

## CRITICISM OF THE PROGRAMME FOR THE W.P.P.E. (1968)

The programme of the WPPE raises two main questions in relation to the possibility of closer work between the WPPE and the CFB: one is concerned with what is the role and purpose of a programme, and the other is concerned with how well this particular programme satisfies these requirements.

### A. The Role and Purpose of a programme.

The CFB view of the role of a programme and its position in the development of the Marxist-Leninist movement is set out in the J.C.C. statement on the question of party building. Here one of the conditions for the formation of a party is given as

"a draft programme that would need to be fully discussed to ensure that it was fully understood by all the constituent parts of the organisation and would stand the test of time; furthermore in the production of such a draft programme it would be necessary for a number of publications, statements, etc. to be brought out."

A further condition that throws light on this is given as

"to have carried out as an organisation practical work upon which concrete evaluation could be made and practical conclusions drawn."

Thus the CFB, which is the descendant of the JCC, does not believe that it is possible to draw up an effective programme except over a relatively long period of time.

This view is both the result of some years practical experience of the problems of developing the Marxist-Leninist movement in this country (see *Origins and Perspectives of the Marxist-Leninist Movement in Britain*) and also has a theoretical basis.

From the theoretical point of view one could say that Mao Tsetung summed up the task of Marxist-Leninists within any particular country when he wrote of Japan

"The Japanese revolution will undoubtedly be victorious, provided the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism is really integrated with the concrete practice of the Japanese revolution."

It is relatively easy to state in theoretical form the universal truth of Marxism-Leninism and relatively easy to engage in some sort of practice but to tie the two together in a totally integrated way is a task that we expect to take many years of trial and error. Only then will we have a programme that sums up this vital relationship and can be tested successfully in practice.

We believe [redacted] the essence of the point Marx was making in his covering letter to W. Bracke of May 5th 1875 which accompanied the Critique of the Gotha Programme [redacted] WAS

"by drawing up a programme of principles (instead of postponing this until it has been prepared for by a considerable period of common activity) one sets up before the whole world landmarks by which it measures the level of the Party movement."

A British Marxist-Leninist programme "has to be prepared for by a considerable period of common activity" if it is to be effective not only in handling the objective problems of the revolution in Britain but in unifying the movement subjectively.

## B. The Programme For The WPPE In Particular.

Despite the reservations with which we approach it, explained in section A above, we think the WPPE programme is a serious attempt to grapple with a task that is easily postponed indefinitely; there are many things that we can learn from it. Because in this section we mainly pick up points over which there are probably differences between us and the WPPE this does not mean we have a negative attitude to the programme but is for the purpose of raising points that can be clarified in subsequent discussion. In this sense we are not attempting a comprehensive evaluation of the programme.

One of the problems is that we may have differences over what we consider to be the main purpose and best form of a ~~minimum~~ programme. Our view is that it should be concerned with practice and that the points made in it should be testable in practice. It should assess the present state of the class struggle and especially the main forces in it and their balance of power between them; and the policies in the programme should be directly related to the concrete conditions of the present stage and show that they form a comprehensive plan for pushing the struggle to a more advanced stage. Thus the question of what is the next step must be handled directly.

Of all the points to be handled none is more important than an assessment of the present stage of the Marxist-Leninist movement for the reasons given earlier above and we feel this is a serious omission from the Programme of the WPPE.

Length. Engels in his Critique of the Erfurt Programme wrote...

"In my opinion the programme has to be as brief and as precise as possible. Even if the odd foreign word or a sentence which can't be grasped in all its implications crops up, that doesn't matter. Oral discussion in the meetings, and written explanations in the press, will do the necessary there, and the brief, pregnant sentence will then, once understood, become fixed in the memory, become a slogan, and that will never happen to the fuller discussions."

The purpose of a programme is to orientate a whole movement concisely and accurately in its strategic tasks in a way a long document cannot.

