

THE HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE C.W.M. (DRAFT)

This summary of the CWM's history is based on a relatively thorough summing-up of experience, embodied particularly in "Some Points Concerning the History of the CWM", the general thrust of which was approved at the Third National Conference.

The CWM was founded in 1976 when three branches split away from the "Communist Party of Britain Marxist-Leninist" at a time when that organisation was sinking irrevocably into opportunism. The Newly-formed CWM published "The Absolute Decline of the Communist Party of Britain Marxist Leninist", which is a positive and important historic document of the British ML movement. It repudiated some of the Birch Party's reactionary political lines as well as the non-Marxist-Leninist organisational life of the "CPBML" which made it impossible to struggle for correct lines; at the same time this document preserved and carried forward the healthy spirit which had originally motivated many comrades to ~~found~~ the "CPBML", that of avoiding dogmatism and sectarianism in seeking a revolutionary line for Britain's concrete conditions.

At the same time the CWM had only a weak grasp of the way forward - how to plan its concrete work, how to unite the ML movement, and how to organise itself internally.

The CWM's early approach was to refuse to consolidate itself politically or organisationally, instead concentrating its energies on uniting the ML groups on a basis of joint practice.

To this end the CWM called a national conference of Marxist-Leninist organisations and individuals in July 1977. The results of this conference showed that the ease of uniting the groups had been overestimated. The Albanian splittist line was just rearing its head, but even apart from this there was lack of consensus about priorities for mass work, organisational principles, and other questions. Hence the CWM needed to rethink its own role.

Around this time the CWM recruited several new members and was able to establish a number of branches in addition to the original ones. Among these new recruits some comrades who had been part of the Joint Action Committee of Marxist-Leninists were admitted in an incorrect way, following a struggle in which leading members of the CWM made different opportunist and liberal errors.

The First National Conference of the CWM (November 1977) scored an important victory for democratic centralism against the federalist and small-group approach typified by one of its original branches. But while upholding democratic centralism in principle, the congress was in practice rent by factionalism.

From a political and ideological point of view, the Programme adopted at the Conference was weak and diffuse. In particular, using a loose formulation, it implied that revolutionary theory would simply arise spontaneously from the working-class movement. Its errors were ones of tallism, workerism and in general negation of the role of theory.

The practice of the CWM following the First Conference was heavily imbued with a leftist impetuous line of believing that the masses could be won relatively speedily to revolutionary politics. In London particularly there was a period of furious activism in a wide variety of strikes, demonstrations etc, resulting in very few concrete advances.

The organisation had, in its early period, a relatively large paper membership, but a considerable proportion of these people were not consolidated ideologically or organisationally. The National Committee failed to co-ordinate the work of the branches, there was an absence of proper reports going upwards or realistic leads going downwards. The National Committee's bureaucratic and liberal errors were typified by IW, the National Secretary. In these circumstances many comrades went their own way without a sense of direction; among other problems, some comrades buried themselves in trade union activity without this being integrated into the strategy of the organisation.

The bookshop October Books played a significant role in winning contacts for the organisation. However very serious errors of financial mismanagement were made, resulting in a damaging drain on the CWM after the shop was closed down.

In the field of publications the CWM scored important successes. The first periodical publication, Workers' Notebook, was mainly negative, including within its covers more or less anything without a clear political editorial line. But the new monthly paper New Age succeeded in combining revolutionary politics with a lively presentation during over two years of its publication. The book Why Paul Foot Should be a Socialist, despite some secondary weaknesses, was almost unique ~~as~~ as a readable and undogmatic popular presentation of Marxism-Leninism at the time it appeared. The CWM also held two conferences on publications, the second of which was particularly successful and gave rise to the publication of a book. The two issues of the theoretical journal Party Line which appeared were also good, and only objective problems prevented it appearing more regularly.

At a special conference held in February 1978 there was a clear victory for support for the Three Worlds Theory, even though, out of concern to avoid dogmatic formulations, the statement adopted was a loose and ambiguous one.

Around the time of this conference there was an extreme flaring-up of factionalism and absolutisation of the two-line struggle against subjectively defined 'anti-working class' trends. In particular, one comrade created a grave problem with his style of ruthless struggle and merciless blows. But the National Committee, using organisational rather than political methods, wrongly, and in a manner which violated the ~~letter~~ of the constitution, took a decision to expell him.

In the aftermath of this comrade's expulsion, a considerable number of members left or were removed from the organisation. Although it is very likely that with many of these comrades a split would have been inevitable over the question of democratic centralism, the NC must bear responsibility for its failure to lead the CWM in a Marxist-Leninist style.

The spring and summer of 1978 was thus a period of disorientation. In the teeth of this counter-current certain comrades at different levels struggled to bring about a recovery prior to the Second National Conference.

At the Second Conference a draft for the new and much stronger programme was discussed and adopted, and a particularly successful special conference on the question of classes was held shortly afterwards to discuss that section of the Programme. This marked a major step in the ideological consolidation of the remaining comrades in the organisation, and a small but significant step towards the building of a Marxist-Leninist understanding of the characteristics of the British revolution.

The Second Conference marked a decisive break with the factionalism which had prevailed earlier in the CWM, and a fraternal atmosphere developed for the first time. Bitter experience was beginning to teach comrades to understand democratic centralism in a concrete and practical way.

Finally, at the Second Conference a new National Secretary was elected who had a qualitatively better grasp of the job, replacing IW who became Chairman.

Following the Second Conference the leadership of the NC improved. In particular a regular Internal Bulletin was produced which created an important precedent for methods of leadership in the ML movement.

Around this time the unity process with the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain made advances. This was helped by the fraternal contacts built at a local level between comrades of the two organisations, the increased consolidation of the CWM, the victory of the RCLB over the Redfern faction, and the serious efforts of the CWM representatives on the unity discussions to improve their style of work.

On the whole during 1979 there was a greatly improved understanding by leading comrades and by those in close contact with the centre, principally in London, that the old style of empiricist and spontaneous practice would have to be changed.

Appropriate organisational changes were made, particularly through the introduction of a cell structure in London, the CWM's practical work was thus set on a sound footing and was ripe for development. But at this time, conditions for unity with the RCLB were very favourable and the CWM gave this work first call on its resources. With a small organisation, this meant that other aspects of work would suffer, but the decision was a correct and principled one in the wider interests of the movement.

From the early part of 1979 the first Chairman of the CWM and the present Chairman, IW, both drifted into inactivity and subsequently resigned. This showed the shallowness of Communist principle among some comrades which became clear as soon

as the leftist hyper-enthusiasm of the early days had worn off and our past practice was subjected to critical scrutiny. IW had careerist motives for wanting to join the Labour Party but did not use the CWM in a careerist way; his earlier struggle in breaking with Brich played a major positive role.

The CWM's practical work was on the whole empiricist, diffuse and lacking in conscious planning. These errors weakened its impact. No workplace cells were established. But comrades did work hard and bravely to spread Marxist-Leninist ideas in factories and other workplaces, in colleges, in the community and among contacts, thus gaining experience in applying the Communist style of work and Marxist principles to concrete conditions. All this will be of value to the movement.

The CWM gained significant experience in areas of work which had been neglected by the ML movement so far, particularly in anti-racist work which won the respect of people of the oppressed nationalities.

The CWM initiated or helped organise several events to hit at Soviet social-imperialism. It did solidarity work in support of the Irish people's struggle against British imperialism and for the liberation and anti-hegemonic struggles of many countries and peoples of the third world. Fraternal relations were thus built with different liberation organisations and Marxist-Leninist groups.

