

Draft Internal statement on the History of the RCL.

The Communist Party of Great Britain was founded on 1st August 1920 as the revolutionary vanguard Party of the working class in Britain. Lenin had personally encouraged its formation ~~out of~~ ⁱⁿ the unity of the most systematic Marxist elements and the most resolute fighters in the working class struggle.

With the assistance of the Third Communist International, of which it was a section the Party grew rapidly in numbers and influence and played an active part in workers struggles before the General Strike of 1926 and in mobilising people against the threat of fascism in the 30's.

Later, particularly from the time of second World War, elements of rightist revisionism began to become apparent in the Party, and by the time of the great international struggle against modern revisionism in the early 60's the CPGB had become a party irretrievably in the hands of a revisionist clique, a party of bourgeois reformist politics betraying the working class more effectively than the open representatives of the bourgeoisie could do.

But ~~from~~ ^{from} the same time that the revisionists dragged the ~~aims~~ ^{name} of ~~true~~ Communism in the mud, genuine Communists stepped forward to carry on the revolutionary aims of 1920. It is out of this historic struggle to rebuild the vanguard party of the working class that the Revolutionary Communist League was formed.

At first the banner of true Communist struggle in Britain was raised by Michael McCreery who split with the CPGB in 1964 and formed the Committee for the Defeat of Revisionism for Communist Unity. Unfortunately however, ~~him~~ with his untimely death in 1965 the vanguard nucleus fell apart.

From the middle sixties the situation in the anti-revisionist movement in Britain was confused. This was partly as a result of anarchistic tendencies which had their social roots in the class nature of imperialist Britain but which were also influenced by what have now become clear were negative aspects of the Cultural Revolution in the Peoples Republic of China.

Two progressive party-building trends existed. One, ~~to~~ which many honest comrades rallied in the belief that it would form a genuine revolutionary party, was around the CPBML, despite the opportunist weaknesses of its leader Reg Birch. The other trend consisted of a significant number of small anti-revisionist groups strongly committed to mass struggle in their local areas.

The best elements of the first trend eventually split with the leadership of the CPBML and formed the Communist Workers ~~League~~ ^{Movement}. Representatives of the second trend went through a process of unity and struggle in the Communist Federation of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) and founded the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain. With the unification in 1980 of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain and the Communist Workers Movement, the two most significant revolutionary Communist trends in Britain have re-united in their determination to re-establish the true vanguard Party of the working class in Britain envisaged 60 years ago by Lenin.

~~Party~~ The Formation and Development of the ~~CPBML~~ CFBML

The origins of the CFB, lie in the Joint Committee of Communists, which was founded in April 1967 by a number of local anti-revisionist groups. These groups did active mass work and were committed to rebuilding the Communist Party. However the JCC had many weaknesses. It emphasized the autonomous nature of the groups to such an extent that the role of chairman rotated and the only centralised office was minutes secretary. A strong tendency to oppose the prevailing dogmatism in the Marxist-Leninist movement resulted in opportunist confusion about even some of the most fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism: for example a statement adopted by the JCC in April 1968 on Party Building did not even once refer to the working class.

In September 1969 the JCC formed the Communist Federation of Britain in a step which expressed the desire of many comrades to make progress in re-building the Communist Party. The new organization continued the mass work of the JCC and made some ~~progress~~ progress in centralization with a Federation Committee and a permanent elected Chairman and Secretary. It produced a monthly paper "Struggle" and later a theoretical journal, Marxist-Leninist Quarterly which appeared irregularly. Nevertheless the ~~group~~ ^{groups} were ~~f~~

were fundamentally still autonomous. The federal constitution violated the principle of democratic centralism that lower levels should be subordinate to higher levels by preserving the independence of the groups, some of which retained their own name till as late as 1976. Representatives of the groups attended the Federation Committee as delegates, and even when a decision was approved by the committee its implementation was entirely dependent on whether each particular group decided to implement it. So jealous were the groups of any development of centralist leadership that on one occasion the Federation Committee actually forbade the elected officers from giving a lead to a General Meeting of the entire organisation.

