The Wind from the East: a Personal History of the Maoist Movement in Britain.

By Neil Redfern.

> "I know we will create a society where there are no rich or poor, no people without work or beauty in their lives, where money itself will disappear, where we shall all be brothers and sisters, where every one will have enough." (Sylvia Pankhurst).

Acknowledgement.

This is a history of the struggles of many hundreds of people over many years to build a revolutionary movement capable of overthrowing the rotten imperialist society in which we live. I pay tribute to them, while raking full responsibility for the opinions expressed here.

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Introduction.

I have deemed this history a personal history because I was an active participant in the Maoist movement. I could not dispassionately discuss, for example, the events which led to my expulsion from the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain. I am aware that I loom rather larger in the pages which follow than my contribution to the movement merits. No doubt there is an element of score-settling. But I have tried to be objective (not in the academic sense of disinterested enquiry, but in the Marxist sense of recognising that there is such a thing as objective reality while recognising too how difficult it can be to comprehend that reality). It is for others to judge whether or not I have been successful. No doubt one reason for giving greater attention to the CFB/RCLB than to the CPB is that I was a member of the former organisation. But the principal reason is that while the CPB fairly quickly returned to the revisionist fold, the CFB/RCLB remained Maoist, or at least nominally Maoist, to the end.

For most, the word 'Maoist' conjures up an image of a sixties radical student brandishing a copy of the 'Little Red Book' (the *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-Tung*). But it is important to grasp that the Maoist movement emerged from the international communist movement forged after the second, Bolshevik, revolution of 1917. In the late 1950s profound ideological and political differences arose between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In 1960 the CPC published *Long Live Leninism,* an all-round critique of 'modern revisionism'.[1] In 1963 it denounced the CPSU, led by Nikita Khruschev, as a 'revisionist' party: it was a party which was 'allying with imperialism to oppose socialism… and allying with the reactionaries of all countries to oppose the peoples of the world' and had 'allied itself with imperialism…against all Marxist-Leninist Parties, in open betrayal of Marxism-Leninism.'.[2]

It was not the CPC's contention that Marxism-Leninism is a set of immutable principles. Marxism is not a religion, replete with revealed truths (though some, including not a few of the people we will encounter in this history, treated it as such.) Though this writer is convinced that the basic premises of Marxism are correct, it is quite possible that some of the premises on which this history is based are false.

It **was** the CPC's contention that the 'revisionists' no longer upheld aspects of Marxism-Leninism that had arisen out of experience and had been validated by practice. They no longer insisted, for instance, as historical experience had emphatically demonstrated, that social revolution is inevitably violent. But the CPC acknowledged that what is thought to be correct can be incorrect and that what is true, what it is essential to uphold, can change. It was once believed by orthodox Marxists, is still believed by some, that socialism could only be built in such advanced capitalist countries as Britain, Germany, and the USA. The experience of the Twentieth Century, though not everyone will agree with this assertion, has emphatically demonstrated this to be untrue.

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[1] CPC, *Long Live Leninism* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1960).

[2] CPC, 'The Origin and Development of the Differences between the Leadership of the CPSU and Ourselves - Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU' (this was but one in a series of criticisms of revisionism later published in a single volume as *The Polemic on the General Line of the International Communist Movement* (Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 1965).

It is not a coincidence that the Maoist movement emerged in 'The Sixties', a time not just or even mainly of flower power and free love, but of national liberation wars, notably in Vietnam, of the Great Proletarian Cultural. Revolution in China, uprisings of black people in the USA, mass strikes in many imperialist countries and student revolts, notably during 'Les Evenements' of May '68 in France. The uncompromising revolutionary stance of *Long Live Leninism* appealed to many of those inspired by the revolutionary times

There had been for some time a significant minority of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) which believed that their party had become a revisionist party. Emboldened by the CPC's criticism of revisionism and provided with ammunition by the CPC's publication of English language critiques of revisionism in *Peking Review*, they began to organise to oppose the CPGB's leadership. This matter will be discussed in some detail in Chapter One. Here, it necessary to note that it fairly quickly became clear that the vast majority of the CPGB's members supported their revisionist leadership and that the struggle against revisionism in the CPGB would fail.

But this was a time when a new generation of revolutionaries was emerging, seasoned by participation in the working-class struggle (the 1960s saw an upsurge in rank-and-file trade union activism) and such movements as the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) and, later, the Student, Vietnam Solidarity and Women's movements. To many of these revolutionaries, Maoism seemed the most radical thing around. The Cultural Revolution, which erupted in 1966, seemed the acme of revolution. By 1970, after a significant number of the new revolutionaries had embraced Maoism, a Maoist movement had been born.

What did the Maoists stand for and what differentiated the Maoists from other trends on the far left?[3] Though the majority of Maoists in Britain came from the new generation of revolutionaries, the ideological and political foundations of the Maoist movement were mainly established by the existing anti-revisionists. But they had been transformed by the anti-revisionist struggle and by ideological and political interaction with the new revolutionaries. Maoists took as their basic text the *Polemic on the General Line.* This expressed a vibrant Marxism in tune with the revolutionary times. It was a qualitative advance on (though, as we shall see in the next chapter, not a complete break with) the defensive, Eurocentric outlook of the international communist movement of the 1930s and 1940s, which anti-revisionists had initially used as a revolutionary reference point.

The most obvious difference between Maoists and others on the revolutionary left was on the question of Stalin. For Trotskyists, in Britain the main tendency on that left, Stalin was the 'gravedigger' of the Russian Revolution, a betrayer of the world proletarian revolution. For Maoists, he was, in the words of the CPC, a 'great Marxist-Leninist, a great proletarian

[3] Maoists usually referred to themselves as 'anti-revisionists', 'Marxist-Leninists' or 'Revolutionary Communists'. But in this work, those revolutionary organisations which emerged in the 1960s and which claimed an ideological and political affinity with the Communist Party of China are deemed to have been Maoist. (But see the comments below on the Workers' Institute of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Testung Thought and on the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist). 'Communist' refers to those communists who supported the CPC in the dispute in the international communist movement; 'revisionist' to those who supported the CPSU.

revolutionary.'[4] (An assessment we will consider in Chapter Five.) Closely connected with the question of Stalin, was the matter of the nature of the Soviet Union and China. Trotskyists mostly regarded both as 'deformed workers' states. Maoists argued that the Soviet revisionists had restored capitalism in the Soviet Union. In the late 1960s they began to argue that the Soviet Union had become an expansionist 'social-imperialist' state. As for China, Maoists regarded it as an inspiring beacon of socialism and revolution. But after Mao's death in 1976 and the subsequent arrest of the 'Gang of Four', a minority of Maoists insisted that the right wing of the CPC had staged a *coup d'etat* and were 'capitalist roaders' building a capitalist China.

Far more important than the question of Stalin was the question of imperialism. A fundamental contradiction for the British revolutionary left of the 1960s and 1970s is that it sought socialist revolution in a non-revolutionary period in an imperialist society. It was generally assumed on the revolutionary left that the principal obstacle to revolution by the working-class was misleadership by the old parties of the left, the Labour Party and the Communist Party. But surely the main reason why most working-class people did not favour revolution was that the prevailing socio-economic conditions had fostered strong reformist and patriotic sentiments among the working-class. There had been substantial reforms over the previous century, notably the great expansion of the franchise in 1918-28 and the 'Welfare State' introduced after the Second World War. Living standards had risen considerably since then. Most working-class people were beginning to be able to afford such consumer goods as televisions, washing machines and refrigerators.

Imperialism is a blind spot for most labour historians and for most of the left. Consider, for instance, an account of the attempt by the International Socialists (IS) (the precursor to today's Socialist Workers' Party (SWP)) to build a base in a Coventry car factory in the years 1968-75,[5] the peak years of post-war prosperity. Full employment had permitted the emergence of a powerful, militant shop stewards' movement. Especially in such heavily unionised industries as car manufacturing, shop stewards had led many successful working-class economic struggles against capital. It seemed to many on the far left that the working-class was embarking on an offensive against capital. But post-war full employment was not just a matter of economics, it was a **political** policy, a vital aspect of a post-war settlement between labour and capital.[6]

In 1944, Ernest Bevin, once the leader of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), but then the Minister of Labour, told parliament that when he and Winston Churchill went to speak to British troops awaiting embarkation for the D-Day invasion of France, 'the one question they put to me when I went through their ranks was "Ernie, when we have done this job for you are we going back on the dole?" (Working-class people had bitter memories of inter-war unemployment, the dole, and the means test). 'Both the Prime Minister and I answered: "No, you are not."'[7] Shortly after D-Day, a White Paper on

[4] CPC, 'On the Question of Stalin', *The Polemic on the General Line* p. 104.

[5] Saunders (2017).
[6] See Redfern (2019 for a discussion of this matter.
[7] Cited in Addison (1977), p. 242.

Employment promised that post-war governments would have 'as one of their primary aims and responsibilities the maintenance of a high and stable level of employment.'.[8]

By the late 1960s, the post-war settlement was beginning to fracture: but it and earlier reforms had inoculated the great majority of the working class against the revolutionary exhortations of the far left. While many working-class people were prepared to strike over wages and conditions, defend gains won, support revolutionary shop-floor militants and some even to join far left organisations, revolutionary politics were not very attractive to the great majority. It is unsurprising that few workers in the Coventry car factory rallied to the IS. But the author had nothing at all to say regarding the imperialist milieu in which the IS failed to build a base in Coventry.

An underlying reason for Trotskyist overestimation of the prospects for revolution in the imperialist countries is a complementary and Eurocentric underestimation of the importance of revolutionary national movements against imperialism. In 1916 Trotsky had dismissed the leaders of that year's Easter Rising in Ireland (see Chapter Six) as 'nationalist dreamers' and asserted that 'the historical basis for the national revolution… [has]… disappeared even in backward Ireland.'.[9] At 1920's Second Congress of the Third, Communist, International (Comintern),[10] Trotsky claimed that 'the Indian revolution can only be successful as a proletarian revolution.' .[11]

The Congress rejected Trotsky's views and adopted *Theses on the National and Colonial Questions* which insisted that the revolution in such countries as India and China had a national character. Of particular importance were thesis four which declared that the 'whole policy' of the Comintern on the national and colonial question 'must be based primarily on the union of the workers and toiling masses of all nations and countries in the common revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the landlords and the bourgeoisie' and thesis eleven which insisted that all Communist Parties must support national liberation movements and that this obligation rested primarily on the 'workers of those countries on which the backward countries are in a position of colonial or financial dependence.'. [12]

In the early 1920s, when it was becoming clear that the post-war revolutionary wave in Europe was ebbing and that the locus of world revolution was shifting to the East, Lenin argued that the outcome of the Communist Movement's revolutionary struggle would 'be determined by the fact that 'Russia, China, India, etc., account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe. And during the past few years it is this majority which has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity.'.[13] It was in this spirit that most Maoists (not all, as we shall see) in Britain endorsed the insistence of the CPC that the 'various types of contradictions in the contemporary world are concentrated in Asia, Africa and Latin America…the storm centres of world revolution.'[14] and insisted that

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[8] Timms (1995), pp. 132-133.

[9]' L. Trotsky, 'On the Events in Dublin', *Trotsky's Writings on Britain*, volume III (London, 1975), p. 87.

[10] The Third International had been founded in 1919 in opposition to the Second International which had collapsed into social-chauvinism in 1914,

[11] Gupta (2006), pp. 66-67.

[12] Editor Uncited (1977), pp. 177-183.

[13] V.I. Lenin, 'Better Fewer, But Better', *Selected Works, Vol. 3* (Moscow, 1971), p. 787.

[14] CPC, 'Apologists of Neo-Colonialism', *Polemic on the General Line,* p. 201.

supporting revolutionary nationalist movements against imperialism must be at the heart of the struggle for socialist revolution in the imperialist countries.

Maoists are not prominent in the literature on the revolutionary left in Britain. Lawrence Parker has written on the 'anti-revisionist' opposition in the CPGB.[15] John Callaghan has little to say.[16] Robert Alexander's work is unreliable. He claims, incorrectly, that the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain (RCLB) supported the Party of Labour of Albania's (PLA)) attacks on Mao and Maoism after the death of Mao.[17] Other than a brief passage on the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) (CPB) and another on the RCLB, there is very little on Maoists in two volumes on the far left in Britain edited by Evan Smith and Mathew Worley.[18] In their introduction to the first of these volumes Smith and Worley refer to Maoists who advocated 'student-peasant alliances' and 'guerrilla warfare'.[19] Such Maoists could perhaps have been found on university campuses in 1968: but if so, they were, to say the least, unrepresentative.

Those who want a reliable guide to Maoism should not consult Julia Lovell's *Maoism a Global History*[20] or Quinn Slobodian's *The Meanings of Western Maoism in the Global 1960s*.[21] In Lovell's work we meet an arbitrary selection of tendencies, individuals and organisations, most of them merely influenced by Maoism. We encounter black nationalists, terrorists who took rather too literally Mao's claim that a 'single spark can light a prairie fire', anarchists encouraged by the Cultural Revolution, socialist feminists who saw in the Cultural Revolution a break with the staid bureaucratism and authoritarianism of the official labour movement, but virtually none of – the subject of this history – the ideologically and politically fully paid-up Maoists, the Marxist-Leninists or revolutionary communists.

Lovell and Slobodian provide little evidence of the politics of the fully paid-up Maoists, such as their furious debates regarding post-Mao China, preferring to mainly base their accounts on the memoirs and reminiscences of disillusioned ex-members. In Lovell, the fully paid-up Maoists of, for instance, West Germany, are portrayed as cranks. It is simply not true, as this writer knows from personal experience, that among those Maoists 'make-up was banned…clothes were made out of an uncomfortable scratchy military twill' and that 'toilets had no doors.'.[22]

The only British Maoist organisation discussed by Slobodian is the Workers' Institute of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Testung Thought. This was a cult: it was utterly unrepresentative of the Maoist movement in Britain. In I978 it attached itself to a protest outside the Soviet Embassy organised by the RCLB and the Communist Workers' Movement (CWM) on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Given an opportunity to speak, its leader, Aravindan Balakrishnan, announced that there was no point in preparing for a demonstration in 1979, as an international dictatorship of the proletariat

[15] Parker (2012), pp. 17-32.
[16] Callaghan (1987).
[17] Alexander (2011), p. 75.
[18] Smith & Worley (eds.) (2014); Smith & Worley (eds.) (2017).
[19] Smith and Worley (eds) (2014), p. 9,
[20] Lovell (2019).
[21] Slobodian (2018).
[22] Lovell (2019), p. 292.

was imminent: China's Peoples' Liberation Army was poised to invade and liberate Europe. In 2016, Balakrishnan was found guilty of raping two of the three women he and his wife, Chanda Pattni Balakrishnan, had kept as slaves.[23]

The Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) (CFB), the CPB and other Maoist organisations had emerged out of the CPGB and the wider labour movement. But the Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist (CPE)[24] (from which the Worker's Institute had split) was part of the Internationalists, a cult operating in several countries. The CPE and similar organisations which emerged from the student movement of the late 1960s had no organic links with the working class nor with the labour movement and never built such links. The CPE is best seen as a typical sixties' cult. Its similarity to such cults as the Moonies was demonstrated by its attempts to convert working-class people to communism by holding door-to-door sales of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (the 'Little Red Book') on council estates. The CPE and the Workers' Institute are not discussed in this history of the Maoist movement in Britain. In this writer's view, they are appropriate subjects for the literature of psychology, not of political history.

Though Lovell was rather indiscriminate when deeming people and organisations to be Maoist, it is true that in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, Maoism influenced numerous people. But the fully paid-up Maoist organisations made little effort, undoubtedly to their detriment, to work with those influenced by Maoism but not attracted to their side.

Such people had nothing in common with the millenarian fantasists of the Workers' Institute. They were to be found in various fields - in the women's movement (we will consider the experience of those of them who joined Maoist organisations in Chapter Seven), trade unions (notably in the Amalgamated Engineering Union (AEU)), tenants' associations and in anti-imperialist, cultural (particularly in the Workers' Film Association) and ethnic minority organisations (for some time in the 1970s the Indian Workers' Association (Great Britain) (IWA) was led by Maoists). Maoism influenced too some political organisations. The libertarian socialist organisation Big Flame was enthused by the Cultural revolution. But its hostility to Leninist norms of organisation was a fundamental obstacle to unity. Despite styling itself as a Marxist-Leninist party, the Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFP) took its ideological inspiration at least as much from the Black Power movement, particularly the Black Panthers of the USA, as from Marxism-Leninism. It published *Black Voice.* It was dissolved in 1999.

What kind of people joined the Maoist and other revolutionary left organisations of the '60s and 70s? The typical revolutionary was a person who had the time, inclination and means to study, to think, to debate, was inclined to read political literature, attend meetings, go on demonstrations and generally take part in political activity. In 1970, the typical Maoist was a young white male. In the CFB/RCLB around a third of the members were women. Very few ethnic minority people joined the two main Maoist party-building organisations, the CFB and the CPB. Probably a majority of Maoists were better-off working-class people (engineers,

[23] This case provoked several uniformed discussions of atypical 'Maoists' utterly representative of the movement. See, for instance, 'Inside the paranoid Maoist cults of 1970s Britain' @ https://hatfulofhistory.com/2013/11/28/inside-the-paranoid-maoist-cults-of-1970s-britain-a-post-at-the-conversation-uk/.

[24] In 1979 the CPE reconstituted itself as the Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist).

printers, car plant workers and so on) or lower middle-class people (teachers, social workers and suchlike). Some were radical intellectuals or professionals (academics, lawyers, doctors and the like), some of working-class origin. As were many of those who were or had been students, beneficiaries of the great expansion of higher education in the 1960s.

There were a number of Maoist organisations (Sam Richards has provided valuable on-line narrative histories of many of these organisations and also a host of invaluable documentary sources, some of which have been used in this work. (See the Bibliography)). In this work, though other Maoist organisations, particularly the CWM, are discussed or mentioned, we will concentrate on the two largest, most influential and most representative Maoist organisations, the CFB, which in 1977 united with the Communist Unity Association (Marxist-Leninist) (CUA) to form the RCLB, and the CPB. There are a few passages on two small groups – the Nottingham Communist Group (NCG) and the Stockport Communist Group (SCG), discussed because they remained committed to the Maoist project as it existed prior to the death of Mao in 1976.

Let us now consider that history.

Chapter One.

1963-1970: the Emergence of a Maoist movement in Britain.

After the publication of *Long Live Leninism*, veteran communists such as Joe Dix in Manchester and Peggy Pinckheard in London began an organised campaign against revisionism. As in similar battles in 1945 and 1947, discussed below, the anti-revisionists were defeated. Few members of the CPGB supported the new anti-revisionists. Only four out of 461 delegates opposed the EC's pro-Soviet resolution (10 delegates abstained) at the party's 28th. Congress of 1963.[1] Later that year, the party leadership adopted an uncompromising pro-CPSU resolution. The party's leader, John Gollan, saw *Long Live Leninism* as a 'challenge to the general line of our Party embodied in our programme, The British Road to Socialism.'.[2]

In November 1963, presumably in response to the 28th. Congress's endorsement of Soviet (and, implicitly, British) revisionism, thirty or so anti-revisionists met at the Lucas Arms public house in London to discuss the way forward. Among those gathered there were a number of people - Mike Baker, Michael McCreery and Sean McConville, for instance - who were to play a prominent role in the Maoist movement. But those present could not agree on how to continue the struggle. Those who believed the CPGB was incorrigibly revisionist founded an anti-revisionist organisation, the Committee to Defeat Revisionism for Communist Unity (CDRCU). Those who believed it was not founded *Forum,* a clandestine journal aimed at CPGB members (the name suggesting that those responsible believed that revisionism could be defeated through discussion and debate.) Neither the CDRCU nor those who founded *Forum* met with a great deal of success.

Immediately after the Lucas Arms meeting, the CDRCU issued an *Appeal to all Communists from Members of the CPGB* to split from the CPGB and join the anti-revisionists. The leaders of the CPGB were said to have 'abandoned revolution, abandoned the struggle for working-class power and socialism, and replaced it with the aim of winning a few crumbs from the table of the monopoly capitalists.'. The *Appeal* concluded by claiming that the CPGB was 'no longer a Marxist-Leninist Party.'.[3] Unsurprisingly, all fourteen signatories were expelled.

Admittedly with the benefit of sixty years of hindsight, it seems surprising that any of those gathered at the Lucas Arms could have believed that the CPGB or even a substantial section of it would join the ranks of the anti-revisionists. A small minority did adopt an anti-revisionist stance. Dorothy Birch, later to be a prominent member of the CPB, attended a discussion organised by Hendon branch in November. A majority voted against Gollan' s stance. In December, the members of Stoke Newington branch wrote to the EC claiming that the party's leadership had 'rejected proletarian internationalism and the dictatorship of the proletariat.'.[4]

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[1] *Times*, 15 April 1963.
[2] *Daily Worker* 18 September 1963.
[3] CDRCU, *An Appeal to all Communists from Members of the CPGB* (November 1963).
[4] Communist Party Archive (CPA) @ the People's History Museum, Manchester. CPGB/CENT/ORG/20/05

The CPGB's Organisation Department (OD), long practiced in surveillance of Trotskyists, now began to intensify its surveillance of anti-revisionists.[5] Purges of pro-CPC members began. In 1964 Dick Jones and Henderson Brookes, a member since 1947, were charged with anti-party activity. Brookes was expelled. These two and others then formed the Organisation for the Defence of Marxism-Leninism, precursor of the Coventry Workers Association (CWA), which eventually became a constituent group of the CFB. In 1966 Geoff Lee, Mike Leat, Phil Dixon and Mike Faulkner (all later to work in the CFB) were expelled from the Camden Young Communist League (YCL) for demanding that the CP support the national liberation war against US imperialism in Vietnam (this was said by the EC to be the policy 'of the Trotskyists', not the CPGB)[6] rather than advocate a negotiated settlement. A notable expulsion was that of the veteran communist Colin Penn, the secretary of the pro-PRC China Policy Study Group. According to Laurence Parker, this was because he was responsible for an article in the organisation's *Broadsheet* which claimed that there was little difference on international questions between the Soviet Union and the USA.[7]

In 1972 Sean McConville,[8] the Chairman of the CFB, who, along with Sam Mauger had been one of those responsible for *Forum,* alleged that those present at the Lucas Arms meeting had been presented with an 'ultimatum'. They were asked to sign the *Appeal*: if they did not, McCreery and others would. According to McConville those who founded the CDRCU were guilty of a persistent tendency in the movement, that of the 'party fetish', putting 'organisation before politics.'[9] We will return to this matter later.

According to *Forum*, the expulsions and other disciplinary measures showed that it had been reckless and counterproductive to form the CDRCU. Since the formation of the CDCRU:

> the anti-revisionist struggle in this country has been fragmented. A large part of the responsibility for this rests with McCreery, whose insistence on setting himself up as the leader of the anti-revisionist struggle [has] created divisions, mistrust and suspicions among comrades who otherwise might have moved much more rapidly towards a united, if small, movement in Britain.[10]

From the perspectives of sixty or so years later, it seems clear that the fragmentation of the movement was primarily the result of the conservatism, the faintheartedness, of those who insisted on staying in the CPGB. If these had joined those who split, it is at least possible that a united, critical mass of anti-revisionists could have emerged. Instead, anti-revisionists left or were expelled as individuals or tiny circles, contributing greatly to the fragmentation of the

[5] See Redfern (2014).
[6] CPA, CPGB/YCL/10/03.
[7] Parker (2012), p. 61.
[8] McConville's main contribution in 1963 was funding and organising a bookshop, *New Era Books*, which sold literature from the PRC. The bookshop was originally located in Bath, where it had attracted the attention of the *Western Daily Press.* When interviewed, McConville denied that he was a communist, adding that he would 'take legal advice' if anyone said that he was. 'Mao's Salesman in Bath', *Western Daily Press*, 19 August 1963. Later, the bookshop moved to London's Seven Sisters Rd., where it served as the headquarters of the CFB/RCLB.
[9] 'TM', [McConville] 'Revisionism and the British Anti-Revisionist Movement, *Marxist-Leninist Quarterly* (MLQ) no. 3, Winter 1972-73, p. 5.
[10] *Forum,* no. 8, October 1964.

movement. The anti-revisionist struggle was gravely hampered by this fragmentation. Within a few years there existed at least a dozen anti-revisionist groups and circles.[11]

The CDRCU and its Opponents.

The CDRCU had a very unrealistic appraisal of itself. In the Spring of 1964, only a few months after its foundation, it claimed:

> Communists from the main industrial centres…have begun to co-ordinate the struggle against revisionism. Committees in London, Manchester and the North and Scotland are now openly appearing before the militant workers as an alternative to those who advocate policies of class collaborationism. Communists in industry after industry are uniting to hammer out a line of struggle.[12]

Less than two years after its foundation the CRDCU lost around half of its members in a split. Most of the northern members of the CDRCU formed the Action Centre for Marxist-Leninist Unity (ACMLU), led by Baker. According to the ACMLU, the split occurred because poor preparation for the Lucas Arms meeting had led to a 'spontaneous division' in the anti-revisionist movement between those who argued for an immediate split from the CPGB and those who argued that the fight should be carried on inside the party.[13] Given that those still in the CDRCU and those now in the ACMLU were on the same side of this 'division' it is hard to see why this should have necessitated a split.[14]

The CDRCU treated as enemies those anti-revisionists who refused to join it. In the Autumn of 1966, a policy statement announced that anti-revisionists outside the CDRCU 'offer at best a pseudo explanation of the development and growth of the Marxist-Leninist movement in Britain…They have split away from Marxism-Leninism just as much as the revisionists and Trotskyists have done.'. The CDRCU, it loftily announced, 'do not prettify [other groups] by granting them any form of recognition…The way to genuine unity is to unite around the CDRCU.'[15] A few months later the members of the ACMLU, who were trying to organise a conference of Marxist-Leninists, were denounced as 'liquidators within the British Marxist-Leninist movement. [They] have taken another step in their attempt to distort history and negate the CDRCU, the representative committee of the Marxist-Leninist nucleus party.'.[16]

But the organisation began to rapidly decline after the death of Michael McCreery in April 1965. The most obvious manifestation of the CDRCU's decline was the swift deterioration in quality of *Vanguard*, which had been financed by McCreery. The paper went from monthly to bi-monthly publication shortly after McCreery's death and by the Spring of 1966 was no longer a glossy, printed publication, but photocopied pages stapled together.

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[11] See the 'family tree' chart @ https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.hightide/uk-tree.pdf.
[12] *Vanguard*, April 1964.
[13] 'On the development of a programme and the task of building the Marxist-Leninist party.', *Hammer or Anvil,* April-May 1966.
[14] See Parker (2012), pp. 48-52 for one explanation for the split.
[15] *Vanguard*, September-October 1966.
[16] *Vanguard*, March-April 1967.

As its fortunes waned, the CDRCU began to adopt a less haughty attitude to other Marxist-Leninists. In an undated issue of *Vanguard*, there was a friendly reference to the Joint Committee of Communists (JCC),[17] a loose association of Maoist groups, founded in 1967 by some of those, notably Sam Mauger, who had been responsible for the journal *Forum*. They had evidently now concluded that there was no prospect of defeating revisionism in the CPGB. In early 1968 the CDRCU met with a constituent group of the JCC, the Camden Communist Movement (founded by those who had been expelled from the YCL in 1966), deeming it to be a 'fraternal organisation.'[18]

But the CDRCU had by then run out of steam. There was no formal announcement of a dissolution: it simply faded away. The organisation's last gasp of activity was probably the publication early in 1968 of the last issue of *Vanguard*, which contained an attack on the Marxist-Leninist Organisation of Britain (MLOB),[19] a rebranded ACMLU, which, the CDRCU knew, was about to denounce the Cultural Revolution in China as a counter-revolutionary movement and Mao as a revisionist.[20] Clearly, MLOB was no longer part of the Maoist movement in Britain. Nearly half of MLOB's members, including Joe Dix. were outraged by the attack on the CPC and left the organisation. Later in 1968, Dix and others, including Neil Redfern, founded the Manchester-based Lancashire and Cheshire Communist League (LCCL).

There was now one matter on which there was general agreement among the early anti-revisionists. The failure to defeat revisionism in the CPGB meant that building a new, revolutionary communist party must be the paramount task. But many of the new generation of revolutionaries were not convinced, especially during the early stages of the Cultural Revolution in China, when the Red Guards rather than the CPC seemed to be in the vanguard. Some agreed that a party must eventually be built, but not yet. Still others thought that a party could be built by mass work or that mass organisations could be turned into a revolutionary party.

Friends of China or Understanding China?

Inevitably, the Sino-Soviet split impacted on the UK-China friendship movement, the principal concern of which at that time was to gain recognition for the PRC.[21] At the 1964 AGM of the CP-controlled Britain-China Friendship Association (BCFA), there seems to have been a failed attempt by Maoists to make the organisation take a pro-CPC stance on the dispute in the international communist movement.[22] The AGM approved a resolution that claimed that 'McCreery and his circle' (i.e., the CDRCU) were trying to 'infiltrate' the

[17] *Vanguard,* vol. 5, no. 3.
[18] *Vanguard*, January-February 1968.
[19] ''Red Front', Truly a Front of Reaction', *Vanguard*. January-February 1968.
[20] MLOB, 'Report of the Central Committee of the MLOB on the Situation in the People's Republic of China', *Red Front* January 1968.
[21] For many years imperialism had attempted to construct a *cordon sanitaire* around revolutionary China. It was not admitted to the United Nations until 1971. Full diplomatic relations between the UK and China were not established until 1972 and not until 1979 between the USA and China.
[22] See Buchanan (2013) for a wider context, esp. pp.547-9.

organisation and that it would be 'disastrous' to become involved in the Sino-Soviet dispute.[23]

A rival to the BCFA, the Friends of China, was founded after the AGM. According to the ACMLU, the Friends of China was an anti-revisionist organisation that had opposed the formation of the CDRCU and had a 'false perspective that a Marxist-Leninist movement might somehow emerge' from the Friends.[24] Given subsequent attempts, probably by the Friends, to use the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding (SACU) to promote Maoism, it seems likely that the ACMLU 's claim was true.

There is no further trace of the Friends until 1967. Then, probably now bolstered by new, young Maoists, they seized upon the Cultural Revolution in China to try to popularise Maoism. According to *Hsinhua*, published by the PRC's news agency, several hundred people attended a showing by the Friends of a film on the Cultural Revolution.[25] A resolution moved by the Friends at a public meeting claimed that 'the Thought of Mao Tse-tung…is illuminating the path of world revolution.'.[26]

In 1967 Red Guards sacked the British legation in Beijing, while Chinese diplomats fought with police outside the Chinese legation in Portland Place, London. Peter Worsley of Manchester SACU and Sam Mauger both claimed that diplomats from the Chinese legation in London were at that time involved with the Friends of China.[27] Their claim is lent some credence by the reaction of some Chinese diplomats to a public meeting and march held by the Friends in response to the fracas outside the legation. George Brown, the British Foreign Secretary, was denounced as a 'running dog of British imperialism' and the police as 'fascist thugs'. They then marched to the legation, where they were 'welcomed with handshakes and invited into the…legation' by diplomats who denounced 'British imperialism.'.[28] There is little further trace of the Friends after this burst of activity. It may well have continued to lead a shadowy existence as one of the front organisations of the Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist League (RMLL), discussed below. According to the CPGB, in 1971 the Friends 'operated from the address' of the RMLL.[29]

SACU had been launched in the Spring of 1965 at a London public meeting attended by several hundred people. The decision to found SACU had probably been taken in Beijing a few months earlier. The sinologist Joseph Needham and the economist Joan Robinson had been there to attend the 15th anniversary celebrations of the founding of the PRC. Needham and Robinson were both to play a prominent role in the organisation. The diplomat Derek Bryan became the Society's Secretary. An exodus from the BCFA to SACU led to the demise of the former. SACU attracted far more supporters than the BCFA had ever, presumably because the latter's stance and activities had made it quite clear that it was a CP front. Needham had hoped that SACU would be much more broadly-based, less politically pro-China than the BCFA had been. But this proved somewhat optimistic, at least in the short-

[23] CPA, CPGB/CENT/ORG/16/01.
[24] *Hammer or Anvil*, July-August 1967.
[25] *Hsinhua ,* 20 July 1967.
[26] *Hsinhua*, 27 August 1968.
[27] Information provided to this writer.
[28] *Times*, 4 September 1967.
[29] CPA, CPGB/CENT/ORG/13/03.

term. Disputes arose from tensions between those who simply wished to promote friendship and understanding and others, mainly Maoists, who argued that the Society should adopt an overtly pro-PRC, even Maoist, political stance.

A harbinger of trouble to come erupted in 1966. It was alleged in various newspapers that a PRC pamphlet denouncing US atrocities in Vietnam was being sold at SACU headquarters, causing outrage among moderate members of the management committee (that then included the Tory MP Joan Vickers and the Liberal MP Jeremy Thorpe). SACU claimed in a press statement that the offending pamphlet was not in fact on sale and that it had been obtained through deception by a *Sunday Telegraph* reporter. The statement affirmed that it was SACU's policy 'to distribute only such literature as is likely to create closer understanding between this country and China.'.[30]

Quite a few young Maoist zealots did not differentiate between revolutionary organisations and such bodies as SACU, nor appreciate that people like Needham could play a positive role in them. The Irish Communist Organisation (ICO)[31] attacked Needham prior to SACU's 1966 AGM. He was said to be carrying on 'activities aimed at disrupting the friendship of the Chinese and British people…under a thin camouflage of pseudo-friendship.' A friendship organisation should be based on the working-class, it could not come out of the 'bourgeois' SACU.[32]

Prior to SACU's 1966 AGM, the *Sunday Times* claimed that a 'coup' was being planned in order that SACU could be run 'wholly as a pro-Communist organisation.'[33] According to the CPGB, delegates arriving for the AGM were confronted by three different groups 'from the lunatic fringe'[34] giving out statements 'demanding that the AGM throw out the Committee of Management.'.[35] The coup, if indeed one had been planned, was not successful. An anodyne report in *SACU News* merely reported a majority resolution affirming that SACU was not 'a medium for party politics or ideological partisanship.'.[36] According to a CPGB observer present there had been a stormy discussion.[37]

Students influenced by the Cultural Revolution, some of whom would later found the Oxford branch of the CPB, gained control of the Oxford branch of SACU in 1967. This prompted the resignation from SACU of the city's Labour MP, Evan Luard. Others were 'shocked when they were asked to distribute a leaflet that condemned the British treatment of the Chinese

[30] *SACU News,* September 1966.

[31] The ICO, then an organisation of Irish émigrés, had a chequered history. Its leading light was Brendan Clifford. For a time, he had been involved with the CDRCU. Then in 1965, after a Trotskyist interlude, he founded the ICO. The ICO certainly took an anti-revisionist stance, publishing an anti-revisionist journal, *The Communist*, from 1967, but it is only with difficulty that it can be classified as Maoist. Though it was briefly a member group of the JCC, it was essentially a scholastic organisation that contented itself with theoretical pronouncements. It had little contact with the rest of the movement and took little part in party-building initiatives.

[32] 'Appeal to Friends of China', (presumably an appeal to friends in general, rather than to the organisation). CPA, CPGB/CENT/ORG/20.

[33] Cited in Buchanan (2012), p. 194.

[34] Certain named members of the 'lunatic fringe' – Ivor Kenna, Muriel Seltman, William Ash – were Maoists.

[35] Report on SACU AGM, undated, unattributed. CPA, CPGB/CENT/ORG/20/01.

[36] *SACU News*, June 1966.

[37] Report by 'BR' (presumably Betty Reid), 23 May 1966. CPA, CPGB/CENT/ORG/20 .

diplomats in London while refusing to criticise the more serious attack on the British legation in Beijing.'.[38]

In the early Summer of 1967 SACU reported that its AGM had decided on a 'more resolute' pro-China stance. According to a CPGB member present the 'entire meeting was composed of people anxious to push SACU to a more committed position.'.[39] In his address to the AGM Needham referred to factors which SACU had to take into account – such as the war in Vietnam and the Cultural Revolution – in determining its stance on China. While he affirmed that SACU did not take a stand on 'day to day' political matters, he added that 'it might be possible' for SACU 'to adopt a more resolute stance on these matters in future. It might be that members had grown more and more indignant about the treatment given to China in recent months and would welcome such action on the part of the society.'

The resolve of the AGM to adopt a 'more resolute' stance was probably stiffened by a resolution moved by William Ash, a member of SACU's Council of Management and soon to be a prominent member of the CPB, The resolution, 'enthusiastically endorsed' the protests of the PRC regarding the suppression of the 'legitimate demands' of workers in Hong Kong (where Labour disputes had escalated into pitched battles between police and workers') and also the PRC's 'condemnation' of the British government's collusion with the USA by allowing it to use facilities in Hong Kong in 'its war against the people of Vietnam.'.[40]

China's successful test of a hydrogen bomb in the Summer of 1967 accelerated SACU's increasingly pro-PRC stance. A SACU press release congratulated China on its 'brilliant technical achievement.'. Tom Buchanan suggests that Derek Bryan's resignation as Secretary during the row that followed the press release was because Bryan could not get the Council of Management to support him in his attempts to get SACU to 'champion China's cause more openly.'[41] This seems unlikely, given that Betty Paterson succeeded Bryan as Secretary.[42] Paterson, while not then a committed Maoist, had resigned from the CPGB and moved in Maoist circles, eventually joining the RCLB. SACU did begin to 'champion' During Paterson's secretaryship SACU offered firm support for China's nuclear policy, arguing that 'No one will dispute the right of China to do what has been done. If both the Soviet Union and the United States retain their nuclear strike capacity, or even increase it, then only a fool would dispute the right of China to take measures to defend itself.'.[43]

In a stance that must have shocked even some of the most pro-PRC elements of SACU, a defence of Stalin appeared in *SACU News* in the Spring of 1968. A member had written to query the CPC's stance on Stalin, which was 'past [her] comprehension.'. Colin Penn was tasked to reply. Penn commenced by arguing that it was not the case, as was sometimes suggested, that the CPC was now taking up the policies espoused by Trotsky in his controversies with Stalin. The crucial issue then had been 'socialism in one country' (discussed later in this chapter), and on that Stalin and the CPC were as one. Other than that,

[38] Buchanan (2012), p. 198.
[39] Anonymous, undated report, CPA, CPGB/CENT/ORG/20.
[40] *SACU News*, June 1967.
[41] Buchanan (2012), p. 196.
[42] *SACU News*, September-October 1967.
[43] *SACU News*, September-October 1967

yes, Stalin had sometimes given bad advice to the CPC, but the CPC first blamed themselves for accepting it. In general, 'Stalin always kept his eye on the correct socialist objective: in his efforts to attain it he sometimes departed from socialist methods. Today, when in the Soviet Union his achievements are denigrated and his memory scorned, it is important to defend him and to point out that his qualities were greater than his failings.'.[44]

Despite SACU's more pro-PRC stance, in 1968 student members of the Internationalists at Sussex University wrote to denounce it for various sins. They claimed that SACU was sponsored by 'reactionary bourgeois professors, doctors of philosophy, Fellows of the Royal Society' and suchlike people. This could 'do nothing but harm to China and the British people.'. Instead of tackling the task of how to bring the 'shining example' of People's China to the working-class in Britain, SACU was running after the imperialists, trying to persuade them to adopt a 'less hostile attitude.' Explicit attacks were made on Needham and Robinson ('a hireling of the capitalist class…an enemy of Marxism, of Mao Tsetung, and of working peoples the world over.') As for SACU itself, it was 'the duty of every Marxist-Leninist who wishes to promote real understanding between the peoples of Britain and China to ceaselessly attack and expose it.'.

SACU published the students' letter and replies by Needham and Robinson. Needham's reply was full of haughty disdain ('anyone with the slightest historical knowledge would…know that Chinese history did not begin with the Communist revolution'), but Joan Robinson struck the right Maoist note by arguing that SACU sought to:

> follow the injunction to unite with all who can be united with. Let us look for the major contradiction, which is certainly not between me and the students, but between both of us and the apathy which [causes] decent British people to be unwitting supporters of aggression and imperialism.[45]

By 1968 attempts to turn SACU into a Maoist organisation had ceased. Moreover, Anglo-Chinese relations became much friendlier from the early 1970s as China sought friends in the West as a counter-weight to its increasingly antagonistic relations with the Soviet Union. Defending the PRC came to be seen as a much less pressing matter, especially after the establishment of full diplomatic relations between the UK and the PRC in 1972. Few Maoists now worked in (or attacked) SACU, but moderate Maoists, such as Patterson and Mauger, by then the Secretary of the CFB, had ensured that SACU would continue to support socialist China, as opposed to being a mere friendship society, while maintaining a broadly-based membership. Continuing links between SACU and Maoists, especially the CFB, were demonstrated by the fact that the CFB's national leadership continued for years to meet at the Warren St. London headquarters of SACU.

Maoists and the 'Student Revolt'.

A disproportionate number of the new revolutionaries were or had been students. Student unrest in Britain was not to be compared with that in Germany and France (In May 1968 in Berlin 50,000 students marched with Red Flags while in Paris students fought pitched battles

[44] *SACU News*, May 1968.
[45] *SACU News*, June 1968.

with riot police) but they did reflect a great deal of discontent and greatly troubled the university authorities.[46] By May 1968 trouble had been brewing for some time. There had been disturbances in 1967 at London's Regent Street Polytechnic and at Leicester, Liverpool, Sussex, and Essex universities. Though, according to Neil Ascherson, revolutionary sentiments had been 'confined to small groups.'. [47]

In the Summer of 1968, the revolutionary elements among the students formed the Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation (RSSF). At a conference at the London School of Economics (LSE) the RSSF committed itself to opposing 'control of education by the ruling class', to opposing imperialism and supporting 'national liberation movements', to opposing 'racism and immigration controls' and to supporting 'workers' power as the only alternative to capitalism.'.[48] Later that year they committed themselves to the 'revolutionary overthrow of capitalism' but recognised that 'only the working-class' was 'capable of making…revolution.' On education, they demanded, *inter alia*, 'all power to the general assembly of students, staff and workers – one man one vote (the students, or at least the male students who dominated the RSSF, were then little concerned with gender issues) on the campus' and 'abolition of all exams and grading'.[49] This general revolutionary prospectus could not contain the ideological diversity of the student movement, which soon split into Trotskyist, Maoist and anarchist schools.

In the Autumn of 1968 students at the LSE attacked with sledgehammers iron gates recently installed to protect the main administrative building. The police were called; arrests were made. Two lecturers, Nicholas Bateson (soon to be a prominent member of the CPB) and Robin Blackburn were subsequently dismissed for involvement with the attack on the gates. Bateson had argued that tearing down the gates would be an act of practical solidarity with national liberation movements. He waved a 'Little Red Book' during his disciplinary hearing.[50] Interviewed a year or so later, he insisted that Mao's ideas applied 'just as much to Britain as to oriental or developing countries'.[51]

The events at the LSE spurred student activism at various universities, including Manchester,[52] Salford, Keele, and Liverpool in the Spring of 1970. At Liverpool University, students began an occupation of the Senate building in March.[53] Liverpool trades council, in an exception to the indifference of most of the labour movement to student activism, supported the occupation. One issue that had stimulated student anger was the money made by the university as landlords of many of the slum properties in and around its campus.

But the two principal issues were the reactionary, racist views of Lord Salisbury, the university's Chancellor, and the university's investments in 'Rhodesia' (now Zimbabwe) and

[46] For overviews of student politics in the 1960s and 1970s see Crouch (1970), Fraser (1988) & Thomas (2002). For a discussion of student far-left politics see Burkett (2017).
[47] N. Ascherson, 'Soviets on the Campus', *The Guardian*, 19May 1968.
[48] *The Guardian*, 13June 1968.
[49] 'Revolutionary Socialist Students Federation Manifesto', *New Left Review*, January-February 1969, pp. 21-22.
[50] Crouch (1970), p. 85.
[51] R. Bourne, 'Revolutionaries behind the Donnish Exteriors', *The Guardian*, April 22 1969.
[52] Several of these students later became active in a Manchester Maoist group which had informal ties with the CFB.
[53] This account of the occupation is based on information provided by a participant who was later prominent in the CFB/ RCLB. References are given for material based on this writer's own research.

South Africa, where the settler regimes were violently suppressing black nationalists. In 1965, rather than accept black majority rule, the ruling white settler regime in 'Rhodesia' had made a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI, as it came to be known), Many student radicals had cut their revolutionary teeth in the AAM and were increasingly aware that the settlers were backed by British imperialism, the principal imperialist power in southern Africa. The failure of the Labour Government, in power since 1964, to quell the settler rebellion in 'Rhodesia' was just one factor fuelling student radicalism.

Liverpool students, including Maoists and others on the revolutionary left, demanded that the university authorities should 'proclaim their opposition to all forms of discrimination on racial grounds and consequently disassociate themselves from the views of Lord Salisbury and call for his immediate resignation' and for 'a detailed schedule of all university investments to be published in the staff newsletter and students' union paper.'. Demands were also raised regarding files maintained on students' political views and the university's involvement into research on chemical and biological warfare.[54]

But, as at the LSE, the militants were in a minority. The three hundred or so who occupied the senate were alleged to be a mere 5% of the student body.[55] No doubt others sympathised, but the ease with which the militants were subsequently disciplined strongly suggests that a majority of students were either hostile or indifferent. Among those disciplined were a former Secretary of the university's Socialist Society, who was expelled (probably because he brandished a toy gun during his hearing, causing several members of the court to dive beneath the table at which they were presiding). 9 students were suspended for various periods.[56] As at the LSE, several of those disciplined (and other occupiers) became involved with either the CFB or the CPB.

School pupils too were influenced by the radical tide of the 1960s. The short-lived Schools Action Union (SAU) was founded in January 1969.[57] The SAU campaigned against the poor quality of school meals, detention and corporal punishment.[58] Several issues of a paper, *Vanguard*, were produced. One contained the memorable slogan 'smash the dictatorship of the head.'. In March 250 'schoolchildren' marched through London to the Department of Education, where they handed in a list of demands including 'control of schools by a council of children and teachers and the abolition of school uniform.'.[59] In July, members of the SAU demonstrated outside Harrow public school, handing out a leaflet that accused the school of moulding pupils into 'supporters of a sick society.'. It was claimed that 40 Harrow boys had joined the SAU. That same month it was reported that pupils at Eton public school[60] had formed a branch of the SAU, denouncing the school's 'dictatorial system.'.[61]

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[54] *The Guardian*, 10 March 1970.
[55] *The Guardian*, 10 March 1970.
[56] *The Guardian*, 13 April 1970.
[57] This account of the SAU is mostly based on Richards, *The English Experience,* pp. 35-37. References are given for material based on this writer's own research.
[58] Corporal punishment in British state schools was not abolished until 1986 and in private schools not until 1998.
[59] *Times*, 3 March 1969.
[60] In Britain, 'public schools' are private fee-paying schools. Many prime ministers had attended Eton or Harrow.
[61] *Times*, 4 July 1969; 12 July 1969.

By 1970 there were branches of the SAU in several cities, including Birmingham, Glasgow, London, Manchester, and Swansea. Perhaps it was this rapid growth that prompted the Union's national secretary, fired with adolescent zeal, to claim that the 'radicalisation of the schools' was but the first 'of several processes for the overthrow of the bourgeois state.'.[62] But the SAU collapsed nearly as quickly as it had grown. No doubt expulsions, parental control and police surveillance (during the SAU-called London school strike of 1972 police asked several headmasters for lists of strikers[63]) played a part. The organisation failed to flourish and soon after the 1972 strike membership had fallen to a mere thirty or so. Several of those who had been members of the SAU became active in Maoist organisations. By the early 1980s some were prominent in the RCLB.

Solidarity with Vietnam and Ireland.

In the late sixties and early seventies, the *cause celebre* for most Maoists, particularly those with a student background, was solidarity with the national liberation war in Vietnam against US imperialism. It was for them what the Spanish Civil War of the 1930s had been for an earlier generation of communists. There were three strands in the solidarity movement: the pacifist, CPGB-backed British Council for Peace in Vietnam (BCPV); the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC); and the Maoist Britain-Vietnam Solidarity Front (BVSF).[64]

The VSC was by far the largest of these organisations. From 1967 it mobilised tens of thousands in demonstrations against US imperialism. Maoists working in the organisation attempted to promote a line of unconditional solidarity with the communist-led National Liberation Front (NLF), but were opposed by Trotskyists, the dominant tendency in the VSC. The Trotskyists, while prepared to support the NLF in the war against US imperialism, regarded the Vietnamese communists as 'Stalinists'. They were therefore deemed not to be thoroughgoing revolutionaries. They would certainly betray the revolution once victory was won. The Trotskyists' preferred slogan was the ambiguous *Victory to the Vietnamese Revolution* or, in some cases, the unambiguous *Solidarity 'till Final Victory*.

We have seen that some YCL members were expelled for opposing the CPGB's pacifist stance. One of the expellees, Geoff Lee and other members of the JCC distributed a handbill outside a YCL congress, probably the Skegness Congress of 1967. They were insistent, in contrast with the YCL's pacifist stance, that 'the only principled position on Vietnam is one of complete solidarity with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the National Liberation Front'.[65] In 1968, several London branches of the YCL denounced the national leadership of the League for pandering to an influx of 'middle-class' people with 'outworn pacifist slogans' who favoured negotiations rather than solidarity.[66]

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[62] *The Guardian*, 26 February 1970.
[63] *The Guardian*, 26 May 1972. Presumably recognising Maoist influence, the generally sympathetic article was titled 'Little Red Schoolkids'.
[64] See https://woodsmokeblog.wordpress.com/tag/british-vietnam-solidarity-front/ for a fuller discussion of the solidarity movement, based on documentary sources and the recollections of participants.
[65] Undated handbill in this writer's possession.
[66] *Red Front*, vol. 2, no. 1, March/April 1968

In London, the charismatic but incorrigibly splittist Abhimanyu Manchanda[67] – in the Maoist movement he acquired a reputation for individualism and petty intrigues - had split the VSC in 1966 on the issue of whether or not the movement should support the political programme of the NLF.[68] There was surely no need to split the movement on this matter The issue was the justness of the national liberation war led by the NLF. In Manchester, the LCCL was able to unite with Trotskyists from the International Marxist Group (IMG) to oppose the pacifist BCPV[69] and promote basic solidarity with the NLF, setting aside the matter of what might or might not happen after 'final victory'.

In 1968, the 'Tet Offensive', in which the NLF inflicted a severe beating on the US imperialists and their South Vietnamese puppets, prompted the VSC to intensify its solidarity campaign. The BVSF disrupted two VSC-called demonstrations. In March, it was mainly responsible for the 'battle of Grosvenor Square', in which hundreds were arrested during an assault on the US embassy. Afterwards, the BVSF attracted considerable press attention. Just before an October demonstration, Manchanda was identified as a 'full-time agitator' and leader of the BVSF.[70] The VSC had decided that the demonstration would not go to Grosvenor Square. But the BVSF led a breakaway march to the square, where there were again clashes with the police, though not on the same scale as in March. Further publicity for the BVSF before and after the march no doubt helped to attract people to the Front.[71]

The core of the BVSF was the RMLL, founded in 1968 by Manchanda and a few associates who had briefly been members of the newly-founded CPB. As in the case of the Friends of China, attempts were made by the RMLL to turn the BVSF into a Maoist organisation. But the people attracted to the BVSF were mostly not Maoists and soon left when unrealistic demands were made on them. The RMLL was briefly represented on the JCC. But quickly left, due, according to the JCC, to Manchanda's impossible behaviour.[72] Riven with disputes, the RMLL fragmented in 1969. But Manchanda continued to intrigue and manoeuvre. In 1977, shortly after the founding of the RCLB, he renamed the RMLL the Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Communist League of Britain, undoubtedly, to cause confusion with the RCLB.

Some of those who survived the RMLL founded the Association of Communist Workers (ACW). This was a highly dogmatic organisation which specialised in sectarian abuse of

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[67] Manchanda, a member of a family with a long history of revolutionary activism, had been a member of the Communist Party of India. On moving to Britain, he joined the CPGB. It is not clear when he left the latter party. Until 1968 he mainly worked in the Indian Workers' Association.

[68] There must be doubt regarding Manchanda's motives for splitting the VSC. The BVSF was launched immediately after the split in a room he had previously booked. Richards, *English Experience*, p.41.

[69] In 1972, during a critical period in the Paris Peace Talks between the NLF and the US imperialists, the BCPV organised a demonstration in Manchester. Nguyen Thi Binh ('Madame Binh'), the chief negotiator for the NLF at the talks, spoke at the demonstration. Members of the IMG and the LCCL attended, carrying NLF banners. The BCPV objected to the banners; but much to its chagrin, Nguyen Thi Binh insisted that the banners should go to the front of the march.

[70] 'The who and how of protest', *The Guardian*, 25 October 1968.

[71] 'Breakaways defy march organisers', *The Guardian*, 10 October 1968. 'Why revolutionary firebrands failed to spark the workers', *Times*, 28 October 1968; 'Maoists' now on the political map'', *The Guardian*, 29 October 1968. There was also extensive coverage on national television news programmes.

[72] CFB, 'The Marxist-Leninist Movement in Britain, Origins and Perspectives', *Documents of the Communist Federation of Britain* (1972), p. 8.

other Maoists (see, for instance, Chapter Four). Others founded the initially semi-covert Communist Workers' League of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) (CWLB).[73] This organisation was led by Edward ('Ed') Davoren, another charismatic individual with a revolutionary history (he had been deported from South Africa for trade union activities). The CWLB founded the Irish National Liberation Solidarity Front (INLSF) but concealed its own existence from those who worked in the Front. But the Maoist orientation of that organisation was not concealed: the first edition of its paper carried an advertisement for 'revolutionary literature' from James Connolly, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao.[74] At a time of mass nationalist and Republican unrest in Northern Ireland (see the case study on Ireland), the INLSF soon attracted supporters. An image of an AK47 (a semi-automatic assault rifle, much favoured by national liberation movements) on the masthead of the organisation's *Irish Liberation Press* was doubtless helpful in this respect.

In 1970 the INLSF insisted that it 'is not and never can be a Marxist-Leninist party.'[75] But, as in the Friends of China and the BVSF, and with the same consequences, unrealistic demands were made of those attracted to the organisation. Dissent within the CWLB on this and other matters led to a series of expulsions. In response to internal and external criticism, the CWLB in 1972 started to work under its own name, probably because it had been decided that party-building must be the principal task of Maoists. The CWLB's stance on this matter is discussed more fully in Chapter Four.

The CWLB now began publication of the *Voice of the People*, which, the CWLB was soon to boast, sold more copies than 'any other revolutionary publication' in Britain.[76] (The CWLB had, of course, no means of knowing what the sales of other revolutionary papers were). Like the *Irish Liberation Press*, the masthead of the *Voice of the People* contained for a while an image of an AK47. It was dropped in 1977. According to the CWLB this was to remove anything from the paper 'which might prevent as many workers as possible' from buying the paper. In another typical boast, it was claimed that the paper had fought for working-class principles for eight years, a record unmatched by any [other] publication claiming to hold the same political views.'[77]

The Marxist: a British *Iskra*?

All Maoists insisted, with varying degrees of conviction, that it was essential to build a united organisation. The journal *The Marxist* was established in 1966 for that purpose.[78] Initially, there were close connections between the editorial board of *The Marxist* and people soon to be involved with the CFB. Mike Faulkner became a full-time worker for the journal. Issue number two contained a welcome for the journal from the Camden Communist Movement,[79] (then called the Camden Communist Youth Movement).

