

For a Joint Command of the Revolutionary Organizations!

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**Annual Conference of the *Revolutionary Communist League*
(a.k.a. 'the Chartists') May 17, 1974**

1. Background to the present crisis in Britain

The development of a dual power situation – even the most embryonic of embryonic dual power situations – means a *qualitative* transformation of the political situation in a country. Once this situation has become no longer merely episodic, but has established itself as an enduring feature of the political landscape, it can only mean – regardless of consciousness or appearances – that the first steps in the sequence of upheavals in which state power is conquered are beginning to be taken already.

How does a dual-power situation manifest itself? In its incipient stages, it does so in the establishment of a string of precedents. In these, the *authority* of the old institutions of rule – the Courts, Parliament, the police, the Armed Forces etc. – is progressively undermined. In Britain, such a string of precedents has already begun to be set. The last Labour Government was forced in 1969-1970 to abandon its *In Place of Strife* laws. What forced this retreat was the first successful wave of political strikes since the immediate post-war period. The ensuing Tory Government was determined to curb this new element of trade union power. Yet on every crucial occasion in which its authority, and the authority of its institutions, was tested against the organizations of the working class, the ruling class found itself checked.

In the early months of 1972, the Tory Government received a body-blow. There is no need to detail that event here except to recall this: that the Tory Government made quite clear its determination to hold the miners to an increase of about 7.5 per cent. If it was in the end forced to concede about 20 per cent, it was because the entire apparatus of state was faced with a threat to its power. To have stood firm would have been to face a General Strike, under conditions when (as the Saltley coke depot picket proved) the police were entirely unable to control the forces opposed to them, and the troops had not been prepared for a strike-breaking role. The rail dispute of May and June the same year turned out to be the first time the Tories tried to use their compulsory ballot powers under the newly-enacted Industrial Relations Act. This precedent was followed by the even more spectacular victory in the freeing of the Pentonville Five. That week faced the Tories with the immediate threat of a TUG-endorsed General Strike – a massive spontaneous political strike-wave had already begun – unless they backed down. Once again, it was the threat to the power of the ruling class which forced a retreat, this time with the assistance of the Official Solicitor. To sections of the working class, a lesson was beginning to come to mind: that it is only when faced with the risk of losing everything that the ruling class in this period will concede anything at all. For the first time, the struggle for power was an immediate necessity in the day-to-day struggle in defence of trade union rights and living standards.

It was not an accident that our organization was formed out of the conditions arising in this period. However, in this period, our positions were still in many ways premature. They corresponded to reality only momentarily, during the high-peaks mentioned, while in the intervening periods of downswing they lost their force. The victory over *In Place of Strife* was followed by a Tory election victory and a whole series of industrial defeats, of which the postmen's in 1971 was among the most tragic. The analysis of the existence of an embryo dual-power situation could by no means be applied to the whole political period. Each dual-power precedent set was negated almost immediately; there was no real question as to *Who Rules?*

2. The 1974 Miners' Strike

In the early part of this year, a qualitative change, a turning point, in the development of the class struggle in Britain took place. The culmination of three years of Tory government was a final effort – described generally by the Tories themselves and by the press as their ‘make or break attempt’ – to inflict a severe defeat on the trade union movement before its militancy and power grew ‘out of control’. The background to this attempt was the sudden intensification of Britain’s balance of trade problem (a £627m deficit for November-December), a loss of £40,000m off share values in a single week, the oil crisis, unprecedented price rises (the *Financial Times* commodity index broke the 200 barrier on 29th November), the spectre of world recession and, as a result of all this, the prospect – for the first time since the war – of having to impose real annual wage cuts of 5% or more on the British working class starting immediately. The Tories were faced with a problem, most directly, of power. Immediate economic considerations were entirely secondary. It was necessary to risk an enormous financial and economic loss in the short term, in order to effect a fundamental and – if possible – irreversible, alteration in the balance of power against the trade unions in Britain in favour of the employers and the state. Only in this way could the economic survival of British capitalism be secured in the period ahead.

As we have said, there had been previous recent attempts to do this, but this was the make or break effort of the Tories. A long build-up preceded the confrontation. The police were armed. Anti-picket squads were formed. The Armed Forces were prepared. Unprecedented efforts were made to avoid having to take on the miners, followed by equal efforts – once a collision-course was set – to win over and intimidate their reformist leaders. All to no avail. Draconian Emergency Powers were assumed as the miners’ overtime ban began. Enormous coal-stocks had been hoarded, and now a ruthless programme of power-cuts was imposed in order to conserve energy for a long duel. The whole country was thrown onto a three-day week in a sustained lock-out unprecedented in the history of the labour movement in Europe or America. The hard-liners in the Tory cabinet came to the fore. Army manoeuvres took place in the vicinity of Heathrow Airport. Civilian cars were stopped and searched by combined troops and police; council estates were patrolled with armoured vehicles. Parliament, was told by Home Secretary Carr that the combined use of troops and police against the miners could not be ruled out.

In the middle of January, the Tories began to crow. Victory, they implied, was in sight. All TUC attempts at compromise (pledges that other unions would not use a miners’ ‘special case’ award in support of their own claims, etc.) were rudely brushed aside. ‘Satisfactory’ fuel-stocks were announced and the power cuts slightly relaxed. The Government, it was made clear, intended sitting out the strike until the spring warm weather came to its rescue. The miners reacted swiftly. A strike ballot was held and an unprecedented (81 per cent) strike vote obtained, despite (or more likely, in part, because of) a week of hysterical Tory and Press screams on the issue *Who Rules?*. Wider trade union support began to mushroom as the implications of the struggle were rammed home. The miners made clear they meant business. The most militant statements were extracted from their leaders. In Aberdeen, loud applause greeted Rick McGahey’s threat to appeal to troops as ‘sons of the working class’. More and more the TUC, despite the frantic efforts of its leaders, was forced into the struggle. The TUC, it was announced, could not allow the miners to be made an example of. Full solidarity was expected from all affiliated bodies. This was the price the TUC (like the NUM Executive itself) had to pay if its stranglehold on the movement was to be maintained. As the strike took place, blacking was effective. Scarcely an attempt was made to cross picket lines. It was by now clear that the Tories could not hope to win without escalating the conflict onto a new plane.