As a result of this ultra-democratic approach what decisions could be taken by the CFB were taken by consensus and by seeking a rough and ready balance between opposing views instead of thrashing out a principled position that could win a majority vote. Special General Meetings of the entire membership were held on several occasions and more often than not were the opportunity of several groups to unite to oppose a forward development of CFB policy and practice. Sometimes the alliances were completely unprincipled as was the case with one alliance which prevented the CFB from condemning Soviet-social imperialism.

By 1974 the CFB was in severe crisis and facing disintegration. In July 1974 "Struggle" stopped publication after 56 issues. Later that year a majority was won for the seriously opportunist decision to call on workers to vote Labour in the October 1974 elections. This decision, which was implemented by only three of the groups, was the subject for bitter criticism.

The crisis precipitated a sharp struggle about the way ahead in party building. A line emerged that the federation should be united by a campaign of criticism and self-criticism against a number of major errors. The phrase of Mao Zedong's "Combat liberalism" was particularly emphasized: "active ideological struggle... is the weapon for ensuring unity".

The major errors were identified as liberalism, small group mentality, ultra-democracy and intellectualism, and subjected to protracted criticism as five major right opportunist errors.

This campaign from March 1975 to February 1976 must be affirmed as strongly positive. It fundamentally united five out of the seven groups of the CFB and provided the conditions in the summer of 1976 for these groups to abolish group autonomy, formally designate the CFB as a democratic-centralist organisation, and accept the demeritocratic position of branches. This was a qualitative change in the organization which was marked by the republication of a monthly political paper, under the new title "Class Struggle" and the renaming of the theoretical journal as "Revolution". In both cases the editorial policy of these publications was consciously made a vanguard one.

The criticism of liberalism overcame a lot of diffuseness and enabled comrades to unite by thrashing out the substance of the differences between them. The criticism of small group mentality won the conviction of comrades that their first duty was to the working class, not to their own circle. The criticism of ultra-democracy overcame aversion to the idea of leadership, and made progress against the lack of division of labour characteristic of the circle stage of party-building. The criticism of empiricism combated a tendency to be opportunist and about the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism and a spontaneist tendency to undertake work without having definite policies and methods of work to guide it. The criticism of intellectualism was directed against individualist and idealist vacillation characteristic of the intellectuals, and stressed the working class nature of all our work.

Although it must be said that the CFB was united by a process of criticism and self-criticism that overwhelmingly stressed ideological questions, this also opened the door for progress on some political questions. The organization relatively soon took a much more correct position on the Labour Party and on nationalisation and started studying the implications of the theory of the three worlds theory. It committed itself to putting the first emphasis in mass work on building bases in the industrial working class with the aim of establishing factory cells. By the beginning of 1977 the CFB was starting to

draft a major political document as a step towards the writing of the programme of the future party. This document was to become the Manifesto of the RCL.

Equally important, although two of the groups of the CPB had split away during the process of winning unity the five groups that had formed a single democratic-centralist organization were in a position to seek unity with other Marxist-Leninist organizations. Between 1976 and 1977 a successful struggle for unity was carried out between the CPB and the Communist Unity Association (Marxist-Leninist).

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNIST UNITY ASSOCIATION (MARXIST-LENINIST)

Comrades from the London and Grimsby groups of the CPB had split from the organization in 1971 in protest at the lack of progress in establishing a democratic centralist organization and at disciplinary measures taken against some of their members for the way they had struggled. Although there were some weaknesses in their style the political essence of their line was correct.

These comrades formed the Communist Unity Organisation. This later united with members of the Revolutionary Marxist Leninist League who had expelled a left-sectarian opportunist who had formerly been leader of their organization. The united organization was called the Communist Unity Association.

The CUA was committed both to Party building and mass work. In general its political stand combined adherence to the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism with objective assessment of the actual situation, better than any other Marxist-Leninist group in the early 70's. Its strongest contribution was "Imperialism and the struggle for the Revolutionary Party" which argued systematically the importance of combating opportunism as one of the most important tasks in building the Party in Britain where imperialism provided a substantial social and economic base for opportunism. It published a duplicated paper "Workers Unity" weekly.

