concocted charges of "malicious wounding" and "assault".⁶⁶

The ML movement in the early 1970s had not progressed beyond its anti-parliamentarian stance to accept electoral participation as a tactical device that had a subordinate relationship to mass struggle: the concentration on campaigns or workers' strikes did not allow for the development of a community base that would actually bring about electoral success. The CPE (ML) engaged in electoral politics to take the opportunity to spread revolutionary propaganda and analysis; candidates were stood in both elections of 1974: in the February General Election the six CPE (ML) candidates received 1,419 votes; the eight candidates in the October received 1,320. The CPE (ML) stood for publicity purposes but the fringe candidates were seldom mentioned by the bourgeois media.

Brixton's Maoists

The CPE(ML) suffered when it lost about 10% of its membership when Comrade Aravindan Balakrishnan (popularly known as Bala) formerly a member of the National Executive Committee and Central Committee, led a break from the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist) in 1974. He was the leading force behind the establishment of the Workers' Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought (substituting Mao Zedong Thought after 1979). What was brought into the new organisation was the ultra-left posturing and Mao worship evident in the CPE (ML) or, as Bala described them: the "Communist" Party of Elizabeth (Most-Loyal).

The Singaporean-born CPE (ML) member, Balakrishnan, was expelled from the CPE (ML) in 1974, charged with forming a faction that:

"... attempted to put themselves above the discipline of the Party, refused to unite actively to build and strengthen the Party and implement its line, stating that whilst the Party should lead English work', national minority work should be Led by "national minorities", or in other words by this revisionist clique ...they attempted to make the Party's national minority organisations totally separate from collective

⁶⁶ Worker's England Daily News Release, September 4th 1973. See EROL

discipline and line of the Party... ..when called upon to account for their criminal activities, they made a futile attempt to split the Party."⁶⁷

After initial work began in August 1974, the Workers' Institute's Conference on Britain, held in August 1975 set the task of "BUILDING A REVOLUTIONARY STABLE BASE AREA in and around Brixton, a poor and oppressed working-class area in South London".⁶⁸ There was harassment of the Maoists, mainly students and from the Third World, as they distributed leaflets and sold the weekly news sheet, 'South London Workers' Bulletin' but they did draw some portent unorthodox observations from their work.

Drawing upon the Chinese experience of base areas, they argued, against the orthodox Leninist prescriptions; regarding trade unions as so corrupted and embroiled as to be agents of the 'imperialist fascist bourgeoisie', they were in favour of revolutionaries being primarily based, and organise within working class communities. This was seen as "the weakest link for the fascist state system" where political mobilisation involves whole families free from the "fascist rules and regulations and job security" involved in workplaces or educational institutions. Here revolutionary cadre could integrate and learn from the "sterling qualities of the labouring people while raising the intellectual level of the workers. Taking a working class job in the community is vital for this."⁶⁹

Flowing from this 'party-building' perspective, the Workers' Institute opened the Mao Tsetung Memorial Centre at 140 Acre Lane, Brixton, in October 1976 running evening lecture, study groups and film showings. Leisure and politics are integrated into 'revolutionary socials' mixing speeches and refreshments. Members were full-time revolutionaries living collectively and working within their Brixton base area.

The Workers' Institute were the subject of a sociological investigation drawn to study this small "strongly bounded egalitarian" experience. Indeed, a rare academic interest shown in the Maoist movement in Britain, even if focused on what was described as "the modern heirs to the millenarian tradition in Britain...a tiny political sect which predicted the liberation of the world from tyranny by the end of 1977."⁷⁰

The Workers' Institute functioned as a communist commune with thirteen core members living in the centre, half in paid work, six doing full-time revolutionary work, with a strong emphasis on women taking a leading role (apart from leading the Party Committee headed by Bala). Ex-students from overseas made up the backbone of the Workers' Institute membership. There was an internal egalitarianism and absorption into the life of the commune that prevented any intellectual growth or challenge to the status quo of commune life. Bala was the dominant personality and leading comrade yet outwardly, as an observer commented:

⁶⁷ Presenting the Ideas of the First Congress of the CPE(ML) 1979. p73

⁶⁸ WORKERS' INSTITUTE SUCCESSFULLY CONDUCTS VIGOROUS PROGRAMME TO UPHOLD CHAIRMAN MAO'S REVOLUTIONARY LINE AMIDST THE MASSES UPSURGE IN BRITAIN – A REPORT. March 31, 1977

⁶⁹ Workers' Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, ON BUILDING A REVOLUTIONARY STABLE BASE AREA 1977

⁷⁰ Rayner S "The Perception of Time and Space in Egalitarian Sects: a millenarian cosmology" in Douglas, M. (1982) Essays in the Sociology of Perceptions. London: RKP: 249

“Although Balakrishnan is the titular secretary of the organisation he does not occupy separate office facilities. There is no discernible division of labour in the political sphere, and no separation of members and cadres, or of theoretical and activist cadres.”⁷¹

Rayner described the discussion at the Workers’ Institute’s Political Evening school as “ a stilted procedure in which each cadre in turn will reiterate a non-controversial piece of the collective wisdom of the group...the lecturer in charge of the meeting makes no comment on the discussion contributions, but nods dispassionately at various points in each contribution. At the end he makes no attempt to summate the contributions, or expose any possible controversy which might require him to adopt an adjudicating role. Disagreements is not merely driven underground but actually goes unrecognised in the Workers’ Institute. Members frequently express contradictory interpretations of the group’s collective wisdom, but any attempt an outsider may make to expose these inconsistencies meets with total resistance. The outsider simply does not understand because of his failure to ‘think dialectically!’”⁷²

Others regarded the Workers’ Institute as a cult as their political convictions were held with religious fervour. They spoke of the old world as already passing away, and the political perspective was the imminent achievement of world socialism. Liberation was to have been achieved through the agency of the ‘Three Magic Weapons’, which were the People’s Liberation Army of China, Invincible Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse-Tung Thought and the Popular Front of Third World Countries led by People’s China. The Workers’ Institute declared itself as the true leaders of the oppressed masses, boastful and arrogant, demonstrating a religious-type unshakeable belief in their correctness, despite the actual historical development. Hence their claim that:

“The comrades of the Workers' Institute, however, have openly and in an above-board manner stepped forward to march at the head and lead the revolutionary mass movement in Britain, to participate actively in burying the old world of colonialism, imperialism and hegemonism and ushering the new world of socialism and communism.”⁷³

When in marked contrast, the distribution of leaflets and holding meetings in a small part of south London was the reality of their political spread, the obstacles were partially acknowledged but addressed with its own catechism.

“We have found that we have to struggle hard to train contingents of theoretical workers armed with Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, who are adept at applying Chairman Mao's theory of continued revolution, learning from Socialist China and shaped in the brilliant image of Chairman Mao. Here, the three-part programme of the Institute shows the way forward. It consists of: (a) regular current affairs discussion and theoretical study, (b) mass work and social investigation or 'open door' schooling, (c) battles of annihilation against bourgeois reactionary lines and to defend Chairman Mao's proletarian

⁷¹ Rayner (1982) 254

⁷² Rayner 1982: 254

⁷³ Ibid.

revolutionary line.”⁷⁴ This often took the form of shouting slogans and attempting to disrupt other group’s meetings. Other Leftists would recall them with something akin to nostalgic affection:

“The Workers Institute were a strange bunch of head-bangers, they would disrupt meetings of rival groups, and were banned from many groups’ meetings. I only came across them in the late 1970s when they quietened down a lot. They would hand out flyers in the market in Brixton and thought they were building a base as the flyers were so popular; in fact it was other leftists who rushed out to get them as they were so funny.”⁷⁵

Often the recollections grew in the telling:

Mad as hatters; I recall their bulletin which offered hours of harmless fun. They decided Brixton in South London their red base in the imperialist heartlands. Some suggested that they took up tunnelling under the Victoria line to try to implement the line: "Dig tunnels deep, store grain everywhere and never seek hegemony".⁷⁶

Another distinctive feature of their “Cultural Revolution” politics was the Workers’ Institute regarded itself as a component of the Communist Party of China; not politically aligned nor blindly supporting its policies but a section of it. After Mao’s death, the Workers’ Institute sided with Chairman Hua and if China had ‘the gang of four’ to contend with, then Birch-Bains-Reakes-Evans – leaders of the CPB (ML), and CPE (ML) and its fraternal parties in Ireland and Canada – compromised another ‘Gang of Four in the Imperialist heartlands’. Members of the Workers’ Institute confidently predicted that the world would be liberated from capitalist oppression, and argued that:

“The Communist Party of China and Chairman Mao are on the verge of launching the final offensive, this year (1975) to dismantle the old world of colonialism, imperialism and hegemonism and build the new world of socialism. The establishment of the international dictatorship of the proletariat is necessary for this, led by the Communist Party of China and Chairman Mao and with the People’s Liberation Army of China as its main pillar. Only thus can mankind march forward to communism.”⁷⁷

The role of the Workers’ Institute was ideological: as the ‘sole upholders of Chairman Mao’s revolutionary banner in the imperialist heartlands’. As Rayner described it: “The Workers’ Institute is organised in London because ‘it is the worst place in the world’. Its role is not to organise a revolution but to prepare for the period of socialist reconstruction which will follow the liberation of the world by the People’s Republic of China – ‘THE BRIGHT RED BASTION OF WORLD REVOLUTION.’”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ ON BUILDING A REVOLUTIONARY STABLE BASE AREA 1977

⁷⁵ Anecdotal source Paul F

⁷⁶ Anecdotal source

⁷⁷ The New World - Journal of Workers' Institute of Marxism - Leninism - Mao Tsetung Thought. 1975

⁷⁸ Rayner 1982: 265

The assertion that caused much amusement and embarrassment among other leftists was that the INTERNATIONAL DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT had indeed been established covertly in 1977 “by Our Party”, the Communist Party of China.

Any talk of obstacles to this scenario, such as the threat of superpower reprisal with nuclear weapons was dismissed by Institute members with the argument that the Chinese had developed secretly, advanced electronic weapons that, activated by remote control, would prevent enemy missiles from even taking off. Such faith in Chinese electronic weaponry, as a magical element in the struggle for World Socialism, reinforces the separation from more orthodox groups on the left in Britain. The Workers’ Institute, as a repository of revolutionary truth, expressed some of the more ludicrous features of ultra-leftism, surviving as an embodiment of the over-blown rhetoric used in the English-language pages of the weekly ‘Peking Review’ that fed Cultural Revolution postures amongst Western leftists in the 1960s. No wonder an alternative magazine used this opening on the Maoists in Britain:

“An encounter with the Workers’ Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tse Tung Thought [“we have undertaken the unprecedented task of building the first stable base area in the imperialist heartlands, in and around Brixton ...this has driven the British bourgeoisie up the wall”], truly the most lunatic of the lunatic fringe of left politics in Britain, can be an unsettling experience. Tiny in numbers and fanatical in zeal, carrying dogmatism, rhetoric and sectarianism to ever greater extremes, it is many people’s idea of a typical Maoist group.”⁷⁹

Not surprisingly, other Maoist groups were to shun the Workers’ Institute, disassociating themselves from its activities and refusing them entry into their meetings.

However, the activities at the Mao Memorial Centre was subject to police monitoring and a number of members were subject to deportation orders, and the refusal to recognise the authority of the courts led to further harassment and imprisonment of members, such as Ekins Brome⁸⁰. The Worker’s Institute came to broader attention when the diarist in *The Times* began reprinting some of the group’s material, as amusing asides. “Though the hired scribes of the bourgeoisie vainly try to “level” us by describing the Workers’ Institute as the ‘most lunatic fringe of the lunatic fringe in Britain’, their masters are well aware of the danger of the rapid growth and development of the Workers’ Institute in the past four years to their class interests.”

The closure of the Mao Memorial Centre followed a police raid on March 22 1978.⁸¹ Non-payments of rates was the less than charitable explanation given in pub-talk. For a short period, meetings were held at the University College London Union, but by

⁷⁹ Terry Ilott and John Dawes, A Short Guide to Maoists in Britain. *The Leveller*, No.20, November 1978

⁸⁰ Uphold the Communist Spirit of Self-sacrifice of the Worker Comrade Ekins Brome!

Death to the British Fascist State! 22nd April, 1976. See EROL

⁸¹ See: Workers’ Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought

ON THE CLOSURE OF THE MAO ZEDONG MEMORIAL CENTRE BY THE BRITISH FASCIST STATE
November 30 1978 on EROL website

1981 little was heard from the Workers' Institute. If asked, the reply would be that they had gone underground.

Few groups fared any better, some organisations like the Harpal Brar's Association of Communist Workers and the Communist Unity Association did not grow nor did they shrink, they chiefly distinguished themselves by the prolific production of critiques of other organisations' political positions in duplicated pamphlets. Others with fewer resources claimed the task of ideological renewal as their own, but like the Oxford-based Association for the Realisation of Marxism, they had such a low profile in solving theoretical questions, without considering the necessity of participating to solve the problems, that one wonders if they existed in anything for but an individual's imagination. The Communist Organisation in the British Isles (COBI) was founded in 1974 by former members of the British and Irish Communist Organisation who disagreed with a range of that group's policies and analysis. COBI was an unorthodox anti-revisionist organization, drawing inspiration from the old De Leonist Socialist Labor Party as well as Mao Zedong. COBI published three issues of a journal called Proletarian, as well as a number of pamphlets and flyers. In 1977, the group changed its name to Communist Formation and produced one issue of a journal by the same name. As an organization it absorbed its meagre resources into theoretical explorations that, taken in isolation from engagement from the wider movement, took on an academic character. It made little progress and disbanded several years later.

Generally Maoists did have weekly study sessions as part of their political activity : Cheap editions English-language material printed in China, of the Marxist classics, works by Stalin and Mao Zedong, were available from bookshops associated with specific organisations : New Era Books (CFBML) moved from Bath , firstly to Cambridge and then settled in Finsbury Park, north London. The CPBML ran numerous bookshop in Liverpool, Bristol, Brighton, Basildon market as well as Bellman Bookshop in Tufnell Park, London NW5. The CPE ML had its bookshop in Birmingham and London. None of these were thriving enterprises, often reliant on voluntary or low-paid labour, struggling to maintain an outlet as explicit revolutionary bookshops, painted red and displaying material that seldom had a widespread or commercial distribution. Out side of the multitude of Maoist groups other non-aligned Maoists were active: the best known, Banner Books was a short walk, in Camden High Street, to where SACU, the Society of Anglo-Chinese Understanding moved in 1975. Acting like an unofficial clearing house and contact for activists was Banner Bookshop, run by G.V.Bijur, long associated with selling Maoist publications like Mao's "Little Red Book" at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park. In the early 1970s, Bijur provided "was a supply source and meeting place for revolutionaries from every continent. Irish Republicans in Long Kesh were amongst the many who ordered stacks of books by post. Third World leaders, passing through London, often dosed down on the floor of Banner Books." ⁸²

One of the generalised experiences of the young Maoists was described by Alexi Sayle:

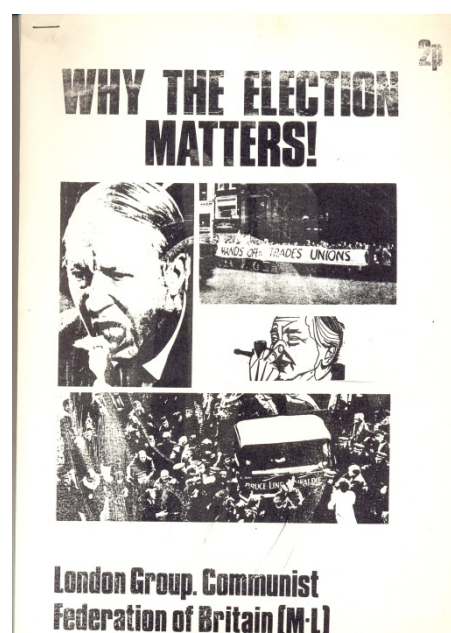
⁸² Class Struggle, March 1984 p3. An observation in what proved to be a premature obituary for "Comrade Bijur" who subsequently informed his English friends he was still very much alive and in the struggle in his Indian home.

Apart from introducing me to pubs and African shebeens the other great thing about the Marxist-Leninist Group was the theory study classes which were held once or twice a week. Unlike the policy of the old CP, members of the MMLG⁸³ were encouraged to study the sacred texts themselves rather than have them interpreted by a crotchety Anglo-Indian⁸⁴ and the gnostic statements of a French cartoon dog. Though, under the influence of the Red Guards, the rest of the Chinese economy was collapsing into chaos the country was still managing to produce huge numbers of the Marxist classics which they then sold around the world at a subsidised price. These books were rather elegant in a utilitarian way: a uniform edition with a cream-coloured, thick paper cover and a slightly blurry old-fashioned typeface. It was Ian [Williams] who led these discussions, and they followed a pattern of study which had existed since the first editions of Marx had appeared and working people all over the industrialised world had seized them and tried to prise open their meaning in rooms above pubs, front parlours and Mechanics' Institutes. The group ploughed through The Communist Manifesto, Wages, Prices and Profits and Stalin's History of the CPSU at the speed of the slowest and dimmest-witted member of the group, which was usually me.⁸⁵

The CFB (ML) gets serious,

Transformation 1973-77

Following the near paralysis that followed the Special General Meeting of 1974, despite its proposals to rejuvenate the organisation, it was, in March 1976, at its Third Conference that the CFB (ML) resolved to build a “nucleus of leadership”. The struggle against the national leadership had largely succeeded before a serious car accident side-lined its leading comrade. Into the breach stepped “T.E” a voracious London critic of the lack of leadership.



The Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) had been founded in September 1969 by five groups doing local mass work in different cities in Britain. As a national organisation the CFB did published a monthly propaganda and agitational paper, 'Struggle', from December 1969. From the spring of 1972 it added a theoretical journal, 'Marxist-Leninist Quarterly'.

⁸³ Merseyside Marxist-Leninist group

⁸⁴ Reference to Palme Dutt

⁸⁵ Sayle (2010):244

However, the CFB (ML) could be described as stagnate from its beginning and for most of its existence the CFB's work was considered by internal critics as "primarily negative". Because the groups were unable to advance beyond a federal arrangement, it failed to win ideological unity amongst its members and it failed to build a recognised national leadership. In July 1974 'Struggle' stopped publication after 56 issues. The external cause of its collapse was a sharp rise in printing costs but the internal cause was the inability of the CFB to overcome its weaknesses. As the crisis of the CFB deepened, by the end of 1974 it seemed to members only a matter of time before the CFB disintegrated.

Unsurprising in a leadership comprised mainly of intellectuals, drawn and inspired by the idea of "communism", there was a sectarian drive that the way forward should start and proceed from the beginning on the theoretically perfectly correct lines. A struggle of ideas on the way forward broke out that culminated in the resolution passed at the second session of the third Conference of the CFB, held in February 1976.

*"Frankly admitting a mistake, ascertaining the reason for it, analysing the conditions which led to it - that is the earmark of a serious party"*⁸⁶, the CFB (ML) self-consciously quoting Lenin, introduced its party-building line, "Build the Revolutionary Communist Party To Lead The Revolution". It repeated classic Leninist formula, drawing on both the ideas and prescriptions contain therein:

"the spontaneous struggles of workers and progressive strata cannot on their own bring about the real answer to imperialist exploitation and oppression in Socialist revolution. The working class must have its own party to lead and unite all these different struggles into a conscious revolutionary movement to seize state power from the bourgeoisie."⁸⁷

The adoption of the line of the Communist Federation on Party Building was presented as the result of a two line struggle inside the CFB between bourgeois ideas and proletarian ideas. Right opportunist errors were seen as dominant in the CFB's past practice. The essence of the struggle was to transform the class stand of the Communist Federation so naming the errors - liberalism, ultra-democracy, small group mentality, empiricism and intellectualism- set out the struggle against bourgeois ideology within the ranks of the CFB (ML).

There would be, because experience had taught them, no return to the federal arrangements. With the blind zeal of a convert, the leadership trumpeted "steely discipline", voluntarily accepted, and what they understood to be the operation of

⁸⁶ Lenin 'Left-Wing Communism' An Infantile Disorder, Peking edition, p50

⁸⁷ Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) Build the Revolutionary Communist Party To Lead The Revolution. Revolution No.1 June 1976 pp4-15. Left Wing Communism and 'What Is To Be Done?' were familiar study material in the ML circles of the 1970s.

“democratic centralist” practices. In actual operation, rigid thinking and a monolithic “face” towards its own membership, was mistakenly taken as working to the formula of “What Is To Be Done?” as adherence to a line of becoming Bolsheviks.

A decade after the Polemic, Marxist-Leninists were said to number a few hundred, and these few hundred were divided among a dozen different parties, organisations, groups and circles. The perspective that it would be “premature” to declare the existence of a new revolutionary party reflected a reality that, despite the claims of both the CPB (ML) and CPE (ML), no Party programme exists and there is no single leading centre.