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[73] This account of the early days of the CWLB is mainly based on information provided to the author in 1974 by ex-members of the organisation. It is consistent with that in Richards, *Rise and Fall,* pp. 58-61. References are given for material based on this writer's own research.
[74] INLSF, *Irish Liberation Press*, vol. 1, no 1.
[75] INLSF, *Irish Liberation Press*, vol. 1, no 5.
[76] *Voice of the People*, vol. 3, no. 7
[77] *Voice of the People*, May 1977.
[78] It was widely believed in the Maoist movement that *The Marxist* had been funded by two businessmen, Jack Perry and Roland Berger. Both had been active in promoting East-West trade since the early 1950s.
[79] *The Marxist*, no. 2 (January-February 1967).

McConville later claimed that founding *The Marxist* had been another instance of putting organisation before politics, because like the CDRCU', the project 'was in no way the outcome of political activity by the Marxist-Leninist groups up and down the country.'. Much the same could have been said regarding Lenin's attempt to use the journal *Iskra* to unite the Marxist circles in Russia. But it is true, as McConville argued, that 'the problems of the Russian revolutionary movement in 1902 and the problems of the anti-revisionist movement in Britain over sixty years later could, at the very least, well be different.'.[80]

But while there was no reason in principle why a journal could not function as a collective organiser, those responsible for the journal seem to have gone about their project in a devious manner. Rather than attempt to unite the existing groups they tried to circumvent them by establishing new groups. The first issue called for the formation of 'discussion groups, using the articles in a planned way and letting us know your reactions and conclusions. Doing this will help to gather together the forces for advancing Marxist understanding in Britain.'[81] This ambition was not realised. In some instances, McConville claimed, *The Marxist* organisation 'succeeded [only] in splitting and destroying groups.'[82] This may well be true: in Manchester, according to Joe Dix, some members of the ACMLU split away to form a discussion group.

The Marxist's unification project failed. In 1968 the editorial board of the journal endorsed the federalist party-building strategy which the JCC was then formulating: the board insisted that a new Marxist-Leninist party 'cannot be built overnight.'. Rather 'it may well be that a unified movement will begin as a loose federation…of groups. The first steps in this direction are now taking place.'[83] A 1970 issue carried an article by McConville and an advertisement for the CFB's paper, *Struggle*.[84]

Eventually, *The Marxist* became the journal of the Brent Marxist Industrial Group. As its name suggests, this was a group based on industrial workers, mainly in the AEU. The group had worked on the JCC but, according to McConville, left after only six months, 'because, they said, the JCC was 'irrelevant' to the British class struggle. Time has clearly proved who was irrelevant and who was not.'.[85] By 1972, the Brent group was not playing a significant part in the movement.

A Revolutionary Communist Party in Imperialist Britain?

Lenin considered that a crucial initial task of party-building was to unite the working-class movement with Marxism (he used the term 'scientific socialism'[86]). But the working-class in pre-revolutionary Russia was a very different working-class from that in late twentieth century Britain. The movement in Britain was the organised working-class in the trade unions, the Labour Party and the Communist Party. This was a deeply reformist and social-chauvinist movement. Some Maoists thought that it was mainly labour movement people that

[80] 'T.M, 'Revisionism and the British Marxist-Leninist Movement', p. 13. p. 12.
[81] 'Our Purpose', *The Marxist*, no. 1 (November-December 1966).
[82] 'T.M, 'Revisionism and the British Marxist-Leninist Movement', p.14.
[83] *The Marxist*, vol. 1, no. 6 (Spring 1968)
[84] Sean McConville, 'Marxism-Leninism and Parliamentarianism', *The Marxist*, no. 15 (Autumn 1970).
[85] 'T.M, 'Revisionism and the British Marxist-Leninist Movement', p. 29
[86] V. I. Lenin, 'Our Immediate Tasks', *Collected Works, vol. 4* (Moscow, 1982), p. 217.

they should aim to win to their side. Others believed that Maoists should base themselves on the lowest strata of the working-class. Some gave the matter little consideration. All were missing the essential point: while there were many class-conscious workers, some of them Maoists and many more potentially Maoists, the great majority of working-class people in Britain had no inclination to be united with Marxism. Nor would they unless the material conditions of British society changed considerably. Before then, it was inevitable that only a relatively small number of working-class people would rally to the revolutionary cause.

It was generally assumed by Maoists in Britain that working-class reformism was due only to the influence of a 'labour aristocracy' corrupted by imperialism. Lenin had been a pioneer of this tendency. During the First World War, desperately seeking an explanation for mass working-class support for war, he blamed the 'treachery' of labour leaders, the 'influence' of a 'privileged stratum', the 'craft mentality' of skilled workers and so on.[87] But at the Comintern's Second Congress the Indian communist M.N. Roy argued that far more than a 'labour aristocracy' benefited from imperialism. According to him:

> at the same time that British imperialism makes hundreds of millions of the inhabitants of Asia and Africa into slaves, it also keeps the British proletariat under the domination of the bourgeoisie…superprofits made in the colonies form one of the main sources of the resources of contemporary capitalism. The European working-class will only succeed in overthrowing the capitalist order once this source has finally been stopped up.[88]

This was too strong for Lenin. A compromise formulation was adopted, according to which "Extra profit gained in the colonies is the mainstay of modern capitalism, and so long as the latter is not deprived of this source of extra profit it will not be easy for the European working-class to overthrow the capitalist order.". [89]

The 'labour aristocracy' and related hypotheses cannot account for the persistent reformism and patriotism of the working-class of the imperialist countries. But this was the model generally applied by Maoists in Britain. The CUA was a keen advocate.[90] A glaring exception was the CPB, which, as we shall see in the next chapter, denied that working-class people benefited from imperialist exploitation of the 'Third World'. Another explanation was suggested in *Forum,* where it was argued that the source of opportunism in the working-class movement was alien middle-class elements.[91] A minority of Maoists, such as the members of the CDRCU, [92] argued that all working-class people benefitted from imperialism.

Very little empirical research on the matter of the connection between imperialism and reformism and patriotism was embarked upon by Maoists in Britain (though see Chapter Three for work by Mauger). But Marxist scholars such as Raymond Lotta and Dan Nabudere argue that the problem is not the influence of working-class movement leaders but that in the

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[87] See, for instance, V. I. Lenin, *The Collapse of the Second International* (Moscow, 1976) & V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism* (Moscow, 1972).
[88] Editor Uncited (1977), p. 117.
[89] Claudin (1975) p. 248. For a later discussion see Gupta (2006).
[90] CUA, *Imperialism and the Struggle for a Revolutionary Party* (London, 1974).
[91] 'The Source of Opportunism in the Working-class Movement', *Forum*, no. 2 (1964).
[92] *Vanguard*, September 1964.

imperialist countries all working-class people - even the poorest - benefit to some degree from imperialism (using this term in the Leninist sense of monopoly capitalism, rather than as a synonym for colonialism). Their argument, their convincing argument, is that superprofits from what came to be called the Third World have not only financed social reform but also contributed significantly to the development of the means of production in the advanced capitalist countries and thus rising living standards.[93]

But when the delegates to 1919's first Congress of the Comintern assembled in Moscow, the consequent deep penetration of reformist and patriotic sentiments into the working-class and people of the imperialist countries was, despite the experience of 1914-18, not fully appreciated. The October revolution in Russia seemed about to be emulated in Germany. Predictions of imminent general proletarian revolution (Lenin proclaimed that the delegates would 'all see the founding of the World Federative Republic of Soviets.' while Gregorii Zinoviev assured the delegates that 'Europe is hurrying toward the proletarian revolution at breakneck speed.'[94]) were soon to prove wildly optimistic. The centre of revolution was shifting to the East, while the revolutionary wave in Europe was at its zenith and would shortly and swiftly retreat. Since then, as we saw in our Introduction, the living standards of the working-class, even the poorest, of the imperialist countries have risen enormously.

The members of the Maoist movement which emerged in the 1960s were of course not immune to the effects of living in an affluent imperialist society. They were mostly born and grew to adulthood in the 'golden age' (c. 1945-1973) of post-war reformed capitalism in the imperialist countries, the age of full employment, welfarism and unprecedented prosperity for most. The radicalism of the 'Sixties' concealed a stable, if decaying, rich imperialist society. Underlying relationships of political economy were fundamentally unchanged. This was a society which profoundly and adversely affected all those who lived in it, including those who sought to overthrow it.

Mao's injunction to 'fear neither hardship nor death' in the revolutionary struggle had little resonance in post-war Britain. Maoists might and indeed did suffer arrest, dismissal from work, a stymied career, attacks by fascists, social ostracism and so on. Some were deterred by such hazards and left or never joined the movement. But a softer hazard (such phenomena as those which Mao called 'sugar-coated bullets') was that the material conditions of life in Britain were such as to foster right opportunism, a tendency to caution, conservatism and susceptibility to reformism and social-chauvinism. Ultra-leftism certainly existed in the movement. We have considered some. But right opportunism, especially on the question of imperialism, was a far greater problem.

If we can now see that the prospects for building a revolutionary communist party with mass working-class support were not great in the sixties and seventies, those times were not times for pessimism or even realism. Those who did try to build such a party should not be condescended to. But on what foundation did the Maoists of that time attempt to build a party? Their ideological and political inheritance from the old communist movement was by no means free of opportunism and revisionism. In particular, social-chauvinism, especially in the form of Euro-centrism, persisted in the Maoist movement and eventually flourished.

[93] Lotta (1984), Nabudere (1977).
[94] Cited in Drachkovitch & Lazitch (1966), p. 165.

Eurocentrism or Internationalism?

Marxism originated in Europe. The first Marxist parties emerged in Europe. It was assumed that it was in Europe, or possibly its outposts in such places as Australia, that the socialist revolution would begin. Most European Marxists shared the paternalistic attitudes of the European bourgeoisie towards the colonial peoples (Africans were 'the children of the planet.' according to the British Socialist Party (BSP[95]).) It was assumed that the colonial peoples were then not ready for self-government. Engels, for instance, argued that under socialism, 'the countries inhabited by a native population…must be taken over for the time being and led as rapidly as possible towards independence.'.[96] If they were not ready for self-government, they were certainly not ready to participate in the overthrow of capitalism.

Like Engels, it was mostly assumed by those present at the Comintern's first congress that socialist revolution in Europe was a necessary precondition for colonial freedom. Its Manifesto declared: 'Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia: the hour of proletarian dictatorship in Europe will also be the hour of your liberation!'[97] But some Marxists had begun to break with Eurocentrism. In 1913, Lenin had responded to such movements in the East as the boycott of British goods by the people of India, with joy: "What delight", he declared, "this world movement is arousing in the hearts of all class-conscious workers".[98] Later, shortly before the first congress, he had argued that:

> socialist revolution will not be solely, or chiefly, a struggle of the revolutionary proletarians in each country…the civil war of the working people against the imperialists and exploiters in all the advanced countries is beginning to be combined with national wars against international imperialism.[99]

At the congress, Bukharin insisted that the 'movement in the colonies…has joined the broad stream of the great liberation struggle that is shaking up the entire immense structure of world capitalism.'.[100] The debates at the Second Congress we considered earlier deepened this understanding. Yet Fernando Claudin overstated his case only a little when he argued that it was not to be 'reflected in any sustained effort by the Comintern either on the plane of theoretical and political thinking or that of practical activity.'.[101]

Consider the case of the CPGB. The party's official historian, James Klugman, was correct to claim that the CPGB was the 'first political party in Britain to recognise that the alliance of the British working-class with the colonial peoples was the key to the victory of socialism in Britain.'.[102] But little was done by the CPGB to turn this theoretical recognition into practice.

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[95] *The Call*, 10 August 1916.
[96] Engels to Kautsky 12 September 1882, cited in Boernser (1957), pp. 24-5.
[97] Riddell (1987), pp. 227-228.
[98] V.I. Lenin, 'Backward Europe and Advanced Asia', *Collected Works*, (Moscow, 1974), vol. 19, p. 100.
[99] V.I. Lenin, 'Speech at the Congress of the Communist Organisations of the Peoples of the East', *Collected Works*, vol. 30, p. 159.
[100] Riddell (1986), p. 308.
[101] Claudin (1975), pp. 248-249.
[102] Klugman, (1969a), p. 159.

The three volumes of the official history of the CPGB covering the period 1919-1941 provide little reason to question this verdict.[103]

The CPGB was effectively founded at a Unity Convention in the summer of 1920.[104] The Convention was held during the Anglo-Irish War of 1919-1921, a war which followed the Easter Rising of 1916 and the subsequent Irish unilateral declaration of independence of 1919 (see Chapter Six), and only a year or so after the 'Amritsar Massacre' in India, in which 379 people had been killed and around 1,200 wounded by British troops at a peaceful pro-independence gathering. Yet there was no discussion of the colonial question at the Convention. It was though deemed important to discuss the matter of the prohibition of alcoholic drinks (reflecting, no doubt, the considerable influence of non-conformism on the British labour movement). A resolution calling for prohibition was referred to the provisional leadership elected at the Convention.[105]

At the Comintern's Second Congress, held during the Unity Convention, a British delegate, Tom Quelch, notoriously claimed, without doubt correctly, that the mass of British workers would regard as treasonable support for struggles such as that in Ireland. The Bolshevik Karl Radek retorted that British communists had the duty 'to agitate among the British troops…to block the policy that the British transport and railway unions are at present pursuing of permitting troop transports to Ireland.'.[106]

Most British revolutionaries had failed to support the Easter Rising, many on the grounds that it was a manifestation of nationalism. But the Second Congress had begun to affect the outlook of at least some British communists. A long article in *The Communist* criticised indiscriminate anti-nationalism by insisting that there was 'a vast difference between the nationalism of a dominant nation and that of an oppressed nation.'.[107] In 1921, an article on the Empire was unequivocal on the importance of the anti-colonial struggle:

> Unless we grasp the imperial character of our struggle, as something more than a subject for perorations, we shall meet with unexpected difficulties, both at present and in the future, and we shall run the risk of tripping over the same obstacle that has stood in the way of socialist development in this country from the beginning. That obstacle is the British Empire. The British Empire is the knot which socialism in this country will have to unravel if it is to succeed.[108]

Evidently, few communists were convinced: the present writer found little trace in the CPGB's archives of practical solidarity with the national struggle in, for instance, Ireland. It seems clear that little practical importance was attached by most to anti-colonial work.[109]

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[103] Klugman, (1969a); Klugman (1969b); Branson, (1985).
[104] See Thorpe (2003), Ch. 2 for a full account.
[105] *Communist Unity Convention Official Report*, p. 60.
[106] Editor Uncited (1977), pp 113 & 127-128.
[107] "Communism and Sinn Fein", *The Communist*, October 7 1920.
[108] "Our Imperial Responsibilities", *The Communist Review*, June 1921.
[109] On occasion party members acted in the spirit demanded by Radek. In 1930 two members were charged with 'maliciously endeavouring to seduce soldiers from their duty' after distributing outside a barracks leaflets urging soldiers to shoot not Indian nationalists but their own ruling class. Branson (1985), pp. 62-5. But such initiatives seem to have been the result of individual initiative rather than a campaign by the CPGB.

According to Charlie McGuire, a year or so after the Unity Convention the CPGB promised a representative of the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) that it would organise 'Hands off Ireland Committees', but did not.[110] The party's publications did begin to support national struggles against British imperialism, But though various committees were set up in 1921 to direct the Party's practical activities, a colonial committee was not established until 1924. Reports to the party centre from lower levels rarely mentioned anti-colonial work.

One probable reason for this apparent indifference is that the CPGB, based on the Comintern's belief that proletarian revolution was imminent in Europe, was attempting to build a mass party with a political practice based on the concerns of the mass of workers. But the great majority of workers were indifferent, perhaps hostile, as Quelch had suggested, to anti-colonial struggles. A few months after the Second Congress, Lenin reported that he had instructed a delegation of English workers on their obligation to support anti-colonial struggles, but "they made faces…They simply could get not into their heads the truth that in the interests of the world revolution, workers must wish the defeat of their government.".[111] James Hinton and Richard Hyman have argued, and this writer agrees, that the early CP would have been well advised not to have attempted to build a mass communist party and to lead mass struggles, but to attempt to build a cadre party and to build influence and credibility among the most class conscious workers.[112] Some, at least, of such workers would have been supportive of revolutionary movements in the Empire.

The British party was by no means exceptional in failing to break with Euro-centrism. At the Comintern's Fifth Congress of 1924, Ho Ch Minh, representing French Indo-China, asked:

> Since their acceptance of Lenin's Colonial Theses, what have [the communists of the imperialist countries] done to educate the working class of their countries in the true spirit of real internationalism…All that our parties have done…is more or less zero. I as one who is a native of a French colony…find it very much regrettable to tell you that the Party in France has done very little.[113]

By 1924 it was clear that the revolutionary wave in Europe had ebbed, leaving Russia as an outpost of working class power in a hostile capitalist world. It had been assumed by the Second International, from which Bolshevism had emerged, that socialism could be built only in such advanced capitalist countries as those of western Europe. The matter of whether socialism could be built in backward Russia had been debated by the Bolsheviks since 1917. Contrary to the claims of Trotsky and his followers, the assertion that socialism could be built in Russia, was not a 'Stalinist' perversion of Marxism. (For an interesting and thought-provoking discussion of the debates among the Bolsheviks on this matter from a Trotskyist perspective see Isaac Deutscher's biography of Stalin.[114])

The main resolution submitted to a conference of Bolsheviks held in the summer of 1917 stated that the 'task of [the] revolutionary classes' was 'to take the state power into their hands' and 'in alliance with the revolutionary proletariat of the advanced countries, direct it

[110] McGuire (2018), p. 16.
[111] Pipes (1996), p. 99.
[112] Hinton & Hyman (1975), p. 9 & p. 52.
[113] Gupta (2006), pp. 107-108.
[114] Deutscher (1968), pp. 283-95.

towards peace and towards the socialist reconstruction of society.'. In opposition to this formulation, Preobrazhensky, a close ally of Trotsky, who was then under arrest, moved that the end of the last clause should be amended to 'direct it towards peace and, in the event of a proletarian revolution in the West, towards socialism.'. Preobrazhensky's amendment was rejected. The resolution was approved.[115] The conference was referred to by Deutscher, but he neglected to point out that Preobrazhensky's amendment was defeated.[116]

Preobrazhensky's amendment manifested the lingering influence of Second International Marxism on Bolshevism (as did the resolution, which, passed prior to the Comintern's Second Congress, referred to an alliance only with the 'revolutionary proletariat of the advanced countries' rather than with revolutionary national movements too). Many Bolsheviks, notably Trotsky and his circle, recent converts to Bolshevism, believed that if the working class seized power, it would be extremely difficult for it to hold onto that power in the absence of socialist revolution in the west. If they did hold onto power, building socialism in backward Russia would be impossible.

In Trotsky's words:

> Without direct support from the European proletariat, the working class of Russia will not be able to maintain itself in power and to transform its temporary rule into a lasting socialist dictatorship. This we cannot doubt for an instant.[117]

But by the early 1920 a majority of Bolsheviks had concluded that socialism could be built in Russia. In 1923, Lenin criticised the Second International perspectives of the Menshevik Sukhanov (and, implicitly, those of Trotsky):

> You say that civilisation is necessary for the building of socialism. Very good. But why could we not first create such prerequisites of civilisation in our country as the expulsion of the landlords and the Russian capitalists, and then start moving towards socialism? Where, in what books, have you read that such variations of the customary historical order of events are impermissible or impossible?[118]

In 1924-1927, following the death of Lenin, Stalin led the majority of Bolsheviks to defeat Trotsky and his followers and allies on the matter of what came to be known as 'socialism in one country'. Trotsky had had no convincing answer to the question posed by Stalin: 'what if the world revolution is fated to arrive with some delay?'.[119]

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[115] 'Minutes of the Sixth Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party', in J.V. Stalin, *Collected Works, vol. 3* (Moscow, 1954), p. 254. The riposte to those who argue that minutes published in Stalin's time cannot be trusted is that they were first published in 1919. Rabinovitch (2004), pp. 83-90.
[116] Deutscher (1968), p. 161.
[117] L. Trotsky, cited in Deutscher (1968), p. 285.
[118] V.I. Lenin, 'Our Revolution', *Selected Works, vol. 3,* (Moscow, 1971), p. 770.
[119] J.V. Stalin, 'The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists', *On the Opposition* (Beijing, 1974), p. 149.

Bolsheviks assumed that building socialism in the Soviet Union (as it had by then become) must be accompanied by continuing support for world proletarian revolution. But there was of course a tension between the task of defending state power in the Soviet Union and that of advancing the cause of international proletarian revolution. Lenin had insisted during the proceedings of the Comintern's Second Congress that a 'nation which is achieving victory over the bourgeoisie [must] be able and willing to make the greatest national sacrifices for the sake of overthrowing international capital.'.[120] But in 1926, at a meeting of the Executive Committee of the Comintern (ECCI), Stalin argued that the interests of the Soviet state and those of the international proletariat were one and the same:

> The interests of building socialism in the Soviet Union wholly and completely merge with the interests of the revolutionary movement of all countries into the one general interest of the victory of the socialist revolution in all countries...to counterpose the 'national' tasks of the proletariat of a particular country to the international tasks is to commit a profound political error.[121]

Stalin's stance was a manifestation of an emerging tendency in the Soviet leadership to subordinate the general revolutionary interest to the defence of socialism in the Soviet Union. A decisive step in this process was taken in 1928, when the Comintern's Sixth Congress resolved that the 'proletarian dictatorship' in the USSR should 'exercise leadership...over the whole world revolutionary movement'.[122] In other words, the CPSU, not the Comintern, should lead the international communist movement.

Subsequent developments in the international economy, in Europe, and in the international situation intensified trends that we might term Soviet-centric. The Wall St. crash of 1929 and the consequent severe depression were thought to have confirmed the claims of 'General Crisis' theory. According to this theory, first propagated by Stalin in 1927, capitalism had entered a final crisis from which there could no recovery. The unprecedentedly severe economic crisis which followed the Wall St. Crash and the intensified inter-imperialist contradictions of the 1930s were thought to provide confirmation of 'General Crisis' theory.[123] After the Nazi seizure of power in Germany in 1933, it was argued that fascism was a threat in all imperialist countries: it was the general response of capitalism to its final crisis, the only way it could avert revolution by an immiserated proletariat.

But the most important aspect of these developments, from the CPSU's point of view, was Nazi rule in Germany. Hitler had made it extremely clear that the Soviet Union was the Nazi's principal enemy: moreover, German imperialists had expansionist ambitions in eastern Europe. Undoubtedly, it had been essential to defend the socialist Soviet Union, the international proletariat's one gain from the revolutionary upheavals of 1971-21. But the CPSU and therefore the Comintern began to pursue this objective so one-sidedly, so undialectically, as to lose sight of the long-term goal of the overthrow of capital.

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[120] V.I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft of Theses on the National and Colonial Question", *Lenin on the National and Colonial Questions* (Beijing, 1967), p. 26.
[121] J.V. Stalin, 'The Seventh Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI', *On the Opposition* (Peking, 1974).
pp. 540-1.
[122] Degas (1965b), p. 474.
[123] See Lotta (1984), Ch. 3, for a discussion of General Crisis Theory.

1935-45: the International United Front against Fascism and War.

The Comintern's Seventh Congress of 1935 brought an end to the Comintern's revolutionary period. The congress adopted a new reformist,[124] defensive 'anti-fascist' strategy which was essentially a rationalisation of Soviet foreign policy. In his congress address, the Comintern's new leader, Georgi Dimitrov, insisted that the main task of the Comintern parties must be 'the struggle for peace and the defence of the USSR.'.[125] The principal way that the Soviet Union sought peace and to defend itself was to attempt to build an alliance with Britain and France, the two imperialist powers most threatened by German expansionism. In tandem with the Soviet Union's diplomacy, the Comintern began at its Seventh Congress a fundamental revision of Marxist-Leninist doctrine on the national question in the imperialist countries.

The experience of the imperialist war of 1914-1918 - in which the social-chauvinist elements (the great majority) of the Second International had supported the war effort of their respective countries - had led the Comintern to insist that a clean break with 'social-patriotism' must be one of the '21 conditions' for admission.[126] For the early Comintern there could be no question of supporting national defence in imperialist countries. Imperialism was moribund capitalism, ripe for socialism. To support national defence was to ally with imperialists rather than with the workers of other countries in the common struggle against imperialism.[127]

But Dimitrov asserted that though communists were 'irreconcilable opponents, on principle, of bourgeois nationalism' they were not supporters of 'national nihilism and should never act as such'. Communists should persist in educating the working-class in the 'spirit of proletarian internationalism', but they should not 'sneer at all the national sentiments of the wide masses of working people'. Communists in those capitalist states interested in maintaining peace should defend 'to the very end the national freedom of [their] own country'.[128]

The Comintern's May Day 1936 Statement issued only weeks after the German army crossed the Rhine at Cologne,[129] made it clear that communists should not look to the internationalist opponents of the 'social-patriots' of 1914-18 for guidance regarding the threatened new war. Today, it was asserted, 'the situation is not what it was in 1914'. Now, 'a number of capitalist states' were 'concerned to maintain peace, hence the possibility of creating a broad front of the working-class, of all working people against the danger of imperialist war.'[130] Implicitly, it was now necessary to support national defence in **some** imperialist countries - those with which the Soviet Union was trying to construct an anti-German alliance.

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[124] For a discussion of this aspect of the new strategy see Redfern (2005).
[125] G. Dimitrov, *The United Front* (Chicago, 1975), p. 11.
[126] Hessel (1980), p. 94.
[127] See V.I. Lenin, 'Socialism and *War*', *Lenin on War and Peace 3 Articles* (Beijing, 1966) for Lenin's views on this matter and his polemic against the 'social-patriots' of 1914-18.
[128] Dimitrov, *United Front*, p. 79 & p. 82.
[129] One of the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, imposed on Germany in 1919, was that the German army should not be stationed on that part of Germany to the west of the Rhine.
[130] Degas (1965b), p. 390.

It had been entirely legitimate for the Soviet Union to seek alliances with those imperialist powers opposed to Germany. But Comintern policy on the Spanish civil war which erupted later in 1936 highlights the tension, the contradiction, between the state interests of the Soviet Union and the general revolutionary interest. A few months into the civil war, Stalin and the Soviet Foreign Minister, Molotov, wrote to Largo Caballero, the head of the Spanish government. According to Stalin and Molotov:

> The Spanish Revolution traces its own course, different in many respects from that followed by Russia. This is determined by the differences in the social, historic, and geographic conditions and from the necessities of the international situation…It is very possible that in Spain, the parliamentary way will prove to be a more effective means of revolutionary development than in Russia.[131]

The 'necessities of the international situation' were evidently that nothing should be done to jeopardize the attempts of the Soviet Union to construct an anti-German alliance. The reference to the 'parliamentary way' indicated that defence of the bourgeois republic, not socialist revolution, should be the strategic objective. The Comintern ensured that the Spanish communists, participants in the Popular Front government, fought with increasing success to contain the revolutionary impulses of the Spanish masses. As the CPC's Kang Sheng (a Comintern cadre in Moscow in the 1930s) remarked in 1964 in a talk with Mao: they 'did not concern themselves with…political power. They wholly subordinated themselves to the exigencies of Soviet foreign policy and achieved nothing at all. The Soviet Union said to them that if they imposed proletarian leadership, England and France might oppose it, and this would not be in the interests of the Soviet Union.".[132]

In 1937 the Comintern's response to Japan's invasion of China made the Eurocentric opportunism of Seventh Congress strategy very clear. A year earlier Germany and Japan had concluded an Anti-Comintern Pact. It seemed possible that the Soviet Union would have to fight a war on two fronts. In a *Manifesto* issued on the anniversary of the October Revolution, the Comintern declared that 'From both the West and the East', the fascist cut-throats are preparing an onslaught on the great land of socialism.'.

Japan presented too a threat to the eastern colonial empires of Britain, France and other imperialist powers. The Comintern was well aware that the resources of these empires could prove invaluable in defending the Soviet Union. Which is doubtless why the *Manifesto* insisted that 'the peoples of Asia and the countries of the Pacific Ocean are menaced by Japanese imperialism'. It urged the working class and people of 'the bourgeois-democratic countries [to] demand that their governments 'carry on a resolute struggle against the fascist aggressors.'.[133] In other words, they should demand that the European imperialists defend their eastern colonies against the Japanese imperialists.

It was a theoretical stretch to categorise Japan, ruled by a military dictatorship, as a fascist power. But it served the **political** purpose of allowing Japan to be included among the targets

[131] Cited in Burnett (1979), p. 160.
[132] Schram (1974), p. 218. For a full discussion, see RCP,USA, 'The Line of the Comintern on the Civil War in Spain' *Revolution*, June 1981.
[133] Degas (1965b), p. 416.

of the anti-fascist strategy. The CPGB responded vigorously to the Comintern's call. Led by communists, dockers in Southampton, Middlesbrough and London 'blacked' cargoes bound to and from Japan. A leaflet circulated by the CP-front, the China Campaign Committee, sensationally headed 'Innocent Purchasers Finance Raids of Death', called for a boycott of Japanese silk, insisting that 'just as the aggressor in Europe plans to dominate the western world, so Japan aims to rule over the East, completely excluding Britain.'. [134]

It had been extremely unlikely that the Soviet Union's courting of the British and French imperialists would succeed. Rather than ally with the Soviet Union, those imperialists hoped to appease the German imperialists with concessions and to encourage them to expand eastwards rather than westwards. The Munich Agreement of 1938, in which Britain and France effectively forced the Czech government to cede the Sudetenland to Germany, was a manifestation of both objectives, and showed that Soviet hopes for an alliance with Britain and France were then chimerical.

The Comintern responded to Munich by resurrecting a stance advocated by Eduard Bernstein, the original revisionist. In opposition to the insistence of Marx and Engels that the workers 'have no country', Bernstein argued that in the late Nineteenth Century 'the German worker was now represented in the Reichstag and owed his country certain obligations that must come before his duty to his class.' [135] As we know, in 1914 the great majority of the European left accepted that they did indeed have 'obligations' to their country.

In one of a series of furious denunciations of this social-chauvinist majority, Lenin insisted that the national question had become a 'thing of the past'[136] for advanced capitalist countries such as Britain, where the ruling bourgeoisie had built a national economy and state. But for the post-1935 Comintern the national question had become a thing of the present in imperialist countries (or rather in those imperialist countries threatened by Germany): 'In contrast to the past', it argued, the working-class now had 'a place in the nation'. Accordingly, it had begun to revise its 'relationship with the nation.'. Now that the bourgeoisie was 'betraying the national interests...It is the working-class and its Communist Party which takes over the legacies of the bourgeois revolution, maintains them against the traitors and develops them to a richer and fuller life.'.[137] In other words, the working-class had acquired a stake in the system and should defend it.

By 1939 the Comintern had ideologically and politically primed the international communist movement to support national defence in those imperialist powers threatened by Germany. But British and French refusal to ally with the Soviet Union had led to it concluding a non-aggression pact with Germany. The Comintern now insisted that the British and French war against Germany which had erupted in September was an imperialist war. But after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, it was deemed to have become an 'anti-fascist' war. The Soviet Union's war against Germany was of course a just war. But in its principal aspect the Second World War was from beginning to end the Second World Imperialist War.

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[134] China Campaign Committee ephemera in CPA, CP/ORG/MISC/2/14.
[135] Cited in Wilson (1972), p. 520.
[136] V.I. Lenin, 'The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination'*, Lenin on the National and Colonial Questions* (Peking, 1975), p. 15. (There is of course a national question **in** some imperialist countries – in Britain, the cases of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales).
[137] 'The Working-class and the Nation', *Communist International*, November 1938, p. 24.

By the end of 1941 support for national defence in Britain and France had been transformed into general support for imperialist war. In a world in which vastly more people were subjected to colonialism than were subjected to or threatened by fascism, the communists of Britain, France and the USA supported 'their' imperialists as they contended, in Europe and in such places as Libya, Egypt, the Philippines, Burma, Malta and Greece, for world supremacy with the axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan. 'Anti-fascist' propaganda and support for the allied imperialists was maintained even in 1945, as British imperialism reconquered colonies lost to Japan in 1941-42 and French imperialists shelled Damascus to quell popular protests against their resumption of power in Syria and the Lebanon.

Communist Policy in 1935-45 raises the question of why most communists had supported the Comintern's anti-fascist strategy, despite its manifest breach with the principles of its first and Second Congresses. The paramount factors were almost certainly the enormous prestige and authority of the CPSU and the perceived necessity of defending the Soviet Union, the only socialist country We should note also, as I have argued elsewhere,[138] that the CPGB had not made a clean break with the social-chauvinism and reformism of the old British left.

By 1950 or so Seventh Congress strategy was seen to have been amply vindicated. Not only had it led to the defeat of fascism and the successful defence of socialism in the Soviet Union, but it had also been followed by the creation of the socialist camp and revolution in China. Unrecognised was that it had also helped capital to resolve its greatest ever crisis, greatly strengthened the nascent state bourgeoisie in the Soviet Union and the revisionist elements in the international communist movement. That these latter matters were in the long run decisive is suggested by the overthrow of socialism in the Soviet Union and China.

The Question of Stalin.

Seventh Congress strategy raises too the matter of how Maoists in Britain assessed Stalin's leadership of the international communist movement. The key event in the growth of revisionism was understood to have been the CPSU's Twentieth Congress. Prior to that, according to the CDRCU, the Comintern had kept the British Party on the ideological and political rails until 1943 (the Comintern was dissolved that year). While the CPGB had 'in the main' adhered to and propagated 'the basic principles of Marxism- Leninism', the Comintern had had to continually correct the party's errors. But after its dissolution revisionism began to flourish in the British Party.[139] According to *Forum*, it was 'a matter of historic fact that at least until 1953 [the year of Stalin's death] a majority of the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union were Marxist-Leninists.'.[140] Defending Stalin against revisionist attacks had created a deep-seated reluctance to consider whether the CPSU, and Stalin in particular, had had any responsibility for the degeneration of the movement.

Edward Upward and Hilda Upward wrote to *The Marxist* in 1970 to argue that modern revisionism could not be understood 'unless the period of Stalin's leadership is opened up for discussion. Revisionism can hardly be said to date from 1956…It was the apparent approval

[138] See Redfern (2005), Chs. 1-3.
[139] M. McCreery, 'The Way Forward', *Vanguard,* February 1964.
[140] *Forum,* November 1964.

of the CPSU for the revisionism of the Western Parties that made us feel that further struggle for an anti-revisionist party in Britain at that time [the late 1940s] was useless. We are very disturbed when we find writers in *The Marxist* classing Stalin with Marx, Lenin and Mao. Surely it must be understood that serious discussion is urgently required on the whole period of Stalin's leadership.'.[141]

But the Woodwards' letter failed to provoke a discussion. Rather, upholding Stalin came to be seen as one of the main lines of demarcation between Marxism and revisionism. Among British Maoists, a robust defence of Stalin came to be regarded as one of the most reliable indicators of ideological and political rectitude The vast majority of Maoists refused even to consider the possibility that Stalin might have made serious, even grievous errors. Claiming that the degeneration of the British party came after the dissolution of the Comintern or the death of Stalin was almost certainly based on an *a priori* assumption that Stalin could not have had any responsibility for that degeneration and/or a dismissal of evidence that he had had. The present writer's staunch defence of Stalin was one reason why he became a leading member of the Maoist Movement in Britain.

If Maoists generally supported the strategy of 1935-45, many were highly critical of developments in the western parties in the later stages of the war and in the early post-war years. In 1944, in *How to Win the Peace*, Pollitt had argued that war-time national unity should continue into the peace. Post-war reconstruction could build the foundations of socialism. Implicitly, the CPGB considered that the British state could oversee a peaceful transition to socialism and thus advance the cause of the working-class.[142] Opponents of this reformist strategy emerged prior to the party's Eighteenth Congress of 1945[143] and again around the time of its Nineteenth Congress of 1947.[144] They were easily defeated. Edward Upward's semi-autobiographical novel *The Rotten Elements* provides a vivid account of the CPGB's internal political battles of that time.

It is now clear that the CPSU was indeed responsible for post-war revisionism. After the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, the Soviet party directed the affairs of the international communist movement through a newly-formed Department of International Information (OMI).[145] There can now be no reasonable doubt that Togliatti, the leader of the Italian communists, spoke for Stalin when, on his return from exile in the Soviet Union in 1943, he announced that the 'problem for the Italian workers today is not to do what was done in Russia.'. No, the task was to 'guarantee order and discipline' in the rear of the allied armies. The Italian communists carried out this task even as the allied imperialist armies disarmed partisans who had seized power in several northern Italian cities in April 1945. [146]

Maoists were not of course aware of the existence of the OMI. But there is other evidence that Stalin instigated the revisionist post-war strategy of the communist parties of western Europe. Take, for instance, the question of the 'peaceful road'. In 1964 the CPGB's leader, John Gollan, claimed that Stalin had 'fully approved' the implicit 'peaceful road' to socialism

[141] *The Marxist*, Autumn 1970.
[142] H. Pollitt, *How to Win the Peace* (London, 1944).
[143] Redfern (2005), Ch. 5.
[144] Deery & Redfern (2005).
[145] Banac (2003), pp. 271-282.
[146] Claudin (1975), pp. 360-361.

strategy of the original 1951 version of *The British Road to Socialism*.[147] Maoists tended to regard claims that Stalin had endorsed the peaceful road as preposterous. After all, was not acceptance of the necessity of violent revolution a fundamental line of demarcation between Marxism and revisionism?

But at the end of the Second World War the Soviet party had been anxious that the war-time alliance with the allied imperialists should not disintegrate in the post-war period. It claimed that there could be peaceful post-war reconstruction and co-operation. A peaceful road to socialism was now deemed to be possible. In 1945 Stalin told Tito that 'today socialism is possible even under the English monarchy. Revolution is no longer necessary everywhere.'.[148] Documents released from the Russian state archives essentially confirm Gollan's claim that Stalin had endorsed the CPGB's post-war strategy. In 1951 he had insisted in a talk with Pollitt that British communists should stress that they 'are not going to delegitimise Parliament, that England shall come to socialism through its own path and not through Soviet power.'.[149]

Maoists' blinkered view of Stalin ensured that the vast majority failed to break with the Comintern's post-1935 opportunist strategy (some argued that there had been a rightist application of a basically correct strategy.[150]) Like the late Comintern, they failed to uphold the internationalist insistence of the early Comintern that the main enemy of the working class of the imperialist countries is, as Karl Liebknecht put it in 1914, 'at home'. We will see that in Britain, the CFB and the CPB both insisted, in very different ways, that the national question was a thing not of the past but of the present in the Britain of the 1970s and 1980s. This was to profoundly affect the development of the movement.

Building a Revolutionary Communist Party.

By the end of the Sixties there was general agreement among the Maoists, both the veteran anti-revisionists and those activists of the mass movements of the Sixties who had rallied to the movement, that the most important task, the central task, confronting them was to build a revolutionary communist party. But how should it be built? What attributes should it possess? For most, it was axiomatic that significant working-class support was an essential pre-condition for party formation. For the CFB, party-building involved developing 'a politically advanced cadre force…a full analysis of the national and international political situation…[and]…a draft programme.'.[151] Whatever tasks it was thought must be done, whatever conditions it was thought must be created, building a revolutionary communist party was quite beyond the resources and capabilities of any one organisation of the fragmented Maoist movement. The immediate party-building task confronting the movement was uniting the fragments.

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[147] 'Which Road', *Marxism Today* (July 1964).
[148] Roberts (2008), p. 247.
[149] The documents can be seen in full @ *https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.postww2/stalin-pollitt.pdf.*
[150] See, for instance, NCG, 'The Marxist-Leninist Movement in Britain: Past, Present and Future', *Red Star* no. 4 (October 1980), p. 5.
[151] CFB, 'Joint Committee of Communists on the Question of Party-Building', *Documents of the Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist* (June 1972), p. 12.

To unite the movement, it was crucial to fight for the party spirit over the circle spirit, to fight for the wider interest rather than the narrow, parochial interest of one's own circle. Though there were differences, some of them important, between the various Maoist organisations, they had a great deal of ideological and political common ground, summed up in *A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement*,[152] the key text in the *Polemic on the General Line.* [153] Given a party spirit, Maoists could have united relatively quickly around the *Polemic* and developed a greater level of unity through collective practice. But the struggle against the revisionism of the CPGB had created in many Maoists a circle spirit, a wariness of other Maoist organisations, which might not be as ideologically and politically sound as one's own organisation.

Especially with the benefit of hindsight, but not only with the benefit of hindsight, Lenin's advice to German communists in 1919 seems pertinent to the situation of Maoists in Britain in the late 1960s. Lenin had insisted that those German communists who were agreed on:

> the basic issues (the fight for the dictatorship of the proletariat and for Soviet government) and [were] implacably hostile to the [social-chauvinist] groups in all nations, could and should have acted in unison…differences on less important issues can, and unfailingly will, vanish; this will result from the logic of the joint struggle against the really formidable enemy, the bourgeoisie, and its overt (Scheidemann[154]) and covert (Kautsky[155]) servitors.[156]

Lenin offered similar advice to British communists, urging them to found as quickly as possible a united party 'on the basis of the decisions of the Third International.'.[157] The fundamental principle underlying Lenin's advice on party formation in Britain and Germany was that organisational unity on the ideological and political line of the Comintern would be principled unity. A deeper and wider unity could arise (or not) out of the collective revolutionary struggle. Basing itself on Lenin's stance, the Comintern actively intervened in the process of party formation in Britain.

As the NCG pointed out, Comintern intervention had been 'not so much a response to the state of the class struggle in Britain but rather a response to the October revolution and the subsequent upheavals in other countries.'. As we have seen, when the delegates to the Comintern's First Congress assembled, it was in expectation of imminent European-wide proletarian revolution (Bukharin declared that it was utopian 'to think that it is possible to rehabilitate the capitalist system at all. The capitalist system is cracking at all its seams.'[158].) It

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[152] CPC, 'A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement', *The Polemic on the General Line*, pp 1--59.
[153] See RCP,USA "A Critical Appraisal of the Communist Party of China's 'Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement', *Revolution*, June 1979.
[154] Philipp Scheidemann was a member of the German Social-Democratic Party who played a counter-revolutionary role in Germany in the revolutionary year of 1918-1919.
[155] Karl Kautsky, who had been the foremost theoretician of the Second International, refused to support the revolutionary opposition to the First World War. After the war he became a fierce critic of the Bolsheviks.
[156] V.I. Lenin, 'Letter [on October 28 1919] to the German Comrades who belonged to the 'United Communist Party of Germany' and who have now formed a new party', *Collected Works, vol. 30* (Moscow 1965), p. 87.
[157] V.I. Lenin, 'Letter to the British Workers, *Collected Works, vol. 32* (Moscow, 1965), p. 140.
[158] J. Riddell ed., (1986), p. 126.

is clear, especially with the benefit of the hindsight not available in 1919, that this was a fundamental misreading of the objective situation.

But far more significant, a matter not addressed by the NCG, which argued that the Comintern's intervention had been 'highly opportunistic',[159] is that it fostered a necessary split between the revolutionary and reformist wings of socialism in Britian. The NCG's critique was essentially the same as that of Walter Kendall, who, a decade or so earlier, had asserted that the intervention of the Comintern had produced a communist party that was 'an almost wholly artificial creation.'.[160] Like Andrew Thorpe,[161] the present writer does not find Kendall's assertion persuasive. Though based on a incorrect analysis of the objective situation, Comintern intervention led to the creation of a communist party composed of the best elements of the BSP and the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), united on a Comintern synthesis, however partial and flawed, of the experience of European socialism over the previous half century.[162] We will return to the NCG's views on party-building in Chapter Five. Now, we will consider those of the CPB and the CFB.

[159] NCG, 'The Marxist-Leninist Movement in Britain', *Red Star*, no. 4 (1980), p. 12.
[160] Kendall (1969), p. 252.
[161] Thorpe (2003), pp. 29-30.
[162] See Redfern (2005), Ch. 2.

Chapter Two.

The Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist):.

The Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) (CPB) was founded in 1968. It made a positive contribution to the revolutionary ferment of the sixties and early seventies. It challenged and criticised revisionism on such matters as the transition to socialism. It gave firm support to socialist China and opposed Soviet social-imperialism. It participated militantly in the economic struggle of the working-class against the capitalist class. It supported national liberation struggles, notably that in Vietnam. But it was not, as it claimed to be, 'the political party of the proletariat.'.[1] It was merely the largest Maoist organisation. Initially a coalition of militant anti-revisionist trade unionists and young Maoist baby-boomers, the young Maoists mostly split from the CPB in 1975-6.

Crucially, the CPB made no attempt to analyse the roots of revisionism in the international communist movement. In its eventual indifference to national liberation movements, it emulated what was perhaps the gravest aspect of the CPGB's opportunism. It itself revised some fundamental tenets of Marxism-Leninism. It denied, for instance, that the working-class in Britain benefited from imperialism. It had an indifference to theory, manifested in its failure to publish a theoretical journal. After Mao's death in 1976, the CPB broke with Maoism and eventually returned to the Soviet camp. Now propagating an ugly workerist nationalism, it is no longer a party of the left.

Reg Birch and the anti-Revisionist Struggle.

While it was the emergence of a Maoist movement that permitted the formation of CPB, it was manifestly Reginald ('Reg') Birch, the CPB's leader for many years, and his circle which mainly determined its ideological and political outlook. Birch's biographer, CPB member William Podmore, shows that during the Second World War Birch supported the CPGB's social-chauvinist defence of British imperialism.[2] He supported too its post-war reformist strategy. In 1946 he argued that 'maximum production must be achieved…no one is to be allowed to stand in the way.'.[3] There is no evidence that Birch ever made a self-criticism for supporting the CPGB's war-time and post-war revisionism.

Birch's associate William Ash claimed that Birch was 'probably the best informed man in Britain on the differences between revisionists and Marxist-Leninists'.[4] But we will see that Birch promoted revisionism. Podmore claimed that Birch had opposed 'from the start' the revisionism of the *British Road to Socialism*.[5] Birch no doubt claimed as much, but there is no supporting evidence in the CPGB archive or elsewhere. In 1957 he had been elected to the CPGB's Executive Committee, on which he loyally served for ten years. He never attracted the attention of the Organisation Department. He took a centrist stance on the Sino-Soviet dispute in the international communist movement. In 1963, during an EC discussion

[1] CPB, *Constitution of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist*), Article 1.
[2] Podmore (2004).
[3] CPGB, *A Wage Based on Human Needs* (London, 1946), pp. 15-16.
[4] Ash (1978), p. 211.
[5] Podmore (2004), p. 44.

on the matter, he argued that the Soviet party were 'wrong on Stalin' and that the British party's EC was incorrect to see the Soviet party as 'all right' and the Chinese as 'all wrong'.[6]

In the Spring and Summer of 1965, the CPGB's leader, John Gollan, supervised an investigation into contacts which Birch allegedly had with the pro-CPC Communist Party of Australia and with others in the orbit of the CPC, such as Jack Perry. Birch was then accused of trying to organise a 'pro-Chinese' bloc for the forthcoming party Congress.[7] Now seen as highly unreliable, the London District Committee, hitherto his power-base, declined to renominate him for a seat on the party's EC. But Birch did not publicly associate himself with the anti-revisionist movement until November 1966, when he was listed in the first issue of *The Marxist* as a member of its editorial board.[8]

Birch's membership of the CPGB was suspended early in 1967. He visited China that August at the invitation of Chinese trade unionists. He probably had talks with members of the CPC, which, while anxious to avoid the over-centralism of the Comintern, was also keen that new Marxist-Leninist parties be founded throughout the world. While Birch was in China, it was announced that a meeting of British Marxist-Leninists would soon be held to discuss the formation of a new party. It seems clear that Birch and his associates had decided that a Marxist-Leninist party should be formed more or less immediately and saw little role in this project for the existing movement. As we saw in the previous chapter, the JCC's federalist party-building strategy had recently been endorsed by *The Marxist*, which is presumably why Birch and his ally Ted Roycroft resigned from its editorial board immediately after Birch's return from China.

The CPB and Party-Building.

No Maoist organisations had been consulted when Birch, asserting that the 'time is overdue for the establishment of a Marxist-Leninist Party.',[9] issued invitations to a meeting to be held in October at London's Conway Hall. According to McConville, few of those invited were members of the existing movement; the largest contingent was composed of AUEW associates of Birch.[10] Ash claimed that at the Conway Hall meeting were 'all those who felt that Britain had for long enough been a deprived country as far as having a genuine working-class revolutionary party was concerned.'.[11] But only a small minority of Maoists attended. Among these were McConville, Mauger, members of the Workers Party of Scotland (Marxist-Leninist) (WPS)[12] and former members of the now defunct CDRCU/ACMLU, including Joe Dix.

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[6] EC meeting of 14-15 September 1963. CPA, CPGB/CENT/EC/09/07.
[7] Part of the investigation involved an interrogation of Vi. Sands, who had worked as Birch's secretary, by Betty Reid and John Mahon, a close ally of Gollan. CPA, CPGB/IND/GOLL/04/06.
[8] Some Maoists saw here a connection with the CPGB's decision a few months earlier to support Hugh Scanlon, once a member of the CPGB, but then a prominent member of the Labour Party, rather than Birch, for election to the presidency of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW) (after a series of mergers the AEU had become the AUEW).
[9] R. Birch to various individuals and organisations, September 1967. Copy of letter in author's possession.
[10] McConville, then a member of the CFB, alleged this several years later in conversation with this writer.
[11] Ash (1978), p. 229.
[12] The WPS had been founded in 1966 by people who had been members of the CDRCU. It gained some notoriety in 1972 when two members, perhaps emulating Stalin, were gaoled for bank robberies carried out to raise funds for political activity. The organisation was dissolved in 1983.

It was announced during the meeting that a Provisional Committee of the British Marxist-Leninist Party (PCBMLP) was to be formed there and then. A CPGB observer reported that 'about twenty people' then 'jumped to their feet and started protesting…I got the overall impression that the protestors were from other splinter groups and that the main thing they were protesting about was…the proposal for a new party.'.[13] According to Dix, objectors were treated with contempt. McConville claimed that Dorothy Birch asserted that 'the time for little groups is past' and that John Hannington, a leading AUEW ally of Birch, dismissed the objectors as people who had been 'pissing about for years and got nowhere' and that the London anti-revisionist groups had been 'poncing off the industrial workers for years'.[14]

Credence for these claims is provided by an experience of this writer. Shortly after the founding of the CPB, he had an informal meeting with Hannington in a north London pub. At the start of the meeting, Hannington, in the manner of a high Soviet official with little time to spare for trivial matters, announced that he could spare five minutes. He responded to a request for talks between the CPB and the LCCL by proclaiming that the time for discussions was over: the party had been formed. The members of the LCCL could apply for individual candidate membership of the CPB.

The inaugural meeting of the PCBMLP adopted a document on its 'immediate tasks'. It was agreed that before a new party was formed it was 'of the utmost importance' that all Marxist-Leninists should '1. agree to a statement of the fundamental Marxist-Leninist ideological and political principles and a minimum programme and policy in the present era…2. On the basis of the above statement, to unite all those Marxist-Leninists who can be united and set up a British Marxist-Leninist Organisation.'. [15] Perhaps due to the indifference to theory of Birch and his associates or to the fundamental ideological and differences that, as we shall see, existed among those who founded the CPB, the first of these tasks was never accomplished. Given that the second of these tasks was deemed to be contingent on completing the first, it might seem unsurprising that this too was not accomplished. But there was a more fundamental reason: Birch and his associates were not concerned to seek unity with other Maoists.

Just as no Maoist organisation had been consulted prior to the Conway Hall meeting, so no attempt was made afterwards to seriously engage in dialogue with other Maoists. Some time between the formation of the PCBMLP and the foundation of the CPB, the committee published a *Bulletin* containing criticism, some of it justified, of the existing movement. But the *Bulletin* was essentially an attempt to justify Birch's arbitrary approach to party-building. The tone of the document was captured in the opening paragraph: Birch had 'summoned' people to the October Conway Hall meeting where he had 'explained' the 'purpose' of the meeting. It was to 'set up a provisional committee which would go to work immediately to form a communist party.'. [16]

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[13] CPA, CPGB/CENT/ORG/20/04.
[14] 'T.M, 'Revisionism and the British Marxist-Leninist Movement', p. 29.
[15] 'Immediate Tasks for the British Marxist-Leninist Organisation'. This writer has a photocopy of this document, of uncertain provenance.
[16] PCBMLP Bulletin 1 *A Communist Party in Britain Now!* Document in author's possession.

In February 1968, shortly before the foundation of the CPB, Manchanda submitted a *memorandum* to the PCBMLP. According to him, it had been resolved at its first meeting to get 'in touch with all Marxist-Leninist groups to win their co-operation.' But there had been no 'serious attempt' to do so. 'Not only had [the PCBMLP] adopted a rigid attitude to other groups, but…we have been quite hostile to them.'. He claimed too that when he suggested that representatives of the PCBMLP should try to arrange meetings with the various Maoist groups he 'incurred the displeasure of Reg and Dorothy Birch.'.[17] Manchanda's claims are consistent with our other evidence regarding the PCBMLO's attitude to the existing movement.

Birch had been expelled from the CPGB after the Conway Hall meeting. The CPB was founded in April 1968 at the conclusion of a three-day congress attended by seventy or so people. Nick Bateson and other members of the Camden Communist Movement had previously left the JCC to work on the PCBMLP. Their parting statement argued that 'the political tasks confronting the Marxist-Leninist movement cannot be carried out by small groups' rather they 'hinder the development of the movement as a whole.'[18] Quite true, of course, but joining the CPB proved to be a political *cul-de-sac*.

Stalin observed of the foundation of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1898, out of which the Bolsheviks emerged:

> Although the First Congress had been held, no Marxist Social-Democratic party was as yet formed in Russia. The Congress did not succeed in uniting the various separate Marxist circles and organisations and welding them together organisationally. There was still no common line of action in the work of the local organisations, nor was there a party programme, party rules or a single leading centre.[19]

Much the same could have been said of the CPB on its foundation. It was a revolutionary party in name only. It had not united the Maoists, won significant working-class support or drafted a programme.

Initially, the CPB probably had around 150 members. Ash, soon to become the first editor of the CPB's paper *The Worker*, traduced those who had refused to join the CPB as those fearful of belonging 'to a tiny new revolutionary party in the oldest and most cunning capitalist country in the world [as that] was not exactly the prescription for a cushy number.'.[20] Perhaps some who refused were fearful. No doubt reluctance to give up the autonomy of a small group was a factor in some cases. But many, probably most, of those who spurned the CPB had fundamental objections to what they regarded as a premature foundation of a party and to the high-handed manner in which Birch was proceeding with party-building.

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[17] 'Memorandum Submitted to the Secretariat of the Provisional Committee of the British Marxist-Leninist Organisation', February 24 1968. Copy of the memo. in this writer's possession.
[18] 'The Differences in the JCC and Camden Communist Movement', 24 November 1968. Document in author's possession.
[19] *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks* (Moscow, 1951), p. 43. Though attributed to a commission of the Soviet party, it is known that the work was written by Stalin.
[20] Ash (1978), p. 230.

