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Marxism Today

EDITORIAL COMMENTS

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Which Road?

John Gollan

WITH the adoption of our programme, *The British Road to Socialism*, our Party, for the first time, worked out a comprehensive strategy for social revolution in terms of the actual political conditions of Britain.

The Marxist case for social revolution was never just the glaring contradiction of poverty *versus* riches, or the need to end capitalist exploitation. Marx put it in *Capital* in these words:

"The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with and under it. Centralisation of the means of production and socialisation of labour at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated."

Case for Social Revolution

In the modern epoch of imperialism the case is even more overwhelming than it was in Marx's time. In capitalist society of the 1960's we see fulfilled Lenin's prophecy of the extreme concentration of power—economic, political and social—in the hands of the monopolists. The development of science, technique and automation has brought the contradiction between productive power and the relations of production—the class relations in production—to breaking point. This contradiction can only be resolved by a social revolution. Exploitation was never higher. In Britain, some 7 to 8 million people are living "precariously close to the margins of poverty". One-third of the families in Britain have to exist on a deficient diet. The final solution of all the great social issues—housing, education, town planning—is bound up with the social revolution. So it is also with the final elimination of war.

Politically, monopoly rule, as Lenin said, leads to "reaction all along the line, whatever the political system": it threatens bourgeois democracy with authoritarian rule and fascism, or makes it more and more only a facade for the rule of the monopolists. The further development of democracy is incompatible with monopoly rule. Today the fight to defend and extend democracy brings one inevitably up against the issue of social revolution and the development of socialist democracy. And the central issue of social revolution is state power.

This is the basis of our fundamental disagreement with reformism and the position taken up by the right wing of the Labour Party. The substance of their position is to aim to administer capitalism more efficiently, to come to the rescue of the ruling class when capitalism is in difficulties, instead of organising the mass action of the people to solve those difficulties through the social revolution, the ending of capitalism and the building of socialism.

Two Paths—Violent and Non-Violent

One of the main issues of controversy in the international Communist movement is about the way to social revolution.

The two World Conferences of the International Communist Movement (1957 and 1960), declared: In a number of capitalist countries the possibility exists to win state power without civil war. There were two ways to state power, peaceful and non-peaceful. The actual possibility in each country depends on the definite historical conditions. There was no dispute in the meetings that there are *two* ways. For many countries in view of the actual conditions the non-peaceful course is their only way. It was up to the Communist movement in each country to decide in the light of their circumstances.

The working class, said the 1960 Statement, "seeks to achieve the socialist revolution by peaceful means", the forms and course of development of the socialist revolution "will depend on the specific balance of class forces in the country concerned, on the organisation and maturity of the working class and its vanguard, and on the extent of the resistance put up by the ruling class".

At the time, the Chinese Communists supported this position of the two World Conferences, and the 1957 *Declaration* and the 1960 *Statement* were adopted unanimously (in both, the paragraphs on the two paths are identical). But the Chinese comrades are now saying "it is necessary to amend the formulation of the question in the *Declaration* and the *Statement*. . . ." Even before they had made that admission and released private documents showing that they had disagreed all along, this was already clear from their earlier writings.

Now they are quite categorical. The only way to revolution is by violence: "Marxism has always

proclaimed the inevitability of violent revolution" (*The Proletarian Revolution and Khrushchov's Revisionism*, p. 8).¹ ". . . Violent revolution is a universal law of proletarian revolution" (p. 11), and Mao Tse-tung is quoted: "The seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of the issue by war is the central task and the highest form of revolution. This Marxist-Leninist principle of revolution holds good universally, for China and for all other countries."

On this basis, of course, our Party should abandon *The British Road to Socialism*. The armed struggle is to prevail from South-East Asia to Britain, irrespective of political conditions, traditions or systems of government.

We disagree. The World Communist movement has long since abandoned the practice of direction from a single centre or deciding on a single strategy to be applied in every country irrespective of conditions. Each Communist Party must decide its own course, and the conditions under which they work differ radically. But apart from this, we deny that the armed struggle is a universal law of Marxism to be applied everywhere, irrespective of conditions.

In taking up this attitude the Chinese are challenging the position laid down by the World Communist movement. It is understandable that a Party of such authority which came to power after decades of civil war, should have such views. At the same time a Party with even greater authority, revolutionary experience and achievement, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, holds to the view of the Statement that there are two paths to revolution, violent and non-violent.

Attitude of Marx

It is totally wrong to say that the universality of violent revolution was or is the classical position of Marxism. On the contrary, Marxism confirms the position of the 1957 Statement and 1960 Declaration—namely, there are two ways depending on conditions. It is equally wrong in the complex conditions of today to put the strategy of social revolution in a dogmatic strait-jacket.