Negatively the CUA did not effectively find the way of progressing beyond an anti-revisionist stage. When a liquidationist group left the London branch on the grounds that it should concentrate on mass work alone rather than Party building. This left the CUA with a substantially correct political stand but a more weakened ability to integrate theory with the actual practice of the class struggle.

The struggle for unity between the CPB and the CUA was the correct step for both organizations. Inevitably the character of the Revolutionary Communist League was more influenced by the character and history of the larger organization, the CPB. Nevertheless the CUA contributed substantially to the process of forming the Manifesto of the RCL, particularly in the emphasis on the imperialist nature of Britain and the need to combat opportunism.

The Revolutionary Communist League of Britain.

The founding Congress of the Revolutionary Communist League in July 1977 was a major development in rebuilding the party of the working class. It was a victory in uniting two Marxist-Leninist organizations after years of disunity in the Marxist Leninist Movement. This consolidated the successes in uniting the CPB, what with the CPB, CUA and the members of the West London Marxist Leninist Association, who were to join the League later in 1977, the RCL represented a unity trend that by the end of 1977 had united the best elements from seven Marxist-Leninist groups. The founding Congress was therefore a decisive blow against the small group stage of development in Party building. In addition the Manifesto of the RCL was the strongest, most systematic contribution in Britain at its time towards the programme of the future Marxist-Leninist Party. The importance of the founding Congress of the RCL was made even greater by the fact that the CPML had by that time irretrievably degenerated into revisionism under the control of the Hinch clique, as the comrades of the CUA had made clear.

Morale was high after the founding of the RCL. In the twelve months following the founding Congress membership increased by 33% in a systematic way. A successful delegation to China at the invitation of the CPC laid the basis for future relations.

Important as all the advances were, there were also inevitably shortcomings in the League, which only became apparent to members in a perceptual way through the ^{development} emergence of an number of contradictions. The sharpest of these was the emergence of an anti-League faction in the leadership of the BCL during 1978. There were many factors contributing to this.

The individuals concerned were not originally opportunists and each had a fairly long history of work within a Marxist Leninist organization. The central figure was N. Redfern who had been appointed Acting Secretary in October 1977 and Secretary in January 1978, of the Central Committee. Although in the past this person had had some individualist, dogmatist and commandist tendencies and a tendency to ultra-leftist political positions, these had not in general been antagonistic. However in the first half of 1978 his individualism took the form of arrogance, and contradictions on the Political Committee became antagonistic. This was associated with his marriage to someone from a larger and more experienced Marxist-Leninist organization in another country. The attitude of Redfern and his wife to inner party struggles became a careerist one. In due course this degenerated into unrestrained splittism directed against the chairman of the Central Committee, and, when the Central Committee imposed disciplinary measures against this splittism, to open defiance of its authority. The case of PD. was somewhat different. He was not a careerist but he was liberal with Redfern's errors and had some sympathy with his political line and some tendencies towards dogmatism on a major question. When the contradictions became ~~more~~ very sharp PD suddenly reverted to an ultra-leftist line opposing the theory of the three worlds, and joined Redfern in defying the Central Committee's disciplinary measures against Redfern's splittism. The three individuals then formed an openly ~~stated~~ declared faction. When they circulated a splittist appeal to all members of the organization against the authority of the Central Committee, they were expelled.

Although the anti-League faction involved only three individuals it was quite disruptive to the work of the Central Committee and the Political Committee for much of 1978. Apart from weakness on the Central Committee due to inexperience in handling serious individualism and splittism among leading comrades, the faction also created confusion because they offered opportunist solutions to certain real problems. On political line, in the course of putting the emphasis on grasping the main features of the theory of the three worlds the league had made some rightist errors in not giving enough attention in propaganda and practice to exposing British imperialism's international oppression and exploitation. However instead of correcting this weakness accurately and systematically Redfern used it to attempt to swing the organization into an ultra-left line on the international situation which in effect opposed the theory of the three worlds.