Despite its small size, the CWM won quite a few contacts around it. In particular New Age worked well was a collective organiser and, through reading and writing for and distributing it, a number of people were strengthened as part of the wider revolutionary movement which supports the ML line.

The CWM developed a sound Marxist-Leninist line on the relationship between the national and international aspects of the class struggle, and other burning issues, and defended it in the heat of complicated struggles in the British ML movement, thus making a significant contribution to the very favourable situation which prevails in the movement today.

The Third National Conference of the CWM was held in late 1979 under the auspices of approaching unity with the RCLB. There was a summing up of the history of the organisation and of experience in various areas of work. At this conference the CWM, making full use of its positive and particularly negative experience, consolidated itself as a fighting detachment in order to complete speedily the work of uniting with the RCLB so that the united organisation can march on to meet the great and inspiring new tasks of laying the foundations for rebuilding the revolutionary Party of the proletariat.

THE ABOVE DOCUMENT WAS ADOPTED BY THE C.W.M. WITH THE FOLLOWING AMENDMENTS:-

1. On page 1, para 2, line 9 "join" was changed to "found".
2. Page 1, para 5, line 2, the following was inserted after "1977" - ", in pursuit of its consistent policy of seeking unity with other Marxist-Leninist organizations."
3. Page 1 para 5 line 5, after "questions" the following was inserted, "At this conference the representatives of the Communist Federation of Britain and the Communist Unity Association stood for what was basically a correct line on party building, but put this line forward in an incorrect way."
4. Page 1, para 6 , the following was added to the end: "The CWM was not sufficiently strong to absorb them in a proper manner, while their presence also contributed to preventing its consolidation."
5. Page 2 para 1, line 5, after "publications" the following was inserted, ", avoiding stereotyped presentation while at the same time making a clear break with the appalling style of the CP(ML)."
6. Page 2 para 1 line 7, "in the world" was deleted.
7. Page 2 para 3 line 4, after "blows" the following was inserted, "The question was not primarily an ideological one, and a strong disciplinary measure was necessary in the circumstances."
8. Page 2 para 3 line 6, "spirit" was changed to "letter".

SOME POINTS CONCERNING THE HISTORY OF THE

This report is concerned with political developments in the CWM before the second National Conference. It compliments the National Secretary's report which deals with the more recent period.

The period we cover here was one of intense internal conflict. At present, the CWM is in the process of uniting with the RCLB, and thus ceasing to exist as a separate organisation. But something of its character and politics will be transferred into the new united organisation. We want to make sure we fully understand our positive and negative experiences and turn this consciousness into a source of strength.

The proletarian revolutionary movement is something very new in history. The bourgeois revolution began in about the 14th century, and even 500 years later it was still incomplete, even in some advanced countries. It had gone through innumerable twists and turns. The proletarian revolution has also had its setbacks - particularly what happened in the USSR! But we do have the ability to sum up and learn from our experience, positive and negative. The tradition of being self-critical is one of the Communist movement's most precious assets, so we must treasure it, otherwise our cause won't advance.

So it is possible to turn setbacks into a source of strength. What follows is an attempt to analyse our past for the express purpose of guiding future practice. We have tried to make clear statements, but some of the points we make are pretty complex - this is inevitable if we are to reflect the dialectics of real events. It is necessary as clearly as possible to identify lines; yet we must shun the dogmatic approach which sees redder-than-red individuals struggling against a sinister line: in reality, even those who represent a correct line or trend make errors which may impede the struggle against what is incorrect. In the last analysis the struggle between lines within the movement is a reflection of class struggle outside. But, this does not mean that people putting forward wrong lines are necessarily representatives of the bourgeoisie.

It would have been useful to refer to criticisms of the CWM from outside... but unfortunately these haven't been forthcoming, to any large extent in written form, despite promises or threats to the contrary. I have made use of criticisms from inside the organisation. We have on the whole referred to written sources, rather than trust to memory of what people said. There was a vast quantity of duplicated paper flying around during the early period of the CWM; very little of this furious xeroxing was co-ordinated or guided properly from the centre. On the whole the documents we quote do, we believe, give a fair impression of the lines which were also being expressed verbally.

I. The completest hostile criticism we had was the Birmingham letter of resignation, which didn't in fact contain much substance. We dealt with it in Party Line I, so there's no need to refer to it here.

The Context

It is important to bear in mind what was happening outside the organisation. Internationally, the Soviet Union was becoming ever more vicious and devious in its scheme for world domination. As it became objectively more clearly the main source of war, the discrepancy between this objective threat and the subjective appreciation of it by most "left" forces grew wider. The international economic crisis deepened. In the international Communist movement, there were important changes following the overthrow of the 'gang of four' in China, while the Albanian party moved over into the camp of the enemy. Within Britain, we felt the effects of the heightened contradictions of capitalism: a savage attack was launched against the working class, which found no good political response. The leadership of the Trade Union movement collaborated, by and large, with capital, and we witnessed sterile and hypocritical conflicts between openly anti-working class forces and phoney leftists.

The people in the CWM tried on the whole, in these circumstances, to break out of the sterile round of bourgeois politics and propose a radical revolutionary alternative: not just in the sense that we are calling for revolution, but in the sense that the politics we are striving to build are fundamentally different from what has existed before in Britain.

Not surprisingly this is difficult. We are part of this country's existing bourgeois political life in many ways (for example, through connections with the TU movement). The revolutionary, radically different model of politics which we have before us is one which hasn't yet been established in British terms - we can study it in old USSR, in China, etc.

[Our movement's existence expresses the fact that there is a contradiction - between the vast potential for human progress through a rational organisation of society on the basis of the productive forces - and the restrictions created by the capitalist system now in its stage of decay, (a decay which the crisis illustrates).]

This contradiction is enormously strong in Britain, indeed in some respects stronger than elsewhere in the world, in this country with the world's oldest capitalism.

Given the massive weight of this contradiction - the weight of social production and the extent to which this strains against the bonds of private appropriation - why is the political expression of this contradiction so weak? [Why are we only a tiny handful of people who are giving expression to Marx's scientific ideas? Given the difficulty of this question it's hardly surprising that some of us at times have felt unsure of ourselves and demoralised. This is one of the reasons for the troubles we have been through. Because of our small size there has been a feeling of the need to protect ourselves from disruption within, which has sometimes led to panic reactions. These two problems are closely related as we can see in the fact that some of the comrades who took a strong stand over protecting the organisation from disruption, subsequently became disillusioned with it or drifted into inactivity. This is fundamentally because the contradiction is so big and we are so small.]

It must be reaffirmed that ML does provide a correct path to progress (provides the means by which this path can be discovered). We must do more study so as to heighten our subjective conviction and steel our will. Moreover (we will come onto this later) such study must be related to practice; we can only win solid conviction among ourselves by winning concrete results, even in very small instances at first. The result of such successes will also be to win more recruits to our movement. But this consciousness is not so easy to come by. It is all too easy to jump to the assumption that once a particular wrong tendency has been 'smashed' the flood-gates will open and a mighty revolutionary surge be unleashed.

In fact, as we strive to master the objective laws of the British revolution, there must - in conjunction with our concrete experience of the class struggle - be a process of interchange of ideas and experience within the organisation, whereby comrades work together to overcome each other's one-sidedness. This is the inner secret of democratic centralism: it enables an all-round correct line to be worked out, using the methods of criticism and self-criticism, and seeking truth from facts. Some comrades are closely rooted in the working class movement, but to some extent infected by the bourgeois politics which dominates it; others have a good grasp of the revolutionary, anti-opportunist line put forward by China but are weak in applying it to concrete conditions. [The ML movement is constituted by a coming-together of many different elements, which initially may co-exist uneasily: in time, they overcome each other's one-sidedness and come to be welded into a single fighting unit, guided by an all-round revolutionary line, rich in content. But, and this is a big but, what is needed is a correct and healthy organisational life. It is now recognised that no-one in the CWM had a deep understanding of the spirit of the spirit of democratic centralism at that time.]