Consider too the case of the Maoists in the Association of Indian Communists (AIC).[21] According to Jagmohan Joshi, Birch and his associates were not free of the paternalistic social-chauvinism which, as we have seen, had tended to sour relations between the CPGB and the Indian party. According to Joshi, Birch rejected criticism of the CPGB's relations with the Indian Party, was insensitive to the apprehension of some members of the AIC at the prospect of working in a predominantly white organisation and dismissive of the importance of such work when told that many members of the AIC would wish, after joining the CPB, to continue their mass work in the Indian community.[22] A few years later, Maoists who had fled persecution in Pakistan were similarly rebuffed by the CPB and founded the Pakistani Worker's Association (PWA).[23] The AIC's Maoists declined to join the CPB and thereafter concentrated on mass work within the IWA. Joshi founded a left-wing bookshop in Birmingham.

The CPB attracted new members for a few years after its formation. In 1970 the members of the Croydon branch of the YCL announced that they had resigned from the CPGB and joined 'the comrades of the CPB.'.[24] The party then had around three hundred members. Though it had become - mainly by virtue of declaring itself the party – the largest anti-revisionist organisation, there were still many Maoists who had not joined it. This was of little concern to its leaders. The CFB and the CUA were just two of the organisations whose letters and critiques were ignored.

Moreover, the CPB was not averse to literally violent rejection of criticism. The CPGB observer at the meeting at which the decision to form a new party had been announced reported that some objectors were 'ejected (some quite forcibly) by what seemed to me to be some of Hannington's young mates.'.[25] According to the CWLB, members of their organisation who distributed leaflets critical of the CPB at its 1977 May Day meeting were 'punched in the face, kicked, thrown to the ground and violently ejected from the hall.'.[26] These claims seem credible, given an experience of this writer, who was threatened with violence when criticising the CPB from the floor during its Conway Hall May Day meeting of 1978.

Maoists and Birchites Battle for the Soul of the CPB.

When founded, the CPB was essentially a coalition, a fluid and changing coalition, but a coalition nevertheless, of mainly working-class trade unionists, many of them veteran communists, schooled in the economic class struggle, and more ideological Maoists, many of them '68ers, schooled in anti-revisionist, anti-imperialist and student politics. From the CPB's inception the trade unionists were dominant. The largest initial cohort was of trade unionists. A few months after the foundation of the CPB the initial cohort was joined by the

[21] The origins of the AIC lie in a split in communism in India. In 1966 several influential Indian Communists resigned from the CPGB in protest against its support for the 'Indian revisionists'. Statement of the Co-ordinating Committee of Indian Communists in Britain, 15 June 1966. CPA, CPGB/CENT/ORG/20/04.
[22] Joshi claimed all this several years later in conversation with this writer.
[23] According to a founder-member of the PWA.
[24] CPA, CPGB/CENT/YCL/10/8.
[25] CPA, CPGB/CENT/ORG/20/04.
[26] *Voice of the People*, May 1977.

members of the London Communist Group (LCG). These were mostly trade union activists, particularly of the AUEW. According to the CWM, formed by people who split from the CPB in 1976, most members of the LCG became members of the CPB's Central Committee.[27] Among the Maoists were Ian Williams, one of the Liverpool University expellees and Ross Longhurst (aka 'Harry Powell'). Both became prominent in splits from the CPB.

An early unity, based on broad anti-revisionism, such as opposition to the CPGB's reformist *British Road to Socialism* strategy, concealed fundamental and increasingly antagonistic ideological and political differences. The trade union camp, which we will term Birchite, was mainly concerned to fight the economic class struggle. The '68ers, while agreeing that it was essential to wage the economic struggle, were much more concerned than the Birchites with such matters as national liberation struggles and the fight against racism. The differences within the coalition were never resolved. According to many who left the party, Birch and his circle were intolerant of criticism and refused to engage in ideological and political struggle. Most of the Maoists split from the CPB in 1974-76.

Not long after its foundation the CPB began to publish *The Worker*. The paper was clearly anti-revisionist in orientation, drawing on the general ideological and political principles established in the anti-revisionist struggle of the previous few years. The paper presented a lively, militant contrast to the stodgy reformism of the CPGB's *Morning Star*. The edition of May 1969, for example, supported the armed struggle of the Palestinian people against Israel and its US backers. A full page advertisement for the party's bookshop provided information for those who wished to develop their knowledge of Marxist theory.[28] In 1970, in contrast to the great majority of the revolutionary left, which urged workers to vote Labour in that June's general election, the CPB denounced Labour as a bourgeois party and urged workers not to vote but to 'organise for struggle against capitalism'. Elsewhere firm support was given to the national liberation war of the people of Vietnam against US imperialism.[29]

But these two editions also contained elements of an economism which would eventually dominate the party. An article in the May edition on a 'new upsurge in working-class militancy in western Europe' treated with equal importance the struggle of the working-class of the imperialist countries for better wages and conditions and the revolutionary struggle of the oppressed peoples and nations against imperialism.[30] In 1970, reflecting an economist emphasis on gaining lay and official trade union posts (an 'extraordinarily large percentage' of the party's membership' were 'either full time or lay [trade union] officials'.[31]), Ted Roycroft's election as an assistant divisional organiser of the AUEW was hailed as an important victory.[32]

A study of *The Worker* shows that the Birchite wing of the CPB's coalition was clearly in the ascendency when the delegates to the party's Second Congress assembled in April 1971. Many issues of the paper covered industrial news more than any other topic. In the edition of

[27] CWM, *The Absolute Decline of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)* (1976), p. 1.
[28] *The Worker*, May 1969.
[29] *The Worker*, June 1970.
[30] *The Worker*, May 1969.
[31].'Anonymous but highly credible internet source', cited in Richards *Ebbing Tide*.
[32] *The Worker*, June 1970

January 1971, for instance, more than 50% of its column inches were devoted to economic struggles, including strikes, by car workers, power workers, firefighters, art teachers and others.[33] There was some justification for this, in that legislation, discussed in more detail below, that would severely limit the right to strike was then before parliament. But even so, the coverage of industrial disputes was disproportionate and reflective of the party's growing economism.

Opposition to economism, presumably mostly from the Maoists, had emerged by 1971. After the Second Congress, the Central Committee informed the membership that 'there are many false ideas current in the Party which run counter to the document adopted' there. In particular, 'Opponents of the line often say that they are combatting economism and they cite Lenin's *What is to Be Done*?' The leadership claimed that because *What is to Be Done* had been a product of the specific circumstances of Tsarist Russia, it was therefore not generally applicable, and certainly not to the Britain of the 1970s. Criticism of the party's 'two class line, discussed below, was also rejected.[34]

At its Second Congress the members of the CPB had had to choose between Birchism and Maoism. A majority chose Birchism. The 'document adopted' at the Second Congress was *The British Working-class and its Party* (*TBWCP*). Though not a programme, *TBWCP* was clearly an exposition of the CPB's revolutionary strategy and must be assessed as such. *TBWCP* was based on the doctrine of historical materialism and thus clearly stated that the working-class is exploited by the capitalist class and must aim to overthrow capitalism in socialist revolution. Other than this, there is little to commend in *TBWCP*: it was steeped in economism, spontaneism and social chauvinism. It contained explicit rejections of Lenin's developments, unattributed, of Marxist theory on imperialism and on the party. The Maoists in the party chose to continue the inner-party struggle rather than split. Probably they were right to do so, right to continue to struggle against the Birchites until it came apparent, as it did, that they were incorrigible.

Social-chauvinism was the most serious ideological problem manifest in *TBWCP*, though those with 'false ideas' seem to have mainly criticised economism. Before further consideration of *TBWCP*, it is intriguing to consider an alternative path that the CPB might have taken. Clearly modelled on the *Polemic on the General Line*, a draft programme, drawn up between the party's Founding and Second Congresses, offers a tantalising suggestion that the party might have travelled a Maoist rather than Birchite road. In the section on 'National Liberation and the British Revolution', it forthrightly stated that the 'keystone of the British revolution must be proletarian internationalism.' and that 'there can be no Marxist revolutionary struggle in Britain which does not recognise its intimate relationship with the national liberation struggles throughout the world and, more particularly, the liberation struggles against British imperialism.'. Further, it was argued that the 'meagre reforms, the "crumbs" given to British workers at the expense of the colonial workers, have all been methods of enslaving the British workers by bribery taken out of the enormous profits looted from British colonies and semi-colonies.'.[35] Presumably, the draft programme was rejected because its stance on imperialism was unacceptable to those responsible for *TBWCP.*

[33] *The Worker*, January 1971.
[34] 'Burning Questions for Our Party', cited in Richards, *Second Wave.*
[35] CPB (M-L), 'The Programme of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist' paras 44, 38, 42.

The post- Second Congress CPB on Imperialism.

Proletarian internationalism, the concept expressed in the slogans 'Workers of all Counties, Unite! and 'Workers and Oppressed Peoples and Nations, Unite!' is one of the principal foundations of Marxism. Early editions of *The Worker* had contained a great deal of propaganda, presumably written by the Maoists, suffused with internationalism. We have seen that the paper contained coverage of such struggles as those in Palestine and Vietnam. A prominent article in the Spring of 1969 linked British imperialism's support for the illegal settler regime in 'Rhodesia' to its promotion of racism at home.[36] In May that year a front-page banner headline in *The Worker* demanded 'Keep British Troops Out of Ireland – No Black and Tans in 1969'[37] and denounced police attacks on civil rights campaigners and nationalist communities in Northern Ireland. It was 'essential that a campaign be launched to mobilise the workers of Britain against the use in Ireland of. British troops.'.[38] (The CPB's line and practice on Ireland is discussed in some detail in our case study on the matter.)

The prominence given to anti-imperialist struggles in early editions of *The Worker* suggests that its editor, Ash, was supportive of such struggles. Many members of the CPB had been active in the Vietnam solidarity movement, including the great demonstrations of 1968. The CPB itself took part in a demonstration in support of the struggle in Vietnam in May 1970.[39] But as early as 1968, at a meeting of the pre-party PCBMLO, Dorothy Birch had argued that '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.'. Reg Birch had dismissed the Vietnam solidarity movement: '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.'.[40]

All the more reason, it might be thought, to urge the working-class to support those activities. But while *The Worker* continued to cover the struggle in Vietnam and to denounce British imperialism - in 1972 it criticised British aggression against Iceland in one of the recurrent 'Cod Wars'[41] and in 1974 it denounced attempts by Britain to cut a deal with the white settler regime in 'Rhodesia'[42] - practical solidarity work virtually ceased after the adoption of *TBWCP*.

When *TBWCP* was adopted, Britain was second only to the United States as an imperialist exploiter and oppressor. It was, for instance, the main imperialist enemy of the people of South Africa, subjected to vicious repression under its apartheid regime, and was violently supressing the national struggle in Northern Ireland. But *TBWCP* did not refer, other than in passing to such matters. There was no suggestion that it was crucially important that the working-class in Britain should support struggles against British imperialism. Shortly after

[36] *The Worker*, Mar.ch 1969.
[37] The Black and Tans were irregular troops deployed by Britain in the Irish War of Independence of 1919-1921.
[38] *The Worker*, May 1969.
[39] *The Worker*, June 1970.
[40] Cited in Richards, *High Tide*, p. 134.
[41] *The Worker*, November 1972. Britain and Iceland regularly came into conflict over British access to cod in waters declared by Iceland to be their territorial waters.
[42] *The Worker*, 7 February 1974.

the CPB's Second Congress, *The Worker* outlined the CPB's political priorities. They did not include support for national liberation struggles. It would concentrate on the economic class struggle. [43]

One reason for the CPB's indifference to anti-imperialist struggles was almost certainly its denial of the link between imperialist exploitation abroad and social reform at home. To accept that the link existed would be to accept that the living standards of British workers were not entirely the result of their own struggles and in consequence to pay much more attention to national liberation struggles. Probably relevant too was the past membership of the CPGB of Birch and several other leading Birchites. Birch joined the party in 1939, when the question of the connection between imperialism and social reform had disappeared from communist discourse.[44]

In *TBWCP* the question of the connection between imperialism and social reform was raised only to be dismissed:

> The case has been glibly argued, usually to explain the better wages and conditions in Britain than in her colonies, that the working-class became a partner of capitalism in imperialist plunder and was rewarded with the 'crumbs' of this plunder in the form of wage increases and various welfare benefits (free education, council housing, health service, etc.) … We repudiate this idea totally. [45]

Lenin and other early leaders of the Comintern had been, as we saw in the previous chapter, among those who 'glibly' insisted on the connection between imperialism and social reform. The leaders of the CPB were clearly aware of Lenin's ideas on imperialism and had rejected them. If they had considered the early Comintern leadership to have been in error, a refutation should have been attempted. But was not. It is probable that the party leadership did not wish their members to become acquainted with these ideas. It is striking that in an educational programme for members and contacts there was no specific text on imperialism. This, of course, could have been a mere oversight, though a very serious oversight. But it is, to say the least, remarkable, that the programme stipulated that Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism* should be studied, except for the chapter on the national question.[46] This contains a succinct discussion of the national question in the era of imperialism, including the exploitative relations between the imperialist countries and their colonies and semi-colonies.

TBWCP glibly argued that the 'different forms and different degrees of exploitation and poverty in the industrialised imperialist countries and the non-industrialised colonies should blind no-one to the fact that in essence they are the same wherever encountered.'.[47] This is to

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[43] 'The Politics of our Struggle', *The Worker*, June 1971.

[44] At its Sixth Congress of 1928 the Comintern had overturned the stance of its Second Congress on this matter. The programme adopted by the congress claimed that only the 'labour aristocracy' benefited from social reforms and, moreover, that this was not a stratum of the working-class, but merely 'the leading cadres of the social-democratic parties.'. Degas (1960), p. 471.

[45] CPB, *TBWCP*, p. 3.

[46] CPB, 'Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) Party_Study_Document'.

[47] CPB, *TBWCP*, p. 3.

deny the political economy of imperialism, to cover up the exploitative and oppressive relationships between imperialist countries and the 'non-industrialised' countries.

Britain was second only to the USA and was way ahead of third-placed West Germany in ownership of foreign assets in the 1970s.[48] Between 1970 and 1974 13.9% of total British investment income came from investment abroad.[49] Some of course came from investments in other imperialist countries, but a great deal – in 1975 2,264 million dollars – came from developing countries.[50] But so blind, perhaps wilfully blind, was the CPB to the role played by such superprofits in sustaining capital's rule in Britain that it justified its post-Second Congress concentration on the economic struggle in Britain on the grounds, as we shall see, that economic militancy was leading inexorably to revolution.

Celebrating Economism and Spontaneism.

As on the matter of imperialism, *TBWCP* parted company with Leninism on the question of the need for a vanguard party. It contained a caricature of the views of those who insisted that there must be a vanguard party to lead the revolutionary struggle of the working class:

> Often the assertion that the working-class is the force for revolution, that they make the revolution, is largely lip service. It is rather considered that a revolutionary party is made up of special men whose knowledge of Marxist theory is a peculiar and unique study to be doled out to those more ignorant as the guiding spirit given a revolutionary situation. This concept is wrong, for it must of necessity make the theory of revolution the special art of a few and not that of the people, and must imply that the motive force, i.e., the working-class, are inspired by the environmental situation and respond emotionally in anger and protest to revolution without knowing why, and that this ignorance is corrected by Marxist-Leninist theory supplied by an elite body, i.e., the Party. This is in contradiction with the premise that the working-class is a revolutionary force. It cannot be if it does not know the how and why of revolution.[51]

As with the criticism of 'glib' arguments on the matter of the material basis of reformism, here we have an explicit rejection of Lenin's concept of the party, regarded by the great majority of Maoists as axiomatically correct.[52] Instead of criticism, the CPB offered a caricature, a misrepresentation, of 'special men' doling out theory to the 'ignorant' Probably, Lenin's concept of the party was unpalatable to the trade union militants who dominated the party.

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[48] International Monetary Fund, *Statistics*, (Washington, 1977), p 108.
[49] Her Majesty's Stationary Office, *National Income and Expenditure 1966-1976* (London, 1978), p 65.
[50] United Nations Organisation, *United Nations Statistical Yearbook* (New Yor, 1975), p. 82.
[51] CPB, *TBWCP*), p. 8.
[52] Lenin's ideas on the party can be found most succinctly in his works *What is to Be Done* and *One Step Forwards, Two Steps Back.* A dogmatic reading of these texts, especially of passages in *What is to be Done,* led some to conclude that the vanguard should be composed of intellectuals who would take Marxism to the workers. But here a 'vanguard party' is taken to be a party of the most politically conscious elements of the working-class and any other elements who wish to take up the revolutionary struggle against capitalism.

TBWCP was published towards the end of the period, briefly discussed in our introduction, of full employment and trade union militancy that followed the Second World War. Birch and many other trade union members of the CPB were intimately involved in this militancy. It was no doubt partly this experience that led Birch to boast in his preface to *TBWCP* that in Britain 'the incessant war rages, the classes cannot be reconciled. Today this is more and more clear, the contradictions cannot be concealed, hence revolution is the main trend.'. The CPB claimed that in 'every industrial country save Britain there is relative industrial peace. Here every agreement is but an armistice and tomorrow is the war.'.[53]

In contrast to Lenin, who argued that it was a vital task of a vanguard party to 'divert' the working class away from the spontaneous economic class struggle and take up the general political struggle against capital, the CPB considered that it was through the spontaneous struggle that the working-class would overthrow the capitalist class. Precisely how was never spelt out. The 1970s saw several bouts of intense class struggle in British industry. These led the CPB to claim that Britain was entering a revolutionary period. But it was not. Essentially, the industrial turmoil of the 1970s was a battle between capital and organised labour over how the economic class struggle should be conducted.

By the late 1960s the bourgeoisie was blaming trade union militancy for British economic decline relative to such rival imperialist powers as the USA and Germany. In 1971, the Conservative government, capitalising on anti-trade union sentiment stoked up by the media, passed an Industrial Relations Act which severely curtailed the power of the trade unions. Among other provisions, it established a National Industrial Court and effectively made unofficial strikes illegal. A CPGB-front, the Liaison Committee for the Defence of the Trade Unions (LCDTU), led militant opposition to the Act.

The CPB's AUEW members were very active in this organisation. The CPB was correct, given the passing of the Industrial Relations Act, to argue that to fight for higher wages 'when the policy of the capitalist class is to keep them down is in itself a political struggle.'.[54] But even so, the fight against the Industrial Relations Act was essentially a fight to ensure that the working-class could fight for better wages and conditions on more favourable terrain.

Shortly after the CPB's Second Congress, page one of *The Worker* claimed that 'protracted war' is the 'strategy for the working-class. Rival strategies, such as the revisionists' call for the return of a Labour Government and the Trotskyists' demand that the Trades Union Congress (TUC) call a general strike were criticised, rightly so, but for the wrong reasons. The CPB's 'protracted war' strategy was based on an erroneous assumption that capitalism was mired in a crisis so severe that the capitalist class had declared war on the working-class. The economic struggle was sure to escalate to new heights, such heights that the army would be deployed against strikers with, 'as in Ireland, orders to shoot to kill.'.[55']

The poverty of this strategy was unintentionally but starkly illustrated by *The Worker* in June 1972. A page one banner headline proclaimed: 'One War: One Strategy'. Beneath were two articles. One welcomed recent defeats for US imperialism in the national liberation war in

[53] CPB, *TBWCP,* p 1; p. 6.
[54] *The Worker*, July 1971.
[55] *The Worker*, July 1971.

Vietnam. The other, more prominent article, under the headline 'Protracted War Basic for Britain', bathetically welcomed the support of the National Committee of the AUEW for a pay claim.[56]

In the winter of 1972, a few months into the 'protracted war', the CPB announced that 'the mobilisation of workers in the revolutionary movement has begun. All the factors of a potential revolutionary situation are present.'.[57] The CPB was not of course alone in such wishful thinking. The revolutionary left in general, like Marx in his day, was always discerning revolutionary potential in this or that development. But what constituted a revolutionary situation? Lenin argued, in summary, that a revolutionary situation occurred when the ruling class could no longer rule in the old way and the revolutionary classes were no long prepared to be ruled in the old way.[58] This seems correct. These conditions had certainly been present in France in 1789, in Russia in 1917 and in Germany in 1919 (though in countries such as China power had been won at the end of a protracted people's war rather than by insurrection).

In 1972 there were two notable outbursts of class struggle in Britain. Both were resolved in a way that demonstrates that Britain was far from being in a potential revolutionary situation. In January, the month in which the CPB claimed that such a situation existed, the first national official miners' strike since the general strike of 1926 began. The cause of the strike was government attempts to curb public sector pay (coalmining was then a nationalised industry). Six weeks into the strike, in which power cuts were causing increasing disruption to industry (supplies of coal to electricity generating plants were low), the government decided it would offer the miners a 27% pay increase, an increase well above the then rate of inflation of 7.13%. The offer was accepted.

The CPB reacted to the successful miners' strike by claiming that May Day 1972 'finds the British working-class in a higher state of political struggle than at any time in its history.'[59] Even allowing for the degree of hindsight allowed by the passage of fifty years, this was an extraordinarily subjective assessment. A 'higher state' than when the Chartists drilled in their hundreds of thousands demanding the Peoples' Charter? A higher state than during the 'Red Year' of 1919 when the government, fearful of insurrection, sent troops to Glasgow and gunboats to the Mersey? A higher state than during the General Strike of 1926?

Every edition of *The Worker* carried ample evidence that the great majority of working-class people accepted the capitalist system and sought only to improve their condition within it. *The Worker*'s regular 'On the Industrial Front' section, containing news of disputes over pay, conditions, working practices, redundancies and so on, showed that these disputes were fought on terrain that both management and workers fundamentally accepted. Take, for example, a dispute at Swan Hunter's Tyneside shipyard. Fitters were suspended because they refused to work overtime during their lunch break. After a five day strike the employers backed down and reinstated the fitters.[60] Or take the case of workers at the engineering company C.A. Parsons who forced the employers to back down from an attempt to end a

[56] *The Worker*, 1 June 1972.
[57] *The Worker*, January 1972.
[58] V.I. Lenin, *The Collapse of the Second International* (Moscow, 1976), p. 11.
[59] *The Worker*, May 1972.
[60] *The Worker*, November 1971.

closed shop (a place of work where employees had to join a trade union recognised by the management).[61]

July saw the second high point of the class struggle in 1972. Five dockers (the 'Pentonville 5' (named after the gaol in which they were imprisoned)), were gaoled under the provisions of the Industrial Relations Act (the dockers had continued mass unofficial picketing in defiance of an injunction issued by the National Industrial Relations Court). The government reacted to an eruption of mass unofficial strikes and a threat by the TUC to call a general strike by finding a pretext to release the dockers (an hitherto obscure state functionary, the Official Solicitor, obtained a court ruling that the dockers must be released on the grounds that there had been insufficient evidence for their arrest) and then effectively discarded the Industrial Relations Act. There was, understandably, a great deal of coverage of these events in *The Worker*. They were alleged to be 'rehearsals' for the 'final confrontation when it will not be individual factories occupied tactically but the whole employing class expropriated strategically.'.[62] How this would happen was not discussed.

Without the reserves provided by foreign investments in such places as South Africa and Malaya, it is possible that Britain in 1971-72 would have been in a potential revolutionary situation, that the bourgeoisie would have been unable to make the concessions and the tactical withdrawals from confrontation discussed above. Another confrontation with the miners came in 1973-74, when the government's continued attempts to restrict public sector pay led to an overtime ban by the NUM. In response, the government imposed a three-day working week which led to domestic power cuts. A strike by the NUM began in the Winter of 1974. The government called and lost an election, essentially on the issue of whether the government or the NUM should run the country.

The Conservative government's election defeat meant, claimed the CPB, that Britain was now not just in a potential revolutionary situation: it was in an actual 'revolutionary situation because we are more and more coming to realise that our basic demands for a decent life for ourselves and our children cannot be met within the capitalist system.'.[63] But the new Labour Government offered the miners their demanded 35% pay increase, again well above the then inflation rate of 16.04%. It was accepted. |

A second General Election later in 1974 returned a Labour Government with a small majority. The government and the TUC then agreed a 'social contract' in which, in return for wage restraint, the government repealed the Industrial Relations Act and, among other initiatives intended to pacify the working-class, introduced food subsidies, froze council house rents and substantially increased social security benefits. But pay restraint at a time of high inflation led in 1978-79 to the mass strikes of the so-called 'Winter of Discontent' and to the return of a Conservative government committed to a new attack on organised labour (discussed in Chapter Five).

Around the time of the miners' strikes the CPB published Guerrilla *Struggle and the Working-class.* The title reflected the CPB's specious equation of the industrial struggle in

[61] *The Worker*, June 1972.
[62] *The Worker*, July 1972.
[63] *The Worker*, 21 March 1974.

Britain with the guerrilla warfare then being waged by the NLF in Vietnam and by the People's Liberation Army in China during the revolutionary civil wars of the 1930s and 1940s. Mao's concept of protracted peoples' war was deployed (though not cited) in support of the CPB's contention that factories in Britain could be used in the same way: 'our general principle is to lure [the enemy] in deep, withdraw into the base area and fight him there, because this is our surest method of smashing his offensive.'[64] *The Worker* claimed that 'Our guns at this time are industrial action whenever and however it occurs. Our village bases the factories.'. [65]

It is difficult to know where to start when criticising the deeply misconceived strategy advocated in *Guerrilla Struggle*. Perhaps the first point that should be made is that guerrilla struggle in China and Vietnam was an aspect of national-democratic revolution in semi-feudal, predominantly agrarian societies. It is unlikely that strategy and tactics appropriate to such societies were appropriate to the struggle for socialist revolution in advanced capitalist societies such as Britain. Take, for example, the 'base areas' referred to by Mao and the 'village bases' in Vietnam. These were places controlled by the revolutionary forces, places where the revolutionary transformation of society began. But factories in Britain are controlled by the employers, with, when necessary, the support of the police and, on occasion, the army. They could not be used as revolutionary base areas, as the example of allegedly doing so provided by the CPB – enforcing a reformist demand for a closed shop - showed. [66]

Guerrilla Struggle argued that the political consciousness of workers organised in the trade unions, the 'most advanced' section of the working-class,[67] would gradually be raised during an attritional guerrilla struggle. There were many highly class conscious and even politically conscious members of the unions. But the unions were not the 'most advanced' section of the working-class. For decades they had collectively been, particularly such unions of the skilled industrial workers as Birch's AUEW, the principal social prop of the social-imperialist Labour Party.

Shortly after mass strikes had forced the release of the 'Pentonville 5', *The Worker* had insisted that 'the spontaneous struggle is not enough.'. To 'gain final victory over their class enemy' workers 'must have a revolutionary party'. Workers were urged to join the CPB.[68] *Guerrilla Struggle* referred several times to the CPB's leadership role in the factories. But its allotted role was effectively that of a communist-led trade union branch. There was no indication that the CPB accepted a responsibility to lead workers in the general struggle for power, that it should attempt, for instance, to build support for national liberation struggles against British imperialism or to fight the racism and sexism endemic in British factories.

By 1978 the CPB was no longer claiming that Britain was on the cusp of revolution. But it was still insistent that the economic struggle of the industrial unions was the way capitalism would be overthrown:

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[64] CPB, *Guerrilla Struggle and the Working-class* (London, nd), p. 6.
[65] *The Worker*, 25 July 1974.
[66] CPB, *Guerrilla Struggle and the Working-class*, p.4.
[67] CPB, *Guerrilla Struggle and the Working-class*, p.4
[68] *The Worker*, August 1972.

> to defeat capitalism we must assert the role of the trade unions. We must make the demands for employment and wages. And in making those demands that yesterday were traditional demands of workers, know that today they are revolutionary demands as capitalism in absolute decline cannot accommodate them…The industrial workers bear a grave responsibility to the rest of the class… it is upon the factory floor, at the point where wealth is actually produced that the struggle is most crucial, it is where the fiercest blows can be dealt to capitalism, and in the end it is where capitalism can only be destroyed.[69]

Is the factory floor the place where the fiercest blows can be dealt to capitalism? And is this where capitalism can only be destroyed? This strategic orientation had much more in common with that of the pre-First World War quasi-syndicalist SLP,[70] which had provided the early CPGB with many of its industrial militants, than with that of the Leninist communist movement that had emerged during and just after the First World War, a movement that stressed the fundamental importance of state power much more than the undeniably important struggle at the place of work. When material conditions in Britain permit a bid for working-class power, this will surely be achieved not on factory floors but through an equivalent of the storming of the Winter Palace. But the CPB habitually referred to the 'employing class', to 'capitalists' and so on and not to the bourgeoisie as a whole or the bourgeois state as the entity that must be overthrown.

A Tribune of the People or a Trade Union Secretary?

In *What is to be Done*, Lenin argued that a revolutionary's model should not be a 'trade union secretary' but a 'tribune of the people, who is able to react to every manifestation of tyranny and oppression, no matter where it appears, no matter what stratum or class of the people it affects.'.[71] It is true, as the CPB's leadership pointed out after its Second Congress, that *What is to be Done* had been a product of a very different society than 1970s Britain. It was written in 1902, in Tsarist Russia, where the proletariat was a tiny proportion of the population and where a democratic revolution still had to be accomplished. Even so, Lenin's essential point - that a revolutionary party must seek to unite all who can be united against the main enemy - is universally applicable.

But the CPB did not aspire to be a tribune of the people: it aspired only to lead the struggle of the working class against the capitalist class. Moreover, implicitly, there was no need for the working-class to seek allies, for there were only two classes in Britain. There, 'the oldest and most proletarianized of capitalist countries, all the intermediate classes left over by feudalism have been absorbed into the proletariat, as has the peasantry.'[72] It is true that the peasantry had been 'absorbed' (though not all into the proletariat). But the 'middling sort', the intermediate strata and classes between the working-class and the bourgeoisie, had grown in Britain in the Twentieth Century. According to the Revolutionary Communist Union (RCU), briefly discussed later, these intermediate classes constituted c. 27% of the population.[73]

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[69] *The Worker*, 4 May 1978.
[70] See Challinor (1977) for a discussion of the SLP.
[71] V. I. Lenin, *What is to be Done. Burning Questions of our Movement* (Beijing, 1965), p. 82.
[72] CPB, *White Collar – a Myth Destroyed, a Class made Stronger* (London, nd, c. 1973), p. 11.
[73] RCU, *Draft Programme for the Revolutionary Communists in Britain.*

There are still numerous small farmers, smallholders, shopkeepers and suchlike, 'left over.' Such people, leading an uncertain, precarious existence between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, had been the main social base of fascism in the inter-war years and continued to provide support for right-wing politics in post-war Britain. The CPB recognised that capitalist development had created many people working as nurses, computer programmers and other technicians, teachers, university lecturers and clerical workers. But for the CPB, these too were all proletarians. According to Ash, the proletariat constituted 'at least ninety per cent' of the population.[74] According to the CPB:

> Today, the term 'middle class is an anachronism. As more capital is concentrated in fewer hands, an increasing proportion of the population is reduced to selling its labour to live. The capitalist class, ever dwindling in numbers, now stands in opposition to the vast majority of the people, the mass of wage workers. It is an irreconcilable antagonism.[75]

But selling labour is not the same thing as selling labour-power. It is, as Marx showed, through the sale of commodities with surplus value created by labour power that the proletariat is exploited by the bourgeoisie. Arguably, many white-collar employees involved in the productive process, such as computer operators and clerks, are selling labour power and are proletarians, but the great majority of the 'middling sort' do not and are not. By treating all such people as an undifferentiated, homogeneous mass, the CPB ignored the fact that many of them, by virtue of income, status and conditions of work provide a social base for right-wing or reformist politics.

The CPB's 'two class' analysis allowed the party to claim, in the 'false ideas' internal document of 1971, that 'our party is composed solely of members of the proletariat.'.[76] But it was not. Many of its members were teachers, social workers, intellectuals and professionals and so on, not to speak of trade union officials. Inevitably, they took into the organisation middle class prejudices and convictions. Revolution is not, by-and-large, attractive to such people. As the CWM commented, 'the 'two-class line appealed to individuals who wanted socialism and who wanted to identify with the working-class, but who didn't want to remould their ideology or…their lifestyle.'.[77]

The CPB's fallacies on the matter of the class structure of Britain raise what was the principal objection to its economist, trade union-based strategy. It was a strategy – probably manifesting an indifference to the struggles of others by the trade unionists, the mostly skilled, white, male trade unionists, who ideologically and politically dominated the party – that was incapable of uniting into one revolutionary movement, into one united front, the various struggles of all those with an objective interest in overthrowing capitalism. What place in the CPB's strategy for those oppressed because of their ethnicity or gender, whether proletarians or not? What place in it for the unemployed? What place for those workers in casual employment or in small businesses or sweatshops or who were home workers? What

[74] Ash (1978), p. 231.
[75] CPB, *White Collar – a Myth Destroyed,* p. 12.
[76] 'Burning Question of our Party', Richards, *Second Wave.*
[77] CWM 'The CPB, A New Revisionism'. (Internal CWM document, 1977).

place for those revolutionary minded 'middling sort' people who were not proletarians, despite the CPB's insistence that they were?

Consider, for example, the matter of ethnicity. In Britain in the early 1970s there were c. 2.3 million ethnic minority people, mainly of Irish, Indian sub-continent or Caribbean origin or descent.[78] The ideological and political climate of that time was increasingly hostile to such people. Support for the fascist National Front was fostered by racist politicians such as Enoch Powell and racist newspapers such as *The Sun*. Tory and Labour politicians vied to argue that immigration was causing serious social problems and must be curbed. All ethnic minority people, of whatever class, were at risk, particularly the non-white among them, from various forms of oppression – such as the immigration laws (these did not apply to Irish people), racial discrimination in housing, employment and so on, police harassment and attacks from racist thugs.

These realities were recognised by the early CPB. In 1970, for instance, before economism gained a firm grip on the party, the CPB had participated in two London demonstrations protesting against persecution of the USA's Black Panther Party. *The Worker* stressed that the demonstrations were directed 'just as much against racialism in Britain'. An extract from a leaflet handed out by the Black People's Alliance reprinted in *The Worker* denounced:

> The persecution of Asians from East Africa through the passage of the Commonwealth [Immigration] Act of 1968 which refuses them entry into Britain although they are British citizens holding British passports is perhaps the clearest example of this [racism]. If the Labour Government could overnight, create two kinds of citizens in law simply on the basis of race, then what is to prevent any future government from deporting British citizens born and bred in Britain but who are black? [79]

But later, especially after the adoption of *TBWCP*, The CPB tended strongly to reductionism on the matter of racism, to treat it, if it all, as simply a complicating factor in its economist strategy and as a bourgeois plot to split the working-class on racial lines. Such reductionism was manifest in a CPB handbill of 1971 attacking a new immigration bill drafted by the Conservative government elected in 1970.[80] The handbill linked the new bill to the Bill then also before parliament:

> The Industrial Relations Bill would make it possible to fine and imprison workers who strike. The Immigration Bill would make it possible to deport them. By this fascist measure any Home Secretary can decree, without any trial or tribunal, which members of an entire section of the working-class should be thrown out of the country because their presence is "not conductive to the public good"… Divide and rule is the weapon British imperialism has always used.[81]

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[78] Owen (1995), p. 6.
[79] *The Worker,* April 1970.
[80] Based on the bill, the Immigration Act of 1971 ensured that only Commonwealth citizens with a 'patrial' connection could now migrate to the UK. In practice this meant that few non-white such citizens could migrate but that many from the white dominions such as Australia could.
[81] 'Immigration', cited in Richards, *Second Wave.*

In 1972 The CPB held a party school on 'migrant workers'. While it was acknowledged that 'there are special problems connected with racialism and the deliberate exploitation of racialism by successive British governments', the 'problem' to be discussed was 'how to bring migrant workers into the unified stream of a class-conscious, politicised British working-class struggle…for the overthrow of capitalism.'.[82] It might be thought that one very important aspect of building a 'united stream' of struggle would be to combat the racism endemic in the white working-class. But in 1973, the year following the party school, there was virtually nothing in *The Worker* on racist oppression. There was, among a surfeit of strike news, a report that the engineers' union had condemned racism, which the capitalist class was said to be using to 'divide the working-class on ethnic lines and in so doing prolong the capitalist system.' [83]

It would be labouring the point to cite many more examples of the CPB's essential indifference to the matter of racist oppression (the economism documented here was replicated in the CPB's line and practice on the matter of women's oppression, as we will see in our case study). Two more examples will suffice. Race (and gender) was a prime factor in the two year-long industrial dispute at Grunwick's photographic processing plant in London. The plant employed mainly Asian women, who in August 1976 went on strike over poor pay and conditions. The dispute then became a strike for union recognition when the women joined the Association of Professional, Executive, Clerical and Computer Staff (APEX).

Despite, or perhaps because of, the CPB's ambition to build a 'unified stream' of struggle, *The Worker* treated the dispute at Grunwick's as simply a strike for union recognition without mentioning the racist management that had precipitated the original strike or the fact that the strikers were mainly Asian women.[84] A sit-in protest by the strikers at the TUC's headquarters in November 1977 against the official trade union movement's racist indifference to their struggle (there had been many examples of rank-and-file support, notably postal workers' refusal to deliver mail) was not reported by *The Worker*, nor was the final defeat of the strike in July 1978.[85]

In 1978 the Greater London Council (GLC) proposed that in and around Spittalfields in London's East End, several blocks of flats should house only Bengali immigrants. This, it was argued, could provide safe havens in an area that had become notorious for racist attacks on Bengalis. According to *The Worker*, the 'sinister' aim of the proposal was to segregate workers, thus 'allowing capitalism to divide and rule.'.[86] A member of the RCLB resident in the area had attended a public meeting held to discuss the proposal. He reported that many of the objections which had been raised at the meeting had been on the racist grounds that Bengalis were being privileged over the housing needs of 'our' people. Some of those objecting had identified themselves as trade unionists living in the area.[87] But *The Worker* reported merely that a 'large meeting of East Londoners' had condemned the GLC's

[82] 'Party School on Immigrant Workers', cited in Richards, *Second Wave.*
[83] *The Worker*, 12 July 1973.
[84] *The Worker,* 20 September 1976.
[85] For a fuller account of the dispute see
The Grunwick Dispute @ https://www.striking-women.org/module/striking-out/grunwick-dispute
[86] *The Worker*, 29 June 1978.
[87] Notes taken by this writer at the RCLB PC meeting of July 1978.

proposal.[88] How do we account for the disparity between these reports? The most likely explanation is that the economist CPB was reluctant to challenge the racism endemic in the white working-class in the 1970s.

For the CPB, certainly after the adoption of T*BWCP*, the ideal revolutionary **was** a trade union secretary, not least because it had no vision of socialism as a society in which all human relationships would be transformed, in which all exploitative and oppressive relations are increasingly eradicated. Perhaps the starkest expression of the CPB's crass economism is a passing remark by Ash. For him, communism was the world turned upside down. Ash went 'demonstrating and marching around outside in the rain in support of this cause or that while the class enemy remained warm and dry and fat inside.' The essence of politics for Ash was 'to reverse that situation and get *them* outside in the rain.'. [89]

This dreary, reductionist view of socialism was present at the CPB's London May Day Rally of 1981. A few weeks earlier there had been an uprising (a matter further discussed in Chapter Five) in London's Brixton, mostly by young black proletarians, sparked by police harassment but fed by such underlying problems as youth unemployment. For several days there were street battles with the police. The uprising was clearly of little interest or significance to the CPB, for there was not even a mention of these stirring events in the May Day edition of *The Worker* or in the speeches made at the rally. Far more significant to the CPB was a strike by civil servants, given a big page one splash.[90] The CPB's indifference to the Brixton uprising was but one manifestation of a steady ideological and political degeneration that had taken place since its Second Congress. Another was a conflation of class and nation.

The CPB Picks up the Union Jack.

There has always been a tendency among Marxists in the imperialist countries to fly the national flag rather than or at least as well as the Red Flag. Birch served his political apprenticeship in the CPGB in the late 1930s. The Birchites had inherited the Comintern's post-Seventh Congress conflation of the national interest with that of the proletariat. It began to seriously assert itself in the CPB in the mid-70s when, alarmed by Britain's industrial decline, it began to insist that the working-class must take over from the bourgeoisie responsibility for the British nation.

Britain's industrial decline was of course a consequence of anti-colonial struggles, competition with other industrial powers, especially Germany and the USA, and the increasing parasitism of Britain, the decline of industrial capital relative to finance capital. British national decline had been the principal reason why in 1973 Britain had joined the European Economic Community (EEC) (the 'common market'), the predecessor of the European Union.

During the 1975 referendum campaign on whether Britian should remain a member of the EEC, the CPB claimed that the bourgeoisie hoped, in collaboration with other European

[88] *The Worker*, 20 June1978.
[89] Ash (1978), p. 211.
[90] *The Worker*, 7 May 1981.

imperialists, to 'dissipate and contain the militancy of British workers.'.[91] After the referendum (convincingly won by remainers), *The Worker*, under the headline 'Who are the Real Patriots?', attacked the bourgeoisie for selling 'the country's assets' to rival imperialists. The working-class was now 'the only guarantee of Britain's survival.' The fruits of the industrial revolution were now at risk. A new industrial revolution was essential.[92]

For Marx, the original industrial revolution, the 'rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production' in Britain, had involved 'the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the 'aboriginal population' of the Americas, 'the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black skins.'.[93] We must assume that the leaders of the CPB were aware of this history, this, in Marx's words, 'blood and dirt', such horrors as were to be found on the slave plantations of Jamaica. They choose instead to promote an 'our island story' narrative of the origins of the industrial revolution, a narrative that stressed the sturdy endeavours of British inventors, entrepreneurs and artisans. The industrial revolution had been:

> dependent on the development and continuity of industrial skill – from the millwright to the engineer, from Whitworth to Whittle. Because in finality industry is only labour – past and present, its future depends on the transmission and development of industrial skill and knowledge from one generation to the next.[94]

Nationalist themes were prominent too in Birch's report to the CPB's Fourth Congress of 1976. In a long litany of aspects of British decline, Birch informed the delegates that once 'more than half the world's ships were launched in British yards. In 1955 the proportion was still more than a quarter. By 1973, however, according to Birch, the figure was just 3.6%. Birch did not mention the vast colonial empire that had necessitated and underpinned British dominance of shipbuilding.

In contrast to *The Worker*'s portrayal of industrial decline as a plot against the working-class, Birch rightly attributed it to the political economy of capitalism: Britain 'is now 'the sick man' of world capitalism, 'providing us with the clearest demonstration obtaining anywhere of the fatal stranglehold which capitalist property relations place upon the social forces of production.'. [95] But according to Birch, 'only from us [the working class] can come the necessary action to redeem the present desperate situation.'. What should happen if the working-class did gain responsibility for British industry? Birch clearly did not envisage that a socialist Britain should radically restructure its relationship with the oppressed peoples and nations. 'Why', Birch asked:

> cannot Britain sustain itself as an island? What is lacking? There is no lack of anything necessary to provide the workers with full employment and improved standards of living… in terms of raw materials there is no overall shortage. Such

[91] *The Worker*, 15 May 1975.
[92] *The Worker*, 18 October 1975.
[93] K. Marx, *Capital, a Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production Vol. I* (London, 1976), p. 703.
[94] CPB, *For an Industrial Revolution* (London, 1976), p. 1.
[95] All quotes on Birch's report are from CPB, *Report of the Fourth Congress of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)*.

> raw materials as we lack are available in the world in exchange for the products that we are best at making.

For Birch, the imperialist relationships between Britain and the oppressed peoples and nations that had greatly helped, and were continuing to help, Britain to be primarily an exporter of manufactured goods and importer of raw materials, were irrelevant. These relationships had greatly helped to provide British workers with employment and rising living standards. But Birch justified the CPB's post-Second Congress indifference to national-liberation struggles by insisting that the 'working-class allies itself with none other than the working-class' - the proletariat is 'the only revolutionary force' - thus airily dismissing the revolutionary potential of most of the people of the world, those of the oppressed peoples and nations.

The CPB's gross social-chauvinism was, paradoxically, probably the main reason why it refused to support the CPC's 'Three Worlds' theory. Devised in the 1970s by the right wing of the CPC, the theory was a Sinocentric adaptation of Seventh Congress strategy, suited to an international environment in which China was threatened by the Soviet Union,[96] much as the Soviet Union had been threatened by Nazi Germany in the 1930s. To support European unity and fight for anti-Soviet national unity, as the CPC advocated, would be to ally with a capitalist class that, according to the CPB, was betraying the British national interest.

China, the 'Three Worlds' Theory and the CPB.

The 'Three Worlds' theory had first been expounded by Deng Xiaoping at the United Nations Organization in 1974. The theory (discussed below) was a response to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, which convinced the CPC that the Soviet Union had become a social-imperialist state that posed a serious threat to China.[97] An armed border dispute in 1969 reinforced this belief. The Soviet threat to China caused, clearly with Mao's approval, a *rapprochement* with the USA, leading to US President Nixon's visit to China in 1972.

After the revolution of 1949, the USA had treated the PRC with unrelenting hostility. It refused to recognise its revolutionary regime. It supported military incursions into revolutionary China from the still to be liberated Tibet by remnants of the defeated Kuomintang army. It imposed a trade blockade. It vetoed China's admission to the United Nations. It fostered a *cordon sanitaire* of anti-communist dictatorships in south-east Asia. Chinese and US troops fought on opposite sides in the Korean civil war of 1950-53. When Nixon visited China the US imperialists had been engaged in their brutal war against the people of Vietnam for several years. For communists, US imperialism was the chief enemy of the people of the world.

In 1971, in an early indicator of an emerging *rapprochement* between the USA and China, the USA did not veto China's admission to the United Nations. An early sign that China's foreign policy would change as relations with the USA thawed, was that in the same year the

[96] After its 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union claimed it had a right (dubbed the 'Brezhnev Doctrine') to intervene in the internal affairs of any socialist country.
[97] See CPC, *Leninism or Social-Imperialism -in Commemoration of the Centenary of the Birth of the Great Lenin* (Beijing, 1970).

USA and China both opposed East Pakistan's (now Bangladesh) secession from greater Pakistan. The USA and China were both anxious, especially after India invaded East Pakistan to support its secession, that it should not fall under Soviet influence. Not long after Nixon's visit, in a further sign of a now burgeoning *rapprochement,* China reported with mild disapproval, but did not condemn, the CIA-engineered military *coup* in Chile in 1973 and recognised with unseemly haste the Pinochet military dictatorship installed by the *coup*.

China's changing foreign policy had created considerable unease among Maoists in Britain. If, Maoists mostly thought, the people of East Pakistan wanted independence, they should have it. The CPB had been quite clear on this matter. It denounced the 'compradors and big landlords of Pakistan [who] have used every kind of fascist and savage measure to bring the people of East Pakistan to their knees.'.[98] Had, Maoists debated, China's stance on Bangladesh been a necessary compromise with US imperialism? If so, Mao had been quite clear that compromises with imperialism by socialist countries need not lead to the communists of the imperialist countries involved making compromises with 'their' imperialists - the 'people of those countries will continue to wage different struggles in accordance with their different conditions.'.[99] But not long after the *coup* in Chile, the CPC's International Liaison Department (ILD) pressed the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA (RCP,USA)[100] to give priority to opposing Soviet social-imperialism rather than US imperialism.[101]

The essential points of the 'Three Worlds' theory were well known to Maoists in Britain. They had been the subject of regular and systematic propaganda in *Peking Review,* which Maoists tended to look to for guidance on what stance to take on the international situation. Deng referred to three types of country and to the contradictions between them. The 'First World' countries were the two 'superpowers', the USA and the Soviet Union, the 'Second World, the other major capitalist countries, and the 'Third World', the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.[102]

Deng's country-based model did have a certain basis in reality. But it was increasingly promoted in *Peking Review* as an implicit replacement (after Mao's death as an explicit replacement) for the class-based analysis of 'four fundamental contradictions' (between the socialist countries and the imperialist countries; between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the capitalist countries; between the oppressed peoples and nations and imperialism; and among the imperialist countries) generally used by Maoists when analysing the international

[98] *The Worker*, May 1971.
[99] Mao Ze Dong, 'Some Points in Appraisal of the Present International Situation', *Selected Works, vol. IV* (Beijing, 1969), p. 87.
[100] After the death of Mao in 1976, the RCP,USA played an exemplary role in opposing the capitalist-roaders who seized power in China, in rallying Maoist parties and organisations to oppose their 'Three Worlds' theory and in critically evaluating the history of the international communist movement. But in recent years it seems to have degenerated into a cult based on the writings of its leader Bob Avakian. See https://revcom.us/en/bob_avakian.
[101] RCP, USA, ''Three Worlds' Strategy: Apology for Capitulation', *Revolution*, November 1978, p12.
[102] 'Speech at the UN by Teng Tsiao-ping, Chairman of the Delegation of the People's Republic of China' *Peking Review*, !2 April 1974.

situation.[103] Revolution had no place in the 'Three Worlds' theory. Rather, an international united front should be formed against the two superpowers. 'Second World' countries could participate in the united front. They should oppose threats to their national independence from the superpowers and unite against them with the 'Third World'. In the 'Third World' and 'Second World' all classes should unite to oppose the two superpowers. Deng's call for a united front against **both** superpowers was camouflage for the PRC's emerging *de facto* alliance with the USA.

In 1977, after Mao's death, the CPC published *Chairman Mao's Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds is a Major Contribution to Marxism-Leninism*,[104] in which it was asserted that the theory was a 'global revolutionary strategy.'.[105] Was the 'Three Worlds' theory Mao's theory? The available evidence suggests that the theory had been cooked up by the right wing of the CPC. There is some documentary evidence that in the years immediately before his death Mao had opposed those, notably Premier Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping, the chief capitalist-roader, who were promoting the theory.[106] Some corroboration is provided by the post-Mao CPC. Mao's allies, the 'Gang of Four' (discussed in later chapters), were said to have 'frantically' opposed 'Chairman Mao's theory of the three worlds. 'Hoisting a most "revolutionary" banner' they had 'vainly tried to sabotage the building of an international united front against hegemonism…doing Soviet social-imperialism a great favour.'.[107]

From the mid-1970s, the Soviet Union, sensing advantage after the USA's ignominious defeat in Vietnam in 1975, had begun to challenge the USA-dominated world order, culminating in its invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Soviet expansionism was now regularly denounced by China, while the existing domination of the imperialist order by the USA and its allies was virtually ignored. In 1975, for instance, China argued that Soviet 'undisguised expansion and crude interference' was the principal reason for the civil war which erupted in Angola shortly after it had won independence from Portugal. The earlier invasion of Angola by US-backed South African forces determined to overthrow the new revolutionary nationalist government was not discussed.[108] Similarly, in the Autumn of 1976 *Peking Review* claimed that the Soviet Union was now the Third World's 'most dangerous enemy.'. There was no mention of the installation of a US-backed military dictatorship in Argentina only six months previously.[109]

China's emerging anti-Soviet alliance with the US imperialists (discussed further in Chapter Four), prompted criticism by those Marxist-Leninists who regarded the leaders of the CPSU as revisionists, but who did not accept the Maoist stance that the Soviet Union had become a

[103] When this analytical model was promoted by the CPC in 1963, the first of the four contradictions had been defined as 'between the socialist camp and the imperialist camp'. CPC, 'A Proposal Concerning the General Line of the International Communist Movement', *The Polemic on the General Line*, p. 7.
[104] CPC, *Chairman Mao's Theory of the Differentiation of the Three Worlds is a Major Contribution to Marxism-Leninism*, First published in *Peking Review* (45, November 4, 1977) and then as a pamphlet (Beijing, 1977).
[105] *Chairman Mao's Theory*, p. 1.
[106] Lotta (1978), pp. 32-34.
[107] *Chairman Mao's Theory*, p. 24.
[108] 'Chinese Foreign Ministry Statement on the Angolan Situation, *Peking Review,* 21 November 1975.
[109] 'Soviet Social-Imperialism – the Third World's Most Dangerous Enemy', *Peking Review* 44, 1976 (October 29, 1976).

social-imperialist state. Perhaps, it was suggested, Soviet-US contention in such places as Angola should be seen as aid to national liberation movements rather than as social-imperialist contention with the US imperialists? In the USA, Jonathan Arthur argued that 'capitalism has not been restored, and cannot be restored in the Soviet Union or any other socialist country.'.[110] Also in the USA, Al Szymanski insisted that the Soviet Union was still a socialist country.[111] The RCP,USA published a refutation of this 'tarnished socialism' thesis[112] and in 1983 organised a debate on the matter between Szymanski and Raymond Lotta.[113]

In Britain, many of those critical of this or that aspect of Soviet policy, still regarded the Soviet Union, the one gain of the upheavals of 1917-21, as a socialist country. Many Maoists, especially those who had come out of the CPGB and/or had connections with the official labour movement, had vestiges of emotional and ideological ties with the Soviet Union. They might believe that the CPSU had become a revisionist party, even that capitalism had been restored: but having a deep intellectual belief in the Maoist critique of the Soviet Union was another matter. As we will see in the next chapter, the members of the Coventry group of the CFB were in this company. The CPB eventually joined those Marxist-Leninists who argued that the Soviet Union was still a socialist country.

China's tilt to the USA had probably been the principal reason for rapidly deteriorating relations between the CPC and the CPB in the 1970s. Warm accounts of CPB delegations to China in *Peking Review* gave way to cooler accounts and eventually to a rupture. A delegation in 1971 was said to have had talks with the CPC 'in a friendly atmosphere of proletarian internationalism.'. The delegation 'was given a warm send-off at Beijing airport' by Zhou.[114]

But shortly afterwards came evidence of China's tilt. In the CPB, China's failure to support Bangladesh's fight for secession from Pakistan and a revolutionary upsurge in Ceylon (soon to be renamed Sti Lanka) in 1971-72 aroused much disquiet. In 1973, at the end of another delegation, there was a very short announcement that the CPB's leader, Reg Birch, had had a 'cordial and friendly conversation' with Zhou.[115] But Ian Williams, a member of the delegation, told the present writer that talks between the ILD and the delegates had been anything but cordial. There had been frosty exchanges, especially on the matter of Bangladesh. According to the CWM, after the final CPB delegation in 1976, Birch told other leading members of the CPB that China's foreign policy was 'revisionist'.[116]

The Maoists Split from the CPB.

[110] Arthur (1977), p. v.
[111] Szymanski (1979).
[112] RCP,USA, *The 'Tarnished Socialism Thesis or the Political Economy of Soviet Social-Imperialism,* The Communist, vol.2, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 1978).
[113] RCP,USA, 'The Soviet Union: Socialist or Social-Imperialist? Essays Toward the Debate on the Nature of Soviet Society', *The Communist* (Chicago, 1983) & 'The Soviet Union: Socialist or Social-Imperialist? Part II: the Question is Joined', *The Communist* (Chicago, 1983).
[114] *Peking Review*, January 1971.
[115] 'Comrade Reg Birch Leaves Peking for Home', *Peking Review*, 8 June 1973.
[116] 'Birch Sinks Lower', *New Age*, no. 3 (April-May 1978).