The intention of the “bolshevised” CFB, that had rejected federalism and sought to build a democratic-centralist, “Leninist” organisation, as they understood it, was:

“..to weld together a single democratic centralist organisation of all genuine Marxist-Leninists. An organisation which will not itself be the Party but which can use democratic centralism to mobilize all the positive factors available for Party building. It will use democratic centralism to concentrate correct ideas speedily and to ensure unity of action in testing and strengthening those ideas in practice. In the middle term then, we need a single Party building democratic centralist organization.”⁸⁸

The Marxist Leninist movement was fragmented by sectarianism and small group mentality, with each group regarding itself as the core of the 'movement' and regarding other groups as a political opposition. This was a view that the CFB (ML) had held. The internal transformation within its organisation and politics was partly reflected in its public approach to the rest of the movement. It claimed a “principled position”⁸⁹ to strive for the unity of the movement, and draw clear lines of demarcation with other organisations and to carry out polemic in order to win unity in the Marxist Leninist movement; it was questionable how far this represented a genuine rejection of past judgements and attitudes, however the call to unite was to dominate the approach of the CFB (ML) in its transition from a federalist mode of operation towards, what was understood, as a democratic centralist organisation throughout the latter half of the 1970s.

THE TWO LINE STRUGGLE IN THE CFB (M-L)

The first session of the Third Conference met in March 1975 in a state of demoralisation and great theoretical confusion. While all agreed on the need to have a more democratic centralist organisation, there were diverse approaches how to achieve this. Some advocated passing a resolution, taking an organisational approach, declaring this to be in existence and to punish those who defied it. Others, basing themselves on an understanding that echoed the Chinese experience, saying it was

⁸⁸ CFB (ML): Call to the British Marxist-Leninist Movement. Revolution No.5 May 1977

⁸⁹ 'Relations between Marxist Leninist Organisations in Britain' published in MLQ 11 1976

necessary to 'put politics first', and to build organisational unity only on the basis of ideological unity. However there was confusion on what this entailed, so despite their words, some supporters of this line went on to put their main emphasis on organisational changes of the constitution.

There was the perpetual contradiction over the emphasis between theory and practice with a majority arguing that what was needed was more practice. "The main weaknesses of Marxist-Leninist at the present time is that we have no real roots in the proletarian struggle", that "Collective practice is primary" and "building of bases in the localities must be a priority for the Federation as a whole". A swing back to the importance of revolutionary theory was to follow the period of "failed practice". The integration of theory with practice would be mouthed but seldom achieved.

A perpetual discussion with the CFB (ML) was another cleavage in the organisation's life over whether the groups were primary or the needs of a national CFB was primary. The constituent groups were regarded by the majority as primary, as "the best way to build the CFB is to build the constituent groups". This perspective brought forth complaints about the amount of time national work took up, and from some groups, sharp criticisms of the leading comrades in the CFB, but refusal of critics to take national leadership positions themselves.

The first session of the Third Conference was deeply split with the only unanimous decision was to meet again at a later date. What had occurred was a minority view presented for overcoming the weakness of the past, in the months after the first session won overwhelming support. The line identified with 'TE', and coming out of the London group, drew upon the statement by Mao Tse-tung at the beginning of his article 'Combat Liberalism'. "We stand for active ideological struggle because it is the weapon for ensuring unity within the Party and the revolutionary organisations in the interests of our fight".

This line identified five major errors that existed throughout the CFB and crippled its work and were responsible for the stagnation of the organisation. They were named as liberalism, small group mentality, ultra democracy, empiricism and intellectualism. A few years later, an additional flaw was identified, acknowledging "serious right opportunist errors which, if not corrected, would have developed into full blown social-chauvinism".⁹⁰

It was an ideological offensive, consciously not just a struggle against mistakes but a class struggle against bourgeois ideology within the organisation. The mantra was that "active ideological struggle is the unbeatable weapon in winning unity in the revolutionary ranks, an essential task of Party building"

"At first some comrades wanted only to talk of 'mistakes' -accidental slip-ups -and

⁹⁰ Proletarian Internationalism and the Duties of British Communists Revolution Vol.3 No.2 June 1978

were offended when they were criticised for having committed bourgeois and petty bourgeois errors, But, with struggle, ideological education and bold criticism and self-criticism they became convinced”.⁹¹

Opponents called it 'labelling' and said that it was dogmatic. They said that criticism and self-criticism should 'be specific' -that it should only deal with the details of the mistake. Proponents of “active ideological struggle” said: “Of course it is necessary to understand how the error manifests itself in each particular case but it is essential for all comrades to be able to identify the general error by name, in order to hunt it down consistently”.⁹²

The failure to identify these “errors” by name severely weakened previous efforts to overcome the backward aspects of federalism and to strengthen democratic centralism in the CFB. Clearly ultra-democracy ran through the CFB from the beginning: comrades sent by their groups to the NC were seen as mere 'delegates' of their groups and not as comrades who had to give leadership to the whole Federation. An example of small group mentality meant giving priority to group work instead of national work and resenting having to give up leading comrades to national work.

The Glasgow group left early on shortly after the first session of the Third Conference, repeating their view, stating that at this stage practice is primary and that to build a true national Marxist-Leninist movement, the beginnings must arise from group's common practical work.

The Coventry group left relatively late in the struggle after failing to correct their liberalism, ultra-democracy and small group mentality. They also tail behind the opportunists in the working class by not combating Social Democracy boldly and by supporting bourgeois nationalisation.⁹³

A few individual members of the CFB left, “when the waves of criticism began to lap around their feet. Instead of struggling to overcome errors and being prepared to make bold self-criticism, they got out”.

The process of over-turning federalism was a crusade not just to identify the five main errors but expose and grasp their class character. They were all ideas that cripple the cause of the proletariat; un-proletarian ideas and their class character is bourgeois and petty bourgeois and liberalism was the most serious error within the CFB, standing for an unprincipled peace that allowed so many errors to flourish unchecked.

⁹¹ Build the Revolutionary Communist Party To Lead The Revolution Revolution No.1 June 1976

⁹² Build the Revolutionary Communist Party To Lead The Revolution Revolution No.1 June 1976

⁹³ See Letter of Resignation. Revolution No.1 1976

Underlying this was an individualist mentality:

“The social roots of individualism lie in what Chairman Mao called “the petty bourgeoisie's individualistic aversion to discipline”. At present a significant proportion of the Marxist-Leninist movement in Britain come from the petty bourgeoisie or from the middle strata. In order to win wholehearted acceptance of the proletarian principle of democratic centralism we must be ready to wage a firm and protracted ideological struggle against individualism, and against its most serious immediate expression, small group mentality.”⁹⁴

Unity would not be won by 'sharing experiences' and 'collective practice' if when comrades talked about 'ideological struggle', they really meant 'ideological discussion', staying on good terms instead of thrashing matters out for the sake of real unity. Politically it damaged the CFB (ML), starkly illustrated by the situation, whereby two different component groups of the CFB (ML) publically called for different political actions in the October 1974 General election. It reflected a dysfunctional organisation, a situation where small group mentality dominated.

“Small group mentality severely crippled the work of the CFB and had led to gross opportunism. At policy making meeting, it was usual for the group to engage in horse trading until a majority could be put together on a composite resolution. For example at the Second Conference (Special General meeting) held in February 1974, 3 groups opportunistically combined to ensure that the Soviet Union was not directly described as being Social Imperialist or as having a new bourgeois ruling class.”⁹⁵

Until February 1976 the supreme policy making body of the CFB was the 'General Meeting' of all the membership. “The resolution of the Third Conference firmly states the importance of building proletarian leadership and sums up the essence of leadership as 'working out ideas and using cadres well'. It states that the Executive Committee will be built as the leading core of the CFB and the National Committee as the leading body.”⁹⁶ The line was emphatic: without strong national leadership, local work cannot progress and will not contribute to this overall task. Therefore national work has to come first.

In this period of active ideological struggle, there was a dogmatic reliance on quoting the historical experience of the international communist movement to seek out solutions. To counter “intellectualism”, an equally damaging approach was taken to reducing theory to a limited source; hence the reliance on Quotations in the public statements of the organisation. There was numerous references to what Lenin said,

⁹⁴ Call to the British Marxist-Leninist movement Revolution No.5 1977

⁹⁵ This can be seen in the statement on the International situation, published in MLQ 7 Summer 1974

⁹⁶ Build the Revolutionary Communist Party To Lead The Revolution, Revolution No.1 June 1976

'without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement', reproduced in documents, papers and journals. Indeed, *"the creation and advocacy of revolutionary theory plays the principal and decisive role"*, yet the work of the theoretical journal, 'Marxist Leninist Quarterly' was dismissed:

"Marxist-Leninist Quarterly" made severe intellectualist errors in being a 'forum' for 'discussion' of 'interesting' political questions instead of a fighting journal arming the proletariat with revolutionary theory to be used in the class struggle to overthrow the bourgeoisie. Articles were woolly and confused, there were many footnotes and conclusions were not drawn sharply."⁹⁷

On the one hand, attacking empiricism because it guaranteed that the theoretical ideas of an organisation will be those its members pick up spontaneously in the course of practical political work, which are overwhelmingly the ideas that normally prevail in capitalist society; the ideas of the bourgeoisie. *Consequently* the organisation becomes deeply corrupted by bourgeois reformism, bourgeois trade union politics, social democratic ideology and other forms of bourgeois ideology. This was associated with the intellectualist error of failing to take "a bold and open proletarian stand".

"For example they claimed that the 'Quotations of Mao Tse-tung' are very good but are written for Chinese conditions and should not be applied to Britain. It is true that the 'Quotations' were collected with Chinese political conditions in mind but their principal aspect is that they sum up concisely most of Mao Tse-tung's theoretical teachings, based on the history of Marxism-Leninism and the world Communist movement over many decades."⁹⁸

Opposition to this practice was answered simplistic, drawing upon the psychology of class guilt:

"A common example of intellectualism within the CFB was to take on an impracticable number of tasks and be unable to carry them out. There was also a deep intellectualist arrogance about learning and grasping the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism. Because the 'Quotations of Mao Tse-tung' are short and quickly read; they were held to be beneath comrades' dignity. It is true they are short and quick to read, but they are difficult to grasp and apply consistently. Applying them must be the main task of the CFB in the field of study. As a result of the campaign against intellectualism, all comrades, both those from the working class and those from intellectual backgrounds, have united in striving to take an open, conscious proletarian stand, to write and speak simply and clearly, to study in order to apply in practice and to decide on realistic tasks

⁹⁷ Ditto.

⁹⁸ Ditto.

and carry them through to the end. In particular comrades from the intelligentsia must be ready to go through a long period of remoulding and to learn modestly from working class comrades.”⁹⁹

However the criticisms raised of the CFB (ML) had merit, members recognised in the charges of right opportunist errors, the reality of their existence in the practice of the organisation. There was no reference to the working class in the statement on Party building by the Joint Committee of Communists (the organisation from which the CFB was founded); ‘the Internationale’, the battle hymn of the international working class, had not been sung; ‘Origins and Perspectives of the Marxist-Leninist Movement in Britain’, the main policy statement of the CFB, had an introduction which did not mention the working class or state that the Party that is to be built must be a Party of the working class. When internal critics argued these omissions were not mere accidental oversights, members nodded in agreement.

It was a premature boast that the change in line, and leadership had,

“.. fundamentally solved the contradictions, has united the organisation in a militant unity and has ensured it will play a progressive part in building the revolutionary Communist Party, the central task in Britain today. The victory of this correct line has been a vivid demonstration of the truth that "the correctness or incorrectness of the ideological and political line decides everything".¹⁰⁰

But as a whole the organisation endorsed the view of the Resolution:

*" When a task, no matter which, has to be performed, but there is as yet no guiding line, method or plan or policy, the principal and decisive thing is to decide on a guiding line, method, plan or policy."*¹⁰¹

There was a twin track approach set out for the organisation:

1] There would be a push for “principled unity”: the CFB had not conducted a struggle against small group mentality in order to consolidate itself as a small group opposed to the other British Marxist-Leninist organisations.

2] In the field of practice, the Conference Resolution stated clearly that the first priority was to build Communist bases in the industrial working class in order to establish and consolidate roots in the working class.

⁹⁹ Ditto.

¹⁰⁰ Build the Revolutionary Communist Party To Lead The Revolution Revolution No.1 June 1976

¹⁰¹ Mao Zedong, ‘On Contradiction’ Selected Readings, p94

‘Active Ideological Struggle’

The launch of an ideological struggle, led by T.E., centred on “five main errors”, designed to get to a higher level on the road to building a democratic-centralist organisation. This drive for ‘Leninist norms’ saw a concentration on ‘pure’ ideology divorced from questions of political lines and actual practice. This was illustrated starkly with The CFB’s line on women. Its’ newspaper ‘Struggle’ in the early Seventies had a front-page picture of a women depositing a burning bra into a litter bin with the accompanying headline of “Now shows us your politics”. In a self-criticism of the political line thought such derisory ‘humour’ appropriate, it was observed that:

At that time, the CFB had a bee in its bonnet about bourgeois feminism: to the extent that bourgeois feminism gets a listing among "the enemies", while the bourgeois ideology of male supremacism is dealt with under the heading of "contradictions among the people". The CFB quickly labelled the women’s movement as "bourgeois feminist" -not because we made a thorough analysis of its lines, (which were many and various), its social composition, the class it served, but because our dogmatism prevented us from looking at the lines and policies of the movement, taking the positive and building on it, rejecting the negative and criticising it in theory and practice¹⁰²

A steady stream of self-criticisms and assertions appeared in a stilted, dogmatic style in the pages of the organisation’s publications. There was always the admonishment that it was for the good of the movement that such positions were adopted. Thus in criticising the proposals of the CWLB proposed party-building Commission,

“We urge you to consider the criticism carefully and in the spirit of “correct mistakes if you have made them, guard against them if you have not”. We are not yet sure whether you understand this principle fully. We did not think it was correct for ‘Voice of the People’ to describe the Communist Unity Association’s reply to your statement as an attack. In our view it was a bold comradely criticism and part of the struggle to build unity in the Marxist-Leninist movement.”¹⁰³

The language was tinged with a patrician ‘modesty’ and approbation, sprinkled with homiletic Chinese drawn from the weekly newsmagazine ‘Peking Review’. It was a period of drawing a line under the previous incarnation of the CFB ML and an assertion of the new improved, politically serious revolutionary CFB ML.

“At present in Britain the Marxist-Leninist movement is deeply divided into a dozen different circles, organizations and self-declared Parties, all infected with small group mentality and liberalism. An essential part of the central task of building the genuine revolutionary Communist Party is to unite all those who can be united. The final ringing

¹⁰² Revolutionary Communist League of Britain , The Oppression of Women – Criticism of Old Lines October Vol. 1 No.2 October 1982

¹⁰³ Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) ‘Active Ideological Struggle Is The Key Link In Party Building’ Revolution No.3 January 1977

call of the Communist Manifesto, "Working Men of all Countries, Unite!" deeply applies to us too."¹⁰⁴

In a later judgement, this period marked a (belated) 'return to principles' for the League, an elevation therefore of certain dogmas to the level of theory and a denial of the need for concrete analysis or study. What became enshrined after 1976 was chronic dogmatism and idealism within the organisation that stunted the development of its politics despite the serious (and seriously flawed) attempt to come to term with the 'petty-bourgeois' class character of the movement. The establishment of a central leadership within the CFB (ML), subsequent fusion with the CUA (ML), and foundation of the RCLB and the publication of its Manifesto in 1977 put forward a line that a) questions of line, theory and leadership had basically been resolved in the League and b) that the way forward was through active ideological struggle.

The organisation had attracted attention and begins to fulfil its role as an alternative pole of attraction to the Birch party. The CFB's standing had been enhanced after internal changes and, as the result of fusion with the Communist Unity Association, bolstered by former RMLL members that saw the creation of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain in July 1977. In London recruitment to the organisation was seen as through a distinct Non-members contact group which acted as a filtering probationary experience prior to some joining the organisation. Elsewhere potential members were involved in the campaigns and study activities of their local group during a probationary period prior to membership. As small groups disintegrated, its former members would seek out other political homes: leading comrades of the East London Marxist-Leninist Association (that had evolved partly out of the North London Defence of Workers Rights) first went into the CPB (ML) and six months later found a more political RCLB a better vehicle.

However, the organisational growth of the organisation was undermined when ideologically RCLB, at its founding, also took on board and made 'revolutionary' the social chauvinism of the Western communist Tradition which had been a marked feature of the CFB.¹⁰⁵ This self-critical corrective judgement, a rarity for the movement in Britain, was critical of the RCLB's early but flawed approach, not only by the dogmatism of the Manifesto, but by the anti-intellectualism campaign which preceded it, the sole reliance on the 'Little Red Book' and the obscurantism of many of its documents such as "Build the League to Build the Party" which proclaimed that "Practice and mass work is now primary in party building!" and also reflected an arrogant dogmatism in proclaiming:

The principal contradiction in Party-building is between proletarian and bourgeois ideology. Our success in Party-Building has been mainly determined by the extent to

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Revolutionary Communist League of Britain, Eurocentrism, the 'key link' in theoretical work *October*, No. 3, Summer 1985

which we have correctly handled this contradiction.” and: “The RCLB itself has been basically bolshevised as far as theory, line and leadership is concerned.”¹⁰⁶

The new turn had brought about a withdraw from areas of mass work, like TOM and Working Women's Charter, in order to concentrate on building a membership base in industrial work. The objective partly reflected an attempt to reverse the petty-bourgeois dominance of its membership with its professional base in medicine, the law, and education.¹⁰⁷ However, for a young movement the implantation of members into working class occupations was a politically (and personally) difficult choice at a time of waning industrial militancy and intensifying economic crisis. The flexibility to successful ‘grow’ the organisation was not present. There was a narrowing of focus, partly in reaction to previous intellectualism and unfocused activity, that saw a dogmatic and rigid attention given in the ‘Manifesto period’ (1977/78) to party building through Ideological tempering and internal focus on organizational questions, China worship and industrial base building. These were errors of political immaturity that reflected an indication of serious intent to “Build the League to Build the Party”.

The Anti-League Faction

The renewal of the organisation suffered from both political struggle and paralysis when, with the initial absence of the Chairman through illness, the Political secretary attempted to energise and develop the organisation to be more “Bolshevik”. What was labelled the ANTI LEAGUE FACTION¹⁰⁸ by its detractors within the RCLB consisted of three members. What gave it an influence beyond its numbers was that two of the three were political committee members, the highest body of the organisation. The consequence of this meant that the political in-fighting at the summit of the organisation served to paralyze the leadership of a much centralised organisation. The disruption and damage was considerable: although only the three ALF members were to be expelled in January 1979, around 20% of the League membership was lost in the period of struggle.

What the episode illustrated was the rotten state of internal political life within the League: there was an over-emphasized centralism, a concept of democratic centralism imposed so distorted that the Political Committee had a ‘united face’ policy when speaking to the Central Committee.

The League’s failed attempt to achieve relevance – the so called ‘Rectification Stage’ of 1979/80, and the subsequent weakness of its 2nd Central Committee – came to shape the political trajectory of the organisation. By 1985 the RCLB itself was organizationally diminished and politically damaged by three major struggles over questions of political orientation as, in quick succession, leading comrades – the secretary, Chairman, and editor of its newspaper – were either expelled or left the organisation. These struggles

¹⁰⁶ Eurocentrism, the ‘key link’ in theoretical work *October*, No. 3, Summer 1985 see: EROL

¹⁰⁷ Anecdotal evidence

¹⁰⁸ The Anti-League Faction – its history and main features . Revolution Volume 4, No. 1 August 1979

resulted in the formation of two new groups, including the Stockport Communist Group and Mosquito Press. It is all too easy to fall into a religious comparison.

“The ambitions of the Communist Party – and the self-perception of members – were unmistakably theocratic. Organisationally, we conceived ourselves to be a communion of the elect, covenanted to a sacred cause. Politically, we aspired to be teachers and guides. As a visible church, we traced an unbroken line of descent from the founding fathers, claiming scriptural precedent for our policies....Authority in the party was theocratic too, an institutionalized form of charisma which operated at every level”¹⁰⁹.

There had been a conscious political decision taken by the leadership of the RCLB to build up the authority of the first Chairman in the late 1970s, difficult to attribute it as a ‘personality cult’ but it was a definite campaign to build an authoritative leader-figure. It was not successful; indeed the development of a stable leadership core was never achieved throughout the short history of the organisation. The ALF - Phil Dixon, Pat and Neil Redfern – attempted to assert a leadership onto the organisation. Dixon and Neil Redfern were on the Political Committee, they had both been members of the Communist Unity Association, and highly regarded, persuasive comrades. As Political Secretary Neil had led the organisation in the absence of the Chairman for the first half of 1978. Pat Redfern (nee Derrington), although a rank-and-file member had a long pedigree in ML politics that other League members found intimidating. Her previous membership of the German group, KBW (Kommunistischer Bund West Deutschland), gave her the reputation of a tested comrade. In the early 70s, she had been active in a local ML circle in Offenbach, joining the KBW in 1973. Membership of the RCLB was short -she had been granted candidate membership in January 1978 and was expelled by the London District a year later in January 1979 for "splittism".

