

Ripples: the 1990s and After

In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and events in China, political compasses were discarded and historical confidence ebbed. The advent of Gorbachev and eventual fall of the Berlin Wall and Cold War division of Europe were background milestones in the disintegration of the Western Maoist movement. In the Soviet Union Gorbachev's attempts to firstly reform, and then liberalize the Soviet politico-economic system provoked, after the thwarted August Coup, that system's collapse in 1991. "Fascist Coup Defeated... People Celebrate Soviet Dis-Union" was the RCLB's *Class Struggle* headline¹, while the AKP (ML) and MLPD likewise sided with the "determined resistance of the Soviet people"².

In a trend, reflective of a reconciliation demonstrated at the International Mayday seminars held in Brussels, January 1998 saw the creation of the Committee for the Marxist-Leninist Party. William Bland was instrumental in this process that brought together ideologically-diverse 'anti-revisionists' from a pro- Soviet breakaway from the New Communist Party, the unreconstructed diehards of the Stalin Society, and individual organisational-less Maoists. In quick succession it renamed itself, the National Committee for the Marxist-Leninist Party, then in 2000 re-christened the National Committee for Marxist-Leninist Unity and what eventually emerged in 2003 as the online, Communist Party Alliance.

Bland's political vehicle, the Communist League was saved from oblivion by an internet audience and web allies in North America, *Alliance ML*³, formed in 1989, by former members of the Albania-USA Friendship Society and its sister organization, *Canadian Class Struggle*. They were linked to the (pro-Albanian) international grouping, the *International Struggle Marxist Leninist* (ISML), as well as the journal *Revolutionary Democracy* in India. Bland maintained a pro-Albanian stance after Enver Hoxha's death but then condemn 'the betrayal of socialism' under the leadership of Ramiz Alia. William Bland died on March 13th 2001 and a memorial meeting was organised by the Stalin Society and held at Conway Hall on Sunday, April 22nd 2001⁴.

The trajectory of the RCPB (ML) international went in a different direction. Its first delegation to visit North Korea had direct talks with the International Department of the Workers' Party of Korea during October 18- November 4 1997. Without endorsing the Juche Idea over that of Marxism-Leninism, in a meeting held at Marx House in London on November 23 1979, the RCPB (ML) expressed their considered belief.

"One of these is that there is now one communist movement. Each party has had to find its bearings in the new situation following the end of the bipolar division of the world, and it has now been possible for parties who previously had been divided or not even known to each other to develop relations, not basing these relations on some dogmatic criteria, not basing them on jumping to conclusions on superficial observations, not allowing any ideological differences to divide the movement, but basing the relations on building political unity against imperialism and social democracy."⁵

¹ RCLB, *Class Struggle*, Vol 15 No8 September 1991.

² MLPD, *Rote Fahne* 24th August 1991

³ <http://ml-review.ca/aml/index.html>

⁴ <http://www.lalkar.org/issues/contents/may2001/bb.htm>

⁵ *Workers Weekly* 29th November 1997 Vol27. No.19 p20

Relations, firstly around the anti-war movement and solidarity with North Korea, developed with the New Communist Party, a pro-Soviet break-way from the Communist Party, originally based on the Surrey District led by Sid French. The RCPB (ML) argued the DPRK was important to support because it self-declared itself a stronghold of Socialism and after the collapse of the Soviet Union "acted as a rallying point for many communists and other progressive political parties in the midst of a confusing situation"⁶



DPR Korea London diplomat Mun Myong Sin, Dermot Hudson of the UK Korea Friendship Association, Michael Chant and Andy Brooks NCP general secretary.

These political encounters with what were former opponents became more social as increasingly they were speaking on the same platforms: they attended meetings at the John Buckle Centre and joint statements were issued in both parties' name⁷. At its 15th Congress in 2006, Andy Brookes NCP General Secretary "praised the positive contribution the RCPB (ML) had made towards advancing communist unity through co-operation and dialogue with the NCP over the years." But no date was set for the wedding.

Elsewhere, the two-member Finsbury Communist Association survived into the new century, and maintained its record as the oldest continuous anti-revisionist group. The mainstays of the FCA, Florence and Ivor Kenna, had been expelled from the Communist Party and since then has been a running commentary on life and politics in the London borough of Islington, the Marxist-Leninist movement and the world from Compton Street EC1 producing a four-page stencilled monthly entitled *The Finsbury Communist* that first appeared in February 1965.

Throughout the first half of the 1990s, FCA did contribution to a quarterly journal, referred to as '*Open Polemic*'⁸. Its masthead read: 'communist Open Polemic for revolutionary unity', and it attracted polemical contributions, either self-submitted or extracted from organisation's publications, from a broad definition of self-declared 'Marxist-Leninists'. Besides the Finsbury Communist Association, its pages saw analysis by an eclectic collection of individuals (including Ted Hankin, Paul Cockshott, Matt Lygate) and small groups (Partisan, RCG, Red Action, Mosquito Press, Workers Party of Scotland, the Trotskyist Unity group) and carry a critical 'reflection' on Open Polemics from the RCLB. The intention was a discussion journal acting as a catalyst for a new party building organisation. The result, as the *Finsbury Communist* reported, was that:

"Open Polemic held a conference on the 14th January to discuss the 'definition of the Revolutionary class under Advanced Capitalism'. 15 people attended.

⁶Workers' Weekly V. 28, No. 25 1998

⁷ i.e. No War on Iraq! Reject the Use of Force! Defend the Rights of All! Joint Call of NCP and RCPB (ML), September 28, 2002.

⁸ Published Issue one (Spring 1991) – Issue Eleven (March 1995)

A majority rejected the revolutionary class being defined as the industrial working class. No conclusion was reached to who the revolutionary class is.”⁹

While such clear detail and gossip as the mainstay of FCA’s output, it represents the small group mentality that was all too prevalent in the early and not so early days of the anti-revisionist movement. The Finsbury Communist Association was described early in its existence as representing the highest expression of oppositionist behaviour. In essence what this meant was FCA’s opposition by word or deed, unaccompanied by political analysis, to the attempts by other groups to do anything. The self-appointed critics in the F.C.A. saw this as preventing the development of an opportunist party. Instead the FCA was used in opportunist temporary alliances within the movement as well as acting in an opportunist manner to substantiate its own disruptive existence. They inhabited the fringes of the movement as well as in the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding and Celtic League. The Finsbury Communist Association and others like them could survive amidst the multitude of anti-revisionist chieftains, subjectivism and vulgarising of Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought. Unfortunately in all its existence, the FCA did not contribute to the growth of the movement demonstrating that longevity is no arbiter of right or wrong.