The Tory hard-liners – Heath among them – had decided, late in 1973, on confrontation and victory at almost any cost. Their motive was not the love of confrontation but the knowledge that – if the future of their system was to be secured – they simply had no choice. But by now (early February) it was beginning to become clear that victory could not be imposed without a specific electoral mandate to crush the unions, legitimizing, if necessary, the use of troops. Simply to stand firm on the present mandate would be to risk everything. It would mean standing up to a General Strike. *The Times* had in fact (with other papers) advocated this editorially in December, on the grounds that the unions would be defeated in the end. The trade unions, said the Times (showing its usual insight) had a ‘vetoing’ power, but no initiating power, no power to complete a revolution and resume production under

working-class rule. But that was in December. Now, the ruling class was somewhat less sure. The repercussions of Mick McGahey's troops appeal were ominous. A General Strike, however it started, would be more than a mere stopping of work. It would be semi-insurrectionary almost from the outset. Moreover, a spate of articles was now appearing – in the press about the existence of supposedly insurrectionary Communist and Trotskyist organizations. These, it was imagined, might feed on a General Strike situation, and no-one could say where matters might end.

It was at this point that, as if from no-where, there suddenly emerged not mere individual employers but massive sections of the employing class prepared to make clear their disagreement with the tactics being employed by Heath. It was at this point that, quite suddenly, certain spokesmen of big business began pontificating with widespread support that perhaps it might be better to try and rely on the reformist leaders after all, and to seek a compromise solution with the miners. And it was at this point that even the hard line Tories realized that they could not simply soldier forward, that, their own class would not follow, that it was necessary to go back to the electorate for a mandate on the issue Who Rules? before continuing on. As we know, it was in seeking this new narrow mandate that the Tories lost the mandate they already had. The miners had forced them to the polls; now they were forced out of office (largely by a middle-class defection to the Liberals). The minority Labour Government was returned and the miners won their massive industrial victory. The split in the Tory Party, the defection to the Liberals, the Constitutional deadlock and the minority position of the Labour Government merely reproduced, in formal, Constitutional, terms, the embryonic dual-power deadlock which had long since begun to develop, on the industrial plane.

3. Economics and politics

The recent record of the working-class struggle in Britain has consisted of this: a series of political victories, accompanied by economic defeats. Some comrades may be tempted to point to the economic defeats of the working class – the fact that real wage-cuts are being imposed – as evidence that the foregoing account of the class-struggle is incorrect. Real wages are not keeping pace with prices. Even the biggest wage awards are eaten away by price-rises within months. Does not this contradict all the talk of 'victories' being won by the working class? Isn't it truer to say that in economic terms – the terms which matter – the working class is being defeated all along the line? And doesn't this make a nonsense of the claim that the working class is on the offensive, that it has spontaneously conquered the earliest steps in a developing struggle for power?

In fact, it does nothing of the sort. If the working class were able to make, real economic gains under capitalism, its political offensive would for that very reason soon peter out. The position we are in is the opposite. It is precisely the kind of position which classically characterizes the beginnings of a pre-revolutionary situation. Each working class political victory – each conquest of a new measure of power within the capitalist state – proves to be economically empty, turns out to be insufficient to do any thing (more than transient) to prevent a further fall in living standards. And then each such demonstration of the economic emptiness of a political victory simply demands a new such victory on a higher plane. The cycle is self-reinforcing, particularly since at certain-point – which we have already reached – the very working class political victories themselves start to disrupt the vital mechanisms of the capitalist system itself, rendering it still less capable of delivering the goods. There is no simple, mechanical relationship between economic crisis and social revolutionary upheaval. The May Events in France had profound economic roots but they were not the result of a sudden economic collapse. In Britain today, the crucial fact is this: cuts in real wages are beginning to be imposed. It is only within the last year or so that this has been the case. This process, under capitalism, cannot and will not be reversed this side of an all-out revolutionary crisis, although of course within the overall downswing temporary upward oscillations are bound to occur. This need for wage-cuts represents a qualitative break with the past. It is a situation unprecedented since the war. It cannot continue for long without provoking an explosion. It is already propelling the class-struggle forward in geometric progression, compelling the workers' organizations to pose – even in the mere fact of their existence – an unbearable and mounting challenge to the survival of the capitalist economy and the power of the state.

4. A terribly dangerous precedent

From an analysis of the present situation it should be clear: there can be no return, on the part of the bourgeoisie, to their former 'democratic' methods of rule. This statement can be disputed only by reformists and centrists to whom the real crisis of British capitalism is a closed book. We have in office a Government resulting from the greatest victory ever won by the trade union movement in this country. It is the first time that an industrial struggle has actually brought a capitalist government down. This Labour Government was not wanted by the bourgeoisie. Although liberal sections of big business have no choice but to try and deceive themselves on this score (consoling themselves with the thought that matters could hardly be worse than they were under Heath) the real fact is that this is the first Labour Government to have been imposed upon the bourgeoisie against its will. Of course, the bourgeoisie will strive might and main to use that Government, and, to the extent that real state power remains in its hands, it will of course succeed. But there's the rub. For the lesson of the recent period is that state power has been seen to be slipping inexorably from the hands of the bourgeois institutions themselves. And in such circumstances, the reformist leaders become simply unable to deliver to their ruling class masters the goods. For how long can the ruling class tolerate a Government which bends in their hands, which keeps conceding to the unions, which allows – and even at times gives the appearance of encouraging – disrespect for the most sacred and hallowed principles and institutions of bourgeois rule? It is true that the Government is only a minority one and for the moment is for that reason subject to tight enough control. But for how long can that last? Recent opinion polls have shown a hardening Labour lead of about 10 per cent over the Tories. Does anyone believe that the talk in the Tory Press about the Queen's right to refuse an election to a Labour Prime Minister is mere talk? Does anyone believe that we have heard the last of that campaign for a 'Government of National Unity' which erupted so frantically – albeit prematurely – from the most respectable ruling class quarters in an effort to prevent even a minority Labour Government from assuming office? And in any case, are, not allegations about 'unconstitutional' Government already beginning to be bandied about? Some comrades in our group seem to be amused at the suggestion that this Labour Government is presiding over an incipient dual power situation which will continue to develop in the period ahead. Then why are the spokesmen of the ruling class not so amused? The right-wing Tory MPs now speak for a very powerful section of the ruling class. While the Army tops, the Judges and others (including the Tory Front bench) are for the moment keeping fairly quiet, they are letting such politicians speak their thoughts for them. If there is not even embryonic dual-power situation in Britain at the present time, then why does Angus Maude, MP, head an article on the recent AUEW case in the *Sunday Express*: 'Do We Now Know Who Really Rules Britain?' and find widespread support? Why do thousands of his readers agree with him when he writes:

'This is surely a terribly dangerous precedent. After this victory why should the AUEW leaders – or the militants in any other powerful union – respect or obey the law? Even when they have forced the repeal of the Industrial Relations Act, there may be other statutes which restrict their activities in inconvenient ways. Why should they not then announce that they do not 'recognise' these laws or the authority of the courts which seek to enforce them? If the militant unions can flout the law and get away with it scot-free, then they are effectively above the law. The authority of our democratically elected Parliament has been very seriously diminished, together with the authority of the courts on which we rely for the maintenance of social order and the protection of the rights of individual citizens. The question 'Who governs Britain?' has now been proved to be a constitutional issue of supreme importance. It is not, as some superficial thinkers apparently decided at the last election, either a political gimmick or an irrelevant triviality. It is urgent and critical' (*Sunday Express* May 12 1974).

Is not this exactly the position on which the Tories as a whole fought the election? Does it not reflect explicitly the inner thoughts of virtually the entire apparatus of state, the military tops, the top civil servants, the judges, the newspaper editors and almost the whole bourgeoisie? Are they all – as I am supposed to be – suffering from some peculiar delusion? Where can such almost universal forebodings and feelings of the ruling class stem from, if not from the actual crisis of power, an actual situation in which there is beginning to arise a contending power in the state and real power is slipping from our old rulers' hands? In this situation, can we afford any illusions that the ruling class can content itself with its former 'democratic' methods of rule?

5. A Word on Adventurism

I have attempted to explain in what *sense* it must be understood that the process, the sequence of upheavals, in the course of the working class conquest of power, has already got under way. I have made quite clear that this is not an automatic process, that it requires leadership, and that without such leadership it will turn into its opposite. To give leadership, however, is to make conscious in the working class the unconscious movement already in being. Once the process has begun to get under way, the very most elementary of all prerequisites for a would-be revolutionary leadership is that it should be aware of the fact itself. It can hardly expect to help other sections of the working class to achieve such an awareness otherwise.

There can be no practical leadership given unless it consists in doing consciously, with eyes open and in an organized way, what is already beginning to be done unconsciously by the working class. The conclusion – given the present situation – should be clear. But isn't it sheer adventurism to say that our objective task is to 'start the process of seizing power'? Didn't Trotsky say that the first task is to conquer the masses, and only then move to the conquest of power?

The accusation of adventurism is a serious one. Trotsky and Lenin attacked the young German Communist Party for its 'March action' – the calling of a General Strike when the working class was not prepared for the seizure of power. The result was a massacre of Communists in a period when the bulk of the working class was standing aside. The Bolsheviks several times attacked a foreign communist party for this: for taking a practical measure which, while inviting an all-out retaliation, did not correspond to what the mass of the working class was already striving for. To take an isolated step – an insurrectionary stand in one locality, a General Strike or whatever – which by its own logic precipitates an all-out clash when the bulk of the working class is likely to remain dormant, out of reach and unprepared, is what is called adventurism. In particular, the crime of the German Communist Party in March 1921 was that it attempted to lurch violently forward in a period when the working class had already 'burned its fingers', was retreating, moving backwards. In this situation, the United Front tactic should have been employed not as an offensive (as the Bolsheviks used it in 1917), not in the process of seizing power itself, but in a defensive way, to consolidate support for an offensive at a later stage. In this situation, the Communist Party of Germany, even if it had applied the tactic of the United Front, could not have placed the question of power – the 'Take the Power!' demand or any demands implying that – in the centre of its United Front propaganda. The revolutionary high-point in Germany had passed in 1918-1919. The movement was now on the downturn. It was a question of knowing, not how to launch an offensive, but how to retreat. To attempt to begin the seizure of power in such a situation was lunacy. The problem was to conquer, not power, but the masses – for a future conquest of power in an entirely different period.

In a period of working-class upswing, when the first unconscious steps in the process of taking power have been taken already, the United Front tactic must be used as it was in 1917. We have only one historical experience of this – the Russian revolution itself. For after about 1920 in Europe the whole revolutionary movement was on a downswing, a movement which only began to climb upwards in the period following the Second World War, and is only turning once again into a new international revolutionary high-peak today. In the case of a revolutionary offensive, the conquest of the masses is inseparable from the conquest of power itself. This is not at all dependent on the size of the initial revolutionary organization. Comrades who do not understand this have not really understood the first thing about our organization's most precious theoretical conquest – our understanding of the struggle for power as inseparable from the process of building the revolutionary party through the united front tactic. It was not 'adventurism' on Lenin's part to insist, as early as in April 1917, on beginning the seizure of power then and there, despite the fact that the Bolsheviks were still a minority in the Soviets and Lenin himself (to begin with) only a small minority in the leadership of his own party. In fact, the process of seizing power had already begun in a big way without Lenin; he only 'began' the process consciously by winning the rank-and-file of his party to the idea of doing with their eyes open what they had already started doing in any case. What would have been adventurist on Lenin's part would have been for him to have sanctioned or encouraged – within the overall process of conquering bastions of power – any isolated strikes, demonstrations or occupations etc. which might have precipitated a bloody clash before the whole class was united to the idea of seizing power through his