Dialectics of how the CWM's character evolved

The old CPBML of the early '70s was a movement which - probably more than any other part of the ML movement in the world at the time - avoided simply copying the Chinese, and put forward clear policies related to the situation in Britain. The only trouble was that these policies did not come from integrating Marxism-Leninism with Britain's concrete conditions, instead they issued from the idiosyncratic brains of Birch and his cronies, ultimately determined by the class outlook of the labour-aristocracy, steeped in chauvinism and all sorts of other vices.... Moreover, the bureaucratic structure of the CPBML was such that, when a line was shown to be incorrect, it wasn't overturned through self-criticism, but instead was intensified by the suppression and expulsion of those who disagreed.

When the split occurred which led to the formation of the CWM, the task was to negate the reactionary theories of Birch and co., while preserving the correct aspect which had drawn many people into the Birch party, motivated by the need to get organised and find a path forward for the British revolution. Unfortunately at this time, the need for theory to guide practice also somehow got washed out with the bathwater. The style of early documents or speeches by leading comrades of the CWM was extremely lively and undogmatic, while at the same time being weak and sloppy from an ideological point of view; the practice of the organisation was empiricist, with comrades rushing off in all directions as the inspiration took them.

Revisionism bureaucratizes the workers' movement, cutting it off from the lives of ordinary working people; at the same time it moves away from the scientific theories of Marxism-Leninism. The anti-revisionist movement must become a lively and vigorous movement full of class hatred and verve for the class struggle, while at the same time being guided by a proper understanding of the Marxist theories of political economy, classes, the state, and the need for revolution. The two aspects go together: class consciousness is the immediate sense of belonging to, of being a class; Marxism-Leninism is the class reflecting upon itself and its surroundings, how it came into being, its historical destiny to make revolution, how it will disappear in the future, along with all other classes. But the two aspects do not automatically produce each other. It's quite possible to be one-sided in the anti-revisionist movement. If we concern ourselves only with the theoretical side, in an intellectualist way, and not from the point of view of the class reflecting on itself, we'd fall into sectarianism and dogmatism. The CWM on the whole made the opposite error, of putting one-sided stress on being part of the class, and thus in fact tailing behind the class in our practice.

From this point of view - leaving aside the organisational question for the moment - TF and IW both represented this trend and, in the conflict between them, shared many of the same premises. At the same time there also existed a minority current which stressed the importance of theory, but initially in a somewhat one-sided and dogmatic way. TF also attacked this trend, making particularly violent attacks against one comrade. These different conflicts interlocked with one another. In an atmosphere of mutual accusations of conspiracy flying back and forth, no-one struggled in a thoroughly correct or aboveboard way. On the organisational-political question, TF represented a line of ruthless struggle and merciless blows; IW represented a more correct line of uniting with those with whom he had political differences, an approach which was indispensable if the different one-sided lines in the CWM were to negate one another's negative aspects and thus eventually produce an all-sided correct line.

As things turned out, a polarisation occurred over whether organisation and discipline were needed in a proletarian organisation. It is only unfortunate that the issue came to a head over the question of whether or not to observe a wrongly-taken National Committee decision.

The organisation was plunged into considerable chaos, partly by the action of TF and the others who were opposed to central authority, partly by the incorrect methods of struggle used against TF and the wrongly-taken National Committee decision to expell him. A new unity was eventually built, fragile at first but gradually getting deeper as we progressed towards a more all-sided correct line. People like IW who took a correct stand on the need for unity and co-operation within the organisation unfortunately drifted into inactivity once the struggle for an all-sided correct line moved on to criticise some of the errors which they had made. Even though the comrades who led the original split with Birch are no longer playing a leading role, we can still say that we have overcome the one-sidedness of the early CWM line while preserving its correct characteristics.

Initial position of the CWM

The CWM declared its existence by publishing a document called The Absolute Decline of the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist).

This makes an excellent critique of the Birch Party, from a Marxist standpoint and will certainly go down in history as an important document of the ML movement in Britain. Despite some significant weaknesses, for instance an inadequate treatment of democratic centralism, it is on the whole remarkably good, particularly when one considers that it was written at a time when the influence of the dogmatism fostered by the 'gang of four' in China was at its height. However, it is not at all as sharp in indicating the way forward as it is in criticising Birch.

[It is repeatedly said that the new Party should be built "as soon as possible", "as a matter of urgency", and so on. This over-optimism was in part due to isolation from the realities of the M-L movement and the world at large, fostered by the Birch Party. It could - and did - lead to unrealistic expectations, followed by a sense of disappointment and disorientation.]

[Two questions are very closely linked: how to organise the CWM internally, and how to unite with other ML groups. The CWM's view on this is set out in its "Open Letter to all Marxist Leninist Organisations", probably written in late 1976: that individual groups each had experience but this needed to be synthesised; thus there would be a conference aimed at pooling collective experience and developing "a programme of practical and theoretical work towards the founding congress of the revolutionary party."

"In the meantime the Communist Workers' Movement seeks mergers with all groups and individuals where there is a common identity of interest, on the basis of complete equality (emphasis in original), and with this in mind it declares itself to be a purely provisional organisation whose aim is to dissolve in common with the other groups to form the revolutionary party. The CWM does not claim for itself any fixed line or programme other than the basic precepts of communism. Within these limitations, especially at this stage, we welcome diversity of opinion, as Marxism-Leninism, and our experience, especially in the CPB-ML, convinces us that only from that can a correct line emerge."

Thus the CWM's approach was to infuse a shot of adrenalin into the ML movement and shock the groups out of their slumbers. The conference duly took place in July 1977, and results fell far short of these expectations. While making a virtue out of its own lack of a definite line, the CWM also commissioned the CFB to submit a lengthy set of detailed "theses" for discussion; this shows an element of self-contradiction in the CWM's approach. How exactly the diverse experience of all the groups was to be pooled within a very short time into a common political programme was not explained.

The JAC was founded in 1975 at a time when the CPBML was exhibiting the counter-revolutionary character of its line, no other centre existed, and there was great confusion in the movement. A considerable number of meetings were held to swap experience between different groups and individuals (despite the stress on joint action, there was in fact mostly discussion and very little action). The JAC was characterised by a weak conception of the need for struggle in winning unity, and consequently by over-optimism about how easily unity could be attained. Several JAC meetings, held in the early part of 1977, included CWM comrades, and it was agreed that the JAC would help in organising the July Conference; this applied particularly to the "individuals" in the JAC, who were mostly Londoners. The CWM did not have a London branch at this time.

Two questions are very important when we look at the CWM's political line around the time of the June Conference. Firstly, does the consolidation of the existing groups along democratic-centralist principles help or hinder the cause of unity? Secondly, is it possible to win unity around a few very broad principles or is it necessary to go into some detail? In discussing these points we must now take up the question of the CWM's relations with the Joint Action Committee of Marxist-Leninists which has an important bearing on subsequent struggles in the CWM.

CWM and JAC

The point of view that consolidation of the existing groups would be inimical to broader unity, and that unity could be won around a few general principles, was represented particularly strongly by the JAC trend at the July conference. It is very important to realize that these ideas were identical with the official position of the CWM at that time, even though during the conference itself, and immediately afterwards, some CWM comrades were beginning to shift their stand ("shift" seems a pretty accurate term, because there was never any serious effort to grasp deeply the truth on these matters). The first of these ideas sounds very plausible - the trouble with it is that to gain a good grasp of democratic centralism is by no means easy, it requires a considerable amount of practice; thus to have plunged all the different groups into an organisation without having gained any prior experience of democratic centralism would probably have resulted in chaos. On the second question, the JAC put forward Seven Points which it considered identified the key aspects of the Marxist-Leninist line.