There was the diluted Maoist heritage found in the *Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist)* established in 2004. Harpal Brar was the leading member of the Association of Communist Workers, dissolved in 1997 at his entrance into the Socialist Labour Party led by former miners’ leader Arthur Scargill. After his expulsion seven years later, after failing in his work to bring what was described as an ‘Anti-Revisionist Marxist-Leninist programme’ to the SLP, Brar was the founder-Chair of the CPGB (ML). With its all-encompassing defence of ‘existing socialism’ in China, Cuba and North Korea’s Democratic People’s Republic, and Zimbabwe, it lauds an unconditional solidarity, what it regards as radical internationalism. Indiscriminately champions the universal contributions of theory and practice of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Mao as a pantheon that fossilises those

contributions, more a recipe for ideological confusion rather than revolutionary advance.



CPGB (ML) contingent on the May Day 2008 march in London

The CPGB (ML) offers a home to some, including for a brief period, some former political opponents very critical of Chairman Brar, the activities of the Association of Communist Workers and life within the Socialist Labour Party. Within the CPGB (ML) there is more stress on an earlier form of anti-revisionism, and less stress on the Maoist innovations that characterised the movement, with Brar a leading member of the Stalin Society, writing in defence of the Soviet Union up until the death of Stalin in 1953.

⁹ Movement News. *Finsbury Communist*: an anti-revisionist journal. February 1995

“During the long years of his leadership of the CPSU, Stalin fought with might and main against all opportunistic distortions of Marxism Leninism. In defending and safeguarding the revolutionary teachings of the science of Marxism Leninism, he helped to enrich and further develop the theory and practice of the science of proletarian revolution. In attacking and negating Stalin at the 20th Party Congress of the CPSU, Khrushchev was, in effect, attacking and negating the dictatorship of the proletariat and the fundamental teachings of Marxism Leninism – teachings which Stalin had throughout his life so vehemently, so brilliantly and so successfully defended and developed.

This is the true significance, the essence, of Khrushchev’s attack on Stalin.”¹⁰

The *Communist Organisation of England* briefly emerged from the Mosquito Press grouping, proclaimed to be based on Juche philosophy it moved away from its Maoist origins in the RCLB. While it produced a founding declaration under its own name, COE’s main focus was working inside the small circulation journal, *Ireland War’s* support group and various Korea Friendship publications and organisations. The group did not last, within 18 months there was a breakdown in relations between Hugh and ‘Keith Anderson’, and the dissolution of the alliance with the SCRP. Then the ‘single member’ COE was re-badged as the Communist Organisation of Britain retaining an interest in issuing statements and speaking in support of North Korea, its leaders and philosophy. It shared his attention with the co-existent vehicle, the Institute of Independence Studies set up under the directorship of ‘Hugh Stephens’ before his entry to academic teaching. Hugh now speaks at Korea friendship meetings under his own name.

Nowadays, the number of individual ex-Maoists retaining a political activism unattached to an organisational membership would be greater than those still organisationally active. Given the usual lack of disclosure of membership strength by fringe or extreme political organisations the numbers influenced by their direct participation are hard to gauge. Informed speculation¹¹ would suggest a guestimate on the total number that passed through membership of all Maoist organisations in Britain is in the order of three thousand, a number matched by the membership of the SWP or Militant at their height.

All this compares unfavourable to the numbers say in Germany, where, in 1977, according to the security watchdog Office for the Protection of the Constitution calculated around 12-15,000 active German Maoist revolutionaries. Ex-Maoist Gerd Koenen thought 80-100,000 passed through Maoist groups in Germany in the 1970s.¹²

The initial anti-revisionists/Maoists, out of the old Communist Party in the early Sixties, were never that numerous nor united in a single organisation: the numbers involved around a hundred activists with unknown amount of passive resisters. Late Sixties saw a rapid growth and turnover during its radical student phase as new organisations were formed but then there was a slow numerical decline throughout the 1970s. The CPB (ML), Birch’s party, was rightly regarded as the largest, nudging, according to ex-members, around three hundred at its height. Once the Second Wave of Maoism waned and student recruits were less forthcoming, the number of Maoists remained constant with very little organic growth – an organisation like the RCLB grew mainly by the fusion with other smaller groups and was around eighty strong at its height in the late 1970s. It stood at about twenty when it dissolved.

Others like the CPE (ML) later RCPB (ML) nudged a core membership of fifty in the early 1970s, its best time, an offshoot, the Workers Institute around twenty at its height, other groups were large if

¹⁰ E.g. <http://cpgb-ml.org/download/publications/RevisionismUSSR.pdf>

¹¹ Anecdotal evidence

¹² Das Rote Jahrzehnt Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch 2001 p18

counted its membership near a dozen (like the Birmingham Communist Association) and then down to two people and a dog groups like Finsbury Communist Association, and the Communist Organisation of Britain¹³.

There was an increase in the late 1970s/early 1980s though mainly Kurdish and some Iranian settlement in the country, but these could not numerically compensate for the general dissolution of the Maoist movement. These Maoists were disconnected from any multi-party-building strategy, mirroring the experience of those organisations based on the established national minorities' communities. While not disputing the political influence within their communities and on broad fronts they worked in, they seem no more numerically significant as an organised force – the Association of Indian Communists reputedly not reaching two hundred in membership¹⁴ – and again mirrored an inability to recruit and grow. This failure characterised the movement: its inability to sustain an organisational form and build a core leadership and rank and file movement.

The “new century” attempt at party-building was less evidence of growth than a testimony to the fidelity of long-time activists as in statements of solidarity and meetings, mainly on the struggle in India, pour forth from 2009 onwards from the London based *Co-ordination Committee of Revolutionary Communists of Britain*. It sought to co-ordinate Maoist and anti revisionist groups in UK particularly amongst the Nepali, Indian, Turkish and Philippine communities, and said it had “embarked on the preparatory stage of party building”¹⁵. It sought to start base building, developing a new strategy for a British Path to Socialism, partly influenced by the (New) Communist Party of Italy who promoted development of a Maoist revolutionary strategy to pursue in a European Imperialist country.¹⁶

However in practice, the Co-ordination Committee proved to be a loose association of three organisations – *Democracy and Class Struggle* [DCS], *George Jackson Socialist League* and *Revolutionary Praxis* – each advertising and mutually supporting each other's activities, e.g. such as London protests at the Indian High Commission against the murder of Comrade Azad, the state's Operation Green Hunt and Indian Expansionism.¹⁷

There was a notable concentration on events in the Indian sub-continent in the work of the largely internet-active DCS, based on a veteran member of the Indian Workers Association. The legacy of Maoism it defended was the radical impulse of ‘People's War’ and Kumar Sakar, through *Second Wave Publications* distributed material in support of People's War in India and Nepal. DCS criticism of the RCP, USA for its opposition to the national leadership in Nepal, grew to condemn the developments within the American organisation for what it saw as the rejection of Maoism and replacement by Avakianism:

¹³ In 1998 COB had unbelievably claimed 28 year existence; presumably most of it invisible, underground or as ML entrists hidden in other organisations.