All were formally expelled for "bourgeois factionalism" in January 1979. They later explained:

of the bureaucrat-centralism which then prevailed in RCL, and also because of our own ideological errors and bad style of work, we were not able to bring the two-line struggle in the RCL to fruition.... We weren't all that interested in winning the maximum possible unity, mentally wrote off the members of the RCL and were quite content to split away with a handful of people and found another circle. The interests of the working class would though have been best served if we had made our self-criticisms and stayed in the RCL to fight for our line. What the working class needs after all is a national organization, not a plethora of small circles.¹¹⁰

In the aftermath of their expulsion, the three comrades issued a pamphlet in the name of Communist Unity entitled "*Exposure and Defeat of the RCL's Social Chauvinism is a Major Task in Party Building*". This was later circulated internally within the League as part of a political offensive against the chairman of the organisation. Despite the

¹⁰⁹ Samuel (2006) : 58

¹¹⁰ Letter to the members of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain from the Stockport Communist Group. *Red Star*, No. 9, January-April 1982

intense passion generated within London around the former chairman, his eventual departure from the organisation was unaccompanied. However that 'London cockpit' of struggle that split over into the early Eighties had weakened the functionality of the organisation, and, as importantly, its self-belief.

Years later, in a self-critical piece, the "serious right opportunist errors" of the League in its internationalist stance were partially addressed:

Although the RCLB has never plumbed the depths which the CPB (M-L) has, it has relatively neglected its duties to lead the British working class in struggle against British imperialist exploitation of the oppressed people and nations. In words the RCLB recognised its duties to do this, but its deeds did not live up to its words. Politically, this error came about because in recognising that Britain is a second world country, subject to superpower aggression and threat, we forgot in practice that Britain's other aspect and its primary aspect at that, is that it is itself a bloody imperialist country which cruelly exploits many third world countries. Ideologically, the error occurred because we had not -sufficiently grasped the crucial importance of the unity of the working class of Britain with those peoples and nations oppressed by British imperialism and had not bothered to educate ourselves on this question. Objectively these were serious right opportunist errors which, if not corrected, would have developed into full blown social-chauvinism. These errors were quite marked in our practice and propaganda. In "Class Struggle", in the seven issues published from the founding of the RCLB to the Central Committee meeting which decided that the right opportunism on this question must be rectified, there were eleven articles on Soviet social imperialism in the world, and only four on British imperialism. Although it is essential that militant propaganda is done on the threat from Soviet social imperialism, this balance of articles, especially considering that the articles on British imperialism were secondary articles, forgot that in its international relations Britain is primarily an imperialist exploiter and oppressor. What is quite startling is that two articles on the struggle in southern Africa ('South African Liberation Forces Make Further Advances' in the August 1977 issue, and 'Despite Fascist Repression Azanian People Fight On' in the November 1977 issue) managed to avoid even mentioning British imperialism! It is quite evident that the leadership of the RCLB had seriously neglected its duties to educate the membership of the League on British imperialism. Another example of this error is that although the RCLB had correctly organized a demonstration on the occasion of the 9th anniversary of the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia, it at that time felt it couldn't spare the time to organise practical work to fulfil its internationalist duty to work in solidarity with the struggle of the people of Zimbabwe.¹¹¹

There was a dual trajectory operating throughout the movement throughout the 1970s as some organisations grew by fusion and haphazard unity process other organisations became mere shadows of their previous selves and gradually disappeared: the Communist Workers League of Britain declined after a series of expulsions of members but did produce two studies on workplace organisation,

¹¹¹ PROLETARIAN INTERNATIONALISM AND THE DUTIES OF BRITISH COMMUNISTS
Revolution Vol.3 No.2 June 1978 p16-17

Building Communist Revolutionary Bases at Place of Work (1974) and the need to build the party in their 1976 publication, *'Hey! It's Up to Us'* that proposed a Party-building Commission of all Marxist-Leninists.

The first meeting was held in Birmingham in 1977 with representatives numbering nearly two dozen and the constitution and organising principles of the Commission were adopted. It had a life of a few months as with the defection of one of the two other organisations from its original commitment, "the Commission ceased to exist". The failure of the initiative was attributed by the CWLB to "Those groups and organisations describing themselves as Marxist-Leninist, who have failed abjectly to take up the only serious, scientific, principled set of proposals to have been put before them in the sixteen or so years since the anti-revisionist movement took root here."¹¹²

In a correspondence, typical in its use of language, the Communist Unity Association issued a more sober view in an open letter in August 1976 commenting on "Hey, Its Up To Us!". The points made by the CUA were criticisms common from others in the movement to the approach the CWLB had proposed to unite the movement.

"You propose the setting up of a commission to conduct analysis on the areas of your five theses. Comrades, we must frankly state that this is bourgeois, not proletarian "scientific method". The proletarian method is to conduct analysis and polemics in an open ideological struggle for the correct line, not to relegate this responsibility to a commission.

Comrades, your responsibility, as with all Marxist-Leninists, is to engage in struggle for unity on correct ideas. It is not enough to make general assertions as you have done in your pamphlet. It is necessary to take clear positions on the actual lines and practices of other organisations, and publicly state these positions.

We agree that the CPB (ML), CPE (ML), WPS and WPPE are not genuine revolutionary parties. We do not agree that your pamphlet provides this.

You have not concretely criticised the line, the publications, or the political practice of these organisations in any way. You have merely asserted that they do not have the qualities of a revolutionary party. This is not proof of anything and does not provide the type of criticism that will lead comrades to abandon incorrect lines. . [A Commission] is an evasion of the responsibilities for leadership and for ideological struggle required if we are to go forward. "

NCG had supported the proposals of the Communist Workers League of Britain (ML) contained in its 1976 publication *Hey! It's Up to Us*. This called for a working commission on party building that would result, after systematic scientific analysis, in the formulation of a programme which would lay the basis for the establishment 'of a pre-party communist organisation uniting the ML movement in Britain.' How this related to the view that by the late nineteen seventies in Britain, the Nottingham Communist Group concluded that "as a conscious, organised revolutionary movement Marxism-Leninism in Britain is in real danger of extinction."¹¹³ Who did they consider

¹¹² Voice of the People Vol.6 No.6 , September 1977 p3

¹¹³'The Marxist-Leninist Movement in Britain: Past, Present and Future', Red Star, No. 4, Oct. 1980, 6.

genuine partners in this endeavour as their opinion of the two largest (“dwarfs”) of the movement in Britain did not change:

The RCLB is still thoroughly soaked with the reactionary 'Three Worlds Theory' and hence supports the present Chinese revisionist regime. Their practical activity consists largely in tailing after various solidarity work on national liberation front issues. While they are bad enough the CPB(ML) are even worse. Once comprising some genuine elements, this organisation has now thoroughly degenerated. It is chauvinist, racist, and sexist. Its activities now consist of attacks on the Thatcher regime and a rather apologetic attitude towards social democracy. Of armed proletarian revolution there is no mention. In terms of any overall revolutionary strategy and perspective neither organisation has one. Both these organisations are a disgrace to the Marxist-Leninist movement and should be remorselessly exposed.¹¹⁴

In the September of 1979, the Stockport Communist Group¹¹⁵ had publicly criticised the CWLB's 1976 proposals as "'an idealism which takes the form of schematicism ...a grand scheme to build the party without concretely examining the particular conditions of Britain today ...where there are several communist organisations which have political lines ...It is quite idealist to imagine that the different communist organisations can sit down together to draft a programme without first settling accounts with existing lines."¹¹⁶

The SCG then argued that the main task was to propagate and criticise political lines as the "essential prerequisite for serious programmatic work". In a self-criticism published when working in tandem with the NCG, the SCG described their previous position and criticism in these words: it stank to high heavens of self-opinated and arrogant circle mentality.¹¹⁷

The ideological affinity that had developed between the small circles of the NCG and SCG had its convergence point in support for the discredited 'Gang of Four' in China. Their political reference points were not so much concrete developments within British politics or society but rather international events. In this they shared a characteristic with the past ML movement in that they had a foreign policy approach before a domestic programme.

The appeal *Build The Party* issued in 1981 called for the establishment of a Programmatic Commission whose sole task would be "to develop a revolutionary programme embodying a thorough scientific analysis of the character of contemporary British Capitalism and on the basis of this scientific knowledge to elaborate a strategy

¹¹⁴ BREAK THE CHAINS! Manifesto of the REVOLUTIONARY INTERNATIONALIST CONTINGENT IN BRITAIN (1986) Section 2.d.16

¹¹⁵ The last organisational manifestation of the expelled RCLB members, formerly known as 'Communist Unity'.

¹¹⁶ The Way Forward in Re-Building the Communist Party. Sept 1979 p13

¹¹⁷ Stockport Communist Group: A Self –criticism Red Star No.8 October 1981: 31-43

for the conduct of revolutionary struggle in Britain." It was a re-run of the 'CWLB'S *Hey! It's Up To Us*.

The revolutionary programme was to form the political basis for a national organisation of a pre-party kind which would use the programme as a guide for participation in the class struggle with the aim of establishing a base within the working class and, through experience, deepening and developing the revolutionary programme. Only then would the conditions have been created for the formation of an authentic Marxist-Leninist party.¹¹⁸

Amidst the unity trend of the late 1970s, the WPPE thought it not practical (or even correct) to unite the numerous so-called Marxist-Leninist groups into one party at the moment."¹¹⁹ The WPPE had effectively abandoned any party-building pretence in favour of integrating with the masses in local activity. Indeed WPPE members were often active in the two communities they were based: Tyneside and East London. The organisation had neither advanced in statute or political understanding. In 1973, in a claim suggesting that the WPPE was not immune to the sectarian arrogance that inflicted other small groups, the organisation had made its judgement that "No one and no organisation save the WPPE and WPS, has even attempted a thoroughgoing analysis of what needs to be done. None have matched McCreery's analysis of ten years ago."¹²⁰

The WPPE, adhering to the common experience of the movement, did produce one breakaway¹²¹ : Alex Tudor Hart had been associated with the WPPE at its founding in 1968 but had decamped in a few years to form the Committee for a Socialist Program that produced the publication, *Working People*, but was noted more for Dr Tudor Hart's use of the 'Forum' column of *China Now* to promote his views.¹²²

There were other ad hoc groupings of non-aligned activists in groups like the Manchester Marxist-Leninist group that emerged from the university milieu in the 1970's. These and the Joint Action Committee of Marxist-Leninists (formed in 1975), were almost exclusively intellectual in composition working in higher education, working in various solidarity campaigns (notably around Eriteria and Kampuchea). They undertook some translation of European Marxist-Leninist texts but survived in the fractured environment of the Maoist movement because no other group could use their unquestionable talents or, perhaps just as importantly, break down their unwillingness to submit to political direction within a party building organisation.

¹¹⁸ IS A REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT POSSIBLE IN AN IMPERIALIST COUNTRY TODAY?

Harry Powell, March 1993: <http://freespace.virgin.net/pep.talk/RevMov.htm>

¹¹⁹ WPPE, Unity of What ...For What? 1977. See EROL

¹²⁰ *The Way Forward*, page 6

¹²¹ Paul Pawlowski, an activist from the Sixties left to eventually form the defiant anti-monarchist Republican Party of England, but it was politically, a sole member enterprise, and hardly constitutes a credible split but has a footnote association with the fantasists 'English People's Liberation Army'.

¹²² A.T.Hart was influenced by the fears and arguments of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament-wave that arose in the late 70s/early 80s . He echoed the concerns of the 'Green socialism' of East German dissent, Rudolf Bahro. He was of the opinion that it was the only realistic prospect given the "almost entire absence of any maoist influence on Marxism either in Europe or in Britain."

The Joint Action Committee of Marxist-Leninists emerged in 1975 and represented a short-lived tendency rather than a formalised, structured organisation like existing Marxist-Leninist groups; it was a grouping of individuals rather than a group of individuals. As a principle the JAC did not seek to supersede existing organisations, it was not a deliberate party-building vehicle but sought to make a contribution to create the conditions for a genuine Communist party to come into being, thus its express purpose was of a forum for “working together”. Given the fragmented nature of the movement, there was a line pushed in the JAC that while local groups should continue to do their local work, it was necessary for them to feel part of a national movement. The Joint Action Committee of Marxist-Leninists could act as that forum: it would co-ordinate activities around a general line and “would be [able] to learn through practice.”

“Not All Unity Among May Day Marches” headlined a 1977 report that “the Joint Committee of Marxist-Leninist demonstrated outside the Soviet Embassy in protest against the ‘fascist regime of the Soviet Union.” The committee, which supports a maoist doctrine, said in a statement...after Stalin died in 1953, a group of counter-revolutionaries led by the traitor Khrushchev had come to power and restored capitalism.¹²³

Some publications were produced: Down with the New Tsar! was a 12-paged pamphlet distributed at the picket of the Soviet Embassy; there was the 15-paged Marxist-Leninist Unity containing translations from the Chinese edition of Mao’s Selected Works, selected pages from the History of the Party of Labour of Albania, translation from the German of an article by Ernst Aust and a passage from Liberation an Indian Marxist-Leninist journal. At the other end of the scale, now lost, was the short-lived ‘Proletarian Mirror’ circulated in South London housing estates, although never official a JAC publication, produced by people associated with it and described as “a curious mixture of Pravda content and Daily mirror style”.

A considerable number of meetings were held to swap experiences between different groups and individuals, and despite the stress on joint action, there was in fact, mostly discussion and very little action. Amongst those involved in the deliberations were the Manchester Marxist Leninist Group (MMLG), the Communist Workers Movement (CWM) attended, ex-Communist Federation of Britain members and other organisation-less Maoists, and the Nottingham Communist Group appeared, as the group behind ‘The Marxist’, Brent Marxist Industrial Group.

Each brought their own agenda items: thus the Nottingham Communist Group proposal in February 1977, reflected their own solution

“Our collective task is to develop a programme that will be the ideological foundation upon which an authentic revolutionary party can be built. We must form a clear conception of where we are, where we want to go and how we are going to get there.”

¹²³ *The Times* May 2nd, 1977

In contrast, the Manchester Marxist Leninist Group (MMLG) believed that, “the conditions of existence of the Marxist-Leninist movement in Britain necessitates its unification and strengthening through the development of political work amongst the working class.” It argued that the direction of this integration with the working class and its struggles “can only be taken by local groups.” How this stress on localised and limited practice, coupled with political discussion, would aid the unification of the movement was never convincingly explained as it seemed to reinforce parochialism among activists. MMLG proposed that work could not go forward with their experience of the general framework of meetings as they

“only tend to consolidate the petty-bourgeois nature of the movement, bringing out its worst features: dogmatism, academicism, vacillations around matters of principle, discussion of issues in abstract from practice – all an effect of the lack of integration with the working class.”¹²⁴

The Brent Marxist Industrial Group, after circulating a number of documents on national sovereignty and the working class, had withdrawn from the JAC discussions at the end of 1976. It had participated in the initial meeting of the Joint Action Committee of Marxist-Leninists to discuss the issue of the Superpowers but felt that the lack of progress and cursory discipline in approaching committee business did not suggest a sustainable set up. Indeed as illustrated by this addition to the official JAC meeting record; it reads – “(Minute-taker’s Note: As neither the sequence of the agenda, nor, in some instances, the agenda itself was adhered to, it is impossible to record the discussion under the agenda headings.)”

The mainly London-based JAC individuals were involved in organising the July 1977 Conference at Birmingham initiated by the CWM, who had no London-based members at that time. With the failure evident at that conference the Joint Action Committee of Marxist-Leninists had largely lost its purpose. The Birmingham Conference had shown that a strategy aimed at pooling collective experience and developing a programme of practical and theoretical work towards the founding congress of the revolutionary party was beyond the practical and subjective capabilities of the varied ML groups. The JAC grouping had been characterised by a weak conception of the need for struggle in winning unity and consequentially been over-optimistic, like the CWM, about how easily unity could be attained. Some of the individuals associated with JAC decided to join the CWM, while others differed and discuss before deciding to collectively join the CWM.¹²⁵

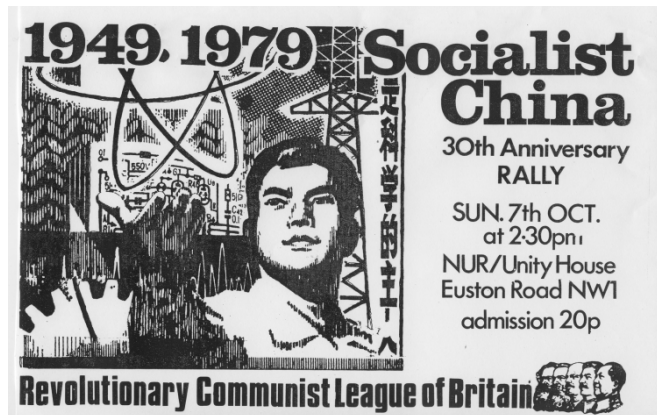
¹²⁴Statement to the JAC ML from the Manchester Marxist-Leninist Group: Two Lines on Unification. January 1977. See EROL

¹²⁵ An internal history of the CWM critical of the manner of this ‘group recruitment’ noted: “certain comrades who represented the JAC trend around the time of the July Conference subsequently changed their line and came to play a very important role in the CWM after the CWM’s original leadership core had lapsed into inactivity, which is an interesting little example of dialectics!” [*Some Points Concerning the History of the CWM* ‘Speech at 3rd Congress, December 1979 p8]

So by 1977end, the Joint Action Committee of Marxist-Leninists grouping had evaporated. The movement had a shrinking periphery: veteran communists, and initially involved in The Marxist were Colin and Virginia Penn ,the organisers of the China Policy Study Group which produced China Broadsheet, always an interesting and explanatory publication but essentially unconnected to the task of rebuilding 'the Party'. The subscriber periodical, 'Politics & Money' produced (1970-78) by A.N. Silver and M. Essex, likewise provided an analysis of current events reminiscent of the early editions of 'The Marxist' but again not a party-building vehicle. There were other events like the Conference on Superpower Imperialism organised by the Thames Polytechnic Anti-Imperialist Society in October 1977 where academics Jitendra Mohan and Robert Biel spoke, but generally the organisational focus for Maoists in Britain were being restricted. It was not that there were not 'non-party' projects or non-aligned Maoists still active in various cultural interests such as Banner Theatre and the Workers Film Association and politically campaigning groups associated with Women's and Gay Liberation, but the core party-building endeavours had gravitating towards a choice between two approaches that both said, join us, we are the movement.

Understanding Albania, the Superpowers and Three Worlds

Differences on international theory and strategy in the late 1970s, including the “Three Worlds Theory” and the Albanian criticism of China and Mao Zedong exacerbated the crisis of UK Maoism. The Maoist movement was wracked by a number of strategic political disputes in the late 1970s that fundamentally re-shaped what constituted ‘the movement’.



The first major fissure to crack saw a rapid defection by the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist), first to a pro-Albanian stance and then as quickly to defence of the Soviet Union in the 1980's. The newly-founded Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) likewise declared itself for the Party of Labor of Albania. The ideological defection of both the CPB (ML) and the RCPB (ML) left the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain as the only significant group still supporting the post-Mao leadership in China, which was reaffirmed by a RCLB delegation to China in November 1977.

“Soviet Imperialists Attack China” was the headline in *The Worker*, April 1969, when CPB (ML) Chairman Reg Birch congratulated the “immediate repulse to the Soviet Revisionists in their dastardly imperialist attack on China’s inviolate and sovereign border.”

“... the fear of China that these Russian renegades betray, a fear that is quite legitimate since China stands for communism and these traitors have supplanted communism by a mixture of bureaucratic capitalism, social imperialism and fascist oppression. Communism is taking great strides in China under the leadership of Chairman Mao and the proletarian cultural revolution which purged the Chinese Communist Party of revisionism and brought the significance of the communist revolution to millions of men and women. Is it any wonder that millions through out the world who want to destroy imperialism are looking to China and studying Mao's writings? This spells disaster for the Soviet revisionists.”

The CPB (ML)'s identification with Maoist politics was always taken for granted by those outside of the movement. Observers would note that the Party was the largest of the ML groupings, that it actually had links with the British working class through trade unionists, and that its paper, although dreary in style was relatively quite sober in its treatment of the two recognised socialist countries: Albania and China. In print at

least, the CPB (ML) avoided the worst excesses of 'Mao worship' that inflicted much of the ML movement in its early days of exerting orthodoxy. That the CPB (ML) was regarded as the 'official' Maoist party was not surprising: there were almost annual delegations of CPB (ML) members visiting Albania, and frequent delegations to China. Early on, the CPB (ML) received the official seal of approval from these parties in the forefront of the struggle against modern revisionism. For some years – approx 1969-1975, whilst other groups were sent Hsinhua news bulletin, loaned films, invited to embassy parties and maybe even given a subsidised trip to China as "Friends of China", but only the CPB (ML) had their messages printed in *Peking Review*, were officially and openly invited by the Party Liaison Department and were received by top state and party leaders. In the climate of the time, this did bring some prestige to the CPB (ML) and reinforced the view of Reg Birch as "Britain's leading Maoist".

