

restricted circulation

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW



occasional internal bulletin
of

Revolutionary Communist League of Britain

TAKING UP THE CALL



"COUNTRIES WANT INDEPENDENCE, NATIONS WANT LIBERATION, PEOPLE WANT REVOLUTION."

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This is the fourth of an occasional internal bulletin designed to circulate correspondance and developments in international contacts, making available their analysis and viewpoint. There may be unacknowledged disagreements and these articles should not be taken as official R.C.L. positions.

1. EPLF AND TPLF JOINT STATEMENT

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) have scored spectacular victories over the past ten months. The regime in Addis Abeba has suffered heavy defeats. The Derg is in deepening crisis and its downfall is accelerating.

The heavy defeats of the fascist regime and the quickening pace of its downfall have created favourable conditions for the struggle of the Ethiopian peoples for democracy and justice, for the oppressed nationalities to exercise their right to self-determination, as well as for the Eritrean people's struggle for self-determination and independence. The day is fast approaching when the Ethiopian peoples, through their united struggle, will destroy this anti people regime which has caused them much suffering for so long, and a democratic state based on voluntary unity and equality will be established. Favourable conditions for the consolidation of their struggles are being created.

At the same time, the just anti colonial struggle of the Eritrean people is pressing towards a final victory. Favourable ground is being laid for the Eritrean people to determine their destiny, for a lasting solution to the protracted war, for peaceful development in Eritrea, and for peace and stability for the peoples of Ethiopia and the Eritrean people.

The fascist Derg is making all out preparations to drive the Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples into a much bloodier war, with the aim of clinging to power at the expense of the blood and suffering of the two peoples. It has begun, with the support of its backers, to implement its declarations of intensifying and escalating the war whose aim is to wage a campaign of extermination in Eritrea and Ethiopia.

The Eritrean and Ethiopian peoples must confront the threat posed by the regime's desperate and brutal war of extermination by intensifying their struggle and heightening their mutual cooperation. Realising that the opportunity for the attainment of their aspirations for peace and democracy and the realization of their rights is greater than ever, they must now coordinate their efforts to crush the tottering anti people regime.

The various organisations leading the struggle of the two peoples should handle their differences democratically, and intensify and consolidate their cooperation for the attainment of common goals on the basis of their common views. The Derg and its backers must not be given the chance to mount the suppression and counter-offensive which they are preparing in order to paper over the cracks threatening the regime. The various organisations should bury the regime with coordinated struggles and blows without respite.

Properly assessing the present situation and conscious of the great responsibility that places on each of them, the EPLF and TPLF had meetings from 20th-24th April 1988 at Politburo level, with the aim of reviewing their severed ties and coordinating their struggle. These meetings, which were held with a deep sense of solidarity and responsibility, ended in success.

The two organisations believe that differences between them, existing as well as future, ought to be handled democratically and should not become obstacles for meaningful cooperation based on common views on basic issues. They agreed that this understanding should also serve as the basis for their future cooperation.

The two organisations confirmed that they have the following common fundamental views which make joint work and cooperation possible. They believe:

1. The expansionist and anti democratic regime in Addis Abeba must be destroyed. It is a regime that does not hesitate to crush the struggle of the peoples of Ethiopia and the Eritrean people, a regime that cannot satisfy the demands for democracy and the rights to self-determination of oppressed nationalities in Ethiopia and the demand for decolonisation in Eritrea.
2. The intervention of the superpowers, the Soviet Union and United States, does not solve the problems of the region but creates and exacerbates them. Their intervention at the present time, especially that of the Soviet Union, should be opposed and condemned.
3. The struggle of the Eritrean people for independence is just and legitimate.
4. The struggles of the Ethiopian peoples for democracy and the right to self-determination are correct and just. National and multi-national organisations must unite their forces and struggle for the voluntary and equal union of the Ethiopian people in a way which serves best and to the highest degree, the rights and interests of the oppressed nationalities. The peoples' democratic union is realised only when the right to self-determination assures that they and only they, decide in a free and democratic way to unite.
5. Since the struggles of the Eritrean people and the peoples of Ethiopia are directed against a common enemy, there is a natural alliance which demands close cooperation.

To accomplish these joint aims and frustrate the enemy's plans for intensifying the war of extermination, the EPLF and TPLF have agreed to cooperate and consolidate the struggles of the Ethiopian peoples and the people of Eritrea for the realisation of their just goals. The two organisations believe that other combatant organisations should similarly handle the issues that separate them and cooperate in the struggle for common aims.

Oppressed Peoples of Ethiopia and Eritrea!

Although the Derg has been weakened, with the support it can get from its backers it is preparing to carry out a campaign of atrocities and extermination against you. In order to foil this sinister plan and create a region of peace and democracy by uprooting the oppressive regime, and thus crown your just goals with success, you must now, more than ever before, step up your efforts to coordinate your struggles. The time when the days of darkness under this oppressive and brutal regime will end and when your just goals and aspirations will be realised is not far away.

Combatant Ethiopian and Eritrean Organisations!

Now more than ever the situation is favourable for the fulfillment of the just goals for which you have fought for so long. Resolutely implement the imperative of the day, the coordination of the struggle against the regime!

Down with the fascist regime!

Forward with the consolidation of the struggles of the Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples!

**ERITREAN PEOPLE'S
LIBERATION FRONT**

**TIGRAY PEOPLE'S
LIBERATION FRONT**

JOINT COMMUNIQUE OF THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLES DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (EPDM) AND THE TIGRAY PEOPLES LIBERATION FRONT (TPLF)

High level representatives of the Ethiopian Peoples Democratic Movement and the Tigray Peoples Liberation Front met from 5th to 10th May, 1988. In the course of their democratic and extensive discussions, they assessed the basic and timely issues; the major current tasks to be carried out; the condition of the people and the enemy in both Ethiopia and Eritrea; and the activities of the various organisations. They also thoroughly examined the relationship of EPDM and TPLF in the past years of the struggle. They analysed the basic common stands which can facilitate their democratic unity, and underlined their differences, which can be narrowed down through struggle in the future.

Accordingly, recognising democratic unity as one of the most important immediate tasks, the two organisations would like to inform the Ethiopian masses and democratic forces that, based on their common and agreed stand, they have taken concrete steps to form a United Democratic Front, which is anti imperialism, anti dependent capitalism and anti feudalism. This Front initially comprises the two organisations, and will be expanded in the course of the struggle.

They put the stated common democratic objectives for which the two organisations have been fighting, and the joint stand which enables them to form a United Democratic Front, as follows:

1. The two organisations believe that Ethiopian society is subject to an underdeveloped, dependent capitalist system, within which economic, political and social power is controlled and exercised by the enemies, imperialism, bureaucratic capitalism and feudalism, which oppress and exploit the people.
2. In the Ethiopian situation the main enemies are the ruling classes, Soviet imperialism and the dependent capitalist bourgeois system in power. These are enemies who are exercising dictatorial state power. Although feudalism has been weakened by the resolute struggle of the people, it has not been completely destroyed and must still be considered as an enemy.
3. To identify Soviet Imperialism as the main enemy in the Ethiopian situation does not indicate that American Imperialism has ever ceased to be an enemy of the Ethiopian peoples or that Soviet Imperialism can be fought by siding with American Imperialism. American Imperialism is a fundamental enemy which can never be considered as an alternative.
4. In order to free Ethiopia from the causes of backwardness and dependency, and to overcome the obstacles to development and build a free economy, a democratic revolution which can destroy these enemies must be carried out. The revolution must be led by the proletariat in alliance with the

peasantry, and its objectives will be to form a free people's democratic government and uphold basic human rights.