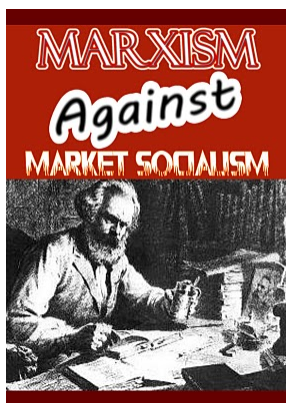
¹⁴ Anecdotal evidence

¹⁵ Statement by Democracy and Class Struggle 30th Jan. 2010 on the meeting in Paris organised by the *Parti Communiste Maoïste de France* [Maoist Communist Party of France] on 30th – 31st January 2010 which sought to develop Marxist Leninist Maoist Party building in Europe.

¹⁶ *Manifesto Program of the (new) Italian Communist Party*. First edition published in March 2008 <http://www.nuovopci.it/eile/en/in080619.html>

¹⁷ Co-ordination Committee of Revolutionary Communists of Britain: Call for mobilisation and support from Co-ordination Committee of Revolutionary Communists of Britain for Indian High Commission Demonstration in London on 15th August 2010

On Comrade Mao's Birthday we call for defense of Marxism Leninism Maoism and the rejection of Prachanda's Neo Revisionism and Avakian's Post Maoism.¹⁸



DCS did produce, *Marxism against Market Socialism* (April 2010), this publication critically examined late 20th century developments in China, through a series of essays combating market socialism, will, its publicity claimed, contribute to the clarification of the political economy of Socialism which revisionism confused with the political economy of Capitalism in the 20th Century. The position that it was “essential to understand the capitalist character of contemporary China” was expressed by ‘Nickglais’ of Democracy and Class Struggle to a meeting in Conway Hall London in October 2008 organised by Second Wave Publications.¹⁹

A Maoist group within the Black Community in London, the George Jackson Socialist League of Tongogara Otewodros²⁰ maintains a public presence for Maoism, organising public meetings of commemoration, such as those for George Jackson²¹ and Claudia Jones, and agitational campaigning meetings, in particular around the case of imprisoned Black American radical journalist, Mumia Abu-Jamal²².



Harry Powell of Revolutionary Praxis, the Nottingham-based group, raised the question ‘*Is this the End - Maoism in Britain*’²³ and came out without any hopeful conclusion. Was anyone listening? The only registered online response was from an Italian Maoist, Paolo Babini of the optimistic Party of the Committees to Support Resistance - for Communism (CARC-Italy). This intervention is reflective of the international outreach to ideological co-thinkers and includes contact with a small grouping in France, Parti Communiste Maoïste de France whom the DCS expresses support for their “call for International Red Aid at a national and international level as a means for developing the necessary higher levels of solidarity than at present.”²⁴



The fruitfulness of this approach was partly seen when there was an attempt to rally the forces with a meeting addressed by Norwegian Maoist, Kenneth Fuglemsmoen of Tjen folket (Serve the People) at a joint meeting under the auspices of the Co-Ordination Committee of Revolutionary Communists of Britain. Under the advertised title of "The Present International and National situations and the tasks of creating a revolutionary communist party in Britain", it was arranged at the perennial favourite of the London Left, Conway Hall, on December 17th 2008; it failed to coalesce the remaining veterans into a pre-party

¹⁸ See: <http://democracyandclassstruggle.blogspot.co.uk/2012/12/post-maoism-myth-propagated-by-rcpusas.html>; and, <http://democracyandclassstruggle.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/international-dimensions-of-prachandas.html>

¹⁹ Contemporary China - What is its social character is it capitalist or is it socialist?

²⁰ A veteran activist formerly in the CWLB and RCLB.

²¹ e.g. 23rd September 2010 at Karibu Education Centre, 7 Gresham Road, Brixton, London SW9 7PH

²² <http://www.freemumia.com/who-is-mumia-abu-jamal/>

²³ <http://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.ebbingtide/powell.htm>

²⁴ Statement by Democracy and Class Struggle 30th Jan. 2010

organisation. In a real sense the problem was pithily summed up in a blog response to the leaflet produced by the Co-ordination Committee of the Revolutionary Communists of Britain's 2010 British General Election²⁵ - "Should do, would do, but no how do."

Still there is a vision, expressed by one participant, Revolutionary Praxis, that:

It is through political action that we reach out to people with our revolutionary message. We engage in the fight to defend working people against the impact of capitalism's economic crisis, to oppose murderous imperialist wars, to combat racism and fascism, to protect young and old people and so on. Communists must strive to provide leadership to fight back wherever there is oppression and exploitation. Only if we succeed in these tasks will we create the revolutionaries necessary for forming a vanguard, revolutionary party.²⁶

Powell continues his long association with book selling in the online 'Alternative Bookshop'²⁷ advertising radical material along with writing to defend Maoism and Mao²⁸. There is online commentaries under the name of Revolutionary Praxis, having earlier politically flirt with those around the Stalin Society and engaged with the process that saw the formation of the miniscule Communist Party Alliance.

Former allies around the increasingly infrequent pro- Revolutionary Internationalist Movement magazine, *A World to Win*,²⁹ established the World People's Resistance Movement (Britain) in June 2002 "with a meeting of people from different nations and nationalities including Turkish, Kurdish, Iranian, English, African and Latin American people from London." ³⁰

World People's Resistance Movement holds its meetings at the 100 Flowers Cultural Centre, Dalston, and a membership drawn mainly from national minority communities, poses the question how far the WPRM is engaged in party-building activities as distinct from being a broad front of pro-Maoist solidarity activists. In a major statement, *Britain 2009*³¹ it raised questions,

"why have some sections of the anti-globalisation and anti-war movements not developed into a revolutionary movement? Why could such a massive anti-war movement not stop the ruling class attacking and occupying Iraq? Why has a movement against the war on Afghanistan not developed? Why has the just struggle in the North of Ireland for independence against the British state, with the so-called peace process been disregarded? Why has the intensification of suppression of the people, particularly the Moslem and Black youth, been overlooked? Why are radical forces dominated by pragmatism and spontaneity? And, why are we unable to carry out a comprehensive scientific analysis of the society and find proper answers for many key questions it poses?"

²⁵ British General Election - Don't Vote - Organise and Fight Back. 2010 leaflet

²⁶ *FOR A NEW WORLD: MANIFESTO OF REVOLUTIONARY PRAXIS* posted at <http://www.revolutionarypraxis.org/>

²⁷ <http://www.alternativebookshop.com/>

²⁸ See: *Defend the Memory of Mao!* And also *Chinese Communist Critiques of Soviet Society* both on EROL.

²⁹ *BCM World to Win*, London WC 1 N 3XX U. K. Last issue No. 32 published in 2006.

³⁰ They have an internet presence: <http://www.wprm.org/index2.html>.