There were three visits to Albania in 1969: Jim Farrell and another CPB (ML) industrial comrade were guest of the Albanian trade unions in the May; Ted Roycraft, CPB (ML) Secretariat member, led a six member delegation (that included Danny Ryan of Bristol CPB (ML) in the October; and in November, Reg Birch was in Tirana for the 25th Anniversary celebrations of the founding of Socialist Albania.

During that visit, during a conversation with Enver Hoxha, the Albanian party leader was quoted as praising *The Worker* as providing "thoughtful and helpful analysis and commentary on the struggle of the working class in Britain."

Such visits were taken as physical demonstrations of fraternal links, they provided the opportunity for exchange of views and first hand observations of a socialist country.

"A tour of Albania is in many ways a miniature of China. Everywhere there are Chinese machinery, equipment and technical experts. This is real international Marxist-Leninist cooperation and solidarity. Mao's name is greatly revered by all. His pictures and quotations are found in every factory along with pictures of Enver Hoxha and other giants of history."¹²⁶

December 1970, *The Times* reported that "seven senior party members – all men, and most of them industrial workers or union officials" were to visit China as the guests of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. "Despite Birch's early assertion that there would be no intelligentsia on the governing body of his party, another of the committee's members joining the Peking trip will be the accomplished novelist William Ash."¹²⁷ Upon the delegation's return, Ash was quoted as saying:

"The Chinese Central Committee were very interested to hear about political and economic prospects in Britain, but they would not dream of interfering, making suggestions or providing any finance. The idea of exporting revolution is anathema to them."¹²⁸

¹²⁶ *The Worker* June 1969

¹²⁷ *The Times* 12.12.1970

¹²⁸ *The Times* Jan.14th 1971

In January 1971 during a visit to China, Reg Birch was pictured with Chou Enlai¹²⁹ and the nearer bastion of anti-revisionism was not neglected as in November 1971 Reg Birch attended the 6th Congress of the PLA¹³⁰ he was to be a regular visitor, and In November 1973 Reg is again pictured with Enver Hoxha in *The Worker* emphasising the international status of the Party and its leader in the wider movement.

The diplomatic victory that saw the long time American policy of “isolating and containing China in ruins and thrown the Soviet revisionists into a state of panic”¹³¹ was downplayed with a back page article on the occasion of Nixon’s visit to China pointing out that it was the USA who made the concessions:

Rest assured that there will be no desertion by China of the Marxist-Leninist position of supporting national liberation struggles and of continued and fearless support of the just war of the Vietnamese people.¹³²

These bilateral visits did not constitute the formation of a Maoist international along the lines of the Comintern, but ideologically the ML groups looked to the CPC and PLA as the centres of the (anti-revisionist) communist movement. To some extent, this was less true of the CPB (ML) than other organisations. Reg Birch stated explicitly the deeply held belief within the CPB (ML) leadership in his 1978 May Day address at Conway Hall, London:

“You will not solve the problems of Britain by theories extracted from Peking or anywhere else. They will be solved solely by the will, the power of the British working class, its clarity and the guidance it receives from this party.”¹³³

The pride in, what Reg always referred to as the oldest working class in the world, degenerated into a very chauvinist stance that was impervious to learning from other organisation. It always had an arrogance that saw, after a period of shifting international allegiances in the later 1970s, the CPB (ML) dropped any pretence to recognising the Maoist centrality of third world based struggles to the destruction of imperialism.

The CPB (ML) speaker at its May Day meeting in 1979 emphasised the responsibility of their party and the working class in Britain for the future of communism and the survival of socialism in the world: The destruction of imperialism is now revealed in all its stark simplicity as the prime responsibility of the working class in the imperialist countries themselves.

This move away from one of the tenants of Maoist politics was always present in the 'internationalism begins at home' sentiments of the CPB (ML) approach. Manchanda, as secretary of the British-Vietnam Solidarity Campaign in the late 1960s, may be

¹²⁹ *The Worker* February 1971

¹³⁰ *The Worker* December 1971 p4

¹³¹ *The Worker* June 1971

¹³² *The Worker* April 1972 p4

¹³³ *The Worker*_May 11th 1978

regarded as having a political interest in such solidarity activities but he conveys the long-standing sentiments of the CPB (ML)'s leadership by recalling Dorothy Birch contribution to an early meeting of the BMLO discussions:

"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."

A position supported by Reg Birch as he explained, "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."¹³⁴

As an organisation, the CPB (ML) had very little solidarity experience; it had a controlling interest in the New Albanian Society, and had attempted to take control of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign in the early 70s. But any 'undue attention' given to the concerns of overseas parties or struggles were generally regarded as absenteeism from the prime task of attending to 'national task where they live -fighting the enemy, capitalism, where it is.' i.e. Britain. The CPB (ML) did give coverage in the pages of The Worker to overseas struggles but this diminished as the workerist orientation came to dominate the organisation in the early 1970s. The key to revolution is the struggle for independence in one's own land.

The shift in international allegiance of Britain's most prominent Maoists, the CPB (ML), occurred over a very short period of time. In 1976, the pending changes were signalled in Birch's speech to the 7th Congress of the Party of Albania, he concluded, "The test of a revolutionary working class in Europe today is in its understanding of the greatness and historic contribution to Marxism-Leninism to revolution and socialism of the Albanian people. Just as in October 1917 and for all the years of the Bolshevik Revolution, the test of class understanding of Marxism was the attitude to the Bolshevik Revolution now the test is the attitude to Albania. Albania is not alone, nor are the workers of Europe ever without a champion and friend while there is Albania."¹³⁵

That Reg Birch had singled out the attitude towards Albania as the test of marxist understanding was not simply diplomatic opportunism, it was a clear sign of agreement with the PLA analysis of the international situation. The Worker of November 29th 1976 devoted half of its space to coverage of the PLA Congress, reproducing excerpts from Enver Hoxha's criticism of the concept of 'three worlds'. In an allusion to the foreign policy analysis of China, the 1976 Congress document says: "For our party there is but one world. The divisive force is class. The division in Britain: working class – capitalist class, the expropriated and the expropriator, the exploited and the exploiter." This attacked the three-world line before it was profitable or popular to do so. That support was made even more explicit with the front page *Worker* article. "A Single World Divided By Class" with its opening line:

¹³⁴ Memorandum February 24 1968. RMLCL Proletarian Line (1977): 25

¹³⁵ New Albania Society, Albania, the most successful country in Europe (1976)

All over the world the two class forces, the capitalist class and the working class, confront each other with their radically different: ways of life and thought: profits, exploitation and war on the one hand, production geared to people's needs, freedom and peace on the other.¹³⁶

The CPB (ML) was not simply tailing behind the Albanian position, the 1976 Congress of the organisation had contained criticism that matched that of the Albanian party, and that agreement cemented the CPB (ML) alignment to Albania and her strained relations with China. The Congress document observed:

"The division of the world into 1,2,3 is artificial and mechanistic, and there are special dangers inherent within the so-called developing countries and within the liberation struggles today; no true liberation can be achieved within this one world without the strongest development of marxist forces."

The CPB (ML)'s Congress 1976 pamphlet spoke of "the revisionist 'Power' of a former socialist country, the USSR" and that the forces of Marxism-Leninism in Europe are woefully weak". "Those who say, if they do, beware the imperialist designs of the USSR state the obvious."

The pamphlet, *Britain in the World 1977* forewarned that "We do not judge or give instructions to another working class and we do not tolerate instructions from any other on how we shall act. Our Party was founded on Marxism-Leninism and the Communist Manifesto is our first text."

Dorothy Birch wrote the Party pamphlet, "a scorching rebuff to the Chinese party's three worlds notion and its consequent attempt to suborn Britain into a war against the USSR."¹³⁷ It argued "We in Britain are being urged to put into cold storage our revolutionary task and to join in alliance with our employing ruling class".. "it is argued that the working class should unite with its own imperialism and US imperialism to defeat USSR imperialism." This was described as a "betrayal, a disowning of the revolutionary role and a revival of Second Internationalism"

Furthermore, in an example of political amnesia, the CPB (ML) argued, "we have never referred to the USSR of the new revisionists as social imperialism. It is a capitalist imperialist power as we stated regarding the invasion of Czechoslovakia."¹³⁸

The CPB (ML) dismissed as "capitalist phraseology" the term 'third world', "first used in connection with the absurdity of 'nonalignment'. And "if we are to believe that there is no socialist camp where is the People's Socialist Republic of Albania and where is the proletariat of the world?"

With the public polemic between the Albanian and Chinese parties, the CPB (ML) firmly condemned the "poisonous theory of the "three worlds" and enlarged its foreign

¹³⁶ The Worker Jan.24th 1977

¹³⁷ Podmore, Will (2004) Reg Birch: engineer, trade unionist, communist. London: Bellman Books 147

¹³⁸ *Britain in the World 1977:4*

policy differences to include a re-assessment of China's general political orientation. Others would follow in their wake in looking at events in China in a more critical light.

However, the CPB (ML) did not accept the Albanian line that the Communist Party of China had never been Marxist-led revolutionary party. Its leader said when Mao died, that

"Like ML parties throughout the world, the CPB (ML) grew up under the banner of Chairman Mao's Marxist thought. It was his gigantic contribution to Marxist understanding that helped all of us grasp the significance of uniting theory and practice and applying Marxism-Leninism to the national situation facing the working class."¹³⁹

There was praise for the veteran leaders of the Chinese Revolution: "Chu Teh, Chou Enlai and Mao have all gone and with them appears to have perished the banner of socialism."¹⁴⁰ Still, *The Worker* was "proud to join forces with ZERI I POPULLIT in the welcomed task of making known to the workers everywhere the principled stand of the Albanian people and their Party of Labour, with Enver Hoxha at their head, in the defence of socialism and in the encouragement of the revolutionary advance of all exploited people."¹⁴¹ The works of Mao (Volume V) were advertised at the start of 1978 in the party paper, to be replaced from February onwards by the Collected Speeches of Enver Hoxha.

Throughout 1978, The CPB (ML) organised public meetings in support of Albania. At a meeting in Conway Hall (London) in October, Enver Hoxha was praised for leading the attack "against the anti-communist theory of three worlds."¹⁴² The meeting, "Albania – beacon of Marxism-Leninism", promoted the view that, "the Albanians had been able to foresee, expose and survive the treachery of former allies in the struggle for socialism – first of all Yugoslavia at the end of the war, then Russia in the 1960s and now China."¹⁴³

The incoherence and rapid alteration in the CPB (ML) position could be seen as The CPB (ML) stated at 'Congress 1979' had argued that "No particular imperialism is essentially worse or any better than another. To qualify imperialism by describing it as 'social imperialism' or whatever is to imply some qualitative difference. The aggressive acts of Russia and China have everything in common with the customary behaviour of classic imperialists and have nothing in common with socialism, they are the outward manifestation of the internal degeneration of capitalism within those countries."

"The line of 'three worlds' which never warranted the title of a theory, stands naked for what always was, a weak apology for China's bid to attain the status of a world imperialist power."...."Our Party was the first in the world to oppose it."

¹³⁹ R. Birch, *The Worker* Sept 20th 1976.

¹⁴⁰ *The Worker* No.34, 5th October 1978 p2

¹⁴¹ Message to Zeri I Popullit dated August 8 1978, printed in *The Worker* No.29 24 August 1978 p3

¹⁴² *The Worker* No.35 October 12th 1978 p20

¹⁴³ *The Worker* No.36 October 19th 1978 p4

“Furthermore we do not interfere in the affairs of other parties or states or instruct them, as in Europe over the EEC, or others in the call for new Marxist trade unions.”¹⁴⁴ That last statement perhaps an allusion explaining why praise for Albania was conspicuously by its absence in the Congress document. There was also criticism that “it has been a traditional weakness of the international communist movement to look to some international centre for direction and leadership, a communist Vatican, a Marxist pope...the formation of a communist international would be at best provide no solution and at worst be a diversion.”¹⁴⁵ .

Throughout 1979 another shift had taken place in the perception of the party. The identification with Albania waned, the relationship with Albania cooled as there were noticeably less frequent reports about Albania in contrast to 1978 and there was no special reference to Albania in that year’s May Day edition of *The Worker*. The principal reason for the waning relationship was evident in fellow Party member, Will Podmore’s sympathetic biography of Reg Birch. He notes that the 1979 Congress document “depicted the development in Britain of the two contending classes and the way that the working class had developed trade unions in order to survive. It appraised the organisational strengths and political weaknesses of our trade unions. It also upheld the class’s right, and duty, to work in our trade unions, and opposed suggestions from, sadly, the Party of Labor of Albania, that workers should walk away from their own organisations and form Red unions.”¹⁴⁶ Even though Reg Birch retired from the General Council of the TUC that year, neither him or the CPB(ML) were going to idly accept such "slanders" directed against British trade unionists. The dominant line that had informed the CPB (ML)'s international allegiance was:

“We can’t turn to a united international communist movement for aid, which is no great handicap really. We have to rely on our own resources in any case.”¹⁴⁷

The CPB (ML) reaffirmed its self-reliance and its sturdy independence baulked at being little more than a political section of the Albanian friendship society; there were others who did accept the guidance from Tirana. Although the founding congress of the CPE (ML) was held on March 24th 1972, it was not until six years later, in 1978 that the First congress was convened. It was the 3rd Plenum of the Central Committee that took the decision, naturally "historic", to dissolve the CPE (ML) and to found the "genuine" party of the "British Proletariat". The RCPB (ML) would follow that “Albanian line” and set up organisations (consisting of a few party members) that purported to be revolutionary trade union opposition, Reg and the Party he founded and shaped “held to the line of working in the trade unions, despite pressure from the Albanian leadership.”¹⁴⁸

"Capitalist Chaos in China" was the headline of *The Worker* of February 1979, but the article offered no real explanation as to why China had allegedly "changed colour"

¹⁴⁴ Congress '79: 12

¹⁴⁵ Congress '79: 13

¹⁴⁶ Podmore 2004 :166

¹⁴⁷ The Worker 21.December 1978

¹⁴⁸ Podmore :167

other than a change of personnel at the apex of power. The CPB (ML) offered the explanation that the overthrow of the Gang of Four was “a factional putsch (that) put Hua Guofeng in office.”¹⁴⁹ Despite the defences of the Gang of Four, there was no likelihood of the CPB (ML) participating in the re-alignment of that ultra- leftist trend associated with the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement that emerged in the early 1980s. The CPB(ML) saw in China's foreign policy an evil deed: " The Chinese ruling clique are brazen enough to demand aloud what the imperialist powers dare not whisper - a holy war in Europe to destroy the working class at the heart of the industrial world, the main danger to imperialism." ¹⁵⁰

Under the headline "China Degenerates", *The Worker* carried a report on the trial of the Gang of Four, the article was accompanied by a photograph, dating from 1975, of Chang Chu-Chiao talking to Reg Birch: "For loyally supporting the revolutionary ideas of the great Chinese leader, Mao Tsetung, for faithfully carrying out, during the Cultural Revolution, the instructions of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, Chiang Ching has been sentenced to death by the kangaroo court rigged up in Peking It is no wonder Teng Hsiaoping and his henchmen hate the Cultural Revolution since it held them up to popular scorn as capitalist roaders -a charge they proved against themselves by everything they have done since insinuating themselves into positions of power."¹⁵¹

In 1978 Reg Birch visited the USSR in his trade union capacity. An article in the March issue of the AUEW journal carried an article called “The USSR as we saw it”. There was no criticism of the USSR, praising thee “desire for peace” amongst shop-floor workers and in writing, “because of the different system of society, the Unions’ functions are entirely different to ours” implied the USSR was not capitalist.

In a major policy statement entitled “Britain in the World – Our task is revolution” published in November 1978, the CPB(ML) criticised Chinese foreign policy “That would have gang us up with a bunch of murderous thugs, such as the Shah and Pinochet.”¹⁵² ‘*New Age*’ newspaper of the Communist Workers’ Movement - formed mainly by ex-CPB (ML) members – pictured Reg with leading Chinese leader, Chang Chun-Chiao, with a caption that read: Upon his return from China, Reg “told some members of the CPB (ML) that China’s foreign policy was revisionist, and that the CPB (ML) should not change its policy, since there would soon be changes in China. Could it be that he knew something about the plans of the Gang of Four to seize power? Could it be that Birch was something to do with the “illicit foreign relations” the Gang of Four were accused of maintaining and was involved in wider conspiracies in the international movement?”¹⁵³ Their fellow Maoists in the RCLB proclaimed “Birch No Longer part of the Marxist-Leninist Movement!” in their theoretical journal,

¹⁴⁹ The Worker 8.November 1979

¹⁵⁰ The Worker November 23, 1978

¹⁵¹ The Worker February 5, 1981

¹⁵² The Worker No.39 November 9th 1978 p2

¹⁵³ New Age No.3 Mid-April to Mid-May 1978 p7

Revolution¹⁵⁴. The CWM agreed: "Now Birch has joined the camp of the Soviet Social-Imperialism and their agents."

Throughout 1978, there appeared snippets in *The Worker* that defended "the Soviet people" against western propaganda. The CPB (ML) began to argue that the 'imperialist warmonger' Thatcher was "planning a world war" and it became more vocal in defence of the Soviet Union stating:

"The fact that the Soviet Union is no longer socialist is immaterial. It remains "communist" in name and that is enough for an anti-'communist, anti-working class crusade at home." ¹⁵⁵

The emphasis on industrial working class reflected a domestic agenda fearful of the perceived intentions of the destruction of industrial capacity and its workforce, the patriotic pride in the achievements of the British working class reflected in a workshop mentality, the analysis that saw the main advance for revolution in the industrialised world where the advanced workers were, the threat of war in Europe sparked by a confrontation between Nato and the Warsaw Pact that would destroy the workers. The argument developed so that if the war involved the Soviet Union, then Western war-preparations should be condemned and the Soviet Union supported; *The Worker* asserted, "We, the British Marxist-Leninist Party, know that the great Russian people will make revolution once again; since they were the first they shall not be the last."

Further elaboration, of the CPB (ML)'s new orientation to "socialism's first home" gradually emerged. Using the belligerent confrontation of the Western Powers, the CPB (ML) negated the immediate experience of Soviet foreign policies to argue that: "The US ought to realise that in casting the Soviet Union as the villain, of the piece from an imperialist point of view, it is automatically casting the Soviet Union as the hero from the point of view of all those sympathetic to the cause of national liberation." ¹⁵⁶

In the days when the CPB (ML) berated Soviet Social Imperialism, the Party had employed assertion and rhetoric to state its case, so there was no embarrassing theoretical explanation to ditch as the process of reconciliation proceeded. By some warp logic, China was said to have defected from the Socialist camp, leaving only the Soviet Union "in spite of past revisionist vagaries, the ally of working people under attack ...the only power sympathetic to the aspirations of genuine liberation movements anywhere."

In the wake of that belief promoted by the CPB (ML), there came support for Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and condemnation of the Polish trade union, Solidarnosc's project of "a catholic Khomeini in Europe".

¹⁵⁴ Vol 3 No.1 February 1978:pp1-29 See: EROL

¹⁵⁵ Worker January 10th, 1980

¹⁵⁶ The Worker 17.12.1981

Evidence of the changing attitude towards the Soviet Union was seen in reports of “a renaissance of socialism in socialism’s first home” and the Party’s determination to thwart the British prime minister, Thatcher, in “her wish of a war against Russia”¹⁵⁷ The CPB (ML) support for the Soviet presence in Afghanistan and declared opposition to what it saw as China’s alliance with US Imperialism.’ The Worker’ defended “the right of the Afghan government to call in Soviet troops for assistance”¹⁵⁸

The transformation in line was emphasised in the front-page headline in the first issue of *The Worker* in 1982. It expressed the CPB (ML)’s perspective, “Attack on USSR is War on Workers”¹⁵⁹. Later in the year in the CPB (ML)’s *Congress 82*, the Maoist arguments on the restorationist regenerative class analysis from the Polemic and Cultural Revolution were airily dismissed:

“The Bolshevik Revolution upon which the Soviet Union is established owes its place in history to being the only change in class power from bourgeois to proletariat, the only change of relation of production from capitalist to socialist in the world. This revolutionary development has dictated the role of the Soviet Union in the world irrespective of individual leaders, for it is the relations of production that determines the political superstructure – hence the domestic and international line...Man cannot be restored to previous state, he can only be destroyed. So in the case of socialist relations of production. Capitalism cannot be restored in the Soviet Union.”