On the relationship between Party-building and mass work the League had been established in July 1977 after a lot of emphasis on ideological and political questions but having only weak links with mass work. This was partly due to its uneven development and partly due to a dogmatic and idealist attitude to party building. There was also a dogmatic attitude to the correct principle of putting the main emphasis in mass work on mass work among the industrial working class, which effectively vetoed any other form of mass work. In addition the League was founded in July 1977 with, positively, a very strong sense of voluntary discipline, but, negatively, some important weaknesses in comrades using their ~~own~~ initiative and finding their bearings independently. This was related to dogmatism. An idealist over emphasis on criticism and self-criticism had led to some perfectionism which also damaged the process of integrating theory with practice.

Redfern labelled these weaknesses as rightism and conservatism in mass work and claimed to present a solution by pushing the phrase "Practice is Primary" forward as a slogan. He did this in an ultra-left impetuous way that did nothing to strengthen the style of integrating theory with practice. Instead it tended to imply that comrades should not make sure they understood the policy or line that should guide the work. This also favoured Redfern's attempts to introduce left-opportunist ~~line~~ line without proper consideration.

Distortions in the League's practice of democratic centralism, which over emphasized centralism to the relative neglect of democracy, were also an important underlying weakness that became sharply manifest in the emergence of the anti-League faction. Changes in the ~~composition~~ composition of the standing committee and its style of work were difficult to deal with because of the degree of authority reserved to these five or six comrades. In particular the policy of the standing committee speaking at Central Committee meetings with a united face was a serious case of over centralism. Fuller investigation and debate have made it clear that while the CFB was overwhelmingly correct to commit itself to the principles of democratic centralism, there were mechanical weaknesses in the way a system of leadership was set up which did not grasp that leadership must grow and be strengthened over a period of time. This, coupled with a strong emphasis on voluntary discipline and with tendencies to dogmatism, created a highly centralized organization, with a strong revolutionary spirit but too vulnerable to the degeneration of a few people in the leading core and too weak in individual initiative. Accordingly various measures have been taken to promote the practice of Communist democracy and the democratic style of seeking truth from facts, and to inter-relate democracy and centralism better with the complementary policies of centralism based on democracy and democracy under centralized guidance.

The petty-bourgeois individualist and splittist conduct of the members of the faction was thoroughly repudiated at a conference in March 1979 at which the great majority of members militantly affirmed their determination to build the League as a fighting vanguard Communist organization.

Subsequently the League undertook a rectification stage that lasted over a year, directed mainly at errors of the centre and aimed at rejecting not only the incorrect lines associated with the faction but also learning deeper lessons to strengthen the organization. Although there were weaknesses in the presentation of this movement due in part to inexperience of leadership as well as some other errors, in the main it has already proved itself a success in the serious Communist style of criticism and self criticism.

Collective study of Mao Zedong's "On Practice" provided the theoretical basis for correcting idealism of a dogmatist kind while also guarding against empiricism.

The criticism of the "Bolshevization" campaign of 1978 helped correct a mechanical and idealist view of the structure of a Bolshevik organization, while maintaining the fundamental value of cells as basic units of the League where possible.

In May 1978 the Central Committee unanimously passed some amendments to the Manifesto correcting among other things certain rightist errors of political line that the faction had obstructed it from correcting by their splittism.

A document on Zaire fundamentally corrected some serious ultra-left distortions of our internationalist line that the faction had imposed on the League and which had caused confusion for some time.

The Central Committee approved a major lead stressing the importance of the mass line as a crucial style in mass work and rejecting ultra-left criticisms of this fundamental principle.

A discussion document on criticism and self-criticism attempted to strengthen our ability to use this principle too in a more materialist way and to integrate it with a fundamentally healthy democratic-centralist inner party life.

The Central Committee issued a major lead correcting a dogmatic and perfectionist distortion in our mass work which had gone beyond the correct policy of emphasizing industrial work to a seriously sectarian policy of effectively vetoing any other form of mass work. This had been a major feature which led to the RCL being founded without any deep links with mass work.

In the wake of this important reappraisal the Central Committee resolved to take up anti-racist and anti-fascist work as a second national priority in mass work. On the basis of this, already some noticeable progress has been made in building links with advanced elements of the national minority communities, a section of the people who will undoubtedly play an extremely important role both in Party building and in the revolutionary struggle as a whole.