³¹ *Britain 2009* by WPRM (Britain) posted at <http://www.wprmbritain.org/wp/> on May 30, 2009

The activists saw the need to change: with its roots in “Supporters of the RIM in Britain”, initially, the group’s politics favoured the concerns associated with the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement. In its ‘Britain 2009’ statement, WPRM (Britain) acknowledged that it ignored “the particularities of this country “in its practical work, and that there was

“a severe lack of general understanding about the workings of this society. We need to accept the fact that we have confusion in analysing the objective situation and anarchy in everything else. But the will to change is becoming stronger, and through a well thought and planned process, we could change ourselves and others, join forces and overcome these fundamental problems.”³²

There was a major rupture in its orientation that saw the WPRM group criticise the RCP, USA on its position in relation to the struggle in Nepal and later the promotion of Bob Avakian’s “New Synthesis.” Indeed, the damning conclusion on their former allies was that the RCP (USA), which was established 35 years ago to carry out revolution in the top imperialist country, had completely failed and remained grossly insignificant, so it also provides a good example of what not to do.³³

The rich tradition of overseas-born communists organising principally around issues “back home” (rather than full integration into the domestic class struggle as seen in the Indian experience in Britain) continued.

At Woolwich Town Hall, London, on 10 August, 2009 Chairman Prachanda of the UCPN (Maoist) spoke at meeting of Nepali Samaj UK to an audience of three hundred British Nepali compatriots. Most of the meeting and interaction was conducted in the Nepali language but Prachanda spoke in English to explain the new dynamic involved in Marxism Leninism Maoism.

“Mao Zedong did not copy Leninism but developed Marxism Leninism according to the specific conditions of China first giving rise to Mao Zedong thought but following the Cultural Revolution to Maoism - hence Marxism Leninism Maoism.

Prachanda Path is the application of Marxism Leninism Maoism to the highly specific character of the Nepalese Revolution. This concrete analysis of concrete conditions is the soul of Marxism according to Lenin and the Nepalese Revolution has led to specific Nepalese interpretations of Protracted War and Multi-party Democracy said comrade Prachanda.”³⁴



He was introduced to two British representatives of the newly formed Co-ordinating Committee of Revolutionary Communists of Britain and the organisations present, the National Democratic Front of the Philippines and the CPGB (ML) and the WPRM, were thanked for their attendance.

There is a residue of Maoist influence in Britain that lies within those communities still attached to the anti-imperialist struggle still waged throughout the Third World. The attempt to inspire and implant a sustained movement, based on British political conditions, has been unsuccessful. WPRM makes the judgement that with the exception of advances of revolutionary movements in Nepal and

³² *Britain 2009* by WPRM (Britain)

³³ *The Criterion of Truth* Posted by WPRM on June 17, 2010

See also: *British Maoists Criticize “Quixotic” Revolutionaries’ position on Nepal* posted May 2010

³⁴ <http://democracyandclassstruggle.blogspot.co.uk/2009/08/chairman-prachanda-in-london-speaks-of.html>

India, revolutionary practices have repeatedly missed their acclaimed targets. The WPRM posed the question:

Then, why have we failed in this country? The answer is certainly not lack of practice, because none of us has been passive, and we have continuously put into practice whatever we understood from the revolutionary theory. So, what is new in continuing as before? Because, having a few more people, without synthesising our failure, does not spontaneously change the quality, or the outcome of our political activities..... We need to create a revolutionary and democratic environment, within which, all groups and individuals are able to freely express their views and carry out their revolutionary activities independently to flourish creativity. We also need to coordinate our political activities, to influence the class struggle in Britain and support struggles elsewhere. These would develop something new and what the people need.³⁵

Still, the belief was that “the main problem is lack of a powerful alternative” as mass movements in Britain have been dominated by pragmatism and spontaneity and revolutionary politics has been unable to advance and develop, and at present is extremely weak. There remain political and ideological criticisms within the remaining organised Maoists in Britain as seen in the response of Powell to an article by former allies in WPRM: *The Criterion of Truth*. Fellow RCP, USA supporter, Harry Powell criticised WPRM for its “undialectical and idealist” assessment of the organisation they once both looked towards for political guidance. While concurring with dismissing “idealist tendencies [that] have now become manifest in putting forward Bob Avakian’s “New Synthesis” – not a product of the practice of the RCP but Bob’s own unique creation - as the answer to the problems of the ICM.”³⁶

The political practice of Revolutionary Praxis reflects an assessment that experience has shown that a Maoist revolutionary organization in Britain cannot emerge from international solidarity work alone, that building a revolutionary movement in Britain, “will not be done by small, closed meetings in London to debate the correctness or otherwise of the line of the UCPN(M) or the validity of the Thoughts of Chairman Bob.”³⁷



Revolutionary Praxis at Chesterfield May Day 2010

Afterword

Political Opponents from its earliest days have ridiculed the notion that Maoism could offer anything to the traditional British political struggle: The opinion was there no political, social or economic basis for any kind of Maoist movement in Britain. What would they do in England? They could launch their war from Hainault Forest, hide out along the Pennines, or they could build autonomous bases in Snowdonia. So what specifically Maoist things would a Maoist party do in Britain? Wear olive green jackets and caps and chant phrases from the Little Red Book?

³⁵ Britain 2009 by WPRM (Britain)

³⁶ Harry Powell, On the Primacy of Practice (June 2010)

³⁷ Harry Powell, On the Primacy of Practice (June 2010).

The funny satire of 'Chairman Dave Wheelbarrow' illustrates the ease at which caricatures could be drawn. That picture drew upon perceptions from the early immature days of the movement, the waving of the Little Red Book, and language learnt from 'Peking Review'. The Chinese imagery from the Cultural Revolution that suggests Maoism had a limited application³⁸. Critics would even throw in the lyrics of John Lennon for ridicule:

You say you'll change the constitution
Well, you know
We all want to change your head
You tell me it's the institution
Well, you know
You better free your mind instead
But if you go carrying pictures of chairman Mao
You ain't going to make it with anyone anyhow
Don't you know it's gonna be all right



The humour of Chairman Dave Wheelbarrow

Maoism throughout Western world, according to the standard view wheeled out by political opponents, was a product of a misplaced enthusiasm for the Cultural Revolution amongst 1960s and 1970s, radicals chanting Mao's Slogans, aphorisms and odd folksy stuff. Seemingly the main Maoist strategy was unavailable to them, and said not to trust the working class anyway, they were supporters of whoever they see as the 'oppressed' groups in society whilst cheering on Maoism in the 'third world'. The association of Maoism – as if it were a monolithic trend – with the tragedy of Cambodia and an understanding that only sees killing fields, was, for western critics, said to have finally revealed its bankruptcy as an ideology.

As with so many charges levelled within the Left, there would be little recognition on the basis of self-definition and self-perception. To define Maoism as being synonymous with that narrative sketched out is incredibly arbitrary: not only highly selective and ill-informed of the actual history and content but sloppy, lazy engagement.

In reality, Maoism as a specific political current in Britain had its roots in the context of the Sino-Soviet split and only later the political ferment of the Cultural Revolution.

