

OSB

one step beyond

OR

Smash The Revolutionary Communist Party

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In the past we have heard rumours that women in Manchester and Bradford Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) groups have had harassment from male RCP members on leaving the party. We have no further information or contact with the women involved. However, in June 1987 a Nottingham woman was viciously attacked by two male members of Nottingham RCP. The reason for the attack was that she had left the party.

A woman supporter of the RCP questioned the action and was told that it was internal to the party and none of her business! She suggested that males attacking women was unacceptable, and was told 'don't be so bloody moralistic'.

Obviously we are not happy with the way the attacks have been dealt with by the RCP. One of them is still branch organiser and the other is still in a position to speak publicly for the RCP. This would suggest to us, of course that they have not been disciplined, and that the party is actually condoning what they did and even covering up for them.

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REVOLUTIONARY ?? COMMUNIST ??
PARTY !!

Fortunately still insignificant, it's 'full' membership no more than 150, the RCP represents the extreme version of the Leninist disease. It's structure is utterly authoritarian and its self-defined role highly elitist.

Active RCP'ers come in two sorts. There's the 'full' membership, or in common Leninist lingo the 'cadre'. And there are the officially designated 'supporters', who attend branch meetings and who are in the process of being groomed for eventual acceptance amongst the elect cadre. Joining this elect band is dependent on an 'exam' in RCP dogma. Its bureaucratic structure,

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by which information flows up and down, prevents any real discussion of issues amongst the membership. Discussion, if any, of this particular event will be limited to the sanitised version preferred by the supremoes at the top. Their strategic position from which they can control the flow of information, and from which they are able to destroy the development of any real, organic links between people is typical of the way elites the world over secure their pre-eminent position.

When Marx said that the dominant ideas of any age were those of its ruling class he expressed something of greater relevance than he could ever have imagined! Those ideas don't only dominate the wider society, they also infect great chunks of the 'revolutionary' movement. Certainly if we look at its understanding of how revolutionary groups should organise it's not difficult to see how Leninism has been the major carrier of this infection within the movement (1). It reintroduces and reinforces the hierarchical relationships that characterise capitalism amongst supposed revolutionaries. As such Leninist parties are simply mirror images of the capitalist state structure. This hierarchy is not only institutionalised within the party but also in the relationship they see existing between the party and the working class. But for Leninism this is all uncontroversial:

"...classes are led political parties;

that political parties, as a general rule, are run by more or less stable groups composed of the most authoritative, influential, and experienced members who are elected to the most responsible positions, and are called leaders. All this is clear and simple."

"The Russian Bolshevik...cannot help all this talk about 'from above' or 'from below', about the dictatorship of leaders or dictatorship of the masses etc. as ridiculous and childish nonsense, something like discussing whether a mans left leg or right arm is of greater use to him".

LENIN: "LEFT WING COMMUNISM".

GLIB LENIN CASTS IT OFF

That this can be so easily brushed aside is related to the fact that Leninism simplifies the whole question of Social Revolution.

When we start to discuss the idea of revolution we can't simply look at capitalism as 'production for profit', 'the wages system' and 'class exploitation'. Though these are fundamental constituents. Capitalism rests on certain social relationships, certain patterns of authority. The constant reproduction of capitalism as a system is based on a general acceptance of these relationships. These are first learnt within the patriarchial nuclear family - 'do as Daddy tells you' - and are reinforced in school

and later at work etc. Capitalist ideology constantly bolsters the passivity of the majority and assures us that hierarchy is both natural and inevitable. This elitist division between order givers and order takers, the myth that the people at the bottom are incompetent - all this is also central to the Leninist conception.

The question of passivity is profoundly important and can't be so glibly cast off. We have to emphasise that the Social Revolution isn't simply a question of denying the ruling class its power, it's more than that. It concerns the total change of capitalist social relationships.

KARL MARX WAS DEAD RIGHT

Marx said that the working class must make its own revolution. In this he was dead right! In the course of things today people are denied even the most basic control over conditions of their daily lives. The idea of the social revolution has to be concerned at root with empowering people. And this isn't something that can be done for people.

But the problem is precisely this. People - the working class, the 'masses', in fact any oppressed group - can't empower anyone, they can't control anything unless they're conscious of their ability ('ability' in the widest sense), to do so. In other words, they have to be aware not only of the problems to be dealt with, but

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also of their capacity to deal with them. Again they have to be in a position to define the problems in the first place. It follows that each individual making up the 'collectivity' also has to be conscious. How else can they actively participate in the collective project of building a new society? And if people aren't actively participating, in what sense are they making their own revolution?