The deteriorating relationship between the CPC and the CPB became public at the CPB's Fourth Congress of 1976, at which, Birch, clearly in reference to the 'Three Worlds' theory, claimed that the 'division of the world into 1, 2, 3' was 'artificial and mechanistic.'.[117] The increasing hostility of the Birchites towards China was one of the main reasons why most of the Maoists split from the CPB in the mid-1970s. According to Williams, many of them had hoped that the Birchites could be defeated at the Fourth Congress. But they were not. The CPB's by then social-chauvinist stance on Ireland (discussed in our case study) had already caused the members of the Bristol Branch to depart in 1974.[118] Many members left shortly after the Fourth Congress and formed the CWM. Prior to their departure these oppositionists circulated to the whole membership (and later to the wider movement) *The Absolute Decline* [a reference to the 'absolute decline' which the CPB claimed Britain was in] *of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)*. The NCG was founded after this new exodus.

Those responsible for *Absolute Decline* were unlikely, at the conclusion of a gruelling internal struggle, to have been entirely objective on the reasons for their split. But the charges made against the Birchites provide corroborative evidence of an authoritarian culture discussed earlier. A particularly shocking allegation is that just prior to the Congress, Birch, in the manner of a medieval monarch dealing with a recalcitrant courtier, suspended CC member Ian Williams, who had dared to vote against him, 'until such time as he "recants and changes his vote."'. Just as shocking was the allegation that the Congress document was not discussed by the CC prior to the Congress and that it was not seen by most branches until a week beforehand.[119] *Absolute Decline* and the role subsequently played by the CWM in the Maoist movement are more fully discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

The CPB Breaks with China and Returns to the Soviet Fold.

On the occasion of Mao's death in 1976, *The Worker* dedicated its first two pages to a eulogy. In a message to the CPC, the CPB's Central Committee was said to be 'profoundly shocked and grieved to learn about Chairman Mao's death. It sends its deepest fraternal condolences to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, all comrades and the people of China.'.[120] But *The Worker* did not comment on the arrests of the 'Gang of Four' which soon followed Mao's death.

In 1977 the CPC indicated that relations with the CPB had been severed by publishing in *Peking Review*, under the heading 'The Central Task is to Establish a Revolutionary Communist Party', lengthy extracts from the CFB's 'Call to the British Marxist-Leninist Movement.'.[121] This piece had sharply criticised the CPB's rejection of the CPC's 'Three Worlds' theory.[122] This particular criticism was not mentioned in *Peking Review*, but would undoubtedly have been appreciated by the ILD. It led to an invitation to the newly formed RCLB to send a delegation to China.

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[117] CPB, *Report of the Fourth Congress of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist),*
[118] Richards, *High Tide*, p. 90.
[119] CWM, *Absolute Decline*, p. 3.
[120] *The Worker*, 20 September 1976.
[121] *Peking Review*, 15 July 1977.
[122] CFB, 'Call to the British Marxist-Leninist Movement', *Revolution*, May 1977, p. 5.

Probably in response, the CPB published Mao's views on compromises with imperialism, suggesting that like the RCP,USA the CPB had been pressed by the ILD to give priority to fighting Soviet Social-Imperialism.[123] Published around the same time, the CPB's *Britain in the World 1977*, written, according to Podmore,[124] by Dorothy Birch, contained an all-round attack on China's foreign policy. Birch claimed that the CPC was urging the CPB 'to put into cold storage our revolutionary task and to join an alliance with our employing ruling class and to 'unite with [our] own imperialism to send US imperialism to defeat USSR imperialism.'. This would be a 'betrayal, a disowning of the revolutionary role and a revival of Second Internationalism.'. (Presumably, a reference to the support for war given by the parties of the Second International in 1914).[125] There was of course much truth to these allegations, particularly the reference to 'Second Internationalism'. But the CPB's opposition to China's foreign policy was emphatically not a manifestation of proletarian internationalism, which was entirely absent from Reg Birch's speech at the CPB's May Day rally of 1978 (the rally at which this writer was threatened with violence).

The speech was suffused with disgraceful social-chauvinism. In his remarks on the international class struggle Birch scorned the internationalist duty of workers in Britain to support the struggle of those peoples and nations oppressed and exploited by imperialism: 'shall we support [the third world] because they are so oppressed? We make the mistake of distinguishing such oppression from the exploitation workers suffer in Britain when the two things are the same.'.[126] With these remarks Birch was effectively denying the revolutionary character of the **national** struggle of the peoples of the Third World against imperialism. This may have been partly due to the influence of the PLA, which had always been ambivalent on this matter.

The PLA had courageously stood up to Soviet bullying and played a major role in opposing Soviet revisionism, but it was not a Maoist party.[127] The PLA's stance on the 'Three Worlds' theory was very similar to the CPB's. The PLA had severely criticised the CPC's advocacy of national unity in the 'second world' against the 'Soviet threat'. But in reacting to the CPC's revisionism, the PLA itself promoted revisionism, notably in denying, like the CPB, the revolutionary character of the national struggle of the oppressed peoples and nations.[128] This stance allowed the RCLB and other supporters of the 'Three Worlds' theory in Britain to denounce all those who opposed the theory as Albanian/Trotskyite ultra-lefts.[129]

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[123] 'Anniversary of Mao's Death', *The Worker*, September 12 1977.
[124] Podmore (2004), p. 147.
[125] CPB, *Britain in the World 1977* (London, nd), p. 1.
[126] *The Worker*, 4 May 1978.
[127] Enver Hoxha, the leader of the PLA, claimed that Mao was a revisionist and always had been a revisionist. In the words of the RCP,USA, at 'a time when the international communist movement is at a crossroads Enver Hoxha had the opportunity and responsibility to play the role of a giant. He chose instead to be a pipsqueak.'. RCP,USA, 'Beat Back the Dogmato-Revisionist Attack on Mao Tsetung Thought.' *The Communist*, May 1979, p. 97.
[128] E, Hoxha, *Imperialism and the* Revolution (Tirana, 1978), p. 82.
[129] See, for instance, RCLB, 'The Party of Labour of Albania – a New Centre of Revisionism', *Revolution*, August 1979.

China's suspension of aid to Vietnam and Albania in 1978 provoked severe criticism in *The Worker*[130] and may well have prompted an obituary in *The Worker*: 'Chu [Chu Teh], Chou and Mao have all gone and with them the banner of socialism.'.[131] The CPB's break with China eventually led to a reassessment of its stance on the Soviet Union. In 1968 the CPB had condemned the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia and insisted that the Soviet revisionists had 'restored capitalism' in the Soviet Union.[132] But the CPB failed to subsequently develop a coherent summation of the experience of socialist revolution and construction in the Soviet Union and China, an analysis of post-Stalin Soviet society. or a theoretical model of socialism. An eventual return to the Soviet camp was therefore always a possibility.

In 1979 the CPB began to support the Soviet challenge to US imperialism. *The Worker* published without comment the claim by the puppet Kampuchean government installed by Vietnam after its invasion of Kampuchea in December 1978, that the country had been 'liberated' by Vietnam.[133] Seeing signs of a 'renaissance of socialism' in the Soviet Union, the CPB supported the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. It had been a defensive manoeuvre against a plot by the USA and Britain, 'urged on' by China, to wage war against the Soviet Union.[134]

Clearly, if socialism in the Soviet Union was enjoying a renaissance, capitalism had not been restored there. According to the CPB it could not have been. At its 1982 Congress, the CPB claimed that 'Man cannot be restored to a previous state, he can only be destroyed. So in the case of socialist relations of production. Capitalism cannot be restored in the Soviet Union'.[135] The CPSU was still 'the ally of working people under attack…the only power sympathetic to the aspirations of genuine liberation movements.'.[136]

What prompted the CPB to discern a 'renaissance of socialism' in the Soviet Union is not at all clear. Certainly, there had been no abatement of the Soviet revisionism which had led to the split in the international communist movement in the 1960s. As for the claim that capitalism could not have been restored in the Soviet Union, this was a mere assertion, entirely without theoretical elaboration, though perhaps based on Arthur's writings. Politically, the most likely explanation of the CPB's pro-Soviet turn is that Soviet anti-western rhetoric in the New Cold-War atmosphere of the 1980s led the CPB to see in the Soviet Union an ideological and political ally in the struggle against the British bourgeoisie which was allegedly betraying the national interest.

By the 1980s it was only with difficulty that the CPB could be described as a Marxist, let alone a Maoist party. It possessed not even a vestige of Marxism's insistence on the working-class as an international class united in a common struggle against capitalism. Those taking

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[130] 'Albania and Vietnam will continue building socialism and supporting revolution despite China's suspension of aid to both countries', *The Worker* 13 July 1978; 'An act of aggression against Socialist Albania', *The Worker*, 27 August 1978.
[131] *The Worker*, 5 October 1978.
[132] 'Statement by the Communist Party of Britain (M-L)', *Peking Review*, 27 September 1968.
[133] *The Worker,* 11 January 1979.
[134] *The Worker*, January 1980.
[135] Richards, *High Tide,* p. 60.
[136] *The Worker*, 14 January 1982.

part in the TUC's Peoples' March for Jobs of 1981[137] were urged to use their strength to 'overturn Thatcher [Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister] and take command of Britain's future.'.[138] By 1988 the CPB had become a workerist British nationalist party. In a particularly flagrant example of its nationalism, indeed racism, the delegates at that year's Party congress demanded that immigration should be halted 'until the chaos has been reduced to order.'.[139] Given that this is a history of Maoists in Britain, there is nothing to be gained by further discussion of what was no longer a Maoist organisation (but see our two case studies).

What can be said in conclusion? Obviously, like the Maoist movement in general, the CPB failed to lead the working-class in a revolutionary struggle to overthrow capitalism or even to build significant working-class support. Some observations on these failures will be offered in our general conclusion. But what was specific to the CPB? How do we account for its degeneration? Without more evidence, in particular archival evidence, it is hard to say.

But one factor, perhaps the principal factor, was the arrogance and complacency of the CPB's leaders, Birch in particular. Arrogance and complacency were manifest in their attitude to theory, the indirect experience of the international communist movement. They did not need to refer to this. They already knew what had to be done. They left the CPGB with a set of assumptions and attitudes that were clearly never subjected to critical evaluation or changed by experience. There is no evidence that they made even the most perfunctory attempt to dig up and analyse the roots of revisionism. Arrogance, complacency and even violence were characteristic too of the CPB's dealing with other Maoists. It was apparent that the party thought it had nothing to learn from others and that dialogue and debate were pointless. This was the case even with the CPC. According to Williams and others, it was obvious during delegations to China that Birch and his cronies considered that they had little to learn from the CPC.

Finally, according to the testimony of many, Longhurst and Williams, for instance, the internal culture of the party was highly authoritarian. Many decisions were taken by Birch alone. Minorites were not listened to. The party's Secretariat, a sub-committee of the Central Committee, composed of Birch and his coterie, effectively usurped the functions of the Central Committee. Party Congresses were used to rubber-stamp decisions of the Secretariat.

The defeat and departure of the Maoists in 1971-76 was no doubt highly significant. Given the dictatorial leadership of Birch, the Birchites' intolerance of criticism, it was probably inevitable that the Birchites would defeat the Maoists. The departure of most of the Maoists can only have intensified the CPB's tendency to see itself as the champion of the perceived interests of workers in Britain rather than as the leader of one section of an international proletariat. It was always quite likely, given the economism, spontaneism and social-chauvinism of the Birchites, that once the Maoists had departed, the CPB would end up in the same camp as the British nationalist right.

[137] Unemployment had risen from 1.3 million on the eve of the 1979 election to 2.518 million in April 1981.
[138] *The Worker*, 7 May 1981
[139] CPB *Congress 88*, p 8, Richards, *Second Wave.*

Chapter Three.

From CFB to RCLB.

The Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) was founded in 1969, essentially as a response to the creation of the CPB. Like most of the Maoist movement, the CFB considered that ideological and political differences with other Maoist organisations precluded organisational unity.[1] Federalism was seen as a means of building sufficient ideological and political unity between the constituent groups of the organisation to allow eventual organisational unity. A political crisis in 1974-75 led to the effective unification of all but one of the CFB's groups. In contrast to the CPB, the CFB did recognise that imperialism had fostered reformist and patriotic sentiments among the working-class. Even so, it was assumed that there was a significant social base for revolutionary politics. The organisation supported the post-Mao regime in China and quickly embraced its 'Three Worlds' theory. In 1977 it united with the CUA to form the RCLB.

The CFB and Party-Building.

When founded, there were CFB groups in Coventry, Glasgow, Grimsby, London, and Yeovil. It was hoped that other Maoists would gradually coalesce around the CFB. Groups in Birmingham, Leeds, and Manchester (the LCCL) did join the CFB but eventually left. A different Leeds group and a group in Liverpool joined and stayed. The ICO, discussed in Chapter One, joined and left in 1971.

The CFB adopted the JCC's *On the Question of Party-Building*, which had insisted that the 'main characteristic of the Marxist-Leninist movement in Britain today is the existence of individual autonomous groups.'[2] Given the relatively high level of ideological and political unity in the movement, to regard the existence of autonomous groups as its 'main characteristic' was a rationalisation of the circle spirit. Though each group of the Federation insisted that it was autonomous, a Federation Committee had been established: it was assumed that autonomy would gradually be relinquished. Composed of one representative from each group, the committee had only the power to implement unanimous decisions, thus effectively giving each group a veto.[3]

The Federation Committee oversaw the publication from December 1969 of *Struggle*, a monthly paper, and from spring 1971 of *Marxist-Leninist Quarterly* (MLQ), a theoretical journal. *Struggle* propagated a distinctively Maoist line. Firm support was given to socialist China. In contrast to most of the left, the paper declined to support the Labour Party in the general election of 1970. All CFB groups participated in national demonstrations in support of the national liberation war in Vietnam. In contrast to the Trotskyists' at best ambivalent support for the war and to the revisionists' call for a negotiated settlement, *Struggle* gave unconditional support to the NLF.

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[1] See (e.g.) CFB, 'The Marxist-Leninist Movement in Britain Origins and Perspectives' *Documents of the Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist* (1972), esp. p. 7.
[2] CFB, 'Joint Committee of Communists on the Question of Party-Building', *Documents of the Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)* (London, 1972), p. 12.
[3] CFB, 'Introduction', *Documents of the Communist Federation of Britain* p. 1.

These modest achievements demonstrated that the constituent groups of the CFB (and indeed the movement generally) had sufficient ideological and political unity to unite, to begin to collectively integrate the indirect experience of the international communist movement with the concrete practice of the British revolution. They showed that the principal obstacle to organisational unity was not differences between its groups (the differences between them were generally not greater than the differences within the groups) but the circle spirit. They could have led, but did not, to questioning the rationale of federalism. To the members of the CFB they seemed to vindicate federalism. They did though lead to a cautious step towards greater organisational unity.

A new constitution was adopted in 1971. (This, or rather the circle spirit, prompted the departure of the LCCL, which had only recently joined the CFB after an internal struggle against the circle spirit.) In addition to requiring only a three quarters majority rather than unanimity for Federation Committee decisions to be binding, the new constitution required each group to identify itself as a member group of the CFB.[4] But the budding party spirit that had inspired the CFB's groups to adopt the new constitution was not sustained. For several years the organisation stagnated due to the circle spirit and chronic liberalism.

The circle spirit was a significant factor in the departure of the Grimsby group from the CFB in 1971. The ostensible reason for that group's departure was dissatisfaction with the leadership. The group's letter of resignation denounced the 'middle class Mauger/McConville clique' and insisted that their group was 'a working-class group.' Building a Marxist-Leninist party was for them not an 'academic exercise but a major step towards the liberation of our class from capitalism.'. A number of London members, including Phil Dixon, resigned in sympathy. Here too, class antagonism was involved: Mauger was accused of having served 'bourgeois food' (*vol au vent*) at a social evening.[5]

In 1971 McConville identified liberalism as a serious obstacle to achieving a higher level of unity. But rather than initiate an ideological struggle against liberalism, he proposed an investigation of the various matters dividing the groups as the main means of creating the unity necessary for the abolition of group autonomy. This primarily organisational rather than ideological approach combined with the circle spirit to ensure that discussion of the matter was desultory and inconclusive.

The response of the Coventry and Glasgow groups to McConville's initiative suggests that their support for federalism was essentially a rationalisation of the circle spirit. The Glasgow group did not respond until February 1974. Despite the new constitutional requirement that the CFB's groups should identify themselves as groups of the CFB, Coventry's response was issued in the name of the Coventry Workers' Association. The group staunchly defended group autonomy, arguing that the CFB's preconditions for the foundation of a party must be the preconditions for the abolition of group autonomy.[6]

[4] CFB, 'Introduction', *Documents of the Communist Federation of Britain* p. 2.
[5] Uncatalogued letter @ the PHM. The resigning members founded the Communist Unity Organisation (CUO) which in 1973 merged with the Marxist-Leninist Workers Association to form the CUA.
[6] Coventry Workers' Association, 'Statement on Group Autonomy and the Federation', October 1972.

The Crisis of 1974-75 and its Resolution.

Attributed to poor sales, publication of *Struggle* ceased in the summer of 1974. But the fundamental reason for poor sales was federalism, the organisational expression of the circle spirit. The CFB's federal structure had made possible the initial progress discussed above but quickly became an obstacle to further progress. The CFB had a weak centre (the Federation Committee) and a strong periphery (the groups). For most members, the Federation Committee had little relevance. Commitment to the federal project had steadily waned, eventually becoming too low to allow the continued publication of *Struggle.*

A general meeting held in the spring of 1975 failed to reach agreement on the way forward. The only decision taken was to reconvene on some unspecified date. The Glasgow group resigned from the Federation soon after the meeting. EC members Mauger and Redfern (Redfern had resigned from the LCCL after its departure from the CFB to join the Liverpool group of the CFB and had recently been co-opted onto the EC) went to Glasgow to discuss matters with the group, but found its members implacably determined to leave. It seemed that the CFB might have entered a terminal crisis.

But two developments led to a positive resolution of the crisis. Firstly, by the end of 1975 what had come to be known as the Social-Democratic tendency had been defeated in a two-line struggle that greatly increased the ideological and political unity of most members of the Federation. Secondly, soon after the general meeting of 1975, Dion Burford (after joining the London group in 1971 Burford had quickly become influential) initiated a debate regarding the CFB's poor progress in party-building. By the end of 1975 a majority of the membership had become convinced that Federalism itself was the fundamental reason for its poor progress.

The Struggle against the Social-Democratic Tendency.

As in 1970, the CFB did not support the Labour Party in the first of the two general elections of 1974. As we saw in the previous chapter, after winning the first of these elections the Labour Party offered various reforms aimed at increasing support from the labour movement and winning a majority in a second election. In response, the Federation Committee decided that the organisation would urge the working-class to vote Labour. There had always been a 'vote Labour' minority in the CFB, concentrated in the Coventry group, but in 1974 support for that stance from the London group was sufficient to win a majority on the Federation Committee.

For most, the case for supporting Labour was based primarily on Lenin's advice of 1920, dubious even then, that communists should support Labour like a 'rope supports a hanged man'. In office, it was argued, Labour would be exposed as a bourgeois party. Dick Jones had argued thus for years.[7] In 1974 Jones advanced the somewhat contradictory argument that the 'the decisions of the 1973 Labour party conference and the 1974 [February] election manifesto were probably the most 'progressive' policies adopted by the Labour party 'since

[7] D. Jones, 'Like a Rope Supports a Hanged Man', *The Marxist* no. 13 (Winter 1970).

1945.'.[8] The Federation Committee adopted a resolution which argued that the CFB should advise the working-class to support Labour on both these grounds.[9]

One of the 'progressive' Labour policies supported by Coventry was nationalisation of major industries. For the revisionists and the Labour left, nationalised industries constituted a socialist sector of the economy. Most Maoists deemed them to be a state capitalist sector. But in 1976 Jones and 'DS' claimed that nationalisation would demonstrate 'the superiority of a planned centrally-directed industry over that in which competition and anarchy reign supreme.'[10] Implicitly, as with the revisionists, socialism was equated with planning and state ownership of the means of production (a matter discussed further in Chapter Five). Not coincidently, it was the Coventry group which later led a rearguard action against defining the Soviet Union as a social-imperialist state.

Consistent with the 'vote Labour' stance was the contention that the Maoist movement's practice should be centred around the activists of the official labour movement. Of course, it was essential that Maoists should work in such basic working-class organisations as trade unions: many did. But it was contended in an *MLQ* article that 'advanced' (i.e., the most politically conscious) workers) were those 'who still actively identify with the Labour Party.'. Similarly advanced were those 'who fight for 'the implementation of conference decisions.'. These 'present the greatest potential for communism because of their experiences and contacts.'.[11] The Coventry group argued that 'by definition', it would be 'reformists, revisionists and Trotskyists' whom Maoists would 'aim to convince of the correctness of the analysis and action of Marxism-Leninism.'.[12]

Closely connected with the Coventry group's stance on social-democracy, and the subject of much criticism by the EC, was that the group attached in practice far more importance to working in trade unions than to building a revolutionary communist party. Dick Jones, the leading member of the group, was very active in the trade union movement, but was never a delegate to the Federation Committee, which was attended by a succession of second-rank members.

Several articles critical of the Social-Democratic tendency appeared in *MLQ* in 1975-76. 'DB' (Burford)[13] and Redfern[14] sternly criticised the various pro-Labour stances. In 'Lower and Deeper into the Proletariat', 'JT' challenged the rightist line on the question of who the advanced workers were, arguing that to find the most class-conscious workers it was

[8] Dick Jones, 'Expose the 'Reformists of every Stripe and Hue'', *MLQ* 7 (Summer 1974), p. 4.
[9] The resolution claimed that Labour should be supported because: '1. In office, especially in the growing world capitalist crisis, its working-class supporters will most easily be aided to dispel any illusions remaining about Labour's ability to carry out Socialist policies. It also provides the opportunity to combat reformist illusions generally. 2. Because it has been forced to accede to certain progressive demands of the labour movement, relating to Trade Union legislation, a statutory wages policy, the reopening of the question of the E.E.C.'. The resolution was published in a pamphlet (*Why the Election Matters*) published by the London Group of the CFB in September 1974.
[10] Dick Jones & DS, 'Nationalisation', *MLQ,* no. 11 (1976), p. 47.
[11] J.B., 'Spontaneity, Parliamentarism and the Labour Party', *MLQ*, 10 (1975), p. 20.
[12] DJ & DS, 'Nationalisation', p. 41.
[13] D.B., 'Vote Labour is Tailism', *MLQ*, no. 10 (1975).
[14] N. Redfern, 'The Labour Party and the Crisis of British Imperialism', *MLQ* 8 & 9 (Winter 1974-75); Unattributed, 'Nationalisation and the Crisis of British Imperialism', *MLQ* no. 11 (1976).

necessary to 'go deeper into the proletariat to seek out those who have ceased to support a system and a party that they can see does not serve their interests.'[15] After the defeat of the Social-Democratic tendency, the CFB never again called for support for Labour nor were articles advocating nationalisation published. The view that the 'advanced elements' were those active in the organised labour movement was rejected and an outlook of 'going lower and deeper' into the proletariat was embraced.

A particularly significant aspect of the struggle against the Social-Democratic tendency was that it was conducted across group lines as well as between groups. The great majority of the membership became united in opposition to the tendency. Unity on this question had helped to win support for Burford's case that federalism itself was the fundamental reason for the Federation's stagnation.

A Campaign against 'Five Ideological Errors'.

Burford argued that federalism had promoted five right opportunist ideological errors - liberalism, small-group mentality (the circle spirit, in other words), ultra-democracy, empiricism and intellectualism – that were responsible for the CFB's stagnation. He quickly won the support of EC members Mauger and Redfern. EC encouragement of ideological and political debate and struggle within groups as well as between them led to increasing support for Burford's case and to greater general ideological and political unity. His analysis was supported by the great majority of the membership at a reconvened general meeting (now deemed to be a conference) of the CFB, held in February 1976. [16]

Having made virtually no attempt to engage in the previous year's discussion and struggles on party-building, the Coventry group's members, embodiments of the circle spirit, walked out of the conference on the morning of its first day, when it became clear that the conference would support the Federation Committee's proposed end to group autonomy. The defeat of the Social-Democratic tendency had of course been a significant factor in Coventry's walkout, But, as a new EC insisted, the principal reason was the circle spirit.[17] The split with Coventry might seem to suggest that those who argued that Maoist organisational unity was premature were correct. But there will always those who prefer to split rather than unite.

Federalism was effectively abolished when, after Coventry's departure, all remaining groups endorsed the EC's proposals on the way forward and adopted a democratic-centralist relationship with a newly established National Committee. The conference elected a new EC of Burford, Mauger (who had made a self-criticism for his responsibility for the old line and practice of the CFB) and Redfern. (McConville had by then resigned from the organisation). 'JT' was later co-opted onto the Committee.

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[15] J.T., 'Lower and Deeper into the Proletariat', *MLQ*, 11 (1976), p. 54.
[16] See 'Resolution of the Third Conference of the Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)' & 'Build the Revolutionary Communist Party to Lead the Revolution', *Revolution*, no. 1 (June 1976).
[17] 'Reply to the Resignation Letter of the Coventry Group', *Revolution*, no. 1 (June 1976).

A Rejuvenated CFB.

The crisis of the CFB in 1974-75 had undoubtedly been the result of a concatenation of the effects of the 'five ideological errors', particularly liberalism and small group mentality. (Though in 1980 the NCG was to dismiss the claim that 'small-group mentality' had been a major factor in the failure of the movement to thrive as 'an explanation which owes much to bourgeois social psychology but very little to materialist dialectics.'.[18]) The struggle against the 'five ideological errors' had revitalised the CFB and imbued it with a new confidence (which began to be seen as arrogance by some Maoists). The struggles against the Social-Democratic tendency and against the 'five main errors' had created the conditions in which a level of ideological and political unity, based on the *Polemic on the General Line,* allowed a *de facto* organisational unity. The detour of federalism had been unnecessary, but probably inevitable, given the ideological climate of the movement in the 1970s.

The CFB's renewed revolutionary enthusiasm was demonstrated in June 1976 by the publication of a monthly paper, *Class Struggle*, for the first time since *Struggle* had folded two years earlier. The first issue of *Class Struggle* denounced, in contrast to the revisionists and Trotskyists, the Labour Party as 'the best bosses party', the Congress Party of India as a 'child of Soviet social-imperialism' and gave firm support to the national liberation war against the settler colonial regime in 'Rhodesia' and to the continuing class struggle against capitalist-roaders in China. To mark the recent abolition of group autonomy the paper was published as the paper of the organisation's National Committee.

In a series of articles in the CFB's new theoretical journal *Revolution* which replaced *MLQ* (the very name of which was said to have sounded 'like a review type journal produced for progressive intellectuals'), the organisation published wide ranging self-criticism. *Origins and Perspectives* was repudiated.[19] Repudiated too was McConville's *Revisionism and the British anti-Revisionist Movement.* The key point made here was that the CDCRU and the CPB 'should not [have been] criticised for attempting to set up a centre for building the new Revolutionary Communist Party of the working-class.'.[20]

Though these articles did not explicitly advocate a new party-building strategy. it was asserted that the way forward was an ideological struggle against liberalism and small-group mentality. While this was undoubtedly necessary, the conservatism which had led to the formation of *Forum* rather than participation in the CDRCU reasserted itself. The CFB still contended that the current level of Maoist ideological and political unity precluded a general organisational unity. Rather than fight for the party spirit in the movement, to try to unite it as quickly as possible, the CFB/RCLB advocated a step-by-step unification of the various groups and circles.[21] Unity negotiations with the CUA began soon after the Third Conference.

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[18] NCG, 'The Marxist-Leninist Movement in Britain', p 16.
[19] 'The Working-class Grows Strong by Fighting Errors within its Ranks', *Revolution*, no. 2 (October 1976).
[20] 'Revisionism is Bourgeois Ideology Dressed up as Marxism. Criticism of the Article in MLQ3 called "Revisionism and the British Anti-Revisionist Movement.'', *Revolution*, no. 2 (October 1976). It was certainly true that the CDCRU should not have been so criticised. But as we have seen, the CPB did not attempt to 'set up a centre' for party-building: it declared that it was the party.
[21] 'Fight on to Unite the Marxist-Leninist Movement', *Revolution*, vol. 3, no. 1 (June 1978).

The CWLB's Proposal for a Programme Commission.

In the same month that *Class Struggle* first appeared, the CWLB, which had previously shown little interest in collaborating with other Maoists, published proposals on party-building. *Hey, It's Up to Us!* called on other Maoists to work with the CWLB on a programme commission. The task of the commission would be to study the experience of those parties which had led successful revolutions and to draft a 'scientific' programme based on that experience. Prior to the drafting of a programme, the CWLB contended, Maoist organisational unity would be premature. A programme would facilitate a split between 'the camp of science and the camp of anti-science'.[22]

But Marxism is not scientific in the sense that, say, chemistry and physics are. Revolutionary practice is not like a laboratory experiment that can be repeated. The CWLB's proposal was a manifestation of subjective idealism, of a belief that creating the conditions necessary for the foundation of a revolutionary communist party could be accomplished by scholastic enquiry alone. The proposal for a commission raises the question asked by Mao - where do correct ideas come from? Do they originate in the mind? No, Mao insisted, knowledge develops through a summing up of practice, in a continuous dialectical process from lower to higher levels of practice and knowledge.[23] In a revolutionary movement, such a process can only exist in a united organisation engaged in collective practice, in attempting to apply Marxism to the concrete conditions of a particular society.

In an application of its 'scientific' approach to revolution, the CWLB had published a 'scientific' guide to industrial base-building. Like the CPB, it dogmatically compared industrial base-building in advanced capitalist Britain with the CPC's building of red bases in the Chinese semi-feudal countryside.[24] The guide did not appear to be based on direct experience. (During a visit to Albania around the time the guide was published, this writer had several conversations with two members of the CWLB. They were very vague regarding their organisation's base-building work, giving the impression that none had started.)

Hey It's Up to Us! was launched at a well-attended public meeting in London. Here was an opportunity to make a rousing call for Maoist unity. But Burford and Redfern attended merely to argue that the proposal for a programme commission was essentially a proposal for a new federation.[25] The CWLB was unmoved by the CFB's criticisms. A commission was eventually launched. But, failing to attract significant support, it withered away within a few months. The CWLB later refused to participate in a conference of Maoists convened by the CWM, deeming it to be a 'conference of the lost.'.[26] (The CWLB appears to have collapsed around 1981. This writer has found no trace of its existence since then). The conference is discussed below.

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[22] CWLB(M-L), *Hey, It's Up to Us! Draft Theses, Conclusions and Proposals of the Communist Workers League of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) on the Central Question of Party Building* (London, 1976), pp. 37-38.
[23] Mao Ze-dong 'Where do Correct Ideas Come From?' *Selected Readings from the Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Beijing, 1971), pp. 502-504).
[24] CWLB, *Building Communist Revolutionary Bases at the Place of Work* (London, 1974).
[25] See 'Active Ideological Struggle is the Key Link in Party-Building', *Revolution*, no. 3 (January 1977).
[26] According to the WPS. (*For Marxist-Leninist Unity. On the Birmingham Conference* (Glasgow, 1977)), p. 1.

The CFB's Mass Work.

For several years after its foundation there was no attempt, other than on Vietnam Solidarity work, to plan and coordinate the mass work of the CFB's groups. All groups regarded industrial work, attempting to build support among the industrial working-class, as especially important. Most groups had members active in trade unions and supported industrial disputes (the London group, for instance, regularly participated in the mass pickets of 1976 at Grunwick's). Otherwise, groups were involved in such diverse fields of mass work as tenants' associations, the Working Women's Charter campaign (discussed in Chapter Seven), among students, the Troops Out Movement (TOM) (discussed in Chapter Six) and in anti-fascist campaigns. (The Liverpool Group had regularly participated in actions against the fascist National Front (NF) (two members were arrested at the pierhead on an anti-National Front demonstration)).

The CFB Goes 'Base-Building'.

After the Third Conference of 1976, the CFB's new EC gained the NC's support for a 'base-building' strategy. The decision was based on a dogmatic application of a passage from Lenin (the CFB had become rather prone to such dogmatism). Citing a rather uncharacteristic statement of his that the work of Russian Marxists must be 'primarily and mainly based on the factory', the CFB argued that 'Marxist-Leninists should stop all work in broad fronts to release resources for base-building in the industrial working-class.'.[27]

The strategy involved a fundamental reorientation of the organisation's mass work. All broad front work ceased. The CFB's middle class members were urged to take working-class jobs, to work among the class their organisation was seeking to lead in revolution. To give a lead on this matter, Redfern, who assumed overall responsibility for industrial work, gave up his job as a systems analyst and entered a government centre to train as a capstan lathe setter-operator. ('JT' assumed responsibility for leading industrial work when Redfern moved to London to become the organisation's full-time Secretary.)

Most middle-class members did not give up their jobs, either because of objective factors (personnel officers were understandably suspicious of the motives of middle-class people seeking working-class jobs), personal circumstances (having a family to support, for instance) or subjective disinclination. But some did. In Liverpool members went to work at Plessey's telecommunications factory, at a laundry and at a bakery.

It was assumed that with Maoist leadership significant numbers of industrial workers would respond to revolutionary ideas. A few months after the adoption of the base-building strategy, the CFB claimed that 'British imperialism would not last for six months' were it not for the misleadership of the working-class by 'revisionists, social-democrats and Trotskyists.'[28] But when Maoists gained mass influence – as had, for instance, the members of the Grimsby branch of the CFB in a tenants' association and the Coventry group in the engineer's union –

[27] 'Build Communist Bases in the Working-class', *Revolution*, no. 2 (October 1976), pp .24-25. Emphasis in the original.
[28] Call to the British Marxist-Leninist Movement', *Revolution*, no. 5 (May 1977), p. 3.

it was almost invariably the result of personal standing and hard work and was rarely translated into Maoist influence *per se*.

Virtually no empirical investigation of the political economy of Britain was carried out by the CFB/RCLB. In 1972 *MLQ* had published two articles by Mauger on the 'labour aristocracy' thesis we considered and dismissed in Chapter One.[29] Mauger contended that skilled industrial workers were playing a progressive role in the contemporary class struggle. In support of this contention he pointed to their leadership in the fight, discussed in the previous chapter, against anti-trade union legislation. Mauger's time in the CPGB and close links to the organised labour movement (he was a researcher for a trade union) had perhaps clouded his judgement (he had been one of the main exponents of the Social-Democratic tendency). The workers in question had undoubtedly played a crucial part in the necessary fight against the Industrial Relations Act. On the other hand, a matter which Mauger did not raise, the unions of skilled industrial workers were one of the principal social props of the social-imperialist Labour Party.

The organisation's understanding of the effect of imperialism on the working-class in Britain was based on an uncritical reading of such texts as Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. The stance adopted during the struggle against the social-democratic tendency that the organisation should look 'lower and deeper' for revolutionary sentiments rather than to the activists of the labour movement was based on limited direct evidence and subjective enthusiasm rather than on thorough research and a systematic summing up of experience.

How were factory bases to be built? A year or so after the adoption of the base-building strategy, the RCLB's *Manifesto* (the unification of the CFB and the CUA to form the RCLB is discussed below) explained the RCLB's general approach to the matter. At 'the place of work in the course of struggle against the employer and the capitalist class, we will…rally the advanced workers …and deepen their consciousness.'. Who were the advanced workers? They were not 'the privileged strata, who are predisposed to opportunism.' To find the advanced, the organisation would have to go 'lower and deeper to the real masses.'.

The 'privileged strata' were people bribed 'in a thousand different ways' by the 'superprofits of imperialism.'. They were 'most of the petty bourgeoisie, most of the intelligentsia and a minority of skilled workers.'.[30] So who then were the 'real masses? Implicitly, they were all working-class people except for a 'minority of skilled workers.'. But the notion that those benefiting from imperialism were only those who were 'bribed', obscured the fact that all working-class people benefited in one way or another from imperialism. Those members of the RCLB attempting to build bases were confronted with the same intractable problems encountered by the IS people in their Coventry car factory. The organisation did find sympathisers, supporters and even some recruits while base-building, but no factory bases were built.

[29] SM, 'Notes on the Labour Aristocracy in Britain. Part 1. Imperialism and Opportunism', *MLQ* no. 2 (Summer 1972); SM, 'Notes on the Labour Aristocracy in Britain. Part 2', *MLQ* no. 3 (Winter 1972/73)
[30] 'Manifesto of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain', *Revolution,* vol. 1, no. 1 (July 1977), pp. 21-22.

Three factories – Westland Helicopters in Yeovil, where members of the CFB were already working, MK in London and Ford's in Liverpool – were selected for base-building. Those members who were not working at these places would serve base-building work in various ways – say in research on the company or factory gate sales of *Class Struggle*. It was highly unlikely that a communist base could have been built at Ford's or at Westland, both of which contained high concentrations of those better off, white, organised, stable male workers who were the social base of social-democracy and who ideologically, politically and organisationally dominated the workplace. But hard work and persistence was unsuccessful too at MK's, where there were significant numbers of the less-well off, of ethnic minorities and of women.

Class Struggle was sold and bought outside and inside the chosen factories (there are always people who will buy such papers – the Liverpool branch of the CFB regularly sold *Struggle* in pubs on Friday nights, while the Stockport Communist Group (SCG)[31] had some success in selling its paper *The Stockport Communist* outside an engineering factory). But rarely are paper-buyers prospective recruits. *Class Struggle* study groups were established in 1979. But few workers participated - in London only eight people in two factories.[32]

Revolutionary Communism was a distinctly minority enthusiasm in imperialist Britain. While capturing union positions was not seen as a priority, some members were elected to shop-steward posts, but as respected and trusted trade union militants, rather than as communists. Base building had revealed sympathy by some workers for the ideas of communism, but also scepticism that radical change was possible. There were potential recruits for the revolutionary cause, but it was extremely unlikely that significant numbers of them would be found in any one factory. Base-building had led the organisation to ignore in its practical work those revolutionary-minded working-class people (and middle-class people) who might be found elsewhere.

The failure of base-building combined with unity negotiations with the CWM seems to have been instrumental in the RCLB's decision in 1979 that as a 'secondary field of mass work' (secondary, that is, to base-building) the organisation should again be involved in anti-racist and anti-fascist work.[33] The RCLB's Second Congress of 1981 'upheld the orientation of building communist bases in industry':[34] but while members working in industry continued to take part in the class struggle at the place of work and aimed to win support for the organisation, the decision to take up other forms of mass work meant that in practice the base-building strategy adopted in 1976 had been abandoned. The organisation was certainly no longer 'devoting all resources' in mass work to industrial work.

In 1980, the organisation's new National Secretary, who had been a member of the CWM and was thus perhaps more able to assess the strategy objectively than those who had promoted it, convincingly summed up the intellectual and ideological failings that had led to

[31] The SCG was founded in 1980 by Redfern and one other of those who had been expelled from the RCLB in 1979 as an 'Anti-League Faction' (a matter discussed in the next chapter). Though the group attracted a few new members, it, like all the other small groups, failed to prosper.
[32] Richards, *'Ebbing Tide*, p. 4.
[33] Richards, '*Ebbing Tide,'* p 12.
[34] 'Report on the Second Congress of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain', *Class Struggle Special Supplement*, nd (1981).

the adoption of the base-building policy. The decision to devote all resources in mass work to industrial work had been partly based on an uncritical reading of Lenin. The organisation had thus 'tended to concentrate on a dogmatic reference to the vanguard role of the proletariat…without any attempt to prove or qualify this by analysis of what was actually happening in Britain.'. |In consequence, 'we ignored the existence of national struggles within [Britain] and wrote off the significance of the anti-imperialist work that many non-working-class elements were doing.[35]

China, the 'Three Worlds' Theory and the CFB,

1976 had been a decisive year for the Maoist movement in Britain. It had presented opportunities and dangers. It was the year in which many members of the CPB had split to form the CWM. As we will see, this opportunity to promote Maoist unity was missed. More significantly, much more significantly, it was the year in which revisionists seized state power in China, a matter discussed below and more fully in the next chapter. The CFB's most consequential decision in 1976 was to support the post-Mao regime in China and its 'Three Worlds' theory. It led to the CFB succumbing to social-chauvinism.

The CFB had never collectively evaluated the Comintern's strategy of 1935-45. the antecedent of the 'Three Worlds' theory. In 1972, Mike Faulkner, the editor of *MLQ*, had suggested that the CPGB, 'like the majority of other C.Ps., has been revisionist since the mid 1930s.'.[36] This oblique reference to the communist movement's post-Seventh Congress strategy was an extraordinary break with the settled view of the movement. But the article did not provoke a debate. In 1975, *MLQ* published an explicit critique of Seventh Congress strategy.[37] This article too failed to spark a debate. The next issue of *MLQ* distanced the CFB from the article by pointing out that its stance 'represented a minority position…and moreover questioned a long-standing line of the Communist Movement. It was therefore incorrect to publish this without a refutation.'. Further, by reprinting a *Peking Review* article which restated the orthodox Comintern line, the CFB in effect repudiated the article.[38]

The foreign policy of the PRC had begun to provoke considerable disquiet among some members of the CFB, though a few were fully supportive. As in the CPB, China's refusal in 1971 to support the war for Bangladesh and a revolutionary upsurge in Ceylon (soon to be renamed Sri Lanka) in 1971-72 had aroused particular concern. The Coventry group had wanted an 'all round condemnation' of China's foreign policy. But most reassured themselves that China's stance on Bangladesh had been a necessary compromise with imperialism. And had not Mao remarked, as the CPB noted, that the post-war compromises made by socialist countries with the capitalist world need not require communists to make compromises with 'their' bourgeoisie? At a general meeting held in January 1972 a compromise resolution was adopted. It stated general principles but failed to directly address the issue – China's foreign policy – which the meeting had been convened to resolve.[39]

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[35] 'David Evans', 'The First Summary if Industrial Work 1976-79', cited in Richards, *'Ebbing Tide:* p 5.
[36] 'M.F', 'What is a Marxist-Leninist Party', *MLQ* 1 (1972).
[37] 'NR' & 'JT', 'Neither Adventurism nor Opportunism', *MLQ* 10 (1975).
[38] MLQ 11 (1976), p. 4.
[39] 'Resolution adopted by C.F.B. General Meeting, 16th January 1972, concerning certain aspects of the General Line of the Foreign Policies of Socialist Countries.', *MLQ* 1 (Spring 1972).

China's *rapprochement* with the USA and increasingly antagonistic relations with the Soviet Union prompted debate in the CFB on the question of the class character of the Soviet Union. By 1973 a majority of leading members of the CFB had become convinced that the Soviet Union was a social-imperialist state. Three unsolicited articles insistent on this assessment were published in *MLQ*.[40] A minority (particularly the members of the Coventry group) resisted. A 'document on the international situation' adopted by a general meeting in the Spring of 1974 adopted a fudged formulation on the nature of the Soviet Union. One of the 'four fundamental contradictions' in the world was stated to be 'between the oppressed nations on the one hand and imperialism and Soviet revisionism on the other.'. The foreign policy of the Soviet Union was held to 'closely approach [that] of an imperialist country.'.[41]

The 'document on the international situation' was based on the theoretical framework of the four fundamental contradictions, referred to in the previous chapter. In 1975 *MLQ* published a letter from the London group criticising the 'document'. It was essential, the group insisted, 'to grasp that the Soviet Union was a social-imperialist state.'. Moreover, refusal to accept this analysis implied 'criticism of the foreign policy' of the PRC.[42] This was the first instance, but certainly not the last, of a conflation of the question of the nature of the Soviet Union with the question of the foreign policy of the PRC and the first manifestation, but certainly not the last, of a tendency to conflate the matter of China's foreign policy with that of revolutionary strategy in Britain.

Coventry's resignation from the CFB meant that few of the remaining members of the organisation had an emotional or ideological attachment to the Soviet Union. In 1976, not long after the commencement in Angola of the Soviet challenge to post-Vietnam US imperialism, the CFB's National Committee unanimously overturned the 1974 general meeting's stance on the Soviet Union and adopted a resolution which 'explicitly declared' that the 'Soviet Union is a social-imperialist state, socialist in words and imperialist in deeds, ruled by a new state-monopoly capitalist bourgeoisie with an imperialist class character.'. Burford, the drafter of the resolution, was careful to add: 'as has been pointed out by the Communist Party of China.'.[43]

It is probable that some members of the CFB argued that the Soviet Union had become a social-imperialist state due to an ideological desire to support the CPC. Just as the leaders of the CPGB had in the late 1930s aligned their strategy with Soviet foreign policy, so the CFB's line on the international class struggle was becoming aligned with China's foreign policy. Opinion in the RCLB was now rapidly moving in favour of the 'Three Worlds' theory and in particular its stress on national defence against the two superpowers. Some members clearly began to assume that compromises made by the PRC did require similar compromises by communists in Britain. Centred on the London group, a social-chauvinist tide in favour of defending British national independence (or, to put it more bluntly, defending British imperialism) against Soviet-social-imperialism was emerging.

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[40] 'NR', 'Social Imperialism', *MLQ* 6 (Spring 1974); 'PJ', 'The Soviet Economy and the Restoration of Capitalism', *MLQ* 8 & 9 (Autumn/Winter 1974/75); 'PT', 'A Criticism of Erich Farl's Article 'Is the USSR an Imperialist Country'', *MLQ* 10 (1975).

[41] 'Introduction to the Proposed Document on the International and National Situations', *MLQ* 7 (Summer 1974), p. 13.

[42] CFB, 'Criticism of the CFB Statement on the World Situation', *MLQ* 10 (1975).

[43] 'The Soviet Union is a Social-Imperialist State!', *MLQ* 11 (1976).

We have seen that the CPC was insistent that the Soviet Union was a 'threat' to all countries. The National Committee resolution on the Soviet Union, modelled on the 'Three Worlds' theory, took up this theme and referred several times to the 'threat' from the Soviet Union.[44] *Class Struggle* argued that 'European countries' should 'learn from the Third World countries which are uniting to fight for their independence from the two superpowers. The working-class will not give in under the threat of war, but will fight all aggressors.'. [45] In practice of course, given Britain's alliance with the USA, the only 'aggressor' could be the Soviet Union, 'the most dangerous threat of war'.

This was the context in which in October 1976, shortly after Mao's death, the CFB's National Committee rescinded the 1972 resolution on the Foreign Policy of Socialist Countries. Underlying this decision was a strong subjective, emotional loyalty to the CPC that fostered an unwillingness to even consider the possibility that revisionism was gaining the upper hand over Marxism in the CPC. Those members of the CFB made uneasy by China's increasing closeness to the USA – China was by then supporting the US-backed South African forces in Angola in what had become a proxy war between the Soviet Union and the USA (Soviet-backed Cuban troops had recently defeated South Africa-backed mercenaries) - continued to reassure themselves that China was making necessary compromises.

But others could see no problem. In *Revolution*, Burford argued that the 1972 resolution had caused members of the CFB to doubt that the CPC is a 'great, glorious and correct party.' This could have caused 'untold damage…especially now that we are confronted with the task of supporting the International United Front against the two superpowers.' Those who had been critical of the CPC, instead 'of modestly getting on with the central task of party-building' and following the 'overwhelmingly correct lead of the Communist Party of China on the world situation', had tried to 'lightly decide the principles which should govern the foreign policy of People's China.'.[46]

Deng Xiaoping's dismissal in the spring of 1976 had prevented a full flowering of the 'Three Worlds' theory until after the death of Mao in the Autumn. The CFB had supported Deng's dismissal. Under the headline 'Never Forget Class Struggle', a prominent article in the first issue of *Class Struggle* had argued that 'the working-class of China is using this slogan…to keep her on the path of socialism.' 'If put into practice', Deng's ideas 'would have put profits in command of industry and agriculture, instead of putting the interests of the people in command.'.[47]

But the CFB supported too the arrests of the 'Gang of Four' shortly after Mao's death in October 1976. Precisely what had happened in China was then obscure, but it **was** clear, in contrast to the campaign against Deng, that administrative rather than ideological and political methods had been used to defeat the Four. In 1978, Raymond Lotta convincingly argued that the arrests were carried out as part of a *coup d'etat* by the right wing of the CPC (the academic literature on the matter mostly supports this analysis.[48]), the culmination of a

[44] *Ibid.*
[45] 'Détente – a Thin Cover for War Preparations', *Class Struggle*, September 1976.
[46] 'Against Opportunist Attacks on the Foreign Policy of the CPC', *Revolution* 3 (January 1977), p. 20.
[47] *Class Struggle*, June 1976.
[48] For an overview of the academic literature see Forster (1992).

bitter struggle between those, including Mao and the Four, who stood for the continued socialist transformation of China, and such capitalist-roaders as Deng Xiaoping.[49]

Subjective loyalty to the CPC was the primary factor in the CFB's belief that the arrests of the Four had been justified. There had been no analysis of the politics and class forces involved. It was decided that it had been correct to have had the Four arrested because there had been mass demonstrations in support of the arrests (there had been demonstrations of mass support for the earlier sacking of Deng Xiaoping too, but it was decided that these had been stage-managed and not truly representative of mass opinion) and because Mao was said to have nominated one of the *coup* leaders, Hua Kuo-feng, to succeed him. No member of the EC or the NC spoke in favour of the Four.[50] Rationalisations of the *a priori* assumption that it had been correct to arrest the Four soon appeared in *Class Struggle* and *Revolution*. Absurdly, it was claimed that the Four were capitalist-roaders.[51] What can we say of those who had seized power in China? In the words of the Christian apostle Mathew, 'by their deeds you will know them.'. The capitalist-road down which the new regime marched China is discussed in the next chapter.

The CWM's Maoist Conference.

The split from the CPB of those who founded the CWM in 1976 had presented a potentially excellent opportunity to foster Maoist unity. Encouragement was provided by the stated determination of the members of the CWM to break with the 'arrogance and self-importance' of the CPB and their call on all 'genuine communists' to 'build together' a revolutionary communist party.'.[52] The split had stirred up renewed enthusiasm and desire for unity A united call for principled unity from the CFB and the CWM would have been a powerful and authoritative call. But the opportunity was not seized. Reflecting the CFB's conservative, step-by-step approach to building Maoist unity, the organisation regarded the probable next stage in Maoist unity, after unity with the CUA, as unity with the CWM. Leading members of the two organisations began to meet regularly in Liverpool, where lived Ian Williams, then the most influential member of the CWM.

Mainly due to their previous isolation inside the CPB, the members of the CWM had little understanding of the wider movement and greatly underestimated the difficulties involved in uniting it. Against the advice of the CFB, the CWM decided that a national conference of Maoists was the way forward. It called upon the movement to work with it to organise a national conference 'as soon as possible in 1977.' The stated aim of the conference was 'to bring together the collective experience of Marxist-Leninists and to develop a programme of practical and theoretical work towards the founding congress of the revolutionary party.'[53] But neither before nor at the conference did the CWM offer leadership as to how the conference might foster that project.

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[49] Lotta (1978).
[50] Notes taken by this writer during the relevant EC and NC meetings.
[51] 'Victorious Chinese People Grasp Revolution Promote Production', *Class Struggle*, December 1976; 'Never Forget Class Struggle', *Revolution*, no. 3 (January 1977).
[52] CWM, 'Open Letter to all Marxist-Leninist Organisations', undated, but written in pencil on the copy in this writer's possession is 'Sept, '76'.
[53] CWM, 'Open Letter to all Marxist-Leninist Organisations'.

Many organisations were represented at the conference.[54] Testifying to the widespread slavishness of the movement towards the CPC and its complacency regarding the events in China only a few months previously, no organisation represented at the conference thought it necessary to discuss those events. The CFB and the CUA sent a joint delegation (Redfern and 'JT' from the CFB and Phil Dixon and Wilf Dixon from the CUA) to the conference. Many individual members of the CWM attended, as did many unorganised individuals. Those who attended (around two hundred) did so with widely differing ideas as to how the conference should proceed and what it could accomplish. Several argued for a swift unification of the movement. Others proposed what would in effect be a new federation. One delegate proposed Maoist unity on similar principles to those advocated in this work.[55] The conference was not a success. The only decision taken was to convene more conferences. But none were.

The RCLB's Founding Congress.

The Founding Congress of the RCLB was held in Liverpool in July 1977, shortly after the CWM's Birmingham conference. It united the CFB and the CUA and adopted the *Manifesto of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain.*

During the unity negotiations between the two organisations the CUA had argued that the section of the *Manifesto* on the international class struggle should be based on the 'four fundamental contradictions'. But the CFB's EC contended that it should be based on the 'Three Worlds' theory. The EC was itself divided. Burford had wanted the *Manifesto* to call for the 'broadest possible united front against the hegemonism of the two superpowers', but the majority insisted that it should call for 'the broadest possible united front against imperialism, especially the hegemonism of the two superpowers.' Given that the constitution to be adopted by the Congress stated that a congress was the highest body of the organisation,[56] the CUA suggested that the matter should be put to the congress. This was opposed by the CDB's EC as ultra-democratic,[57] The CUA gave way and agreed that the international section should be based on the 'Three Worlds' theory.[58] Most members of the CFB thus attended the Congress unaware of the differences between the two organisations and on the CFB's EC.

The RCLB's *Manifesto* claimed that the 'Three Worlds' theory was Mao's 'great strategic concept.'. The first two clauses of the section on the class struggle internationally stated that 'the present era is the era of imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism. It is the era of the

[54] Other than the CWM, the CFB and the CUA, organisations represented were the Bangladeshi Workers' Association, the Birmingham Communist Association, the Coventry Workers' Association, the East London Marxist-Leninist Association, the Joint Action Committee of Marxist-Leninists, the Workers' Film Association, the Working Peoples' Party of England and the Workers Party of Scotland (Marxist-Leninist).

[55] Proposals of this nature were circulated prior to the conference but were from individuals lacking the influence of the CFB or CWM. The RCLB published a criticism of various party-building proposals made at the conference in 'Take the Bolshevik not the Menshevik Road in Party-Building', *Revolution* vol 2. no. 2 (November 1977).

[56] 'Constitution of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain', RCLB, *Revolution*, vol. 11, no. 11, p.29.

[57] In an overreaction to the ultra-democracy that had once prevailed, the CFB had lurched into an ultra-centralist version of democratic-centralism. It was held that the rank-and-file should show a 'willingness to understand and implement' the policies and decisions of the leadership. 'Resolution of the Third Conference of the Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)', *Revolution*, no. 1 (June 1976), p. 3.

[58] Notes taken by this writer during various CFB EC meetings of 1977.

proletarian socialist world revolution' and 'that the world is largely divided up between two great imperialist superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States of America, who exploit and oppress the peoples of the world.' It logically and conceptually followed from this second premise that the RCLB should have called, as Burford had argued it should, for the formation of a united front against the hegemonism of the two superpowers. Yet it called for a united front against 'imperialism, especially the hegemonism of the two superpowers'.[59]

This inconsistency suggests the lingering influence of a 'four fundamental contradictions' concept of the international class struggle, especially the view that the world was divided up between **all** the imperialist powers, not just by the two superpowers. It certainly reflected the stance of the majority of the members of the new organisation's leading core the Standing Committee of the Central Committee (Burford, as Chairman of the RCLB, Redfern, as Secretary of the Central Committee and 'JT' from the CFB and Phil Dixon from the CUA)[60] that in Britain the main target of the international united front should be British imperialism. But it became clear that Burford assumed it should be Soviet social-imperialism.

The Congress was regarded by the RCLB as a highly significant advance. It was certainly an advance. It united the CFB and the CUA. The *Manifesto* concisely summed up what the RCLB regarded as the collective knowledge of the movement. Interviewed by the editor of *Class Struggle*, Redfern expressed a great deal of post-Congress optimism. He claimed that the organisation was able 'to give a united, centralized lead to its comrades and to the working-class and able to promote lively working-class democracy and initiative within its ranks in the struggle to carry the fight forward. It is a national Party-building organization with branches in several cities and towns in Britain.'[61] But in the next chapter we will see that the differences on the international situation soon led to a bitter struggle and expulsions.