5. They accept that Ethiopia is a country whose unity is based on brutal national oppression and this national oppression can be solved only when the right of the oppressed nations and nationalities to self determination up to and including secession is recognized and respected.
6. In our country the majority of the population belong to the oppressed nations and nationalities. The national contradiction is the main aspect of the class struggle and the two organisations will struggle resolutely to eradicate it. They accept and struggle for the establishment of a democratic Ethiopia, based on the development and prosperity of the peoples of Ethiopia and the equality of nations and nationalities, as the correct priority.
7. They recognise that the struggle of the Eritrean peoples is legitimate and just, and believe that recognition of and respect for the Eritrean peoples' right to self determination should be the democratic and political response. Both organisations confirm their shared aim of cooperation with the Eritrean peoples and the struggling organisations on issues of common interest.
8. Both organisations believe that a protracted people's war is the principal tactic for destroying the absolute dictatorship established by the state bureaucratic capitalist bourgeois in power and its masters, the Soviet Imperialists.
9. The TPLF and EPDM believe in and are struggling for the establishment of two parallel fronts which are independent of external powers. One is a democratic united front which is anti all forms of imperialism, anti feudalism, and anti dependent capitalism. The other is a tactical front which opposes the Derg's Republic and Soviet intervention. Both organisations believe that the remnants of the previous reactionary ruling classes should not be allowed to join this front under the cover of democracy. The masses must realise who they are and oppose them.

Taking these basic political and other unifying common stands of struggle as their starting point, and believing that the formation of a United Democratic Front will make a great contribution to the consummation of the democratic revolution in Ethiopia, EPDM and TPLF have agreed to form a United Democratic Front and have outlined in detail how this Front will be formed and developed stage by stage. Accordingly, following on from the various areas of agreement which must be considered, they have agreed on the following as the main concrete steps for the Front's formation and development.

1. There will be a committee of representatives of both organisations which will organise the formation of the United Democratic Front and coordinate joint activities.
2. The propaganda and organisational work carried out among the people by the two organisations shall reflect the common objectives, and joint organisational work will be carried out.
3. They will carry out joint political, military and social activities which are conducive to the formation and in the spirit of the United Democratic Front.

Having taken these concrete steps, TPLF and EPDM have agreed that they must do all they can to strengthen their organisation vis a vis the Ethiopian revolution. In addition to the formation of a democratic front, and concerning the tactical front :

1. They have realised that it is necessary to struggle for the formation of a tactical front encompassing the anti Derg and anti Soviet intervention forces and that this must be strengthened both within each organisation and jointly.
2. More than ever, they believe that their common call for the formation of such a front must be heeded.

At this meeting the representatives of the two organisations have reached an agreement concerning the Ethiopian prisoners of war held by the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front. They would like to announce to the Ethiopian masses that as Ethiopians, they have agreed to negotiate with the EPLF and to receive the prisoners and let them freely decide their own future.

Through their struggle against the enemies of the democratic revolution, the TPLF and EPDM have so far scored brilliant victories and have paved the way for the final victory of the oppressed masses. At this stage of the Ethiopian democratic revolution in particular, for it to maintain its strength and revolutionary spirit and attain its objective, the unity of the struggling forces around common objectives is urgent and cannot be postponed.

Based on these common objectives which will bind them together in the future, within the guidelines of unity in struggle, and aware that the realization of this unity would be a heavy blow to their enemies, the two organisations are more than ever ready to actualize such unity. The concrete steps undertaken to form a United Democratic Front, which is a weapon to defeat the enemies of the Ethiopian peoples, namely all forms of imperialism, dependent capitalism and the remnants of feudalism, is a great victory for the Ethiopian people.

OPPRESSED PEOPLES OF ETHIOPIA!

Those enemies, who have robbed you of the fruits of your labour and of your democratic and human rights, and against whom you have fought so heroically, paying great sacrifices, are weakened and awaiting the final blow. Arise with iron resolve, coordinate your revolutionary strength with those organisations which are on your side, strike against your enemies. Unity is strength! Support the organisations which are on your side with all your capacity. You can own the fruits of your labour only when your fundamental enemies are destroyed, so arise and arm yourselves!

ETHIOPIAN DEMOCRATIC AND REVOLUTIONARY FORCES!

The struggle for which you have sacrificed so much, although it has contributed greatly to the Ethiopian democratic revolution, has not yet achieved the desired goal against our enemies, due to the fact that the questions of leadership and unity have not been answered. The strength of the enemies of the Ethiopian revolution lies in the lack of organisation and unity among the struggling forces. Until the democratic forces are organized and united, the lifespan of the enemies will be extended, causing serious damage to the revolutionaries, the people and the revolution itself.

Therefore, Democratic Forces, wherever you are, those of you who are organised strengthen yourselves, those who are not yet organised, organise yourselves. It is your great, timely duty to join in a democratic front. The TPLF and EPDM, in forming a democratic front, have taken a historic step to coordinate their forces, and they call on you to play your part by joining in the common struggle of the revolutionary forces.

ANTI DERG AND ANTI SOVIET INTERVENTION FORCES!

The Derg and Soviet intervention are the main enemies of our country at this time. These anti people forces have strengthened their political, economic and military superiority, stifled basic human and democratic rights and exposed the people to class and national oppression. These, the pillars of the old order, are the causes of the backwardness and poverty of our country. To destroy these forces, TPLF and EPDM strongly believe that it is necessary, as a matter of urgency, to form a front which is anti Derg and anti Soviet intervention and independent of external powers. Both organisations have struggled for this aim. We repeat our call on all forces opposed to the Derg and Soviet intervention to struggle for the establishment of a united front, on the basis of the necessity for true national independence and unity of the people.

ERITREAN MASSES AND STRUGGLING ORGANISATIONS

The EPDM and TPLF, on the basis of their firm democratic stand have always supported the Eritrean peoples right to independence from colonialism. In their effort to strengthen their relationship with the struggling forces in Eritrea, they have never ceased advocating a democratic solution to the problem. Accepting that the causes of oppression in Ethiopia and Eritrea are the ruling classes in Ethiopia, they will resolutely continue their struggle until these are destroyed.

In past years, the Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples have contributed greatly to each other's struggle. Now more than ever it is necessary to strengthen the struggles of the two peoples for true independence, peace and democracy in the area. The time is ripe. We call on you to strengthen your popular struggle and your relationship with our organisations.

THE ENEMIES OF THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLE SHALL BE DESTROYED BY OUR UNITED STRUGGLE.