In the early 1960s the dominant established and largely pro-Soviet leadership expelled communists who sought to build a movement around the perception of Soviet Union's rejection of Marxism's main ideological tenets. The majority of organisations were small and isolated formed by members opposed to the 'revisionism' of the Communist Parties: exemplified by Michael McCreery's Committee to Defeat Revisionism, for Communist Unity. These communists identified with the Sino-Albanian side of the polemic largely because the arguments *reflected their own concerns* and criticisms both of the revisionism of their own party leadership and the anti-Stalin criticism of the CPSU under Khrushchev.

The anti-revisionist groups were initially characterised by pro-Stalin sentiments, regarding criticism of Stalin, such as Khrushchev's 1956 'Secret Speech', as an attack on the experience of building socialism in the Soviet Union. In opposing the Soviet notion of a party and state "of the whole people", opponents were wary of anything that diluted an orientation to factory-based workers in domestic politics. Internationally the policy of "peaceful existence" under Khrushchev seemed more

³⁸ <http://web.archive.org/web/20060104144408/www.davewheelbarrow.org.uk/index.html>

an accommodation with, mainly, American Imperialism, contrasted with anti-revisionist rhetorical support for militant (so much the better if armed) struggles against Western Imperialism.

By the early Sixties the conviction, far from an orthodox position, that class contradictions and class struggle continues in socialist societies, led Mao to consider that if socialism had been overthrown in the Soviet Union, China could suffer the same fate and derail the historic struggle to go forward to build a communist society. The appeal of Maoism to its Western supporters was never simply negative, in part a means to differentiate one's politics from Maoism's converse – the Soviet Union and the politics of the pro-Moscow Communists.

Maoism was not only a criticism of what had gone wrong, it provided an alternative.

For its adherents, Maoism involves big questions: it provided a framework of reference for fundamental Marxist concern such as what constitutes a revolutionary road. These had a romantic appeal amidst the campus radicalism, which briefly swept the universities and colleges of the industrialised world in 1968.

With the primacy of an international identification (as pro-China) and the subjective need to support the global analysis and strategies of the CPC, there was still space for political manoeuvre and a range of possibilities and flexibility in response. Maoists in Britain (and elsewhere) interpreted events in China, mediated by perceptions of their own domestic environment and the prism of a wider ideological allegiance.

Maoism is characteristically discussed in relation to Chinese political culture and developments or in the context of either of movements operating in a rural Third World insurgency. Political activists in the industrialised urban societies would seem ill-equipped to emulate the strategy and tactics employed in the Chinese national liberation struggle and the concept of 'New Democracy' that were seen largely as applicable to the Third World. The teleological dimension - the ideological belief of taking part in a universal and historically necessary process - saw opposition to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) partly on the basis that it had deviated from the initial Leninist project: Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the structures and operation of a vanguard party, and the application of proven strategies and tactics.

Mao had an answer to maintain the revolutionary impulse, to stop the ruling party leadership from being conservative, staid and straying from the revolutionary path. In 1966 Mao unleashed political chaos in launching supervision from below in the Cultural Revolution that challenged his colleagues of many decades standing, the authority of the ruling communist party and its policies.

For the radicals there was the immediacy of purposeful action, the requirement to act with the belief, not only, that it would be different this time, but also that the action of human intervention - the will to act – could bring about the desired transformation. China was different: activists could look at the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and say, "that is not what we think socialism is about".

In a sense the absence of a real yet niche Maoist tradition in Britain is peculiar. In the US and France Maoist movements grew up as part of the New Left (inspired by the cultural revolution), usually not emerging primarily as splits from the "revisionist" official Communist Party but from ideologically more ambiguous and experimental student movements of the Sixties. The German scene saw a variety of strong Maoist organisation develop an equally varied amount of analysis and political lines. The Maoists in Britain were smaller in number but no less diverse while each cleaving to the same ideological foundation of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. Maoism was not a term used widely within the pro-China, anti-revisionist, Marxist-Leninist movement in Mao's life time, and explicitly not used by the authorities in China. So given the complexities of the evolution of British 'maoists', putting Mao, and the ideas that are associated with his name, as the primary centre of

the organisations ideology would constitutes a "Maoist" organisation, as opposed to considering Mao in a line of continuity as a junior or equal political partner as does the CPGB(ML).

There were different cultural-political impulses towards an allegiance with a Maoist position. The context for the second wave of Maoist activists partially inspired by an idealistic zeal and fervour that could not be contained by the dominant "pro-Moscow left", enmeshed with their own legitimacy crisis with the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, was the struggle around the Vietnam War, and the Civil Right and Black Power movements in America. Especially within Southern Europe, the Maoist appeal was built in the anti-fascist struggles against the military in Greece, Spain, Portugal and Turkey. In Northern Europe, in Norway and Denmark, the militant anti-EEC movement radicalised young people. And everywhere the identification was with the Third World struggles and the icons of Che, Fanon, Cabral and Ho Chi Minh and the anti-authoritarianism Cultural Revolution propaganda that built the Cult of Mao.

From this milieu of mainly radicalised students, new overtly pro-Maoist organisations emerged that largely superseded the earlier organisations dominated by older ex-Communist party members.

It was a competitive environment with the ideological attractions of student Trotskyism: where there was a relatively developed Trotskyist presence, as in Britain, Maoism failed to flourish; conversely, the opposite occurred in Germany, Scandivan and Mediterranean Europe where Trotskyism was relatively weak.

Maoism never enjoyed the popularity that Trotskyism did with student militants in Britain. Such commentators, often holding to a Marxism in which the true revolution is yet to come, argue that the Chinese communist revolution – along with all of the others from Russia to Vietnam – were deluded and misdirected. Why? A proper communist revolution should take place only in an advanced capitalist context. Given that the Chinese revolution occurred in a largely pre-capitalist, agricultural country, it was both a travesty of Marxism and bound to 'fail'. A variation we see today in the common position that Chinese communists were that in name only, using Marxism as a convenient ideology for their own very different agenda. They echo an academic paradigm that was set in the Cold War': that early theorists and members of the CCP were deluded and did not understand Marx properly. These, in turn, taught Mao, he too misinterpreted Marx. In China the adoption of Marxism was presented as opportunist and used as a convenient screen for nationalist and specifically Chinese concerns.³⁹

An easy label to apply was that Maoism was as a variant of Stalinism, with maoist criticism of the Stalin era less understood or acknowledged than their defence of Stalin. The Trotskyists' dogmatism, their disdain for 'socialism in one country', messianic leadership pretences and scriptural politics provide little meaning to the dynamics in the real world: 'Maoism' came from the under-developed world; there was an easy dismissive comment employed that 'what use was Maoism when Britain has not had a peasantry for five hundred years?' Yet the path of revolution, let alone to communism, has proven to take very different forms, depending on particular historical, social and economic factors on those historical conditions for the time being existing. Revolutionaries engaging in the world might see the point of Maoism, those with a close reading of the classical texts do not recognise the world in which Maoism developed and operated in. Political activists in Britain influenced and shaped by engagement with Maoist thought and actual history gave recognition to this in their critical assessment of the contributions of what is clumsily referred to as Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.

³⁹ See: Benjamin Schwartz (1951) *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao* for a standard authority, and counter-criticism in *Chinese Marxism* by Adrian Chan (2003).