party. Lenin did not do this. He began the seizure of power not by shooting anyone or by storming any building, but by explaining to his own party the situation as it was and the objective tasks it posed, and winning the rank-and-file Bolsheviks to his positions. The objective process was unfolding in its own way, and, to a large degree, independently. Every premature, localized (and therefore doomed) insurrectionary movement (the semi-insurrectionary ‘April Days’, the ‘July Days’ in particular) Lenin fought to hold back with all his power. But still, premature clashes took place, as they always will. The tie-up between the objective and subjective factors – the seizure of power by the masses on the one hand, and the conscious activity of Lenin and the party on the other – was only completed in the final insurrection itself. The record of our organization in standing against the immediate calling of a General Strike by the TUC or anyone else throughout the recent stormy period in Britain is one we can be proud of. My own position on these questions is well-known. The charge of ‘adventurism’ is ridiculous. On the other hand, we must learn to endure such accusations, because they will be levelled against us by all and sundry from now on.

6. A reminder on the ABC’s of materialism

For a revolution to succeed, it is necessary that the transfer of power to the working class should already have begun, long, long before the actual carrying out of an insurrection. Even the final event, the armed insurrection itself, must be two-thirds, or nine-tenths completed – silently, unconsciously and in a sense ‘legally’ – days and even weeks before it is consciously embarked upon (Trotsky makes this perfectly clear in his *History of the Russian Revolution*). Why is this? Essentially because conditions determine consciousness. It is only when the working class has, in a sense, *already seized the power*, that it can become conscious of the fact, can understand its strength – and can for that reason organise its rule and give it institutional form through a new state apparatus and through a party. It is not men’s consciousness which determines their social being, but their social being which determines men’s consciousness. If the state power is not already being seized, then all the effort in the world will not succeed either in creating a revolutionary consciousness in the working class, or (which is the same thing) a genuinely revolutionary party.

But why, in that case – it will be asked – is a revolutionary party needed at all? If the seizure of power happens anyway, and consciousness is merely a ‘reflection’ of the accomplished fact, then why the effort of Marxists, why leadership, why theory? But consciousness is not merely a reflection. The point here is that, while the working class may eventually take the power ‘spontaneously’, it can only do so for a moment – an instant in which the bourgeois state remains suspended in mid-air. For a week, a day or as little as an hour, the situation hangs in the balance. Unless the working class becomes aware that it has the power, that the bourgeois state is paralysed, that a mere touch will cause it to collapse – the old balance of forces will be restored. It is at this point of utterly unstable equilibrium that consciousness becomes – or rather appears as – a determining force capable of changing the world. In the preceding period, this unity of theory and practice is only in a state of becoming.

Is it being alleged, then, that the party has ‘nothing to do’ until the final moment of insurrection? On the contrary, if that were the case, I would not be insisting on the need *even now* to be placing the task of seizing power before the working class. The point is that to wait until the final moment, until an openly revolutionary situation, before posing the task of conquering power, is to wait until it is too late. It is necessary that the real revolutionary onslaught of the working class – its successive conquest of bastions of power in face of the bourgeois state – should find its conscious, theoretical expression at each and every stage. Otherwise, there can be no question of a revolutionary leadership being built with deep enough roots in the class.

7. What revolutionary working-class consciousness is

Revolutionary consciousness is in one sense brought to the working class from without, from a miniscule minority of petit-bourgeois intellectuals who may be won from the bourgeoisie as the old ruling class disintegrates. But this only applies to the forms, the language, the concepts by means of which the new consciousness becomes crystallised and articulated. As regards content, the matter is quite otherwise. Marxist consciousness is nothing unless it is workers’ *own* consciousness of their *real*, living, tangible power, their organised strength as against the state and capitalism both nationally and internationally, their productive power and capacity to master and