The JAC approach only gave a very poor basis for waging the struggle for ideological unity (something whose value has been underestimated by British Communists in the past). Moreover, since organisations develop unevenly, and have different experiences, they also have different perceptions of what constitutes the basic principles on which they have to reach political unity with others before they can accept organisational unity. The JAC's ideas on unity couldn't result in a real unity between M-Ls', Strange as it may seem, the JAC's isolation of 7 points on which to unite bears quite a similarity to aspects of the approach to party building of the much more tightly organised Communist Workers League of Britain; they selected certain questions as crucial for M-Ls, and proposed establishing joint commissions of M-Ls to investigate them. On the question of M-L unity, the CFB and the Communist Unity Association, which united later in the RCLB, held a more correct line, though they tended to wield the big stick and pin labels like "Menshevik" and "opportunist" on people, using this as a substitute for getting to the heart of matters. (This may have represented one aspect of the Gang of Four's international influence). At this point, the CWM stressed political and ideological struggle as the means to win unity of the Marxist-Leninists internally and with other comrades, and saw bilateral meetings as the best form of this. It underestimated the importance of common practical work as a means of strengthening unity at various levels.

Footnote:

I. It is correct that it is necessary to distinguish between major questions of principle and minor matters. But in order to reach an understanding of how these should be interpreted, unity within and between organisations must be gone into in some depth.

After the July conference failed to produce the unrealistically-hoped for results, the CWM had to reconsider its position (more on this in a moment). The JAC had also lost its raison d'être and virtually ceased to exist in its original form; some of the individuals who had been associated with it immediately joined the CWM, while others, including TF, held a number of meetings in London before deciding collectively to join. Readers should now brace themselves to consider some rather sordid events.

The majority of CWM members had come to realise that their organisation had to be consolidated around a common line as a democratic centralist organisation or the CWM would not get anywhere. They were convinced partly by the CFB-CUA and partly by experience. When the JAC application came, certain CWM comrades objected on the grounds that some of these people had, at the July conference, expressed opposition to the idea of a pre-party organisation consolidating itself along democratic centralist lines. There was also the factor of unity with what became the RCLB to be taken into account; some comrades already recognised that uniting the CWM and RCLB would be a major contribution to party building, and certain leading members thought that acceptance of a group who had opposed democratic centralism in a party building organisation would upset possibilities of uniting with the League. Lastly, and most importantly, leading comrades agreed that it was wrong in principle to accept a group application for membership. Since the development of these involved in it was uneven, it would be appropriate for some to join sooner than others.

It seems that some JAC members were suspicious that certain leading CWM members wanted to exclude them and this was why they wanted to apply to join collectively. Thus, on the JAC side, there were suspicions of CWM when it made its application, and on the CWM side, there was disquiet about the JAC's approach, partly for correct reasons, and with some comrades partly for opportunist reasons.

In retrospect the CWM's objections have a certain amount of strength, though the CWM's own understanding of consolidation was confused to say the least, as we will soon see. Unfortunately these political lines of demarcation were confused with personal animosities; TF put forward the idea that there were "dark forces" at work, and although his analysis of the forces was not very accurate, there is no denying that a conspiratorial atmosphere prevailed.

The National Committee (1) discussed the application several times. Despite all the objections, several of which were seen as valid by all, a majority voted to accept it. But the approach of some leading members was very wrong. One NC member, the leading personality in the Birmingham branch, said in answer to one of the comrades who objected to the application, "Don't worry - I know what rubbish they all are; if they make any trouble we'll throw them out," although actually this may have been a ploy to convince others to accept the application, because Birmingham branch had strong reservations about the organisation consolidating itself (they later proposed a draft constitution which would have given an effective veto to any single branch over any decision of the organisation). Two other leading members put the view that to get the best JAC members it was necessary to accept all for the moment; if the others weren't won over, they could be expelled later. Four members took a fairly principled stand,

(1) Prior to the First National Conference, the NC was made up of representatives of branches. The organisation was essentially federal, not democratic-centralist. If it had been democratic centralist, NC members would have been elected on the basis of political strengths and ability to serve the cause of the working class, irrespective of which branch they were in.

two in favour of admission, but stressing the need for struggle to cement unity with the JAC members. At the time, no comrades waged a struggle against our un-Marxist conduct over this matter; there was no conscious factionalism or conspiracy, as certain people later claimed, but liberalism, individualism, and norms of bourgeois organisations were prevalent in our early days.

The NC decided not to divulge anything about the discussion to the new members, because this might unnecessarily create bad feelings between new members and some NC members. All the same, some JAC members who applied to join came into CWM without revising previous had attitudes, and were suspicious of leading CWM members, while some leading members of CWM were quite happy to boost the number of members in the organisation, but were not prepared to wage a struggle to unite all members more firmly. The same CWM members were later the readiest to resort to organisational methods of resolving contradictions, and consistently neglected political and ideological aspects of building the organisation.

The same weaknesses are therefore apparent in the wrongly taken decision to admit these applicants and the way TF was expelled. Since these applicants in fact constituted a group (though they kept on saying they weren't one), the correct method of uniting with them would either have been to call them to dissolve the group and apply individually in the normal way, or to treat them as a group with which the CWM should struggle for unity. But this was hard to do in the circumstances, given the CWM's shaky conception of its own character and purpose, and JAC's refusal to become an organisation with a declared political line which could be struggled over.

Certain comrades who represented the JAC trend around the time of the July conference subsequently changed their line and came to play a very important role in the CWM after the CWM's original leading core had lapsed into inactivity, which is an interesting little example of dialectics!

Consolidation, and Preparation for First Conference.

After the July Conference, a Circular was issued stating that the CWM "for its part, while still holding its already stated positions of willingness to merge with other organisations on a basis of equality, and of readiness to dissolve itself into the party, will be considering the questions of its (sic) own organisation and basic programme, in which it welcomes the participation of other Marxist-Leninists."

Though some sort of consolidation was apparently a necessity after the July Conference had failed to bring about a speedy dissolution of the existing groups, there was no clear idea of what this meant. Instead, the approach was to issue stirring clarion-calls about the need to plunge into the thick of class struggle. One example can be found in a document from Liverpool which was produced in the latter part of 1977, and which set before the membership the task of making the CWM into a household word. This did undoubtedly help to inspire members with verve and vim; only the practical work we did during the winter of 1977-8 was directionless and tailist, and did not produce for us any firm bases in the working class. The ultra-left approach of setting excessively high targets, implying that they can be attained in a short space of time, and not even giving any notion of a strategy leading to the attainment of these goals, but relying on enthusiastic hard work, is bound to fail. Enthusiasm and hard work then turn into their opposites, dejection, dispiritedness and passivity. This is indeed what happened in the case of some Liverpool comrades. This approach was a hangover from CPB(M-L) days, when individual drive substituted for consistent, organised political work. There is a lot of instructive material in the "Liverpool Document", but one passage is particularly telling: "The CWM should use all working-class organisations and win support and positions inside them in order to influence the masses." Despite a statement criticising social-democracy, (not in a hard-hitting way), the document fails to make any statement about which working-class organisations it means, which kinds of positions should be sought, and its notion of "using" working-class organisations has the aim of manipulation of the workers about it - a feature of the trade union bureaucratism that the Birch party embraced. It is easy from today's standpoint to understand the logic behind this argument: on the one hand, great tasks cried out to be done, on the other hand, we were inwardly conscious of the fact that the movement was small and cut off from the masses. Our problems were posed in terms of bridging this gap. What gets forgotten is the commanding role of scientific, Marxist-Leninist theory, of mastering the objective laws of the British revolution and formulating a revolutionary strategy and tactics so as to build up our forces step by step. From the point of view of this document, it is not difficult to understand wrong tendencies which became evident in some comrades later, including seeing the CWM as a hindrance to winning high positions in the trade union movement, of imitating the approach of Militant (a Trot. group which tries to gain influence by working inside the Labour Party), and so on. It is significant that this document came from the same comrades who referred to above as neglecting political and ideological struggle and relying on organisational means of dealing with problems. This document is another example of this approach. On the positive side, though, the document did orientate our work towards the working-class.