1965 -TWO CONTRIBUTIONS - 1993

IN 1965, prior to the theoretical considerations raised by the practice of the Cultural Revolution, there was an assessment of three contributions of Mao Zedong to Marxism seen in relation to the situation in Britain.⁴⁰ The original impetus of the Maoists in Britain was to fight modern revisionism in the CPGB during the early and mid-1960s Maoism began to become an international tendency, attractive to anti-revisionists who were discordant voices within or had left the pro-Soviet Communist Parties after Khrushchev's speech. This Stalinist minority in the United States, Europe and around the Third World, formed currents that would become the "Marxist-Leninist" parties aligned with China against both American imperialism and Soviet social imperialism.

Given its origins, the question can be raised as to how far British Maoism was ever fully Maoist (setting aside what that actually means). Indeed, there is evidence that for some hostility to Khrushchev and veneration of Stalin far more important than the developing anti-revisionist politics coming from China. Indeed in its early days some of those attracted within the Communist Party as a result of the Sino-Soviet split on the international level, may well have been simply orthodox opposition tendencies taking on Maoist clothing, as opposed, some argue, to a fundamental break with its (revisionist) practices.

A weakness of those attracted to FORUM was precisely its orientation to what it regarded as the existing vanguard forces: the revisionist Communist Party. What was seen as the immediate aim, the 'way forward', lay "with the Party Congress due in November [1965] to swing the party, or as much of it as possible, over from the present policy of passivity (end thus of actual, even if not intended, betrayal) to a policy of revolutionary activity, which has nothing at all in common with "leftism" of any kind."⁴¹

It is ironic that the early anti-revisionists were declared by opponents to be dogmatic doctrinaires when the first contribution of the Chinese leader, Mao Zedong, was seen in extending the field of revolution under Marxist leadership from that of the industrialised capitalist countries to practically the whole of the rest of the world. Maoists continue to argue that in the process of the Chinese revolution Marxism outgrew its initial Eurocentrism and ceased to be merely European in significance. It became a genuinely global weapon of liberation. The experience of the Chinese Revolution, and the guidance that experience provided for sufficiently similar conditions, meant "just as the Chinese revolution was made possible by the Russian revolution, so the world-wide revolutionary explosion of today has been made possible by the Chinese revolution....To sum up on this first contribution by Mao, the CPC has shown how to achieve the socialist revolution on a peasant basis and through a national liberation struggle – the form that the present revolutionary wave is taking throughout the non-industrialised world."⁴²

In its publications the Committee to Defeat Revisionism expressed support for the Chinese Communists against the revisionism of the Soviet leadership. Thus, Michael McCreery wrote in

⁴⁰ Anonymous (1965) Three Contributions of Mao Tse-Tung to Marxism seen in relation to the situation in Britain 1965. <http://www.marxists.org/history/erol/uk.firstwave/forum-65.htm>

⁴¹ Ditto

⁴² Anonymous (1965) Three Contributions of Mao Tse-Tung to Marxism seen in relation to the situation in Britain.

one of the Committee's pamphlets, dated November 1963, that "The defence of Marxism-Leninism is being led, internationally by Mao Tse-tung and the Communist Party China."⁴³

In another pamphlet, Arthur Evans wrote that "Having enriched the theory and practice of Marxism in these two directions curbing god-worship and putting the angels to a richer through more varied work, the Chinese leadership resurrected Lenin's State and Revolution, studied it in the light of their own experiences, and decided that Lenin was, as usual, nearer to ultimate truth than any contemporary."⁴⁴

Evans argued that "Stalin gave to the Chinese communists a certain amount of excellent advice and some advice which The Chinese took the excellent advice, thanked Comrade Stalin for the bad advice and went on their own way.

Not a bad way of doing things."

The charge laid on British Marxist-Leninists of 'doctrinaire' were true to an extent, they were in defence of the Leninist doctrine as they understood it to be but partially from a political position that challenged in practice a traditional allegiance and orthodox enshrined in Comintern practice.

The organisations that emerged in Britain increasingly functioned within Maoist-informed theoretical formulations that constituted the purpose for their being and activity. Marxist-Leninist doctrine, the structures and operation of a Leninist vanguard party that demanded discipline and commitment, and the political practices as they understood and derived from reading Marxist texts shaped their political perceptions. Coupled with this was a voluntarist impulse to social practice and a high level of theoretical abstraction that asked for, but was seldom evident, of a critical reading of concrete situations. Repeating the slogans of the Cultural Revolution on the streets of London, Liverpool, Newcastle and Manchester was far from rooting one's politics in a practical materialism demanded by the canon of Marxism-Leninism. This was recognised as most underwent a criticism of their own 'ultra-leftism' practices in the mid and late-1970s. Maoism contained, for its adherents, an appreciation of the fruitfulness of error within an epistemological framework expressed in the language of Mao Zedong's "Five Essays on Philosophy" and the article "Where Do Correct Ideas Come From?" Whereas, what Western radicals drew as the key features of the Chinese Revolution, appeared to be applied in a shrill, dogmatic and absolutist manner under the mantra of 'grasping the key link', what it also suggested was a willingness to be good at learning so as to prevent a recrystallisation of previous "errors" through ahistorical social practice.

Post-WW2 radical internationalism, in Britain moved through the de-colonisation period and unravelling of the British Empire, and internationally focused around the question of Vietnam. The infusion of student radicalism over America's fighting in south-east Asia greatly reinforced the anti-revisionist movement, transforming its character and focus.

There was a thread of anti-imperialism within the politics that was never lost; in the mid-1960s, Vietnam raised a possibility that if the forces of progress, represented there by the

⁴³ A.H. Evans (1964) Truth Will Out: Against Modern Revisionism. The Committee to Defeat Revisionism, For Communist Unity, London: iii.

⁴⁴ A.H. Evans (1963) Against the Enemy! The Committee to Defeat Revisionism, For Communist Unity, London:5.

National Liberation Front, won their battle against U.S. imperialism, then, the world would be likely to pass over relatively peacefully into socialism through national liberation. The belief was then “we can reasonably hope to avoid a third world war” the Forum audience was informed. The fate of the world, the Cold War was being decided in those liberation struggles. A reasonable case can be made for a perspective that in reality the Third World War was a proxy conflict fought *in* the Third World. Solidarity work in Britain was part of the proletarian internationalism that Maoism both defended and radically promoted.

Reading the material produced by the movement in Britain ⁴⁵ would substantiate the position that Mao’s second contribution (as seen in 1965) was that the methodology and thinking of the Chinese Communists could apply everywhere. Far from being an application of Marxism specifically with Chinese characteristics, Mao provided a practical guide for revolution anywhere and everywhere— principally, for Forum’s speaker, to find in any situation the principal contradiction, and to concentrate on it. This point at the present moment here in Britain, was Forum’s anonymous author believed the most important of all.