This political consciousness isn't arrived at by learning dogma by rote. It develops by learning to think, to criticise and to analyse. It develops through activity. In the broadest sense it concerns a growing self-confidence. The development of a real political consciousness has two things in common with any other kinds of learning. One: the only sure way to success is by 'doing'. Two: It's a process that never stops.

Leninist organisations, in limiting debate, bureaucratically channelling discussion and stifling dissent prevent the development of conscious people. Revolutionary class politics is about the 'self-activity' of the working class. The role of revolutionary organisations is to encourage that self-activity and to foster the creativity that historically has proven itself time and time again. When a 'revolutionary' organisation prevents the development of conscious, competent people even within its own ranks, it becomes an outright lie!

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Let's re-emphasise. The development of consciousness has to be considered as a practical task, no amount of learning the party line can be substituted for this. Organisations do not exist to tell their members what to think. Likewise organisations do not make 'interventions' in struggles with a view to telling the people directly involved in that struggle what to do. Indeed, such behaviour actually harms any development of political consciousness.

Furthermore, when, in the final analysis, Leninism understands the problem of revolution as a question of organisation, discipline and good timing, in the banal way that it does, it simply transfers the techniques of pure militarism on the revolutionary plane. In doing so it again completely misses the point. It dehumanises its membership, it treats them as pawns, it burns them out in an endless routine of party building activity. More than that it forces people to subordinate a part of what makes them tick in a self-denying crass 'militantism'!

"The militant attitude is indeed counter-revolutionary, in so far as it splits the individual into two, separating their needs, their real individual and social needs, the reason why they can't stand the present world, from their action, their attempts to change the world. The

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militant refuses to admit that they are revolutionary because they need to change their own life as well as society in general. They repress the impulses which made them turn against society. They submit to revolutionary action as if it were external to them: It is fairly easy to see the moral character of this attitude. This was already wrong and conservative in the past: today it becomes increasingly reactionary."

JEAN BARROT " THE ECLIPSE
AND RE-EMERGENCE OF THE
COMMUNIST MOVEMENT"



"WHAT'S A PRETTY
COMRADE LIKE
YOU WANT TO
READ THE MINUTES
FOR?"

THE RED FRONT

Of course there is a reason behind all this. Although some Leninists do pay lip-service to the idea of self activity, ultimately the revolution is a party affair. The key to the ultimate success of the revolution being the specifically Leninist vanguard party. The party is glorified as the brains and the consciousness of the working class. Such creativity as there is must always be channelled through the party:

"We are the party of the working class" wrote Lenin, "and therefore almost the entire working class...should act under the leadership of the party."

"ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK"

"The party in the last analysis is always right, because the party is the sole historical instrument given to the proletariat for the solution of its basic problems."

TROTSKY

"our objective is not merely to represent the working class within the framework of Parliament and British capitalism, but to go beyond both and

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create a new sort of society."

"THE RED FRONT. A PLATFORM FOR
WORKING CLASS UNITY"

The Red Front was a pathetic sham of an electoral alliance under whose banner the RCP fielded candidates in the last general election. Of it they wrote that "...the future of the working class depends on the success of this project." ('The Red Front').

It's not only the police who maintain files on people. The RCP's file on potential recruits and others in Nottingham, which included 'progress reports' and comments, was recently lost. The police got hold of it - and all those names! Luckily it has been returned to its owners.

But think on - next time you have a 'friendly chat' with a member of the RCP (or, indeed, any of the other extreme Leninist groups) the 'state in exile' is already building up its files.

THE RULING CLASS IN EXILE

It goes without saying that the theory justifying all this is one articulated by the very people who stand to benefit most from a new state dispensation along these lines. To put it bluntly we haven't only got a ruling class, but also a would-be ruling class. This is made up of all those

people and organisations, reformist or 'revolutionary', who seek to realise their own particular ends on the backs of the working class.

The idea that a single organisation, however proletarian its make up, that is orientated around a particular definition of a particular doctrine could ever claim to represent the interests of the working class is patently absurd. The truth, if you like, isn't something that can be simply set down in the pages of a text book, whoever writes it. It is something that emerges during the course of activity and the widest possible debate. The Social Revolution is a wave and not a railway track.