Footnote:

I. In another place the document says that "all writing should be simple, concise and to the point, yet not devoid of political content"; this amounts to downgrading politics to something of secondary importance to style.

First National Conference.

The First Conference was planned to last 10½ hours, and its agenda was, to say the least, ambitious: it was to adopt a Programme, a fairly extensive programme of work, a constitution, a long document on the international situation, a statement on ML unity; and to discuss questions of publications, finance, and carry out elections. None of these items was properly prepared for, and no unity of understanding had been achieved prior to the Conference. Each question was the object of acute struggles between different tendencies, and a detailed study would show that our organization contained within it most of the different infantile disorders of the ML movement. We cannot do more than mention a few significant points.

The Constitution as finally adopted is sound on the whole, though a few of its provisions sound a little bizarre; it gives the impression not so much of a pooling of collective wisdom, as of a hotch potch compromise reached by rival tendencies, each striving to introduce checks and balances against the threats they imputed to the others. The main struggle occurred over an attempt by the Birmingham branch to negate democratic centralism; They first produced their own rival draft, impregnated with a very distinct small groupish spirit (among other points, it stated that "at all times the organisation will strive to develop a consensus view in a spirit of struggle, criticism, and friendship.") They then introduced a series of amendments to the main text, opposing the existence of candidate membership, opposing the authority of the National Committee over membership questions, calling for the NC to be mainly composed of representatives elected by the branches, opposing the provisions about conformity to the decisions reached by elected bodies, and about the NC having the initiative in setting up new branches, etc. This attempt failed to find support elsewhere in the organisation, and was defeated. The question of unity was not properly discussed at this time. We can, however, see from a draft on unity circulated at the Conference, that the key idea, a dogma in fact, was that the process of unity must combine theory and practice. This idea is all very well in the abstract; in concrete terms, though, it meant making the unity process dependent upon first unfolding joint practical activities with other groups; but this is precisely what was very hard to do, given the weakness of the CWM's command over its own practice! We will illustrate this point further by referring to the discussion of the "Programme of Work". But first let's say a few words on the question of the CWM's first Programme. (The Programme we are talking about here has now been replaced by a much stronger document adopted at the Second Conference).

The CWM throughout its early period grappled with the contradiction between form and substance. Faced with the task of expressing Marxism in concrete, lively and down-to-earth terms, comrades often followed the approach of aiming to be "simple, concise and to the point, yet not devoid of political content", thus elevating the question of form above the question of political content. In terms of the historical dialectics of the ML movement this approach played a positive role in combatting the dogmatism and stereotyped language in the ML movement which resulted mainly from Lin Biao's negative influence over the Cultural Revolution in China. But the one-sidedness of this approach, if allowed to develop, would inevitably lead us into abandoning the specific, scientific character of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, and merging it with the general morass of British "left" politics.

Footnote:

I. The NC never produced a version of the Constitution as finally adopted, though it accepted as accurate a version later produced by the pro-TF forces on their own initiative. Readers will by now have gathered that the minuting of Conference and NC decisions was scanty and haphazard, owing to the disorderly and amateurish style of work of IW, which other comrades did not try very hard to correct at this stage.

Prior to the National Conference, the NC asked one comrade to prepare a draft programme. Once submitted, this draft was rejected, and a new one prepared. Looking back on the rejected draft, it is certainly full of politics; the style is stereotyped and bombastic, making the politics hard to digest, but with a lot of rewriting it could have provided the basis for a sound Programme. The new draft, which formed the basis of the Programme as adopted and published provided a very stirring and well-written rallying-call, but is far from giving an accurate, all-round characterisation of where our organisation or the Marxist-Leninist movement was at. The use of such a fluid and non-committal text amounted to taking the easy way out and fudging the ideological differences within the organisation rather than struggling for unity. It was a compromise document, just consisting of what could be fairly readily agreed upon. There were, notwithstanding, some struggles over the Programme; we will just mention one particularly significant instance. The Draft Programme contains the following statement:

"Communism is thus not an ideology foreign to the working class as Tories, Labourites and Fascists would have us believe. It is the summation of the struggles and aspirations of our class. It cannot be brought in from 'outside' for it depends upon the working class to achieve it. How our future is built in Britain depends on us, the working class of Britain, alone, and on our own experiences and traditions depend the methods of that building."

Here is quite a good illustration of the theoretical weakness at that stage. There are two correct points in it, namely (a) only the working class can make the revolution, (b) the revolution cannot be "imported" into Britain but a road will have to be discovered which conforms to Britain's own conditions. These points must be reaffirmed. But jumbled up with them in the midst of the sloppy terminology of the text, are at least two major errors: (a) the idea that Communist ideology arises spontaneously from the working-class movement; (b) a failure to distinguish between the revolutionary strand in the working-class movement and all the opportunism and class collaboration which characterises the "labour movement".

Some comrades pointed out at the Conference that Lenin had criticised these ideas in "What is to be Done?" and other writings; a small improvement was made by amending the text to read: "It is the summation of the revolutionary struggles of our class and indicates our historic destiny"; however the text in the printed version is provided by an amendment from Birmingham which was also adopted:

"...it cannot be brought to workers in Britain from outside, it grows through our own struggles to survive. How we build our future depends on us workers in Britain, on our historical experience and traditions."

Footnote:

I. Indeed the draft did not even mention that the CWM follows the principles of Marx, Lenin and Mao; an amendment to this effect was adopted at the conference, against the opposition of IW. Nor did it state what the main contradiction in Britain was; a fundamental question of revolution in this country, which should in the main determine our strategy.

This amendment serves, if anything, to make the text even worse than before, and the net result is a glaring repudiation of the guiding role of scientific Communist theory.

It can thus be seen that both the Liverpool trend (represented by the draft Programme) and the Birmingham trend shared a common characteristic of glorifying the spontaneous activities of the working-class and under-estimating the role of theory, even though they differed on the question of organisation. This is one reason why the workerism which constituted one of the foundations for the trouble occasioned by TF could not be dealt with in a political way; The Liverpool branch which led the fight against TF helped create the basis for the problem by their own political errors, and they were not mature enough politically to bend part of the thrust of their criticism inwards against themselves. On the whole many of the London comrades, (including TF himself though he exploited the climate of workerism) had a relatively better understanding of the importance of theory, and had it not been for the factionalism and splittism which rent the London district there might have been a basis for unity among these comrades in formulating a principled critique of the CWM's errors, though the individualism of TF and several other ex-JAC members, as well as the subjectivism of some other people, was perhaps an insuperable obstacle to this happening in an organisation as small as ours. In general the atmosphere at the First Conference was anything but fraternal: in particular the "social" on the Saturday evening would have been more appropriate to the annual general meeting of the Mafia than to an organisation seeking to embody the glorious traditions of the proletarian revolutionary movement.¹ No short description of ours could do justice to the atmosphere on this occasion; perhaps a novel will be written about it one day! Of course this experience convinced many comrades of the poisonous nature of factionalism, and it thus laid the seeds of its opposite, the struggle to forge a truly proletarian style of work, worthy of the cause. But before this struggle could gather momentum, the CWM was to pass through further traumas.