[59] RCLB, 'Manifesto of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain', *Revolution*, vol, II, no. 1, p. 5.
[60] Due to a serious accident Mauger was no longer able to take up leadership responsibilities. His experience was sorely missed by the new leadership.
[61] 'Militant Founding Congress of Revolutionary Communist League of Britain Held', *Class Struggle*, Vol 2, No. 1, August 1977.

Chapter Four.

The RCLB from Founding Congress to Second Congress. (and a digression on the NCG and the SCG)

The members of the RCLB left their Founding Congress full of confidence. The future seemed bright. Their confidence was infectious. Most members of the East London Marxist-Leninist Association (ELMLA) went over to the RCLB shortly after the congress. Membership increased by around a third in the next year or so. But a bitter struggle in the leadership, ending in the expulsion of a so-called 'anti-League Faction' early in 1979, indicated an uncertain future. The organisation's continued support for the revisionist regime in China led for some time to an increasingly rightist application of the 'Three Worlds' theory. Unity with the CWM in 1980 led to some moderation of this rightism by a renewed stress on the struggle against British imperialism, albeit one based on an eclecticism in which radical nationalism had begun to coexist with Marxism.

China, the 'Three Worlds' Theory and the RCLB.

Around the time of the RCLB's Founding Congress *Peking Review* began comprehensive and sustained propaganda on the 'Three Worlds' theory.[1] The RCLB was keen to support the CPC's claim that the 'Three Worlds' theory was Mao's theory. *Revolution* cited Mao's remarks on 'three kinds of forces' involved in the Suez affair of 1956 ('one, the United States, the biggest imperialist power, two, Britain and France, second rate imperialist powers, and, three, the oppressed nations') and demanded, with the air of one who has played a trump, let 'those who deny the fact that Mao himself originated the Three Worlds concept ponder this!'.[2]

But as we saw earlier, it probably was not Mao's theory. Nevertheless, on the matter of inter-imperialist contradictions there was some continuity between the CPC's historic stance and the theory. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Mao had argued that 'throughout the world the task now is to mobilise the people of all countries and organise an international united front to fight fascism and defend…the freedom and independence of all nations.'.[3] China's experience of fighting national oppression (since 1937 China had been fighting a national war against Japanese imperialism) probably made the Comintern's support for national defence in such countries as Britain unproblematic for the CPC.

This aspect of Comintern history was not questioned by the CPC in its struggle against Soviet revisionism. In its *Proposal Concerning the General Line* the party argued that in 'the capitalist countries which US imperialism controls or is trying to control, the working class and the people should direct their attacks mainly against US imperialism, but also against

[1] In 1977, issues 28,29,30,32,34,36,43,44,48,50 & 51 carried endorsements of the 'Three Worlds' theory from foreign Maoist organisations and/or exegeses of aspects of the theory. In 1978, issues 1,3,4,5,6,7,15,26,28,30,31,32,33,36 & 38 contained similar material.

[2] 'Volume 5 of Mao's Selected Works - an Arsenal of Materialist Dialectics, *Revolution*, vol. 2, no. 2 (November 1977).

[3] Mao Ze Dong, 'On the International United Front against Fascism', *Selected Works, vol. III* (Beijing, 1967), p. 29.

their own monopoly capitalists and other reactionary forces who are betraying the national interests.'.[4] This could perhaps have been an appropriate strategy for such minor capitalist countries as Greece and Turkey, but certainly not for relatively independent imperialist actors such as Britian and France.

The CPC seems never to have collectively evaluated the Comintern's post-1935 anti-fascist strategy. But it is clear that Mao and others were critical of its practical application. As we saw earlier, Kang Sheng, in his talks with Mao, had criticised Comintern strategy in Spain. In 1964, in his *Talk on Questions of Philosophy* (actually a wide-ranging talk on the universal applicability of class struggle to philosophy, politics and economics) Mao insisted that the period of the anti-Japanese war which ended in 1945 had constituted preparation for the 'seizure of power', but Stalin had opposed seizing power.[5]

An early salvo in the CPC's new round of propaganda on the 'Three Worlds' theory urged all 'the countries and people subjected to control, interference and bullying by Soviet social-imperialism' to 'form a broad international united front to expose the Soviet Union's policies of war and aggression and wage an unflinching struggle against it.'[6] Implicitly, the working-class in 'second world' countries should unite with the bourgeoisie to defend Britain against the Soviet Union.

The concept of an international united front is deeply problematic. Though there is an international class struggle, it is fought in separate countries. As Marx and Engels argued long ago, 'Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.'.[7] It was orthodox Marxism to consider that the primary responsibility of the communists of imperialist countries was to fight their 'own' imperialists. But the RCLB's *Manifesto* was not explicit on this matter. Its call for the formation internationally of the 'broadest possible united front against imperialism, especially the hegemonism of the two superpowers.'[8] was open to more than one interpretation. What was the significance of the word 'especially'? Surely, it could only mean, if taken seriously, targeting primarily the two superpowers rather than British imperialism. As we will see, it began for some to precisely mean that. Eventually, it meant fighting only Soviet social-imperialism.

It was implicit in China's early propaganda on the 'Three Worlds' theory that the Soviet Union should be treated as the main enemy in the international class struggle. In *Chairman Mao's Theory*, published soon after the RCLB's founding congress, it was explicitly argued, with reference to the appeasement of Nazi Germany in the late 1930s by Chamberlain and Daladier (then the respective Prime Ministers of the UK and France), that the Soviet Union should indeed be treated as the main enemy:

> If we should still indiscriminately put the two superpowers on a par and fail to single out the Soviet Union as the more dangerous instigator of world war, we

[4] '*Proposal Concerning the General Line'*, p. 18.
[5] Mao Ze Dong, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-9/mswv9_27.htm.
[6] 'Soviet Social-Imperialism – Most Dangerous Source of War', *Peking Review*, 15 July 1977, p. 26.
[7] K. Marx & F. Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Beijing, 1965), p. 41.
[8] RCLB, 'Manifesto of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain', p. 5.

would only be blunting the revolutionary vigilance of the people of the world and blurring the primary target of the struggle against hegemonism.[9]

The Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) and the Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist) [of the USA] (CPML[USA]) were but two Maoist organisations that drew the logical conclusion from the CPC's claim that the 'Three Worlds theory was a 'global strategy'. The Australian party insisted it would fight for Australian independence against the Soviet Union 'in alliance with [the USA] and the patriotic sections of the Australian bourgeoisie.'.[10] In 1980 the CPML[of the USA] declared that China was correct to ally with the USA in an 'antihegemonic' front.[11] In Britain, the WPS and Manchanda's circle jointly called for a united front with the USA.

The RCLB and the Sino-US Anti-Soviet Alliance.

The RCLB's *Manifesto* had been adopted before the CPC's new campaign of propaganda on the 'Three Worlds' theory. Support for the USA had been ruled out. In the event of a war 'between the two superpowers on West European territory', the RCLB would be 'for the defeat of our own bourgeoisie'. Burford and Redfern attended a meeting convened by the WPS and Manchanda to insist that there could no question of an alliance with the USA.[12] But the RCLB would support 'a people's war of national resistance against…invasion by Soviet social- imperialism' and insisted that the 'peoples of Western Europe must strengthen their unity and make preparations now' for such a war.[13]

It was an extraordinary illusion, a fantasy, that there could be a Soviet invasion of western Europe that did not precipitate a war 'between the two superpowers on West European territory.' There was virtually no reference in the RCLB's *Manifesto* to the two rival imperialist blocs led by the two superpowers. Britain and the other major West European powers were members of the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). Poland, East Germany and other powers were members of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. The 'second world' countries of western Europe were connected to the USA by numerous economic, political and military ties. Preparations for a fantasy 'people's war of national resistance' could only help the US-led bloc prepare for the war which was actually threatening, war between the two imperialist blocs.

Differences on the Political Committee (PC)[14] on the matter of the international united front gradually became antagonistic after the return of the delegation to China. There, the delegates had encountered ample evidence that revisionists led the CPC. In talks with the ILD on the international situation, the CPC's representatives argued that US imperialism's attempts to

[9] *Chairman Mao's Theory*, p.39.
[10] Cited in RCP,USA, 'Three Worlds" Strategy Apology for Capitulation', *Revolution* (November 1978), p. 16.
[11] Elbaum (2018), p. 256.
[12] The RCLB published in *Revolution*, vol. 3, no. 4 (November 1978), together with a refutation, the 'Joint Communique of 15th July, 1978 issued by the Workers' Party of Scotland (Marxist-Leninist) and the Revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Communist League of Britain', which had called for an anti-Soviet alliance between Britain and the USA.
[13] *RCLB Manifesto*, p. 8.
[14] There had been a restructuring of the RCLB's leading committees. The old Standing Committee of the Central Committee was renamed the Political Committee while a new Standing Committee of PC members in London (Burford, Dixon and Redfern) that could actually function as a Standing Committee was established.

broker a peace deal between Egypt and Israel should be supported.[15] They contended that Yugoslavia was a socialist country, a reversal of one of the verdicts of the CPC's 1960s polemics against Soviet revisionism. On a visit to an exhibition on party history they saw a positive evaluation of the prominent capitalist-roader Peng Dehuai.[16] Dixon and Redfern were disturbed by these signs of revisionism. But all the delegates were beguiled by their experiences in China (it was of course the achievements of the socialist period which they witnessed) and returned to Britain convinced that China was still on the socialist road.

Shortly after the delegation's return, Redfern, the delegation's leader (for personal reasons, Burford, though the leader of the organisation and a member of the delegation, did not lead it) was interviewed by the editor of *Class Struggle*. Asked which class 'holds power in China?' He replied 'Without doubt the working-class! China is a state of the dictatorship of the proletariat.'. The Chinese people were said to have been 'overjoyed' by the 'downfall of the "Gang of Four."' He retailed some of the absurd accusations against the Four heard by the delegation. Chiang Ching. for instance, was said to have made a 'stoker put coal in the boiler piece by piece so she wouldn't be disturbed by the noise!'[17]

Early in 1978, doubtless influenced by *Chairman Mao's Theory*, Burford began to claim that a correct application of the 'Three Worlds' theory meant that the organisation should give priority to fighting Soviet social-imperialism. He claimed, for instance, that the organisation didn't take seriously enough an alleged Soviet threat to Zimbabwe. (There was a potential threat from the Soviet Union, which had military advisers in Zimbabwe's neighbour Mozambique).

But whatever the CPC thought, most of the leadership was firmly of the opinion that proletarian internationalism demanded that priority be accorded to the struggle against British imperialism. Burford's arguments were rejected at meetings of the Standing Committee and the PC.[18] But, an aspect of the ultra-centralism which then prevailed in the organisation, the PC presented a 'united face' to the CC. and thus Burford's case was not put to the CC, which met in February.

At the CC, the PC argued that the organisation had paid insufficient attention to opposing British imperialism (particularly telling evidence was the failure of *Class Struggle* to point out in two prominent articles on South Africa that Britain was still the principal imperialist backer of the apartheid regime[19]). The CC enthusiastically supported the PC's proposal that the organisation should oppose British imperialism in practice by launching a campaign to send a Land Rover to aid the national liberation war of the people of Zimbabwe led by the Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU) against the settler regime in 'Rhodesia'.[20]

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[15] Notes taken by the present writer. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in 1980. Since then, co-operation between the two countries has been crucial in helping to contain the struggle of the Palestinian people against Israel and its US backers.
[16] Peng had been purged in 1959.
[17] *Class Struggle*, vol. 2, no. 26, January 1978.
[18] Notes taken by this writer at the SC & PC meetings of January 1978.
[19] 'South African Liberation Forces make Further Advances', August 1977; 'Despite Fascist Oppression Azanian People Fight on', November 1977.
[20] Notes taken by this writer at the SC, PC and CC meetings of January-February 1978.

Arguably, the PC's rejection of Burford's stance on Soviet social-imperialism and the CC decision to launch a Zimbabwe campaign were not in conformity with the 'Three Worlds' theory which the organisation professed to uphold. How compatible, for instance, was supporting a national liberation war against British imperialism with supporting British ability to resist Soviet expansionism? Such contradictions were not considered. A *Revolution* article indicated a crucial turn to the left by publishing in support of the decision to launch the Zimbabwe campaign *Proletarian Internationalism and the Duties of British Communists'*.[21] Earlier, *Revolution* had criticised Birch for, among other matters, denouncing the 'Three Worlds' theory.[22]

These articles provoked a typically sectarian, literary fusillade from the ACW. In a pamphlet denouncing the RCLB for social-chauvinism, the ACW made many pertinent criticisms of the RCLB's stance on imperialism, war and the national question in imperialist countries. But their observations were suffused with sneers ('some random profundities of the RCLB') and condescension ('it is probably known even to the RCLB comrades that the Second World War was started not in 1941 but in 1939'). The pamphlet's libellous conclusion was that the leaders of the RCLB were motivated by 'personal gain and nothing else.'. [23]

More significant than the ACW's bile and vitriol, which of course rendered its criticism ineffectual, was that the pamphlet manifested the continued refusal of the movement to subject to serious evaluation the Comintern's post-1935 strategy. The ACW (for whom criticism of Stalin was blasphemous (the word is used advisedly)) refused to even consider the possibility that under Stalin's leadership the Comintern had revised Leninism. There was not a word on the 'Three Worlds' theory.

In seventy-six pages of 'merciless criticism' the ACW pointed out 'contortions and contradictions' in the *Revolution* article denouncing Birch.[24] These contortions and contradictions were the result of its author, Redfern, attempting to reconcile the 'Three Worlds' theory with orthodox Marxism-Leninism. In 1979, after the expulsion of Redfern and others as an 'anti-League Faction, Burford asserted that in 1978 the RCLB's line on the international situation had been based not on the 'Three Worlds' theory, but on a 'Two Worlds' view that the contradiction between imperialism and the oppressed peoples and nations was then the principal contradiction in the world, that the united front that really mattered was that between the working-class of the imperialist countries and the revolutionary classes of the oppressed peoples and nations and that there was no fundamental difference between the two superpowers and the other imperialist powers.[25] Burford was correct. Objectively, the RCLB's turn to the left had been in contradiction with the 'Three Worlds' theory.

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[21] RCLB, 'Proletarian Internationalism and the Duties of British Communists'*, Revolution*, vol. 3, no. 2 (June 1978).
[22] RCLB, 'Birch no longer Part of the Marxist-Leninist Movement', *Revolution*, vol. 3, no. 1 (February 1978).
[23] ACW, *On the Social-Chauvinism of the R.C.L.B,* p. 59. The ACW was dissolved in 1997. It was always little more than a sect of true believers. It is befitting that some of those who once were members now propagate an ossified (c. 1935) version of Marxism-Leninism in the Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist) and are members of a Stalin cult, the Stalin Society.
[24] ACW, *On the Social-Chauvinism of the R.C.L.B,* p. 13.
[25] Chris Burford, 'Comments on the Political Line of the Zimbabwe Campaign of 1978'.

Shortly after the launch of the Zimbabwe campaign, several imperialist powers clashed in Zaire. France and Belgium intervened there to oppose an invasion by Soviet/Cuban backed mercenaries. *Class Struggle* denounced the intervention of France and Belgium, while being quite clear that from an international perspective the main issue was the Soviet and Cuban intervention.[26] *Class Struggle*'s stance was not in conformity with the CPCs' advocacy of Second and Third World unity against Soviet social-imperialism. It was though in conformity with majority opinion on the CC, which at its June meeting approved the May SC resolution on which the *Class Struggle* piece had been based.[27]

Burford's claim that priority should be given to the struggle against Soviet social-imperialism was in accord with Comintern strategy of 1935-45 and the 'Three Worlds' theory. Moreover, the ideological and political climate of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the climate that was fostering such Cold War warriors as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, was extremely favourable to the social-chauvinist gale blowing in the Maoist movement. *Class Struggle* had insisted early in 1978 that support for the arrests of the 'Gang of Four' had been 'a matter of proletarian internationalist duty. It was 'the duty of all communists…to support the socialist People's Republic of China.'[28] The duty of communists to fight British imperialism was soon to come into antagonistic contradiction with the alleged duty of communists to support China and the CPC.

The PC recommended at the June 1978 CC that the 'united face' of the PC be ended. The CC agreed and then heard from Burford that on the PC there were serious differences on the international situation. Burford, alarmed by the leftwards shift in the RCLB's ideological and political line, had already tried to shore up his authority by claiming on the PC that he should be the subject of a 'cult of the personality'. He now launched a personal attack on Redfern, claiming that he had been plotting to 'seize power' in the RCLB. He demanded that he be removed from the post of Secretary. Only one CC member supported this manoeuvre. The CC did approve, unanimously, Burford's proposal that in August, to mark the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the CWM and RCLB should jointly organise a march to the Soviet Embassy.

Probably, most members of the RCLB assumed that the August demonstration would be an act of solidarity with the oppressed Czech people. But Burford and others used the occasion to urge support for British national independence against Soviet expansionism. The influence of the CPCs propaganda over the previous year was manifest on the demonstration. There was virtually no acknowledgement of the possibility, indeed probability, of a war between the two imperialist blocs, but much loud support for the fantasy war of national resistance.

In language reminiscent of jingoes attacking people who had refused to support imperialist wars with Germany, *Revolution* denounced Birch as a 'traitor', who 'urges us to ignore the war threat posed by the superpowers, especially the Soviet Union.' Readers were urged to resist 'appeasement' of the Soviet Union, to remember 'Chamberlain's appeasement of

[26] 'Soviet and all Imperialists Out of Zaire', *Class Struggle*, June 1978.
[27] Notes taken by this writer at the May SC and June CC meetings.
[28] 'Support for Socialist China Means Wholehearted Support for China' Veteran Leaders', *Revolution*, vol. 3, no. 1 (February 1978).

Hitler.'.[29] C*lass Struggle* called for increased military spending to defend British national independence against the 'threat' from the Soviet Union. Addressing those preparing to march to the Soviet Embassy, Burford argued that the Soviet Union was 'the main source of war' and 'called on the people to prepare themselves for defence.'.[30]

At September's PC meeting Redfern criticised the social-chauvinism that had surfaced during and after August's demonstration. He and Dixon both criticised statements made by Hua Kuo-feng, the new Chairman of the CPC, during recent visits to Yugoslavia and Iran,[31] but did not raise wider questions regarding the CPC and its 'Three Worlds' theory. Both, Redfern especially, still assumed that China was making compromises with imperialism that did not require communists in imperialist countries to follow suit. Both, Redfern especially, were refusing to recognise the incompatibility of the 'Three Worlds' theory with Marxist-Leninist doctrine on war and peace and on the national question in imperialist countries.

In response to Redfern's criticisms, Burford claimed that the RCLB needed urgently to discuss how better to oppose Soviet-social-imperialism. The Zimbabwe campaign, he argued, had been 'diversionary' - solidarity work with Zimbabwe should be ended at the conclusion of the current campaign. Redfern, who had a strong emotional commitment to the Zimbabwe work, was incensed. He had just returned from a speaking tour on which he and a leading member of ZANU had attempted to raise support for the national liberation war against British imperialism in Zimbabwe.[32]

A heated and acrimonious discussion ended when Redfern impetuously called Burford a 'traitor to the working class'. Given an opportunity to withdraw the accusation, he refused to do so.[33] His refusal was a manifestation of the tendency in the movement in Britain to invert Mao's call to 'unite, don't split' and to split rather than unite. Redfern's stubborn refusal to withdraw his accusation against Burford – persisted in for several months - sabotaged whatever prospects for reaching unity there might have been. It was also tactically foolish as it handed the initiative to Burford.

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[29] 'Ten Years after Czechoslovakia – Strengthen the Struggle against Hegemonism', *Revolution* (August 1978), p. 6, p. 10, p. 11.

[30] *Class Struggle*, August 1978; September 1978. A more sophisticated justification of social-chauvinism was contained in 'Britain and the Struggle against Superpower Hegemonism and War', *Revolution* vol. 3, no. 4 (November 1978).

[31] Hua Kuo-feng visited Romania, Yugoslavia and Iran, all centres of US-Soviet contention, around the time of the RCLB's August demonstration. Sending Hua, rather than the Foreign Minister Huang Hua, was a clear signal that his visits were partly intended to make party political points. In Yugoslavia Hua endorsed the Yugoslav revisionists' system of industrial 'self-management'. *The Guardian*, August 23 1978. Hua visited Iran at the height of the popular revolt that was soon to overthrow the viciously reactionary pro-US regime of the Shah. Hua's condemnation of superpower 'expansion, aggression and domination' (*The Guardian*, August 30 1978) in one of the principal bulwarks of US power in the middle east was a clear signal that the Soviet Union should be the principal target of the international united front.

[32] If being attacked by the enemy is a sign of doing the right thing, the RCLB was doing the right thing. During the speaking tour, twelve British missionaries in Rhodesia were killed, allegedly by ZANU, provoking hostility to the tour. The local authority responsible for Yeovil revoked a booking for a hall where a meeting was to be held. An outdoor meeting was attacked by the fascist National Front. The Bristol branch of the RCLB was denounced by the local press for supporting ZANU.

[33] Notes taken by Redfern at the PC meeting of September 1978.

Shortly after the September PC Dixon joined Redfern in opposing Burford's social-chauvinism. Persisting in his refusal to renounce his accusation against Burford, Redfern was removed from the post of Secretary. Dixon and Redfern were ousted from the PC. In November an extremely sectarian document was circulated to the CC. Initialled 'MC' ('Malcolm Chapman' was Redfern's party name), textual evidence suggests the involvement of others. Entitled *The Bourgeoisie has Seized Power on the Political Committee* (a wholly inappropriate and provocative application of Mao's concept of the bourgeoisie being 'right inside the communist party') the document effectively accused all the other members of the PC of being class enemies:

> Led by the opportunist who is currently the Chairman of the Central Committee, the bourgeoisie has seized power on the Political Committee. Its aim is to disarm the working-class and the people and prevent the British revolution. Even more, it wants to mobilise the working-class and people to fight for its aims on the battlefields of Europe against its imperialist rivals. The bourgeoisie has found mouthpieces for these aims in the organisation, who excuse, prettify, embellish and support British and US imperialism.

Unsurprisingly, these *ad hominem* attacks won no support on the Central Committee. On the issue that had sparked Redfern's splittist attack on Burford, most of the RCLB's leadership were ideologically and politically closer to Redfern than to Burford but presumably considered that the social-chauvinism being promoted by Burford was then a less serious matter than Redfern's splittism. The differences that had provoked the row at the September PC were extremely serious and sooner or later would have necessitated a split if not resolved. But it was not August 1914. There had been time to try to resolve differences through discussion, debate and struggle. If discussion, debate and struggle did not resolve the differences, it is conceivable that a different alignment of forces might have emerged, and social-chauvinism defeated.

By the end of the year Dixon, Redfern and others had formed a faction. Early in January 1979, the faction appealed for support by widely circulating an openly factional document.[34] Later in January, Dixon and Redfern attended a CC meeting, but walked out after not being allowed to address the CC. The members of the faction were then expelled for 'bourgeois factionalism'.

The faction gained virtually no support among the rank-and-file of the RCLB. No doubt Dixon's and Redfern's splittism discredited that for which they fought. But the history of the international communist movement and the authority of the CPC had probably been a more significant factor. Though the members of the faction claimed to uphold the 'Three Worlds' theory, it was not difficult to discern that what they stood for was at odds with the theory and with the RCLB's Manifesto, both of which were consistent with post-1935 Comintern strategy. Effectively asked to choose between the faction and such authorities, only a tiny number of members of the RCLB chose the faction.

The RCLB's ultra-centralism had probably also been a significant factor. The differences convulsing the leadership had been concealed from the wider membership (though some

[34] 'The Two-Line Struggle in the RCLB is a Struggle between Marxism-Leninism and Revisionism'.

probably knew of them via informal channels). They had not been told why Redfern had been sacked as Secretary. The PC insisted that rank-and-file members return the faction's January circular. As a CC member remarked a few years later, the way in which the 'Redfern Affair' had been resolved ensured that no debate of the politics happened. The affair was 'conducted in secrecy and resolved by organisational means.'.[35] After the expulsions, the RCLB insisted that the principal issue had been democratic-centralism, that forming a faction had violated this fundamental organisational principle.[36] The expelled members, who had formed themselves into a new group, Communist Unity,[37] immediately after the expulsions, insisted that on the contrary, it had been matters of ideological and political line, especially social-chauvinism.[38]

The expulsions came shortly after a public meeting in London in December 1978, held to celebrate the successful conclusion of the campaign to support the national liberation war in Zimbabwe. Those attending the meeting heard speeches from representatives of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and ZANU and from Burford. (Redfern, who had initiated and led the campaign, was not called upon to speak). Burford and the faction both used the meeting to make political points. Burford obliquely criticised the underlying rationale of the campaign by having little to say on British imperialism and a great deal to say on the two superpowers, particularly the Soviet Union.[39] The members of the faction ostentatiously did not applaud his speech.

Those in the RCLB who wished to give a higher priority to opposing Soviet social-imperialism rather than British imperialism were probably helped by some negative features of the Zimbabwe campaign. It had been regarded as imperative, especially by Redfern, that the campaign be closely integrated with factory base-building. Sending a Landrover was seen as a highly symbolic manifestation of solidarity with the struggle in Zimbabwe. But attempting to raise a sum sufficient to buy a Landrover through such means as factory collections and donations by union branches had been unrealistic.[40] According to the organisation's Industrial Sub-Committee, attempting to do so had seriously disrupted the organisation's mass work. Blame for this was to be laid 'at Redfern's door.'.[41] Some considerable blame, to be sure. But the main reason was the RCLB's fundamental misreading of the state of working-class consciousness. Very few workers in Britain felt any sense of solidarity with the national liberation war in Zimbabwe.

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[35] 'In Response to Reorientate the League' (a matter we will consider later).
[36] 'Militant RCLB Conference Denounces Anti-League Faction', *Class Struggle*, April 1979; 'The anti-League Faction. Its History and Main Features', *Revolution*, vol. 4, no. 1 (August 1979).
[37] Communist Unity survived only a few months, foundering over disagreements over China and the Three Worlds Theory.
[38] Communist Unity, *Exposure and Defeat of the RCLB's Social Chauvinism is a Major Task in Party-Building*.
[39] *Class Struggle*, 14 December-28; December 28, 1978.
[40] A small number of substantial individual donations ensured the money was raised.
[41] 'Summary of Zimbabwe Campaign and Industrial Work.' April 1979.

A Rectification Campaign against 'Ultra-Left Idealism'.

Perhaps prompted by such manifestations of rapidly escalating international tensions as Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea in December 1978, the RCLB's leadership decided early in 1979 that a rectification campaign against the ultra-leftism allegedly promoted by the recently expelled 'anti-League Faction' was necessary.

The invasion, sanctioned by the Soviet Union, was followed by another barrage of propaganda in *Peking Review.* The invasion was claimed to have been a manifestation of Soviet ambitions to dominate the whole of Asia and eventually the whole world.'.[42] The experience of 1935-45 was invoked to suggest that the Soviet Union should be treated as a latter-day Nazi Germany. Vietnam was said to have defeated Kampuchea with a 'blitzkrieg of the Hitlerite type.'. Appeasement could only encourage aggression – 'this is what happened in the 1930s when concessions to Hitler gave the German fascists a big boost.'. All 'peace-loving countries and people' were urged to form 'a broad united front against Soviet hegemonism.'.[43]

On January 1st, 1979, shortly after the invasion, China and the USA finally established full diplomatic relations. Later that month, during an official visit to Washington, Deng Xiaoping told *Time* magazine that China regarded the USA as part of a united front against 'hegemonism.'.[44] Evidently, the Soviet Union was now deemed to be the sole hegemonic power and the USA deemed to be one of the 'peace-loving' countries. Deng informed US President Carter of China's plans to invade Vietnam to 'teach it a lesson' and returned from Washington convinced (wrongly so, apparently[45]) that he had US approval for the invasion of Vietnam. A brief border war followed an invasion in February.

The invasion of Kampuchea was grist to Burford's social-chauvinist mill. As we have seen, Burford had argued that in 1978 the RCLB's line on the international situation had been based on a 'Two Worlds' view.' It had. It had been based on certain fundamental principles of proletarian internationalism: that the main enemy of the working-class of the imperialist countries is 'at home', that the working-class of the imperialist countries should fight to form a united front against imperialism with the oppressed peoples and nations; and that the communists of an imperialist country have a duty to support revolutionary nationalist struggles against their 'own' imperialists.

But a CC resolution adopted soon after Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea put the RCLB back on the right 'Three Worlds' track. The resolution declared that a 'struggle for British national independence' must be 'Britain's main contribution' to the 'international united front called for by the Theory of the Three Worlds.'.[46] But the only significant threat to British national independence came from the Soviet Union. Whatever the subjective motivations of those who supported the resolution, it led to giving priority to fighting British imperialism's principal enemy, Soviet social-imperialism, rather than British imperialism. There was, for

[42] 'Social-Imperialist Strategy in Asia', *Peking Review,* 19 January `1979.
[43] 'How to Deal with Soviet Hegemonism' *Peking Review*, 30 March 1979.
[44] *Time*, 5 February 1979, Cited in Elbaum (2018), p. 229.
[45] Zhao (2022), p.59.
[46] CC document 'Proletarian Internationalism', nd, but February 1979.

instance, to be no further practical solidarity with the national liberation war against British imperialism in 'Rhodesia' during what had become a crucial period in the war.

Commenting on the Zimbabwe campaign, Burford argued that Redfern had produced an 'impressive ultra-left distortion of proletarian internationalism.'. Underlying Redfern's insistence that priority should be accorded to fighting British imperialism, was an assumption that an action should be judged not by how it 'served the international working-class, but how much it served the interests of the workers in Britain.'.[47] Redfern had not argued for giving priority to fighting British imperialism because it 'served the interests of the workers in Britain' (though it did), but because in Britain fighting British imperialism was the best way of serving the interests of the international proletariat. But for Burford and his keenest supporters, the main enemy was not at home, but away.

In a document clearly written by Burford, but issued by the Political Committee, Burford argued that the stance taken by the RCLB on Zaire in 1978 had been 'riddled through and through with the petit-bourgeois idealism of the anti-League Faction.'. It was claimed that the demand to oppose French and Belgian intervention in Zaire as well as Soviet aggression had been a demand to 'oppose <u>all</u> enemies <u>equally</u> and <u>simultaneously</u>.'[48] This was a crass distortion of a stance based on a recognition that the primary internationalist responsibility of communists in imperialist countries is to oppose their 'own' imperialists (in this case the western imperialist coalition) and not the enemies of 'their' imperialists.

But for Burford, *Class Struggle*'s insistence that the 'workers of western Europe have a special responsibility to demand that the imperialists of Europe…pull out their soldiers.' was 'positively grovelling at Brezhnev's feet!'. According to Burford, it had not been grasped that the 'principal contradiction in Zaire in May 1978 was with the Soviet Union' and that therefore the western intervention should not have been opposed. The western imperialists had intervened 'on the side of those fighting a just struggle against their main enemy at the time'. Burford cited in support of this contention Mao's stance in the 1930s that while the CPC 'opposed all imperialism', a distinction must be made 'between Japanese imperialism' which was then 'committing aggression against China' and the imperialist powers which were then 'not doing so.' [49]

To apply such a differentiation to the Zaire affair was specious. In the 1930s Japan had been 'committing aggression' against China in an attempt to turn the whole of China into a Japanese colony, following its conquest of China's province of Manchuria in 1931. But Zaire, while formally independent, was a western neo-colony. Mobutu, the regime's president, had led in 1960 a CIA-backed military coup against a revolutionary nationalist government headed by Patrice Lumumba, subsequently executed. Mobutu had been a faithful lackey of western imperialism ever since. In 1975, for instance, just before the eruption of the civil war in Angola, Zairean forces had been sent there to aid South African and US-backed forces manoeuvring to prevent the main liberation movement, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), taking power after the imminent defeat of the Portuguese

[47] 'Comments on the Political Line of the Zimbabwe Campaign of 1978', p. 26
[48] 'Criticise the May 78 Resolution and June 78 Class [Struggle] Article on Zaire', June 1979, p. 2. Emphases in the original.
[49] 'Criticise the May 78 Resolution', p. 1.

colonialists. To have supported, or even not to have opposed the intervention in Zaire would have been to support or not oppose the determination of western imperialists to keep control of their neo-colony Zaire.

Burford claimed that the 'Anti-League Faction's 'idealist nonsense' – its insistence on fighting its 'own' imperialists - was said to have been such that 'on that basis the united front of 1941 onwards would never have been formed.'.[50] Indeed it would not. It is unlikely that many, if any, RCLB members regarded, as Deng Xiaoping did, the USA as part of a united front against Soviet social-imperialism. But in the concrete conditions of the time, implementing the CC resolution on British national independence could only mean supporting the US-led imperialist coalition against the challenge of the Soviet-led coalition.

Rectification indirectly led the RCLB into effectively endorsing British imperialism's efforts to retain dominance in Zimbabwe. The Lancaster House Agreement of December 1979 was a neo-colonial settlement. ZANU ended the national liberation war and prepared to contest elections. It undertook that if it won there would be little reform: there would be no land reform for ten years. Britain prepared to dispatch a colonial governor to 'Rhodesia'. Preoccupied with opposing Soviet social-imperialism, the RCLB could only lamely argue that the Lancaster House agreement provided 'a basis for struggle on a new front.'.[51]

In 1980, a British governor was installed in 'Rhodesia'. C*lass Struggle* excoriated attempts by the governor and the UDI regime to prevent a ZANU victory in imminent elections but supported ZANU's reformist strategy.[52] ZANU's victory in the elections was hailed in a front-page article as a 'victory over British imperialism'.[53] It was certainly a victory over British attempts to prevent a ZANU victory. But ZANU's nationalist strategy combined with unrelenting imperialist pressure ensured that ZANU's election victory did not, could not, lead to national and social liberation for the people of Zimbabwe.

The RCLB in the International United Front against Soviet Social-imperialism.

While the Lancaster House agreement was being forged. the members of the *Class Struggle* production team were engaged over Christmas 1979 in a Stakhanovite effort to bring out a special edition on Kampuchea. According to *Class Struggle*'s editor, there were a 'number of important struggles…for example, the Zimbabwean people's struggle', on which the RCLB would have liked 'to do more', but it had decided 'to concentrate on Kampuchea because of its global importance.'.[54] Or, to put it another way, all too reminiscent of the CPGB's post-1935 preference for opposing German, Italian and Japanese imperialism rather than British imperialism, the RCLB had decided that it was more important to oppose Soviet social-imperialism than British imperialism

Included in the special edition of *Class Struggle* on Kampuchea was a report on a celebrity conference on Kampuchea held in Stockholm in November 1979. (Attendees and supporters

[50] 'Criticise the May 78 Resolution and June 78 Class [Struggle] Article on Zaire'. p. 3.
[51] *Class Struggle*, 10-23 January 1980.
[52] For some time, ZANU had worked with other nationalist organisations in a Patriotic Front. It contested the elections as ZANU(PF).
[53] *Class Struggle*, 10-23 January 1980 & March 20 – April 2, 1980.
[54] *Class Struggle Special Issue on Kampuchea*, (nd), 1980.

had included such as Noam Chomsky and Felix Greene (and Keith Bennett of the CWM)). One demand raised at the conference was that the new regime in Kampuchea should not be allowed to take Kampuchea's seat at the United Nations. The USA had refused to recognise the regime, as had all western governments. Under intense US pressure, the United Nations had resolved that the old Kampuchean regime should keep Kampuchea's seat. C*lass Struggle* approvingly reported that the Stockholm conference had 'warmly acclaimed' the decision of the 'United Nations General Assembly…to maintain the seat of Democratic Kampuchea.'.[55]

Given general Maoist support for the Communist Party of Kampuchea's (CPK (popularly known as the Khmer Rouge)), struggle against Vietnam, we should briefly consider the widely-accepted accusations of torture, killings and much else made against the CPK, by, for instance, John Pilger in articles in the *Daily Mirror* in 1979[56] and popularised in the film *The Killing Fields.* It seems likely that some of these accusations were true. The Maoist Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM)[57] accepted that some of them – of torture and killings, for example – were true and located them in the context of an ultra-left strategy of attempting a rapid advance to communism that involved abolishing money and all private property.[58] The RCLB was of course unaware of this strategy and its consequences.

When the special edition of *Class Struggle* on Kampuchea was published the matter had become overshadowed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. According to *Peking Review*, this was a 'grave threat to peace and security in Asia and the whole world.'.[59] It was regarded by the USA and its allies as a far more serious matter than Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea, as a global rather than a merely regional threat. In response to the invasion, US President Carter had announced in January 1980 that the USA would resist by force any further Soviet military ventures. It also called for trade sanctions and a boycott of the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow. [60]

'As we go into the next decade', the RCLB warned, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan 'has shown us what to expect – increased momentum in the Soviet expansionist drive as it sets out to challenge the USA for world domination. The response of the people of the world must be increased unity against superpower hegemonism, and particularly against Soviet social-imperialism.'. The RCLB was shortly to hold a public meeting on 'British imperialism, the superpowers and the struggle for independence'. [61]

In the spring, *Class Struggle* noted with approval that the client states of US imperialism 'on the Arabian Peninsula' were demanding 'increased military and other assistance' from the USA and other Western imperialist powers. It was to be regretted that 'no real trade boycott has been launched…Western multinationals have actually established new offices in Moscow

[55] *Class Struggle Special Issue on Kampuchea*, (nd), 1980.
[56] The articles were republished in Pilger (1989).
[57] RIM was an international organisation of Maoist parties and organisations united chiefly by their opposition to the Chinese revisionists and their 'Three Worlds' theory. It published the journal *A World to Win.*
[58] *Condescending Saviours - What Went Wrong with the Pol Pot Regime*
@ http://www.bannedthought.net/International/RIM/AWTW/1999-25/PolPot_eng25.htm, pp. 17-18, p.38, p. 26, p. 27
[59] *Peking Review*, no 16 (7 January 1980).
[60] Most of the allies of the USA, including West German and Japan, followed the US in boycotting the games. Britain did not, despite the British government's support for a boycott.
[61] *Class Struggle*, 10-23 January 1980.

since the invasion.'.[62] At a conference on Afghanistan convened by the IWA, unidentified speakers accused the RCLB of 'trying to get the people of Afghanistan into a struggle between the two superpowers on the side of US imperialism.'.[63] Objectively, this was true. Subjectively, the organisation was edging closer to such a stance.

After the invasion of Kampuchea, the RCLB and the CWM had jointly founded a British-Kampuchea Support Committee (BKSC). (Similar bodies were established in several countries). The committee's stance on the struggle in Kampuchea was essentially humanitarian, strongly reminiscent of the CPGB's revisionist stance on the war in Vietnam in the 1960s and '70s. All those who 'love peace, independence and justice' were urged to support the Committee. Arthur Clegg, once a leading member of the CPGB (in the 1930s he had been the National Organiser of the China Campaign Committee), disingenuously hailed by *Class Struggle* as a 'veteran British communist',[64] was a notable member of the BKSC. In 1981, in an echo of Earl Browder's justification of the notorious dissolution of the Communist Party of the USA in 1944,[65] the RCLB supported the dissolution of the CPK. This had been necessary to 'consolidate the…unity of all resistance forces.'.[66] The BKSC did not flourish. It seems to have simply faded away.

Judged by *Class Struggle*'s coverage of the international situation in 1979-80, the objectives of the rectification campaign had been met. The paper's treatment of Afghanistan and Kampuchea on the one hand and of Zimbabwe on the other suggests that the organisation had been purged of the 'ultra-left idealism' which had led the organisation to give priority to fighting British imperialism rather than Soviet social-imperialism. The RCLB now turned its attention to uniting with the CWM. But the process of unification showed that 'ultra-left idealism' had not been eradicated.

Uniting the RCLB and the CWM.

The unity negotiations between the CWM and the RCLB which had begun in 1976 had continued during the internal struggles of both organisations (there had been disputes in the CWM similar to that which had led to the expulsion of the 'Anti-League Faction' from the RCLB). Both organisations held conferences on their respective histories prior to a Unity Conference held in the Spring of 1980.

The CWM's history had been the main business at its Third National Conference, held in late 1979. The conference resolved that a programme it had adopted in 1977 had erroneously 'implied that revolutionary theory would arise…spontaneously from the working-class movement.'. Spontaneism was held to have been responsible for an early period of 'furious activism in a wide variety of strikes, demonstrations etc. resulting in very few concrete advances.' This activism was defined (perhaps reflecting the influence of the RCLB) as a 'leftist impetuous line'.[67] It seems much more likely that it had been based on a failure to break with the CPB's denial of the effect of imperialism on the working-class (*Absolute*

[62] *Class Struggle*, 17-30 April 1980.
[63] *Class Struggle*, 3-16 April 1980.
[64] *Class Struggle Special Issue on Kampuchea*, (nd), 1980.
[65] For a recent discussion of 'Browderism' see Johanningsmeier (2014), ch.11; see also Redfern (2002).
[66] *Class Struggle*, February 1981.
[67] CWM, 'The Historical Experience of the C.W.M. (DRAFT)', p. 2. (Upper case in the original).

Decline had had little to say on the question of imperialism), its assumption that many working-class people would take up the revolutionary class struggle once provided with communist leadership.

A new programme adopted by the CWM in 1980 brought the organisation closer to the RCLB's stance that imperialist superprofits were a major factor in promoting reformism in the working-class. According to this programme, 'super-profits derived from …[imperialist]…exploitation enabled the imperialist ruling classes to develop industry and buy over small sections of the working-class.' But the programme included a number of extravagant reformist demands - such as 'retirement at 55' and a 'pension of 75%' of the current wage of those working in the retiree's occupation prior to retirement - which were essentially demands for a greater share of imperialist booty and which showed the lingering influence of Birchism. Moreover, it was claimed that social reforms were paid for by 'taxation and other deductions' from working-class pay.[68] But those demands and that assertion were not included in a 'Programmatic Document' adopted by the RCLB at its post-unity Second Congress a year or so later.

In the Spring of 1980, the RCLB too held a history conference. A draft version of the RCLB's history written by Burford intended for submission to the conference was rejected by and replaced by a Standing Committee version (it is not obvious why Burford's draft was rejected). Both versions concentrated on the period leading up to the expulsion of the 'Anti-League Faction' and on the subsequent rectification campaign.[69] In what was effectively a letter of resignation, Wilf Dixon (a member of the CC since the organisation's foundation) claimed that a statement in both versions affirming the importance of giving 'special support to those struggling against the agents of British imperialism in southern Africa', had been a response to rank-and-file criticism of the organisation's recent record on this matter. The organisation's recent stance on Zimbabwe had caused particular concern.[70]

There was more criticism of the leadership at the conference. A few members spoke in favour of some aspects of the line of the 'Anti-League Faction.'.[71] A minority resolution claimed that 'rightist as well as leftist errors had existed in the organisation', that the leadership had 'never defined' during the rectification campaign what was meant by 'ultra-left idealism' and that the rectification campaign had been 'principally negative.'.[72] According to Dixon, several members asked 'what was leftist?' about the RCLB's denunciation of the western intervention in Zaire in 1978.[73] The conference could not agree a version of the organisation's history, but a holding motion from the chair that 'this conference supports the general outlines of the historical assessment of the RCL and the main lessons of the rectification stage.' was carried 'overwhelmingly.'.[74]

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[68] CWM, Political *Programme of the Communist Workers Movement.*
[69] 'Draft Internal Statement on the History of the RCL.
[70] Wilf Dixon, 'THE RCL HAS NO FUTURE', May 1983 (Emphasis in the original).
[71] Wilf Dixon, 'THE RCL HAS NO FUTURE'.
[72] Conference Arrangements and Two Proposed Resolutions.
@ https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.hightide/conf-arrangements.pdf.
[73] Wilf Dixon, 'THE RCL HAS NO FUTURE'.
[74] 'Minutes of RCL Conference 20th. April 1980' @ 'https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.hightide/conf-minutes.pdf.

The RCLB's insistence that Maoists should concentrate all their resources on industrial work had been an obstacle to unity. But this obstacle had been resolved by the RCLB's drift away from exclusive concentration on industrial work. The organisation had become involved in anti-racist and anti-fascist struggles. Members in Manchester, for instance, worked in the Oldham-based Bangladesh Divided Families Campaign.[75] We will consider the RCLB's new mass work in the next chapter and in our case study on Ireland.

Differences (within the RCLB as well as between the CWM and the RCLB) on the matter of the national struggle in Ireland were not to be so easily resolved. On its foundation, the CWM had called for a 'united socialist Ireland',[76] but by 1978 had decided that Ireland needed first a national-democratic revolution. It now gave unconditional support to the nationalist Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA). It had publicised the PIRA's claim that:

> The world should be in no doubt that the length of the war of national liberation and the strength which the Irish Republican Army can exert are proof that we command mass support in the occupied North. We wish to stress the determination of the Irish Republican Movement to continue the struggle for an end to British rule. Irrespective of how long it takes, our units will strike at enemy forces until England declares openly and honestly that she is withdrawing from Ireland.[77]

The RCLB agreed that the objective of the revolutionary struggle in Ireland was national liberation, not socialism. But there was significant opposition to supporting the PIRA. Opposition came from a minority which upheld a 'socialist struggle' line, from those who argued that the task in Ireland was national liberation, but did not support PIRA and, vehemently, from the social-chauvinist elements headed by Burford (see Chapter Five for the development of the CFB/RCLB's line on Ireland).

The various differences between the two organisations had been resolved to their mutual satisfaction by late 1979. The CWM's Third National Conference decided that 'as the few previously remaining differences of principle between the CWM and RCLB have been resolved, the two organisations will unite as soon as possible.'.[78] But a Unity Conference held shortly after the RCLB's History Conference was not an unqualified success.

The conference was asked to deliberate on the unresolved matter of the RCLB's history. Unable to reach agreement, the matter was referred to a new Central Committee, which seems to have never discharged this responsibility. A relatively minor matter had been the CWM's strong objection to the stance of the RCLB's *Manifesto* that there should be one

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[75] The Immigration Act of 1971 had led to many cases of British citizens not being allowed to bring to the UK family members born in other countries. One such case was that of Anwar Ditta of Rochdale, who could not bring to the UK children born in Bangladesh. The Divided Families campaign led to Ditta's children arriving in the UK in 1981.

[76] CWM, *Absolute Decline*, p 14.

[77] CWM, *New Age*, no. 14 (June 1978).

[78] 'PRESS STATEMENT – IMMEDIATE 11/12/79' (upper-case in the original).
@ ′ https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.hightide/cwm3rd.htm.

party for the whole of the United Kingdom, i.e., including Northern Ireland. The conference overturned what was now deemed to be a social-chauvinist policy.[79]

What the united organisation's attitude to PIRA should be was not a minor matter. A minority strongly opposed supporting PIRA. According to Dixon, Burford had refused to remain in the Chair after a pro-Republican resolution (but not one in favour of 'unconditional' support) had been 'passed overwhelmingly'. The first post-unity edition of *Class Struggle* inspired by the organisation's new pro-Republican stance caused 'uproar'.[80] An editorial had stated that since partition 'only the revolutionary republican struggle has upheld the banner of consistent opposition to British imperialism.'. It was with 'heartfelt enthusiasm' that the paper was reporting on a recent TOM delegation to Northern Ireland. At a rally held to mark the 9th.anniversary of internment, the delegates were said to have 'burst into wild applause when 3 masked provisional IRA volunteers appeared.'. [81]

After resigning from the RCLB,[82] Dixon claimed that the conference had ben 'a fiasco, but unity went ahead with a high level of abstentions on almost all votes.'.[83] Dixon's claim is corroborated by the RCLB itself: after its Second Congress of 1981, it noted that 'many comrades' had 'feared that the Congress would be a divisive occasion (like the RCL/CWM conference).'.[84] According to Dixon, there had been some agreement with his assertion that Phil Dixon and Redfern 'had exposed the social-chauvinism of the RCL [where] it was strongest – with respect to the struggle against British imperialism.' Dixon claimed that 'nothing can erase what Dixon and Redfern fought for.'.[85]

Unity between the CWM and the RCLB was triumphantly announced in the early summer of 1980.[86] But many members of the CWM, quite a few of whom, according to 'JT', had been opposed to unity with the RCLB had left by 1980. That it was not thought necessary to adopt a new name for the united organisation suggests that the remaining members of the CWM joined the RCLB. A 'merger' (clearly an assimilation) with the Birmingham Communist Association (BCA) followed shortly afterwards.[87]

The History Conference and the CWM/RCLB Unity Conference had revealed tension in the RCLB between the evident desire of some members to pay greater attention to the struggle against British imperialism and the organisation's support for the CPC's call for the formation of an international united front against the Soviet Union. Curious omissions in *Class Struggle*'s *coverage* of the international situation suggest differences on how to respond to grave developments in the international situation.

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[79] 'Our Coverage of Ireland', *Class Struggle,* November 1980.
[80] W. Dixon, 'THE RCL HAS NO FUTURE', p. 6.
[81] Editorial & 'Troops Out!', *Class Struggle*, August 1980.
[82] Dixon and others contacted the SCG after departing from the RCLB. Talks foundered on the question of China. Dixon and the others did not agree with the SCG's position that revisionism had triumphed there.
[83] Wilf Dixon, 'THE RCL HAS NO FUTURE'.
[84] RCLB, *Class Struggle Special Supplement. Report on the Second Congress of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain* (1981).
[85] Wilf Dixon, 'THE RCL HAS NO FUTURE'.
[86] "The RCL and CWM have United", *Class Struggle*, June 1980.
[87] 'Birmingham meeting celebrates BCA merger', *Class Struggle*, July 1980.

The British government had recently agreed that US cruise missiles could be deployed in Britain and had begun to create public readiness for war by circulating to every home *Protect and Survive*, a pamphlet in which advice on how to survive nuclear war was dispensed. Ronald Reagan had won the US Presidential Election of 1980 partly due to war-mongering anti-Soviet rhetoric. These developments had not been covered by *Class Struggle*. Nor were they referred to in the *Class Struggle* report on the RCLB's Second Congress, which failed to place the congress in an international context[88] or in Burford's report to the congress, which contained only a fleeting reference to 'the world imperialist crisis'.[89]

The RCLB's Second Congress.

When the RCLB held its Second Congress in the Summer of 1981, it had become, though still a small organisation, the dominant Maoist organisation in Britain. It now incorporated the CFB, the CUA, the ELMLA, the CWM and the BCA. A considerable number of individual Maoists had joined the organisation. It can safely be assumed that the great majority, if not all, of these Maoists were supporters of the 'Three Worlds' theory. It is probable though that the differences which emerged in the conferences of 1980, the omissions in *Class Struggle* and the scant discussion of the international situation at the congress were all manifestations of differences on the application of the theory to the concrete conditions of British imperialism.

The *Class Struggle* congress report asserted that throughout 'our decisions, throughout our work', 'runs a strong anti-imperialist thread.'.[90] For Lenin, imperialism was monopoly capitalism. But a few months before the congress, the RCLB had parted company with Lenin by claiming that imperialism is 'the stage when [capitalism] goes beyond a system existing in a number of individual countries to a system organised globally on the basis of a division of the world among a handful of great powers. Imperialism thus creates the fundamental division between oppressor and oppressed nations.'.[91] This is to treat **one** aspect of Lenin's concept of imperialism[92] – the division of the world - as its essence. Like the British Liberal Hobson, who equated imperialism with colonialism and who regarded imperialism as a policy rather than as a new stage of capitalism,[93] the RCLB now treated imperialism as a system of national oppression. It was a radical nationalist rather than Marxist concept of imperialism.

We have seen that that early in the RCLB's rectification campaign its CC had resolved that a 'struggle for British national independence' must be 'Britain's main contribution' to the

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[88] 'Report on the Second Congress of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain'.
[89] 'Report to the Second Congress by the Chairman of the First CC', para. 24, @ https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.hightide/rcl-2nd-report.htm.
[90] 'Report on the Second Congress of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain'.
[91] *Class Struggle,* March 1981.
[92] According to Lenin, imperialism is the 'highest stage' of capitalism, the stage in which 'the dominance of monopolies and finance capital has established itself; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun; in which the division of all the territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.' V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (Beijing, 1973), p. 106.
[93] J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism*: *a Study* (London, 1902). Hobson's concept of imperialism became dominant in the British labour movement. The CPGB's Hobsonian understanding of imperialism prompted several interventions by the Comintern in the 1920s. See Macintyre (1975).

'international united front'. The congress affirmed and developed this stance by adopting a 'Programmatic Document' which resolved that the 'main component' of the RCLB's anti-imperialist struggle must be opposition to 'hegemonism and the war preparations of the two superpowers, especially to the accelerating expansionism of Soviet social-imperialism.'. Its stance on this matter was based on 'the right of all nations to self-determination.'.[94] It seems likely that this formulation was one which designed to appeal to all shades of opinion in the RCLB, from the out-and-out social-chauvinists such as Burford to those who favoured the eclectic mix of Marxism and radical nationalism which would soon become dominant in the organisation. (The RCLB's stance on British national independence will be discussed in the next chapter, in a consideration of a *Class Struggle Special Feature on War and Peace*).

Radical nationalism increasingly affected the RCLB's stance on the national struggle in Ireland. The congress decided by an 'overwhelming majority' that 'unconditional support' should be rendered to 'the armed struggle of the Irish people and to their Republican leadership in the fight against British imperialism'.'[95] Those on the outgoing Central Committee who had not supported PIRA were denounced by some other members as 'Orangis[t]',[96] a nationalist slur that these members were to be compared with the deeply reactionary members of the Orange Order of Northern Ireland.[97] The Congress seems not to have considered whether unconditional support' for PIRA was compatible with the 'Three Worlds' theory's emphasis on strengthening European readiness to resist the 'Soviet threat'.

Radical nationalism was present too in the RCLB's analysis of the national question in Britain. We will consider its policy on what the RCLB termed 'national minorities' (such immigrant communities as the Irish and South Asian) in the next chapter. Here, we will consider its stance on Scotland and Wales. Until comparatively recently the great majority of Welsh and Scottish people had clearly regarded themselves primarily as British rather than as Scottish or Welsh. They had mostly voted for unionist parties, joined unionist parties and national trade unions. Most of the revolutionaries among them had joined the CPGB. Scots and Welsh had rallied to the Union Jack in the two world wars of the Twentieth Century. They had played a full role in building (and benefiting greatly from) the British Empire.

This subjective understanding was the result of a centuries long historical process that had created a common British economy and state. True, this had been a process of conquest and assimilation of Wales and Scotland by England. It is true too that the English are dominant within a British bourgeoisie that has frequently proven indifferent to specifically Scottish or Welsh interests. Even so, Welsh and Scottish nationalism had historically been embraced only by a small minority, but had begun to win greater support in the 1970s. Influenced by growing support among Scottish and Welsh workers for independence and by a remark by Engels that four nations inhabited the two islands of Britain and Ireland, the RCLB's *Manifesto* upheld the right of self-determination for Scotland and Wales but did not advocate separation.[98]

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[94] 'Programmatic Document, Section VII', para. 20.
[95] 'Report on the Second Congress of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain'.
[96] Dixon, 'THE RCL HAS NO FUTURE'.
[97] The Orange Order was an organisation dedicated to the maintenance of the Protestant ascendancy in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland.
[98] *RCLB Manifesto*, p. 18.