In point of fact most Leninist parties are anything but working class. This shouldn't surprise anyone. In his classic text 'What Is To Be Done', Lenin wrote that through its own efforts the working class was unable to develop a 'socialist consciousness' and he looked to the middle class intellectuals to develop one for them. Whilst Lenin may have refined his position later on, that elitism remained central to his political stance. The RCP is quite in keeping with this tradition, which has always been a vehicle for the self-serving pseudo-revolutionary pseudo-intellectual middle class. Privileged in this society it seems impossible for them to envisage a revolutionary movement in which they are not granted a privileged status. Come

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students of the RCP, you have nothing to lose but your illusions!! Given such a ridiculously blown-up sense of self importance is it any wonder that someone leaving the party should be blasted as a 'scab' by baying 'comrades' left behind. That this degenerated into violence, as it has done, merely reveals the neurotic extremism that infests the RCP.

When all crass justifications are cast aside, the revolutionary problem is reduced to the question of gaining party power. All questions are subordinated to the interests of the party. That this allows any two-bit opportunism to pass as valid activity is merely a 'tactical question' (2). That individuals are reduced to nothing more than foot soldiers for the party generals is beside the point. That the working class is considered to be little more than manipulable play-doh is a non-issue.

WHAT THE RCP MEAN BY DIRECT ACTION ISN'T

As we've said there is a role for revolutionary organisations. But it's certainly not to wean people off their allegiance to capitalism only to reincorporate them into another straight jacket. It's not to coerce, control, set limits on a debate, or in the classical sense to lead. Practically our task is to encourage creative self-activity and to foster the confidence and combativity sorely missing today. Politically the task is to set out a coherent critique of this

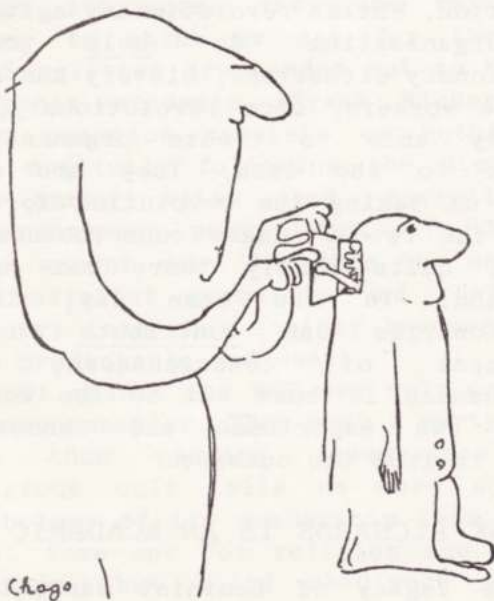
society - but not with the pretence that it is (or that there ever can be) a definitive document - and to pose the revolutionary problem: that the fuck-ups in this society can only begin to be solved when people take direct control of their lives, in all its aspects. We can facilitate the development of consciousness, we certainly can't impose it. An imposed consciousness is a contradiction in terms.

In short the interest of the working class can only be expressed by the working class themselves through their own organisations developed during the course of struggle. By which we do not mean the Labour Party, the Communist Party or even the Revolutionary Communist Party. Neither do we mean the hierarchical apparatus of the Trades Union movement. All of these are, one way or another, incorporated into capitalism and reflections of its ideology. This of course goes for any oppressed group struggling for its liberation. The RCP claimed that the policies of the 'Red Front' all "...begin with what the working class needs..." and that "...the only way they can be achieved is through the direct action of the working class itself". We can only shrug our shoulders and ask what kind of 'direct action' it is that is represented and channelled by a particular group. Direct action means precisely that - direct, autonomous self activity. In the RCP dictionary 'direct action' is a meaningless contradiction.

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HALF A BRAIN

Anyone with half a brain and even the most limited knowledge of the history of revolutionary struggle knows that history itself contradicts the claims of groups like the RCP. The spontaneous creativity of the people in struggle has always preceded the moment when any revolutionary organisation, as an organisation, got a look in. The myth that the only guarantor of success is the 'party' is the banal politics of the kindergarten. Take the



Soviets in the 1905 Russian Revolution (see what Trotsky had to say!), the Factory Council movement in Russia in 1917, the councils in Germany in 1919, the collectives in Spain during the civil war, take Hungary 1956 where the entire state apparatus was replaced by insurrectionary workers - and no party to be seen. Whether it be a Bolshevik party or an Anarcho-Syndicalist union, any organisation that claims to be the only valid channel for the development of revolution will limit it and constrict it and if not passed over, ultimately contribute to its destruction. Whilst revolutionary agitation and organisation do help create revolutionary situations, history has shown that the workers, once revolutionary, are perfectly able to create organisations adequate to the task. They are quite capable of taking the revolution forward. And if the revolutionary consciousness is lacking, quite simply there can be no revolution. In the same way, though revolutionaries can contribute to the development of consciousness, that consciousness is born out to the working classes own experience and cannot be brought in from the outside.