WE SHALL TRIUMPH

**THE TIGRAY PEOPLES
LIBERATION FRONT**

**THE ETHIOPIAN PEOPLES
DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT.**

MAY 10, 1988.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Resistance and struggles abroad

A declaration of unity

NDF and FMLN issue joint communiqué against US aggression

"We oppose the various forms of aggression to which our peoples are subjected, the total disregard for our people's right to decide their own destiny, and the open and covert intervention implemented by the US government headed by Ronald Reagan against the sovereign peoples of the world including those in El Salvador and the Philippines."

Thus ran the first lines of a joint accord signed by the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) of El Salvador and the National Democratic Front (NDF). Signed on April 12, the joint communiqué was made public by NDF international representative Luis Jalandoni before close to a hundred Filipinos and their European friends and supporters who had gathered to celebrate the NDF's 15th founding anniversary. The festive gathering was held in Utrecht, The Netherlands.

In their joint accord, the two liberation movements vowed to "fight continued US domination of our respective countries through puppet governments which have given away our sovereignty and sacrificed our people's interests, which maintain states that do not correspond to our national and democratic needs and which advance only the interests of the US government, big business and the ruling classes of our respective countries."

The announcement of the joint accord was the highlight of the NDF anniversary and solidarity celebration. During the festivities, Jalandoni also read messages of congratulations and solidarity from various liberation movements, communist parties and progressive non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals, including the East Timor National Liberation Movement (FRETILIN), the Communist Parties of Australia, Portugal, France and Greece, the international NGO X-Y, and the American scholar Gabriel Kolko, who sent his greetings on behalf of all Americans supporting the NDF cause.

Chris Huinder of X-Y, said that his organization was proud to have supported the NDF and NPA politically and financially for the past 10 years and it will persist in doing so.

Hasun Abu Ita, representative of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), conveyed his greetings to the NDF in the name of the PLO and the Palestinians engaged in a national uprising in the Israeli-occupied territories of Palestine.

Francois Houtart of the Permanent People's Tribunal (PPT), on the other hand, reiterated the PPT's recognition of the NDF as "a legitimate representative of the Filipino people." He added that his faith in this recognition was renewed in his recent visit to the Philippines where he interviewed the NDF national leadership. He said, "The maturation of the Philippine struggle is very profound" not only in terms of advances in its armed aspect but also in the "gains in political strength of the NDF."

Joost Lagendijk of the Netherlands Pacifist Socialist Party (PSP), said that her organization was proud of having the distinction of being the first political party to officially recognize the NDF abroad. She promised the PSP's continued support for the NDF and its program of land reform and democratization of Philippine society.

More than 30 messages of congratulations and support for the NDF were received by the NDF International Office days before the diplomatic affair. The messages include those from the Green Party of West Germany and other Western European parties, the United Church of Australia, FRELIN in East Timor, OPM in West Papua, Pax Christian Netherlands and other progressive organizations from India, Sri Lanka and the United States.

Among the dignitaries present in the diplomatic affair were Cristina Arguellos from the Nicaraguan embassy in The Netherlands, representatives of the Manuel Rodriguez Front and the Communist Party, both in Chile, a delegate of the Pan-Hellenic Socialist League in Greece, the Communist Party of Indonesia and other non-governmental organizations.

Meanwhile, in a debate sponsored by the UN Students' Association of Leiden University in Holland on the evening of the same day, NDF deputy international representative Byron Bocar debated with Aladin Villacorte, political officer of the Philippine embassy in The Netherlands, on the Aquino government's pending land reform program and the continued stay of the US military bases in the Philippines.

Villacorte pointed to Congress bills intended to implement the Aquino regime's land distribution scheme and its intention to extract higher rent for use of the bases. Bocar, on the other hand, assailed the viability and the pro-landlord bias of the proposed bills and stressed the cost of the US bases in terms of nullifying national sovereignty and exploiting the Filipino people to a





NDF International Office

The International Office of the National Democratic Front (NDF) of the Philippines welcomes and supports General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's recent announcement that the Soviet Union is ready to give up its military facilities at Cam Ranh Bay in exchange for the elimination of the United States' Subic Naval Station and Clark Air base in the Philippines.

Mr. Gorbachev's proposal is unambiguous and categorically espouses peace in the region. It erases in one stroke the favorite but fallacious argument of Washington and the Aquino administration for retaining the two largest U.S. bases overseas -- that they are necessary to maintain the so-called "balance of power" in the region and that they should remain in the Philippines in the interests of "collective regional security".

The Gorbachev announcement strengthens the growing popular movement in the Philippines calling for immediate dismantling of the U.S. bases, freedom from nuclear weapons and re-establishment of national independence and sovereignty. It comes at a very good time -- when the U.S. and Philippine governments are "reviewing" a bilateral military bases agreement which terminates in 1991.

The NDF considers that the proposal, taken with the six others made by Mr. Gorbachev in his Krasnoyarsk speech of September 16, conforms to the highest interests of the Filipino people, as well as to those of the peoples of Southeast Asia and the entire Asia-Pacific region. If responded to positively, these proposals will certainly go a long way towards denuclearizing and ensuring genuine security and peace for the entire region.

The NDF considers as inadequate and suspiciously evasive U.S. President Reagan's call for caution and Mrs. Aquino's characteristic no-comment response. The questions are simple. Do they want peace and security in the region or not? Do they want disarmament and denuclearization or not?

You shall know them by their words and actions, as the saying goes. In any case, no matter what later responses are forthcoming from the imperialists and the Philippine reactionaries, the NDF with the Filipino people shall continue to fight for the removal of all foreign military bases and nuclear weapons from Philippine soil; continue to advance the struggle for national liberation and genuine democracy; and continue to work for peace, denuclearization, disarmament and security for the Asia-Pacific region.

Luis Jalandoni

Luis Jalandoni
NDF International Representative
September 17, 1988

3 THE PHILIPPINES INDEPENDENT REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

By John Gee

I should start by saying that what I am going to try and do is to focus on the role of the Communist Party in the revolutionary struggle in the Philippines and also the illegal organisations but I think I should let people know in advance that this is a somewhat one-sided approach in that there are a large number of legal organisations as well which have an important role in transforming Philippine society. But I am picking on this one aspect which I hope people will be interested in.

When we look around the world today there are very few places where we can see a revolutionary movement actually making a challenge to the state power. There are revolutionary movements in many countries at various strengths. In the Philippines we have got a movement which is on a grand scale, it is on a scale of the great revolutions of the past. Shortly before the Marcos regime was overthrown there was a CIA report, looking at the situation in various countries around the world and the report concluded that the Philippines had the fastest growing insurgent movement in the world.

Yet I find in Britain there is not a very strong awareness of what is happening in the Philippines and there ought to be. It is an important revolutionary movement, an important front against imperialism and it's something from which we can learn a lot although the conditions in the Philippines are very different from the ones here.

Today the armed force of the revolutionary movement in the Philippines, the New People's Army operates in over 60 of the Philippines' 72 provinces and several years ago it started armed operations in the cities - what they call "sparrow-squad" operations. And the mass organisations number millions of members. There is a mass base to the revolutionary movement: to the illegal revolutionary movement now belong about 10 million people. It is significant in terms of any country in the world. And this is something which has arisen over a relatively short period of time historically. The modern Philippines' revolutionary movement really started right at the end of the 1960s, so the advance has been stupendous and I think it is something that is very inspiring.