The RCLB's reference in its Second Congress report to 'Welsh' and Scottish' workers rather than British workers suggests that separatist sentiments were gaining traction in the organisation. A 'Class Struggle Correspondent' reported approvingly on a commemoration organised by the Welsh Socialist Republican Party in Abergele in north Wales. The commemoration was of 'two patriotic martyrs' killed when a bomb they were carrying on the eve of the 'investiture of the so-called Prince of Wales' in 1969 exploded prematurely.[99] (It had been assumed at the time, presumably correctly, that it had been intended that the bomb would be detonated at the investiture[100]).

The Second Congress report was insistent that 'advanced' workers were mostly to be found among 'national minority workers and Welsh, Scottish and Irish workers.'.[101] The inclusion of 'national minority' workers among the 'advanced' was presumably a response to the urban uprisings (discussed in Chapter Two and the next chapter) of young, predominantly black proletarians which had erupted earlier in the year. But what had prompted the inclusion of Scottish and Welsh workers, who had shown no sign of being more 'advanced' than English workers? Many of the industrial workers of Scotland and Wales were among those highly paid and organised workers - miners and steelworkers, for instance - who provided vital support to the social-imperialist Labour Party. What then did the RCLB have in mind when implicitly claiming that Scottish and Welsh workers were more likely than English workers to be 'advanced'? Presumably, those working-class people, an increasing number, who supported nationalist parties were deemed axiomatically to be more 'advanced' than others.

The RCLB and the Class Struggle in China.

After the return of the delegation to China in 1977, the RCLB had selectively quoted Mao and Deng Xiaoping to claim that it was Deng, not the Four, who had been the most resolute in continuing the class struggle under socialism.[102] But the key issue, the issue on which the RCLB had not offered a quote, was where were the chief capitalist-roaders? They were, as Mao had insisted during the struggle against Deng Xiaoping, 'right inside the Communist Party – those in power taking the capitalist-road. The capitalist-roaders are still on the capitalist-road.'.[103] Of course, once in power the capitalist-roaders could not admit that China was on the capitalist-road. Nor could the RCLB: it supported China's new constitution of 1978, which omitted the concept of capitalist-roaders. [104]

It seems extraordinary, given developments in China since the RCLB's first congress of 1977, that the matter seems not to have been discussed at its Second Congress. According to 'JT', while there were many RCLB members who had misgivings over this or that aspect of CPC policy, most had been extremely reluctant to consider the possibility that capitalist-roaders were in power in China. But by 1981 there was abundant evidence, discussed below, that China was on the capitalist-road.

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[99] 'Report on the Second Congress of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain'.
[100] *The Guardian*, October 15, 1969.
[101] 'Report on the Second Congress of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain'.
[102] 'Support for Socialist China Means Wholehearted Support for China' Veteran Leaders', *Revolution*, vol. 3, no. 1 (February 1978).
[103] Cited in Lotta (1978), p. 40.
[104] 'Socialist Democracy in Action', *Class Struggle*, April 1979.

Moreover, the CPC had recently published its *Resolution on CPC History*. We can be sure that this would have been closely studied by the RCLB. Reading between the lines of the *Resolution* makes it quite clear that in the opinion of the CPC's post-Mao leadership there had been a Gang of Five not Four. The dismissal of Deng Xiaoping in 1976, for instance, was said to have been the work of Mao and the Four. The *Resolution* deemed the Cultural Revolution to have been a 'catastrophe'. It denied that capitalist-roaders could emerge among the leadership of the CPC.[105] The section on building a 'Powerful, Modern, Socialist China' made it clear that the cultural revolution slogan '*Grasp Revolution, Promote Production!'*, a slogan which stressed the dialectical relationship between politics and economics, had been abandoned. The task confronting the Chinese people was to build the means of production. There would be no related transformation of the relations of production.[106] Such dialectical slogans as that which exhorted dockers to 'Be Masters of the Wharf, not Slaves to Tonnage', would certainly not be heard in the China of Deng and his fellow capitalist-roaders.

The RCLB's response to evidence that China was no longer on the socialist road, certainly not on a Maoist Road, was to refuse to consider the matter. A few months after its Second Congress, the organisation complacently stated that 'we quite deliberately do not make our starting point what we consider correct for China.'.[107] Despite this disclaimer, the RCLB had of course ever since 1976 decided what was 'correct for China' by supporting its capitalist-roaders. China, which for decades had been the bastion of world revolution, was the concern of communists and revolutionary people everywhere. There were universal principles of Marxism by which to evaluate developments there. It was these which the CFB had used to decide that capitalism had been restored in the Soviet Union. Now, it had become imperative to decide whether China was still on the socialist road. Others, notably the RCP,USA,[108] already had.

A digression on the NCG and the SCG is appropriate here. (There is a further digression in the next chapter.) In contrast to the RCLB, the NCG and the SCG had both regarded it as politically imperative to study events in China. Both took several years to reluctantly conclude that in 1976 capitalist-roaders had seized power in China. In 1980 the NCG had become the first Maoist organisation in Britain to criticise the CPC's post-Mao leadership.[109] In 1981 it became a signatory of a *Joint Communique* of international Marxist-Leninist parties and organisations. These parties and organisations declared that following the death of Mao 'a counter-revolutionary bourgeoisie' had 'seized power' in China and was 'dragging one fourth of humanity back down the capitalist-road.'.[110] In 1981 the SCG published its conclusions on what had happened in China in 1976 and since. It took broadly the same stance as that of the *Joint Communique* .[111]

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[105] CPC, *Resolution on CPC History (1949-1981)* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1981), pp 32-48.
[106] *Ibid*, pp. 73-86.
[107] 'Editorial', *October*, vol. 1, no. 1, (April 1982). p. 5 (Emphasis in the original).
[108] Lotta (1978); RCP,USA, 'China, the Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Professor Bettleheim or how not to Criticise Revisionism', *The Communist* no. 5 (May 1979).
[109] NCG, 'Is China still Socialist?', *Red Star* no. 1 (1980).
[110] 'To the Marxist-Leninists, the Workers and the Oppressed of All Countries – Joint Communique of 13 M-L Parties and Organisations', *A World to Win*, no. 1 (May 1981, pp. 1-2.
[111] SCG, *China: Mao and the Gang of Four against the Capitalist-roaders*. There were some ultra-left aspects of the SCG's analysis, such as arguing that a state of the 'Paris Commune type' was appropriate for China.

The NCG and the SCG both particularly emphasised the CPC's rejection of Mao's concept of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. The NCG pointed out that shortly before his death Mao had warned that 'a full-scale capitalist restoration may appear in China.'[112] The SCG noted how quickly the capitalist-roaders had reversed the correct verdicts of the Cultural Revolution. Though the new constitution of 1978 referred to 'continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat', there was no reference to the crucial point of the bourgeoisie being 'right inside the communist party.'.[113] In 1979 the Chinese revisionists asserted that the remnants of the pre-revolutionary class enemies could 'no longer grow into a fully developed reactionary class and openly confront the proletariat.'[114]. This was almost certainly true, but was no doubt intended to disarm the people of China from identifying and struggling against their actual main class enemy – such people as were responsible for the new constitution.

The RCLB had supported the 'four modernisations' undertaken in China from 1978, parroting such absurd claims as that the 'Gang of Four' had 'acted as a brake on growth in agriculture and industry and sabotaged production and modernisation plans'.[115] The real target of the Chinese revisionists here, as generally, was not the Four, but Mao and the Cultural Revolution, the 'chaos' of which had allegedly held back production and modernisation. In fact, China's economy had grown faster (7% per annum) during and after the Cultural Revolution than before (4%).[116] The NCG and the SCG argued that the 'four modernisations' were an initial stage of capitalist modernisation. The NCG showed how the Chinese revisionists had used their call to modernise China to end the Maoist emphasis on putting politics in command of economics and to insist that the primary responsibility of workers and peasants was to work hard to make profits for their enterprise.[117] The SCG particularly emphasised the 1980 National People's Congress decision that the 'means of production can be put on the market for free circulation.' which meant that socialist enterprises could become (and generally did) capitalist enterprises. [118]

The SCG also identified the CPC's renewed contacts with long-standing revisionist parties and its praise of their revisionism as evidence of the CPC's own revisionism. Hua referred to the Italian Communist Party's promotion of the peaceful road to socialism as 'its exploration of the road to socialism.'. The remarks of Santiago Carillo, the leader of the ultra-revisionist Spanish Communist Party, that 'the workers are able to win power through a democratic way in those countries where they constitute a decisive majority' were effectively endorsed by the CPC.[119]

The NCG's denunciation of the Chinese revisionists provoked a reaction, mostly bluster and abuse ('bullshit', 'turds'), from the editor of the CWM's *New Age.* This completely failed to

[112] Cited in NCG, 'Mao on Revisionism', *Red Star*, no. 3 (1982).
[113] SCG, *China: Mao and the Gang of Four against the Capitalist-roaders*, p. 32.
[114] 'Fundamental Changes in China's Class Situation', *Peking Review*, November 23, 1979. Cited in SCG, *Mao and the Gang of Four*, p. 22.
[115] 'All Out Effort for a Modern China', *Class Struggle*, vol. 3, no. 3 (nd, but 1978).
[116] Ishikawa (1983).
[117] NCG, 'Is China still Socialist', p. 4.
[118] *Peking Review*, September 22, 1980. Cited in SCG, *Mao and the Gang of Four*, p. 26
[119] *Peking Review*, November 24, 1980. Cited in SCG, *Mao and the Gang of Four*, p. 45.

engage with the NCG's theoretical and political analysis. It echoed absurd accusations against the Cultural Revolutionaries (that they had wanted to 'destroy all authority, eliminate all bourgeois learning, reject all things foreign, cast aside all the past, denounce all technology', etc., etc.), Allegedly, the Four had 'demanded blindness to reality, to the workers' needs, to the need for unity, for the people's material welfare, the country's defences and the threat of war' and had plotted to establish a 'fascist dictatorship.'. Its discussion of post-76 China was facile ('modernisation is absolutely essential'; 'Lenin introduced NEP') and, perhaps because of the 'Soviet threat' to Britain, mostly confined to the international situation ('there is an absolute necessity to unite all the anti-superpower forces at this time').[120] The essence of the *New Age* case was that the CPC must be correct because, well, it **was** the CPC. As the editor of *Red Star* argued in reply to the CWM's glib criticism, its position was 'predicated on the assumption that China cannot be revisionist because you don't want it to be.'.[121]

The course taken by the PRC since 1976 has conclusively shown that the NCG and the SCG, not the RCLB and the CWM, were correct in their respective analyses of developments in China. The capitalist-roaders who seized power in 1976 implemented from 1978 'reforms' which have given Chinese factories and enterprises the character of capital, the labour of the working-class the nature of labour-power and the profits of factories and enterprises the nature of surplus-value. In short, Chinese enterprises have become capitalist enterprises in which the working-class is exploited by a new bourgeoisie.[122] In recent years China has become a social-imperialist state. Its 'belt and road' strategy, for instance, is used to export capital to Asia, Africa and even Europe.[123] Contention with other imperialists, especially the US imperialists, is rapidly growing more acute.

The RCLB continued to give firm support to the regime in China until the massacre in Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989.[124] Within weeks, the organisation produced a *Class Struggle Special Supplement* on China. It was evident that there had been, however reluctantly, internal discussions for some time. After resolutely evading for years public discussion of events in China, the RCLB now presumably considered it politically necessary to do so.

The *Class Struggle Special Supplement* blamed a 'clique headed by Deng Xiaoping' for the crushing of the protest in Tiananmen Square.[125] Later, at a ' Future of Socialism conference held in 1991, the organisation concluded that China was 'not on the socialist road'. 'Probably', it had not been since 1978.[126] That was the year in which the Chinese revisionists had begun to dismantle China's socialist economy. They had been able to do so only because they had seized power in the *coup d'etat* of 1976. *Class Struggle* did not bring this embarrassing fact to the attention of its readers. Neither here nor elsewhere did the RCLB

[120] *New Age* No. 16, October 1979.
[121] NCG, 'Letter from Editor of *New Age* and Reply', *Red Star*, no. 3 (1982).
[122] See Lotta (1994) for a succinct discussion of Maoist political economy and socialist transformation in China.
[123] See, for instance, 'China Consumes Gambia's Waters', *Le Monde Diplomatique* June 2021.
[124] Many people—estimates vary from several hundred to several thousand—were killed. It was evident that most were demanding greater 'democracy' (there were effigies of the statue of liberty), but a minority were Maoists denouncing the road taken since 1976.
[125] *China: Class Struggle Special Supplement* (Summer 1989).
[126] 'Report on RCL Conference on the Future of Socialism', *Class Struggle*, Nov-Dec. 1991.

offer any self-criticism for the support it had given since 1976 to the capitalist-roaders in China. In the next chapter we will consider the RCLB's summing up of the experience of socialist revolution in China.

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By 1981 the radical tide of 'The Sixties' had receded. In those heady days, a significant number of workers gave, if not always support, a hearing to the revolutionary left, but few did now. One response of the RCLB and of the far left generally to their failure to gain mass working-class support had been to pay more attention to matters of race, gender and nation. Much of this was of course a necessary corrective to a reductionist emphasis on class. But it was also what Ellen Wood called a 'retreat from class', [127] i.e., a retreat from an insistence on class struggle as the motor of history. It was a retreat that had been in evidence at the RCLB's Second Congress.

By 1981 most of the anti-revisionists who had initially been predominant in the organisations that were now incorporated into the RCLB had, for one reason or another, departed. The organisation was now dominated by 'anti-imperialist' baby boomers, few of whom had taken part in the anti-revisionist struggle. Nor had they been involved with the labour movement: they were thus, rightly or wrongly, less ideologically tethered to the traditional concerns of that movement. The nationalist element in the CPC's outlook had been unproblematic for such members. Further, many young Maoists had studied the work of such Maoist-influenced intellectuals as Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas, who. as Wood observed, were less than firmly committed to historical materialism.[128] No direct evidence has been found that the ideas of these people influenced the RCLB, but this writer remembers them being raised in conversation and at meetings. It would be unsurprising if they had seeped into the consciousness of at least some of the members of the RCLB. Present in 1981, an eclectic mix of Marxism, radical nationalism and (eventually) radical feminism was to flourish in the RCLB in its final years.

[127] Wood (1998).
[128] Wood (1998), Chs. 2, 3 & 4.

Chapter Five:

From Maoism to Progressivism: the RCLB's Final Years (and another digression on the NGG and the SCG).

After its Second Congress, the RCLB entered a period of steady decline and final dissolution. The organisation's concern regarding the 'threat' from the Soviet Union eventually gave way to a concentration on support for and participation in anti-racist and 'national minority' struggles and Ireland solidarity work. In the early 1990s, presumably prompted by the massacre in Tiananmen Square and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the RCLB attempted a summation of the historical experience of socialist revolution and construction. The conclusions drawn had much in common with the liberal democratic critique of that experience. The drift into eclecticism noted in the previous chapter accelerated, culminating in 1992 in the adoption of an eclectic *Political Platform.*

The RCLB on War and Peace.

The *Class Struggle Special Feature on War and Peace referred* to in the previous chapter was published in the Winter of 1981-82. The *Feature* was based on the 'Three Worlds' theory and more particularly on the stance in the 'Programmatic Document' adopted by the RCLB's Second Congress that the 'main component' of the RCLB's anti-imperialist struggle was 'opposition to hegemonism and the war preparations of the two superpowers, especially to the accelerating expansionism of Soviet social-imperialism.'. What, concretely, could this mean? And did the formulation serve to obscure ideological and political divisions?

While war, the RCLB argued, was inevitable under imperialism, it was possible to prevent or delay a particular war. To do so, it was necessary to 'pinpoint the source of war'. Was this inter-imperialist contention? No: it was the Soviet Union. We must, the RCLB claimed, 'look squarely in the face the fact that the main thing precipitating a war is Soviet expansionism.'. This, of course, was merely the standard 'they started it' social-chauvinist justification for support for imperialist war. According to the RCLB, in 1982 preventing or delaying war did not mean, for instance, campaigning against the deployment of cruise missiles in Britain: it meant making 'the expansionists realise clearly that if they attack, they must expect fierce opposition, they must expect 'the same treatment as they are getting in Afghanistan.'.[1]

It was from this perspective that the RCLB was highly critical of the mass peace movement that emerged in western Europe in the early 1980s. In the Autumn of 1981 at least 100,000 people in London and a similar number in Bonn had demonstrated against the deployment of cruise missiles in Europe. In Britain, a women's peace camp had been established outside Greenham Common military base, where these missiles were to be located. In many cities and towns groups had been established to try to create public opinion against the deployment of the missiles. The SCG worked in one such group, Stockport against the Missiles, unsuccessfully advocating a revolutionary rather than pacifist orientation.[2]

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[1] 'Special Feature on War and Peace' part 1. *Class Struggle*, December 1981 (Emphasis in the original).

[2] Probably few were persuaded but many alienated by an SCG pamphlet ('*War is Coming. Prepare for Revolution)* distributed at a CND demonstration in 1982, in which E.P. Thompson, then prominent in the anti-war movement, was denounced as an 'agent of the imperialists.'.

But according to *Class Struggle*, such work showed that the peace movement in Britain was 'among the most backward.'. On demonstrations, 'the USA was targeted, and the Soviet Union was let off the hook.'[3] In contrast to the 'backward' peace movement in Britain, people in Germany who campaigned against the Soviet Union rather than their domestic German imperialists won *Class Struggle*'s plaudits. Under the headline 'New Tsar's Royal Welcome', the paper hailed a demonstration organised by the principal political party of German imperialism, the Christian Democrats. Slogans such as 'Brezhnev, hands off Poland' had been shouted during his visit to West Germany.'.[4] Poland had of course long been a prime focus of contention between Germany and Russia. One wonders what those Poles who had suffered Nazi Germany's brutal occupation of Poland during the Second World War would have thought of these German reactionaries' solicitude for Poland.

But what if war did erupt? In 1982 the matter of war and peace was not of course simply an academic question. War seemed very likely. *Class Struggle* was insistent that the working-class should prepare for war: it should fight to end 'the present bourgeois defence strategy' with a 'more effective alternative aimed at engulfing the social-imperialist aggressors in the flames of people's war.'. [5]

The cause of British national independence was of course inextricably bound up with imperialist contention between the USA and the Soviet Union. The planned deployment of cruise missiles in Britain was a consequence of British membership of NATO. It must have been obvious to the members of the RCLB, as it was to the many thousands of people who demonstrated against the deployment, that the USA would inevitably respond militarily to a Soviet invasion of western Europe. But the *Special Feature* failed to mention Britain's alliance with the USA and British membership of NATO. Moreover, conspicuously not ruled out, as the RCLB's *Manifesto* of 1977 had, was support for the US-led imperialist bloc in an inter-superpower war in Europe. Intentionally or not, the *Special Feature on War and Peace* reads as propaganda for support for the US coalition in such a war.[6]

There was though something dutiful about the *Special Feature.* After its Second Congress, Hobsonian 'anti-imperialism', especially support for the national struggle in Ireland, rather than resistance to the 'Soviet threat', became more and more prominent in the RCLB's line and practice. This was probably the result of continuing internal struggle. According to 'JT', relations between those who wished to stress the 'Soviet threat and those who wished to mainly support struggles against British imperialism became antagonistic after the Second Congress. It was presumably this which led to Burford's expulsion for 'revisionism'. Moreover, the internal dynamics of the organisation became complicated, as we shall see, by

[3] 'Special Feature on War and Peace' part 1. There certainly was a 'backward' aspect of the peace movement in Britain in that it tended to oppose US rather than British imperialism.
[4] 'Special Feature on War and Peace' part 2, *Class Struggle*, January 1982.
[5] 'Special Feature on War and Peace' part 1.
[6] But as we know, there was not a Third World War. The threat had been real, but the international situation changed rapidly after Mikhail Gorbachev's faction of the Soviet party won power in 1985. This faction considered that internal reform was the most pressing matter facing the Soviet Union. Gorbachev moved quickly to defuse tensions with the US imperialists, notably in an early declaration of an intention to withdraw from Afghanistan. Summit meetings between Gorbachev and Reagan led to much improved relations between the Soviet Union and the USA. By 1987 or so the threat of war had receded considerably.

the emergence of a pro-Soviet tendency on the CC. *Class Struggle*'s editor, 'Keith Anderson', appointed sometime after the Second Congress, stated in a letter of resignation from the RCLB in 1983 that he no longer believed that the East European states were capitalist or that the Soviet Union was imperialist.[7] Whatever the reason, after the publication of the *Special Feature on War and Peace*, *Class Struggle* began to have little to say regarding the 'Soviet threat' to Britain.

A year or so after the congress, the RCLB passed a test of its anti-imperialism when Argentina seized the Falkland Islands (the Malvinas, according to Argentina) in May 1982. Located in the south Atlantic, 300 miles off the west coast of Argentina, Britain had assumed possession of the islands in 1833. To a background of media jingoism, a British military taskforce retook the Islands in June. Internationally, Maoists tended to denounce both the British imperialists and the military dictatorship ruling Argentina. But Maoists in Britain had a particular responsibility to oppose Britain's war. The SCG failed this test by handing out at a May Day 1982 demonstration a leaflet that failed even to mention the war with Argentina. The RCLB opposed the British campaign to retake the islands,[8] dismissing bogus claims by some on the left that the descendants of those British people who settled in the Falklands after 1833 had a right of self-determination.[9]

The RCLB and a Fork in the Road.

The radical nationalist element in the RCLB's outlook, manifest in the congress declaration that Scottish and Welsh workers were 'advanced' while, implicitly, English workers were not, eventually became dominant. Disputes, initially over the question of whether 'national minority' working-class people should be regarded primarily as members of the working-class or primarily as members of their respective communities, widened into a struggle on the much more fundamental question of whether national contradictions in Britain were subordinate to the contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. A Special Conference held late in 1983 resolved that they were not.

The RCLB and 'National Minorities'.

The RCLB used the term 'national minority' to refer to such British communities as the Indian, Pakistani. Bangladeshi, Caribbean and Irish, composed of modern immigrants and their descendants. The *Manifesto* adopted in 1977 had treated working-class members of these communities as 'members of 'the whole British working-class' and national contradictions as subordinate to 'the class contradiction between the whole British working-class and the bourgeoisie.'.[10] While recognising that all members of national minorities were subject to various forms of racial discrimination and oppression, the RCLB's view was that these were qualitatively worse for working-class members of these minorities. Such working-

[7] RCLB National Secretary's circular of October 1983. By 1985 'Anderson' had become an apologist of Soviet social-imperialism. That year he and a few others who had left the RCLB had united with the Scottish Communist Republican Party to found the Communist Organisation of Scotland and England (COSE). COSE insisted it 'defends and supports unconditionally all the socialist countries.'. It was quite clear from the context that the Soviet Union was included in this category. Richards, *Ebbing Tide*, p. 34.
[8] *Class Struggle*, June 1982.
[9] See for example Socialist Organiser 15 April 1982.
[10] *Manifesto of the RCLB*, p.19.

class people were particularly vulnerable to the bourgeois offensive against the working-class that we have discussed in previous chapters[11] and which, as we shall see below, accelerated in the 1980s.

Like the far left in general, the RCLB had welcomed the urban uprisings of 1981 in such places as Brixton, Manchester's Moss Side and Liverpool's Toxteth. Unlike the rest of the fat left, and in conflict with its own *Manifesto*, the RCLB had treated them as uprisings of national minorities. According to *Class Struggle*, 'the fighting in Brixton had shown once again, if further proof was needed, that the national minority people are in the forefront of the struggle in the current stage of the class struggle in Britain.'.[12] But this was to view the uprisings from a radical nationalist perspective. It had overwhelmingly been black proletarians, not black doctors and black shopkeepers, who had risen up in protest against state oppression and unemployment.

The RCLB's Second Congress overturned the *Manifesto's* line on the national minorities. It resolved that rather than 'the whole British working-class' having a common fight against capitalism, 'the British revolution' would be won by a 'strategic alliance' of the 'working-class and the national minorities.'.[13] Working-class members of these minorities were implicitly regarded as primarily part of the national minority arm of this alliance rather the working-class arm.

It was with this orientation that later in 1981 the RCLB become involved in the campaign to free the 'Bradford 12'. This *cause celebre* involved twelve Asian youths charged with making explosives with intent to endanger life and property. They had been arrested in the wake of street battles between Asian youths and racist skinheads in a mainly Asian area of Bradford. The youths had armed themselves with petrol bombs to defend their community Their defence was that they had a right to defend their community. Most branches of the RCLB worked in local defence committees. There was national participation in a demonstration in Bradford in December 1981.[14] Nearly a year later the accused youths were acquitted of all charges. Significantly, a majority of jurors were white. *Class Struggle* hailed the acquittals as 'A Victory for Black People.'[15] It was. But it was a victory too, not acknowledged by *Class Struggle*, nor, it must be admitted, by the vast majority of white workers, for the 'whole working-class'.

[11] In 1982 nearly 30% of Black and Pakistani/Bangladeshi men were unemployed, compared with 12% of white men. https://www.runnymedetrust.org/blog/ethnic-unemployment-in-britain.
[12] Editorial, *Class Struggle*, May 1981.
[13] RCLB, *Report on the Second Congress of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain*.
[14] *Class Struggle*, October 1981; *Class Struggle*, December 1981
[15] *Class Struggle*, April 1982); *Class Struggle*, June 1982; *Class Struggle*, July 1982.

A Call for 'Reorientation'.

The disagreement, which eventually became antagonistic, over the question of the relative importance of class and national contradictions was sparked by the circulation to the members of the CC in 1982 of 'Re-orientate the League for the Tasks of the Moment'. This document made no mention of a strategic alliance and treated black proletarians as an emergent vanguard of the whole working-class. The RCLB's practice, it was argued, should be reorientated towards this vanguard. According to Richards, the document was circulated by 'Keith Anderson' in the name of the Standing Committee but had not been discussed by that committee.[16]

Before dealing with this issue, a digression on the question of the influence of the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG) on the RCLB is necessary.[17] The RCLB, or at least elements in its leadership, had become quite close to the RCG, even to the extent of allowing its paper, '*Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism'* (FRFI) to be sold, despite objections, in New Era Books. The influence of the RCG was acknowledged in the 'reorientation' document. In 'theory and in practice', the RCG was said to have made major contributions to the development of a revolutionary line for Britain.'.[18]

Like the advocates of reorientation, the RCG regarded those involved in the uprisings of 1981 as primarily proletarians. Relevant also is that it still regarded the Soviet Union as a socialist state. The influence of the RCG might have affected *Class Struggle*'s coverage of the international situation. After the defeat of those calling for reorientation, a new leadership pointed out that for 'many months' the paper had not covered national struggles [against Soviet social-imperialism] in such places as Eritrea and Afghanistan.[19] Wilf Dixon told this writer that the majority of the central committee had wished the paper to give priority to covering struggles against US and British imperialism. This may well be so, but it seems likely that it was also the result of 'Anderson's developing pro-Soviet sympathies.

According to 'Reorientate the League for the Tasks of the Moment', Britain was entering a period of new revolutionary opportunities. The crisis of British imperialism was so severe that an immiserated proletariat would eventually have no option but to follow the lead provided by those who had risen in revolt in 1981. That year – a 'crucial year for revolutionary politics in Britain' – an 'emerging vanguard' of Black and Irish workers had 'announced its existence.'. Moreover, it had begun to coalesce and to lead other sections of the working-class. In Bristol, 'the youth said, "We are the black IRA."' In riots in Maidstone 'there had been hardly a black face to be seen.'. These rebellions had shown that:

> The situation for revolutionaries in Britain is excellent. Lenin and Stalin showed decisively how the imperialist chain snaps at the weakest link. From this, we can deduce (and this is borne out by practice) that revolutionary opportunities occur, not only in the places where imperialism is weakest, but at times when it is

[16] Richards, *'Ebbing Tide'*, p. 22.
[17] The RCG had been founded in 1974 by people who had been expelled from the quasi-Trotskyist International Socialists.
[18] 'Re-orientate the League for the Tasks of the Moment'.
[19] "RCL – 3rd Congress', *Class Struggle'*, June-July 1984.

> weakest in periods of crisis, not boom. This analysis is amply borne out by the situation in Britain today.[20]

Even allowing for some understandable over-estimation of the significance of the rebellions of 1981 and for hindsight, this assessment of the state of the class struggle in Britain, especially the reference to a weakest link, an explicit comparison of Britain with pre-revolutionary Russia, was based more on wishful thinking than on concrete analysis. The uprisings in such places as Brixton, Toxteth and Moss Side had demonstrated a great deal of anger at unemployment, racism and police harassment. But they did not herald revolutionary opportunities. The British ruling class was securely in power. The working-class as a whole was still dominated by reformist ideology and had been largely indifferent, hostile even, to the events of 1981.

According to a new leadership elected by the RCLB's Third Congress of 1984, discussed below, the outgoing CC, the CC which had called for reorientation, had 'arbitrarily' overthrown the 'collectively agreed policy of the League…on the question of the strategic alliance.'. In *Class Struggle* 'Black and Irish' people had been treated as 'mainly workers therefore their struggles [were seen as] essentially working-class struggles. The national minority struggles are replaced with black and Irish workers forming the vanguard of the working-class.'.[21] There is considerable justification for these charges. Many articles in 1982-83 did promote reorientation. An article on 'community policing', for instance, had argued that the uprisings of 1981 had shown that 'a section of the working-class was reclaiming its revolutionary traditions and was prepared to fight the ruling class with the aim and intention of winning.'.[22]

What did the pre-Third Congress CC minority stand for? The minority was determined that the organisation's Second Congress call for a strategic alliance of the working-class and the 'national minorities must be upheld. But its principal objection to 'Re-orientate the League' was that 'it subordinates the national struggle to the class struggle.'.[23]

A Clash of Contradictions.

In the autumn of 1982 *October* published an article that epitomised the radical nationalism which was rapidly growing in the RCLB. The author, a prominent member of the Birmingham branch, a prime centre of eclecticism, argued that the 'primary' struggle of the national minorities, including its working-class members, must be against 'racist oppression.'. National minorities, it was claimed, should have control of a national territory in order to combat this oppression and to develop economically, politically and culturally. It was conceded that this 'free national development' could 'only be implemented under socialism' However, 'democratic demands' could be made as part of the revolutionary struggle. The author had in mind such demands as 'the right to community self-defence, affirmative action and specialised education.'.[24] There was no attempt to justify this

[20] 'Re-orientate the League for the Tasks of the Moment'.
[21] "RCL – 3rd Congress', *Class Struggle´*, June-July 1984.
[22] *Class Struggle*, March 1982.
[23] 'Reorientate the league for the Tasks of the Moment – A Criticism', p. 1.
[24] "Racism, National Oppression and Free National Development", *October*, vol. 1, no. 2 (October 1982).

essentially separatist and reformist stance from the standpoint of historical materialism, to explain how such reforms could contribute to the struggle to overthrow capitalism.

The CC minority asserted that the Russian revolution had profoundly altered the attitude of the communist movement to national struggles. It was claimed that Lenin had argued that 'developments since 1917 [had] resulted in the division of the world into oppressor and oppressed nations and [had] stressed the importance of the role of the oppressed peoples in colonial countries in world revolution.' National struggles should therefore no longer be seen as struggles 'against feudalism and for bourgeois democratic rights – predominantly a struggle of the bourgeoisie to form nation states.'. [25]

Lenin had not argued that the division into oppressor and oppressed nations was a post-1917 development. To insist on this point is not mere pedantry. The division was primarily a product of late nineteenth century imperialism. To assert that it was a new development is to obscure the considerable degree of continuity between post-1917 revolutionary nationalist movements and such pre-1917 movements as had erupted in India, Ireland and China. Thus, it obscures too the fact that these movements, both pre and post 1917, **were** deemed by the Comintern to be bourgeois-democratic in character. Reporting at the Second Congress of the Comintern on the work of its Commission on the National and Colonial Questions, Lenin had been insistent that there 'can be no doubt of the fact that any national movement can only be a bourgeois-democratic movement.'.[26]

What 1917 and its aftermath had shown was that an **existing** struggle, that of the oppressed peoples and nations, had the potential, a potential partially realised, not least in the Chinese revolution, to become a component part of the world proletarian revolution. It did not change the essential bourgeois democratic character of national movements. That it had not has been shown many times since 1917, not least in 1976 when many of those who had joined the CPC during the national-democratic revolution that triumphed in 1949 were prominent among the capitalist-roaders who seized power in China and who had been supported by the RCLB ever since.

The CC minority greatly exaggerated the role played by the national question in the Russian and Chinese revolutions. It was claimed that the October revolution 'was the product of the alliance between the proletariat and the oppressed nations within the Russian empire.'. It is true that national unrest had been a major factor in the Russian revolutions of 1917, but the bedrock of the revolutionary struggle had been the worker-peasant alliance, i.e., a **class** alliance. The Chinese revolution was claimed to have been 'based on a co-ordination between the struggle of the whole Chinese people and the struggle of China's national minorities' against Han chauvinism.' (The Hans are the dominant nationality in China).[27] This is incorrect. The strategic goals of the Chinese revolution had been freeing the revolutionary **classes** (not the 'whole Chinese people') from imperialism and feudalism.

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[25] 'Amendment to Reorientate the League', p. 2. Despite its title, the document was issued by those who opposed reorientation.

[26] V.I. Lenin, 'The Report of the Commission on the National and Colonial Questions', *Lenin on the National and Colonial Questions'* (Beijing, 1967), p.32.

[27] 'Amendment to Reorientate the League', p. 2.

The Fork in the Road.

Late in 1983 the RCLB convened a Special Conference on the issue of reorientation. The conference was held when all the fundamental contradictions in the world were rapidly becoming more acute. The analysis of these contradictions by the CC minority demonstrated a blinkered and rigid focus on 'anti-imperialism' and national contradictions in Britain. Its analysis of the international situation, a mere one paragraph summary of the 'Three Worlds' theory, was based on a dogmatic assumption that the principal contradiction in the world was that between imperialism and the oppressed peoples and nations. The threat of imperialist war – manifest in such developments as the US Cruise missiles deployed in Britain having become fully operational in December 1982 - was not addressed at all by the CC minority.[28]

A similar one-sided focus on national contradictions was present in the CC minority's analysis of British society. 'The 'English working-class' (implicitly the white working-class) was claimed to be, 'temporarily at least, in alliance with imperialism.'. It was 'thoroughly imbued with racist ideology' that had been used 'to enlist [it] onto the side of imperialism in its oppression of nations.' and was complicit in the racist oppression of non-white people.[29] There is some truth to this assessment, but it was just as true of the Scottish and Welsh supposedly 'advanced' working-class. (An amendment passed at the conference insisted that whatever was agreed at the conference 'should apply only to England. [30]) More importantly, the 'English' working-class was treated as an undifferentiated mass, rather than as one composed of a minority opposed to imperialism, a majority that simply accepted imperialism and a minority that actively supported imperialism.

The CC minority did not refer to recent important economic developments that had affected **all** working-class people. In the early eighties the bourgeoisie internationally had for some time been turning from Keynesianism to neo-liberalism, partly in an attempt to extract more surplus-value from the working-class. In Britain, the Conservative Government elected in 1979 in the wake of the 'Winter of Discontent' was dismantling much of the post-war settlement between labour and capital, notably by adopting a monetarist economic strategy that caused rapidly rising unemployment and cuts in social services. It gradually reintroduced most of the provisions of the Industrial Relations Act defeated in 1972. It defeated public sector unions – in the steel industry [31] for instance - in bitter strikes.

Prior to the Special Conference, the advocates of reorientation had made a robust defence of their position. Some criticisms of the CC minority 's position (e.g., on the role of national movements in the Russian and Chinese revolutions) were similar to those made here. In defending its line and criticising the eclecticism of the minority, the CC majority adopted a much more forthright Marxist stance than in the original 'reorientation' document. In

[28] 'Amendment to Reorientate the League, p. 1.
[29] 'Amendment to Reorientate the League, pp. 3-4.
[30] 'Proposed Ordering of Amendments for Conference'.
[31] One of the government's monetarist objectives was to cut public sector pay and subsidies to so-called 'lame duck' industries. A 13-week strike in British Steel's plants occurred early in 1980. The unions eventually accepted a pay increase considerably less than the rate of inflation. The deal was conditional on a productivity agreement that saw a third of the 130.00 workforce made redundant and several plants closed. Government subsidies were severely curtailed.

particular, it argued that 'Marxists must consider all questions, including the national question, from the standpoint of the international proletariat.'. Its response to the minority's accusation that the majority were 'subordinating' the national question to the class question, was yes, we are: 'in that revolutionary communists proceed from the standpoint of the proletariat…they have always subordinated every other question to that one.'.[32]

But relative success in the Bangladesh Divided Families, Bradford 12 and other such campaigns, especially when contrasted with the failure of factory base-building, would probably have fostered an ideological and political climate favourable to the CC minority's line. Interacting with their line would have been an increasing tendency to see anti-racist work as an end in itself, not as a means of developing a revolutionary movement against capitalism. The Birmingham branch explicitly argued for such a stance: we 'must', it argued, 'develop the struggle against national minority oppression in itself and for itself.'.[33] One member of this branch later took this liquidationist stance to its logical conclusion by arguing that party-building was a 'reactionary' project.[34]

The members of the RCLB encountered a fork in the road at the Special Conference. The road taken was not a Marxist Road. The conference rejected a resolution from the RCLB National Secretary which argued that as the document before the conference 'implicitly proceeds from the standpoint that the main contradiction in Britain is the national one…it should be rewritten on the basis that the main contradiction is the class contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.'.[35] The National Secretary was right. The document was not based on historical materialism. It was devoid of class sentiment. It contained nothing on the offensive of the government against the working-class. It contained no proposals to intervene in the class struggle. It was after the defeat of the reorienteers at the conference that 'Anderson' resigned from the RCLB. It is astonishing that the National Secretary did not resign. An amended version of the CC minority document, though with its overall radical nationalist stance unchanged, was adopted by the conference (a new section on the oppression of women was added).

The RCLB's Third Congress was held a few months later. The congress seems to have been a rather introspective affair in which the objective world scarcely impinged upon its deliberations. The Congress Report indicates, despite such clear evidence of the increasing threat of inter-imperialist nuclear war, such as the launch in March 1983 of the US imperialists' Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), the so-called 'Star Wars' plan (claimed by the RCP,USA to be a plan for a first-strike nuclear attack on the Soviet Union), that the international situation was not discussed,

The Congress was held during the great miner's strike of 1984-85, the pivot of the bourgeois offensive against the working-class. But the congress report mentioned the strike only in its relationship to the struggle of national minorities. There was no sense of the strike as a

[32] 'Rally Around "Re-orientate the League', pp. 7-8. Emphasis in the original.
[33] S. Richards, *Ebbing Tide.* p 12, p. 16.
[34] 'Class Struggle, National Struggle and Party-Building'
1987 internal RCLB document @ https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.hightide/cs-ns.pdf
[35] 'Proposed Ordering of Amendments for Conference'.

response to a bourgeois offensive against the working-class. the **whole** working-class.[36] The congress confirmed the RCLB's now dominant eclecticism by referring to two 'separate streams of struggle' in Britain – 'that of the national minorities and that of the working-class.'.[37] This of course was the logic of 'free national development'. In 1989 the RCLB took the radical nationalist road it had been travelling to its logical conclusion. Its Fourth Congress of that year decided that it aimed to build not a party of the proletariat but a 'multi-national communist party based on both the working-class and the national minority people.'. ('Top of the agenda' was the question of women's oppression.[38] The RCLB's developing line on this matter is discussed in our case study).

While membership of communist parties has always been open to all who share the objective of communism, irrespective of class, gender, nationality or whatever and while communist parties aim to build a united front of all those exploited and oppressed by capitalism, it has also been held as axiomatic that communist parties are fundamentally parties of the proletariat, parties aiming to lead the struggle of the proletariat to overthrow capitalism. Affirming this aspect of historical materialism had been a crucial aspect of the CPC's struggle against Soviet revisionism.[39] It is indicative of the RCLB's by now deep eclecticism that it clearly considered it unnecessary to justify its revisionism. Quite possibly, it was not aware of it. A May Day leaflet distributed by its Birmingham branch around the time of the Third Congress declared that when raising 'the banner of internationalism we proclaim our solidarity with all those fighting for national freedom.'.[40] Of the struggle of the international proletariat to overthrow capitalism, there was not a word.

More on the NCG and the SCG.

In contrast to the RCLB, the NCG and the SCG continued to treat the prospect of war with extreme urgency. In 1984 the two groups jointly sent a delegate to a new international conference of Maoist parties and organisations. This conference founded the RIM and adopted *The Declaration of the Revolutionary International Movement*, a substantial advance on the *Joint Communique* in developing fundamental principles for Maoist unity. It did not however resolve what was the most pressing matter facing the movement – the attitude to be taken by Maoists to the threat of imperialist war. In the RIM there were those who believed that the Comintern's strategy of 1935-45 provided basic, if seriously flawed, guidance for revolutionary practice in the Second World War and those who thought the strategy opportunist. The *Declaration* argued that 'there were great revolutionary achievements in the course of World War II: at the same time, it is impossible not to see serious errors.' What were these errors?

> In particular we can note the error of eclectically combining…contradictions. In practical political terms, the diplomatic struggle and international agreements of

[36] 'RCLB - 3rd Congress', *Class Struggle,* June-July 1984. *Class Struggle* did report on the strike. Some articles were written by miners in cop-operation with the Leeds branch, which was located close to the Yorkshire coalfield.
[37] 'RCL - 3rd Congress', *Class Struggle*.
[38] 'RCL Congress', *Class Struggle,* September 1989.
[39] CPC, 'On Khrushchev's Phoney Communism and its Historical Lessons for the World', The *Polemic on the General Line*, pp. 415-480.
[40] Leaflet reproduced in Richards, *Ebbing Tide*, p. 9.

> the Soviet Union became increasingly confounded with the activities of the Communist Parties making up the Comintern. This problem also contributed to strong tendencies to portray the non-fascist powers as something other than what they were – imperialists who would have to be overthrown. In the European countries occupied by German fascist troops it was not incorrect for the Communist Parties to take tactical advantage of national sentiments from the standpoint of mobilising the masses, but errors were made due to raising such tactical measures to the level of strategy. Liberation struggles in colonies under the domination of the allied imperialist powers were also held back due to such erroneous views.[41]

The *Declaration* was a compromise, a necessary compromise, in the interest of building deeper unity. Some, including the RCP,USA, would have liked to have seen stern criticism of the period 1935-45. That party had been developing severe criticisms of the Comintern's united front strategy for some time. In the late 1970s it had made a sharply critical analysis of what it regarded as an opportunist application by the parties of the allied imperialist powers of a basically correct strategy.[42] But in 1981 it argued that the united front strategy had itself been fundamentally opportunist, asserting that 'the second world war, from beginning to end, had been the second world *inter-imperialist* war.'.[43] Similar points were made in private conversations during the conference.[44]

Despite the unity the NCG and SCG had built over the previous four years, serious disagreements on the way forward in party-building emerged after the international conference. The NCG had not been aware of the CWLB's proposed Programme Commission until after its demise. After the CWLB rejected the NCG's suggestion that the commission be re-established, the NCG itself proposed establishing a programme commission. According to the NCG, Maoist unity prior to the adoption of a programme would inevitably result in that 'persistence of empiricist practice and dogmatic theory' which had allegedly been the fundamental cause of the failure of the revolutionary movement in Britain ever since the formation of the CPGB.[45]

The SCG had serious reservations regarding the NCG's proposal but swallowed its doubts. In 1981, in *Build the Party*, the NCG and the SCG jointly issued a call to establish a Marxist-Leninist Programme Commission (MLPC). Despite some initial interest, only the two groups and a few individuals eventually took part. Under the aegis of the MLPC, they published, influenced by the work of the RCP, USA on the history of the Comintern, *The Unholy Alliance: the United Front against Fascism and War 1935-45.* This publication made essentially the same criticisms of the Comintern as are made in this history. But it did so from a perspective that effectively treated the Comintern as a counter-revolutionary organisation, rather than as a communist organisation making serious opportunist errors. [46] Accusations of Trotskyism were made at the international conference which founded the RIM.

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[41] *Declaration of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement,* p. 20.
[42] *The Communist,* 1.1. (October 1976), 2.1. (Fall/Winter 1977) & 2.2. (Summer/Fall 1978).
[43] 'Outline of Views on the Historical Experience of the International Communist Movement and the Lessons for Today', *Revolution,* June 1981, p.9. Emphasis in the original.
[44] According to the NCG & SCG delegate to the conference.
[45] NCG, 'The Marxist-Leninist Movement in Britain', *Red Star*, no. 4 (1980), pp. 16-17.
[46] MLPC, *The Unholy Alliance: the United Front against Fascism and War 1935-45* (Manchester, nd).

The MLPC made little progress. In 1983, the SCG proposed that the NCG and the SCG should unite on the basis of the *Joint Communique.* The NCG rejected this proposal. In 1984, the SCG argued that the acute inter-imperialist contradictions of that time meant that Maoist unity was imperative and that the NCG and the SCG should unite on the *Declaration of the Revolutionary International Movement* and then develop the programme through theoretical and practical struggle. Despite being urged by a representative of the Committee of the RIM to agree to this proposal, the NCG refused. It insisted that even 'if world war does seem likely, unity would still be incorrect unless we had a clear analysis of the causes of the impending war in some detail.'.[47]

To insist, despite the relatively high degree of ideological and political unity between the NCG and the SCG, that there could not be principled organisational unity between them was a grave manifestation of subjective idealism. Essentially, the NCG regarded a programme as a vaccine against opportunism and revisionism. But was it? Take the case of the pre-1914 Socialist Party of Germany (SPD), generally then regarded as the most theoretically advanced Marxist party in Europe. It had a 'clear analysis of the causes of imperialist war' and of the specific war then threatening Europe. A general European war had been expected for years. The SPD had fully participated in the debates and discussions on the matter in the Second International. Yet, like the vast majority of European parties, the SPD capitulated to social chauvinism when war came in 1914. Its members had mostly proved incapable of resisting intense ideological and political pressure to put nation before class. This, not an intellectual failure to understand the causes of the war, was the reason for the defeat of socialism in 1914.

A period of ideological and political disarray, which it is pointless to consider in any detail, followed the NCG's spurning of the SCG's proposal that the two groups should unite. The SCG was dissolved. Redfern opportunistically applied to rejoin the RCLB and was accepted as a candidate member. He soon regretted his opportunism and resigned after a year or so. A criticism of the *Declaration of the RIM* written by him was published after he had resigned.[48] Some members of the MLPC formed the Revolutionary Internationalist Contingent in Britain (RIC) which published *Break the Chains! Manifesto of the Revolutionary Internationalist Contingent in Britain.* Later, after a failed attempt to work in RIC, Redfern and others founded the Revolutionary Communist Union (RCU). RIC and the RCU were essentially the NCG mark II and the SCG mark II.[49] The two groups maintained comradely relations. The RCU published a *Draft Programme for Revolutionary Communists in Britain,* written in collaboration with Maoist Iranian exiles in London. The RIC and the RCU were both dissolved in 1989.

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[47] NCG to SCG.

[48] 'Criticism of the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement', *October* no. 4 (Winter 1988).

[49] There are some factual errors in Sam Richard's account of the history of these two groups. (*Ebbing Tide,* pp 56-60). The 'PD' who sought readmission to the RCLB along with Redfern was not Phil Dixon, who had quickly become inactive. I (the first person is appropriate here) did **not** say that I had rejoined the RCLB on a 'fishing trip'. I had been quite sincere, if profoundly in error. RIC was not a joint enterprise of the NCG and the SCG. The Revolutionary Communist Union was not an organisation of Iranian exiles.

The RCLB on Marxist Ideology and Theory.

After its Third Congress of 1984 the RCLB seems to have no longer been convulsed by internal struggles. Apart from its Irish solidarity work, discussed in our case study, there is little point in further discussion of its practice, given that this continued on the eclectic path previously discussed. On the other hand, the RCLB's theoretical and ideological development is of considerable interest. There were significant developments on the question of the oppression of women, discussed in our other case study, on the matter of Eurocentrism and in a summing up of the experience of socialist revolution and construction in the Soviet Union and China.

Eurocentrism as the 'Key Link'.

In 1985, *October* announced that eurocentrism was the 'key link' in the RCLB's theoretical work.'. Defined as an outlook 'that views the world from the standpoint of the western "Labour Movement"', eurocentrism was said to exaggerate 'the significance and potential of the economic struggles of the western working-class' and relegate 'to a subordinate role the oppressed nations and their struggles.' It was the key to 'understanding the failure of successive revolutionary initiatives in the West'. The most serious consequence of eurocentrism was said to be social chauvinism.

There is much to agree with here (though it is no doubt a reflection of the RCLB's radical nationalism that it referred to the 'oppressed nations', not, as is customary among Maoists, 'oppressed peoples and nations'.) But is it true that in Britain social-chauvinism had been manifested 'most clearly in relation to the communist movement's stand on Ireland.'[50] Surely, the support given by most labour movement activists in the imperialist countries to their 'own' bourgeoisie in the two world wars of the Twentieth Century had been the most egregious case of social-chauvinism. Once, the RCLB would have agreed with that verdict with respect to the first of these world wars. As for the second, it is striking that in *Eurocentrism and the Communist Movement*, the RCLB subjected the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin to forensic analysis from an anti-Eurocentric perspective, and found them wanting, while dealing only perfunctorily with the Comintern's strategy of 1935-45.[51]

On the matter of Eurocentrism, the RCLB had apparently been greatly influenced by the work of 'mainly Third World Marxists', particularly Samir Amin.[52] Was Amin a Marxist? Despite his excellent political criticisms of eurocentrism, Amin did not subscribe to the most fundamental economic doctrine of Marxism. In his various works published by 1985, Amin argued that surplus value is produced not by the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie, but in a process of unequal exchange between the imperialist countries and the 'Third World.' [53] *Eurocentrism and the Communist Movement* endorsed Amin's views: but because the RCLB's CC had taken fright at the political implications of itself endorsing Amin (it had been noted that 'Amin appears to deny the classical Marxist tenet that surplus value is created in the process of production, and not in the process of distribution.'), the book was

[50] 'Eurocentrism, the "key link" in Theoretical Work", *October*, no. 3 (Summer, 1985), pp. 1-2.
[51] *Eurocentrism and the Communist Movement* (London1986).
[52] 'Eurocentrism, the "key link" in Theoretical Work", p. 1.
[53] The most influential of these works was *Imperialism and Unequal Development* (New York, 1977).

published under the imprint 'October Books', a label 'not specifically identified with the RCL.'.[54]

A member of the RCLB spoke on the matter of Eurocentrism at a public meeting in 1985 marking the 25th. anniversary of the massacre at Sharpeville, South Africa.[55] He or she claimed that the members of RCLB had not been able, because the 'weight of imperialist ideology is so strong' in Europe, to overcome Eurocentrism 'by our unaided efforts.'. They had had to wait for enlightenment from 'an outstanding body of "thinkers"' from the Third World. In an apparent endorsement of Amin, it was claimed that Eurocentrism was present in the communist movement's understanding of political economy. It regarded as the 'most important processes' those 'within or among the industrialised nations, instead of between them and the oppressed nations.'. [56]

Maoists had not needed to wait for enlightenment. They could have learnt, as many did, from Lenin and the early Comintern. As early as 1913 Lenin had responded with joy to the stirrings of revolt in the East, such as the boycott of British goods by the people of India, 'What delight', he had declared, 'this world movement is arousing in the hearts of all class-conscious workers'.[57] Bukharin too had recognised the importance of this development. He had insisted at the first Congress of the Comintern that the 'movement in the colonies…has joined the broad stream of the great liberation struggle that is shaking up the entire immense structure of world capitalism.'.[58] We have seen too that the Comintern's Second Congress made a conceptual breakthrough on the national and colonial question. Its subsequent regression did not invalidate earlier contributions.

The new leaders of the RCLB deemed the early Maoist movement to have been severely infected with Eurocentrism. This was certainly true, as we have seen, of the CPB. But it is only from a perspective skewed by radical nationalism that the CFB can be said to have 'shared the Eurocentric and then social-chauvinist orientation' of the CPB.[59] There had been elements of Eurocentric thought in the CFB, but, like the great majority of Maoists, though not the CPB, the CFB had always regarded firm support for national liberation movements as one of the principal lines of demarcation with Trotskyism and revisionism.

The CFB 'Statement on the World Situation' of 1974 had unequivocally argued that 'since the war the main revolutionary struggles in the world have developed in Asia, Africa and Latin America.' Yet the statement was damned for 'failing to grasp' the 'revolutionary significance' of national struggles in the Third World. Quite how, was not explained. It was further asserted that the *Manifesto* of the RCLB had included 'glaring social-chauvinist

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[54] 'October, eurocentrism and the Theoretical Development of the RCL'
@ 'https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.hightide/entrism.pdf.

[55] Sixty-nine people were killed and many more seriously injured in a protest against the apartheid regime's notorious pass laws, which severely restricted the right of non-whites to decide where to live and to work.

[56] 'Colonialism and eurocentrism', *Class Struggle*, June 1985. This was a neo-Marxist misrepresentation of the communist movement's stance, which held that surplus value was accrued through the exploitation of the labour power of the proletariat of **all** countries.

[57] V.I. Lenin, 'Backward Europe and Advanced Asia', *Collected Works*, (Moscow, 1974), vol. 19, p. 100.

[58] Riddell (1987), p. 308.

[59] 'Eurocentrism, the "key link" in Theoretical Work', p. 4.

aspects':[60] These were not identified but presumably were not considered to include its social-chauvinist support for British imperialism against Soviet social-imperialism.

Some criticisms of the early RCLB are simply not true. It was claimed, for instance, that in 1977-78 there had been in *Revolution*, 'not a word' on imperialism or the national question, 'the burning issues of the age.'.[61] *Revolution* had then been used mainly to discuss party-building. But even so, the question of imperialism had featured prominently in *Birch no Longer Part of the Marxist-Leninist Movement* and had been the principal concern of *The Third World is a Rising Force against Imperialism* and of *Proletarian Internationalism and the Duties of British Communists*. 1978 had also seen the campaign of solidarity with the national liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. These facts presumably did not fit the narrative the author wished to tell.

Marxism or Liberalism? the RCLB on the Historical Experience of Socialist Revolution and Construction.

The massacre in China's Tiananmen Square was followed in quick succession by the opening of the Berlin wall, the collapse of the regime in East Germany and in 1991 the end of the Soviet Union. It was presumably these events which led the RCLB to undertake a fundamental appraisal of the project embarked upon by the communist movement in 1917. The organisation's conclusions on this matter were publicised in the *Special Supplement* discussed in the previous chapter, in a *Class Struggle* report on a 'Future of Socialism' conference and in the organisation's new *Political Platform.* Offered here are merely comments on the RCLB's appraisal, not an alternative appraisal,

The first thing which must be said regarding the RCLB's appraisal is that – perhaps influenced by the bourgeois triumphalism which accompanied the rapid decay and eventual collapse of Gorbachev's Soviet Union – it conveyed no sense of the momentous, epoch-making nature of the revolutions in Russia and China. These revolutions had far greater significance than such past revolutionary upheavals as the great French revolution of 1789: they were initial steps towards an end to the successive systems of class exploitation and oppression which have existed since class societies first emerged many thousands of years in the past.