Without agreeing with the conclusion - advocating “national unity against the main enemy, U.S. imperialism, supported here by the Labour-imperialist Wilson Government”⁴⁶ - it showed a desire to politically read Mao to apply the method. Too often it saw a crude, mechanical transplantation of (misunderstood) practice to inappropriate conditions: the adoption of a positive role for “national capitalist” (as in the early days of revolutionary China) was still an unreasonable position in the context of the Britain of the mid-1960s, and any policy deviation could be promoted under the cover of “maximum unity against the main enemy”. But again it is an example, illustrating a position that bedevilled the movement, of trying to address a political error from a dogmatic and eurocentric analysis.

This was evident in its best known leader, Trade Union leader, Reg Birch. The largest and most “successful” of the Maoist parties in Britain was formed by Reg Birch with the Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) during the Cultural Revolution inspired wave in 1968. What is startling was the absence of the contemporary influence of the ‘cultural revolution’ style in the organisation and its activity. The Maoist groups that emerged after



CPB (ML) delegation to China : Birch with Chou Enlai. Farrell, Williams and Ash in the background.

⁴⁵ Substantially available at <http://www.marxists.org/history/erol/erol.htm>

⁴⁶ “It has to mobilise all those who can be brought to join this fight, from the working class socialists who have been shocked by Wilson’s support for U.S. bombings, napalm and gas, to the national-capitalists; from car-owning skilled aircraft workers, to the industrialists who resent betrayal of their industry to U.S. capital. The Labour Left, from Mikardo to Warbey, are our natural allies for a new policy of anti-imperialism, of refusal to let our country be dragged into the abyss into which the U.S. is rushing, pulling its satellites with it...” “It is the line for victory, for both national survival and the conquest of working class power – one being impossible without the other, as thousands of national-capitalists will ultimately understand.”

the launch of the Cultural Revolution, tended to have a 'Chinese flavour'. The CPB (ML) was almost sober and staid in comparison to the ultra-left excess undertaken by the English Internationalists and its predecessor organisations, the CPE (ML), formed in 1972. Although how far Mao can be blamed for those who chanted in his name is a difficult call, as youthful inspired western radicals sought to "apply" Mao Tse-Tung Thought. Given the difference in behaviour and presentation, it could be problematic for outsiders to consider that both organisations were representative of the 'same movement', and even less predict they would make the same political choice at a critical junction in the movement's development.

The critical 'frog in the well' view adopted by critics of Maoists fail to address the wider point that in the Sixties, Mao's challenging writings did provided inspiration for those who sought an explanation and remedy for the cancerous revisionism in the communist movement. His principled defence of Marxism-Leninism and his contributions to it helped to combat political degeneration and revitalise revolutionary struggle in the 1960s (and after) throughout the world.

The third contribution noted (in 1965) by our anonymous contribution to Forum meeting was Mao's position on proletarian dictatorship. The opinion before the launch of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, made clear it was "especially important for us to rehabilitate fully, before working class public opinion, that central concept of the science of socialist revolution."⁴⁷

In a judgement reflective of the orthodoxy of the early anti-revisionists, it is suggested that the slogan of developing socialism in one country, which history has proved to have been decisively correct, "alone would ensure Stalin a permanent and honoured place in the history of mankind." A common mantra expressed, but rarely honoured in practice, was that for communists a primary duty is of learning the necessary lessons, both positive and negative, from, at the time, unique historical development of the experiences of the Soviet Union.

This was no unthinking blanket defence of Stalin, no retreat to nostalgic clear cut "Class against Class" dogma. Here was the seed of a political rectification campaign that argued the post-Stalin CPSU leadership had attacked, abused and made a scapegoat of Stalin personally precisely in order to avoid a political criticism of his policies. The Soviet leadership continue the chauvinist and capitulationist tendencies of Stalin's later years, while discarding that part of Stalin's policy which was attempting, even though wrongly, to maintain the Soviet Union in the direction of socialism. Those described pejoratively as "Stalinist" thought it impossible to "thoroughly criticise present CPSU policy unless we are prepared to pursue the criticism back to its origins, to way before both the 20th Congress and Stalin's death." That perspective in the anti-revisionist trend in Britain remained evident but challenged by a trend comprised of those who only sought to politically defend rather than understand the development of the Soviet Union under Stalin. After all, the anti-revisionists (and later Maoist groups) had been formed for what they considered the renewal of the communist movement in the struggle against new forms of repression and exploitation represented in the ruling Soviet party.

⁴⁷ Anonymous (1965) Three Contributions of Mao Tse-Tung to Marxism seen in relation to the situation in Britain

Fast forward thirty years to another meeting evaluating the contribution of Mao Zedong. On the occasion of marking the Centenary of Mao Zedong's birth, the London branch of the Revolutionary Communist League organised a workshop with a presentation on the historical development of Maoism in Britain, and its contemporary relevance to political advance. Distributed at the public rally that evening was copies of two documents, despite differences within them, that made evaluations of the contributions of Mao: the *Political Platform of the RCLB* and the *General Declaration on Mao Zedong Thought* approved by the International Conference of Marxist-Leninist Parties and Organisations on September 1st 1993.⁴⁸



The main contribution drew out what had changed. Revisionism had fragmented and the Left become far more diverse. Maoism existed as an element in relation to this spectrum in Britain; “our task is to show its input to be essential and, while it is one among many, also catalytic.”⁴⁹ The idea of organisational hegemony, the preponderance of a single headquarters directing a movement was explicit set aside. What was foresaw was a process of alignment, building upon existing initiatives of resistance that would gravitate to “the trend which has demonstrated in its practical relation to the mass struggle that it has the most to offer theoretically... In general one can say that what is needed is a movement which respects struggles of ordinary people rather than seeking to replace them. This is entirely in keeping with the original spirit of the Communist Manifesto, and contrary to the bureaucratic approach represented in the Soviet school of communism.”

In an echo of the earlier Forum meeting, the relevance of Maoism was said that it empowered those in struggle rather than imposes its own agenda, it remained a vibrant international current for the regeneration of revolutionary struggle and it retained a vision of a new society in the making.

“This takes us to [a] specific quality of Maoism, its non-Eurocentrism. This is undoubtedly an essential basis to free the left in this country from chauvinism which has always dogged it.” There was greater recognition and emphasis on this aspect of Mao's contribution, and its relevance for Marxists in Britain. The Chinese communists, free from the chauvinism and bureaucratic character of the Moscow orientation, had the strength to build upon inherited Marxism, to develop it. Likewise, today “We take Maoism as a point of departure, developing and defending earlier values, applying Mao's methods of criticism and carrying them forward.... Some questions he never faced. Other ones the Chinese faced with realising it, and this was true of racism.”