After the First National Conference.

Because the agenda could not possibly be completed, it was necessary to hold two further conferences in a short space of time, one on publications in December 1977 and one in February of the following year to deal with the international question and the programme of work. It should be noted at this point that the plethora of general meetings reflects the absence of a leading core which was really capable of leading and winning the respect of members.

Footnote:

1. The Birmingham branch, which was responsible for the accomodation arrangements, had thoughtfully ensured that each rival faction was lodged at a separate address.

Because there was not good leadership, democracy couldn't flourish properly either, initiatives from the members could not be summed up, and there was a lack of proper guidance or preparation for the general meetings. Thus, in what follows, it must be remembered that those comrades who were struggling for democratic centralism were struggling in defence of a principle rather than in defence of something which actually existed at the time; the substance of democratic centralism was created in the course of the struggle.

There is no denying that at the First Conference an important victory was scored over a wrong line which attempted to establish the CWM as a narrow circle, or as a federation of local narrow circles (the problem of federalism and small group mentality are closely connected). However, the actual functioning of the CWM as an organisation in the succeeding period was weak. Those comrades who perceived the dangers of federalism and small-groupism gave strong support to IW who was, historically, the only person with the necessary prestige to lead the correct trend. But this made it difficult to criticise his shortcomings. There was no real two-way flow established, no collecting of initiatives from the base and no leadership or guidance from the centre; this weakness is illustrated above all in the two issues of the Internal Bulletin produced prior to the Second National Conference; the system of monthly written reports from the branches which was supposed to exist never functioned, and this in turn meant that those leads which were given by the NC were often subjective and out of phase with reality; the NC didn't receive feedback about the results of its leads, hence it could not provide a proper framework in which the branches could assess their activities, and so on..... In other words, the "machinery" of democratic centralism never got started up. The problem was certainly a difficult one. If people tried to struggle with the Birmingham branch (which went its own sweet way most of the time) they would be accused of conspiring to oust them from the organisation; thus there was no common understanding of what kind of organisation the CWM was supposed to be, and what its purpose was.

Publications

The ideas put forward during the publications conference, which reflect some aspects of the problems we have been discussing up to now, have been summed up already in connection with our second publications conference held earlier this year. The only point we will stress here is that, under the leadership of the first Publications Officer, the CWM's publications from this point onwards (the last issue of Workers Notebook, January 1978, followed by the new paper, New Age) followed a correct approach of putting politics in command and thus constituted a bastion from which the struggle could be conducted against the CWM's tendency to theoretical flabbiness. Also, in January 1978 the NC adopted the book Why Paul Foot should be a Socialist as an official publication of the organisation; this provided the movement with a very good popular exposition of the ML line, lively and rich in content. The secondary negative aspect is that there now developed a contradiction between the ideologically strong external face of the CWM (represented by our publications) and the important weaknesses which subsisted internally.^{II}

Footnote:

I. In contrast, the RCL's publications gave a more faithful reflection of its weaknesses than ours did!

The February 1978 Conference

Among other items which the National Conference did not have time to discuss was the question of a Programme of Work. A draft was submitted (This emanated from Birmingham) which correctly commits us to dealing with "issues affecting the day-to-day life of workers here in Britain" and starting from the needs which the masses are conscious of, "not from those objective needs that we might recognise, but which the masses are not yet aware of." It is thus a document written from the viewpoint of Mao Zedong thought, at least as far as taking a correct attitude to the masses is concerned. But Mao Zedong Thought is more than just this, it also means scientifically analysing concrete problems; and here the draft lets us down, for there is no clear suggestion of what concrete priorities might be. An extremely wide range of activities is proposed, for example branches are called on to set up area-based broad front organisations involving workers from different places of work and the unemployed, for the purpose of co-ordinating support for all local struggles; and this in addition to forming local anti-racist and anti-fascist committees, working in the Trade Unions, and in various other fields.

Discussion of this document was postponed until the second of our special Conferences held in February 1978; it was barely touched on there, but was referred back to the NC to be amended in the light of the discussion, and that was the end of it. The document wasn't adopted, yet no real alternative was put forward. We have thus laid bare a major weakness, namely the fact that there was no conception of the kind of work which we ought to be doing, short of plunging head-first into the fiery storms of class struggle. Because we did not apply politics to the concrete problems of our activity in the world at large, the thrust of political struggle came to be turned inwards. The meaningful kind of internal struggles are ones which are related to, which find their point of reference in, the real world around us: what kind of work we should be doing in the unions, how do we effectively fight opportunism, and so on. But the line we were following was one of denying politics to our mass work, reserving so-called politics for the "two-line struggle", and thus fruitlessly consuming ourselves.

The way we understand this question today, it is not a matter of simply saying whether theory or practice is primary; for Marxists, practice is always primary, but theory plays the leading role. The question is one of putting scientific Communist theory in command of all our practice, following the mass line and seeking truth from facts, for the purpose of mastering the objective laws of the British revolution and working out a political line so as to guide the revolution to victory, step by step.

To conclude this self-criticism about the programme of work, we must quote from a criticism which was circulated by a rank-and-file comrade at the time of the February conference, and which did not receive much attention then. Although in our opinion this document underestimates the dialectical relation between theory and mass work, it reads nevertheless as a startlingly correct critique of the main errors we were then making, and shows an understanding of the inter-relationship between our weakness on the question of mass work and our weaknesses in three other fields, namely the question of unity with other Marxist-Leninists, the question of how to organise ourselves internally, and the question of having theoretical clarity on our Programme:

"As for our programme of work, it is my opinion that it must emphasise that our contribution - nay duty - is to provide organisation and leadership to the struggle of the working class. We cannot just be in the ranks of the oppressed, or just join those ranks, let alone tail behind the masses and other groups who purport to be leaders. If we participate in any organisations or demonstrations we must do our best to play leading roles and not avoid doing so under some pretext of staying with the masses. Our contribution is to organise and lead.

"So - we need above everything else, a correct political line. We did not have a political line in the beginning so as to facilitate our attempts to unite the Marxist-Leninist movement as much as possible. Since that first conference, we have been consolidating our Movement and have repeatedly stressed the need to build a party. To build a party is going to require a lot of struggle to achieve theoretical clarity. But our Programme reveals that there is a great deal of theoretical confusion at this time. Some people make a virtue out of this lack of clarity by saying that it is not very important and that we should be more concerned with doing mass work. Yet without this clarity we will run round in little circles to disappear up our own arse-holes. Without this clarity we will be crucified on the alter of good intentions and minor contributions alongside a host of other leftists. Mass work in no way automatically ensures the raising of our low theoretical level".

We now pass on to the actual events of the February Conference. These are closely connected with the question of the international line. At the First National Conference, IW had circulated a draft entitled "How Many Worlds?", which came to be known colloquially as the "pink document".¹ At the First Conference, one comrade produced a sheet of amendments, aimed at sharpening up the politics, and it was agreed that IW should submit a revised draft incorporating these suggestions. But at the February Conference he re-submitted the pink document together with a few amendments of his own which in no way adequately represented the points which the National Conference had mandated him to include. A rival draft was also circulated which set out the main issues of the three worlds theory very sharply indeed, employing extensive quotations from the Chinese.