One of the principal issues in Maoism's critique of Soviet revisionism was the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat.[62] For Marx, the principal lesson to be drawn from the bloody suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871 was the necessity for dictatorship by the proletariat over the overthrown bourgeoisie. For Lenin, citing |Marx:

> Between capitalist and communist society lies the period of the revolutionary transformation of the one to the other. There corresponds to this also a political

[60] *Ibid*., pp6-7, p. 8.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 9.
[62] See 'The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Khrushchev', *The Polemic on the General Line,* pp. 359-410.

> transition period in which the state can be nothing but the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat.[63]

But, as in the Soviet revisionism criticised by the CPC, there was virtually no mention of the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the RCLB's analysis of the experience of socialist revolution and construction. There was no recognition that in every class society the state is ultimately a dictatorship of one class over other classes. Reading the *Special Supplement* discussed in the previous chapter inevitably brings to mind Lenin's remark that Karl Kautsky, in his criticism of Bolshevik rule, had 'transformed Marx into a common liberal.'.

The *Political Platform* did mention (an appropriate verb) the dictatorship of the proletariat,[64] but far more characteristic was a stress on 'democracy' (never defined). According to the RCLB a communist party in power 'has to stay open to challenge, criticism and, if necessary, to condemnation.' Quite true, of course: but according to the RCLB 'that can only happen if popular democracy, including the right to establish new parties and a free press become an entrenched and central part of socialist society.'.[65]

The RCLB failed to ask questions that should be mandatory for Marxists – which class interest does such rights serve? Would members of the overthrown exploiting classes be allowed to form political parties? Or parties advocating a return to capitalism? Would a 'free press' that called for the overthrow of socialism be tolerated? Would the communist party compete with other parties in elections?

Shortly after the October revolution, the Bolsheviks lost elections to the Constituent Assembly established by the Provisional Government formed after the first revolution of 1917. Believing that the Soviets were a form of government that far better served the interests of the workers and peasants, and that the Assembly could become a centre for counter-revolution, the Bolsheviks dissolved it, much as Cromwell dissolved the Rump Parliament. There is no evidence that the RCLB considered such matters, strongly suggesting that it had accepted much of the liberal democratic critique of Marxist doctrine on the state. Indeed, the 'rights' which the RCLB insists should exist under socialism are rights which exist in liberal democratic societies under the rubric of pluralism.

Much of the revisionist and Trotskyist critique of the Soviet experience under Stalin's leadership was accepted. Maoists have undoubtedly been one-sided in their defence of Stalin: but if the RCLB believed that there had been positive aspects to the Stalin period, none were referred to in the documents being considered here. According to the RCLB it 'no longer satisfies anyone' to assume that 'the Stalin period…was mainly good and that there was an abrupt change around the time that Khrushchev took over the Soviet leadership…in 1956…things probably started going wrong after Lenin's death in the mid-1920s.'.[66] This was an extraordinary statement for a nominally Maoist organisation to make.

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[63] V. I. Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* (Beijing, 1970), p. 7.
[64] *Political Platform of the RCLB,* para. 11.
[65] 'We Stand by the Chinese People's Revolution' *Class Struggle Special Supplement*, Summer 1989.
[66] 'RCL Conference on the Future of Socialism'.

In the 'mid-1920s' (and later) Stalin made major contributions to the world proletarian revolution: contributions acknowledged by all communists, including the CPC. Probably the most important of these – a matter discussed in Chapter One, but not thought worth raising by the RCLB - was his leadership of the struggle against Trotsky's defeatism on the question of 'socialism in one country'. This then became a practical question. Under Stalin's leadership, the expropriations of financial, industrial, commercial and landed capital which had begun after the revolution, but which had been halted by the necessary retreat of the New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1921-28, were completed, thus ending the exploitation of workers by capitalists and peasants by landlords.

Typical of the RCLB's increasing tendency to leave class out of its analyses (the section of its *Political Platform* on *Problems in the Historical Experience of Socialism* contains prominent statements on women and on the national question under socialism, but virtually nothing on the working-class and peasantry[67]), none of the documents under discussion hailed the extraordinary, revolutionary expropriations of the 1920s and early 1930s. It was a transformation which laid the foundations for the construction of socialism.

The RCLB's assertion that the Soviet party had identified 'socialism with central planning' is simply untrue.[68] Though planning was introduced, made possible by the expropriations of capital, it was the ending of class exploitation which in the Stalin period was seen as the foundation of socialism. It is true that the revolutionary enthusiasm with which workers and peasants carried out this transformation was not sustained. In the late 1920s the Bolsheviks aimed initially to construct a planned economy in which there was a dialectical relationship between the planners and the rest of society but soon switched to authoritarian planning and a command economy.[69]

In its *Political Platform* the RCLB claimed that in the Stalin period 'any expression of popular dissent which did arise was treated by definition as counter-revolutionary and antagonistic to socialism' and that this allowed a 'bureaucratic class to restore capitalist relations over a period culminating in the accession of Khruschev to power.'[70] Maoists have usually argued that 1956 marked not the end but the beginning of a process of capitalist restoration. Though Maoists did tend to pay little attention to a preceding degeneration, there **was** an 'abrupt change' in 1956. This was the year of the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Party, which the RCLB failed to mention. Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin at the Congress is generally understood by Maoists to have been an initial fusillade in the Soviet revisionists' attack on Marxism.

What did the RCLB have in mind when claiming that 'capitalist relations' were restored in the Stalin period? A clue is provided by the statement that 'Developing democracy…is the

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[67] *Political Platform of the RCLB*, paras. 30-37. There is a passing reference to an alleged 'breaking of the worker-peasant alliance' in the Soviet Union This presumably refers to the collectivisation of agriculture which began in the late 1920s. While there was clearly an element of coercion in collectivisation, was the worker-peasant alliance broken? It certainly made enemies of the Kulaks, the rich peasants. Under the New Economic Policy adopted in 1921 many rich peasants hired poor and middle peasants. Collectivisation was welcomed by many, perhaps most, middle and poor peasants, for it freed them from exploitation by Kulaks.

[68] 'RCL Conference on the Future of Socialism', p. 6.

[69] See Kuromiya (1988).

[70] *Political Platform of the RCLB,* para. 4.

key to building a socialist system.'[71] Democracy is about politics. And politics is fundamentally about economics. It is 'the concentrated expression of economics.'.[72] It is about the allocation of resources, a matter of who gets what. This is determined by the relations of production – who owns what, etc. - in a given society. But the RCLB's failure to acknowledge that the most fundamental aspect of socialism is a socialised economy, makes it unlikely that it was the relations of production that it had in mind. Yet in the final analysis it is these that determine whether or not a society is socialist.

It is of course crucial that a socialist society is democratic (in the sense of the widest and deepest possible popular administration and control combined with a dictatorship over the overthrown exploiting classes). But the RCLB's stress on democracy, or rather a lack of it, as a cause of capitalist restoration was one-sided and unmaterialist. It caused it to ignore a far more fundamental problem. As Marx argued, socialism emerges from capitalist society 'economically, morally and culturally, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from which it has emerged.'.[73]

Maoists have usually argued, in, for instance, *The Shanghai Textbook on Political Economy* published during the cultural revolution, that socialism's 'birthmarks' spontaneously generate a new bourgeoisie.[74] This seems correct. But in the Soviet Union little was done, once the basic socialisation of the means of production had been accomplished, to overcome such survivals of capitalism as one-man management in state enterprises and the privileges of party cadres. Indeed, some of them – payment according to work rather than need, for instance - became more marked in the 1930s. There was also, as Mao argued, an overreliance on things rather than people, a tendency to see tractors, hydro-electric power and so on as more important than the people who worked on and in them and the relations of production between those people,[75] A new bourgeoisie, capitalist roaders, gradually grew. Towards the end of his life Stalin criticised capitalist-roaders in *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*.[76] But he must bear considerable responsibility for the restoration of capitalism in the Soviet Union that occurred after his death.

In addition to the largely unchecked, and sometimes fostered, matters referred to above, there was a marked tendency to commandist and authoritarian methods and styles of work, intense coercion in socialist construction and widespread political repression. As we have seen, such matters were raised by the RCLB, but virtually no attention was paid to their historical context. The Bolsheviks led socialist construction in a backward country with a brutal political culture. Domestic reactionaries, supported by British and other imperialists, attempted to overthrow the regime in the civil war of 1918-1921. Rich peasants and bourgeois elements who had flourished under the NEP bitterly opposed industrialisation and collectivisation. The German imperialists attacked in 1941. To make these points is not to exonerate the Stalin-era Bolsheviks for all their mistakes and misdeeds: it is to try to understand.

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[71] *Political Platform of the RCLB*, para. 30.
[72] V. I. Lenin, "Once Again on the Trade Union Question, the Current Situation and the Mistakes of Trotsky and Bukharin", *Collected Works, vol. 22* (Moscow, 1965), p. 73.
[73] K. Marx, *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* (Beijing, 1972), p. 9.
[74] See especially "introduction", and Ch.1, in Lotta, (1994).
[75] Mao Zedong, *A Critique of Soviet Economics* (New York, 1977), p 87.
[76] J. V. Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR'* (Beijing, 1972).

A specific aspect of political repression was the purges and terror of the late 1930s, sparked by the assassination in 1934 of Sergie Kirov, the leader of the CPSU in Leningrad. (For a Maoist interpretation of the purges and the terror see an article by the RCP,USA.[77]) British Maoists tended not to consider the matter, but there was one specific aspect of the terror - the trials and executions of such old Bolsheviks as Bukharin, Kamenev, Radek and Zinoviev, which members of the CFB/RCLB, at least informally, did discuss. Maoists tended to assume that the charges laid against such old Bolsheviks (for instance that Bukharin and Radek had been conspiring with Trotsky and the Nazis and other reactionaries to overthrow the Soviet regime) were true, especially given that Khruschev had claimed that they were not. Doubtless, many of those who were purged and executed were spies, counter-revolutionaries, saboteurs, enemy agents and so on, some of them party members. But there can now be no reasonable doubt that many of those accused, certainly those identified here, were innocent.[78]

Almost certainly, the principal factor in the purges of such as Zinoviev was the increasing threat from Germany and Japan to the Soviet Union in the 1930s. William Chase (2001) has convincingly shown the close connection between the international situation and the execution of such as Bukharin. In an egregious failure to distinguish between contradictions between friends and contradictions with the enemy, opposition to the leadership's policy was increasingly seen as tantamount to treachery. This was especially so with respect to those who, like Bukharin, opposed its insistence on the necessity for rapid industrialization and collectivisation (in 1931 Salin asserted that 'we are fifty to a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We make good this distance in ten years. Either we do this or they crush us.'.[79])

The mainly positive experience of building socialism in the Soviet Union and China, even if ultimately overthrown, strongly suggests that the Bolsheviks were correct on the question of 'socialism in one country'. But that experience also shows how difficult it is to build socialism in a world dominated by imperialism and where capitalist roaders such as Khrushchev and Deng Xiaoping are constantly generated. Socialism in the Soviet Union was built by men and women, such as Stalin, who themselves bore 'birthmarks' of socialism. In a sense, then, all the grave mistakes and misdeeds touched upon here must be attributed to capitalism. But these men and women were also responsible for inspiring and soul-stirring achievements. As well as the liberation of millions of people from exploitation and oppression by capitalists, landlords and kulaks, the Soviet state brought schools, hospitals and electricity to even the remotest areas. None of these and a myriad other achievements were mentioned in the documents under discussion.

In 1956, after the 20th. Congress of the CPSU, Mao argued in a speech prior to the CPC's Eighth National Congress that Stalin's record as a revolutionary leader should be assessed as "three parts bad, seven parts good".[80] It would be presumptuous for one who, like the present

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[77] 'An Historic Contradiction: Fundamentally Changing the World Without "Turning Out the Lights"', Further Findings and Reflections on the 1930s', *Revolution* February 21, 2010 @ https://revcom.us/en/a/193online/lights_out09-en.html.

[78] See the documentary evidence in Getty & Naumov (1999).

[79] J.V. Stalin, *The Tasks of Business Executives*, Leninism (London,1940, p. 366).

[80] 'Reinforce the Unity of the Party and Carry Forward the Party Traditions', *The Writings of Mao Zedong 1949-1976*, Vol. II), J. K. Leung & M. Y. M. Kau (eds.), (Armonk, NY,1992). p. 112.

writer, has no experience of actual socialist revolution and construction to make an overall assessment of Stalin's role: but, especially given his responsibility for the international communist movement's policy after 1935, Mao's assessment seems generous.

At the Future of Socialism conference, the members of the RCLB deemed the experience of socialist revolution and construction in China to have been 'mainly positive.'. Though one lesson to be learnt was that under socialism there must be 'a rich vocabulary [?] of democratic mechanisms to keep a check on the Communist Party, something Lenin anticipated, but which was largely forgotten about subsequently.'.[81] Elsewhere, the RCLB claimed that in China 'popular democracy has remained restricted over the years.[82] Was the cultural revolution not a practical expression of Lenin's anticipation? Was the Cultural Revolution not the most effective democratic mechanism yet devised 'to keep a check on the Communist Party'?

The RCLB argued that the cultural revolution was 'an attempt to mobilise the people to combat the growing power of the emerging ruling class within the Party:' but 'it failed to find ways of carrying out the class struggle from below, in a democratic way. Although its aims were correct, the fact remains that the power of the people cannot be imposed from above.'.[83] Yes – just as the October Revolution was launched 'from above' so the Cultural Revolution was. This demonstrated that communist leadership of the class struggle continues to be needed even in a socialist society. It was a practical example of the Maoist concept of continuing the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. Such socialist new things as the Revolutionary Committees, which replaced one-person management in economic enterprises emerged during the revolution. Meeting the needs of the people became the prime responsibility of economic enterprises. Higher education was charged with turning out cadres who were 'red and expert' rather than simply expert. Workers were enjoined to take responsibility for their enterprise rather than simply to work hard.

The absurd charge that the Cultural Revolution was intended to 'rush China towards communism'[84] was one item on Deng Xiaoping's charge sheet against the 'Gang of Four'. But far from trying to rush China towards communism, the cultural revolutionaries took due account of China's economic backwardness. On the question of commodity production, for instance (eliminating commodity production[85] was understood to be necessary in the transition to communism), the authors of *The Shanghai Textbook* stressed that 'to negate the necessity of maintaining commodity production in socialism and to attempt to abolish commodity production prematurely are quite obviously mistaken.'. [86]

At the Future of Socialism conference some 'severe criticisms…on the question of Tibet.' had been made.[87] In its *Political* Platform the organisation claimed that the CPC had been guilty of 'great Han chauvinism' (Hans are the majority nationality in China) towards

[81] 'RCL Conference on the Future of Socialism'.
[82] 'We Stand by the Chinese People's Revolution'.
[83] *Political Platform of the RCLB*, para. 28.
[84] 'We Stand by the Chinese People's Revolution'.
[85] 'Commodity' is used here in the Marxist sense of a thing produced for sale rather than use.
[86] Lotta, (1994), p. 109. As the experience of Kampuchea shows, this is not 'obviously mistaken.'.
[87] 'RCL Conference on the Future of Socialism'.

Tibetans.[88] When the PRC was founded in 1949 Tibet had been largely untouched by the agrarian revolution which had earlier convulsed the greater part of China.[89] Tibet was an extremely backward feudal society in which the great majority of people were serfs living in dire poverty, squalor and ignorance, ruled over by tyrannical and parasitic nobles and monks. At the apex of this rotten system was the Dalai Lama, now feted in the west as a saintly guru.

In contrast to the Soviet Union, which had imposed something resembling socialism on the countries of Eastern Europe it had liberated towards the end of the Second World War, the PRC did not attempt to immediately overthrow Tibetan feudalism, preferring to build mass support through gradual reform and education. Even so, Landlords and other reactionary elements headed by the Dalai Lama launched a CIA-backed failed uprising in 1959. The Dalai Lama fled to India. Since then, allegations of Han excesses and atrocities have been made in such apologias for the old regime as *The Anguish of Tibet*[90] and have become the received wisdom in imperialist countries.

Mao criticised Han chauvinist attitudes and practices towards national minority people at least twice, in 1953 and again in 1956.[91] Of course, we must assume that Han chauvinism persisted. But it is typical of the RCLB's approach to the experience of socialist revolution and construction that while Han chauvinism in Tibet was criticised, it had nothing at all to say about the great revolutionary transformations which took place there. In the 1950s and especially in the 1960s Tibet was transformed. The CPC led Tibetans in the overthrow of feudalism. Agriculture and Tibet's primitive infrastructure was modernised. Education and healthcare, previously available only to a tiny minority, became far more accessible to workers and peasants. During the Cultural Revolution the monasteries, strongholds of Buddhism that taught that poverty or being born a woman were punishments for sins in past lives, were dissolved. But none of this was celebrated in *Class Struggle*.

The RCLB's Retreat from Marxism.

The RCLB's conclusions on the experience of socialist revolution and construction in the Soviet Union and China suggest that by 1992 the various strands of the RCLB's late eclectic ideological and political outlook – Marxism, radical nationalism and feminism (we will see the emergence of this strand in our case study) - had merged into a vague progressivism. This outlook dominated the last issue of *Class Struggle*, published in June 1992. The title had become a misnomer: the paper contained mainly progressive *reportage* of the type then to be found in the journal *New Internationalist.* Concepts such as 'freedom'. 'peace' and 'justice' were commonly deployed in the journal: Marxist concepts such as 'class', 'exploitation', and 'struggle' much less. There was no sense that it was the paper of an organisation seeking to lead the objectively existing struggle of the working-class against the bourgeoisie.

Let us take as representative of the whole an article on the British General Election of 1992. According to the RCLB, the result of the election, a victory for the Conservatives, was 'a

[88] *Political Platform of the RCLB*, para 20.
[89] This discussion on Tibet is based on M. Eley, *The True Story of Maoist Revolution in Tibet* @ https://revcom.us/a/firstvol/tibet/tib-in.htm.
[90] Kelly, Bastian & Aeillo, (1991).
[91] Mao Zedong 'Criticise Han Chauvinism', *Selected Works vol. 5* (Beijing, 1977), pp. 87-88; Mao Zedong, On the Ten Major Relationships', *Selected Works vol. 5* (Beijing, 1977), pp. 295-307.

defeat for democracy'. Why? Because there was no possibility of the 'progressive democratic policies of the Liberal Democrats' bring implemented. One reform advocated by the Liberal Democrats and endorsed by the RCLB was proportional representation, a system that, according to the RCLB, would make 'Parliament more representative'. There was no discussion of the class nature of democracy, that it is a type of bourgeois state, that it is, as Lenin put it, the 'best possible political shell for capitalism.'.[92] And, it might be added. the more representative it is, the better the shell.

The *Political Platform* adopted by the RCLB in 1992 was informed by Marxism but was not Marxist. There was no explicit statement (or implicit assumption) that class struggle is the motor of history nor that the economic foundation of capitalism is the exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisie. Rather than historical progress being dependent on the struggle of the working-class to end its exploitation by the bourgeoisie, it was evidently deemed by the RCLB to be dependent on three, implicitly equally important struggles, those against 'women's oppression, national oppression and class oppression.'. [93] It is highly significant that the term 'class oppression' rather than 'class exploitation' was used. Marxism holds that it is the exploitation of the working-class by the capitalist class that makes the working-class the revolutionary class in capitalist society, and that that makes the final success of the struggles against national and women's oppression contingent on the successful revolutionary struggle of the working-class against capitalism.

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How had it come about that the project of building a revolutionary communist party embarked upon virtually thirty years earlier had effectively ended with the adoption of a *Platform* of the palest pink? As in the case of the CPB, we must distinguish between the objective factors, discussed in our introduction and conclusion, that made it very difficult to build a revolutionary communist party, let alone lead a revolution, and the subjective factors that shaped the ideological and political trajectory of the CFB/RCLB.

The predominantly better-off working-class and middle-class composition of the CFB/ RCLB's membership and of its leadership in particular provided fertile ground for various forms of right opportunism to flourish (though we have seen several cases of left opportunism). The conservatism of those who had in 1963 opposed the formation of the CDRCU and who were later instrumental in the formation of the CFB was undoubtedly a major factor in the failure of the movement to overcome its initial fragmentation. We saw that the formation of the CDRCU was opposed on the grounds that a split with the CPGB was premature. We saw too that those who founded *Forum* and the JCC and later the CFB argued that what were subordinate ideological and political differences precluded organisational unity. We saw too that caution and idealism were carried over into the RCLB.[94] The opportunity for a qualitative advance provided by the spilt in the CPB in 1976 was not seized.

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[92] V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (Beijing, 1976), p. 12.
[93] *Political Platform of the RCLB*, para. 142.
[94] The principal leaders of the later CFB and the early RCLB, those responsible for the organisation's conservative approach to party-building and support for the revisionist coup in China were Burford, a psychiatrist from a wealthy family, and Redfern and 'JT', both of working-class origin, but then in middle-class occupations, the former a systems analyst, the latter a ward sister in a psychiatric hospital.

The key event in the ideological and political development of the CFB/RCLB was probably its support for the road taken by the CPC after the *coup* of 1976. Objective conditions in imperialist Britain, uncritical support for the CPC and the revisionist baggage inherited from the post-1935 Comintern provided the conditions for social-chauvinism to capture the organisation in the form of the 'Three Worlds' theory. The authority of the rightists in the organisation, headed by Burford, was greatly strengthened by the splittism of the 'Anti-League Faction' expelled in 1979.

Though the influence of Burford and his supporters waned in the early '80s, continued support for the 'Three Worlds' theory and the outlook of the anti-imperialist baby-boomers who had become dominant in the membership fostered the various forms of revisionism and radical nationalism that flourished in the RCLB in the 1980s. The slow ebb of the radical tide of the sixties combined with the failure of base-building promoted a 'retreat from class' and eclecticism. The organisation was unable to resist the bourgeois triumphalism that followed Tiananmen Square and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The retreat from class was followed by a retreat from Marxism and an ideological and political break with the project begun in Russia in 1917. Consequentially, given that the organisation's *raison d'etre*, building a revolutionary communist party, had been abandoned, the RCLB was dissolved in 1998.

Chapter Six.

Case Study One – Maoists and the Revolutionary Struggle in Ireland.

The contemporary national movement in Ireland, which had been a British colony for centuries (but had been incorporated into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801), was sparked by the Easter Rising of 1916. Britain's bloody suppression of the rising (several of its leaders, including James Connolly and Padraig Pearse were executed by firing squad) contributed greatly to the decisive victory of the nationalist Sinn Fein party in the general election of 1918. The unilateral Declaration of Independence referred to in Chapter One was issued by a session of the Dail (the Irish parliament) illegally convened in 1919 for that purpose. The consequent Anglo-Irish war was ended by the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921.

The Treaty partitioned Ireland into a catholic/nationalist Free State in the British Empire in the south and a protestant/unionist Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom in the north. A minority catholic/nationalist community in the north was subjected to severe discrimination in favour of protestants on such matters as housing and employment. A property qualification for the municipal franchise ensured that unionists controlled a disproportionate number of town councils. Gerrymandering ensured a disproportionate number of unionist MPs in the UK parliament and also unionist domination of Stormont (Northern Ireland's devolved parliament). The immediate origins of the recent 'troubles' in Northern Ireland lay in the emergence in the late 1960s of a nationalist civil rights movement and a violent backlash by unionists determined to maintain their privileges.

Maoists had considerable conceptual difficulties when analysing the struggle in Ireland. Was the objective of the revolutionary task there national liberation or socialism? Lenin had argued at the Comintern's Second Congress that communists must base their policy on the national question 'not on abstract and formal principles, but…on an exact estimate of the specific historical situation and, primarily, of the economic conditions.'.[1] What little such analysis was carried out by Maoists in Britain, that by the WPS for example, tended to be used to support *a priori* assumptions that the Irish people had to carry out a national democratic revolution against British imperialism.[2] But an historical materialist analysis of the concrete conditions of Ireland leads inexorably to the conclusion that while there is still the matter of partition to be resolved, Ireland has for decades been ripe for socialism.

In 1867, in response to an agrarian uprising, Marx argued that 'what the Irish need is: 1) Self-government and independence from England; 2) An agrarian revolution.'.[3] The subsequent history of Ireland suggests that Marx's prescription for Ireland's ills was appropriate. The 'land war' of the late Nineteenth Century and the land reforms enacted by the UK parliament in response, effectively constituted an agrarian revolution that eradicated the last vestiges of feudalism.[4] Irish agriculture became capitalist agriculture, geared to production for Britain, and petty independent production. In 1916 Lenin observed that whereas in 1867 the

[1] V. I. Lenin, 'Preliminary Draft of Theses on the National and Colonial Questions (for the Second Congress pf the Communist International', *Lenin on the National and Colonial Questions* (Beijing, 1975), pp. 21-22.
[2] WPS(M-L), 'Ireland – Our Tasks', *Scottish Vanguard*, vol. 5, no. 3 (1973).
[3] Cited in V. I. Lenin, *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (Moscow, 1976), p. 48.
[4] Burns 1931), chs. II & III; Ellis (1974), ch. 9.

bourgeois democratic revolution 'had not been consummated…it is being consummated now…by the reforms of the English liberals.'.[5] Lenin was presumably referring to Home Rule for Ireland, enacted by the UK in 1914.[6]

Due to the outbreak of the First World War, Home Rule was not introduced. But the bourgeois-democratic revolution was virtually consummated by the treaty of 1921. The treaty left intact several vestiges of British rule in the Free State – for instance, the power of the UK-appointed Governor-General to veto legislation passed by the Dail. But as the Comintern argued in 1932, the treaty had given big Irish capital a share of state power in the Irish Free State, allowing it to participate as a junior partner of British capital in the exploitation of Irish workers and small farmers.[7] The treaty gave the Free State dominion status within the Empire.[8] It had power over customs and taxation and, most significantly, the right to raise an army. In its own interest and that of British imperialism, this army was used by Irish big capital to wage a bloody civil war against those opposed to the Treaty, using arms supplied by the British.

When giving the report of the Irish delegates to the Comintern's Second Congress, Thomas Darragh had clearly assumed that the Irish revolution would be a socialist revolution which had national tasks.[9] Not all Irish communists agreed with this stance. Prior to the CPI's founding congress of 1922, they held a lively debate regarding the stage of the Irish revolution. In cooperation with a representative of the Comintern, the Congress adopted 'a 10-point socialist programme.'.[10] The party was quite clear that there were still national tasks to be accomplished, but regarded these as 'the outcome of, not a means towards, a social revolution.'.[11] The CPI confirmed this strategy during the General Election of 1932, won by Fianna Fail, the party of the anti-Treaty elements of the Irish bourgeoisie.[12]

The UK government had a year earlier passed legislation that gave Ireland and other dominions full legislative powers. *Fianna Fail* used its legislative freedom to draft a new constitution, adopted in 1937. The constitution abolished the office of Governor-General. Though the British monarch remained nominally the head of state, Ireland become a *de facto* republic. All British troops were removed from Ireland and naval ports, which under the Treaty had remained under British control, were taken over.

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[5] Lenin, *op. cit*., p. 51.

[6] In 1914 the then dominant section of the British bourgeoisie, organised in the Liberal Party, had forced through parliament, in alliance with the moderate nationalists of the Irish Party, the Government of Ireland Act, which provided for Home Rule. The bill had been fiercely opposed by the northern bourgeoisie and by the Conservative Party, especially by its landed elements in the House of Lords. Even though the bill was amended to exclude the whole of the protestant dominated province of Ulster from its provisions, Home Rule would have been acceptable to the Irish Party.

[7] 'The Irish Free State and British Imperialism', *Communist International* (May 1932).

[8] Dominions within the Empire enjoyed considerable autonomy. The other dominions were Australia, Canada, Newfoundland, New Zealand and South Africa. The racist assumptions underlying the granting of dominion status are not hard to discern.

[9] Editor Uncited (1977, vol. 1), pp. 317-326.

[10] McGuire (2018), p. 15.

[11] Connor (2003). p. 129.

[12] Cork Workers Club, "Manifesto of the Irish Communist Party. Ireland's Path to Freedom', *The Irish Case for Communism* (Cork, nd), pp. 31-3

Various measures taken by the *Fianna Fail* government – such as ending land annuities extorted by Britain under provisions of the Treaty and the Control of Manufacturers Acts of 1932 and 1934 - helped Ireland to become less economically dependent on Britain. But it remained a predominantly agricultural economy geared to production for Britain, and with a currency (the Punt) pegged to the British pound (it was to remain pegged until 1979).[13] But the mere fact that the Irish bourgeoisie had been able to take these measures shows that it was a relatively independent bourgeoisie. There was of course, still is, the national task of ending partition, but the Comintern and the CPI had surely been correct in treating this as a task of socialist revolution. Clearly, if Ireland was ripe for socialist revolution, there were significant implications for revolutionaries in Britain. Some comments on this matter will be made in the conclusion to this chapter.

For most of the 1960s, most Maoists and the far left in general paid little attention to the emerging national struggle in the north of Ireland. But events compelled it to do so. In the infamous Burntollet Bridge incident in January 1969, loyalist workers, including B-Special auxiliary police, led by the sectarian demagogue Ian Paisley attacked civil rights marchers with clubs and iron bars. In August 1969 British troops were deployed on the streets of Northern Ireland, ostensibly to protect nationalists under attack from but in reality to shore up the unionist regime.

Escalating unrest led to conflict between nationalists and the army. British imperialism responded brutally to the armed struggle. In January 1971 hundreds of people suspected of being members of republican organisations were interned without trial. Most of those interned, reflecting its leadership of the nationalist resistance against the British state, were members of the PIRA, which had split from the existing IRA in 1969. PIRA insisted that it was not enough merely to defend nationalist communities. The lapsed armed struggle of the Republican Movement for a united Ireland was resumed. On 'Bloody Sunday' in January 1972, soldiers of the British Parachute Regiment shot dead fourteen people participating in an anti-internment march.

Nearly all Maoists found the PIRA's prominent role in the national struggle in the north problematic. The PIRA was not Marxist. It was not even revolutionary. It did not intend to lead a mass struggle to end partition: instead, it would conduct a campaign of elitist terrorism aimed at compelling Britain to withdraw from the north. Underlying the PIRA's elitist strategy was an acceptance of capitalism's social and economic order. Founded by the right-wing of the Republican Movement, it continued for many years to propagate anti-communism and conservative social attitudes, opposition to abortion, for instance.

The typical response of Maoists to PIRA's armed struggle was to offer critical support for its defence of nationalist communities but to criticise its offensive operations. Even the CWLB, which, as we have seen, vicariously sported an AK47 on the mastheads of the *Irish Liberation Press* and, for a while, the *Voice of the People,* was reluctant to support PIRA, giving only 'qualified support' to the Republican movement and expressing confidence that

[13] For an overview of the Irish economy since 1921 see Bielenberg & Ryan (2013).

the Irish people would eventually produce a 'genuine revolutionary working-class leadership.'.[14]

There is no evidence in its publications that the CPB ever seriously considered at a theoretical level the question of the stage of the revolutionary struggle in Ireland or the closely related question of PIRA's role in it. Insofar as this can be deduced, the party seems to have assumed that the stage of revolution was for socialism, not national liberation.

The voice of both the militant trade unionists and the young Maoists in the CPB's coalition was present in the party's early response to the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland. In May 1969, for instance, *The Worker* paid tribute to the role of the IRA in defending nationalists against loyalist pogroms in the 1930s and pledged support for the IRA if it again took up arms against British imperialism. But the dominant voice increasingly became the workerist, social-chauvinist voice of the trade union militants. This was a voice which rather than expose and oppose the sectarianism endemic in the protestant working-class and the anti-Catholic pogroms regularly carried out by elements of that community, preferred to tell fanciful tales of working-class unity and solidarity.

The *Worker* consistently failed to inform its readers that the vast majority of those fighting the British state in Ireland were, though working-class, nationalists and that the majority of the north's workers were unionists, not a few of whom were involved in attacks on nationalists. Probably, the CPB, knowing that few British workers were prepared to support the national struggle in Ireland, was trying to create a bogus sense of trade unionist solidarity. But Burntollet Bridge had been only one incident in which civil rights campaigners had been attacked by loyalist workers.

The spark for the deployment of British troops on the streets of Northern Ireland had been the 'Battle of the Bogside' in August 1969, in which the nationalist working-class of the Bogside area of Derry (Londonderry to unionists) defended their community against yet more attacks by the B Specials and loyalist workers. But a CPB *Special Publication* that hailed the 'uprising in Bogside, in Belfast and a dozen other Northern Ireland communities' did not trouble to inform its readers that these were **nationalist** communities. The loyalistss involved in the attacks on these communities were described as 'assistant thugs' of the police, without identifying their political or religious affiliation.[15]

The front page of the first edition of *The Worker* following deployment of the army had the banner headline 'Ireland One Nation' and condemned the use of troops. The party's statement 'in support of the Irish Peoples' resistance to British imperialism' called upon 'all people here in Britain to demand the immediate withdrawal of British troops.'. But in a flagrant misrepresentation of the situation among the working-class of the north, it was asserted that 'what must be remembered about the so-called "troubles" is that the trade union movement which is relatively united throughout Ireland, North and South, will not be split on religious lines.'.[16] But the trade union movement in the north **was** split: it was dominated by

[14] 'Statement by the Executive Committee of the Irish National Liberation Solidarity Front Concerning the Irish Republican Army and Sinn Fein', *Irish Liberation Press,* vol.3, no. 1 (1972).
[15] 'Ireland One Nation', @ https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.secondwave/ireland-one-nation.pdf.
[16] *The Worker*, September 1969.

unionists, due to the systematic exclusion of Catholics from many trades and places of work. The unionist/protestant character of the movement was to be emphatically demonstrated in 1974 by a general strike successfully called by the so-called Ulster Workers' Council to overthrow a Northern Ireland Assembly in which unionists were sharing power with nationalists.[17] The CPB's social-chauvinist denial of the national dimension of the working-class struggle in the north of Ireland became even more marked after the CPB's Second Congress of 1971. As we noted in Chapter Two, this was a milestone in the Birchites' increasing dominance of the party.

The edition of *The Worker* which immediately followed internment gave the greatest prominence to strike news in Britain, giving internment only two columns on page three, alongside a more prominent piece on an overtime ban by power workers. Internment was presented as a response to a general working-class revolt against economic hardship. Internment camps were said to be 'packed with 'eight hundred detainees, held without trial.' The CPB did not bother to inform the readers of *The Worker* that these were **nationalist** detainees. Internment was said to show that 'when faced by a determined resistance from the working-class, the capitalist state will put aside its camouflage of 'democracy' and 'justice for all before the law.'. The CPB did not bother to inform the readers of *The Worker* that the resistance in question had been **nationalist** resistance.[18]

The CPB claimed that unrest in Northern Ireland was the consequence of the economic decline of the 'great industries' of Ulster, 'such as textiles and shipbuilding.' Unemployment 'rocketed to 20% in some places and people began to rebel.' Now 'the Irish' were demanding 'British troops out! Ireland One Nation'. But nationalist unrest had existed long before recent economic decline. There was not a word in the leaflet on the entrenched discrimination against Catholics in these 'great industries. Nor was it pointed out that the great majority of protestant workers, far from demanding 'Ireland one Nation' were insistent that they were British.[19]

According to the CPB, internment was a response to the severe economic crisis and attacks on trade union rights of the time, rather than as a response to the armed struggle of republicans, mainly the PIRA:

> In Britain industrial pressure over the years forced capitalism to drop its mask of bourgeois democracy and reveal its fascist essence with a law which says industrial struggle is illegal [it did not]. Far from ending the struggle it provides a challenge to the ingenuity and inventiveness of workers. Result a U.C.S. In Ireland a similar process. Unrest in 1969 means…that the army steps in. Workers resist and internment is declared.[20]

It is unsurprising, given the CPB's growing social-chauvinism, that it did nothing to combat and arguably fostered media outbursts of anti-Irish racism which followed PIRA's decision in

[17] Brokered by the British Government, the Sunningdale Agreement of 1973 set up a Northern Ireland Assembly in which some Ulster Unionists shared power with moderate nationalists.
[18] *The Worker*, February 1972.
[19] British Troops Out of Ireland, leaflet in author's possession.
[20] *Ibid*. 'U.C.S.' was a reference to a sit-in at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders on the Clyde, staged in an eventually failed attempt to prevent the owners closing the plant.

1973 to take its armed struggle to Britain. In 1974, bombs in pubs in Guildford and Birmingham killed 25 people.[21] The party's reference to 'all who seek to frighten us here either by law [a reference to the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) rushed through parliament in the wake of the bombings] or by cowardly indiscriminate acts of violence', implicitly placed on the PIRA and the British state equal responsibility for violence arising from the national oppression of Ireland. PIRA was condemned as 'mad cowboys', using 'cruel, wanton, senseless violence.'.[22] A year or so later *The Worker* denounced as 'gangsters' members of the PIRA who 'in a free Ireland…would be dealt with effectively.'.[23] According to Longhurst, it was this matter that had led to the defection of the CPB's Bristol branch. There is little point in providing further examples of the CPB's social-chauvinist treatment of the 'troubles'.

Most members of the CFB spontaneously supported the national struggle in Ireland. When the organisation was founded in 1969, the 'troubles' had just begun. The organisation did not initially have a formal policy on Northern Ireland. It was assumed that there was a just national struggle against British imperialism in Ireland which should be supported. In late 1969 the first issue of *Struggle* denounced the deployment of British troops in Northern Ireland.[24]

It was this spontaneous support for the struggle in Ireland that determined the organisation's (or rather its groups') response to developments in the north over the next few years. Members of the CFB in Glasgow, Liverpool and London worked in the Anti-Internment League (AIL), a broad front involving several Irish and British left organisations, formed shortly after the introduction of internment.[25] Members of the CFB worked too in the Troops Out Movement, founded in 1973 in response to 'Bloody Sunday' to demand a withdrawal of British troops from Northern Ireland.[26] Members of the Liverpool Group were involved in running street battles between supporters of TOM and fascists and loyalists.

In the early 1970s the CFB held an ill-tempered debate on the nature of the struggle in Ireland. The members of the London group were among a minority of Maoists who argued that there was no longer a material basis for a national struggle in Northern Ireland and that Ireland was ripe for socialism. The ICO argued that there were two nations in Ireland, a Catholic/Nationalist one in the |south and a Protestant/Unionist one in the north.[27] In *MLQ* in 1973, Burford argued that Northern Ireland was 'part of the British nation and British state.'.

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[21] The PIRA has never admitted responsibility for these bombings, but there seems little doubt that it was responsible. It may be that a warning was given too late (the PIRA usually gave warnings). Following the bombings, innocent Irish people were framed and convicted, before being released after several years.
[22] 'Oppose the Act of Terrorism', *The Worker*, December 1974.
[23] *The Worker*, 19 October 1975.
[24] *Struggle*, December 1969.
[25] Bob Purdie, then a member of the pro-PIRA IMG and the author of the IMG pamphlet *Ireland Unfree*, claimed in 1973 on the website of the Irish Republican Marxist History Project, that the PIRA provided most of the funds for the AIL. Purdie had by then long recanted his support for the PIRA and became an ardent Scottish Nationalist. He was the author of *Politics on the Street the Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1990).
[26] Contrary to Wikipedia's claim that TOM was a Republican organisation (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Troops_Out_Movement), it was founded by groups on the British far left, including the International Socialists (the forerunner of the SWP) and the IMG).
[27] ICO, *On the Economics of Partition* (London, 1969).

He criticised a tendency on the British left to analyse the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland using 'Irish nationalist ideology.' .[28] (It is ironic, but unsurprising, that one who found a basis for a just national struggle by imperialist Britain could not find one in what remained of Britain's oldest colony). Individual members of other groups supported the London Group line. The ICO and the London Group both asserted that the Marxist doctrine of the right of nations to self-determination meant that the manifest desire of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom must be upheld.

The Glasgow group of the CFB presented an effective demolition of the ICO and London Group of the CFB analyses.[29] The group argued that in 1971, the Republic of Ireland was one of the 'least industrialised countries.'. Only 30.9% of its working population worked in industry, compared to, for instance, 45.7% in the UK and 50.1% in Germany.[30] But Ireland was in a very similar situation to such relatively advanced capitalist countries as Spain (37.5% worked in industry), Portugal (36.3%) and Greece (24.6%).[31] It was misleading to compare Ireland only with major capitalist countries. Let us consider data on another criterion of development, per capita gross domestic product.

Table: Per Capita GDP in US Dollars of Selected States in 1971. [32]

Germany	Ireland	Greece	Portugal	Spain	India	Indonesia	Thailand
11,077	6,354	6,624	5,871	6,618	856	1,235	1,725

Ireland is seen to have been in 1971 far more economically developed than such countries as India and roughly equal to Greece, Portugal and Spain. This strongly suggests that in economic categories, the Republic should be grouped not with 'third world' countries but with small capitalist countries. A recent comparative study of such countries shows that this is appropriate.[33] It is the category into which Ireland is placed by the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD).

But in the Spring of 1974 an 'overwhelming majority' of CFB members voted for a resolution stating that Northern Ireland was a British colony, and that the Irish people's main enemy was British imperialism. It implied that the stage of revolution in Ireland was for national-democratic revolution. Even so, pro-Republicans could not command a majority. The resolution did not refer to the PIRA.[34] The London group voted against the resolution.

It is unlikely that in normal circumstances unity in the CFB could have survived the test of the Guildford and Birmingham pub bombings. But the Glasgow group left the CFB around the time of the bombings. Given this, deeper analysis and fuller policy than that provided by the resolutions of 1974 were deemed not to be a priority. All three members of the CFB's EC

[28] DB, 'Northern Ireland: the Nature of the Struggle', *MLQ* no. 4 (Spring, 1973), p. 18 & p. 23.
[29] The Last Phase of the Democratic Revolution in Ireland', *MLQ* no. 5 (Summer 1973; 'On the 'Usefulness' of the 'Economics of Partition'', *MLQ* no. 7 (Summer 1974).
[30] HM, 'Ireland – Struggle for Democracy and Industrialisation', *MLQ* no. 6 (Spring 1974), p. 30.
[31] Maddison (2003), p. 64.
[32] Maddison (2003), p. 68; p. 184.
[33] O'Rourke (2017).
[34] *MLQ* No. 7, Summer 1974.

elected in 1976 (Burford, Mauger and Redfern) were advocates of a socialist struggle line (though Redfern did not support the London group's position). But given that the organisation had by then become a democratic-centralist organisation and that there was a majority on the National Committee for the 1974 resolutions, this was seen as unproblematic.

When *Class Struggle* was launched in 1976 it treated the struggle in Northern Ireland as an aspect of a struggle for national-democratic revolution in Ireland as a whole. The second edition of the paper declared that the 'just struggle' of the Irish people against 'British colonialism and imperialism' will 'never stop until the Irish people have won full independence.'. The paper insisted that the 'Irish people will decide their own future, through national liberation struggle led by the Irish working-class.'. The Republican Movement was not mentioned.[35]

As we have seen, this distancing from Irish Republicans was maintained after the foundation of the RCLB in 1977. The minority of the CFB which maintained that the stage of revolution in Ireland was for socialism was augmented by the members of the CUA, which had maintained that in Ireland a socialist revolution against British imperialism and dependent bourgeoisies in the north and in the south was required.[36] (The CUA agreed during the unity negotiations between it and the CFB to reserve its views, pending further discussions in the united organisation.) Reflecting these disagreements, formulations in the RCLB's *Manifesto* were ambiguous. The *Manifesto* did not clearly state the stage of revolution in Ireland, merely advocating 'separation of Northern Ireland from the British state' and demanding that 'British troops get out of Northern Ireland [where] the target of the revolution is for independence from British imperialism.'.[37]

Irish Republicans were criticised several times in *Class Struggle.* While the defence of 'catholic areas from sectarian terror' was to be applauded, PIRA was engaged in 'sectarian terror and bombing campaigns.'. Now 'was not the time for armed struggle to win independence.'. Given a divided working-class, it could only 'lead to defeat.'.[38] In May 1979, Airey Neave, a notorious right-wing politician, was killed by a car bomb planted by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), the armed wing of the Irish Republican Socialist party (IRSP). While the RCLB insisted that the crucial question was 'British domination in Northern Ireland.', it did not 'support elitist terrorism which assists the bourgeois state…in its clamour for increased powers.'.[39]

But as we saw in Chapter Five, opinion in the RCLB on Ireland and with it on PIRA was changing. The occasion of Neave's assassination was to be the last time the RCLB criticised PIRA. A 'working resolution' on Ireland adopted by the RCLB late in 1979, shortly before the History Conference of 1980, manifested the radical nationalism discussed in Chapters Four and Five. It was dogmatically modelled on Maoist thought on revolution in the

[35] 'Self-Determination for the Irish People', *Class Struggle* no. 2 (July 1976).
[36] CUA, *The Struggle in Ireland: What British Workers Should Know*, nd, c.1972.
[37] RCLB *Manifesto*, p. 18.
[38] 'British Troops Out of Ireland', *Class Struggle*, (May 1978).
[39] 'Airey Neave's Assassination Brings Demand for More State Power.', *Class Struggle*, April 5th-18th. 1979.

oppressed peoples and nations.[40] (In 1982, the reorienteers discussed in Chapter Five would arbitrarily argue that Ireland 'had conditions broadly akin to those of the "third world."'.[41]) The dominant classes in Ireland were held to be a 'comprador bourgeoisie' in league with British imperialism and a 'national bourgeoisie' with an objective interest in supporting a national revolution. A national democratic revolution against British and other imperialism' was necessary which could be followed relatively quickly by a 'people's democratic dictatorship.'.[42]

If those who drafted the 1974 resolution could not have anticipated the consequences of the Republic's entry into the EEC in 1973, those who drafted the resolution of 1979 seem not to have given the matter any consideration. Membership of the EEC made Ireland a member of an imperialist bloc. From its accession in 1973 to 1980, when the RCLB adopted its 'working resolution', the Republic was a net beneficiary of the EU budget.[43] That is, it received subventions from British, German, French and other major imperialist powers. The Republic benefitted from the unequal trading agreements between the EEC and 'third world' countries. The EEC's Common Agricultural Policy allowed Irish agricultural products much greater access to the EEC. Foreign multinationals such as Nixdorf Computers opened enterprises in the Republic in order to gain access to the EEC.

These developments show the theoretical poverty of the RCLB's stance that the dominant class in the Republic of Ireland was a comprador bourgeoisie: it was a relatively independent imperialist bourgeoisie. It is true that the Republic of Ireland remained a small capitalist country. But it is not the business of communists to support the strivings of small capitalist powers to become bigger capitalist powers. The people of Ireland still have of course the task of unifying their country. How to achieve it is something for revolutionaries in Ireland in determine.

The deaths of ten Republican prisoners on hunger strike in 1981 in protest against the British government's refusal to restore to Republican prisoners' political status (revoked in 1976) stimulated a flurry of activity on the left in Britain. Members of the RCLB in London participated in vigils supporting the hunger strikers. The SCG staged an impromptu street meeting in their support. The Manchester branch of the TOM picketed the local army recruiting office. On two occasions picketers were attacked by the National Front. The deaths hardened pro-PIRA opinion in the RCLB.

The first edition of *Class Struggle* after the commencement of the hunger strikes devoted the whole of its first two pages to the hunger strike under the banner headline 'Irish Patriots Are Not Criminals'.[44] Quasi-religious sentiments indistinguishable from those of Republicans hailed Bobby Sands - elected during the hunger strike as MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone - and the others who had so far died as 'committed revolutionaries, fearless soldiers

[40] It is only necessary to read Mao's' analysis of China's semi-feudal society ('Analysis of the Classes in Chinese Society', *Selected Works of Mao Ze Dong, vol. 11* Beijing, 1967) to realise how inapplicable that experience is to Ireland.
[41] 'Re-orientate the League for the Tasks of the Moment'.
[42] RCLB, 'Ireland CC Working Resolution', November 1979.
[43] European Commission, 'Impact of EU Membership on Ireland', @ https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/about-us/impact-of-EU-membership-on-Ireland_en#econ.
[44] 'Irish Patriots Are Not Criminals', *Class Struggle*, March 1981.

and devoted servants of the people.'. In words that could have been uttered by the Irish romantic nationalist Padraig Pearse, they were said to be the 'beloved martyrs of the Irish people.'. As for British imperialism - 'Blood debts shall be paid in blood!'.[45]

The death of the last Republican hunger striker occurred shortly before the RCLB's Second Congress had decided to give 'unconditional support' to PIRA. Just as the RCLB had evaded its responsibility to assess the policy of the post-1976 CPC by insisting that 'we quite deliberately do not make our starting point what we consider correct for China', so it insisted that 'our solidarity with the Republican movement is not based on it adopting policies which we feel would be correct.'.[46] When interviewing Sinn Fein's press officer in Belfast, a member of the RCLB insisted that 'It's up to the Irish people to decide how they're going to fight their war, we are the oppressor nation.'[47] Yes, but it was up to British revolutionaries to apply Marxism-Leninism in deciding whether or not to support the Republican Movement.

According to the RCLB, 'Genuine communists in Britian extend unconditional support to the Irish liberation struggle and to its Republican leadership.'.[48] The RCLB was beginning to blur the difference between a solidarity movement and a revolutionary organisation. Revolutionaries in Britain have a responsibility to consider whether a given national movement is objectively fighting imperialism. While, as we have seen, the Republican Movement was not a revolutionary nationalist movement, it could once have been argued that the PIRA was objectively fighting imperialism. But the RCLB began to offer it 'unconditional' support at the very time that the Republican Movement had begun a process which would end in an accommodation with British imperialism.

In 1997, in the Good Friday Agreement, the Republican Movement made a pact with British imperialism. In exchange for giving up its armed struggle it was allowed to share power with the unionist representatives of British imperialism. Like the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), it has been incorporated into the power structures of imperialism. This could not have been anticipated when in 1981 the RCLB had decided that the PIRA must be 'unconditionally' supported. But that year the Republican Movement had adopted a new strategy which eventually led to the Good Friday Agreement.

In 1981, 'physical force' Republicans still insisted that their traditional strategy of seeking to compel Britain to leave Ireland by bombings, assassinations, irregular engagements with the British army and so on would eventually succeed. These Republicans had mass support and were not to be compared with such organisations as the Angry Brigade in Britain and the Red Army Faction in Germany, organisations that carried out elitist terrorist actions which had no mass support. Nevertheless, the mass of the Irish people had no place in the old strategy. On several occasions early in the renewed troubles Republicans had tried to quell mass risings against the army in Belfast and Derry on the grounds that they impeded IRA actions.[49]

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[45] *Class Struggle*, 'Mass Upsurge Against British Imperialism', June 1981.
[46]. *Report on the Second Congress of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain*.
[47] 'Sinn Fein Interview', *Class Struggle*, November 1981.
[48] 'I.R.A. Bring the War to Britain', *Class Struggle*, November 1981.
[49] Kelley (1982), pp. 130-135.

Newer leaders of the Republican Movement such as Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness were highly sceptical that the British could be forced to leave the six counties. Despite the movement's historic antipathy to the Republic's Dail and to Stormont (both regarded as illegitimate institutions, the former the creation of the pro-treaty elements of 1921, the latter foisted on Ireland by the British), they argued that the movement should contest elections to them.

A compromise, the 'Armalite and ballot box' strategy, between the old guard and such as Adams and McGuiness was adopted at Sinn Fein's October 1981 *Ard Fheis* (annual conference). There, Danny Morrison argued, 'Who here really believes we can win the war through the ballot box? But will anyone here object if, with a ballot paper in this hand and an Armalite in the other, we take power in Ireland.'.[50]

It was explicit in the movement's new strategy that the role of the Irish masses was not to defeat British imperialism through mass struggle but to vote for Sinn Fein, while the PIRA – let us be blunt - conducted a campaign of elitist terrorism. This was a fundamentally reformist strategy. The violence of the PIRA could not defeat the British imperialists, while Sinn Fein's campaign for moderate reforms on such matters as the status of the Irish language, education and housing[51] was a project that could not fundamentally change Northern Ireland. Moreover, there are deep reservoirs of sectarian distrust between the Protestant/Unionist and Catholic/Nationalist communities. Devising a strategy that can unite the working-class and people of the north and the whole of Ireland is a matter for communists in Ireland. What can confidently be stated is that the elitist, nationalist strategy of the Republican movement cannot build such unity.

PIRA renewed its bombing campaign in Britain a few months after the October 1981 *Ard Fheis,* Bombs that killed eleven people, including several soldiers, and four army horses in London in 1982 caused particular outrage. But, with splendid detachment, *October* noted that during PIRA's armed struggle 'civilians have most regrettably been injured or killed. Such is the nature of war.'.[52] In response, we might recall Marx's words on similar events in 1867, when several people were killed in an explosion aimed at freeing from Clerkenwell prison Fenian prisoners captured during the rising of 1867:

> The last exploit of the Fenians in Clerkenwell was a very stupid thing. The London masses, who have shown great sympathy for Ireland, will be made wild by it and driven into the arms of the government party. One cannot expect the London proletarians to allow themselves to be blown up in honour of the Fenian emissaries. There is always a kind of futility about such a secret, melodramatic sort of conspiracy.[53]

[50] English (2005), pp. 224–225.
[51] See, for instance, Gerry Adams' address to the 1984 Sinn Fein *Ard Fheis* @ https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/manifestos.htm and Sinn Fein's election manifesto for the 1984 European elections @ https://cedarlounge.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/one-ireland-sf-1984.pdf.
[52] 'On the Question of Unconditional Support for the Republican Movement and the Struggle of the Irish People', *October*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Autumn 1982), p.2.
[53] Marx Engels Ireland and the Irish Question (Moscow, 1978), p. 159.

In the early 1980s the Republican Movement began to distance itself from the revolutionary left in Britain in order to try to win a broader base of support. It wished solidarity work to concentrate on the two TOM demands of *Troops out Now* and *Self-determination for the Irish People as a Whole*. By concentrating on these two demands TOM had succeeded in attracting significant support, including from people who would not support PIRA's armed struggle. TOM had always refused to support this struggle on the grounds that to do so would make building mass support for its two demands virtually impossible. In discussions with members of the TOM the SCG encountered opposition and even hostility when suggesting that the Republican Movement's armed struggle should be supported.

Around the time of its Second Congress the RCLB had begun to work in TOM. *Class Struggle* insisted it was 'very important to build TOM as the leadership of the Irish solidarity movement'. TOM's objective was peace: due to its failure to support the Republican Movement, the RCLB had previously denounced the TOM as a social-chauvinist organisation. But it now claimed that TOM was campaigning for its two demands 'on a clear-cut anti-imperialist basis'.[54] Presumably, it held that the TOM's stance was axiomatically an 'anti-imperialist' stance because it was now congruent with Republican policy.