⁴⁸ See Document 27 in *State of the Movement*: a selection of texts from the Marxist-Leninist Movement

⁴⁹ Quotes are drawn from ‘Maoism in Britain’. [RB] unpublished speakers' notes and meeting record. 1993. Private archive

The problem that racism exists within organisations that fight it was not directly faced, but racism was challenged by Maoism through its world view and strong positions on international struggles and solidarity with the oppressed of the world. In terms of the anti-imperialist struggle, the Chinese position was very relevant in answering the revisionist distortions. In this respect, the “World countryside theme [is] still important in showing what is [the] place of this country in [the] wider pattern of world politics.” What was underlined was the importance of the Polemics of the early Sixties as a basis for political development. At the time they had provided militants a rallying point for defence of a basic revolutionary perspective and policies, the movement, as the world had altered, had not limited nor preserved its understanding to those positions.

It was said, in an echo of 1965’s evaluation, that part of the heritage of Maoism, was Mao’s mature understanding and contribution to political behaviour:

“[We] can also learn a lot from Mao’s understands between strategy and tactics, and use of multi-layered approaches. [It] enables us to assess goals and manoeuvres of particular struggles realistically [as seen in Ireland], not to impose from outside an all-or-nothing emphasis on one particular type of struggle and lightly accuse organisations of treachery once this is downplayed.”

The spirit of the sixties was evoked for a strength of Maoism was that it shunned uni-linear and mechanical views of human development, sensing the opportunities created by history in which human initiative must seize, with courage and conviction in the long term, but with creative application of particular tactical approaches. The traditional position that capitalism was locked in escapable crisis and socialism would come was challenged: “if you don’t hit it, it won’t fall. You need revolutionary struggle so seize the responsibilities.”

Subjectively Western Maoists wanted to succeed and as a young movement tried to apply theoretical structures not readily applicable but were politically engaged. The historical treatment of the tendency origins and development underplays the greater consideration needed of the relationship between theory and practice, but goes to correct the ‘commonsense view’ limited to the iconic Maoist slogan of ‘Long Live Chairman Mao’. In addressing what did the political activists understand by the self-identification of either anti-revisionist or Marxist-Leninist (when avoiding using the descriptive term ‘Maoist’) there is a continuum which runs from a position that virtually every decision or action as having theoretical implication to that which rationalises action by the use of legitimising theory.

In Britain, the publication, in 1986, of *Eurocentrism and the Communist Movement* saw the RCLB take a critical look at the experience of socialism, the effect of white supremacy and inconsistency in anti-imperialism while remaining consciously in the Maoist tradition of upholding liberation struggles in the Third World. It formed an early critique drawing on the concept of eurocentrism and as a theoretical contribution it owed as much to the work of Samir Amin as well as Maoist self-correction. Unlike others at the time who took a critical look at their political practice, the RCLB continued in existence for another decade before succumbing to oblivion.

The audience of the Commemoration meeting on Mao was told that in the new historical period at the end of the ‘Cold War’ it was necessary to rediscover that rebellious spirit in the

specific context face today and resurrect the Maoist long term view of the possibility of change.

What was noted was the new challenges that the “whole work-process has been changed and bases of old communist organisation deliberately undermined.” Changes in IT, hierarchical work management, sub-contracting, home working etc., had altered the workplace.

Furthermore the perspective on political economy has altered: the workforce organised differently and posing a dualism of gender/race previously not fully recognise. Maoism was certainly weak on the question of women despite the much publicised slogans of holding up half the sky. But these questions can be addressed by employing “the most important methodological heritage of Maoism. Dialectics.”

Here was a celebration and appreciation that used Maoism as a means to understand the world and chart a way of changing it. It was to prove something of a last hurrah as far as Britain’s Maoists were concerned.

Britain’s Maoists had largely peaked: the majority of organisations did not prove able to turn an initial momentum into long-term growth either in numbers, influence and internal cohesion. What was seen constituted a set of rival organisations rather than a common political trend that dissipated the forces at its disposal rather than coalesce them into a viable party-building organisation.

There was, seen in the fragmentation over the three Worlds Theory, a range of responses from Maoist groups that showed evidence that indeed there was space for political manoeuvre and emphasis outside of an allegiance taken at a simple level as “pro China”.

At the time of the Sino-Albanian split most of the British Maoists of the Seventies – including the largest and third ranking in terms of membership identified with Enver Hoxha's in the debates within the movement over foreign policy and whether post-Mao China was a socialist state. In any case, a movement identified as ‘pro-China’ would be effected by the perception of changes in Chinese policy – foreign and domestic - reflecting (or rejecting) the priorities and perspectives of Beijing as understood by radicals operating in Britain.

Mao’s death was incidental to the fate of the groups associated with his name. The decline of the Maoist groups, their growth and development, was intractably connected to changes within the societies they operated. These contextual factors were greater than events in China: throughout the 1970s and 1980s in Britain there was a disappearing radical milieu crucial to replenish the movement and a failure to root themselves within the working class movements necessary for the consolidation of a “newly emergent” political tendency. The political left already had well-established political actors both ‘revisionist’ and ‘Trotskyist’; these were alternative and more consolidated poles of attraction for militants looking beyond the appeals of social democracy. Before the turn of the century, Maoists in Britain had been consigned to the margins of an increasingly marginalized political life.

The years following Mao’s death saw a period of disarray and decline. A political tendency identified as “pro-China” was always going to be subject to turbulence as policies changed in China and the reshaping international environment. The impetus for development stalled not only in the British experience, the flows and eddies of disintegration was international in

character affecting not only the industrial world but also parties elsewhere. Later there was disenchantment with Deng Xiaoping's changing China and rapid introduction of market reforms, and it was with the suppression at Tianmen Square that the only substantial public Maoist organisation in Britain chooses not to defend the Chinese authorities. Maoist thought was unleashed, freed, so to speak, from the institutional shackles of its identification with the post-Mao Chinese State. The emergence of different 'Paths' from the radical Third World struggles was not reflected in resurgence in Britain.

The brief appearance in British political life did have its enduring legacy in the individually transformative experience and sustained local campaigning and legal victories against deportation and state oppression. In a wider context it did not necessarily establish a dominant cultural reference point, although this should not be underestimated in some national minority communities. It was a movement in organisational flux, adjusting in composition and strategic direction; a work in progress never reaching completion. The enduring legacy has not been organisational in nature.

An approach that regards or promotes 'Maoism' as undifferentiated, as if immune to the process of socio-economic, and political changes, fails to account for its appeal as either defending 'Leninist' orthodoxies, as expressed in the Polemic of the 1960s, or its attraction as a developing critique of Soviet practice that eventually saw an explicit condemnation of 'Soviet Social-imperialism' alongside the more familiar identification of 'US Imperialism' in the lexicon of the radical left. Throughout its existence, on the issues of revisionism, internationalism, class solidarity, gender equality and the nature of a multi-national society, Maoists in Britain approached those elements still necessary for advancement on the 'British Path' to socialism. Imagined alternatives are involved even in failed attempts to build them. The party-building endeavours of anti-revisionist Marxist-Leninists were part of a long enduring tradition of resistance to the existing order. Metaphorically the tide can turn, and while one movement does not necessarily draw on its predecessor, similar questions are once again addressed. Knowledge of past attempts may give rise to more successful response the next time.