We therefore wonder whether the long passages on historical and current background analysis that take up much of the first 7 out of the 12 sections

are vague in a programme; and there are times when the programme is written in a style that rather than being pregnant and precise, is vague and ambiguous.

Commitment. We think you should declare yourselves as Communists, which you members do in this programme. Hesitancy on this question cannot help us and may pave the way for revisionism. The Communist Manifesto declares that "Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims." For us this is not a statement of bravado but an expression of the fact, proved by over 100 years experience of the international Communist movement that Communism can only advance by a steadfast and unshamed battle against all forms of bourgeois ideology.

Your hesitancy on this point makes for ambiguity about the whole status of the "Programme for the WPPF". We are not clear that you necessarily see this as a Communist programme and we wonder how in essence you see the difference between it and the "Draft Programme for a People's Socialist Alliance" published in Workers Broadsheet for May 1972.

Date of the Programme. Certain of the ideas in the programme were current around 1968 but have since fallen out of use. These are: Britain as the "sick man of Europe", armed liberation struggles as the main form of anti-imperialist struggle, Black Power, the struggles of the Celtic nations for independence and of the PQ in Quebec and the credit squeeze. These ideas are perhaps the other side of the coin to the excellent factual information in the programme that already comes from close reading of the current situation in 1968, but we wonder what the WPPF would say now about the success of the programme in putting its finger on the basic contradictions that underlie the present conditions in Britain.

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In the course of detailed discussion of the Programme we would like to examine a number of specific questions raised by it.

Nations within the British Isles. The statement in the very first sentence, that the "English monopoly capitalists hold the dominant position" in the British ruling class is ambiguous in its suggestion that the English monopoly capitalists oppress other sections of the ruling class. While we accept that those of English origin are numerically predominant in the British monopoly capitalist class, we do not believe they oppress those of a different national origin in a specifically national manner.

We believe the programme misinterprets as a national liberation struggle what it describes as "the rising tempo of the nationalist movement" in Wales and Scotland, what was in fact a temporary development of bourgeois politics along supposedly national lines, a development that has now receded in the face of the indifference of the working class in these areas. In the view of the CPB the situation in Britain is that a basically unified working class faces a basically unified ruling class and the principal contradiction is a class one, although it may take somewhat different forms in different areas. We believe the working class knows this itself, and to state that there are major national contradictions in Britain is to take a step backwards.

On the question of Ireland we believe that the situation is more complicated than the WPPF implies and needs further investigation.

U.S. Imperialism. On this question too we believe the WPPE in this programme again magnifies the role of national contradictions and diminishes the role of class contradictions in a way that is retrograde in the specific conditions of Britain.

It was true at the time of writing this programme that U.S. Imperialism was the principal enemy of the peoples of the world but that does not mean this was the case in all countries regardless of concrete conditions. In the case of Britain to say this seriously minimises the strength of the British ruling class and Britain's entry into the E.E.C. shows the inaccuracy of the claim that the British ruling class is "content to be a servile lackey of U.S. imperialism".

The call for a national liberation struggle against U.S. imperialism is a bourgeois democratic slogan different in essence from the call for a socialist revolution; and the WPPE does not overcome this serious confusion by raising the slogan: "Forward to national independence and socialism through workers power!"

The suspicion is created by this programme that the WPPE is willing to pursue an easy enemy, perhaps even with benevolent encouragement from the British bourgeoisie, while leaving that class relatively untouched. Even with U.S. imperialism decisively defeated throughout the world it is clear that the position of the British working class in relation to the British ruling class, its principal enemy, would not be basically improved. The attacks on U.S. culture are particularly diversionary for an advanced monopoly capitalist country such as Britain, that has been ready for class struggle leading to socialist revolution for at least the last hundred years.