I don't think it's any accident that when we look at the Philippines we see a movement which has developed an independent revolutionary line, which has not followed a path which has been charted and laid down by others. This independent element has been very very important throughout and it explains the difference between the Philippine revolution today and revolutionary movements in some other countries which have had many of the same difficulties but have not been able to tackle them as well. (I am not casting aspersions on these other comrades, rather I'm trying to highlight the qualities of the Philippine revolutionary movement.)

The Communist Party of the Philippines was founded in 1968 as a result of a split in an already existing Communist Party. That Communist Party had been founded in 1930 and as Mike said, it had led a revolutionary movement in the 40s and 50s but had been defeated and had gone into decline. There was not an intention at first to create a split in that old Communist Party: the younger members of the party were putting forward new analyses of the situation in the Philippines, trying to get to grips with the reasons why the Communist Party had suffered defeats and trying to find a way forward for the Philippines' revolution. They were pushed into a position where split became inevitable. They were not allowed to propagate their line and to argue in the party for a fundamental change in the line and a reassessment of approach. And that's how the split came about. It occurred right to the end of 1968. The Communist Party of the Philippines - I'll use the shorthand - the CPP is the Communist Party that emerged in 1968. The old party is referred to by the initials PKP which is just the same name in Tagalog, the main language in the Philippines.

The CCP did not regard the Marcos regime as in any way progressive, or enlightened or anti-imperialist, which is a viewpoint which you had argued by the PKP, which claimed that there were certain progressive aspects to the Marcos regime. It claimed, for example, that Marcos had a land reform programme which played a progressive role. In fact, he did have a land reform programme but it was never something which meant anything to the Filipino people. There was recently an analysis made by the Communist Party in the Philippines which pointed out how land reform in the past had only been used to try to stifle revolutionary movements. There have been instances where people who were willing to leave the revolutionary ranks could be rewarded with land. There was no attempt at a comprehensive transformation of landownership and yet there were land reform programmes on paper after the United States had officially left and under Marcos. And there is one being mooted today by the Aquino regime.

The new CPP believed that the old party was backing out of the armed struggle and this was in fact confirmed. They argued that this was the wrong course, that Filipino society could only be transformed through an armed mass struggle. But in fact the PKP, step by step, backed out of the armed struggle and in 1973 it came to the point where its remaining armed fighters surrendered to the Marcos government. There were great ceremonies in various parts of the country which were put on Philippines' television, where they handed over their guns: they still had a lot of guns but they handed them over to the Philippines army. And that was the end of their armed phase of struggle altogether. They were able to work legally. They were finger printed when they surrendered and photographed and so on, like criminals, but subsequently they were able to work openly to a large extent and frequently acted as apologists for the Marcos regime and also defended the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, which is an organisation which loyally supported Marcos right until his fall.

The Communist Party of the Philippines is often seen as a party which was a product of the Sino-Soviet debate. I think that's a very mistaken approach. The Communist Party of the Philippines looked at conditions there, it found

much in the Chinese experience that was relevant to the Philippines but it didn't adopt the lessons of the Chinese Revolution uncritically. It learned what it could, but it always made a critical application of the lessons of China and the lessons of other revolutionary struggles.

In the early days of the party there were a number of documents which it produced and which still form basic educational materials. A fundamental founding document of the party was a book called "Philippine Society and Revolution" by Amado Guerrero, who was the chairman of the Communist Party. This is still studied by all people who join the Communist Party.

The CPP at its foundation analysed Philippine society as semi-feudal, semi-colonial. The Philippines had been ruled by Spain for centuries. There was no pretense at industrial development. There was a plantation economy established in large areas of the country, and what took place was simple, straight forward plunder by Spain. A Philippine revolutionary movement arose at the end of the last century and threatened Spanish rule. About this time a war broke out between the United States and Spain and effectively the United States came in and robbed the Philippine people of the fruits of their revolutionary struggle against Spain. Under United States domination until 1946, the Philippines did undergo a certain amount of industrial development but it was an industrial development which tied the Philippines to the United States, it was not something which paved the way for the establishment of an independent Philippines. So you had industries which processed local products for local use but US profit, and you had industries which directly served US imperialism, which processed some of the products which were exported. At the end of US rule the Philippines was in many ways more dependent than it had been at the beginning of US rule on outside powers.

The United States did not demolish the old social relations (far from it, it reinforced them), so you had a reinforcement of the feudal system which had existed under Spanish rule and not a demolition of that system. US rule saw the emergence of what the revolutionary movements called a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society.

The Communist Party of the Philippines sees its ultimate aim as the realization of communism: it is part of an international movement in that respect. There has to be a socialist revolution. It believes there has to be a first-stage in the revolution and in this stage all forces that can be mobilized against imperialism and against feudalism, should be mobilized. The Communist Party sees the dominant section of Philippine capitalists as completely tied to US imperialism, so it is one of the targets of the revolution. It identifies that stage of the revolution as the national democratic revolution.

The party analysed the forces that could possibly be mobilized against imperialism and against feudalism. It decided that it was quite impossible for the liberal bourgeoisie, which has often been involved in anti-

imperialist, anti-feudal protests in the past, to lead any revolutionary struggle, to decisively take on imperialism and feudalism. The struggle had to be led by the most revolutionary class in society which was the working class and the main ally had to be the peasantry.

The working class in the Philippines made up in the late 60s about 14%-16% of the population. The peasantry made up about 75% of the population. So there was an overwhelming majority of the Philippine people in the peasantry and the working class.

But the party also believed that it wasn't enough even to bring these two classes together in a revolutionary struggle, it looked further for potential revolutionary forces, not to take the lead in the revolution but as allies in the revolution. There were forces which were identified as the middle-bourgeoisie - owners of small works in the towns and so on - the urban petty bourgeoisie, the intelligentsia, etc. The urban bourgeoisie made up about 6-8% of the population. The CPP also considered that although the liberal bourgeoisie certainly couldn't play any leading role and would waver in any revolutionary struggle, still, it had a positive role to play.

And the enemies of the revolution were the big bourgeoisie that was tied to imperialism, the landlords and of course, US imperialism.

The United States still has a very powerful position in the Philippines. I have mentioned the economic ties and those are still great. The United States owns huge sections of Philippine industry, it has big investments there, the US banks have made large loans to the Philippines and of course they demand their money back with interest. There are large plantations owned by American corporations such as Del Monte. So there is a big US economic and financial interest there. There are also strategic interests at stake. There are two major US bases in the Philippines, one of which is just as big as the Isle of Wight. And these are important for the United States domination in South East Asia. They form part of the global struggle with the Soviet Union and also against the national liberation movements in the area. So the United States has a big stake there and its not going to let go of that stake very easily at all.

