

Ten Years Since the Coventry International Seminar

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The 8th National Consultative Conference of RCPB(ML) was held in Coventry on January 17, 2004, aimed at summing up the work of the Party since the 4th Congress in March 2003. The Conference was entitled: "Developing Resistance and Planting the Alternative". Chris Coleman opened the 8th NCC of the Party with the following remarks.

Comrades, as you know, this National Consultative Conference is being held at the time of the 10th anniversary of the Coventry Seminar of 1994, which was held under the title: "Retreat of Revolution, and the Tasks of the Communist and Workers' Movement", and the main speaker, as you know was Comrade Hardial Bains.

This is the way in which we are celebrating the anniversary of this very important event, not just to mark it as an historical event and praise it, and, of course, not in any way to try and say that we are repeating it, because it is from that Seminar, which laid down the guidelines for the communist and workers' movement in this period, that the whole of work, the whole of our programme, has developed.

We are very pleased to be holding this conference in Coventry, because it was here, also in an Indian community centre (another one) in this city, that that very important Seminar was held. As I said, Comrade Bains was the main speaker. He gave a couple of quite extensive presentations, and also answered many questions. The Seminar lasted two days. That was January 2 and 3 exactly ten years ago this month.

You cannot emphasise enough how important and significant that Seminar was. Comrade Bains himself, almost ten years before that, as it was clear the way events were shaping in the world, and the Soviet Union was collapsing, and so on, had said that we were approaching a turning point in history, and no forces could act in the old way. Then of course in 1990, the Soviet Union collapsed, the bipolar division of the world ended, an unprecedented assault started against communism, but not just that – against everything progressive in the world. All the major developments of the 20th century, the whole century, including international law, came under assault. And today we see, with war in Iraq, the total setting aside of international norms, we see the further development of that. At that time, the early 1990s, it was a crucial time, and this Seminar and Comrade Bains' presentation, laid down very important guidelines for this new period. It was put forward in the Seminar – I am not attempting to repeat the main points – there is a thematic report in this issue of *Discussion* which came out just after then, which is some 40 pages long. It is very well worth reading again. Many of the comrades were there. Some of course were not there. Some there in the crèche and have since got 10 years older and come into adulthood! But it is very well worth going back to this. The point is made again and again that this is a new period in world history. It is not a new epoch. Comrade Bains keeps emphasising that it is the same epoch which began with the Great October Revolution, the epoch of imperialism and proletarian socialist revolution. But this is a new period within that epoch when revolution has gone into ebb as opposed to flow. And he points out that this is not unique. It has happened before. One point that he mentions is that with the defeat of the German Revolution in 1918, the revolution went into ebb at that particular time, just a year after the great victory of the October Revolution. So revolution ebbs and flows. But definitely in this period, revolution

has gone into ebb. And the communists and the working class have to adapt the tactics of that struggle to this new fact, this new period which has come into existence.

As I said, I will not go through it, but he points out among other things that it is very much a period of preparation, of the communists and the workers making preparations for when the objective situation changes, of the vanguard bringing the broad section into action, and most importantly for the communist parties to develop modern definitions, to develop theory, in order to put the working class into its rightful leading position. He speaks a lot – and the title of *Discussion* is "Modern Definitions" – and he makes very clear is that what he is talking about is modern definitions. It is not *new* definitions. It is still all the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism which remain the same. So it is not new; it is modern. It is the principles applied to this modern period.

As I said, amongst other things he points out that the working class has to take up not only its own struggles but struggles on the question of education, of health, of the environment, of the democratisation of international institutions, and so on.

In these speeches and in the discussion which took place here in Coventry, exactly ten years ago, was laid down very important guidelines for the communists, for the working class, in this period of ebb or retreat of revolution. It is very important for us, because on the basis of these guidelines we developed our programme. In fact, of March of that year, a few months later, we published what you could call our draft general line, *There Is A Way Out of the Crisis*. Later, after two consultative conferences like this, at the beginning of 1995 we published the *Draft Programme for the Working Class*. We had presented in draft form our line and programme for the working class. Later the next year, we set as the main task to strengthen *Workers' Weekly* under the slogan, "Improve the Content, Extend the Readership". And then, as you know, in 1997, at the time of the general election, we put forward the slogan, "Stop Paying the Rich! Increase Investments in Social Programmes!". There were later developments. The establishing of the programme for the Mass Party Press, the Millennium Project. And then at the time of the general election in 2001, putting forward the task of building the Workers' Opposition and planting the alternative in the soil of the country here.

The important thing is that these whole stages of programme which have been developed for our Party, they are all on the basis of these guidelines which were put forward here in Coventry ten years ago. As we said in our 3rd Congress report in 1999, we cannot stress too highly the importance of this developing programme. Although our history goes right back to 1967 and there has always been a "red thread" throughout all our work, and we have been engaged in all sorts of very militant struggles, against fascism particularly in the late 1970s, never before had we had such a clear developing programme where all the comrades knew precisely the tasks that the Party is accomplishing in this period and it develops from stage to stage, and particularly through the Consultative Conferences we have had from time to time, and of course the Congresses, all the activists of the Party are involved in the development of these programmes.

The Coventry Seminar of ten years ago has that sort of significance.

As I said, we are not celebrating this anniversary as a thing in itself – what a wonderful seminar that was, and we praise it and then we go home. We celebrate it in the way communists should, in that we celebrate the anniversary, as the comrade was saying, by

summing up our work over these last months since the 4th Congress, and set the way forward. So we are celebrating it in an active way and further developing the programmes which stem directly from those important guidelines.

With those brief words on the importance of this anniversary, and the way we are celebrating it, I am very proud to declare this Conference open.

Thank you. *[applause]*