Furthermore, “Concerning the ‘Polemic’, China was ultimately wrong because as right in Marxist term was the break, it undoubtedly became not distorted but perverted for and because of chauvinist ends, as in China...USSR is not our enemy...internationally we are strengthened because of the USSR. Long Live the USSR, Long Live the Revolution, must be our watch word.”

UNCONDITIONAL SOLIDARITY



In contrast, the other “pole of attraction” within the movement, the RCLB had taken a very different attitude. Its uncritical adoption of Chinese foreign policy priorities in the ‘Manifesto period’ of the late 1970s was seen in its public defence of ‘The Theory of the Three Worlds’. At public meetings in London, supported by the CWM, it argued that it was the strategic line for the International Communist Movement without questioning, as had not been questioned in the 1930s, whether the national interests of a socialist state were always those of the wider movement. As the Foreign Ministry of the People’s Republic of China described the situation:

¹⁵⁷ Imperialist China Joins British and USA Imperialism Against USSR. *The Worker* (Vol 12 No.3) 17th January 1980: 2

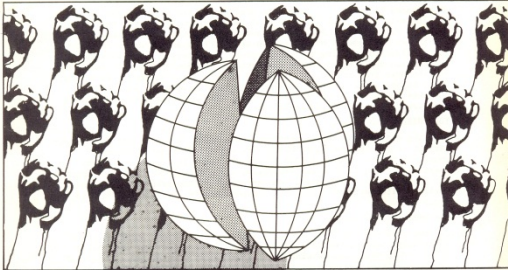
¹⁵⁸ *The Worker*, February 1981

¹⁵⁹ *The Worker* (Vol14 No.1) 14 January 1982

Chairman Mao Zedong pointed out during his meeting with Henry Kissinger in 1973 that as long as we share the same goal, we will not do harm to you nor will you do harm to us and we should work together to counter Soviet hegemonism. We hope the United States would strengthen its cooperation with Europe and Japan and draw a parallel line linking the United States, Japan, China, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Europe. This is unity against the Soviet hegemonism or the "Strategy of forming an alliance against an opponent".¹⁶⁰

The RCLB argued, in a publicity leaflet advertising a series of meetings in London on the Three Worlds Theory:

THE THEORY OF THE THREE WORLDS
the strategic line of the international communist movement



3 PUBLIC MEETINGS

- 1** THE TWO SUPERPOWERS AND THE THREAT OF WORLD WAR
Saturday 21 October 7.30pm
Coop Hall, 129 Seven Sisters Road, N7 (Finsbury Park Tube)
- 2** THE THIRD WORLD, THE MAIN FORCE OPPOSING THE TWO SUPERPOWERS
Saturday 2 December 7.30pm
Coop Hall, 129 Seven Sisters Road, N7 (Finsbury Park Tube)
- 3** THE THREE WORLD THEORY AND THE STRATEGY FOR REVOLUTION IN BRITAIN
Friday 5 January 7.30pm
Conway Hall (Small Hall), Red Lion Square, WC1

Revolutionary Communist League of Britain
203 Seven Sisters Road London N4

Throughout the world there are many complicated struggles taking place. Mao Tsetung's theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds enables us to understand these struggles. It is also a guide for us in carrying out our revolutionary tasks in this country.

THE TWO SUPERPOWERS

This theory is based on a very deep analysis of the world today. It shows how the main enemies of the people of the whole world are the two Superpowers - United States Imperialism and Soviet Social Imperialism. These two imperialist powers have built up armed forces and

economic resources far superior to anything ever seen before in history. Everywhere they are facing each and struggling for domination. The Soviet Union is desperate to take over from the United States as the World's Policeman - in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America it is stirring up trouble, trying to increase its power. The conflict between the two Superpowers is heading inevitably towards a third world war.

THE THIRD WORLD

Standing against the Superpowers are the peoples of the world, in particular the peoples of the Third World, the so-called 'Underdeveloped' countries for so long exploited by Imperialism. The countries of the Third World, including Socialist China, are uniting ever closer to oppose the plans of the Superpowers. The

¹⁶⁰ <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/ziliao/3602/3604/t18008.htm>

struggles of the peoples of the Third World for liberation and national independence further strengthen this great movement.

OUR REVOLUTIONARY TASKS

In countries such as Britain which is part of the Second World of minor Imperialist powers, our main task is revolution against our own ruling class. This Socialist Revolution is a component part of the struggle of the countries and peoples of the whole world against the Superpowers. Britain exploits the Third World. It is in turn exploited and oppressed by US Imperialism, and threatened by the aggressive Soviet Social Imperialism.

Unless we grasp the connection between these struggles we' will be unable to make revolution. The Theory of the Three Worlds gives us that understanding. It is a most powerful weapon in our fight. Countries fighting for independence, nations fighting for liberation and people fighting for revolution -all form part of a great current opposing the Superpowers.¹⁶¹

The RCLB 's chairman did attend another international rally, in Brussels on March 4th 1978, its platform consisted of organisations from Belgium's near neighbours unite in:

"the absolute necessity in the present situation for the Working Class in Europe to defend national independence from Superpower aggression, whilst relying on the working class and deepening the revolutionary struggle for socialism."¹⁶²

The RCLB circulated internally their translation of the Norwegian military programme with its advocacy of a people's war to defeat any superpower that attacked the country¹⁶³ in the early eighties but foreswore any independent analysis of the Soviet Union, echoing Chinese criticism, even maintaining these criticisms as they were quietly abandoned by the Chinese themselves. While criticised from the right for "gross leftist distortion of Mao's Three Worlds theory", other critics of the RCLB charged the organisation with advocating, "a social-chauvinist alliance of all political forces against the superpowers, and in practice against the Soviet Union only."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ RCLB , THE THEORY OF THE THREE WORLDS: 3 PUBLIC MEETINGS (1977/78)

¹⁶² "130th Anniversary of Communist Manifesto". Class Struggle April 1978 Vol.12 No.9 p10. The platform speakers were from PCMLB (Belgium), RCLB (Britain), KPD (West Germany) PCMLF (France), KOL (Luxembourg) and the MLPN (Netherlands) . The last organisation set-up and run by the BVD, the Dutch security organisation.

¹⁶³ Norwegian Marxist-Leninists Intensify the Struggle Against Social-Imperialism. Resolution from the National Conference of the Workers' Communist Party (ML) Norway, November 1974

¹⁶⁴ An Open letter to the Revolutionary Communist league of Britain and the Communist Workers' Movement from the Stockport Communist Group (1981.) See also ACW

There was some truth in this charge as the publications of the organisation, reflecting the Maoist consensus, wrote of the Soviet Union being “hellbent on becoming the one and only superpower. This is dragging the world towards a new world war.”¹⁶⁵

The idea that if the Soviet Union did invade Britain, then a just national war of defence was permissible, was condemned again by means of a historical comparison, that charged the RCLB as being “in the same position as those despicable social-chauvinists of 1914 who defended ‘their’ imperialist country on the pretext that ‘their’ country was being invaded.”¹⁶⁶

Here they reflected a view seen on the European continent. Policy initiatives such as the unilateral withdrawal from Afghanistan certainly improved international relations, and the willingness to watch throughout 1989-90 the communist parties of Eastern Europe abandoned their monopoly of power did not match the “aggressive superpower” description of the “Three Worlds Theory”.

Former members in the Stockport Communist Group could argue (disingenuously) that Three theory was not Mao’s but belong to the post Mao leadership of Deng Xiaoping and other rehabilitated victims’ of the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong’s strategic thinking had a long pedigree in shaping China’s subtlety and flexibility in foreign relations. The importance given, by activists in far different circumstances than their Chinese comrades, to Chinese foreign policy probably says less about China than how China was perceived by its Western supporters. There were dubious arguments to justify, or more correctly avoid, a critical assessment of the movement’s shared confusion on developments in China during 1976 and the years before.

“It is wrong however for us to make a self-criticism for any incorrect statement made by the RCLB’s founding organisations on the question of Comrade Teng [Deng Xiaoping]. These mistakes could not be avoided without committing a more fundamental error of confusing the working class by raising uninformed doubts about the Communist Party of China.”¹⁶⁷

A less convincing explanation could be hard to consider for avoiding difficult questions, and the reassessment of policies regarding China. Muted criticism within the RCLB grew throughout the 1980s did disenchantment with China’s post-Mao developments, not simply its foreign policy decisions, were seen in terms of the abandonment of Maoist precepts for ‘capitalism with Chinese characteristics’. That position engendered, in addition to theoretical blindness, an ideological confusion and crisis of belief that culmination in the RCLB’s ‘Resolution of June 1989’¹⁶⁸. As was noted in a rare internal discussion “to a large extent, commentaries on developments in China (throughout the 1980s) took

¹⁶⁵ Against the ACW’s Hopeless Dogmatism. Revolution Vol 4 No.2 January 1980: 40

¹⁶⁶ An Open letter (1981) p.16

¹⁶⁷ See: Support for Socialist China Means Wholehearted Support for China’s Veteran Leaders Revolution, Vol. 3, No. 1, February 1978

¹⁶⁸ See EROL: Statement of the Central Committee of the R.C.L.B. June 6, 1989

place outside of Marxist-Leninist organisations and was carried on between 'non-party' intellectuals".¹⁶⁹ There was much to explain.

China's own belligerence towards the Soviet Union during the 1970s and early 1980s faded: Renmin Ribao [People's Daily] repudiated the 'Nine Commentaries' that had defined CPC ideological differences with the CPSU in 1963-64.¹⁷⁰ A new approach in "a new historical period of correcting past mistakes" was evident:

"From the late 1970s, the Party gradually resumed long-suspended relations with some foreign communist parties on the basis of the principle of forgetting old scores, looking towards the future and seeking co-operation."¹⁷¹

There was a tactfully playing down of the Three Worlds Theory and a rebuilding of diplomatic relations. The post-Mao leadership had concluded that the designation of an imperialist power identified the first socialist state as an enemy was wrong. Deng Xiaoping expressed the sentiment that

"We can see that we haven't always acted correctly. Sometime ago, talking with Comrade Enrico Berlinguer, general secretary of the Italian Communist Party, I said that we had previously expressed some incorrect opinions concerning his Party. He replied that they hadn't always acted correctly either. So I said that the past controversies between the two Parties should be forgotten altogether."¹⁷²

By the mid-1980s, the Chinese leadership had repudiated the theoretical justification for two decades of Chinese foreign policy; now it commonly and publically referred to the Soviet Union as a socialist country. In 1989 the Beijing Summit between Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping normalised relations between the USSR and China after a break of almost thirty years.

Changing attitudes towards the Soviet Union and a re-evaluation of previously held positions was evident in a number of the European parties. Not all parties fell in line behind the view that previous categorisation, as an aggressive capitalist power was incorrect. In 1985, the AKP (ML) reasserts the analysis of "the imperialist class content of the Soviet government administration", and did not accept the view of the foreign policy as "only the result of 'erroneous policy' of great-power chauvinism."¹⁷³ The following year, the MLPD organised an international "trial" against 'social Imperialism and Modern Revisionism' in Hamburg on March 15 1986 with 36 hours of testimony from 100 witnesses from 18 countries.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Looking Once More at China. October Review, No. 5, July 1996

¹⁷⁰ People's Daily, April 2 1980

¹⁷¹ Dai Bingguo 2001b. The application of four principles of governing relations – independence, equality, mutual respect and non-interference in internal affairs – becoming the general principles governing the CPC's contacts as increasingly relationships were established with those formally regarded as ideological incompatible.

¹⁷² Deng Xiaoping 1980. Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping
<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/dengxp/Vol2/textb1450.html>

¹⁷³ Lysestol 1985

¹⁷⁴ On Charge –30 Years of betrayal of Socialism. Documentary film of the International Tribunal against Social Imperialism and Modern Revisionism, 1986 62 min., colour video Verlag Neuer Wag

Likewise in Britain, the future was still seen in a stark, catechetical light with Supporters of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement in Britain calling for a boycott of the 1987 UK General Election with the slogan; "TORY, LABOUR, ALLIANCE, WHICH WILL IT BE? WHICHEVER MEANS WORLD WAR 3". It distributed anti-election literature with the heading "A vote in '87 is a vote for nuclear war." For over a decade the strategic view had been that:

The working class in Britain finds itself situated in a still powerful imperialist country in a period when the major contradictions in the world are developing in such a way as is likely to result in a major inter-imperialist war. We are presented with a great danger but at the same time also face great opportunities, provided that we seize them. It has always been in the course and the aftermath of inter-imperialist war that opportunities for making proletarian revolution have emerged. The working class must struggle to make the revolution prevent the war, or failing that, turn the imperialist war into revolutionary civil war.¹⁷⁵

REALIGNMENT, BAINS AND ENVER

The CPB ML's initial pro-Albanian turn was echoed by the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist), once the most zealous proponents of "Mao Tse-Tung Thought", the organisation sought to prove it was critical of Maoism and the most vociferous opponent of Chinese "social imperialism". Praise was now heaped upon Enver Hoxha and the Party of Labour of Albania, as "the foremost Party in the International Marxist-Leninist Communist Movement." It joined in the condemnation of the "anti-Marxist" Mao in support of the Albanian positions. The adoption of Tirana's perspective led the Internationalists in Canada, Ireland and Britain to conclude that:

Mao Tsetung, whilst being a revolutionary democrat who led the Chinese people in tremendous advances in their struggle against imperialism and feudalism, was never a Marxist-Leninist..."Mao Tsetung Thought" was a profoundly anti-Marxist and revisionist trend" which denied the hegemonic role of the proletariat in the revolutionary struggle, which substituted eclectics for dialectics, which promoted conciliation of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie and denied the basic character of our epoch.¹⁷⁶

A few years earlier, an internal assessment of 1974 had noted that the CPE(ML) "has never ceased to oppose revisionism and popularise Mao Tsetung Thought ...The final basic lesson of the 'Necessity for Change' Conference was that we must learn from and apply the lessons of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, we must acquire, grasp and apply Mao Tsetung Thought."¹⁷⁷

175 Break the Chains (1986) Section 2.a.11

176 Workers Weekly March 17, 1979

177 The Marxist-Leninist Vol 1 No.1 1974

The discovery that for decade' a vanguard party had adopted anti-Marxist ideas and had been in the forefront calling for their wide scale dissemination would be an awkward revelation at best, and especially for an organisation proud to advertise its revolutionary heritage. In 1968, the English Internationalists proclaimed "their total allegiance to Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought" in the wake of "the most advanced, earth-shaking and deep-going revolution in the People's Republic of China is personally led by Chairman Mao Tsetung, the greatest Marxist-Leninist of the era in which imperialism is heading for total collapse while socialism is winning world-wide victory."¹⁷⁸

The Internationalist trend for a decade or more proclaimed Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, the "world proletarian outlook" until an abrupt discovery, in the wake of Enver Hoxha's pronouncements, that Mao was never a Marxist and the Communist Party he led a bogus party. However, the RCPB (ML) maintains that:

"In the face of extremely difficult conditions, in the face of the attacks and pressures of the bourgeoisie and revisionism, and despite the serious, though understandable, mistake of adopting 'Mao Zedong Thought' alongside Marxism-Leninism as their guiding ideology, the English Internationalists and other forerunner organisations of the RCPB(ML) achieved in concrete reality the task of creating the necessary conditions for the refounding of the genuine party of the working class."¹⁷⁹

March 16th 1979, saw the "historic" decision of the Internationalists trend to dissolve the CPE (ML) and to found the "genuine" party of the "British Proletariat", the Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist).

"The reorganisation of the Party in 1979 was a event of great significance because, while the work which begun in '67 to re-establish the Marxist-Leninist Party in Britain had its glorious deeds – particularly in such things as the anti-fascist struggle – and never went against the principles of Marxism-Leninism, at the same time vacillations in leadership, the effects of Maoism, and other factors, held back the full development of the Party and its work. But with the reorganisation of the Party in 1979, under the leadership of John Buckle, the Party was firmly established, upholding Marxism-Leninism in opposition to all forms of opportunism, including the so-called Mao Tsetung Thought. And it was a Party for the whole of Britain, which meant that at long last the British working class again had its Party, a Party founded in 1920's which had been betrayed by the modern revisionists"¹⁸⁰.

The organisational change marked the rejection of the organisation's Maoist allegiance, and a cover-up of its Maoist past. The change of name in 1979 was convenient, distancing the organisation from its Maoist past while taking up the

¹⁷⁸One Struggle, Two Enemies Three Guidelines Four levels of work . Seek Truth Pamphlet 1, 1968 p8.

¹⁷⁹ Workers Weekly 2.10.1982

¹⁸⁰ Speech delivered by Representative of Central Committee of Revolutionary Communist party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) WW Vol.16, Nos 12-14 March 23 – April 8 1989 : page 3

Albanian franchise. A criticism of the RCPB (ML) was that while the rest of the Marxist-Leninist movement had learnt some lessons from past experience, the RCPB (ML) simply repeated the same sectarian errors but this time as the political section of the Albanian Society.

The relationship with the Party of Labor of Albania followed in the wake of the conversion of Hardial Bains, leader of the CPC (ML). The cooperation and unity of the two parties was strengthened with the visit in May 1980, a delegation of the RCPB (ML) at the invitation of the Party of Labor of Albania.¹⁸¹ The relevant adjustments had been made: the previous April, *The Marxist-Leninist Journal* carried an issue length article, 'Mao Zedong Thought: a profoundly anti-Marxist theory'¹⁸². A month earlier, the RCPB (ML) had taken part in the Internationalist Rally held in Montreal on March 30th which celebrated the Tenth Anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist Leninist). May 1981 saw another delegation visit Albania; the previous month, on April 26th 1981 saw the founding of the Trade Union Revolutionary Opposition.

What coincided with the 1st Congress of the RCPB (ML) was a major Internationalist rally held in London on June 4th 1983 on the occasion of Karl Marx's centenary addressed by Hardial Bains, leader of the CPC (ML). The first Congress of the Party consolidated its political line following the Albanian's "timely exposure" that the "dictatorship of the proletariat was never established in China".

The RCPB regards its history as containing a "spirit of boldness, of purity of motive" of seriousness, of the willingness to storm heaven" which represents "a red spine which, whatever the complications and zig-zags of development, ran through all the work of the Marxist-Leninists in re-establishing the party."¹⁸³ The activists of the RCPB's previous organizational forms were members of a Party of deeds, a party whose principles were shown in its practice, in its revolutionary activity and actions, in the work that it organised.

The organisation's most prominent member, Cornelius Cardew continued with his political activism in the early years of the Thatcher era, taking part in the Irish and anti-racism struggles. In June 1981, he addressed a large conference against racism and fascism at the Conway Hall (some 500 people attended), and in October of that year was thrown out of the House of Commons gallery after shouting 'this House stinks of racism' during a speech by Enoch Powell. He was frequently arrested, and on one occasion sent to prison for a month.¹⁸⁴



Cardew killed in a car accident on Sunday, 13 December 1981. He was 45.

¹⁸¹ see: Workers Weekly March 21, 1981

¹⁸² Vol. 1 No.3 April 1980

¹⁸³ Report to the 2nd Congress of the RCPB: ML 1987 p11

¹⁸⁴ Richard Gott, Liberation Music. London Review of Books Vol. 31 No. 5 · 12 March 2009

See appreciation by Virginia Anderson **Cornelius Cardew lives**, 13 December 2007
http://www.opendemocracy.net/arts-Music/cardew_3509.jsp

In its own terms, the RCPB (ML) was unfortunate to lose two leading comrades within a short time of each other: in December 1981, founder member of the Party and avant-garde composer, Cornelius Cardew was killed in a car accident, and John Buckle's death came within six months of the RCPB (ML) First Congress. The formation of the RCPB (ML) in 1979 was credited, after his death, to the influence of John Buckle who led the Party under the name of David Williams from 1978 until his death on November 27th 1983 in an air crash near Madrid, Spain.

John Buckle was one of the early Internationalists, joining in 1969 at the age of twenty. He had been active in the West Midlands in anti-fascist activity leading on the street confrontations notably at Lewisham (1977) and at the Digbeth Hall in Birmingham in 1978.