The Communist Party was founded in December 1968 and within a very short period of time it founded the New Peoples Army. The New Peoples Army was under the leadership of the party. It launched an armed struggle in a fairly remote part of the countryside. Now, it didn't rely on arms supplies sent in from abroad. It is actually very hard to do this anyway because the Philippines is a group of islands and to get supplies in from abroad would be difficult. But as a matter of principle anyway the CPP believed it had to be self reliant. And this was the course that the New People's Army took. Arms were obtained illegally at first by purchase and the army as it grew was equipped with captured weapons. Its very unusual in that you have a revolutionary army there which is actually equipped with American weaponry because it took it off the Philippines' army. The gains made through captures, through ambushes, through armed conflicts with Philippines regular forces have been tremendous. In 1969 the New Peoples

Army had 200 automatic rifles; today it has over 10,000 and they were practically all captured in conflicts with the Philippines' regular army. There is quite a problem these days in that the New Peoples Army is growing faster than it can equip its troops. But they are still mainly reliant upon weapons they can capture.

This armed revolution has been based in the countryside. The countryside is where the Philippine state, where the ruling classes are at their weakest. It is difficult for the Philippines' army and the Philippines' government to control the vast areas in the countryside and so it was logical to build up revolutionary bases there. The New Peoples Army didn't just go and start fighting the government, it had a political programme as well. It was always an army where politics commanded the gun.

A wholesale land reform was quite impossible but what the New Peoples Army has done in areas where it has been strong is to organise the peasants there and they put pressure on the landlords to cut down the rent so that the peasants keep more of what they produce. This is like a step towards land reform, as full land reform is not feasible in most places at the moment. In a few areas it has taken place but in most of the Philippines where the NPA operates it's not possible. However, rent reduction is standard practice. The landlords could be leaned upon. When they found - if you can put yourselves in their shoes for a moment - if you find armed peasants demanding that you put down their rents you are likely to say yes and this is what happens.

The New People's Army brought in young intellectuals from the cities who could work in the countryside, in some cases teaching literacy, in many cases providing medical assistance to people and giving basic medical advice. Medics travel around with the NPA. NPA units are not based at a particular place all the time, they roam around. They have clear operational areas, they speak of guerrilla fronts, not of liberated areas. It is not possible to establish liberated areas at this stage.

The NPA is quite creative in the way it supports the people's movement. It tries to link up with the initiatives of the legal movement as well and that is itself a tribute to the role of the Communist Party. I'll give a couple of examples. There was a campaign in the Philippines against a nuclear power station that was being built. The nuclear power station was on the main island, Luzon and it was not that far from the capital. It was built on the model of the Three Mile Island power station, so that should say something for its likely safety record but on top of this it was built in an area where there were volcanoes and it was built on a fault, so that was asking for trouble. There was a long campaign against this power station. There was a very successful action which was probably the final nail in the coffin of this project, when there was what was called a people's strike, which was organised semi-legally, where people protested all throughout the area and they stayed away from schools and workplaces, there were demonstrations, protests and so on. And at the same time as this movement was going on, the NPA came along and it blew up the electricity pylons on the way from the power station. Here was a situation where a

legal movement, and an illegal movement effectively worked together, hand in hand. And there was one further proof to the mass of the people that the NPA stood with them and fought for their interests.

In recent times there have been attacks by what they call NPA "sparrow-squads" in the cities. In a number of instances attacks were made on police officers who were involved in the violent suppression of strikes. There was one incident I remember it was several years ago - which was reported here of course, as a terrorist act. The police officer who had been shot off duty was actually somebody who had been involved in ordering 'soldiers to fire on picket lines and a number of pickets had been killed in that incident. So there again there was the illegal movement supporting a legal movement and onidentification of interests there.

The New Peoples Army aims not be a burden on the people. Where they operate they have a rent reduction system but they also have a tax system. It's a very light taxation system but they need to have money simply to operate. And the people accept this, they believe that this is necessary and it helps their army. So it is not a question of taxes being collected at gun point. People know that this is necessary. The army also taxes foreign corporations which are operating in NPA areas. There are a number of logging operations and the New Peoples Army attitude to that is that they are against the destruction of the environment in the Philippines, they aim to limit the destruction inflicted by these corporations but in some circumstances they allow the foreign corporations to operate. They levy a tax on them and if they don't pay up then the machinery gets broken and they can't function any more in those areas. So there is taxation on the foreign monopolies which for so long have stolen the wealth of the Philippines from the Filipino people.

Alongside the work in the countryside work proceeded in the cities to build up revolutionary organisations among the workers, women, youth and in other sectors of society. Now in the late 60s and early 70s Philippine society was going into a deeper and deeper crisis and this was reflected in divisions among the ruling classes as well as in the greater hardships that had been suffered by the people. This resulted in the imposition of martial law in 1972 by Marcos. The Communist Party at the time considered that a new situation had arisen. Before, it spoke about waging an anti-feudal and anti-colonial struggle but now it saw it as important to stress opposition to fascism. It believed by focussing on the question of fascism it could rally the broadest possible force against the old society, it could rally the broadest possible revolutionary forces. And it made this opposition to fascism the most prominent part of its programme. It raised the cry, "Down with the US-Marcos dictatorship!" The party considered that it was important to take advantage of the splits within the ruling class to build a broader movement against the dictatorship. And even to draw in, however temporarily, however conditionally, elements of the ruling class belonging to the anti-Marcos factions.

In 1973 the National Democratic Front was formed which included the Communist Party of the Philippines, the New Peoples Army and some sectoral

organisations. It's now grown to have a mass base of over 10 million and is comprised of organisations of revolutionary students, peasants, workers and so on. It includes a group called Christians for National Liberation and even an organisation of patriotic business people which was formed just before Marcos was overthrown. The Party itself has grown to 100,000 members, from 150 in 1969 when the armed struggle began.

From what I have said so far it should be fairly clear that the Communist Party has been very flexible in dealing with the situations it's faced and has not been bound by received wisdoms from other countries. I think many in the West would look askance at the idea of a revolutionary Christian organisation, they would find this a very strange notion indeed but in the Philippines you have a situation where the great majority of the people are religious, they are devout Christians. The Communist Party analysed the role of the Church and the role of priests in Philippine society. Priests and nuns actually played a prominent role in the revolutionary struggle against Spain at the end of the last century. There is a differentiation in the Church, the Church which is subject to class divisions like the rest of society. In the top ranks of the Church they see eye to eye with the oppressing classes but at the bottom of the Church where there are priests or nuns who are working regularly with the poorer sections of the population, many of them identify with the interests of the people there and among those sections of the clergy a base has been built and consolidated in Christians for National Liberation.

When the Aquino government came to power - this was a time when the Communist Party had made a mistake in its analysis. They'd called for people to boycott the elections and they really didn't expect that Marcos would be defeated, they believed that the election would be rigged - as it was - but there was a popular movement in the Philippines which was so strong that the Marcos government was overthrown and Aquino got in as President. The Communist Party took a deep breath and then took stock of its mistakes and said that it had underestimated the isolation of the Marcos government, it had underestimated the power of the peoples movement against that. Then it tried to deal with a new situation. There was a real danger to the revolutionary movement. It would have been quite easy to make the mistake of taking Aquino and her supporters at their word and giving up the armed struggle which was, of course, what the government advocated immediately. But the party and the National Democratic Front didn't do that. They stated what they wanted from the government, they stated what the people's demands were in terms of changes in Filipino society, not even at that point fundamental changes but reforms that were in the peoples interests. They wanted of course, steps towards a real land reform, they wanted a democratisation of the Philippines, they wanted the scrapping of the repressive labour laws that Marcos had used against the labour movement and so on. But even there they showed flexibility. They were ready to enter into a ceasefire with the government but it was a conditional ceasefire, they were not going to lay down their arms in exchange for this ceasefire: they were not going to be tricked into a surrender. And so there was a ceasefire and then peace negotiations broke down, because the government wouldn't simply deliver the goods. And the armed struggle started up again.