The RCLB was now tailing so closely behind the Republican Movement that it effectively allowed a crucial part of its strategy for the revolutionary struggle in Britain to be determined by Irish nationalists. In preparation for a conference on solidarity with the national struggle in Ireland to be held in November 1982, the RCLB insisted that a principled anti-imperialist stand on Ireland implied that 'when the Republican movement makes a call for any particular campaign' those active in the solidarity movement must 'fully support that call and not go their own way.'.[55]

It soon became evident that a majority of members of the RCLB regarded support for the national struggle in Ireland as an end in itself. But the orthodox view among communists in the imperialist countries is that support for national movements against their 'own' imperialists was not an end in itself but essential to world proletarian revolution. As RIC insisted, the 'struggle of the Irish people serves to weaken the British ruling class, and this helps workers in Britain while if the working-class in Britain steps up its struggle against that same class this weakens its capacity to carry on its occupation of part of Ireland.'[56]

It was this concept of solidarity that 'Keith Anderson', Class *Struggle* editor and prominent reorienteer, chose to highlight in his report on the solidarity conference. The report contained a long extract of a speech by 'Comrade' David Reed (the party name of David Yaffe, then the leading member of the RCG). Prominence was given to his claim that the national struggle in Ireland was 'the key to the British revolution.'.[57] Reed's stance was based on a dogmatic application of a statement by Marx, who, writing not long after the failed uprising of 1867, had insisted in an oft-quoted letter to Engels in 1869 that:

[54] *Class Struggle*, November 1981.
[55] *Class Struggle*, November1982.
[56] RIC, *Ireland – National Liberation Struggle or Socialist Revolution'* (nd. c. 1988).
[57] K. Anderson, 'A Task Taken up for Solution', *Class Struggle*, December 1982.

> *it is in the direct and absolute interest of the English working Glass to get rid of their present connection with Ireland.* And this is my most complete conviction, and for reasons which in part I cannot tell the English workers themselves. For a long time, I believed that it would be possible to overthrow the Irish regime by English working-class ascendancy. I always expressed this point of view in the *New York Tribune.* Deeper study has now convinced me of the opposite. The English working-class will *never accomplish anything* before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland. That is why the Irish question is so important for the social movement in general.[58]

It is unlikely that Marx's views in 1869 on the importance of Ireland for the British revolution were still applicable in the 1980s. As we have seen, Ireland and its relation to Britain had changed fundamentally since 1867. Still, Reed's implicit fundamental point – that support for movements against British imperialism must be seen as an essential part of the revolutionary struggle in Britain and not as an end in itself – was true. But for the members of the RCLB, both the reorienteers and their opponents, the key issue at the conference was 'unconditional support' for the Republican Movement.

Supporting the Republican movement was presumably not problematic for the 250 people attending the conference.[59] But there had not been a majority for 'unconditional' support, which would have amounted to giving the Republican Movement a blank cheque. The RCG's line of 'unconditional support for the right of the Irish people to self-determination'[60] was more in tune with the sentiments of most of those present. The principle for most, surely, was support for the Irish struggle, not Republicanism. Who knew how that movement would develop? It is striking that Reed made virtually no reference to the Republican Movement in his conference speech. But his stinging criticism of the TOM, that its strategy was essentially one of 'building an alliance with the left of the imperialist Labour Party, [61] could be construed as veiled criticism of post-1981 Republican strategy.

The policy of the Irish Solidarity Movement (ISM) that emerged from the solidarity conference was essentially that advocated by the RCG - unconditional support for the right of the Irish people to self-determination. The RCLB initially participated in the work of the ISM. It took part in a march in London in 1983 that attracted six hundred supporters.[62] But the defeat of the reorienteers[63] at the RCLB's Special Conference of 1983 meant that

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[58] Marx to Engels, December 11, 1869, cited in D. Reed, *Building an Irish Solidarity Movement* (London, 1982). p. 2.

[59] The conference was mainly the work of the RCG and the RCLB but was attended by people with varying ideological and perspectives, from, for instance, Sinn Fein and Plaid Cymru and from such places as Glasgow and Tyneside, as well as the usual London crowd.

[60] Reed, op. cit., p. 1.

[61] Reed, op. cit., p. 8.

[62] Richards, Ebbing Tide, p.24.

[63] The defeat of the reorienteers probably accounts for an extraordinary outburst by 'Anderson' shortly after his resignation from the RCLB. In an address to a conference of 'independent anti-imperialists' in Glasgow he claimed that a 'positive cult of brutish anti-Republican violence…[held] sway in the RCLB.'. But in September 1983 he 'finally at one blow smashed the schemes of the anti-Republican faction…by reconstituting Mosquito press as an independent anti-imperialist organisation, around which the pro-Republican forces immediately regrouped.'. K. Anderson, *There is a Way Forward – Let Us Take it!* (London:

henceforth the organisation regarded Irish solidarity work as an end in itself. According to the RCLB's Third Congress, just as it was incorrect to treat the national question in Britian as subordinate to the class question, treating solidarity work as part of the revolutionary struggle in Britian was to subordinate 'the revolutionary national liberation struggle in Ireland to the class struggle in Britain.'.[64] The RCLB had effectively became an auxiliary of the Republican Movement.

From 1983 it became very active in the Irish Republican Prisoners of War Campaign Committee (IRPCC), established that year by Irish Republicans and Republican sympathisers. This committee campaigned for five demands (including repatriation, on demand, to gaols in Ireland, release of prisoners framed by the British police and abolition of the Prevention of Terrorism Act) for the welfare of Irish POWs in Britain. The committee held regular demonstrations, street meetings and so on. Unsurpisingly, the British government did not accede to the demands.

RCLB branches participated in the various national Republication commemorations – for instance, the annual Manchester Martyrs Commemoration.[65] In the early 1980s the Manchester Martyrs Commemoration Committee (MMCC) had been led by members of the local Sinn Fein cumann (branch). Members of other organisations on the Committee – including the RCLB, the RCG and Red Action[66] - accepted their direction. After the Sinn Fein cumann in Britain were dissolved, individual members of Sinn Fein continued to participate in the Committee's work, but the great majority of the committee were now members of the British far left and individuals, who all strove to give the impression that the Commemoration was organised by the Irish community in Manchester. Attended mostly by members of the British far left and IRA supporters, including Republican bands from Scotland, the commemorations were essentially pro-IRA events.

In 1987 the by then fundamental incompatibility between the objectives of the Republican Movement and those of the British far left became clear when Sinn Fein withdrew its support from that year's Manchester Martyrs Commemoration. Most members of the MMMC, by then including the recently founded RCU (in an apotheosis of tailism, the RCU sold Sinn Fein's paper *An Phoblacht* in clubs and pubs frequented by Irish people[67]) wished the Commemoration to continue to be a pro-IRA event. But open displays of solidarity with the armed struggle in Ireland were becoming an embarrassment to the leaders of the Republican movement. Sinn Fein wrote to the Committee stating that it wanted the event to have as broad an appeal as possible by raising only the matters of 'British withdrawal and self-

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Mosquito Press 1984), p. 13. Mosquito Press was controlled by 'Anderson' and one other. It had operated outside the democratic-centralist structures of the RCLB.

[64] 'RCL - 3rd Congress', *Class Struggle*, vol. 8, no. 6-7 (June-July 1984).

[65] The Manchester Martyrs – William Allen, Michael O'Brien and Michael Larkin – attempted to free from a prison van two members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood who had been arrested during the failed e uprising of 1867. A policeman was killed during the attempt. The three men were publicly hung in Salford the same year. Several thousand people attended, some singing patriotic songs such as *Rule Britannia*.

[66] Red Action was a quasi-anarchist group. Some of its members were attracted to the Irish solidarity movement mainly for the opportunities it provided for violent confrontations with far-right organisations and the police.

[67] Since the dissolution of the SCG in 1984, most of those who founded the RCU in 1987 had worked in one way or another -- as individuals, in the RCLB and in RIC - on the MMMC. Redfern became its convenor.

determination for the Irish people.'.[68] In a press release it was argued that this was 'in the best interests of the Irish people.'.[69]

Sinn Fein's withdrawal of support from the Commemoration was the catalyst for a fundamental appraisal by the RCU of the Maoist movement's line and practice on Ireland. The RCU withdrew from the MMMC when the Committee rejected its proposal that the Committee should no longer support the Republican movement and no longer pretend that the annual commemoration was the work of the Irish community in Manchester. The RCU's summing up of Irish solidarity work led to the analysis and conclusions reflected in this case study.

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Maoists in Britain, and the far left in general, failed to build an effective movement in solidarity with the national struggle in Ireland. But their failings – such as the CPB's social-chauvinism and the late RCLB's radical nationalism, were not the principal reason for their failure. This was undoubtedly that most British people, for the socio-economic and associated ideological reasons we have previously discussed, were not prepared to support revolutionary struggles against British imperialism. There is now no solidarity movement. It seems likely that deep-lying economic, demographic and political processes will lead eventually to Irish unity. But if not, a new movement to end partition will probably arise, British revolutionaries will have the internationalist duty to support it. How to do so will have to be decided by a new generation of British and Irish revolutionaries.

[68] Sinn Fein to Secretary of the MMMC, November 18, 1987. Letter in this writer's possession.
[69] Sinn Fein press release 20 November 1987.

Chapter Seven.

Case Study Two – the 'Woman Question'.[70]

Mao remarked that women 'hold up half the sky'. But the failure of the left, including the revolutionary left, to take sufficiently seriously and to actively combat women's oppression was a major factor in the emergence of the new women's movement out of the ideological and political ferment of 'The Sixties'.[71] Feminism posed a serious challenge to Marxism. Is, as Marxists insist, the oppression of women primarily a phenomenon of class society? Or is it, as feminists argue, primarily a manifestation of patriarchy? If the former, how was the oppression of women to be explained and fought? Why was the nominal commitment of the revolutionary left to fight the oppression of women so infrequently translated into practice? Why did so many men on the revolutionary left have male chauvinist ideas and practices?

Rather than seriously study such questions, Maoist organisations tended to resort to dogmatic assertions. The ACW, typically, treated feminists as enemies. The CPB largely ignored the women's movement. The CFB had little to say but did acknowledge that women faced a specific form of oppression. The RCLB did eventually seriously take up the matter but added radical feminism to its eclecticism.

Male members of communist organisations were certainly not inoculated against the male supremacist and misogynistic ideas that arise from the structural domination of women by men. The institutions of state and civil society have been dominated by men since the emergence of class society. Such dominance constantly reinforces male supremacism and misogyny. Gerry Healey, the leader of the Trotskyist Workers Revolutionary Party, sexually exploited several female members. Others in the leadership attempted to cover up his crimes. A leading member of the SWP was accused of rape by a rank-and-file member. Around seven hundred members resigned in protest when internal disciplinary procedures decided that she had not been raped.[72] The case of Aravindan Balakrishnan was raised in our introduction. These are of course extreme examples. There may be similar cases, but none are known to this writer.

It is indicative of the low priority afforded to what the communist movement tended to call 'the woman question' that this 'question' did not feature in the CPC's 1960s polemic against the CPSU's revisionism. It is not that Communists were indifferent to the matter. Had not Engels argued that the overthrow of primitive communism by men who had acquired control of a newly arisen surplus of production meant that:

> The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children. . . . In order to make certain of the wife's fidelity and

[70] This chapter has been previously published, with minor differences, as 'Women hold up half the sky: the response of Maoists in Britain to the challenge of feminism', *Journal of Labor and Society* (June 1919).
[71] See Rowbotham (2001) for a personal account of the movement. For a more conventional account see Pugh (2000).
[72] Callinicos (2014).

> therefore the paternity of his children, she is delivered over unconditionally into the power of the husband; if he kills her, he is only exercising his rights.[73]

And had not Mao, early in his revolutionary career, argued that while most men in China were subjected to political authority, family authority and religious authority, women, in addition to being dominated by these three systems of authority 'are also dominated by the men (the authority of the husband).'.[74]

But the oppression of women is rarely, if ever, seen as the most or even as a pressing question by Marxist revolutionary organisations. One reason for this, of course, is that in such organisations men are usually the majority. The great majority of the members of the CPC were men. Perhaps this is why the matter of women's oppression was not raised in the CPC's critique of Soviet revisionism, though there was much to criticise. We have seen that Stalin was defended as a 'great Marxist-Leninist'. But while various errors, mistakes and deviations from Marxism in the Stalin period were identified,[75] these did not include such matters as the outlawing of abortion and the abolition of the women's councils established after the revolution. Such measures must have militated against the liberation of women. Nor was there any criticism of Khruschev's policies that 'reconfirmed female responsibility for the home as the natural order of things.'[76]

It is notable too that in Mao's writings on socialist revolution and construction he had virtually nothing to say on the 'woman question'. He had nothing to say on the matter in his various criticisms of Soviet political economy.[77] In his analysis of the main contradictions in building a socialist economy contradictions between men and women were not discussed. Yet it is orthodox Marxism to regard women's full inclusion in social production as the principal means of emancipating women.: but the oppression of women by men is a major factor in hindering such inclusion. It is not as though Mao saw socialist revolution and construction as a purely economic task, for the relationship between the majority Han nationality and the other nationalities was one of ten relationships discussed.[78]

It was only after the emergence of the 1970s women's movement and the challenge it posed to Marxism that Maoist organisations in Britain took up the question of women's oppression. Most male Maoists did not take the matter very seriously. Women members (around a third of the members of the CFB and of the CPB were women), like all women socialised to various degrees into accepting male domination, were by no means consistent in challenging this. At the meetings of the Liverpool group of the CFB women members made the tea until this oppressive practice was challenged by new members, not all of them women. At a CFB

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[73] F. Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State in Connection with the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan* (Beijing, 1978), p 44.
[74] Mao Ze Dong, 'Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan', *Selected Works, vol. 1* (Beijing, 1967). p. 44.
[75] CPC, 'On the Question of Stalin', *The Polemic on the General Line* pp. 115-138.
[76] Kolcheveska (2005, p. 87).
[77] Mao Ze Dong, *A Critique of Soviet Economics* (New York, 1977).
[78] Mao Ze Dong, 'On the Ten Major Relationships', *Selected Works, vol. 5* (Beijing, 1977), pp. 295-6.

weekend school on social democracy, no male members offered to run/help with the crèche,[79] though criticism was accepted.

Other manifestations of male domination proved far more intractable. The male leading member of the Liverpool branch of the CPB consistently refused to adjust domestic arrangements so that his female partner could attend branch meetings. In both the CFB and the CPB the phenomena, well known to all women, of male members not registering a woman's contribution until it was echoed by a man, was far from unknown. The male leading member of the CFB's Liverpool group consistently obstructed attempts by female members to discuss the sexist attitudes suffered by them when selling the organisation's paper *Struggle* in pubs. Male members of the CFB resisted for some time, on the grounds that changing words did not change reality, demands from women members that the term 'chair' or 'chairperson' rather than 'chairman' should be used. As late as 1980 the main report to the RCLB's Second Congress was referred to as the 'Chairman's' report.[80] But not using masculine nouns did change reality. It manifested a recognition by male members of one aspect of women's oppression.

These might seem relatively minor points, but they are indicative of a general failure to take seriously the struggle against women's oppression. Though the CFB was founded in 1969, it was not until 1976 that the organisation seriously discussed the 'woman question'. Surveying Maoist literature several decades later, it is striking how little attention was paid to the women's movement, especially given that the heyday of Maoism was the heyday too of the women's movement.

There was little sense in the Maoist movement, certainly among male Maoists, that it could learn as well as teach. The present writer recollects reading in the mid-1970s such feminist literature as Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* and finding it revelatory. More significantly, it never occurred to him or to any other male member of the CFB that perhaps these and other texts should be collectively studied to see what could be learnt from them. Rather than do so, the CFB based its analysis and line on the oppression of women mainly on a collection of quotes from classic Marxist texts.[81]

Rather than learn from the women's movement, some Maoists were contemptuous of it. By the early 1970s the new women's movement had earned a degree of public attention. In 1968 activists in the USA had protested outside a Miss America contest by throwing into a rubbish bin such things as mops and lipsticks which were held to symbolise the oppression of women. One woman took off her bra and threw that into the bin. The contents of the bin were burnt. Thereafter, the mainstream male dominated media mostly obscured the fundamental issues raised by feminist activists by dismissing them as 'bra-burners'.

In this tradition, an article on the women's movement in the CFB's *Struggle,* presumably written by a man, asked 'what does one do' in the movement? Apparently, its members met

[79] In sharp contrast, female members of the Liverpool group of the CFB recollected that the academic Stuart Hall worked in the crèche at the first ever national Women's Liberation Conference at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1970.
[80] 'Report to the Second Congress by the Chairman of the First CC'.
[81] *Selections from the Works of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels., V.I. Lenin and. Joseph Stalin* (New York, 1975).

'during the carefree days when [their] husband is out breadwinning' and 'discuss their marriages.'.[82] These sneers had been provoked by an article in *Shrew*, a publication of the Women's Liberation Workshop, which had argued that 'if you ask a man…to cook your dinner/look after the baby/ wash the lavatory etc, not as a special favour, but because you see it as his responsibility too, you…confront him.' For our author, this was not a challenge to most men's acceptance of an oppressive sexual division of labour, merely a 'handy feminist hint.'. Unless, the author argued, women take up the fight for socialism, 'they might as well join the Women's Institute or the Vicar's afternoon tea parties' as campaign for such things as free nurseries.[83]

Several readers criticised the *Struggle* article. D. Burford ('Chris' Burford, the future 'Chairman' of the RCLB, but not then a member), argued that 'we need to make use of all sorts of mass organisations to unite in a front against capitalism. Women, he argued, who are (echoing Mao) 'half of Britain', will be a 'powerful section of this united front.' A member of the CFB's London group accused the author of 'narrowmindedness'. He argued that the formation of a mass women's movement was a very positive development and that some of its demands should be supported. 'How many women', he asked, 'are expected to come home after work to cook, wash and run the home?' The demand for free creches and nurseries would help to free women from such drudgery. The editor of this issue of *Struggle* trivialised the issues raised by the women's movement by printing a photograph of a woman burning her bra with the legend 'now show us your politics.'.[84]

The ICO was equally dismissive of the women's movement. Not only did it dismiss the movement: it dismissed women. Women, it claimed, 'try to bring men down to their level, instead of attempting to rise to the level of social development of men. For there is no doubt that the qualities of objective thinking have been fostered in men as facilitating their social tasks and neglected in women for sound social reasons.'. It further alleged that the women's movement 'attempts to arouse guilt-feelings in men, and to play upon those to achieve the social domination of men by women under the guise of equality.'. As for the aims of the movement, women's liberation tends to 'agitate on the petty issues and to leave the main issues out of focus.'.[85]

Even if some individual Maoists, not all of them women, were sympathetic to at least some of the ideas and aims of the women's movement, Maoist organisations collectively tended to ignore the movement or to severely criticise it, in some cases from a hostile standpoint. Invariably, these criticisms were based on a dogmatic rendering of the orthodox Marxist stance on the oppression of women. In brief, this, which this writer admits to still subscribing to, is that the oppression of women had arisen with the rise of class society and a sexual division of labour, that while this oppression could only be ended under communism, late capitalism was facilitating the fight for women's emancipation by structural changes which necessitated increased participation of women in production and society in general.

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[82] The anonymous author was in good company. Bob Hope, when presiding over the Miss World contest in London in the month that *Struggle* was published, had made plain his contempt for the feminist activists who had disrupted the sexist proceedings.

[83] 'Women's Liberation – a comment', *Struggle* (November 1970).

[84] *Struggle,* February 1971.

[85] ICO, *Policy Statement Number Seven, Women's Liberation in Britain and Ireland* (April 1974), p. 3.

These were matters on which the CPB had little to say. The stance of the organisation on the matter of women's oppression was what might be expected to have then been the attitude of an organisation dominated by male trade unionists. The oppression of women was not mentioned in the Party's programmatic document, *The British Working-class and its Party. The Worker* did mention women from time to time, but almost invariably on women as workers not as women. A short article condemned the 'double exploitation' of women home workers, but there was no indication of how such workers could participate in the CPB's trade-unionist-based revolutionary strategy.[86] In 1973 International Women's Day was celebrated from a crassly economist and workerist perspective. A brief historical survey mentioned the famous Bryant and May 'match girls' strike but not the struggle for women's suffrage. In a few comments on contemporary politics there was no mention of such matters as contraception, abortion and divorce. [87]

In the early seventies the CPB published a short pamphlet, *Women in Class Struggle*. We find therein not the slightest attempt to tackle the question of women's oppression theoretically. The Party's claim that 'we should kill the constant claim that it is 'men who hold back women, do not assist them ignore them',[88] betrayed a shocking ignorance of or a denial of much recent history. During the First World War there was widespread male chauvinist opposition to 'dilution', the employment of women to replace men serving in the armed forces. After the war, many male workers demanded that women be sent back to the kitchen.[89] The CPB claimed that male workers 'wholeheartedly' supported the women who struck at Ford's Dagenham in the famous 'equal pay' strike of 1968. [90] They did not. While the strike was essentially on the issue of equal pay, management and the male-dominated unions both refused to treat it as such and insisted it was a 'grading issue''[91]

The CPB's crass economism led it to claim that women's labour in industry was used as a means of 'cheapening' labour power and using women's labour power as 'an excuse to pay their menfolk less than a breadwinner's [sic] wage.'. Women, therefore, 'wherever they are must seize every opportunity to demand higher wages as men have always had to do.'.[92] This glib militancy demonstrated an acceptance of a fundamental aspect of the political economy of capitalism, namely that it was indeed men who were 'breadwinners' and women who mainly had domestic responsibilities. It demonstrated too a failure to recognise that the social role of women made it extremely difficult for working women to be as economically militant as men. It also demonstrated a failure to recognise that it was this social role that made possible the economic militancy of men. An RCLB member who worked at Plessey's Liverpool telecommunications factory, where most of the workers were women, but few were active in the union, remembered how discomforted the male members were when she first attended a union branch meeting. Unlike most of the other women, she did not have to go home to attend to domestic responsibilities.

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[86] *The Worker*, August 1972.
[87] *The Worker*, 22 March 1973.
[88] CPB (M-L)*, Women in Class Struggle* (London, nd), p. 5.
[89] In Bristol discharged and unemployed soldiers and sailors objecting to the continued employment of women threatened women bus conductors. Trams were vandalised. All the women were sacked. Kelly & Richardson (1996), p. 220.
[90] *Women in Class Struggle*, p. 5.
[91] Cohen (2012).
[92] *Women in Class Struggle* p. 5.

The CPB appeared not to recognise, or perhaps thought it unimportant, that there were issues – such as reproductive rights – that affected all women, irrespective of class. The CPB conceded that 'throughout the world women suffer discrimination' and unspecified forms of 'oppression'. But it had no strategic proposals on how to mobilise all women, working-class or not, employed or not, trade unionists or not, who could be mobilised in the struggle to overthrow capitalism. Moreover, the party insisted that women's oppression was a manifestation of the ideology of the ruling class not of the 'male sex.' [93] Fundamentally, this is true, but discrimination against and oppression of women are the work of men, the vast majority of whom are not 'of the ruling class'. The CPB had nothing to say regarding the male supremacist and misogynistic attitudes that are rife among men and give rise to rape, domestic violence and other forms of oppression. As with its line on Ireland, there is nothing to be gained by further discussion of the CPB's stance on the 'woman question'.

The journal *The Marxist*, discussed earlier, was published by male Maoist trade unionists. Sometime in the early 1970s, edition no. 20 published a letter on 'women's lib' (the diminutive (possibly used by the editor rather than the correspondent) commonly used in the mainstream media by those who did not take the matter seriously). This was the first time the question had been raised in the journal. The letter did not elicit a reply or stimulate a discussion.

The first point made was that 'the matter of women's liberation was constantly being distorted.' By implication, this was because the women's movement consisted of 'mainly young middle-class women.'. Self-evidently then, their concerns should not be taken too seriously. In a 'lot of cases' these women were said to have children 'at boarding school', to 'own their own homes', have a 'daily', 'holidays abroad several times a year', and to 'own a car.'. The demands of such women for 'nurseries, laundries' and 'canteens' were deemed to be of little relevance to working-class women, who would only 'be able to exchange one lot of tedious work inside the house, for another, outside the house, at a factory bench or in a shop.'. There would therefore be little advantage for working-class women in 'going out to work.'.

Clearly, our correspondent was familiar with the demands of the women's movement and with Marxist theory on the 'woman question'. The purpose of the letter can only have been to disparage the women's movement It seems unlikely that many activists in the movement had a 'daily' or children at boarding school (certainly none of the women's movement activists known by the present writer did). The experience of working class women - isolation of young mothers in the home, the drudgery of housework, financial dependence on men and so on – was, the correspondent argued quite different. [94] But this was the experience of many middle-class women too, even if to less a degree than most working-class women.

The first Maoist organisation to offer a systematic critique of the new feminist movement was the Union of Women for Liberation (UWL), a front of the ACW. Probably, they were one and the same. The florid literary style of the publications of the two organisations was the same, a style, that of a leading (male) member of the ACW, of arrogant certainty and

[93] *Women in Class Struggle*, p. 7.
[94] *The Marxist*, no.20 (nd), pp. 25-6).

complacency. It was widely believed that the female members of the UWL, disregarding accepted convention, had allowed this person to be present behind the scenes at Women and Socialism conferences, attended by women from many tendencies on the left, including from the CFB. If untrue, the allegation is perfectly believable.

The UWL published a series of pamphlets (no less than 15 were offered for sale on the back cover of one pamphlet) of hectoring, condescending diatribes denouncing those it considered enemies of women's liberation. Let us consider one of these as representative of the whole. *Feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement*, thirty-eight pages of attacks on the alleged feminist enemies of women's liberation, claimed to provide a 'workmanlike' (sic) analysis of the various strands of feminist thought. The tenor of the work was made clear by the contents page, where we see that we can read an 'exposure' of the prominent feminist Germaine Greer.[95]

One strand of feminist thought considered was that which 'sees men as the enemy.' (in reality most feminists did not think that men were the enemy). Classed in this category was the US-based Society for Cutting-up Men (SCUM), which called for the 'elimination' of men. It is not clear if SCUM actually existed. Valerie Solanas (later to become notorious for attempting to assassinate Andy Warhol), may have been the sole author of its Manifesto[96] and have written it as a provocation or satire. But, typical of the Jesuitical method of the UWL, it was followed by two quotes that merely argued that all women suffered from various forms of oppression. The Watford Women's Liberation Group declared that a 'woman must believe <u>all</u> women are at exactly the same disadvantage'. The Nottingham Women's Liberation Group insisted that 'women who deny the oppression of <u>all</u> women are identifying themselves with men.'. [97]

Had these women believed that men were the enemy? We don't know and probably never will. But, the UWL argued, such feminist organisations claim 'that <u>all</u> women…[even] the queen herself, should unite to defeat men.' Some feminists argued thus, others merely that, having their oppression in common, women should unite to fight their oppression. But for the UWL, to call for unity to fight their common oppression was tantamount to seeing men as the enemy. Such unity, argued the UWL, parroting the male saloon-bar prejudices typical of the time, was unity which would lead either to the 'elimination of men or to the domination of men by women.'. Moreover, this stance 'gives rise to the many reformist demands that careerist women, petty-bourgeois women, can so easily favour, that women be allowed to join the stock exchange, that tax laws be reformed, etc.'.[98]

It was not until 1973 that women were allowed to work as stockbrokers on the London Stock Exchange. The UWL did not recognise or considered insignificant that this was but one aspect of a widespread and entrenched societal assumption that women's primary role was domestic, an assumption which affected all women, not just 'careerists', and made women, married women especially, dependent on men. In housing, for example, landlords were notoriously reluctant to let to single working-class women. Liverpool City Council refused to

[95] UWL, *Feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement* (Hemel Hampstead, 1971), p. 3.
[96] http://kunsthallezurich.ch/sites/default/files/scum_manifesto.pdf)
[97] *Feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement*, p. 5. (emphasis in the original).
[98] *Feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement*, p. 3.

assign joint tenancies of council houses to married couples, insisting that the man be the tenant. To fight against such discrimination is not necessarily 'reformist'.

The UWL's next target was those feminists (Shulamith Firestone in particular) who see 'women's biological function as the enemy.'. One of the principal demands of the women's liberation movement was for free contraception and abortion on demand. For the UWL, this demand reflected 'the obsession that petty-bourgeois women show for their individual selves and for avoiding the responsibility of having children'. But, the UWL claimed, working-class women did not wish to avoid having children, for they 'see it as an important task to bring children into the world.'.[99] But while the possibility of not having children, would have been enormously liberating for all women, it would have been particularly liberating for working-class women. Many such women bore child after child because their husbands would not countenance contraception. Some died after back-street abortions. Despite the UWL's professed concern for working-class women, it had virtually nothing to say on such matters.

Nor did the pamphlet on the Working Women's Charter, adopted in 1974. The Charter made various demands on the state such as equal pay and free local authority nurseries.[100] The Charter and its supporters were reformist. But it was possible to work in the campaign in a revolutionary way by uniting with the positive and criticising the negative. Women members of the Leeds group of the CFB did so and won some influence. To the degree to which they were achieved (women now have much greater access to contraception, for instance, than in 1974) the demands of the Charter made the lives of many women much more tolerable and fulfilling. They have also enabled more women, if so inclined, to take part in the revolutionary struggle.

But the UWL offered only 52 pages of sectarian criticism of the supporters of the Charter, in particular their refusal to support the UWL's demand for 'social facilities to take over all the household tasks which women now have to provide as a private service to their husbands.'.[101] This demand, if taken literally, prompts a dystopian vision of state interference into private life. But, perhaps, the UWL had in mind merely the provision of crèches, nurseries, laundries, communal feeding and so on to ease women's burden of domestic labour. It is highly unlikely that capitalist society would undertake such provision. More importantly, whatever the UWL's intention in raising this demand, it was one which failed to challenge the male supremacist assumption that such tasks should be the responsibility of women.

According to the UWL 'relationships between men and women in capitalist society are fraught with the discord which arises from the way in which bourgeois society oppresses

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[99] *Feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement*, p. 6. It is true that the right to have children was an issue for some women, particularly poor black women in the USA subjected to forced sterilisation. The women's movement in Britain had been slow to take up this aspect of reproductive rights, perhaps because of the dominance of middle-class white women in the movement.

[100] For a discussion of the adoption of the charter and its subsequent history see the account at the Women's History Network @https://womenshistorynetwork.org/the-first-40-years-the-working-womens-charter.

[101] UWL, *On the Working Women's Charter* (London, 1975), p. 10. This demand was a dogmatic application of Engels's argument in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* that women can only be emancipated by 'the reintroduction of the entire female sex into public industry', a development that is impossible – and therefore utopian - under the conditions presently prevailing in capitalist society.

women…it is understandable that women initially react against men they see as the immediate cause of their difficulties.'.[102] But men are frequently, perhaps usually, the 'immediate cause' – whether through rape, domestic violence or merely by refusing to share domestic responsibilities - of women's oppression. The word 'discord' is a euphemism, probably used to avoid explicitly stating – it is not so stated in either of the UWL pamphlets discussed here – that in class society there is a general and systematic oppression of women by men. In sum, it is tempting to come to the conclusion that the Union of Women for Liberation would have been more aptly named the Union of Women against Liberation.

The views of those CFB members who had criticised the *Struggle* article we considered earlier had been shared by many, probably most, other members of the organisation. But collectively it did nothing, either in theory or practice, to struggle against women's oppression. We have seen that some women members worked on the Working Women's Charter campaign and participated in Women and Socialism conferences, but there had been no attempt to incorporate their experience into the organisation's line and practice.

This changed to some extent in 1976, when the organisation's National Committee (NC) adopted a resolution on the 'woman question'.[103] This development had been primarily the result of ideological struggle and education by women members of the organisation. The Leeds, Liverpool and London groups of the CFB had influential female leading members. Study sessions on the question of women's oppression had been organised. The resolution could have provided the basis for collective mass work on the question of women's oppression, but the resolution was adopted at around the same time as the adoption of the 'base-building' strategy, discussed in Chapter Three, in which the organisation decided to concentrate all its energies on industrial work. Women members of the organisation withdrew from the Working Women's Charter campaign and no longer participated in Women and Socialism conferences.

There were no further theoretical or practical developments on the matter of women's oppression until 1980, when the 'base-building' strategy had been effectively abandoned and a Women's Commission, charged with developing the organisation's line and practice on women's oppression, was established. The first fruits of the Commission's work came in 1982, when the RCLB's new theoretical journal *October* published a criticism of old lines of the CFB and of the RCLB.

The first criticism that could have been made, but was not, was that the resolution adopted in 1976 had been drafted by a male member (the present writer). This was perhaps not wrong in principle. But while the resolution was doubtless indirectly influenced by the experience and knowledge of women members of the organisation, there had not been any attempt to systematically learn from them. Unsurprisingly, the resolution demonstrated a lack of a deep knowledge of the concrete realities of women's oppression (ontologically, it is probably impossible for a man to deeply know this) and of the women's movement in contemporary Britain.

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[102] *Feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement*, p. 1.
[103] 'Combat Women's Oppression: Mobilise Women for the Socialist Revolution'. *Revolution*, no. 4 (July 1977).

According to the Women's Commission, the NC resolution 'took a generally correct theoretical position, but it was abstract in that it did not apply theory to the actual situation faced by women in the UK today.'.[104] Though specific political demands, such as 'Free Contraception and Abortion on Demand' and 'Fully Paid Maternity Leave', were made, it probably was essentially abstract. The theoretical part of the resolution was a dogmatic reiteration of Engels's treatment of the matter. CFB women who attended a Women and Socialism Conference on the Working Women's Charter in Leeds in 1974 had criticised Trotskyists who had argued that socialists should 'concentrate on organising women as productive workers.' This, the CFB women argued, 'does not adequately take into account the role of women in the family in capitalist society and the ideology of sexism.' [105] Yet much the same could have been said of the CFB's resolution.

According to the resolution, the CFB's objective in the in the fight against women's oppression was to 'enable more women to take part in social production' and thus more women would be 'persuaded of their class interests.'.[106] An obvious criticism of this ambition is that the CFB could not affect such fundamental socio-economic processes. Moreover, as the Commission argued, this strategy 'overlooked the many struggles outside the workplace.'. Examples given included 'fights against hospital and school closures' and 'the struggle of national minority women against deportations and split families.'.[107]

The Women's Commission claimed that the resolution labelled 'bourgeois feminism' as an enemy.[108] It was clear from the context that the resolution had in mind those 'bourgeois' feminists who sought to 'deepen the divisions between men and women by denouncing all men as the enemy.'.[109] Even so, the Commission's interpretation is understandable, given that the demand for wages for housework was identified as the 'strongest' such tendency. Selma James, the originator of this campaign, was certainly highly critical of men, seeing them as instruments of the oppression of women, but a close reading of her pamphlet on the matter suggests that she saw capitalism as the main enemy.[110] Even if James did see men as the main enemy, the contradiction with her should surely have been seen as a contradiction among the people, not one with the enemy.

Despite quoting Engels's assertion that 'Monogamous marriage comes on the scene as the subjection of one sex by the other.',[111] the resolution insisted that 'we will defend the proletarian family, based on monogamous individual sex-love and struggle to transform it into a fighting unit of the revolution.'.[112] The Women's Commission was probably correct that this notion of a proletarian family was intended to disassociate the organisation from those feminists who allegedly called for the abolition of the family.[113] But why the emphasis

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[104] 'The Oppression of Women – Criticism of Old Lines'*, October*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1982), p. 5.
[105] An untitled document in the present writer's possession that seems to have been prepared for the consideration of other women Maoists.
[106] 'Combat Women's Oppression: Mobilise Women for the Socialist Revolution'.
[107] 'The Oppression of Women – Criticism of Old *Lines,* p. 7.
[108] 'The Oppression of Women – Criticism of Old *Lines,* p. 8.
[109] 'Combat Women's Oppression: Mobilise Women for the Socialist Revolution'.
[110] James (1972).
[111] F. Engels, *Origins of the Family,* p. 75.
[112] 'Combat Women's Oppression: Mobilise Women for the Socialist Revolution'.
[113] 'The Oppression of Women – Criticism of Old Lines'.

on monogamy? The organisation was then attempting to differentiate itself from the 'sexual freedom' culture that had emerged in the late 1960s[114] and from the feminist rejection of monogamy.[115] Whatever the subjective intention, the Commission rightly insisted that the objective of 'building the proletarian family' was a 'notion of what was achievable in the superstructure which completely ignored the material base. It [was] a prime example of idealism; in that it grossly overestimated the power of ideas alone to change reality.'. The policy of campaigning to allow more women to 'take part in social production' was criticised on similar grounds.

The 1976 resolution claimed that 'under socialism, women will not be oppressed, but they will be unequal.'. But, the Women's Commission asked, 'if a socialist economy is not able to provide full socialisation of childcare and domestic labour, doesn't this mean that women continue to be oppressed?'. The Commission had no 'answers to this.'.[116] Nor does the present writer. But given that socialism will emerge from capitalism, it seems inevitable that women will continue to be oppressed in various ways for a comparatively long period. The oppression of women was certainly not eradicated in such socialist societies as have so far existed.

Though an extreme case, there seems little doubt but that Soviet soldiers committed mass rapes as the Red Army advanced westwards and southwards in the final phase of World War Two. It is no defence to point out that soldiers of other allied states also committed mass rapes. Nor are the atrocities committed by German soldiers, though they no doubt help to explain them. The Yugoslav communist Milovan Djilas alleged that when he confronted Stalin about rapes by Soviet soldiers in Yugoslavia, Stalin replied that he, Djilas, should 'understand it if a soldier who has crossed thousands of kilometres through blood and fire and death has fun with a woman'.[117] If true (regrettably, it is believable), Stalin's comment was utterly contemptible.

When published in *Revolution*, the 1976 resolution was accompanied by an article that, as the Women's Commission argued, 'magnified all the erroneous elements in it'.[118] Here, just two points supplementary to those made by the Commission will be made. Firstly, it was not suggested in the article that in an organisation dominated by men, bourgeois ideology in the form of male chauvinism might have played a part in the neglect of the question of women's oppression, that there might have been male chauvinist attitudes in the organisation. Rather, the CFB's neglect of the question of women's oppression was attributed to the 'five major errors' discussed in Chapter Three.[119]

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[114] Burford, concerned with bedroom arrangements at a weekend meeting, once told the present writer, who was to share a bedroom with a female member of the organisation, that he was entitled to ask if this relationship was 'based on individual sex-love'.

[115] The RCLB had been influenced by a 1962 article in a Chinese publication. As the Women's Commission argued, 'a homily on individual relationships in a youthful socialist country…was hardly likely to help communists arrive at a correct analysis of the family in Britain. 'The Oppression of Women – Criticism of Old *Lines,* p. 6; p. 8. (The two main Maoist organisations in the USA at the time, the October League and the Revolutionary Union both promoted a similar policy to that of the CFB.)

[116] 'The Oppression of Women – Criticism of Old Lines', p. 7

[117] M. Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (London, 1963), p. 82.

[118] 'The Oppression of Women – Criticism of Old Lines', p. 8.

[119] 'Combat Women's Oppression: Mobilise Women for the Socialist Revolution', p. 8.

Secondly, the article criticised 'bourgeois feminists' who 'attack the family by claiming that it…oppresses women; their only solution to women's oppression is to abolish the family.'. This is of course a caricature of such feminism. Even the most 'bourgeois' of feminists had much more than this to propose. And Marxists share with radical feminists the view that the family oppresses women. But, the CFB argued, 'women are not oppressed by the family itself but within the family as it exists at present –that is the family under capitalism.'.[120] But the monogamous family, or so orthodox Marxists argue, predates capitalism. Essentially, it is argued, it arose to establish paternity in order to ensure rightful inheritance. It is futile to speculate what relations between men and women will be like in a future classless, communist society, but we may surmise that when there is no question of inheritance, monogamous marriage will wither away.

The appointment of the Women's Commission had presumably manifested an intention to take seriously the 'woman question': but internal struggles on other matters seem to have served to side-line the matter. We have seen that the questions of how to support the national struggle in Ireland and how to appraise the urban uprisings of 1981 had been particularly contentious. But the 'woman question' surfaced during the struggle over 'reorientation', discussed earlier.

The Women's Commission submitted amendments to the CC minority submission to the conference on 'reorientation', According to the Commission 'the history of the RCLB has been one of, at best, paying lip service to the question of women – both in terms of developing a policy and line, and in carrying out education internally.'.[121] A member submitted a draft policy statement on the 'woman question' annotated 'About time the RCL took notice!''[122] Another member asserted that 'some women comrades (though now departed)…spoke out against chauvinist attitudes within our organisation' (though this member qualified [her?] assertion by claiming that this had been 'in the past' and the women in question had '[blown' it up out of all proportion'.[123]

The Conference approved changes submitted by the Women's Commission. It was affirmed that the organisation had 'paid only lip service' to the matter, that the 'struggle for women's emancipation must become a 'vital part of the [RCLB's] reorientation, that it was 'imperative that the necessary theoretical work gets done' and that 'mass work amongst women should be accorded a priority.'.[124] The RCLB's Third Congress, held a few months after the conference, endorsed the decisions of the conference, including noting that the RCLB had still made 'little progress on the question of women's oppression'[125]

Despite these developments it seems that for several years the organisation continued only to 'pay lip service'. In 1988, in the first of a series of articles on women's history, it was stressed that the RCLB was 'suffering from a persistent neglect of developing policy on the question of women.'.[126] Judged by this series of articles, the organisation did now, finally,

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[120] 'Combat Women's Oppression: Mobilise Women for the Socialist Revolution', p. 10.
[121] Proposed Ordering of Amendments for Conference', p. 3.
[122] 'The oppression of Women' n.d., unsigned.
[123] A contribution to the discussion on women's oppression from the West Riding., 15 August 1983.
[124] Proposed Ordering of Amendments for Conference', p. 3.
[125] *Class Struggle*, vol. 8, no. 6-7 (1984).
[126] 'Glimpses into Herstory: Women's Oppression', *Class Struggle* (1988)

take the oppression of women seriously. These articles, collectively entitled *Herstory*, while containing much to be agreed with, show that radical feminism had been added to the RCLB's growing eclecticism.

The RCLB claimed that the 'vital task of reproducing and maintaining the workforce' is 'carried out for the capitalist system completely free of charge.'.[127] The implication was that women should be paid for such labour. The implication was perhaps not intended: but an organisation firmly committed to Marxism would have pointed out that paying women for this labour would tie them even more firmly to domestic chains. Such an organisation would also have pointed out that according to Marx, domestic labour (such as cooking) necessary to the maintenance of those engaged in producing surplus value is paid for in the wages of those workers.[128] It is of course possible that Marx was wrong on this rather abstruse point of Marxist doctrine.

We find in these *Herstory* articles echoes of the view, common in mainstream feminism, that the fundamental problem with class societies is not the very nature of those societies, but the exclusion of women from positions of power. We learn that 'in ancient Egypt women held high positions of state power'. In other words, these were women who participated in the exploitation and oppression of the slaves and peasants of Egypt. So why celebrate their status? Perhaps the RCLB merely wished to stress that the status of women is not immutable. But perhaps not. Elsewhere in the article, those 'left groups' which regarded 'the oppression of women' as 'subordinate to the class question' were criticised.[129] (We saw in Chapter Five that from the '80s the RCLB no longer regarded the national question as subordinate to the class question.)

The RCLB's break with historical materialism was confirmed after its 1989 Fourth Congress, at which the question of women's oppression had been 'top of the agenda.'. A draft line was 'currently being discussed.'.[130] Containing material presumably based on the new line, a special edition of *October* appeared in the Autumn of 1990. In 'The Basis of Women's Oppression' the RCLB set out to answer the questions 'why are women oppressed? and what is the basis of women's oppression?' Much of this article was based on the work of the feminist academic Maria Mies, in particular her *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*.

The present writer is not competent to evaluate the anthropological evidence used by Mies to criticise Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.* He does consider himself competent to reject the RCLB's use of Mies to assert that Engels situated 'women's oppression only as class oppression.'.[131] This is the received wisdom of those feminists who reject the Marxist analysis of the origins of women's oppression. But in asserting that the first class opposition that appears in history coincides 'with the antagonism between men and women in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex

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@ https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.hightide/herstory.pdf..

[127] 'Glimpses into Herstory: Women's Oppression'.

[128] Marx provided no systematic exposition of this stance, but it can be found in various passages in *Capital.* See, for instance, *Capital vol. 1,* p. 373.

[129] 'Glimpses into Herstory Women's Oppression'.

[130] *Class Struggle*, September 1989.

[131] "The Basis of Women's Oppression", *October*, no. 5 (Autumn 1990), p. 3.

by the male',[132] Engels clearly differentiated between class oppression and the oppression of women.

According to the author of another article, 'the oppression of women by men pre-dates the development of class-division.'. It was 'created by men, and perpetrated by men, for their own advantage'.'[133] It is clear that the author did not have in mind individual acts of oppression (which presumably did occur before the development of class society) but systematic, societal oppression: in other words, the feminist version of patriarchy. It seems clear that the author regarded the development of sexual oppression as the work of men in general, not men of an exploiting class. No doubt other men were complicit, but the Marxist stance, outlined earlier, is that the oppression of women is based primarily on class not gender: it was the necessary and inevitable consequence of the development of class society.

The author then repeated the familiar feminist canard that once 'attempts at socialist revolution' were successful 'the women's issue was not taken up in a significant way.'.[134] This is an astonishing claim for a nominally Maoist organisation to make. Perhaps it was merely the opinion of the author, a contribution to an ongoing debate? But no, a report to the RCLB's 1991 conference on the future of socialism claimed that 'the patriarchy' (the definite article signifying a feminist concept of patriarchy) is an 'essential basis of exploitative social structures, and hitherto existing socialist models have left this largely intact.'.[135]

We saw in Chapter Five that regressive measures that could not but reinforce patriarchal attitudes were introduced in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, but to claim that the question of women's oppression was 'not taken up in a significant way' after socialist revolutions is simply not true. The 'family code' adopted in the Soviet Union in 1918 among other reforms made divorce easy and abolished the requirement of a woman to seek the permission of a male relative to seek work or education. Even in the 1930s the Soviet state made strenuous efforts to encourage women to take up positions of responsibility. That Soviet women took up in the Second World War combat roles that would have been unthinkable for women in the USA and Britain demonstrates that patriarchy had been underlined to a significant extent.

Major advances were made in socialist China. In 'speak bitterness' meetings women were encouraged to denounce abusive men. In 1950, less than a year after the communists won state power, a Marriage Law raised the minimum age for marriage to eighteen for women, prohibited the sale of girls to landlords and insisted that marriage must be consensual. Later, 'barefoot doctors' popularised contraception. Provision of nurseries lifted some of women's double burden of work. Propaganda against Confucianism's insistence that women were inferior to and subordinate to men, encouraged women to step forward and take a much greater role in work, politics and society in general.

Much of this was recorded by Elizabeth Croll, in her by no means uncritical *Feminism and Socialism in China*.[136] Later work by feminist academics that sought to debunk earlier

[132] F. Engels, *Origins of the Family,* p. 75.
[133] "Should Women Fight Imperialism" *October*, Autumn 1990, p. 16, p. 13.
[134] "Should Women Fight Imperialism" p. 16, p. 18.
[135] 'RCL Conference on the Future of Socialism'.
[136] Croll (1978).

allegedly starry-eyed and duped accounts,[137] merely show that the winning of state power is far from sufficient to end the oppression of women, demonstrate the persistence of old ideas and practices in socialist China and how difficult it is to emancipate women from the effects of thousands of years of oppression. But, perhaps unwittingly, they show also the tremendous effort made by the revolutionary elements in party and state to fight women's oppression.

We have seen that the *Political Platform* adopted by the RCLB in 1992 implicitly rejected historical materialism in favour of a vague progressivism that deemed future progress as dependent on struggles against 'women's oppression, national oppression and class oppression', all three clearly deemed to be of equal importance. It not very surprising that on the 'woman question' feminist ideas defeated Marxist ideas in the RCLB. While women are still oppressed, witness Donald Trump's boasts of 'grabbing women by the pussy', many feminist ideas and attitudes have been absorbed into the political mainstream.

In contrast, no doubt due to the obvious triumph of capitalism in the Soviet Union and China, the collapse of the revolutionary left and the inability of the great majority of the left to envisage anything more radical than a reformed capitalism, Marxist ideas seem to most as alien as the aliens in the TV show *Star Trek*. The CFB was founded in 1969, when Lieutenant Uhuru and the other women in *Star Trek* wore very short skirts. This did not signify female freedom: these women were sex objects for the gratification of male viewers. In the 1990s, when the RCLB adopted its Political Platform, Star Trek's starship *Voyager* had a female commander and a female chief engineer. Media portrayals of powerful women serve to suggest that women's liberation is a matter of personal agency, that a woman 'can do anything' if she chooses. But it is still the case, this writer believes, that the exploitation and oppression of women – whether through work, a double burden of work and domestic labour, domestic violence, rape or sexual harassment – can only begin to be ended by the overthrow of capitalism.

[137] Honig (1985).

Conclusion.

There is no longer a Maoist Movement in Britain. We have seen that the CPB broke with Maoism in the late 1970s and that the RCLB succumbed to social-chauvinism and eclecticism in the 1980s. All the other Maoist organisations that had emerged in the 1960s and 1970s faded away. There remain pockets of Maoism here and there. Revolutionary Praxis, led by the veteran Ross Longhurst,[1] was still trying to build a revolutionary party in 2020[2] - but it cannot be said that there is a Maoist **movement.**

The Maoist Movement in Britain had some achievements – particularly its critique of revisionism, its support for national liberation movements against British imperialism and its contribution in the 1960s and 1970s to the overthrow of some crusty traditions, ideas and practices. But it scarcely needs to be stated that the movement did not succeed in leading a revolution. It did not even succeed in building a revolutionary communist party.

We have previously considered the specific reasons for the failure of the CPB and the CFB/RCLB. In this brief conclusion we will consider the general reasons for the failure of the movement. Its failure to defeat the CPGB's revisionism and to gain significant working-class support were but two indications that whatever the subjective desire of the various radicals and revolutionaries who emerged in 'The Sixties', the material and subjective conditions of post-war Britain were such as to make revolution extremely unlikely.

While not many people were attracted to revolutionary politics, enough people were to have made building a revolutionary communist party a viable project. The existence of such a party would have helped to sustain the revolutionary tradition of 1917 and 1949. Socialist revolution would not have seemed, as it now seems to most, either irrelevant or a utopian dream. That such a party was not built can be attributed to three factors – a fragmented movement; not seeking unity with all those who wanted to change the world; and the ebbing of the revolutionary tide of the 1960s.

The optimal period to unite the Maoist Movement was c. 1968-1976, the zenith of sixties radicalism, a period ended by the revisionist victory in China. But the Movement remained fragmented. Probably mainly due to the CPC's support, the CPB attracted a substantial cohort of young Maoists and continued to attract them for some time. But the arrogance of the CPB, its refusal to engage in dialogue and debate with other Maoists, created an enormous obstacle to building a united movement. Another enormous obstacle to building a united Movement was the subjective idealism, splittism and circle spirit and that prevented unity between those Maoists who did not join the CPB. Moreover, there were in the CFB and the CPB two rival centres (three, if we include the *faux* Maoist CPE) for party-building. A critical mass of Maoists, able to successfully shoulder the tasks of party-building, was never formed. A united Movement making progress in party-building would surely have attracted far more people, than did the disunited movement which actually existed.

[1] Longhurst died in September 2020. This writer had a 40-year association with him, including many agreements and some crucial disagreements.
[2] Revolutionary Praxis, *For a New World: Manifesto of Revolutionary Praxis* (nd).

A belated opportunity to build a united, wider and more varied movement occurred in 1976, when the Maoist elements in the CPB split to form the CWM and the CFB had emerged from its crisis of 1974-76. But the opportunity was not seized. A united movement, whenever it emerged, would surely have been better able than the fragments to resist the various anti-Marxist ideological tendencies and currents which existed inside and outside it. But by 1981 the great majority of Maoists, after the defection from Maoism of the CPB, were united in a RCLB that had succumbed to the new wave of revisionism promoted by the CPC after the revisionist *coup* of 1976, and which then joined much of the revolutionary left on the 'retreat from class'.

As Mao once noted, for revolution, it is better to have more people. Though several thousand people passed through the various Maoist organisations, there were only several hundred organised Maoists during the movement's zenith in the mid-1970s. This was to a considerable extent due to a one-sided emphasis on influencing and winning recruits from the labour movement. But there were many others, Maoist or not, the Maoist organisations could have sought unity with but once founded, did not.

There were a considerable number of Maoists in the IWA, the PWA and the Bangladeshi Workers' Association (BWA). Arising from the racism endemic in Britain and from the history of the Comintern and the CPGB, many ethnic minority Maoists were wary of the predominately white party-building organisations. We have seen that the CPB refused to take such concerns seriously. The CFB built good relations with the PWA and BWA. But differences over the relationship between mass work and party-building and over party-building itself meant that few ethnic minority people joined the party-building organisations, particularly during the crucial period of 1968-76.

Consider too the case of the Workers' Film Association. Their members thought it unnecessary or premature to found formal Maoist organisations (though representatives attended the CWM's conference of 1977). Others thought that priority should be accorded to mass work or that a party would somehow arise from mass work. Too certain they were doing the right thing, the party-building organisations made little attempt to engage with such people. Many thought them unserious people who refused to commit to the revolutionary struggle.

In the 1960s and 1970s many people took up such radical and revolutionary causes as gay liberation, Irish nationalism and feminism. There were many individual Maoists active in such movements. But, once founded, the party-building organisations made little attempt to explore how to learn from or unite with other movements. Take the Women's Movement. Women had good reason to be wary of the male chauvinist and even misogynistic practices and attitudes common in the male dominated organisations of the British Labour Movement. There is no need to repeat here the discussion in the previous chapter of the indifference and, in some cases, hostility to the Women's Movement exhibited by some male Maoists or the cases of male chauvinism which showed that the Maoist movement was not immune to the vices of the wider Labour Movement. We can be certain that many women were deterred from joining the Maoist movement.

Let us suppose that a united movement had successfully built a revolutionary communist party. Let us suppose too that those who had built it had deeply researched and analysed the history of the Comintern and the CPGB and concluded that the Comintern's Seventh

Congress strategy was an opportunist strategy and had accordingly rejected the CPC's reheated version of it, the 'Three Worlds' theory. Let us suppose too that they had carried out a through socio-economic analysis of British imperialist society and come to the conclusions that all British people benefited in one way or another from imperialism and that proletarian revolution was not likely in the concrete conditions currently existing in Britain.

How would such a party go about its revolutionary practice? It is possible, as Hinton and Hyman have argued,[3] to practice revolutionary politics in a non-revolutionary situation. It is inappropriate to issue here detailed prescriptions. But the history of the Maoist Movement in Britain suggests that if the primary concern of a revolutionary communist party mut be to win support among the working-class, it would have to carefully analyse which workers it should base its practice on. It would also seek to build support not just among the working-class, but among all who are oppressed by capitalism and those who oppose it; and it would pay particular attention to supporting struggles against imperialism, especially British imperialism.

But we are where we are. There is no revolutionary communist party in Britain. There has not been one for nearly ninety years. Internationally, the defeat of socialism in the Soviet Union and in China has created popular scepticism regarding the project begun in 1917 and helped to create an ideological climate in which white nationalists such as Donald Trump and Nigel Farage, demagogues such as Boris Johnson and Islamic fundamentalists flourish. Marxism is though constantly being vindicated – by, for instance, the current (2025) inter--imperialist contention over control of Ukraine. People are stepping forward on such matters as climate change and the struggle of the Palestinian struggle. People will continue to step forward to fight capital, though not all of them will perceive their struggles as such. It will probably be some considerable time before objective conditions and subjective perceptions combine to allow new victories over capital. How this will happen we cannot know. It is possible that it will not be in the ways that Maoists have assumed it will be.

[3] Hinton & Hyman (1975), p. 52.

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The Working-class Movement Library in Salford and the People's History Museum in Manchester have many records of labour movement organisations, the latter the archives of the Communist Party and the Labour Party.

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