But most of all he was a product of the Internationalists, the organisation of those youth in the Anglo-American world, who managed to break with the sterile intellectualism, as well as with the rightism, which had bedevilled the anti-revisionist circles from the time of the death of Michael McCreery, who first broke away from the old Party after its betrayal of the Marxist-Leninist principles and its adoption of modern revisionism. The Internationalists managed to break with all this which held back these circles and hindered the rebuilding of the working class party, however well-intentioned many of the comrades involved in these circles. The Internationalists took up Marxism-Leninism not as a dogma but as a guide to action” ¹⁸⁵

Hardial Bains, speaking at an anniversary Memorial meeting for John Buckle in November 1988 described his achievement:

“Comrade John came into prominence at a very particular time in the development of the Party in Britain, at the time of the trend of the ideology that Trotsky pushed – “revolutionary politics, bourgeois culture”, that is bourgeois politics with revolutionary phrases. The poison of the old ideology in '77, '78, '79 was threatening the very existence of the Party. The contribution of comrade John was that he based himself on what was positive in the development in the Internationalists and CPE (ML), and what was best in that was the new spirit of self sacrifice and following the teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, uniting with the Marxist-Leninist brother parties and exchanging experiences. “¹⁸⁶

The acknowledgement of the debt owed to fraternal assistance was, throughout the 1980s, increasingly public made by the RCPB (ML). Always more conscious (and celebratory) of organisational anniversaries, as if to emphasise its traditions and legacy, parties in the Internationalist trend would often organise meetings to consolidate its co-operation and co-ordination between parties. In reference to the 20th anniversary of the “Necessity for Change” conference in August 1967, the RCPB (ML) noted it was from this beginning:

¹⁸⁵ Speech of the Party' Workers' Weekly Vol.15 No44/45 December 10, 1988 page 3

¹⁸⁶ 'Speech by Comrade Hardial Bains, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist)' Workers' Weekly Vol.15 No44/45 December 10, 1988 page 7

“ which began the present unbroken progress to refund and build the party in Britain, This conference which was concerned among other things with the noble task of creating conditions for building parties in Britain, Ireland and North America, was mainly the work of comrades from abroad, and in particular of Comrade Hardial Bains, now First Secretary of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist). These comrades, in pure proletarian internationalist spirit and not with any sense of interfering, through the initiative of this conference were instrumental in creating the conditions in which revolutionary forces in Britain were able to come forward to take up the work to rebuild the Party.” ¹⁸⁷

John Buckle oversaw the repudiation of a decade of political allegiance that was achieved by denouncing Maoism without a re-assessment of the political line or life of the organisations that had been motivated by support of Mao's revolutionary line. There was very little self-criticism throughout the 32 pages of the *The Marxist-Leninist Journal's* Special issue: “Mao Zedong Thought” – a Profoundly Anti-Marxist Theory, the followers and propagators of “Mao Zedong Thought” in Britain stand on the side of Imperialism and Capitalism¹⁸⁸ . Such political dishonesty was not surprising given their mentor's lying to the international communist movement; Enver Hoxha would be writing one thing in his 'political diary', later published as the two-volume "*Reflections on China*", but simultaneously praising and promoting Mao and China in public.

However the political perspective of the RCPB (ML) would remain in the same utopian sectarian groove along which its politics travels:

" The entire perspective of the Party is that it is the Party which is going to lead, which is leading the British working class in proletarian socialist revolution, and that there is no other group or organisation in the country which is going to provide the necessary Marxist-Leninist leadership for this revolution." ¹⁸⁹

To maintain this belief, an organization of a few dozen has set up its own mass organisations to provide it with the trappings of a genuine party organisation. The membership of the various "organisations" established by the RCPB (ML) and its predecessors was basically restricted to the organisation's members as the demands of these "broad fronts" were almost identical to the RCPB (ML)'s programme. Given this, such organisations were hardly transmission belts to the Party and represented little more than sectarian expression of the RCPB (ML)' s political isolation.

The proliferation of initials began in the cultural field in 1976 with the establishment of the PCA -Progressive Cultural Association. This was very much a grouping influenced by social realism, and an artistic arm for the party. It contained some talent composers and musicians: apart from Cardew, Laurie Scott Baker, John Tilbury, Dave Smith and

¹⁸⁷ Joyful Celebration of the 8th Anniversary of the Founding of the Party . Workers Weekly Vol.,14 N.12 March 21 1987

¹⁸⁸ Volume 1 No.3 April 1980

¹⁸⁹ Presenting the Ideas of the First Congress of the CPE (ML) 1979 p100

Michael Chant were involved. Michael Chant has kept the political musical legacy of Cardew alive through publications and recitals.¹⁹⁰

In 1977, the Little Red Guards was established with the intention of solving the problem of how to educate children in communism "providing an organisation where they can assist the Party, learn about revolution and make their contribution to the revolutionary movement."

In 1981, the PDF -People's Democratic Front "' a mass organisation of the people" was established. PDF maintained it was not a "party organisation" but anyone on the Left who came across the PDF knew otherwise.

The WUB -Women's Union of Britain -was established in March 1982 producing a collection of its founding documents, occasional papers but was essentially lifeless. The claim to be for the "broad masses of women" was a hollow claim as the WUB "works closely with the Party and under its leadership; but it is not an organisation of the Party"¹⁹¹ There was no differentiation between in the relationship between the sponsoring organisation and the activity of the 'non-party' organisation. So the CYUB - Communist Youth Union of Britain - " is not an intermediary youth organisation; it does not have a programme, strategy and tactical line which are separate from the Party. It is bound to the Party ideologically and politically and it is an organisation which is based and built upon democratic centralism". This is no Woodcraft folk or scout-like organisation; it "works closely as one with the Party".

Finally, the TURO -Trade Union Revolutionary Opposition -is not a parallel trade union but "a revolutionary mass organisation of workers". It was on this issue that the CPB (ML) broke with the Albanian-generated line, the idea that British Trade unions required such a rank-and-file oppositional grouping.

The founding of its broad front organisation, Trade Union Revolutionary Opposition - definitively a national mobilisation event - in May 1981 claimed 50 delegates, which at that time would be a generous 'questimate' of its strength. Undoubtedly a declining and aging membership despite the launch a Youth Union down to less than 20. They could always do the occasional mass commemoration through its relationship with an Indian communal organisation based in Coventry in the Midlands. Hind Mazdoor Lehar (Britain) was often described as the "revolutionary mass organisation of Indian workers in Britain" but its impact and profile was localised. What all theses "front" organisations have in common besides their size and irrelevance, is that they possess banners in the approved style of its parent organisation, in storage at the Party Centre,

¹⁹⁰ For example, his paper , **A Turning Point in Music History** given at a *Symposium on the Scratch Orchestra on its 30th anniversary, November 21, 1999*. Also The Progressive Cultural Association (PCA) released *The Question Is Really One of Word and Deed* by Hardial Bains (1997) comprises a speech by Hardial Bains "In Commemoration of Cornelius Cardew, 1936-1981".: <http://www.rcpbml.org.uk/ww96-7/ww27-5.htm#pca>, and *Daily On Line Newspaper of the*

Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) Year 2006 No. 39, May 17, 2006 , **Cornelius Cardew 70th Birthday Anniversary Festival** <http://www.rcpbml.org.uk/wdie-06/d06-039.htm#coleman>

¹⁹¹ Report to 1st Congress p156

that doubles as the John Buckle Bookshop, in Wandsworth Road, south London, for demonstrations when required.

And what of the original pro-Albanian organisation, former Lui Shaoi supporters, the MLOB headed by William Bland? In January 1975 the MLOB, led by Bland, change its name to the Communist League to disassociate itself from the assumption that the use of "the unexceptionable term Marxist-Leninist to indicate a Maoist political orientation". Baker's MLOB described the renamed Communist League as "empirical dogmatism and the rightist deviation" split led by William Bland, and accompanied by an increasingly non-active Bernard Charnley.¹⁹² Bland was also the principal organiser of the Albania Society, a responsibility he bore well into the Eighties, heavily involved in producing *Albanian Life*, a small circulation friendship journal.

"After the open break of the PLA with China, the Communist League approached the CPB (ML) suggesting discussions aimed at a unitary party as the CPB (ML) had denounced China and aligned themselves with Albania. In this letter to Reg Birch & the CC, the offer was made to dissolve the Communist League & enter the CPBML as individuals if they wanted to ensure there was 'no factionalism'. The CPB (ML) did arrange meetings for a period to 'assess' but after a very brief period denied admission. No reason was offered."

When the RCPB (ML) supported Albania in the late 1970s, it replaced the CPBML as Tirana's recognised party, and provided a new suitor for Bland.

"The Communist League also approached the RCPB (ML) but consistent with the general attitude of the Bains organisations - an olympian indifference and rude silence greeted the approach. They did however then do something remarkable. They approached the Albanian Society and tried to 'take it over". This was unsuccessful as the open and non-sectarian approach of the Albanian Society had been its feature and strength. The membership enjoyed the poetry and the discussion on art, and resisted the attempts to label these as 'distracting bourgeois diversions'. "¹⁹³

¹⁹² The political evolution of Baker throughout the 1980s saw him move from supporting Liu Shaoqi to Council Communism. He emerge as an adherent of the "Movement for Workers Councils" espousing the views of Jan Appel (alias Max Hempel), the anti-Bolshevik Council Communist. He provided the foreword to his translation of Appel's *Fundamental Principles of Communist Production & Distribution*.

¹⁹³ Account by Hari Kumar for Alliance ML

The Decade of the Looming War

“We are living in excellent times. The world is in great disorder because the main contradiction in the world between the people of the world and the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, is coming up for final resolution.”¹⁹⁴

Not all agreed with those sentiments expressed on the fringes of the movement, but the idea that the world was in “pre-war” era dominated ML thinking in the late 70s and early 1980s. Mao Zedong had inserted into the 9th Congress report, the view that sooner or later, unless prevented by the working class, the struggle for world domination between the Superpowers will result in another major inter-imperialist war.¹⁹⁵

Early 1980s saw Soviet invasion in Afghanistan and in Poland imposition of martial law in Poland in December 1981 (lifted in July 1983). All contributed to an atmosphere that speculated about the possibility of a Third World War; this was also reflected in Eastern Europe in 1983 when a major war scare erupted in the Soviet Union.¹⁹⁶

The Chinese analysis of the Soviet threat was taken seriously, and collocate of this was that the Soviet Union was 'Making a feint in the East to attack in the West'. The Soviet Union countered that “Maoist policy increasingly coincided with the views of the world’s extreme reactionaries” and that “The Maoists’ aim was to use the wreckage of human civilization as a pedestal from which China could dominate the world”¹⁹⁷.

The danger of conflict in Europe was a wider concern, seen in the growth of Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, European Nuclear Disarmament, anti-Pershing and cruise missile campaigns. The British government issued in 1980 its advice to surviving a nuclear attack, “Protect and Survive”¹⁹⁸ and there was a spate of speculative books on the coming Third World War.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Workers’ Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, *Introducing New World*(1975)

¹⁹⁵ see: <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/lin-biao/1969/04/01.htm>. Also, ‘New Evidence on the Sino-American Opening’ (Document No.6) CWIHP Bulletin 11 (Winter 1998) p 162.

¹⁹⁶ See: Benjamin B. Fischer (1997) A Cold War Conundrum
History Staff Center for the Study of Intelligence. Central Intelligence Agency

¹⁹⁷ ‘Moscow criticizes West for appeasing Maoism’ *The Times* May 5 1976 p6

¹⁹⁸ Protect and Survive (1980) London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office. Prepared for the Home Office by the Central Office of Information for the police and local authorities in 1976.

¹⁹⁹ Best known at the time was Hackett, General Sir John (1978) The Third World War: A Future History. London: Sedgwick & Jackson. It assumes a conventional war beginning in Europe in August of 1985, which ultimately escalates to a limited nuclear exchange. This in turn precipitates nationalist revolutions that dismember the USSR Hackett tries to make the case--in great detail--that a superior Western conventional force is needed to deter the Russians; but in his book this strategy results in a desperate use of nuclear weapons by Russia.

There was an expectation, a duality in the analysis of the Marxist-Leninist movement in Britain (and elsewhere) that ultimately failed to be rooted in real life. The expectation was that:

Either the US reconciles itself to gradually abandoning its pretensions to world power in the face of Soviet advance, or it must make a stand and say 'no further', War, like everything in human society, never has the mechanical predictability of certain natural events, but the tendency of inter- imperialist rivalry in general, and the present contention between the United States and the Soviet Union in particular, is certainly a tendency towards a new world war.²⁰⁰

What was taken at face value was the assertion that the focus of the contention was to be in Europe. For a decade the persistence belief was that war was looming. The struggle against the war preparations of the two superpowers in Europe was in line with Chinese foreign policy and Maoists in Britain rejected unilateral nuclear disarmament. The strong Chinese preference for European unity was reflected in most Maoist groups a major exception being in Norway.²⁰¹

Much ink was used, especially after Chinese foreign policy was expressed in terms of the 'Three Worlds', on what policy was best to stem the Soviet Threat, and often this concern underplayed the role of the USA. It was argued that it was imperative to recognise the difference between social imperialism, which was strategically on the offensive, and US imperialism, which is strategically on the defensive. For the Joint Action Committee of Marxists-Leninists,

Together with U.S. Imperialism, Soviet social-Imperialism is today the greatest enemy of the peoples of the world. In fact because it masks its dirty activities under the guise of socialism, and as it is a rising imperialist power, it is the most dangerous and the main source of a new world war. The Soviet Union threatens this country as well, as can be seen by the large numbers of ill-disguised Soviet spy ships that cruise around our coast, by the recent arrest of a Soviet trawler illegally plundering our fishery resources and by the fact that a few years ago 100 Soviet spies were expelled from the country. This is not to mention the continual and unprecedented arms build-up in the Soviet Union which threatens all countries in Europe.²⁰²

There was a social-chauvinist tendency to downgrade Britain's own imperialist role in the world, presenting it as a simple subservient junior partner....CFB (ML) et al.

The existence of the Three World Theory provoked distension between groups that were heated and acrimonious, the volume of literature and meetings that focused on

200 SECOND WORLD DEFENCE, The Superpowers, the Threat of War & the British Working Class February 1976: 18

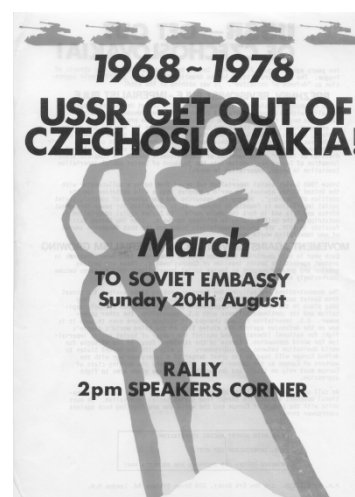
201 Norwegian Maoists ,the AKP (ML) was clear on its policy "of fighting against both imperialist superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union, without relying on the Norwegian bourgeoisie. If the Superpowers attack Norway, the line of the Party is that the Norwegian labouring masses have to rise in a national-revolutionary people's war against the invader."

202 Joint Action Committee of Marxist-Leninists. Down with the New Tsars! Marxist-Leninists Intensify the Struggle Against Social-Imperialism (1977)

the 'Three Worlds Theory' in the late 1970s reflected the attempt to independently understand and assess the implications of the analysis.

Much was made by analogous argument with the United Front and Second World War period of what the correct political stance should be. The mid-70s saw ad hoc groups form outside of the party-building organisations such as Second World Defence (later renamed 'Democratic Defence') "an independent group not affiliated to any political party" for those non-aligned Marxists, like David Fernbach, who took Chinese foreign policy analysis as their own and sought to rally to the task of national defence in the face "of superpower contention, Soviet expansion and the impending danger of war."²⁰³ They would draw upon other European Maoist analysis of Soviet military strategy, and in May 1977 attended the West Berlin Conference on 'The Soviet Union Today – An Imperialist Superpower' by Befreiung magazine. The Soviet Union was seen as the most likely instigator of a new war. The Belgian group AMADA argued "Russian social-imperialism is the main warmonger", "No to social-imperialism, no to the policy of world dominance of Russia!"²⁰⁴. The leader of the German KPD had spoken of the pro-Moscow DKP as waiting "for the hour when they can fulfil their role as a fifth column."²⁰⁵ In Britain, a demonstration called by the Communist Workers Movement and the Revolutionary Communist League on the tenth anniversary of Soviet aggression against Czechoslovakia delivered a letter to

"the Soviet embassy denouncing the Soviet social-imperialist ruling class for its desperate schemes for world domination, for its crimes against the peoples of Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe, for its social-fascist tyranny against the Soviet working class and the Soviet peoples, for the subversion and aggression it has unleashed against the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America, and the aggression it is planning against the peoples of Western Europe, and above all for the world war it is threatening to unleash on the peoples of the whole world in its scramble for world domination against the other superpower."²⁰⁶



The CPB (ML) aside,²⁰⁷ acceptance of the priorities of Chinese (and Albanian) foreign policy analysis was widespread. Nuance in interpretation ranged along a spectrum as there were sharp divisions between supporters of the Three World Theory with some

203 SECOND WORLD DEFENCE, *The Superpowers, the Threat of War & the British Working Class* (February 1976)

204 National Bureau of AMADA. *The Soviet Union: the most dangerous and aggressive superpower* (1975)

205 Semler 1979:108

206 Czechoslovakia Demonstration. Press Release Sunday 10th AUGUST 1978. Interestingly the RCLB and CWM demonstration had a rare example of ML humour in print - naturally a pun, the CWM leaflet banner headline was 'Tanks for the Memory'. The 20th August 1978 demonstration was noteworthy because of the novelty of a 'Left' demonstration at the Soviet Embassy. The Soviet Union was criticised by Trotskyites but they seldom took the streets about it.

207 Following its condemnation of the "Three Worlds Theory" and changing attitude towards the post-Mao leadership, there was a brief flirtation with pro-Albanian politics before the organisation aligned itself to defending the Soviet Union against the "war-mongering" of Regan, Thatcher and China.

small groups taking an interpretation of the policy to advocate, as at the Lisbon Conference, the task of national defence.

The PCP (ML) led by Heduino Gomes Vilar, organised the 1978 Lisbon Conference on the Russian Imperialist Threat calling “for patriotic and democratic action to oppose” the perceived foreign policy intentions of the Soviet Union described as “neo-colonial domination”, “expansionism” and “world hegemony”. Few British Maoists would agree with the Portuguese analysis that “In the present stage of revolution, the aim of the Party’s strategy is to defeat social-imperialism. To affirm this aim, the formation of national democratic front with the national bourgeoisie is necessary.”²⁰⁸

The ‘*Organisation Revolucionaria de Trabajadores*’ [ORT] had informed British comrades it would attend the Lisbon conference to explain their viewpoint. While accepting that the two superpowers were the main enemies of the people of the world and the Soviet Union the more dangerous source of war, the Spanish ORT’s strategy “is to direct struggle at principal enemies, US Imperialism and its Spanish supporters. They have bombs, bases and economic control. Simply not materialist to [argue the] Soviet Union is [the] main enemy.”²⁰⁹

While others would join in denouncing the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia (then known as Kampuchea) in December 1978, echoing the Chinese practice of referring to Vietnam as “the Cuba of Asia” (mirroring a criticism of Cuban intervention in Angola), the Lisbon Conference did not attract major support from pro-Chinese organisations. In Britain, Manchanda and Diane Langford re-emerged as the Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Communist League in 1977 to become the leading advocate of a united front against Soviet expansionism. Taking a rightist line on the question of the “Three Worlds Theory”, Manchanda attended the 1977 conference in Lisbon when most of the ML movement in Britain regarded the line as out-and-out capitulation to bourgeois leadership.

Manchanda and allies intervene at RCLB meetings on the ‘Three World theory’ to argue that:

“Within such a united front will be elements whose opposition to Soviet aggression and Superpower hegemonism goes little further than concern to protect the interests of monopoly capital. The proletariat, on the other hand has everything to gain from national independence. The struggle for independence today is the prerequisite for the advance towards socialism.”²¹⁰

208 PCP (ML) International Information Bulletin No63, 30th December 1978

209 ‘Report on [RCLB] Meeting with Cde. Sergio of the ORT’ dated 7.5.[19]78. Typescript. Private Archive

210 Joint Leaflet 1979 Marxist Industrial Group; Workers’ Party of Scotland (ML); Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Communist League; Finsbury Communist Association . RCLB’s ‘STRATEGY FOR REVOLUTION’ – A TIGHTROPE ACT BETWEEN TWO LINES! (1979)

Only the Workers' Party of Scotland led by former International Brigadier, Tom Murray, fully agreed with Manchanda²¹¹, although the Marxist Industrial Group and Finsbury Communist Association [FCA] were in board agreement, and worked with them. The Workers Party of Scotland and the Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Communist League argued "revolutionary forces must wage a struggle to defend the independence and sovereignty of the European states, even though under bourgeois rule, against Soviet social imperialist aggression and Superpower hegemonism. And in doing so, they should be prepared to unite with all forces which objectively serve this end."²¹²

The Finsbury Communist noted that:

"Manu had come under the influence of a previously little known pamphlet by Mao Tsetung, published in Hong Kong in 1936, which asserted- that it was sometimes the duty of Marxists to follow the lead of their own ruling class". Sir Frederick Bennett, Tory M.P. for Torbay had responded to Manchanda's distribution of information from the Lisbon Conference. For Manchanda, following the pamphlet's advice "In British circumstances, this meant waiting for a lead from Sir Fredrick Bennett. Sir Fredrick, lacking any knowledge of his historical role, provided no lead."²¹³

In August 1978, Manchanda played a major organizational role in the WPS convened consultative conference of the British Marxist-Leninist movement. Predictably, after lively debate, the conference split on whether Soviet Social-Imperialism or British Imperialism was the major enemy of the moment. In the Conference's aftermath Manchanda tried to weld together an opportunist coalition of forces via a self-selected 'Interim Committee', which unsuccessfully tried to prolong the existence of the consultative meeting.