A Powerful Revolutionary Movement. At the end of section 5, on National Liberation Struggles, the Programme states that... "The rise of Celtic nationalism, the inroads of U.S. imperialist takeover, and the mass development of the anti-racialism struggle of the coloured immigrant workers have all contributed to making the situation objectively extremely favourable for the development of a powerful revolutionary movement and its crowning with a socialist revolution." This raises the question of how accurately we think it is necessary for a programme to assess the present state of affairs because it is easy to see with hindsight that this assessment was grossly optimistic. There is a similar over-optimistic statement at the end of section 9, on Blackworkers, where it is said that there is developing among Black workers "a new anti-imperialist perspective which will transform the whole class struggle into one for POWER." (WPPE's emphasis)

The failure here is not only one of over-optimism but of failing to base the assessment of what stage of struggle we have reached mainly on an assessment of the class contradiction between the working class as a whole and the monopoly capitalist class as a whole.

The USSR. The analysis of the experience of the USSR in this programme is a careful and thoughtful one but on a subject on which the CPB believes it is not yet possible to take a public stand - one of the many illustrations of the fact that we are not yet ready to form a party. It may be that for various reasons the WPPE has unity on this question but our assessment is that the amount of careful and comprehensive study that has gone into this question in Britain is too small for us to maintain a position that is held in a unifi-

way without resorting to dogmatism.

For example with reference to Stalin, some of our members would want to point out, unlike you but like the CCP in their article "On the Question of Stalin", that Stalin was a great Marxist-Leninist whose merits outweigh his faults, and others would not agree with this.

Selfishness. The Programme makes as one of its main points in the section on the Cultural Revolution that it has helped people "to repudiate all forms of selfishness", and later it is said that we must apply the lessons of Mao Tse-tung to our own conditions. There is a danger here of presenting the repudiation of selfishness as a bourgeois ideal to be valued for its own sake and not seen in the context of a particular stage in the development of the class struggle under socialism. We would not want to spread ideas of selfishness in abstract at a time when the working class in Britain still has to seize state power.

In the second point in the "Workers National Plan" at the end of the Programme the WPPH once again does not wholly distinguish itself from an idealist viewpoint when it condemns the exploitation of other territories by the British economy as being "totally immoral". The point here is not to have a strong view of morality but to see that the historical development of capitalism produces a situation in which the working class and the people of the oppressed countries are natural and inevitable allies against their common enemy, the imperialist exploiting class.

It is important not to present ourselves as softer or nicer than we are. As Engels wrote in the Critique of the Erfurt Programme,

"One shouldn't sacrifice too much to the concern for popularity, nor should one underestimate the mental gifts and degree of education of our workers."

Black Workers. As in point 4 of the "Workers National Plan" which calls the struggle for Black Power in this country "the first step in developing the struggle for working class power", this section, section 9, also slides over the question of the difference between anti-imperialist and socialist consciousness in an over-optimistic way. Anti-imperialist consciousness is bourgeois democratic and bourgeois nationalist consciousness in essence, and remains so until given ideological leadership by a Marxist-Leninist Party. Thus black workers in this country will only contribute directly to the revolution when they see themselves as workers first, black second.

The WPPH does not seem to have a clear grasp of how far Communists believe bourgeois-democratic revolution falls short of socialist revolution.

Trade Unions. This section does not provide a comprehensive answer to the problems of strategy and tactics in this important area of struggle. While we as the CFB would agree on the need for more thorough democracy at the shop floor level this is only one necessary factor, and not sufficient in itself. We need to get to the position where the trade unions accept the leadership both ideologically and organisationally of representatives not of "working class bourgeois politics", as Lenin called them, but of working class proletarian politics.

#### The Party of the Working Class.

The final section of the Programme comes nearer to spelling out practical policies concisely in a way we would expect of a programme. However some of these lines and policies we would be unwilling to accept at this stage.