FRANK RICHARDS IS AN ACADEMIC !!

The legacy of Leninist manipulation and elitism is such that the working class has never been so far removed from such

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organisations - the effects of Tory reaction notwithstanding. Whilst rightly taking a stand that is wholly separated from the Labour Party, unlike the Socialist Workers Party who have snuggled up to it, the cadre of the RCP fall back on the tired and stale slogans and methods that have long-since stopped having attraction for anybody bar the students.

But an organisation like this must be of great comfort for the middle-class cadre of that party (who have the gall to call the rest of us 'petit-bourgeois'). Reared in capitalist society and conditioned to accept its norms they are relieved of having to think or act for themselves. Their politics are handed out to them by a bourgeois academic (Frank Richards) and their practice consists of nothing more than dutifully following the dictates of the party elite and parroting the well-rehearsed party line. In this they never wander very far from the mainstream of capitalist normality and their later re-entry into that society becomes all the more predictable and easy.

Of course the RCP are only one of the extreme examples. That such a party bares a more than passing resemblance to a religious cult tells us more about the psychology of its membership than anything else. Some opt for religion and some for Leninism, but blind obedience and iron certainty are crutches too many people have to rely on.

When this individual left the RCP her former 'comrades' sat around the office vehemently denouncing her as a 'scab on the working class'. In this mutually reinforcing hate session they reveal not only delusions of grandeur, but also frightening parallels with religious cults and fascism; where dissent is met with violence and gut-emotions take the place of reasoned argument.

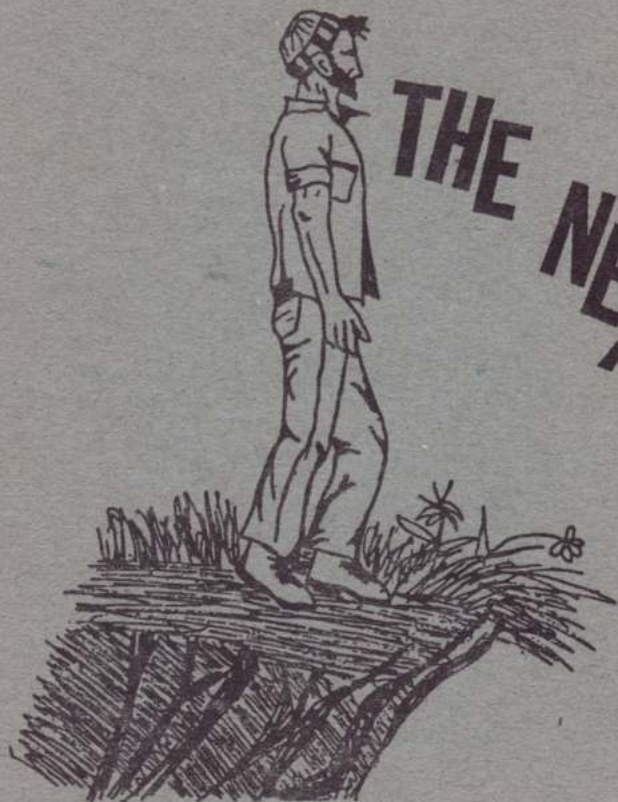
FOOTNOTES

(1). Of course Leninism is 'bourgeois' on a whole series of levels. See "Leninism or Communism" by Jean Barrot - a Wildcat Pamphlet. See "The Bolsheviks and Workers Control" by Maurice Brinton - Red and Black. See the chapter on the ideology of state capitalism in "The Wages System Under New Management" by Adam Buick and John Crump. See "From Bolshevism to Bureaucracy" by Paul Cardan - Solidarity.

(2). Lenin got into a debate with Rosa Luxemburg amongst others over the question of 'national self-determination' which Lenin supported. His position was wholly unprincipled, he saw it as a 'vanguard building issue' ie. the party could benefit from giving support to such a movement. For the RCP such 'V.B.I.'s' are Ireland, Gay Rights, Racism. They have 'front organisations' to this effect ie. Workers (a joke in the RCP's case) Against Racism and the Irish Freedom Movement.

This essay was originally printed in the January 1988 edition of Nottingham Anarchist News. We decided to reprint it because we thought the activities of the RCP needed to be exposed. We also wanted to publicise their methods, which are far from revolutionary. It is not intended to provide other left groups with something to gloat over or argue around, because we consider all authoritarian parties, movements or groups to be equally at fault!

This is the first project handled jointly by Pirate Press and Phoenix Press.



THE NEXT STEP

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