

WHICH ROAD TO SOCIALISM ?

the British Road to Socialism Draft

This, the fourth revision, of the Communist Party's programme is necessitated we are told by the big changes in Britain and the World', since 1968.

Marxism is the science of perspectives and, of course, any programme or outline of future development is conditional. It remains a fact, however, that no programme or 'line' of the Communist Party since the mid 1920's has stood the test of more than six or seven years and sometimes much less without a more or less major upset.

There have, of course been changes in Britain and the world" since 1968. But have they really been so big as to require a new programme? Perhaps the revisions in the draft will enable us to see which changes in particular are referred to.

However, the revisions in the draft indicate more of a change in policy rather than in the general situation itself. While it is not completely honest to hide a change of mind behind a pretended change of circumstances one can understand that this can be caused by embarrassment.

Coalition

A party claiming to base itself on the theory of scientific socialism as elaborated by Marx and Engels', should honestly and openly explain its mistakes, but this draft perpetuates the myth that the Communist Party of Great Britain since the 1920's been based on Marxism-Leninism and has led the working-class in the struggle against capitalism and for socialism.

The selfless and devoted workers who made up the majority of active members in the past were always at the centre of the struggle of their class but were thwarted again and again by the twists and turns of the leadership.

The turn from preparing for a struggle for power by the working class at the end of 1925, to one of tamely following the 'left' trade union leaders in the General Strike of May 1926. Again in the late 1920's the turn, from building a powerful base in the labour movement which could have challenged and defeated the right wing leaders to a policy of splitting the movement into communists, "social-fascists" and "Trotskyist yellow-bellies"—the so-called "Third period". This was a policy which isolated the CP from the working class. Coming a little nearer to our own time there was the call of the CP for a coalition government in 1945, this was at a time when the support for socialist change among the workers was reflected by Labour's landslide victory at the polls.

We haven't space here to go into these matters in detail and hope to do so in the near future. We do this not to score points or from an academic interest but in order to understand the history of the working class.

In an election leaflet of the London District Committee of the Communist Party in 1945, it was said: "We've got to change the House of Commons and the Government at the next election. But provided we get a new House of Commons with a strong majority of Labour, Communist and Liberals, I believe the Labour Party should then form a new National Government and invite others including Tories like Churchill and Eden to participate." (our emphasis).

If members of the Communist Party want to understand why in spite of all its struggles the working class has not succeeded in coming to power and why, when the Communist Party was deeply invol-

ved in all those struggles it remains so weak, then they must unfortunately, face up to the question of Party history.

The changes made in this draft of "The British Road to Socialism" are not, unfortunately, a break with and an explanation of the mistakes of the leaders in the past.

Most of the revisions merely "radicalise" the language of the programme by introducing references to Women's Liberation and advocating "Gay Rights". There is even a reference to 'opening the books' which until quite recently was one of the demands denounced as Trotskyist.

There is much in the first section of the draft entitled 'Why Britain needs Socialism' with which we would agree. Such as the opening lines which state that, "Britain is in deep economic, political and social crisis. It has not suddenly come upon us. It has been building up for many years. It is not the result of natural catastrophes or forces beyond our control. It is the product of the capitalist system under which we live, of the world crisis of capitalism, and of the policies of the governments we have had".

Internationalism

It is the fact that capitalism is a world system, that we suffer from the "world crisis of capitalism" that makes Socialism international. Yet we read on line 88, "British sovereignty itself is threatened by membership of the Common Market" (our emphasis). There have been sharp differences on the question of the Common Market and yet this approach remains enshrined in a programme based on ".....Marx and Engels" ?

"The working men have no country. We cannot take from them what they have not got. Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word" (Marx & Engels, The

Communist Manifesto) (our emphases)

So it is clear what the position "based on Marx and Engels" should be and it would not be one which made it possible for Communists to appear on platforms and demonstrations with right wing Tories. In fact it even happened that the CP was once on a demonstration in which the fascist National Front took part! When I raised this with the then London District Organiser his reply was

consistent exponents of reformist policies, and a left wing trend which to one degree or another has challenged either the basis ideas of reformism, or the practical policies which reformism has led to."

The draft continues further on, "changing the dominant outlook of the labour movement, breaking the reformist grip, and winning it for left policies, involves a battle in all the sections and at all levels of the labour movement."

Marxists certainly would not



CP members marching under YCL banners and the Scottish national flag

that the Party did not organise the demo and was not responsible for who was on it!

Communist Party comrades should look very carefully at policies which can land them in that particular situation. It is worth remembering at this point, that the alternative to capitalist attempts at 'European Unity' presented by the Communist International, during Lenin's time and even up to 1926, was the slogan: *A United Socialist States of Europe*, which is now designated by the CP leaders as 'Trotskyism'!