transform society and the world. While workers are really weak, their consciousness can only be the consciousness of this weakness. The language, the concepts of the Marxists then appear as alien, meaningless forms. And indeed, these Marxist forms are in actual fact then emptied of all real content. Unless the workers are really strong, they cannot be conscious of strength. If they are weak, they will feel weak. They will lack self-confidence. They will look to 'leaders' to grant them 'concessions' in consultation with the ruling class. Nothing any Marxist can say to them, urge them to do or agitate for among them will then have the slightest effect. No number of denunciations of the reformist leaders can in that case possibly overcome the real problem, which is the workers' actual pressing need for illusions in their leaders, a need which lasts for as long as these workers are in practice incapable of taking matters into their own hands. Things only begin to change when the bourgeoisie, for economic reasons, is no longer able to tolerate, adapt to and grant concessions to the reformist mass organisations of the working class. At this point the bourgeoisie finds in the mere existence of the workers' organisations a threat to its own continued rule, and forces these organisations into a position where – despite their leaders – they are in fact becoming an alternative focus of power opposed to the bourgeois state. Under these conditions alone can the working class – as embodied in its organisations – begin to sense its own independent strength. Only in proportion as the working class organisations, from that point on, actually begin splitting the ruling class, checking its offensive, vetoing its executive decisions, depriving it of its social base – and undermining its rule – can the elements of a revolutionary consciousness begin to crystallise within the movement of the working class. Only then will the Marxists begin to be listened to. Only then will real Marxist analysis and literature begin to emerge, nourished by the sap of the class struggle itself. Only then will a revolutionary programme begin to take shape. A programme is a course of action. A revolutionary programme is the course of action to be taken by the working class in sustaining and completing its conquest of state power and the transformation of society under its rule. It includes all the various struggles, demands and measures whose implementation makes up the totality of this process. The 'conquest of power' is not some additional element distinct from the process as a whole. On the contrary, it can only be embodied in a mass of concrete partial steps, which however limited in themselves, represent nevertheless challenges to the authority of the bourgeois state. Likewise, the demand, '*Take the power!*' addressed to the leadership of the mass organisations, cannot be some additional demand tacked on to a mass of other demands considered as distinct from it. The task is not to 'add' something 'revolutionary' to a mass of otherwise reformist demands. Unless the workers' organisations, pushed from below, and despite their own leaders, have already begun the process of taking power – a process embodied in a whole series of partial victories which check and undermine the authority of the bourgeois state – there is certainly no point in confronting the leaders with the programme of conquering power – or even any part of this programme at all. The task is not to introduce – as if 'consciousness' could somehow play an independent role – a revolutionary content which is not embodied in the situation. It is only to give conscious expression to a movement which has already begun. There is nothing to be gained by demanding of the 'leaders' at any particular stage that they take measures other than those which their own working-class supporters are already in practice (however inarticulately) attempting to force upon them. If there is no real movement to take power on the part of the working class, and if the particular leaders concerned are not confronted with this movement from their own specific base in the working class, then to put power demands on these leaders with any support or effect will be impossible. But in that case, the placing of transitional demands of any kind will be equally impossible – unless of course, these demands are first emptied of all revolutionary content. For a transitional measure is not 'transitional' at all unless its enforcement is incompatible in some way with the authority and rule of the capitalist state and system – unless, in other words, it constitutes a step in the course of taking power from that capitalist state. When Lenin raised the slogan *All Power to the Soviets!*, he could only do because the working class had already begun the seizure of power, quite independently of any conscious leadership. The demand could only be placed upon the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries that they 'Break with the bourgeoisie – take the power!' because the Menshevik and SR rank and file were already pushing the power into their leaders' hands, attempting to drive them into conflict with the bourgeoisie, trying to force them to rule without the capitalist ministers. If the workers had not already (despite their leaders) begun the seizure of power in February 1917, the demand '*Take the Power!*', addressed to the Soviet leaders, would have fallen on deaf ears. The task of the Bolsheviks was not to start, sustain and complete the seizure of power all by themselves. It was to base themselves on the actual seizure of power which had already begun to take place. Their task was to identify with it, to participate in it, to consolidate it and above all to direct it to completion through the replacement of those leaders for whom the seizure of power was an activity forced on them and to be put an end to

at all costs before it reach consummation in the establishment of the proletarian dictatorship. The suddenness with which a dual power situation appeared in Russia and the particular soviet organisational form in which the new power was expressed, were, of course, products of the concrete history of Russia and in particular of the fact that here the bourgeois and proletarian revolutions were combined. In Britain, we have been given far more advance warning of events, and the process of development of a dual power situation is likely to be far more halting and gradual as indeed, it has already begun – just barely begun – showing itself to be.

8. A Note on Party-Building

The conception we have of ‘building the revolutionary party’ has always been quite different from that of the WRP, IS, IMG etc. in – amongst other things – one important respect. We have always argued that the task is not to build up piece by piece one more party, in competition with the Labour Party, which will eventually win over the bulk of the working class and then launch a struggle for power. This course is impossible. The working class can only be won to the revolutionary programme in the course of actually carrying out the seizure of power. The Bolshevik revolution itself taught that. The reformists cannot begin to be defeated ‘ideologically’ unless and until the source of reformism’s ideological hold – namely, the real, material rule of the bourgeoisie – is itself beginning to be overthrown. Ideas cannot be fought with ideas – any more than shadows can be fought with shadows. You have to deprive the bourgeoisie of its actual rule, if you are to get rid of the ideological shadow of this rule, which is reformism. But how is the actual rule of the bourgeoisie to be overthrown? Here is where the united front comes in. Unless all the working class organisations are beginning to unite in action against the bourgeois state, and unless they are actually beginning to constitute already an alternative state machinery themselves, there can be no question of even beginning to deprive the bourgeoisie of state power. It is a cardinal tenet of Leninist theory that this process takes place, in the first place, spontaneously, i.e. quite independently of whether or not a revolutionary leadership exists. In fact, this must be so, since there can be no question of a revolutionary leadership even beginning to emerge outside of this practical context. From this it follows that a real revolutionary party cannot emerge and take root in the masses independently of the activities of the other working-class parties, or in advance of the actual struggle for power itself. It can only take root in the course of the actual taking of power, an activity which, first of all, begins to be forced upon the mass workers’ organisations against the will of their leaders in a spontaneous, unconscious way, which simultaneously exposes the incompetence of these leaders – as of their organisations in their present form. The embryo revolutionary leadership, from this point on, can only be build up in the course of the actual conquest of power jointly with the membership of the existing mass organisations. But this presupposes, on the one hand, real links with those mass organisations and, on the other, an implacable resolve to carry through the logic of the process already begun, a resolve which can only be the product of a completely conscious understanding of the significance of what is happening.

9. How not to apply the lesson of Bolshevism

It is all very well for comrades to point to the long, patient work carried out by Lenin in building his Bolshevik Party from 1902 to 1917. The fact is overlooked that Lenin’s Bolshevik Party was the result of Russia’s Social Democratic Party being split, almost from its inception, into two. It is not possible for us to re-write the history of the development of the labour movement in Britain. The British Labour Party was not split into two in 1900 or 1902 nor has it been so split at any time since. This immediately means: the precise context in which Lenin built his party in Russia cannot be reproduced here. The ‘split’ must take place, but it must be the split of a different kind of labour movement, under almost wholly different organisational circumstances.