In the process of the negotiations with the government the National Democratic Front had shown to a lot of people who may have been in doubt about its intentions, that they did want peace but they also wanted justice and they wanted a basic social change in the Philippines. So this was important in terms of winning over the middle ground, which had strong illusions about the Aquino government. Among most of the workers and peasants, there were very few illusions because they didn't see any real, any basic change in their lives in the countryside and in most of the cities in the Philippines. So this was very important for keeping hold of sections of the middle strata who had illusions, really deep illusions in some cases, about Aquino and what she would bring.

Since Aquino came to power there has been a deterioration in the human rights situation and a reversal back to the situation under Marcos. Aquino still has a liberal reputation abroad but this is not something which is evident in the Philippines. There is something equivalent to the death squads in Central America operating in the Philippines now - vigilante groups. They have been at their worst in the South, in Mindanao but they have been established now even in Manila. They attack people who they suspect of being revolutionary activists.

Still, the Communist Party and the National Democratic Front are very confident about the future. They have gone through a very difficult phase, one which some revolutionary movements have faced before and have come unstuck at. They have kept their heads in analysing the nature of the Aquino regime and didn't allow themselves to be swept off their feet by its initial promises of reform. Now they feel confident about the revolution going forward. Several months ago there was an interview with a man who was accused of being Chairman of the Communist Party under Marcos. He spoke about the revolution moving forward from the stage of what they call the strategic defensive to a strategic stalemate where there is a rough equality of power in the country between the revolutionary forces and the counter-revolutionary forces within a space of a couple of years. It's a very short time scale where this is believed to be possible and this actually represents a shortening of the time-scale. Not long before that the stage of strategic stalemate was seen as lying about 5 years away and now it's possibly a couple of years away.

One of the big worries though is about increased American intervention. Several American servicemen were captured by the NPA a few months back and then released. They claimed they were searching for a number of dead airmen or something in the area where the NPA operated and they were released with a caution basically, but there has actually been an incident where some American service men have been killed in the Philippines. The United States is pumping in a lot of money, its also supporting the vigilantes and there is a growing danger of US intervention. It may be that if the revolutionary movement goes the way it's going now in the Philippines that the United States will decide that the only way it can save the Aquino government is to intervene directly itself.

I'll conclude by saying that for many reasons which I have mentioned already, this is an important revolution, something which we need to support. But if we here want to try and take a far-sighted view and to anticipate events we should consider what is likely to be happening in the Philippines in a few years and actually getting ready for it now, because a movement of solidarity is something which will make a difference to the extent of American intervention and the effectiveness of that intervention. And right now the movement in the Philippines is trying to rally as much international support as possible to minimise the danger of intervention and to cut down the United States' support to the reactionary forces. I think it's important that we try and make sure that anybody in Britain who can see, who recognises what's going on in the Philippines really does work hard to mobilize as many people as possible against the danger of US intervention and in solidarity with the Philippine struggle. I think we have got a lot to learn from that struggle, it's something that is very inspiring and for people who are working in our conditions it's important that we should recognize an advanced experience when we see one and be ready to learn from it.

Report given by John Gee from the Philippine Support Group to a public meeting of the Communist Study Group held on 10 March 1988

4 AMERICA : Meeting with Freedom Road Socialist Organization

A stop-over visit this autumn by Bill Fletcher, associate editor of the American journal Forward Motion, allowed for a brief exchange between League members and himself. For further information, two articles on the Freedom Road Socialist Organization follows these notes of the meeting.

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Cde Fletcher talked on the politics of the Freedom Road Socialist Organization, with whom the League exchanges publication.

He gave an outline of the history of his organization coming out of the unity of three ML groups in the U.S. : Proletarian Unity League, Revolutionary Workers Headquarters and Organization for Revolutionary Unity. He pointed out that unity was not made conditional on acceptance of the "Three World Theory". Some aspects of this theory are subject to criticism within FR, but as an organization do not attack "TWT".

He expressed concern at the tendency within the international movement for political flirtation with Gorbachev. Whilst supporting some of the reforms Gorbachev seeks, he should not be regarded as a born again Leninists.

As an organization, Freedom Road has studied the Eurocentrism document and whilst having secondary criticism, generally supports the thrust of its argument.

Speaking on the recent history of ML experience in the U.S., he touched upon familiar themes and the problem of losing tempered comrades, often burnt out by total submersion in organizational life. Despite the difficulties, a political presence has been maintained and signs of growth showing. The organization is winning new recruits from the younger generation, those without a maoist background but from general left activity especially on the issue of solidarity with Nicaragua. The comrade stressed the importance of work with students for winning new recruits. The organization, through its industrial/trade union work, seeks to intergrate with the multi-national working class in North America.

One project Freedom Road sees as very important is to build unity within the working class by securing support for specific struggles. Cde Fletcher was over in Ireland as a guest of Sinn Fein as part of the "Black and Green" project which stresses the mutual interest between Afro-Americans and the Irish national liberation struggle. Such a programme in the U.S. seeks to challenge the often narrow chauvinistic attitude displayed by some Irish-Americans who would support the Republican struggle but not other democratic struggles within the U.S.A.

Freedom Road has been active, but not uncritical, in the Jackson orientated "Rainbow Coalition"; as has the League of Revolutionary Struggle. The comrade believed that their respective political positions were not that different, but that subjective factors, rather than political, precluded an organizational unity.

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Welcome, Freedom Road

Revolutionary unity is always precious, often elusive, and over the years U.S. socialists have had a good deal of trouble building and preserving it. The Marxist-Leninist movement of the early '70s, which initially showed great promise but by the end of the decade was essentially defunct, was not widely known for building unity among the people or on the Left. Yet two determined survivors of that movement—the Proletarian Unity League and the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters—have recently unified in the Freedom Road Socialist Organization.

In different ways, both the RWH and PUL originated in struggle against the ultra-left orthodoxy which held sway over the Marxist-Leninist movement. A dominant ultra-left ideology and politics wreaked havoc on what had been the fastest-growing and most multinational section of the U.S. Left, setting the stage for an epidemic of disillusion, demoralization and defeatism which followed. The retreat of the mass movements and the decrease in militancy weighed especially heavily on the Marxist-Leninists. Born in a period of mass offensive, the new revolutionary organizations did not adjust well to a period of retreat. For many activists, particularly those from radical student backgrounds, the sacrifices, discipline and drudgery necessary to militant activity lost much of their rationale once the scale of struggle had shrunk. And when most of what they had understood as Marxist truth was revealed to be little more than left-wing posturing, many simply abandoned revolutionary politics altogether.