The draft reminds us that Labour government's have come and gone without any fundamental changes in society and that this has been because of the right wing grip on the Labour movement. The Labour Party, it says, has been a "battle ground between a right wing trend, composed of the most

disagree with that, but it tells us nothing of how the right wing has been able to maintain its domination and precisely what "left policies" are needed. Also it underestimates the role of the leaders, both left and right. The rank and file of the movement have always been to the left of the leadership, including the left leaders. Even when the right wing completely dominated the movement their attempts to remove the nationalisation clause from Labour's constitution, were defeated by the rank and file.

Almost every industrial trade union has a clause in its constitution supporting the nationalisation of its own industry. Trade union and Labour Party conferences have demanded nationalisation of the banks and insurance companies, of the 'commanding heights' of the economy. In other words the labour movement has more than once declared not for just reform but for a complete break with capitalism.

However, the leaders of the left have always considered such policies as 'utopian'. Yes, yes, they say, of course we are for socialist measures but we are not going to get them today—we must be 'realistic'. Thus it is not just the right wing who have consciously fought against socialist ideas but also the left who have rejected clear socialist solutions for today's crisis, here and now.

A worker is entitled to regret that if all the leaders are opposed to socialist policies now, then they are not of much practical significance. In all this the CP leaders have tail-ended the lefts, only now and then making mild criticism in the face of sometimes sharp criticisms by the

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Marxist programme can ensure a peaceful Socialist revolution

party rank and file and in response to the Marxist left in the Labour Party. The only way to win the workers for socialist ideas, is to show that they are the *only realistic and practical ideas for the here and now.*

Reformism

While the draft talks of Socialism in a very general way, the Communist Party as well as the right and left reformists put forward on a day to day basis the myth that the problems facing the working class can be solved by measures which fall short of a socialist programme. The draft very correctly says all the problems we face as a class are due to the capitalist system and it poses socialism as the solution—eventually! In the meantime it is suggested that other measures, for instance import controls, will suffice.

If people buy imported goods in preference to British goods it is purely only because they are cheaper and in that case import controls can only mean higher prices. The draft itself says that the problems of Britain are part of the world crisis of capitalism, so how can these problems be overcome by capitalism in one country?

Massive import controls would lead to a trade war in which the working class of all countries would be the losers. What is the difference between refusing to admit goods made by workers in other countries and refusing to admit workers from other countries to make goods here?

In 1924 the Communist Party still had the same position as Marx and Engels over controlled or free trade. At the Sixth Congress Tom Bell said, "Moreover, without any debating about the bush, we have to tell the workers that such issues as the McKenna Duties, Free Trade and so on are only calculated to divide them and set one section against another."

It doesn't really matter what you are called, "right reformist", "left reformist" or "Communist", demands for more housing, more education, higher pensions, no unemployment etc., are just pious wishes unless they are linked directly with the question of who owns and controls the wealth of the country. All the while that 90% of the productive wealth is controlled by 10% of the population, that 10% will dictate policies in their interest.

Bolsheviks

Line 518 tells us that the working class "include the overwhelming majority of the population", but the draft also tells us that to win socialism the working class needs to win with the 'intermediate strata' and "sections of the capitalist class" in order to build a "broad democratic alliance embracing the vast majority of the people". Last year the CP fortnightly 'Comment' gave a list of potential supporters of the 'Alliance' which included 'commuters' and that does not leave many people out!

The capitalist class itself comprises only a tiny handful of people and so it has to draw its support from other classes. Traditionally its support came from the middle class and the more politically backward workers. The middle class in the classical sense have been reduced by the development of capitalism to a quite small minority. It is necessary for the working class to win over or at least neutralise the "intermediate strata" in order to deprive the capitalists of their main support.

This can only be done however by the working class being firm and

decisive and struggling for power. It was by bold measures and the taking over completely of the reins of power that the Bolsheviks were able to implement the programme. This rallied the peasants and ensured their support for the workers government.

In this revision of "The British Road to Socialism", however, the way of securing the support of the 'intermediate strata' and a 'section of the capitalist class' is seen as playing down the whole question of power and presenting a long drawn out gradual process during which seemingly the proletariat will establish socialism, by stealth under the noses of their 'allies'.

At the core of the Draft is the section dealing with the "Revolutionary Process". This section states: "The winning of political power will not be a single act, but a process of struggle. The length of this process will be determined by the outcome of the struggle at various stages".



The State: impartial institution or bosses' weapon?

"It is impossible to proceed overnight from Labour governments which in effect manage capitalism, to a government which introduces Socialism. The political conditions for this do not yet exist; they have to be won. Left governments are part of the process which must show the need for much more fundamental change, while at the same time creating more favourable condition for such a change."

At the same time the programme envisages the possibility of a peaceful socialist transformation without "Civil War". The Marxist left inside the Labour Party have also held out the possibility of peaceful socialist change.