In this country, the moment a General Strike situation begins, or the moment a real revolutionary outbreak occurs, the groups to the left of the Communist Party will at once be thrust into the storm-centre, spot-lighted by the press, denounced from all sides, blamed for every ‘excess’, raided in contrived ‘arms searches’ at the first opportunity etc. etc.. They will be treated as seditious, ‘insurrectionary’ organisations whether they like it or not. It will at once become necessary for these groups to defend each other physically with the utmost vigour against the violence or threats of violence of the state. Meanwhile, the very denunciations and attacks made upon these organisations and the disproportionate expectations built up in them, will tend to drive some of the most militant sections of the working class momentarily in their direction. Initially some of the best sections of the Labour and Communist

Party rank and file will briefly gravitate towards them, no matter how sectarian, tactically inept and/or politically bankrupt the 'Trotskyists' may be. At the same time, sections of the working class base of these organisations, however small and mis-educated, will sense the need for unity, will demand it of their leaders, and will insist that this unity transcends the puny framework of the 'Trotskyist' organisations and extends right through into the Communist Party and Labour Party as well. A 'revolutionary leadership' which does not take the lead in expressing this desire for unity will completely miss the boat – it will be left standing as the real revolutionary movement sweeps by.

The argument against uniting *organisationally* with our 'Trotskyist' and 'Stalinist' opponent organisations is well known. How on earth can we unite with Healyites with Pabloites, with revisionists, with Syndicalists and with Stalinists? One feels truly humbled by the force of such arguments. Did we not break decisively with all such tendencies in order to form our own little organisation? Is not the lesson of Bolshevism Lenin's fierce demarcation of lines, his resolute refusal to organise jointly with the Mensheviks, his split from economism, from centrism and from social democracy in order to build his own independent party? Would Lenin have advocated a 'Joint Command of the Revolutionary Organisations' at the very moment when a pre-revolutionary situation was beginning to arise – at the very moment, in other words, when events were about to subject all ideological differences to the supreme practical test? It is assumed that the answer is self-evident. How could Lenin have advocated any such thing?

In fact, the answer is apparently not known at all. Not only did Lenin in the course of the 1905 revolution advocate joint action with the Mensheviks. He demanded the immediate fusion of the two organisations! 'It is no secret', wrote Lenin in 1905,

'that the vast majority of Social Democratic workers are exceedingly dissatisfied with the split in the Party and are demanding unity... The workers have lost almost all hope that the Party 'chiefs' will unite of themselves. The need for unity was formally recognised by both the Third Congress of the RSDLP and by the Menshevik Congress, held last May. Six months have passed since then, but the cause of unity has hardly made any progress. No wonder the workers are beginning to show signs of impatience. No wonder 'A worker, one of many' who wrote on unity in ISKR (the Mensheviks' paper – CK) and in a pamphlet published by the 'Majority'... has at last threatened the Social Democratic intelligentsia with a 'first from below'. Some Social Democrats (Mensheviks) did not like that threat at the time, others (Bolsheviks) thought it legitimate and, at bottom, fully justified.'

'It seems to me that the time has come, when the class conscious worker Social Democrats can and must carry out their intention (I will not say 'threat' because this word smacks of accusations, of demagogy, and we must do our utmost to avoid both)... it is now possible not only to urge unity, not only to obtain promises to unite, but actually to unite – by a simple decision of the majority of organised workers in both factions'.

Was this on the basis of complete philosophical, ideological, strategical, tactical and programmatic unity – as our solid 'Leninists' would have us believe is the only possible basis for such a demand? Far from it. It was on the basis, simply, of the overriding need for unity as the precondition for revolutionary action on a mass scale. Lenin was *against* the kind of formalistic quibbling which characterises the revolutionary intelligentsia. If practice was to predominate over mere theory, if the masses were to be drawn into the movement, if a mass revolutionary party was to be assembled from the elements already in being, then this stupid nit-picking would have to be thrown overboard:

'...previous formal prerogatives inevitably lose their significance at the present time, and it will be necessary in very many cases to start 'from the beginning' to PROVE to large sections of new Party comrades the importance of a consistent Social-Democratic programme, Social Democratic tactics and organization. We must not forget that so far we have had to deal too often only with revolutionaries coming from a particular social stratum, whereas now we shall have to deal with typical representatives of the masses... it is necessary for all comrades to devise NEW forms of organization by their independent, creative joint efforts. It is impossible to lay down any predetermined standards for this, for we are working in an entirely new field: a knowledge of local conditions, and above all the initiative of all Party members must be brought into play. The new form of organisation, or rather the new form of the basic organisational nucleus of the workers' party, must be definitely much broader than were the old circles. Apart from this, the new nucleus will most likely have to be a less rigid, more 'free',

more 'loose' organization.'

Lenin put matters in a very simple way. The task was to unite...in order to make the revolution. There was no mucking about with insincere 'demands' placed on the Mensheviks so as to 'expose' them for insufficient energy on this, that or the other 'concrete task'. The workers would have smelt a rat at once, and in any case, unity is not possible on the basis of isolated 'concrete tasks' but only on the basis of a generalised practical offensive which undermines the power of the ruling class. Lenin urged support for both the Bolshevik and the Menshevik Party organisations, and their transformation, under the impact of the workers' 'first from below', into a single united organisation:

'Join the Party organisations in huge numbers! Turn our Fourth Congress and the Second Menshevik Conference into a grand and imposing Congress of Social Democratic workers. Join with us in settling this practical question of fusion – let this question be the exception (it is an exception that proves the opposite rule) in which we shall have one-tenth theory, and nine-tenths practice. Such a wish is surely legitimate, historically necessary, and psychologically comprehensible. We have 'theorised' for so long (sometimes – why not admit it – to no use) in the unhealthy atmosphere of political exile, that it will really not be amiss if we now 'bend the bow' slightly, a little, just a little, 'the other way' and put practice a little more in the forefront. This would certainly be appropriate in regard to the question of unity, about which, owing to the causes of the split, we have used up such an awful lot of ink and no end of paper. We exiles in particular are longing for practical work. Besides, we have already written a very good and comprehensive programme of the whole democratic revolution. Let us, then, unite also to make this revolution!'