Both the PUL and RWH lost members during the final disintegration of that movement, but both survived as organizations. Both recognized changes in the period, analyzed the errors of the Marxist-Leninist movement, and opened discussion of the many issues raised by the international crisis of Marxism. And alongside these understandings, both our groups continued to believe that daily work in the people's struggles had to go on as the basis of any organization, and that revolutionaries should organize themselves now to take advantage of the opportunities which were sure to come. For the most part, the memberships of both groups kept on keeping on in the confidence that what we had to offer was something sorely needed in the peoples' movements.

Despite these similarities, our organizations had very different origins and developed along different lines. The RWH formed in a split within the Revolutionary Communist Party (formerly the Revolutionary Union), one of the dominant ultra-left groups of the '70s. The PUL, on the other hand, united a number of local collectives opposed to that dominant line during the heyday of founding Party Congresses. Corresponding to these different experiences were a number of differences in ideology and politics. In building unity we had our work cut out for us.

We agreed to focus serious debate and education on an issue central to any revolutionary strategy and tactics in our country—the struggle against white-supremacist national oppression. Since its inception, the PUL placed enormous emphasis on this issue, an emphasis reflected in labor and other organizing, publications, internal study, and recruitment. While the RWH came out of a tradition which downplayed and sometimes opposed the fight against national oppression, its leadership moved quickly to rectify that situation. They turned the attention of their entire group to the national movements, doing extensive collective study which led to a substantial publication, and carrying out a national campaign in support of the United League in Tupelo, Miss. as well as numerous local campaigns in support of Black struggles. The unity process between our groups led to considerable unity on the peculiar nature of national oppression in U.S. society, on the special role played by white-skin national privileges in the history of class struggle here, and on the centrality of these issues to the peoples' movements.

The other major focus of debate in the unity process had to do with organizational principles and methods. We reaffirmed our commitment to building strong revolutionary organization, to using that organization to help lead the peoples' struggles, and to persuading other activists to join us in that work.

Where We're Headed

Freedom Road will undertake a broad range of work. Both the PUL and RWH have had significant success in struggles for trade union reform and in winning local union leadership. Likewise both have made some real contributions in electoral struggles. The PUL also brings to Freedom Road its work in the Black liberation movement, its experience in fighting discrimination in the unions, its work in the gay and lesbian rights movements, and its work among women of color. The RWH brings significant activism in the contemporary student movement; it also brings broader experience in anti-imperialist and international solidarity work as well as its experience in conducting national political campaigns. With vital work in the unions, Black, women's and student movements, in electoral politics, for gay liberation, and in solidarity with Central America and South Africa, Freedom Road looks forward to making a much greater contribution than either the RWH or PUL could on their own.

The name "Freedom Road" calls to mind one of the greatest, most inspiring episodes of revolutionary struggle the people of our country have ever seen—the mass democratic upsurge in the South during and after the Civil War. It bears the mark of the Black movement, which in its centuries-old fight for freedom has always carried forward the demands of all progressive movements. And it unites with the aspiration of millions of people in the U.S. for freedom based on economic equality, political justice, and full popular participation in the exercise of political power.

With the disintegration of the 1970s U.S. Marxist-Leninist movement, a little world collapsed, and many people gave up on socialism altogether. The unification of our two organizations is a small blow against the demoralization so prevalent within the revolutionary Marxist Left. For demoralization could not be more short sighted. If you wanted to fight along with the U.S. people for equality, peace and socialism, there has never been a better time to try your hand at it. More people are looking for new and if necessary radical alternatives. True, many are now looking Rightward, but many will also look Left. Some will go Left, some become their own Left. How many do either depends on what they see. The country has never needed a Left, including its small revolutionary Marxist contingent, more.

In uniting these two very different organizations, in wrapping up this long process and moving on to different challenges and wider growth, we are building a bridge. It is only a small bridge, but one worth building. It will help connect the last period of great upsurge in the U.S. class struggle—the period out of which both our groups arose—to the next. In so doing, we will cross some wide open spaces and rough terrain. We have to help tie in what is left of a generation of revolutionary activists with the leaders of today's new struggles in order to help prepare the resistance of tomorrow. And in putting behind us the movement which spawned our groups, we need to insure that the next generation of revolutionaries will benefit from our largely negative experience, not just by hearing the old stories from the old comrades, but by working closely with militants now adapting hard-won knowledge to new situations. The Freedom Road Socialist Organization has to grow and help build this bridge—and at the same time cross it to merge with what is new.

—Freedom Road National Executive Committee

Successful Left Unity

We are happy to announce that in December 1986, after prolonged and intensive discussions, the Organization for Revolutionary Unity joined the Freedom Road Socialist Organization. The ORU formed around four years ago on the West Coast. Working mainly in the Bay Area, its members have been active in the labor movement and in Central America solidarity work. They also published several pamphlets on topics ranging from the international situation to the role of working women in class struggle.

This unification has some significance beyond what it represents for the members of these two groups. Both FRSO and the ORU trace their histories back to the early 1970s and the "new communist movement." Since the beginning of this decade, however, many of the organizations comprising that movement have dissolved, generally as a result of internal struggles which they could not survive. The FRSO and the ORU can count themselves among the survivors of that period.

Unification has additional significance. The ORU was founded in opposition to the "Three Worlds thesis," the analysis first promulgated by the Communist Party of China in 1977. That thesis divided the world into three general categories according to the relations of countries to the struggle against the U.S. and Soviet superpowers. The ORU, while opposing both superpowers, believed that the Three Worlds thesis encouraged collaboration with the U.S. and other advanced Western capitalist states. FRSO, which was founded in 1985 with the unification of the Proletarian Unity League and the Revolutionary Workers Headquarters, holds to the basic analytical framework represented by the Three Worlds thesis. Believing that this framework is a basically correct and useful way of analyzing united front forces—friends and enemies—on a global scale, the FRSO

also upholds that framework's emphasis on struggles for national liberation and national independence.

Despite these general differences, the ORU and FRSO were able to reach substantial agreement when analyzing specific world events and appropriate tactical responses. Realizing this was an important indicator of basic unity between us gave us confidence in working for greater unity within a single organization. Differences remain, but in our work together over the last two years we have built significant unity around our tasks both in the peoples' movements and in building revolutionary Marxist organization. We have come to agreement on the central role played by white-supremacist national oppression and the national liberation struggles against it in this country. And we have reached new unity around our more immediate work for a mass progressive politics with the Black struggle for parity at its core.

The unification of the ORU and FRSO should also be seen in the context of other similar efforts such as the recent unification of the International Socialists, Workers Power and Socialist Unity to form Solidarity. These successful unity struggles, as well as the work of groups like the League of Revolutionary Struggle and a number of local collectives, all represent efforts to reverse the dissolution and defeatism within the revolutionary Left. While we don't intend to exaggerate the significance of any of our groups, all our efforts can play an important role in rebuilding a national revolutionary Left with an independent socialist vision for the United States.

The FRSO, now joined by the comrades of the ORU, looks forward to working closely with others on the Left. We look forward to building the closest possible ideological, political and organizational unity to help make the revolutionary Left a vital force on the national political scene.