Opinions of Manchanda's ability had hardened, and the more serious forces within the movement would have nothing to do with his project: The CWM's judged that "The RMLCL's leader has also used many platforms and meetings to make long-winded, jargonistic and usually empty speeches to audiences which have just got more and more fed up, and he has shown no consideration of the effect he has had in making them less and less interested in and drawn to Marxism-Leninism."²¹⁴

Another critic of "pretentious waffling", Chris Burford, wrote in February 1979 to the Marxist Industrial Group of the "individualistic indulgence in empty phrase mongering, his individualistic and opportunist adaption of every latest 'revolutionary theme' without relating it to concrete reality, and his individualistic refusal consciously to practice self-criticism and to learn from the mistakes of the past"²¹⁵

211 Joint Communiqué of 15th July, 1978 issued by the Workers' Party of Scotland (Marxist-Leninist) and the Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Communist League of Britain. *Revolution*, Vol. 3, No. 4 November 1978

212 Leaflet: RCLB's 'STRATEGY FOR REVOLUTION' – A TIGHTROPE ACT BETWEEN TWO LINES

213 Finsbury Communist 267, April 1987

214 Internal Letter. Private archive

215 Internal Letter. Private archive

It was around the 'Theory of Three Worlds' that saw a final fling of activity from the Workers' Party of Scotland (ML). Two WPS (ML) delegates attended a conference of Marxist-Leninists in Birmingham organised by the CWM in July 1977. They published a 20-paged report, "For Marxist-Leninist Unity: on the Birmingham Conference" that outlined both the WPS (ML) views and the proceedings on the day. A story is told (by the usual suspect) of Tom Murray's appearance at the meeting that set up the Marxist-Leninist Consultative Committee accompanied by three fellow WPS(ML) members – the Secretary Duncan Toms and two young lads, both of whom treated octogenarian and ex- International brigade Political Commissar Tom Murray with the utmost deference and veneration. Even the not normally modest or retiring Manchanda had agreed that the "esteemed veteran proletarian revolution" should chair the meeting.

Aberdonian by birth, Murray had been a veteran communist. He had served as political commissioner of a machine gun battalion in the Spanish Civil War. He went as a member of the Labour Party but joined the Communist party of Spain out there. An obituary noted,

On returning to Scotland, he was later an organiser for the Fire Brigades Union, and Secretary of the Scottish-USSR Society. Spain remained dear in his heart and as Chairman of Lothian end Fife Group of the International Brigades Association was largely instrumental in having memorials set up in Kirkcaldy and Edinburgh to local people who fought for freedom in Spain.

At the time of the split in the international communist movement, Comrade Tom stuck firmly to a revolutionary orientation, and was something of a "father figure" to the Marxist-Leninist movement in Britain. For a number of years he was Chairman of the Workers' Party of Scotland (Marxist-Leninist). As a Scottish patriot, Comrade Tom was an important figure in rediscovering and popularising the life and work of John Maclean. He was always a great friend of China, and was fond of remarking that the first political meeting he ever attended was one called by the Liberal Party to support the 1911 revolution in China, to which he was taken by his father. In 1980, he made his only visit to China, a visit which inspired him enormously."²¹⁶

The Interim Committee (IC) was unilaterally formed in the aftermath of the September Consultative Meeting and convened by the WPS (ML). Half of the participants in the Meeting took no part in the vote for the Interim Committee regarding it as purely the affair of the four organisations that constituted it: the WPS (ML), Manchanda's RMLCL, the ever-present FCA and the Marxist Industrial Group. The Interim Committee regarded the September meeting as adjourned. Both the RCLB and CWM were wary of introducing a "creeping federation" after the ML Consultative Meeting by implying continuity of existence via the Interim Committee.

As a forum for setting out the lines of demarcation within the ML movement, the Consultative Meeting had had some success: participants in the Interim Committee pushed the political line that the primary task for Marxist-Leninists in Britain was to

²¹⁶ *Class Struggle*, March 1983

build, consolidate and expand an international united front against hegemonism, in particular against the menace of world war posed by Soviet Social-Imperialism.²¹⁷ The argumentation can be found in the 32-paged publication, Report – Interim Committee, Consultative meeting for Marxist-Leninist Unity 9-10 September 1978 when the WPS (ML) shared a 'rightist interpretation' of the 'Three World Theory' and worked in alliance with Manchanda, the Marxist Industrial Group and the Kennas in the Finsbury Communist Association.

The Interim Committee attempted to "reconvene" the Consultative meeting in March 1979 met with such a poor response so as to expose its basic organisational weakness - as if an organisational structure containing three organisations comprising a combined membership of less than ten could galvanise the bourgeoisie's anti-Sovietism in a tactical unity with the minute Interim Committee.

A political weakness of the Interim Committee was its absorption of China's foreign policy priorities in a mistaken grasp of what constituted internationalist responsibility in the circumstances of Britain. The Interim Committee took the attitude that within the movement the key difference at the present time lie in the interpretation of the general line of the international communist movement -Chairman Mao's Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds and its application to the revolutionary struggle in Britain.

The RCLB at the time made strong criticisms of the Marxist Industrial Group and Workers Party Scotland who it considered basically honest but making serious "rightist opportunist errors" on political line. The Finsbury Communist Association, not regarded as a serious political organisation by the RCLB, had abstained from the Interim- Committee from February 1979 onwards, but had supported the heckling of public meetings on British Imperialism, held in London by the RCLB in 1979, by the MIG and WPS(ML).

It was effectively wound-up on September 22nd 1979, the final session of the Interim Committee attended by MIG- RMLCL- WPS (ML), Bangladesh Communist Caucus and a group from the L.S.E. A final communiqué was issued on December 8, 1979 entitled "For Advance to Socialism...Defend national Independence, democracy and People's Welfare". It concluded,

in the present situation, the maintenance and defence of national independence is a prerequisite for advancing to the stage of proletarian revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat... to make the British bourgeoisie the main target of the revolutionary struggle, as the RCL and CWM do, is not only wishful thinking, but in fact such a policy to the extent it is effective, can objectively only serve the interests of Soviet Social-Imperialism.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ WPS ML Leaflet, WHO THREATENS BRITAIN WITH WAR? See EROL

²¹⁸ *For Advance to Socialism...Defend national Independence, democracy and People's Welfare* 1979:12

Apart from some work on the boycott campaign around the 1980 Moscow Olympics, Manchanda retired from the fray. His political come-back was ill-timed: the ML movement had developed beyond the stage when such as he could dominate a section of the movement. He, like Bala of the Workers' Institute, was no longer even on the fringe of the ML movement; their activities bore no relation to the party-building orientation that had seriously developed in the latter half of the 1970s.

In August 1978, in a commentary on WPS (ML) & RMLCL proposals, the Nottingham Communist Group [NCG] bemoaned the absence of a firm grasp of Marxism Leninism within the movement. The Nottingham Communist Group confess that they had no developed strategy and tactics.

But what we have done and are doing is to carry out a careful scientific investigation into present international contradictions and the place of British Capitalism within this nexus.

As a result of our studies we have become convinced that the theory of the Three Worlds is a fundamentally correct assessment of the world situation in the present period. We accept the Three Worlds Theory, not because it has been put forward by our Chinese comrades, but because in our view it conforms with objective reality.²¹⁹

Yet within a year, the NCG overturned its "scientific investigation" and in an 'Open Letter to Marxist-Leninist Organisations in Britain' declared that the Three Worlds Theory "is not a policy designed to advance the cause of proletarian revolution but rather its aim is to secure and further the interests of the Chinese state bourgeoisie."

There was a shared ideological analysis on the issue of China and about the CPB (ML) and RCLB between the Stockport Communist Group and the Nottingham Communist Group, led by "Harry Powell". Both groups came together in an attempt, for seven people, to draw up a programme for the revolution in Britain.

In the July of 1979, NCG had began publication of Red Star, a quarterly journal designed to uphold the "revolutionary outlook of marxism-leninism in Britain" following what they described as the revisionist resurgence in China following Mao's death three years previously. NCG also distributed the publications of the American-based Revolutionary Communist Party which came out as full-blown supporters of the Gang of Four in 1978.

The NCG now accused other ML organisations of relying on "the Chinese crutch" and possessing the outlook of "petit bourgeois Sinophila", was predicting that they would "disappear up your own arseholes in trying to justify your capitulation to the new revisionist line."²²⁰

The Communist Workers Movement, in a letter complaining about the public use of a private letter from an individual member of the CWM to a member of the NCG, stated:

²¹⁹ Commentary on the Draft Organisational Line Proposed by the WPS (ML) and the RMLCL of Britain. August 1978

²²⁰ Red Star 2

It seems to us that a protracted discussion with you on China would be fruitless ...we think the issue that really concerns you is not China, but justifying the continued existence of your own small group...(thus) , you have chosen to take a stand which 'truly' sets you apart from others.

This was a valid judgement as the NCG had been around the JACML and attended the CWM convened Consultation Meeting of 1977 but there was no real moves by the NCG towards greater organisational or political unity with other ML forces. NCG was like a miniature sect of "true believers" (or more accurately as time went on, sole believer) whose ideological self-cultivation kept the "faith" but possessed neither the ability nor the desire to further the political development and political organisation of the working class.

The CWM letter observed that such groups, like the NCG "live a life of their own, attacking someone or other for 'opportunism' or 'revisionism', all the time" but never having anything positive to bring to the class struggle; their main audience is groups and individuals similar to themselves. That was a description that had wide application.

The NCG maintained a formal 'correct' position to maintain its political stance. It correctly pointed out the capitulation of the rightist line advanced by the Workers' Party of Scotland (ML) et al derived from adherence to a utopian application of the Three Worlds Theory. When NCG upheld 'three worlds' it concluded that the WPS (ML)'s "general line" represented "a crude real politik the genesis of which is the desperation born out of defeat in the struggle to build a ML revolutionary party in Britain". The remedy that it advances, maintained when the line of the NCG became outright opposition to the 'three worlds', was that of developing a revolutionary programme.

THE IRISH WAR

There was another political issue that had co-existed with the existence of the Maoist movement that illustrated the political limitations that were prevalent on the Left in the UK, that and was the issue of Ireland. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Labour government's despatch of troops 'to aid the civil powers' in Northern Ireland, The Worker could not resist pointing out in a short editorial to mark the occasion:

"This Party in 1969 opposed troops being sent" when others imagined it was about 'protecting catholics' ...²²¹

Indeed the party had organised the last public rally against the troops being sent before such solidarity demonstrations were banned from Trafalgar Square. In reality, the CPB (ML), while it did oppose the sending of the troops shared along with the rest of the Left a flawed understanding of what was the issue involved; And as importantly, the remedy for its resolution.

The struggle in Ireland was a challenge for Marxist-Leninists, nor was the wider British left comfortable with the Republican-led struggle. Here was a radical, armed struggle engaged with the British army and based largely in working class communities. Everything to suggest a revolutionary impulse, yet every excuse and perspective was drawn upon to deny the Irish struggle revolutionary legitimacy. You would think that any struggle which involved working class militants in armed opposition to the state would command the support of the British left. Well, it seems, so long as it is not nearby.

In the late 1960's the Irish Communist Organization led by Brendan Clifford began to formulate a view, based it claimed, on Stalin's writings on the 'National Question' which argued that there were two historic nations in Ireland, a Catholic nation in the south and a Protestant nation in the north, both of which were equally entitled to self-determination. The "two nations" position drew a positive response among certain elements of the anti-revisionist movement, including leading elements in the Communist Federation of Britain, who looked at the ICO's historical studies from a position of distrust of IRA (Provisional) politics in the 1970's.

By 1971 the "two nations" theory and other heterodox positions and a name change to the British and Irish Communist Organization (B&ICO) had put it outside the anti-revisionist movement as it existed at the time.

The largest Marxist-Leninist group CPB (ML), after initial solidarity activities around anti-internment, said little on Ireland beyond what was contained in the 1974 pamphlet, 'Ireland One Nation'. That, while hostile to the Republican organisations,

²²¹ The Worker 7.August 1989

had least described the struggle in Ireland as “a colonial question”²²² and Reg Birch’s statement preface the publication with:

Far be it from me, with the confusion and reaction in England, to preach. One task is clear to us all – independence. You alone can lead the way in your own realm, it is yours. There are many warriors, true sons of Ireland, to join the battle. Out with the invader, be it from Westminster or the Vatican, and all their servants resident, willing or unwitting.

Strike Against British Imperialism in Ireland! All Out to Kick Out British troops!

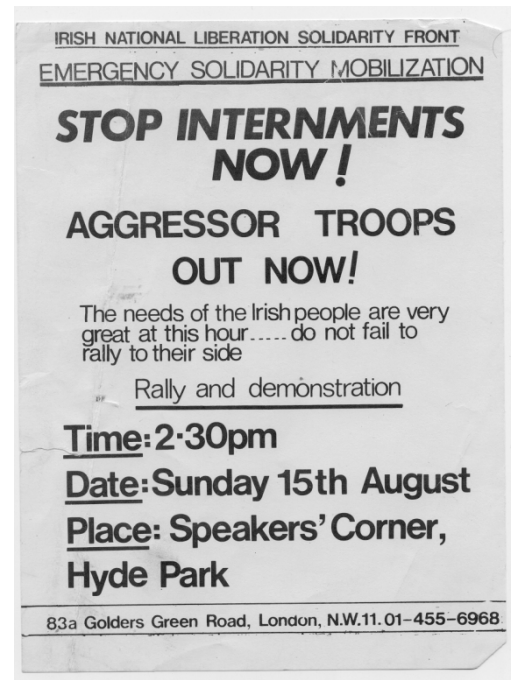
However, little was build upon these expressions of support. Other organisations, principally the CWLB had developed out of a solidarity movement, the Irish National Liberation Solidarity Front, protesting the abuses and criminality, calling for the withdraw of the troops.

After the troops were sent “to aid the Civil power”, *The Marxist’s* analysis of “what started as a predominantly Catholic rebellion”, (later described as “the struggle of the Catholic working class to break the Protestant domination of the job market”²²³) was that: “As Stormont is objectively a hindrance to the unification of the working class irrespective of religion, the Catholic worker must be seen as the shock force around which all other workers must be rallied.”²²⁴

The Marxist argued that the “best way in which outside people can help is to demand that the Government in Westminster should withdraw political support from Stormont, withdraw all British troops and end all forms of financial help” but was non committable politically about the forces involved. Obviously there was an oppositional position against the policy of the British state but never clearly sloganeered as “Troops Out!”

There was little change in as twenty-odd years later, their analysis in light of the ‘No win’ situation from a purely military point of view, gave recognition that the peace process “would not have been reached without the armed struggle of the IRA”, warning that “the clear distinction must be made between a ceasefire, which could be the starting point for new political initiatives, and a surrender, which would put the whole process back twenty years.”

Still, it was noted that,



²²² CPB (ML) Ireland One Nation 1974: 3

²²³ ‘Northern Ireland’ *The Marxist* No.51 Spring 1994:29

²²⁴ ‘The Liberation Struggle in the Six Counties’ *The Marxist* No.18 1971 :22

“The contradictions between the Catholic and the Protestant working classes must be regarded as a contradiction among the people which is currently antagonistic for ideological reasons alone, but which can be resolved on the basis of common material conditions.”²²⁵ .

The character of the struggle, from reading *The Marxist*, was opaque; not a pure economic struggle, nor a straight-forward human rights crusade and neither a national liberation. The comments were measured and without partisan support offered in such a complex situation. Others in the movement were less circumspect in their political line.

The English Internationalists, and its successor organisations, had its line on neighbouring Ireland simplified by the existence of a ‘sister’ organisation in Ireland. The trend was remarkably orthodox in its position of ‘one party, one nation’ and had no issue with the principle of the Irish national liberation struggle. The national liberation struggle is the first stage of the proletarian socialist revolution. What is more, the Communist Party of Ireland (Marxist Leninist) was “leading the struggle of the Irish people for national liberation from British Imperialism”.²²⁶

For the Internationalists the Chinese experience showed the way. The CPI (ML) advocated Maoist People’s War, building a United Front with an alliance of workers and peasants. It did refer critically to “militarist bourgeoisie national movement” and alluded to the armed republicans as “using one ‘expert army’ to defeat another” which “objectively develop sectarianism”.

The previous year, at a London rally held by the English Communist Movement in June 1970, the ‘republicans’ were bracketed with social-democrats, revisionists , Trotskyists in alliance on a reactionary “nationalist basis”.

“The Irish Communist Movement is leading a vigorous onslaught against reactionary nationalism and by creatively applying Mao TseTung Thought will definitely smash the national chauvinist alliance.”²²⁷

In a delusional ultra-leftist claim, this small group of Dublin students, proclaimed that “the powerful and invincible broad united front of the Oppressed people led by their leadership the Communist Party of Ireland (Marxist Leninist) are all lined up and prepared to launch a revolutionary ‘People’s War’ to finally annihilate their class enemies, the British and US Imperialists and all their local lackeys.”

The propaganda of the Internationalists would support the struggle but not necessarily those active or leading it. The vanguard pretensions of the CPI (ML) were maintained.²²⁸

²²⁵ ‘Northern Ireland’ *The Marxist* No.51 Spring 1994:29

²²⁶ *Workers’ England Weekly News* Vol 1. No.17 September 4th 1971

²²⁷ *Red Patriot* Vol 2 No.9 July 6th 1970

²²⁸ “The most important task facing the Irish people’s struggle is the dissemination of Marxist Leninist ideas among the broad masses of the people, the arming of the people with a scientific world outlook...Only by

Partition had flouted the will of the Irish people as a whole. The “patriotic class-conscious nationalism of the broad masses” was seen as a legitimate sentiment, the anti-imperialism of an oppressed nation. The report to the First Congress of the RCPB (ML) was succinct in its position:

“No proposition can be better validated by history than the fact that the Irish people are one people, the Irish nation one nation that the ills of Ireland stem from the enslaving policy of the British ruling classes, from the misfortune of being the first victim of the British bourgeoisie’s colonial policy. History and contemporary facts prove that the Irish people’s struggle for freedom, independence and national unification can never be suppressed but will go on until the Irish people win complete national emancipation.”²²⁹

As for Northern Ireland, there was no legitimacy to the continuing colonial rule in the North.

“The Unionists were not religious bigots but primarily the class allies of the British imperialists ...a lackey colonial bourgeoisie for the imperialist masters...agents of the institutionalisation of the division of the working class.”²³⁰

Unforgiving of early encounters with the B&ICO, the notion of “two nations” in shaping a political approach to the struggle in Ireland was subject to severe criticism, dismissing the metaphysics of a “religious nation”, characterising talk of “two nations” as aimed at preventing the last stage of national integration. The idea that the basic underlying problem was the national oppression due to British imperialism, and that underlying the national oppression the class oppression still to resolve drew upon a well-established political paradigm. In the early 1970s, the CPE (ML) saw the historical situation as

“the winning of national liberation for the Irish people at the same time as giving full rights to the [Scot] national minority and if necessary supporting regional autonomy in various areas.”²³¹ That qualification of ‘autonomy’ did not remain as policy advice in the pronouncements of the organisation as the support for the Republican led-struggle was consolidated.

Having identified the struggle as at the stage of national liberation, in that context the armed struggle of Irish patriots was to be supported, however true liberation was to be achieved, eventually, through the agency of a genuine working class party, their sister party, the CPI (ML). The analysis of the struggle in Ireland remained consistent and constantly reiterated:

arming the people ideologically can the present struggle be turned into a protracted people’s war against British monopoly capitalism.” *Workers’ England Daily News Release* No.271 July 25th 1973

²²⁹ *Report to the First Congress of RCPB(ML)*1983 :266

²³⁰ *Workers’ England Daily News Release* No.274 July 28th 1973

²³¹ *Workers’ England Daily News Release* No.271 July 25th 1973

“The British imperialists claim that they must stay in Ireland to solve the problems of “terrorism”, of “religion”, the “two communities”, etc. But the problem is that the country is partitioned and colonised. The problem is not “religion” but that the Irish people do not have their freedom; they are not permitted to solve the problems brought about by centuries of foreign domination because that domination is continuing. Ireland belongs to the Irish people and Britain has no business there at all.”²³²

The CPE(ML) was clearly in advanced of many others in the movement at that time in seeing British policy towards Ireland as a block on progress in Britain, on questions of democratic rights and freedoms of the people in Britain itself, describing it as “a virtual cancer on the life here in Britain”.

“They have used the bombings in order to:

1. Suggest that, the main problem in society is “gunmen”, “terrorists” and communists.
2. Accelerate racist propaganda against the Irish people, and
3. Prepare conditions for more fascist legislation against progressive organisations in England and against the working class.”²³³

The reason the British working Class should support the Irish people is *not* because the repression being developed in Ireland will otherwise be used in Britain. It was argued that it was a matter of political principle: It is the proletarian internationalist duty of the British working class to support the struggles of the Irish people.