It is no use our affecting to be scornful of the 'tiny' size and influence of the IS, the Militant and other groups – for the most part, they are not so tiny as we, and their influence is growing, as the Communist Party and Labour Party leaders are acutely aware. And it is no good arguing that Lenin was wrong, that nothing came of the 'fusion' demand, or that it represented,, in any case, only a momentary lapse or capitulation to the Mensheviks. In fact, it was nothing of the sort. It represented the only possible means of approaching those workers who were being attracted towards the Mensheviks at that time. In that period, all sorts of Menshevik leaders and intermediate elements – such as Trotsky – were in practice being sucked into the eye of the whirlwind in which they represented and embodied a material challenge to the state. To quibble over 'programmes', to declare 'no support' to the Mensheviks, to abuse them for being the 'Minority' etc. etc. would have been ludicrous in that situation. It is true that Lenin's own programme was deficient at that time, and that the programmatic differences with the Mensheviks were in fact blurred where they should have been clear. But that is just the point. It takes precisely a practical revolutionary upsurge to demonstrate to a real Marxist leader (a) just where his old 'differences' are inadequate, are drawn along not quite the right axis – and are a hindrance, to that extent, to the development of class consciousness – and (b) where the new lines of demarcation – cutting, in certain respects, across the existing organisational split – will have to be drawn instead. It was certainly no accident that by early 1917, Lenin had clarified his position: unconditional unity and fusion with all those (such as Trotsky's group) who stood for seizing power; merciless political struggle, against those who stood against it. That central issue was the axis of demarcation not only as between Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, but also as between tendencies within the Bolshevik Party itself.

Trotsky writes:

'The fundamental controversial question, around which everything else centred, was this: whether or not we should struggle for power; whether or not we should assume power. This alone is ample proof that we were not then dealing with a mere episodic divergence of opinions but with two tendencies of utmost principled significance. The first and principal tendency was proletarian and led to the road of world revolution. The other was 'democratic', i.e. petty bourgeois, and led, in the last analysis, to the subordination of proletarian policies to the requirements of bourgeois society in the process of reform. These two tendencies came into hostile conflict over every essential question that arose throughout the year 1917. It is precisely the revolutionary epoch – i.e. the epoch when the accumulated capital of the party is put in direct circulation – that must inevitably broach in action and reveal divergences of such nature. These two tendencies, in greater or lesser degree, with more or less modification, will more than once manifest themselves during the revolutionary period in every country. If by

Bolshevism – and we are stressing here its essential aspect – we understand such a training, such a tempering and such an organisation of the proletarian vanguard as enables the latter to seize power, arms in hand, and if by Social Democracy we are to understand the acceptance of a reformist opposition activity within the framework of bourgeois society and an adaptation to its legality – i.e. the actual training of the masses to become imbued with the inviolability of the bourgeois state: then, indeed, it is absolutely clear that even within the Communist Party itself, which does not emerge fully-fledged from the crucible of history, the struggle between social-democratic tendencies and Bolshevism is bound to reveal itself in its most clear, open and uncamouflaged form when the question of power is posed point blank. As has been already said, the disagreements centred around the question of power. Generally speaking, this is the touchstone whereby the character of the revolutionary party (and of other parties as well) is determined.’

Since Lenin was able to win a majority in the Bolshevik Party for his change of position, there was no need to split his party. Had the change of line proved impossible to achieve, however, it would have been necessary to split and fuse with Trotsky’s group and with revolutionary sections of the Mensheviks and SRs. In the event, of course, the seizure of power was prepared by a kind of ‘Joint Command’ comprising Bolsheviks, Trotsky’s group (the ‘Mezhrayontsy’ organisation which fused with the Bolsheviks in the course of seizing power) and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries. In the particular circumstances of that revolution, one party – the Bolsheviks – had the overwhelming preponderance of influence in this ‘command’ from the beginning of the process to the end. There is absolutely no reason, however, to erect this fact of history into an immutable historical law. In the final act, yes, there must be one command, one centralising force, one, dominant will. In other words, in the final act of the seizure of power, one democratic centralist organisation must gain command and provide the initiative. But that does not mean that the other revolutionary organisations must be smashed, destroyed or engulfed. It only requires that in the most crucial period of the insurrection an iron discipline is maintained, with the subordinate organisations taking their lead from the dominant force voluntarily, with or without leadership splits, under the pressure of their own members, and possibly only for the brief period of the insurrection itself. After the insurrection – in that case – the various revolutionary’ organisations could resume and maintain their distinct features to provide the possibility of a rich multi-party Soviet democracy such as never existed in Russia at all. Anyone looking at British developments without scales over his eyes should be able to see that this pattern seems much more likely than the Russian one. What the British revolution requires is, not the rapid disappearance of all the ‘revolutionary’ organisations except the Chartists, who then miraculously emerge – fully-fledged like the Bolsheviks in 1917 – as virtually the sole competitors on the revolutionary field. It requires the achievement of unity in action of the existing revolutionary forces for, the tasks of organising the seizure of power. It requires, in other words, some form of joint command of the existing revolutionary organisations. But above all, it requires the existence, within this command, of at least one organisation which is really revolutionary, and which is able to take the initiative as the struggle for power unfolds.

10. For a joint command of the revolutionary organizations!

The quite peculiar purism and sectarianism of so-called ‘Trotskyists throughout the West is not something which can be afforded in Britain at the present time. Those who consider themselves inheritors of the legacy of Bolshevism have an absolute bounden duty to question their independent right to existence, to make this a public issue and again and again to see whether they cannot combine into a single revolutionary organisation. Even in relation to ourselves it is a necessity to make constantly clear that we are against our continued independent existence as an organisation – that we see this not as a virtue but only an extremely unpleasant necessity which is imposed upon us. Of course, this is ‘naive’, it is ‘utopian’, it is an attempt to ‘minimise differences’. The point, however, is that the differences between today’s revolutionary groups are NOT the differences which divided the Bolsheviks from the Mensheviks in 1917. It has to be said that the ‘differences’ – at present reflect only different ways of capitulating to the political, philosophical, moral and psychological pressures of the ruling class – i.e. they are differences which should be ‘minimised’ – i.e. reduced to their real paltry significance, transcended and replaced by a ‘split’ around a wholly different axis.