The question of the three worlds theory as a major line of demarcation in the ML movement has crystallised very rapidly. Many comrades' first experience with the Albanian trotskyite line came during the July Conference, when it was argued by the Coventry Workers' Association. The CWM had no clear stand at the time.² At the November National Conference, the Birmingham Branch moved that instead of taking IW's draft, the Conference should discuss the two major polemical texts from China and Albania, but this was defeated. To the best of our knowledge the Birmingham members never produced any clear statement, at least in writing, saying what their disagreement with the three worlds theory really were - all we got were hints that they did disagree with it.³ Discussions with one of them in the NC suggested that she had no clear understanding of the questions involved. Meanwhile, (i.e. between July and November 1977), the CWM as a whole executed a soft-shoe shuffle in the direction of acceptance of the three worlds theory. This unprincipled approach was mainly influenced by IW, who repeatedly vacillated towards the Albanian line at the July Conference, yet emerged four months later as a vigorous proponent of the three worlds theory, without making any public self-criticism of his earlier stand.

When the discussion of the international line took place at the February Conference not a single Birmingham member attended (the conference was held in Birmingham), the excuse being that they had to take part in a demonstration on the same day. A motion was passed condemning their behaviour; the building of a strong M-L organisation had to take precedence over a demonstration, yet, without any prior consultation or exchange of views with the NC, all the Birmingham members cleared off. In our view this motion was correct, except insofar as it reflected the CWM's usual approach at that time of using purely administrative measures, not backed up by political leadership - this weakness was incarnated particularly by the comrade who was National Chairman, and who chaired all the Conferences and NC meetings during the period under discussion.

Footnote:

1 It was printed on pink paper, but the term could apply to the document's wishy-washy political line.

2. Albania solidarity work was at that time recommended as a key immediate focal point in the CWM's work.

3. In their letter of resignation (see Party Line I) they did finally come out openly against the theory, though their arguments were very vague.

In the discussions which ensued, the alternative draft was rejected. IW exhibited an extremely bad style of work in fighting to the death in defense of every last word and semi-colon in his text, with the result that a vast number of amendments had to be proposed and voted on, and the end-product is the diffuse and ambiguous statement which eventually saw the light of day in Party Line I. Yet as we pointed out in the editorial note to PL I, it is a complex process whereby an organisation arrives at an understanding of theory. Among those organisations which take a correct line today, probably some began with partially assimilated line copied from the Chinese, and others with a confused and unscientific statements representing their level of understanding at the time. In either case, there must have been a struggle to make the progressive line more scientific, less dogmatic. We ourselves have succeeded in doing this. So it wasn't in itself a bad thing for us to have begun with a weak statement which accurately represented the low level of understanding of the organisation, and then to have developed progressively our theoretical grasp of internal questions. But we were unable to advance on this front because of a faulty grasp of democratic centralism and other aspects of conducting relations within an ML organisation. People sometimes supported or proposed particular texts in function of who had put them forward, rather than in the spirit of mutually seeking the truth; IW employed purely administrative methods in order to bludgeon his text through; the comrades in London district all strongly supported the three world's theory (though having several different interpretations), but this did not prevent bitter splits from developing among them during the discussion on the international line.

The conference itself ended in uproar with an attack on Birmingham launched from the Chair, comrades wildly beating the tables, and finally a tirade from TF who alledged that there was a conspiracy against the Birmingham branch, naming two leading members among the culprits, whereupon the Chairman petulantly wound up the meeting and almost stormed out of the room.

TF's approach

We have at our disposal two polemical statements written by TF. The first, entitled "Concerning Methods of Work", uses a vivid story to expose the danger of Marxist-Leninists adopting the old exploiting-class ideology of looking down on the workers. An arrogant site manager despises the ideas of the workers, and ends up having to dig out 400 tons of filling which have just been laid in a trench, because there is a pipe which has to be laid there.

It can now be seen that this type of polemic was not beneficial to the CWM's development. It one-sidedly stresses the correct spontaneous initiatives of the working class and downgrades the role of theory. If the main error of the CWM had been one of spouting theory divorced from the practice of the masses it would have been correct to criticise this; but in fact TF's polemic served if anything to accentuate the CWM's weaknesses and create a climate where comrades were intimidated from voicing criticisms.

In an assessment of the February Conference written just after the conference and before his expulsion, TF argues that the main reason for the predominantly negative results of the conference was "trying to carry out preconceived ideas without regards to the full weight of opposition to these ideas...". This we can take to be a criticism of the methods adopted by the National Secretary and Chairman. But in opposition to IW's bureaucratic methods, TF proposes in effect a line of total ideological struggle. He argues that out of the turmoil a greater unity had emerged. He mentions seven negative aspects of the February Conference, most of which we must recognise as being valid criticisms,¹ as well as two positive ones, first clearing up the line of demarcation "not between acceptance of the three worlds theory or not, but between three worlds theory and practice" (i.e. that there were various interpretations of the three worlds theory), and second, 100% support over guidelines for the NC with regard to page 4 of the programme.²

The problem was that TF tended to see those lines that he disagreed with as being part of an organised conspiracy to draw the organisation away from the proletarian path. According to this logic, he could see the two main pro-three worlds trends, as represented in the alternative three worlds documents, as part of an organised attempt to mislead the working class struggle, and thus found more unity with the Birmingham people who opposed the three worlds theory, than he did with those comrades who, like himself, supported it!

Objectively, the Birmingham members were wriggling to avoid being pinned down, and TF's line favoured the perpetuation of a loose organisation in which many lines would co-exist, constantly struggling with one another at fever pitch, but without any attempt to fight for unity of will among comrades; this line tends to negate the Marxist-Leninist principle of taking the desire for unity as the basis for conducting inner-organisation struggles. TF recognised that this situation can't be prolonged indefinitely, but he sees the dialectic in this way: First the struggle at the conference leads to more unity, "then another struggle, this is what Mao taught me, it will always be like this, until the workers get hold of it then there won't be so many of them and the struggles will be more principled, and there will be more solidarity - in the mean time we soldier on". This argument shows the interrelations between the line of worshipping spontaneous working class activity which dominated the CWM at the time and the faulty understanding of inner-organisation life held by many people.

Footnote:

1. These were: (a) insisting on condemning Birmingham comrades in their absence, (b) failure to include the accepted amendments in the three worlds document, (c) a new batch of amendments being 'slipped in', (d) pushing through the three worlds document in its present form, (e) abandoning p. 4 of the draft programme to the NC, (f) the continuing absence of a constitution, (g) no encouragement from the Chair for comrades to read documents carefully.

2. We have no records of what these guidelines were, but most probably they reflected a loose consensus view, and that is why agreement could be 100%!

Errors of TF's line

In essence, TF argues that a period of constant, stormy struggles is a mechanism whereby the working-class impresses its character upon an organisation. In fact one of the things which expresses the class character of a proletarian organisation is precisely its ability to develop a style of practising criticisms and self-criticism, modestly seeking truth from facts and conducting disciplined struggles in the interest of achieving unity. Moreover, proletarian ideology is a science, which respects concrete facts above everything. The demand for proletarian revolutionaries to go deep among the masses, listen to their ideas and absorb their fine qualities is entirely correct, but in no way should it be counter-posed to the need for developing a healthy democratic-centralist inner-organisational life guided by the scientific spirit of the proletariat. On the contrary, the latter demand is a condition for carrying out the former effectively.

Taken to extremes, as happened in China under the influence of the gang of four, these errors would result in a situation where the only people with a right to speak are a handful of careerists who have arrogated to themselves the distinction of speaking with the voice of the working-class. The errors made by TF and by those people who closely supported him are rooted in the distortions of Marxism-Leninism which spread from China for a long period under the influence of Lin Biao and the gang of four. They followed the method of ruthless struggle and merciless blows which Chairman Mao himself criticised, and even practised the gang of four's principle of "attack by reasoning, defend by force"!