The first point to note about the WFFE's line on the Party is that although the tone of the WFFE differs noticeably from that of the CPGB, essentially they have adopted the same approach on party formation - to declare the existence of a party and call on people to rally round. By contrast the line of the CPB as laid out in Origins and Perspectives of the Marxist-Leninist Movement in Britain is that party unity has to be fought for in a long struggle through common activity and common education.

The WFFE's decision to restrict its activities to England in our opinion goes against the Leninist principle of one party to coordinate the struggle against the ruling class throughout a state; and while we believe in regional initiative within the party and in applying party policy in accordance with the concrete conditions in different regions, nor do we think a Federal Party for Britain conforms to Lenin's position. We are taking this point up with the WFFE in separate discussions.

The WFFE claims to operate on the basis of "democratic centralism": we wonder whether this is a self critical assessment or whether the WFFE doesn't, like many other currently existing Marxist-Leninist groups (including to a large extent our own), operate more in the manner of a "family circle", as Lenin described the Marxist groups who were operating in Russia at the beginning of this century.

The Workers National Plan. This section fails to call on the working class to carry on a resolute struggle against the British monopoly capitalist class, and has certain similarities with the revisionist position adopted by the CPGB following the Second World War. (It is in fact a failure of the Programme that it does not discuss revisionism outside the Soviet Union "and its allied countries".) In case this criticism should seem irresponsible and ill-founded here is a passage from the conclusion of "Looking Ahead" by Harry Pollitt, 1947..

"It is a fine thing that in so many parts of the country Trades Councils are holding conferences on what can be done locally to help solve the crisis. ...It is very significant that from so many of these local gatherings, where the best in the labour movement comes together to tackle the problems, the demand is coming to the Government for a National Plan, for cutting down the size of the armed forces, for a new policy of friendship and trade with democratic Europe, and breaking our dependence on the U.S.A."

We have already stated our opposition to making U.S. imperialism the principal enemy in Britain. We do not see how the working class can systematically "plan" anything positive under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, yet at no point is it made clear in this section of the programme that the working class must seize power forcibly before it will be in a position to introduce "planned increase of production" (which is "the immediate aim" of the Workers National Plan) or "planned cooperative socialist production".

Obviously the WFFE's line is not identical with that of the CPGB at the end of the war but we think it is important to remember as a warning this revisionist period.

In point 2 we would not be in favour of appealing to the working class on the basis that it is "unnecessary" and "damaging" to their interests to export capital because we consider it to be in our class interest to give aid to the less developed countries after the socialist revolution in Britain.

With regard to point three we do not see why or how the Scots and Welsh could come to want "national independence" in what is essentially a unified state without intolerable national oppression of these peoples: as Lenin wrote in section 5 of The Right of Nations to Self-Determination...

"From their daily experience the masses know perfectly well the value of geographical and economic ties and the advantages of a big market and a big state. They will, therefore, resort to secession only when national oppression and national friction make joint life absolutely intolerable and hinder any and all economic intercourse."

The precise relationship of national independence and socialism is very blurred in this Programme and the final point in the Workers National Plan contains a contradiction in Marxist-Leninist terms in the phrase "a socialist peoples republic", which is a confusion over the same question.

The Programme as a Whole. The Programme has a number of positive features which we do not wish to deny when concentrating on those criticisms that we want to take up in discussions with the WPPB. It grasps some of the most important concepts of Marxism-Leninism and presents them in a concrete way so that they appear relevant to the lives of ordinary people. Much of the background information has clearly been gathered as a result of close and alert attention to everyday events, and the class analysis of Britain shows that it is not necessary to flounder on this subject even though it is not yet possible to make a precise and authoritative statement on this.

Overall the WPPB's programme does not change our view that British Marxist-Leninists are not ready to set up before the whole world landmarks by which to ~~measure~~ measure the level of the party movement, and in some ways it illustrates our view on this. However we recognise the value of the attempt and the fact that the CPB must bear in mind more than we have done so far the need to reach a position where we are able to publish a programme.