Party spokesman, Chris Coleman, elaborated on this analysis, speaking in 1991, “It seems to us that it is a matter of principle for people here in Britain to demand that Britain withdraws from Ireland. But what must also be considered is the effect of British policy towards Ireland on life in Britain itself.”

It was an important consideration that the Irish war diminished the ‘democratic space’ and bourgeois rights within Britain. Irish solidarity activists pointed to the discrimination and persecution of the Irish people resident in Britain under the “Prevention of Terrorism Act”, and it is obvious that some of the most blatant fabrications and corruption of the legal process - “miscarriages of Justice” - involved Irish related cases – The Guildford Four, The Birmingham Six, the Maguire Sisters . The belief promoted was that Ireland was used as a testing ground for repressive measures which are then used in Britain: surveillance techniques, crowd control and suppressing demonstrations. Ideologically policies towards Ireland constantly fuel the militarism and the chauvinism in British life and government activity. As the CPE (ML) argued in 1973:

“They promote the view that the Irish people have no basis for fighting against British monopoly capitalism. When the people rise up and refuse to accept this view which is in antagonistic contradiction with their everyday experience then they attempt, on the

²³² *Report to the First Congress of RCPB (ML) 1983 :270*

²³³ Who is the Real Cause of “Violence” and “Terror” in England and Ireland? *Worker’s England Daily News Release*, September 4, 1973; see EROL

one hand to divide the people (protestant v. catholic or black v. white or even one section of industry against another) and make them fight amongst themselves, and on the other hand, to blame all the problems on "IRA gunmen", "blacks", "communists", etc."

An 'alternative revolutionary centre' of the Communist Federation of Britain (ML) had:

...two sharply demarcated lines within that organization concerning the nature of the struggle in Ireland and the associated solidarity tasks of the British communists. One line argued that the Protestants of Northern Ireland had been assimilated into the United Kingdom and that there was no material basis for the ending of partition. That line identified the main and principal content of the struggle in the Six Counties as being the fight for civil rights. That same line also attacked the Provisional IRA on the grounds that they were terrorists and that, as there was no national democratic revolution, their actions divided still further the people of "Northern Ireland" .

2. A second line was that the struggle in the Six Counties was an integral part of an overall Irish national democratic revolution. This line argued that the partition of Ireland was a device used by British imperialism to halt and divide the Irish national democratic revolution and to deepen the divisions of the Irish people.²³⁴

In the early 1970s, the CFB ML's dominant view on the struggle in Ireland was the "Socialist line" that required working class unity and building a revolutionary party in Northern Ireland. It was shaped by the perspective unacquainted with history that:

Northern Ireland is not a colony of Britain but a depressed region of the United Kingdom economy, having features also found in Scotland, Wales and parts of England.²³⁵

Flowing from this was the view that:

We should also avoid supporting the idea of a "United Ireland", which under existing conditions can only lead to the incorporation of the Irish Republic into the British state by some sort of federal arrangement, thereby enabling the British ruling class to rationalise its control over the British Isles. This is therefore objectively a reactionary slogan.²³⁶

In contrast, CFB ML dissidents in the Communist Unity Association Marxist Leninist argued that

Real independence for Ireland can only come thorough socialism. To achieve socialism the unity of the Irish working class, both catholic and protestant, is needed. There is only one basis for this unity, that the rights of the majority of the Irish people be

²³⁴ J.B., The Irish Struggle, the CFB and the RCL. Interim Journal No.3 June 1981

²³⁵ Communist Federation of Britain (1972)

Concise statement of socialist struggle line policy for Northern Ireland. Internal document, circulated December 1972

²³⁶ Ditto.

upheld and that religious discrimination be destroyed. The interests of the Irish workers demand that Ireland be reunited and all of Ireland freed from British rule. The power of Orange protestant bigotry must be broken in Ulster, and the full separation of church and state achieved in the catholic south.²³⁷

This challenge to “the Socialist line” was reflected within the CFB ML by the view that what was involved was an unfinished national democratic struggle. Arguments, and more importantly, the events in Ireland shifted the CFB ML so by 1974 it recognised in its policy statements the call for ‘British Troops Out of Ireland’ but still maintained that:

...the divisions that have been created amongst the Irish working class constitute the main obstacle to progressive political-advance, within Ireland. Of prime concern is the opposition of many workers in the north east part of the country to the forces in the vanguard of the present struggles against British imperialism. To help overcome these divisions the CFB as part of the international working class movement will work to develop links with the working class forces throughout Ireland in the fight to throw off the domination of all foreign imperialism and to help achieve a socialist republic as advocated by the Irish revolutionary forces.²³⁸

Whilst active in the broad-based ‘Troops Out Movement’ neither line in the CFB ML regarded the Republican organisations as the leaders of the struggle for a united Ireland. In this they were not out of step with the rest of the Marxist Leninist movement in Britain. The INSLF, in advance of others in acknowledging an ‘anti-imperialist struggle’ nevertheless expressed common sentiments that:

Unfortunately, at this stage of the anti-imperialist struggle there does not yet seem to exist in Ireland a revolutionary socialist leadership or any organization capable of scientifically working out the way forward, giving leadership to the masses, or mobilizing them around a programme that will lead to national liberation, the re-unification of a liberated Ireland, and the setting up of an independent socialist people's republic.²³⁹

Ever so wary of what it judged to be a Catholic national socialist line, the position of solidarity provided by the INSLF was

qualified support to the two groups within Sinn Fein and the IRA when they are involved in struggle with the forces of British imperialism and when they are in any way subjected to repression, such as is the case now with torture, internment and other brutal actions. ... The INSLF has of course absolute faith in the Irish people and the justness of their cause and understands that through struggle they will solve their difficulties, throw up genuine revolutionary working class leadership²⁴⁰

²³⁷ Communist Unity Association Marxist Leninist,

The Struggle in Ireland, What British Workers Should Know : 1973?

²³⁸ CFB Policy statement on Ireland (1974), MLQ No.7, Summer 1974. pp25/26

²³⁹ INSLF Statement on Sinn Fein and the IRA (1972) , Irish Liberation Press Volume 3 No 1 1972 page 8

²⁴⁰ Ditto.

In March 1969, the CPB (ML) was arguing for “an organisation embracing all sections of the working class in Ireland –both North and South.” It had identified the issue “the artificial boundary of partition, which was imposed by British Imperialism and is still financed and guarded by these forces” but thought “the political and economic problems that confront them are the same”.

The sectarian nature of the Six Counties --“a protestant state for a protestant people” - -was not appreciated, or taken into account, in the analysis of the CPB (ML). It did recognise that “Ireland is a nation in its own right” and that partition was a legacy of it being Britain's oldest colony. What it never recognised was the national Liberation character of the struggle in the North. In 1971/1972 they were active supporters of the Anti Internment League (AIL)

The CPB (ML) foresaw that “the emancipation of the Irish Worker will come about from economic necessity and the unity created in struggle. Catholic and Protestant workers do unite to oppose the Government of capitalism and imperialism.”²⁴¹

While the CPB (ML) organised a “Troops Out of Ireland” march in September 1971 of “more than a thousand” to a rally in Trafalgar Square. While they invited other political organisations supporting the Anti Internment League to participate in the rally, the other groups declined as they did not support the general politics of the CPB (M-L) as expressed in its September editorial:

“What has to be remembered about the so-called 'Irish troubles' is that the trade union movement which is relatively united throughout Ireland, North and South, will not be split on a religious basis.:

In a word, the Irish working class knows its enemy very well. Irish workers understand that they must rely on their own forces. No gallivanting individuals nor outside agencies like the UN are going to win freedom or them.

The real question is: What is the rest of the British working class to do here at home? First, we must say to this Labour government: No son of the working class shall be despatched to Ireland to oppress or to try to put down the struggle there for freedom. No son of the working class shall be used to try to keep a rotten, corrupt puppet government in power in Northern Ireland. What is at stake is an attempt to continue the oppression of the Irish working class.

It must be remembered: Ireland is a nation in its own right.”²⁴²

The CPB (ML) was not alone in its position of formally supporting the struggle in Ireland while doing little in practice in terms of solidarity work. Between 1972 and 1974 there was a struggle in the rival Communist Federation of Britain (ML) over the question of Ireland around two major positions – the ‘anti-imperialist’ line of the Glasgow Group and the ‘socialist struggle’ line of the London Group. Of the two the

²⁴¹ Worker Sept.1969

²⁴² Ditto. Almost uniquely it also carried a front-page article, ‘For The unity of Belfast Workers’ drawn from a statement issued by the Irish Communist organisation.

London line was most clearly social chauvinist – later criticised as a variant of the ICO (Irish Communist Organisation) 'Two Nations theory' which totally discounted the Irish national struggle as a progressive force. Yet the 'anti-imperialism' line which eventually became the line of the CFB fundamentally remain part of the Eurocentric trend. The CFB RESOLUTION ON IRELAND (1974)²⁴³ was vague about the national character of the struggle in Ireland, saying nothing about republicanism or the republican movement, and subordinates the Irish struggle to the struggle in Britain:

CFB recognizes that the divisions that have been created amongst the Irish working class constitute the main obstacle to progressive political advance within Ireland. To help overcome these divisions the CFB as part of the international working class movement will work to develop links with the working class forces throughout Ireland in the fight to throw off the domination of all foreign imperialism and to help achieve a socialist republic as advocated by the Irish revolutionary forces.

In a struggle waged by the politically impure Republican movement, the forces undertaking the struggle were kept at arms length, as seen with the CWLB and CFB, by the maoist organisations in Britain. The CPE(ML) attributed a bombing campaign in England as possibly the work of the British state's 'dirty tricks' ²⁴⁴ CPB (ML) statements would refer to "the 'Cowboys and Indians' operations of the Provos and the British Army. Terrorism detached from a popular movement -like hijackings of civil airliners unrelated to the struggle of the Palestinian people -has just about run its course in Northern Ireland."²⁴⁵

The position of the Party did not grasp the role of the armed nationalist forces in the resistance to the British presence. Instead it concurred with the characterisation of those forces as 'terrorists' which formed part of the problem rather than the solution: So the CPB(ML) went further than simply arguing that "the formation of a Marxist-Leninist party" was essential, it condemned- those active in the absence of such a party.

As far as the CPB (ML) were concerned, no revolutionary force yet existed in Ireland, and they were not prepared to move from the abstract level of calling for troops out -abstract as they seldom were active on the issue -and move to support" in words let alone activity, those who were defending the nationalist people in an armed struggle against British Imperialism's forces in the Six Counties.

In 1974 The Worker's analysis was that:

"The murders committed by the loyalist and Provisional terrorists are an off-shoot of the terrorism practised by the troops and so unsparingly nurtured by them. For us, British workers, there is but one cause: the immediate withdrawal of British troops so Ireland may be one and free."²⁴⁶

²⁴³ MLQ 7 (Summer 1974)

²⁴⁴ *Worker's England Daily News Release*, September 4, 1973 see *EROL*

²⁴⁵ *Worker* 1. September 1972

²⁴⁶ *The Worker* Oct 31 1974

This formally correct line of supporting a campaign of withdrawal was accompanied by the orthodox left position that what was needed in Ireland was a socialist movement to unite the workers regardless of religion. What such a position betrayed was the lack of understanding that indeed it was a colonial situation, and that it was the Republican movement that should be supported because it was the progressive force seeking national unification.

That loyalist worker displayed all the prejudices and hatred of Orange politics towards that movement was used to avoid supporting the Republicans in the name of class politics.

The CPB (ML) referred to the Republican fighting forces as "gangsters", "in a free united Ireland those criminals would be dealt with effectively."²⁴⁷

That the Party could not explain why such forces had a strong working class base and could sustain an urban guerrilla warfare, led to some CPB(ML) members, such as those in Bristol, to leave the organisation. They would not stomach the line that the occupation of the Six Counties and partition of Ireland "suits all the ignorant, degenerate louts of whatever stripe who defile the very name of liberation struggle by carrying out mad acts of sectarian violence." (Worker 9.12.1975)

The theoretical poverty of the organisation shone through as it applied the only formula it knew to inappropriate circumstances. The issue at the heart of the conflict was the very existence of the state itself, bread-and-butter issues were pushed aside when the question of political allegiances were raised.

What the CPB (ML) foresaw, along with other pro-British analysis of the situation, was the development of a united class response that would make redundant the existing republican forces. Like the good trade unionists they were, in 1979, the CPB (ML) trumpeted" the strength of unity gained by the Irish workers in the struggle to break the government-imposed wage limits ...(they) stood together in a mockery of the traditional sectarianism fostered by the ruling class... The fight to arrest declining living standards has caused a radical rethink of traditional values and loyalties in northern Ireland." ²⁴⁸

The line remained unchanged: on Ireland, the CPB (ML) had a correct position of calling for the withdrawal of British troops but that was the limit of its understanding of the issues involved in the Irish War. Its sectarian attitude to those outside of the party meant that where there were Marxist-Leninists active in solidarity with the Irish Struggle like the INSLF in the early years of the movement or RCLB in the later 1970s/80s, no attempt at joint work or mutual support emerged from the CPB (ML). The Party had other concerns. To demonstrate that nothing had been learnt in the preceding ten years, he went on to condemn those who "cowardly seek to carry the fight into places of commerce and relaxation of the British working people" , branding them, "an enemy of our class and a diversionary force within their own."

²⁴⁷ The Worker 19 October 1975

²⁴⁸ Worker May 10th 1979

At the 1979 May Day meeting, the CPB (ML) speaker, said, not in apology for the lack of solidarity activity by the Party, that “we have allowed the sectarian atrocities of the self-styled fighters against British Imperialism to still our tongues, to make Ireland into an unmentionable subject.” He reiterated the call for 'Troops Out of Ireland' without asking the organisation to actually campaign on the issue. Again the CPB (ML) speaker laid down the line that “the Irish people themselves must create the conditions for unity, for only unity will drive out the troops.”

The CPB(ML) did participate in the 10th anniversary march in protest at the sending of the troops into the Six Counties but it repeated its bankrupt analysis that the struggle to defend standards of living would bring about the realisation of working class unity. It argued that acts of "terrorism" made it harder to push the line of 'Troops Out' within British trade unions, and to this argument was added that "more bombings, whether here or in Ireland, simply serve to strengthen Thatcher." ²⁴⁹

Attacks upon the Republicans came thick and fast, and from unexpected quarters: the Communist Party of Ireland (Marxist Leninist). The CPE (ML), and later the RCPB (ML) were not swayed in 1979 by the articles that appeared in the CPI(ML)'s newspaper, *The Red Patriot*, that attacked patriotic Irish freedom fighters as “petty bourgeois terrorists”. A short play by Progressive Cultural Association activist and RCPB (ML) party member John Maharg²⁵⁰, “Our Day Will Come (Tíocfhaidh Ar La)” set in the H blocks at the time of the 1981 Hunger Strike, was a cultural indictment of British rule and emphasised the “indomitable patriotic spirit of the Irish people”.

The articles in the *Red Patriot*, were later attributed to a revisionist faction comprised of former leading cadres – Carol Reakes, Alan Evans and David Vipond – they advanced the idea that the active support for the patriotic struggle had been dictated by the “influence of Mao’s bourgeois nationalism”, that the much criticised British and Irish Communist Organisation reflected, in its two-nations analysis, a reality of the Irish revolution.

“It amounted to an all-out attack on the just democratic struggle of the Irish people and the revolutionary patriotic line which the Communist party of Ireland (Marxist Leninist) had always formerly upheld with credit.”²⁵¹

“When times were not easy Thomas stood alongside us in support of Ireland’s cause” was the message sent by one-time Sinn Fein representative in Britain, Gerry MacLochlainn to a memorial held for Tom Graham, known to many by his pen name of John Maharg (1918-2004). With the demise of the CPI (ML) in the 1980s, its sister-party maintained its support for the Republican-led struggle in Ireland.

²⁴⁹ Worker 27 July 1982

²⁵⁰ Party Memorial Meeting Held for Tom Graham (John Maharg) *Workers' Daily Internet edition* No. 117, October 18, 2004 <http://www.rcpbml.org.uk/wdie-04/d04-117.htm#lead>

²⁵¹ *Red Patriot* Vol 6 Nos. 3-4 August 1st 1982

The RCPB(ML)'s response to bombings in Britain by the IRA ,as at the Royal Marine School of Music near Deal, Kent in September 1989, condemned the "utter hypocrisy of the British government...this was yet another tragic consequence of Britain's unjust and barbarous policy towards Ireland... The cry must become stronger that Britain withdraw from Ireland. Only this will bring a solution."²⁵²

Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, the RCLB had moved nearer to the positions of the CPE(ML)/RCPB(ML) on Ireland . As the Communist Unity Association [CUA] maintained that the main obstacle was the power of British imperialism²⁵³ , fusion with the CFB (ML) to create the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain in 1977 enhanced the 'anti-imperialist' line within that organisation.²⁵⁴

SMASH THE H BLOCKS

**POLITICAL STATUS
FOR IRISH POWS**

REMEMBER BLOODY SUNDAY

TROOPS OUT NOW

**SELF-DETERMINATION FOR
THE IRISH PEOPLE**

The obvious support given to the Irish Republicans throughout the Hunger Strikes in the early eighties, partly coincided with unity talks with the Communist Workers' Movement giving impetus to challenge the old lines. In general, the CWM held a national liberation line, opposed to building of a section of the British Communist Party in Northern Ireland, and understood the re-unification of Ireland as, the strategic goal of the present phase of the Irish national democratic revolution. The RCL abandoned its previous lines on the struggle in Ireland; its replacement regarded the struggle in Ireland as involving Britain's oldest colony.

League members were active in pro-Republican campaigns throughout the country, such as those over political status for the republican prisoners in the H Blocks at the Maze Prison, and later during the Hunger Strike, engaging in marches and street work, with petitions and leaflet distribution. The appeal was a straight-forward one:

"What has all this got to do with us? In Britain, the bosses are trying harder and harder to put their crisis on our backs, Labour and Tory alike. As well as attacking living standards and employment, they are also attacking basic democratic rights, such as picketing or fair trial by jury. They have been continually strengthening the police forces, giving them guns and tightening their links with the army. Both police and army leaders have openly said that they foresee the use of force against protesters in this country. In Northern Ireland they are training a whole body of men and women in the army and police in the most efficient methods of spying, torturing and murdering people. They are also perfecting an entire set of emergency laws and procedures, some of which already apply here -such as the notorious Prevention of Terrorism Act. These techniques and methods have already been introduced here -look at the

²⁵² Workers' Weekly Vol 16 No.32 September 30th 1989

²⁵³ The Struggle in Ireland, What British Workers Should Know [1973?]

²⁵⁴ See EROL: J.B., The Irish Struggle, the CFB and the RCL. *Interim Journal* No.3 June 1981

gestapo-style raids by the SPG on national minorities.

If we want to defend ourselves and fight back against the crisis, we must stand shoulder to shoulder with all the enemies of the British ruling class; men and women, black and white, British and Irish. We must firmly support the right of the Irish people to decide their own future. We must demand that Irish prisoners of war have political status and, most importantly, we must raise the demand that British troops get out of Northern Ireland. In doing this we will be acting every bit as much in our own interests as those of the people of Ireland.²⁵⁵

In 1981 its 2nd Congress adopted the policy of giving unconditional support to the armed struggle of the Irish people and to its Republican leadership. There was a rejection of the judgemental positions of previous positions:

Our solidarity with the Republican movement is not based on it adopting policies which we feel would be correct, but is extended to the movement purely and simply as one fighting imperialism.

But we believe that the Republican movement has many positive features beyond its basic anti-imperialist character. It has mobilised the masses to take up and support the struggle. It has linked the cause of national liberation with that of the emancipation of the working class; it is developing its work in the trade unions and on social and economic questions. It is based solidly in the proletariat and small farming community. It is waging a protracted war against our main enemy, British imperialism. It supports other just national liberation struggles around the world. It is opposed to the two superpowers and supports the non-aligned movement. On the question of political prisoners, it has developed a style of work of uniting all who can be united. Of course, like any other movement in the real world, the Republican movement has its shortcomings and mistakes, but these are very much a secondary aspect.²⁵⁶

There was continual political struggle over the position of the organisation but the slogans of 'Troops Out!' and calls for a united Ireland took on a new context of 'unconditional support' as RCL's activists left TOM, and worked in the pro-Republican, Irish Solidarity Movement (with the Revolutionary Communist group and others), and its London activists established a separate '*Campaign For Ireland*' when ISM acrimoniously split in the early 1980s.

²⁵⁵ Revolutionary Communist League of Britain and Communist Workers Movement. Joint Leaflet Smash the H-Block! Political status Now! 1980

²⁵⁶ "Ireland: Firm Support for the Republican Movement" Report of the Second Congress of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain. '*Class Struggle*' Special Supplement 1981