These people worked hard and courageously in supporting concrete struggles of the working-class, in anti-superpower and anti-racist work, and at this level made very positive contributions while they were in the CWM. True, the work they did was diffuse, and failed to yield any lasting results, but this was largely the fault of the organisation itself which did not provide proper leadership. Had they come into an already strong organisation with a developed Marxist-Leninist internal life and with a good strategic grasp over practical work, they could have been excellent revolutionary cadres; or else, if some of them turned out to be opportunists, been exposed in a correct and principled manner. But the CWM was, at that time, totally unable to apply the method of curing the sickness to save the patient, and this was made worse by the serious liberalism of those few comrades whom TF did trust and who failed to make criticisms of his errors.

The situation in Britain was one where - again under the influence of the negative aspect of the Cultural Revolution in China - the NL movement was split into small groups riddled with cliquishness and factionalism. This was part of the 'sickness' which had to be cured, and the struggle against it has, as in China, made it possible for people who used to hate each other's guts to win unity on the basis of deep criticism and self-criticism. It may be possible in the future for unity to be built with some of the TF group, and on present evidence - while criticising their errors and particularly their threats and use of violence - we should not view them as part of the enemy. But in the actual circumstances at that time, when the struggle against factionalism and small-groupism was making its first painful beginning in the CWM, the contradiction was becoming antagonistic, and it is hard to see how a split of some kind could possibly have been avoided. The form in which the struggle against TF was carried out was, however, thoroughly incorrect and revealed serious weaknesses in the CWM's style of work, as we will now recount.

Expulsion of TF

At the March meeting of the NC, the Liverpool branch brought a surprise motion calling for the expulsion of TF. This was brought up under 'correspondence' at the beginning of the meeting, and no-one except the Liverpool members on the NC was aware of it in advance. A resolution to postpone the item was rejected, and that on the expulsion of TF was carried, by small majorities, leaving the NC and the organisation as a whole deeply divided.¹ Only after the expulsion had taken place did Liverpool produce a written statement on the reasons for taking action against TF. This is published in IB no. 1, and many of the criticisms which it makes against the objectively splittist character of TF's actions are correct. It should be noted that during the March NC meeting, IW verbally placed the main emphasis on accusing TF of a conscious conspiracy to usurp leadership over the CWM, whereas these charges, which we do not now consider convincing, are only accorded a secondary place in the written document. TF never made a self-criticism with regard to the serious correct criticisms which were brought against him, nor did he provide reasonable evidence for the charges he had brought against IW and others. However, it would certainly have been in accordance with the spirit of the constitution for him to have been informed in advance of the motion and charges, rather than to expell him first and expect him to make a self-criticism afterwards.² The more important objection to this procedure is that by concentrating fire on TF individually it was made impossible to arrive at a political grasp of the CWM's shortcomings, in which TF's own errors were interdependent with similar or opposite errors made by others. In fact one comrade had already submitted to the March NC a statement based on the negative experience of the April Conference, which begins: "Rather than making individual criticisms, we should make a collective self-critical examination of our approach." (this was intended partly as a criticism of TF's attacks upon certain individuals). But the expulsion of TF was decided before the experience of the Conference was discussed, and the NC then proceeded to find an extremely original way of burying this comrade's initiative - it was adopted verbatim without discussion as a statement of the NC and entombed in the NC minutes. It makes a number of correct points, advocating the conscious cultivation of a Bolshevik professional approach to revolutionary work and calling for a conscious study of Mao's writings on inner-party life. Only much later did we begin to make progress along these lines.

Footnote:

1. The voting was 6-4, including TF's own vote. At the April meeting (by which time one NC member had resigned from the organisation and another had made a self-criticism about his earlier vote) a motion to suspend TF from the NC while allowing him to continue as a member pending investigation was defeated 5-3.

2. The April NC passed a resolution that it abided by its earlier decision "on the expulsion of TF until he either substantiates or withdraws his charges, in which event the NC will review his case."

Struggle to save the CWM

After TF's expulsion a split occurred over the question of whether to maintain an organisational structure or else to permit total anarchy within the CWM. The organisation was in a severe state of shock - in particular, one traumatic meeting of the London District will long linger in the memories of comrades who were present - and objectively we were in a position of picking up the pieces. Those comrades who were united by a recognition of thence to build a democratic-centralist organisation in the interest of the proletarian cause were still divided on many secondary questions, particularly in relation to the TF affair, and it was entirely correct in the circumstances to postpone a summing-up of these issues until the present time. It is equally necessary for us to make the summing up today, since we must gain a conscious understanding of processes which at the time were taking place largely, in a way, independent of our will.

What happened was that we had to rebuild a shattered organisation, and this gave us an opportunity to build something much better than before - to our credit, we took this opportunity. Bit by bit, we gained an intuitive understanding of the errors made by the CWM at its inception and were able to make positive advances. The period when we summed up this understanding to a conceptual level in conjunction with our struggle to unite with the RCL, belongs mainly to the period after the second National Conference. However one important critical statement made by a rank and file member just before the Second Conference played a major role in focusing our attention on the questions which are dealt with in this paper. This statement puts very well five major reasons why the method of proceeding against TF was wrong:

1. No campaign of criticism against him took place either before or after the expulsion. He was given no chance to expose himself before all comrades. The level of conviction for his expulsion was low. Brushing aside ideological struggle and using bureaucratic methods was in fact liberalism.
 2. The charges brought against him were relatively minor aspects of his menshevism and were not grounds for expulsion. They avoided the real political issues involved.
 3. Due to the lack of conviction, this action split the movement and did not unite it and make it stronger as intended.
 4. NC comrades who voted for his expulsion when they only supported suspension were wrong.
- Personal reasons rather than political also played a role in his expulsion."

The document also raises many of the basic political questions which we have developed more fully in this paper.

Another earlier document is a criticism produced by a NC member against the NC's style of work, which refutes the approach of 'conspiracy' accusations used by both TF and IW: "It seems to me that it is a wrong approach to go in for speculations about conspiracy. The thing to do is launch a vigorous political movement in the sincere hope of forging a new unity."

This document recommends for study section J of Lenin's "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back" which criticises the narrow circle mentality, and in particular the passage criticising the approach of "either a punch on the jaw or let's have your hand!" (Peking ed. p. 169); and also Mao Zedong's article "Strengthen Party Unity" where he says, "as for the fight against sectarianism, one thing in particular should be pointed out, that is, you should unite with those who have waged struggle against you". (Vol. V, pp 317-8).

Footnote:

1. This was a meeting which epitomised the personal and factional conflicts which characterise small-groupism at its worst.

The overall approach of the document is generally correct, and it concludes with the following statement:

"...if we point out that we have a long way to go before we acquire a Bolshevik Party spirit instead of trying to cover it up and delude ourselves, if we are bold enough to do this then we have already taken the first step towards mastering the Communist party spirit, because then we will have shown readiness to be tempered in the heat of criticism and self-criticism in the interests of the proletarian movement."

This call for a modest and sober approach was very much in order. We certainly learned through very hard experience that dedication to the proletarian cause is not just expressed by thumping the table and uttering ringing phrases about the working class, nor is it enough to declare that we are going to smash revisionism, fight the bourgeoisie and liberate humanity, and then get discouraged after a year or two when revisionism and the bourgeoisie are apparently no weaker! What is needed is conscientious work to identify scientifically the tasks which we have to carry out at each stage, aiming to make firm advances, even though small at first, in building bases among the working class, while all the time carefully fostering the spirit of democratic centralism within the proletarian organisation.