—December 1986

Quite clearly, Sino-Soviet relations have changed out of all recognition from a decade ago when the theory of differentiation of the three worlds described the Soviet Union as "the more ferocious, the more reckless, the more treacherous, and the most dangerous source of war."

A summit meeting between China's Deng Xiaoping and the Soviet Union's Mikhail Gorbachev is "absolutely inevitable" said Soviet Vice-foreign minister, Igor Rogachev visiting Beijing in June. His highly optimistic assessment of Sino-Soviet relations occurred against the background of the twelfth round of talks on normalising political relations.

Just as Beijing has re-evaluated its relationship to Moscow, so it has tempered its ties to Washington. So while most observers believe that a summit meeting is likely to take place next year in Beijing, normalisation with the SU would not be expected to mean a return to a formal alliance -- not least because party ties are not yet restored although East European parties have resumed such bonds with CCP paving the way for such ties once state-to-state relations have sufficiently improved -- but nor are such normalisation expected to damage relations with the USA.

There has been obvious healing in every major dimension of the original split which has strained relations since the late 1950s.

The confrontational military dimension of the relationship that saw armed clashes in 1969 and Soviet consideration of a nuclear attack on China is clearly in decline : both sides have withdrawn thousands of troops from China's northern border, and the SU has offered concessions in the territorial disputes along the Amur River.

China has dropped all reference to "Social Imperialism" or "revisionism" in relation to the SU, although it still speaks out against "hegemonism"; but this applied solely to the sphere of foreign affairs.

Given the developments in Chinese economic policy, to continue to accuse Moscow of revisionism would be difficult. The SU is at the beginning of a road traversed by China since the early 1980s. Then China adopted a series of policies which have diminished the role of the state sector. The only reason there is not a convergence in policies is because of China's advantage in reform experiments.

Now each praises the others bold reform programme.

China's Primeminister Li Peng praised Gorbachev's internal programme in July this year:

" We think that the general direction of reform advanced by Mr Gorbachev in the Soviet Union is good, and we hope they will be able to overcome difficulties and enable the reforms to succeed."

Gorbachev's determination to re-establish good relations with his neighbour was signalled early on in his important 1986 Vladivostok speech. He has regularly repeated this concern:

" We take interest in everything that is being done in the People's Republic of China to regulate and modernize the economy, and wholeheartedly wish the great neighbouring people and the Communist Party of China success in this difficult endeavour."

1988 has seen an improving relationship between the two states. The "three great obstacles" cited by China have diminished in importance: the presence of Soviet troops on the Chinese border, and in Afghanistan has been largely settled leaving only the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea to resolve. Then nothing stands in the way of normalisation.

Li Peng observed that "marked improvements" in relations in the fields of economics, trade, technology, culture and education but that "no big progress has been made in bilateral political relations." Normalisation in all but name has steadily become the main characteristic of Sino-Soviet relations: it is the formal recognition of a summit that is needed to complete this process.

In May 1988, work began again on the rail link between the capital of Xinjiang, Urumqi and Aktogay in the SU, a project abandoned after the Sino-Soviet split. The SU is reportedly providing track and construction equipment in return for Chinese consumer goods worth 300 million Yuan.

Both countries have undertaken to double trade by 1990; cross border trade is expected to exceed £30 million this year. China is now the SU's second largest trading partner in the Pacific (after Japan).

Hu Yaobang told party cadre in the autumn of 1984:

"Developing trade with the SU is killing two birds with one stone: it eases tension, and it provides a new market for our goods ... All this can only be to our benefit, as well as ease world conflicts; besides, our being friendly with the Russians will do nothing to reassure the Americans."

Besides increased consultative meetings on issues of material interest, such as briefing with each other on Washington meetings, Sino-Soviet agreements have been made for the opening of consulates in Leningrad and Shanghai.

A cultural co-operative agreement was signed in May; a month later agreements to increase trade and economic and technical co-operation was signed. Already Soviet technicians are reported to have returned to China to help refurbish old plants, plants abandoned by the SU in the early 1960s.

After twenty years of bitter invective and enmity from both sides, now each implicitly recognise the other as socialist countries. Official Chinese visitors to Moscow for the 70th Anniversary of the October Revolution agreed with their hosts that this was "your festival too."

At the beginning of this year, in an interview for a Chinese newspaper, Gorbachev suggested that a Sino-Soviet Summit be arranged as a "logical development" in improving relations between the two countries. In an interview with L'Unita, newspaper of the Italian Communist Party, he stressed :

"... the Soviet Union has been moving vigorously towards complete normalization of relations between the two largest socialist countries - the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China."

That 'logical development' points to a summit in Beijing by the autumn of 1989. The only cloud on the horizon is if an impasse is reached in the slow progress to a settlement in the Kampuchean conflict.

The Soviet-backed occupation of Kampuchea by Vietnam is viewed by China as the most important obstacle blocking a renewal of formal ties between the SU and China.

China correctly argues that :

" It is impossible for the Vietnamese troops to continue their invasion of Kampuchea without the economic support of the Soviet Union. So the Soviet Union can do something in urging Vietnam to withdraw all its troops from Kampuchea at an earlier date."

This September's discussion raised the issue of Kampuchea, and according to Chinese foreign minister, Qian Qichen, the talks had "done useful work and found some common points, although differences remain over certain major issues."

However, China has made some political accommodation to Hanoi. It has said that members of the settlement coalition government "should be acceptable to all parties concerned" which would exclude the more publically known of the Democratic Kampuchea force. In addition China has also offered to act as hosts on the retirement of Pol Pot and others. Both positions meeting one of Hanoi's major demands.

While China's Vice-foreign minister, Tian Zengpei described the negotiations as having taken place in a "business-like, frank and pragmatic atmosphere", Primeminister Li Peng urged the Soviet Union to "really make some effort to create the necessary conditions for a Sino-Soviet summit." In effect, saying put some pressure on Vietnam. The senior Soviet negotiator voiced hope that Sino-Soviet reconciliation would be made possible by an earlier withdrawal by Vietnamese troops. It seems that Kampuchea is a touchstone in Sino-Soviet relations. What it will determine will be the formal relationship, the cultural and economic relations will be unaffected.

This is clearly seen from agreements signed between the Chinese and Soviet governments this summer:

- * in June, agreement was reached on joint venture and the establishment of economic ties between Chinese and Soviet ministries, departments, corporations and enterprises;
- * in July, a new regulation was signed that Chinese and Soviet citizens holding valid travel certificates will no longer need visas to visit each other's countries on business.

A case of business as normal. Setting the seal on the Sino-Soviet thaw, China announced that its foreign minister, Qian Qichen, will visit Moscow in November or early December. This would be the first such visit in over thirty years. The Chinese foreign ministry described the visit as:

" ...a step forward towards a meeting of the top leaders of the two countries."

In September, Mr Gorbachev said he was eager to start summit preparations without delay. Resortation of more "correct" relationship is also the Chinese intention as the foreign ministry commented:

" It is our hope that the two sides will work in this direction. "

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Contributed.