This is not to say that these organisations are ‘Mensheviks’. The point is precisely that the Bolshevik Party itself was in effect a centrist party in the period in 1917 when Lenin and Trotsky were prevented from exercising on-the-spot leadership. The Bolshevik Party in February 1917 carried within itself a whole number of elements which in

Britain today are scattered throughout different organisations. Being from its inception the left split-off from the Russian Social Democracy, it contained a good part of the mass working class base and loyalty which in Britain is enjoyed by the Labour Party. Having a long record of industrial leadership it possessed an industrial 'muscle' matched in Britain – if at all – only by the militants of the Communist Party. And having in its ranks the most committed, intransigent and theoretically well-equipped Marxist intellectuals (Zinoviev, Kamenev, Preobrazhensky etc.) it had a capacity for grasping reality – even when Lenin and Trotsky were in exile – matched in Britain if at all only in the intelligentsia attached to the so called 'revolutionary' organisations. Lenin and Trotsky in 1917 used as their instrument to seize power the organisation – however imperfect – which actually existed. Lenin's dissatisfaction with the leading cadres he had trained is evidenced in almost all his speeches and writings throughout 1917. He did not, however, try to build a new party but used his authority – won through his previous life's work in building up the party – to defeat politically its existing leadership. Likewise, Trotsky had long realised that the Bolshevik party was theoretically deficient, even in the person of Lenin himself, and that on its traditional programme it would end up supporting the bourgeois state against the working class. That, however, did not induce him, in February 1917, to attempt the hopeless task of re-writing history, starting from scratch as if nothing had already been achieved, and trying to build a new 'independent revolutionary party'. He did form an independent organisation, but only to ensure its fusion with the Bolshevik Party – on the basis in practice (although Trotsky did not insist on observance of all the forms) of his own programme – at the earliest possible date. In the meantime he threw aside the accumulated, exaggerated and in part irrelevant antagonisms of the past, reduced his previous differences with Lenin to their real significance, and identified fully with Lenin's practice and with the actual movement of the Bolshevik rank and file .

Is it so heinous a heresy to suggest that something of a similar kind must be attempted today? The childish playing of the game of 'Mensheviks and Bolsheviks' characteristic of our contemporary 'Trotskyists' has got to be stamped on, hard. Is it so unprecedented a suggestion to make, that the members of the various 'revolutionary' organizations 'revolutionary' organisations – including, most valuably, those who are subjectively revolutionary in the Communist Party – should have their heads banged together and be forced to decide for or against fusion in view of the urgency of the immediate objective tasks? What did Lenin and Trotsky do in the immediate post-revolutionary period when they saw in Britain, on the one hand the development of a pre-revolutionary situation, and on the other, a most peculiar assortment of supposedly 'Marxist' organisations? Did they advocate the setting up of one more new little sect, comprised from the start only of ready made 100 per cent Leninists? Did they outline the perspective that by patient work lasting 10 or 20 years, this little sect should grow and grow until eventually it was bigger than all the others and could start thinking about the struggle for power? Or did they insist on the fusion of the already existing 'revolutionary' organisations, on the basis of the united front tactic and the programme of struggle for power as an immediate objective necessity? We know what the answer is. It should be our answer today.

It will be countered that Lenin and Trotsky could impose this fusion because behind them stood the might of the Soviet state and the authority and example of the first working class conquest of power in history. True. But I am talking here about an objective necessity, not about whether or not our organisation has sufficient authority to impose it. It is true that we can only gain authority by our practice in the real labour movement, and not at all by running around with impotent pleas to the 'revolutionary' sects. But in fact our practice in the real labour movement depends on our working class support. And what is one of the most immediate, the most telling and the most unanswerable objection of working class militants in the labour movement to joining a group like ours? It is not that our programme, strategy, or tactics seem in themselves unattractive. It is this, that we are a sect. We are Trotskyists, and, as is well known 'you Trotskyists spend all your time fighting among yourselves.' While it is true that in order to smash the sectarianism of the 'Trotskyist' groups we must already be a force, an influence in the labour movement, it is also true that in order to wield that influence we must, among other things, show ourselves to be in the forefront of the struggle against 'Trotskyist' shadow-boxing, in the forefront of those fighting for the unity of the revolutionary movement and for the formation, through fusion, of a revolutionary party with real power. Otherwise, even many of the best Labour or Communist Party militants will feel that our kind of politics offers them, organizationally; simply no-where to go. However correct they may feel our ideas to be, in the matter of joining an organization, they would rather stay where they are.

While, in the early part of this year, the class struggle in Britain was being raised onto a qualitatively higher plane, our own organization, quite naturally was in a state of turmoil. It would have been a bad sign had we not been. I made clear my own position: the objective situation was one thing, our subjective capacities quite another. The starting-point was the objective situation and its demands. Once these had been agreed, the question how we met them could then be discussed. I put it to the organization that the objective situation was this: that the trade union movement was beginning a process which a future revolutionary leadership would have to complete – the process, namely, of establishing its own power. If we were to find a road to the masses as a revolutionary leadership, our starting-point had to be that fact. It seemed important to me to place it as starkly as possible before the organization, to make quite sure that it was not accepted as a mere part of our routine, that the full implications were understood and that the whole organization was – if necessary – split from top to bottom and a thoroughgoing discussion forced on that issue. This, of course, is what we are engaged in at the present time. The final result – whatever the immediate outcome at this Conference – will be, in my opinion, the emergence of an organization based on reality and therefore capable of forming the nucleus of a revolutionary party as the struggle for power unfolds.

C.K. 17. 5. 74.