But there is a world of difference between the approach of the CP and that of genuine Marxism. We have shown that if the Labour government were to nationalise the 200 monopolies in Parliament—backed up by the mass mobilisation of the 11 million strong trade union and labour movement—this would eliminate the economic power of the capitalists, paralyse the army tops, rally the middle class and politically uneducated workers behind, its banner and thus ensure a peaceful change.

Chilean Lesson

But we have also shown that piecemeal measures by a Labour government—even a left Labour government—which left the power of the capitalists intact would ensure that capitalist reaction would be enabled to mobilise and seek bloody retribution against the working class. Is not this the lesson of Chile, written in the blood of 50,000 workers?

But there are none so blind as those who refuse to see. The above lines from the draft programme show that the CP leaders envisage a series of "left governments"—the British equivalents of the Allende

regime in Chile. Allende nationalised a significant part of the economy—approximately 30%—introduced land reforms and gave big concessions to the working class. But the power of the capitalists and their army and police were left intact, he also tried to follow the advice given in the draft in relation to the army, police and civil service.... "democratic reforms in the armed forces, changes in their structure and personnel."

A few sympathetic officers were given key positions in the army in Chile but the officer corps remained as of old—implacably hostile to Socialism. Any attempt to touch the officer corps provokes the furious resistance of the capitalists. They rightly see it as the guardian of private property.

The Pinochets were left to plot the massacre of the Chilean workers while "serving" the Allende regime. There would have been only one way that reaction would have been crushed—by nationalis-

"Communist" Party from all other tendencies in the labour movement is its clear revolutionary programme, especially if it remains a small force among the big battalions. Yet it is precisely that ingredient that the British Communist Party lacks.

Even the correspondents of the 'Morning Star' have drawn that conclusion and its logical consequences. One writer said on February 17th: "I keep reading statements from leading members of the Communist Party about the necessity of building a 'broad anti-monopoly alliance'. This alliance already exists in our labour movement in which a unity exists between the trade union, co-operative movement and Labour Party—all with a common Socialist objective. The 'only odd man out' is the Communist Party. It is time the dream of alternative leadership outside and in opposition to the Labour Party was dropped as this can only lead to disruption within the labour movement."

The only way forward for the Communist Party I can foresee is helping to get Socialist policies accepted by the labour movement and the closest possible alliance with the Labour Party."

Parliament

To believe that "left governments" could any more bring about fundamental changes, than Labour government's have, while wealth and power remained in the hands of the capitalists, is to harbour parliamentary illusions. It has nothing in common with the Marxist approach. The job of the Marxists is to patiently explain to the workers how their problems can be solved. Workers tend not to take action until they are convinced of its necessity and effectiveness but when they are so convinced, there is no power on earth that can resist them, if they strike with a closed fist and are led by people who know what they are about.

The approach of the Draft to this question of "left governments" is one which would tend to lull the workers while the "leaders" move in and out of the House of Commons "opening the road to socialism". In order to conform with some other radical phraseology in the Draft the workers would also, of course, have to be prepared to run into the street, to defend the "leaders" should the ruling class prove awkward, heaven forbid!

Of course the CP is absolutely correct, as against the ultra left

sects, to pose the possibility of a peaceful transfer of power. The question is how can this be achieved? Because of the overwhelming strength of the working class in Britain, if the labour and trade union leaders were Marxists and campaigned in the movement to explain the crisis of capitalism, and the need for Socialism then capitalism could not last six weeks. State power could pass into the hands of the working class peacefully and even through parliament provided that the class was mobilised to prevent any attack from the capitalist state.

The workers can come to power "overnight" peacefully to the extent that they are organised and determined and in the process will neutralise or win over the "intermediate strata" who are always attracted to the strongest and most determined side. But if the leaders, whether right or left reformists or "Communists" pacify and weaken the workers with "gradualism" then the capitalists will strike a deadly blow at the first opportunity. Yes, of course we are for a peaceful transition to Socialism but it cannot be achieved by the methods advocated in the Draft.

According to leaders of the CP the "peaceful constitutional road" could be followed in Chile because it was the "Britain of Latin America" because there, among the capitalists, the officer class, the high officials of state there was a deep respect for democracy and for the constitution.

If the programme outlined in this Draft should be adopted by the British labour movement then much more likely that Britain become the Chile of Europe.

The radical language covering a reformist document makes it difficult to deal with the Draft of "The British Road to Socialism" in a short article. We hope that we will help stimulate discussion and study by those CP members who are honestly trying to evaluate their Party's programme and performance. We wish them well.

If memory serves me correctly it was one of the members of the "Drafting Commission" who coined the phrase a few years ago, that if we in the CP were not very careful, we were in great danger of being not so much the vanguard, as the guards van!

The author was a member of the CPGB from 1962 to 1972 and is a former National Chairman of the YCL.



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