Also as a result of following a more dialectical policy on mass work which can unite with progressive elements from the middle strata, we have been able to play an important part, together with other comrades, in forming the Britain Kampuchea Support Campaign, on one of the most important and ~~heroic~~ heroic struggles against Soviet and regional hegemonism in the world today.

On Ireland the Central Committee corrected a rightist error of an essentially social chauvinist nature, which had failed to put the struggle against British imperialism in northern Ireland firmly in the context of the struggle of the Irish people as a whole. At the same time it corrected a dogmatist error which committed us to applying the principle of a single party for a single state rigidly to northern Ireland. In the wake of this we have become much clearer about how we should present material on the Irish struggle in Britain overwhelmingly from the point of view of opposing British imperialism rather than particularly stressing any petty bourgeois weaknesses in the nationalist movement in a way that would damage the main thrust of the material. As a result of this important self-critical assessment, as well as of the revised more flexible orientation on mass work, we have given greater practical support to the movement against British imperialism's national oppression of the Irish people.

The reassessment of the important Zimbabwe campaign was delayed by the complexity of the review of its significance and by a weakness ^{prevalent} in other parts of the rectification campaign as well, which led to presenting ideological questions too much on their own and too ~~un~~ separate from political questions. We reaffirm the importance of giving special support to those struggling against the agents of British imperialism in southern Africa while not falling into a leftist deviation on the international situation in the way the anti-League faction tried to make us. At the same time future work of this type should follow the mass line better in the way it is organised.

On the particular question of finance, we have decided to try to maintain the excellent commitment of our dues policy while trying to eliminate the ultra-left excesses which damaged comrades' morale and carried dangers of separating us too much from the customs of the masses in a sectarian way.

Certain questions will need to be looked at more fully in the course of party building work. Although the RCL has carried ~~out~~ out a very substantial and positive reappraisal in only just over twelve months, the fact that this is not complete in all its aspects is not surprising. It has become clear that while there have been important lessons to sum up in our own work, in many cases there have also been links with a far bigger reassessment unfolding in the international Communist movement to correct ultra left and idealist distortions of Marxism-Leninism associated with Lin Biao and the gang of four. While there have been some rightist errors by individual comrades and in individual units of the League as well as in certain policies of the League itself, in the main facts have been shown that the most widespread problem has been a certain ultra-left and idealist trend of thinking which has manifested itself in many ways. The call of the central committee to pay particular attention to ultra-left idealism has therefore been justified as essential for correcting a fundamental distortion in how we guarded against both left and right errors. Strong as the advances made in the CFB and CUA were it is clear that our vigilance was relatively weak against ultra-leftism and that this was the negative side of the valuable work done in criticising rightism.

At times the rectification campaign was presented as if the main aim was to criticise ultra-leftism for its own sake in an abstract way rather than that the main aim was to strengthen our party building. Undoubtedly this made it more difficult for comrades to see the generally correct orientation. Nevertheless enough work has now been done to show the potential importance of the reassessments made during the rectification stage. They were ^{not} not magic answers, and in most cases they need still to be translated into action and tested in practice. Nevertheless there is every reason to believe they will help us to build the Party more effectively and in a way that unites ~~with~~ with more people quite significantly.

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Above all the fruits of the rectification stage, the most important is without doubt unity with the CWM. While our fraternal discussions with comrades from the CWM played a valuable part in helping to understand which areas of our work needed strengthening, it is also true that without the progress we have made in overcoming certain weaknesses of dogmatism, perfectionism and sectarianism, unity would probably not have been possible. Although undoubtedly we have helped our comrades from the CWM to understand some questions it is important to recognise that the process of unification has been mutual.

The RCL now faces a new stage with its unity with the CWM. We are determined to carry forward mutual support and mutual learning in our united revolutionary work. The new situation in which there will be a single united national Marxist-Leninist organisation presents new challenge and new opportunities for Party-building and mass work at a ~~time~~ time of sharpening contradictions in Britain and in the world. We are determined to seize these in a united way and make further substantial progress in re-establishing a revolutionary vanguard Communist Party in Britain closely linked with the struggles of the masses.

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