Marx and Engels for most of their lives worked in a revolutionary Europe. It was the age of bourgeois democratic revolutions and more than once Engels fought on the barricades. But both were also concerned with the development of an international labour movement which crystallised in the International Working Men's Association. The International combined the day-to-day struggle of the mass labour movement against

capitalism with the aim of the emancipation of the working class and the ending of all class rule—made more precise in 1872 as the aim of social revolution and the conquest of political power.

This was after the test had come with the Paris Commune of 1871, the first attempt in history to carry out a working-class revolution. Marx and the International, irrespective of previous warnings that a rising would be premature, without hesitation supported the Commune and its world-wide historical significance. Bloodily suppressed by counter-revolutionary force, the Commune was of decisive importance for the clarification of Marx's ideas on state power. On April 12th, 1871, he wrote to Kugelmann:

"If you look at the last chapter of my *Eighteenth Brumaire* you will find that I say that the next attempt of the French revolution will be no longer as before, to transfer the bureaucratic military machine from one hand to another, but to *smash* it, and that is essential for every real people's revolution on the Continent."

His second conclusion was that for a successful revolution the working class needed its own independent revolutionary party.

At the same time Marx treated the whole matter historically—he allowed for the peaceful transition to socialism as well as the violent transition.

In July 1871, a few months after the defeat of the Commune, Marx gave an interview to a correspondent of the American journal *The World* on the purpose and programme of the International. It had, he said,

"the aim of the economic emancipation of the working class by means of the conquest of political power: the aim of using this political power to achieve social tasks. Our aims must be broad enough to include all forms of activity of the working class. . . . In every part of the world our task presents itself in some particular form. . . . In England, for example, the path is open to the working class to display its political strength. Insurrection would be madness where peaceful agitation would lead to the aim by more rapid and certain means. In France the multitude of repressive laws and the deadly antagonism between classes make inevitable, apparently, a violent termination to the social war. But it is the working class itself of that country which has to choose by what means it seeks this termination."

The correspondent then pressed Marx, in view of his statement on England, to be more categorical and give an absolute assurance of a peaceful path in Britain. But Marx refused to go any further than he had already gone, saying:

"On this point I am not as optimistic as you. The English bourgeoisie has always shown its

¹ Note: All the quotations on the Chinese case are from this pamphlet except where otherwise noted.

readiness to accept a majority decision so long as it disposed of a monopoly of votes. But believe me, at the moment when it finds itself in a minority on questions which it considers vitally important, we shall have a new slave-owners' war. . . ."²

(*Collected Works, Russian Edition*
Vol. 17, pp. 634-7.)

In other words, in relation to England at least Marx advanced the possibility of a peaceful transition and said that whether or not there would be violence depended on the ruling class. This was the consistent position of Marx and Engels over the following 20 years.

A few months later, in a speech to the London Conference of the International Working Men's Association in September 1871, Marx said:

"We must declare to the governments: we know that you are the armed power which is directed against the proletarians: we will go forward against you in a peaceful way so long as that is possible to us, and with arms, if it should be necessary."

A year later at a public meeting in Amsterdam following The Hague Congress of the International in September 1872, Marx again returned to the two possibilities of revolution. He said:

"Some day, the workers must conquer political supremacy in order to establish the new organisation of labour; they must overthrow the old political system whereby the old institutions are sustained. If they fail to do this they will suffer the fate of the early Christians, who neglected to overthrow the old system and who, for that reason, never had a kingdom in this world. Of course, I must not be supposed to imply that the means to this end will be everywhere the same. We know that special regard must be paid to the institutions, customs and traditions of various lands; and we do not deny that there are certain countries, such as the United States and England, in which the workers may hope to secure their ends by peaceful means. If I mistake not, Holland belongs to the same category. Even so, we have to recognise that in most continental countries, force will have to be the lever of the revolution. It is to force that in due time the workers will have to appeal if the dominion of labour is at long last to be established."

(*History of the First International*,
G. M. Stekloff, pp. 240-1.)

Engels' View

Engels, of course, was at one with Marx on all this. He prefaced the first English translation of *Capital* in November 1886 with the words:

"Surely at such a moment, the voice ought to

² In their pamphlet the Chinese quote this last part of the interview, but not the first part.

be heard of a man whose whole theory is the result of a life-long study of the economic history and condition of England, and when that study led to the conclusion that, at least in Europe, England is the only country where the inevitable social revolution might be effected entirely by peaceful and legal means, he certainly never forgot to add that he hardly expected the English ruling class to submit without a 'pro-slavery rebellion' to this peaceful and legal revolution" (p. 32).

Five years later Engels published his *Critique of the Erfurt Programme of 1891*. He was of the opinion that in relation to political demands the main point was not in the Programme—whether the then absolute power in Germany must not be broken before the other political demands could be met, and he remarked:

"It is possible to conceive that the old society could develop peacefully into the new in countries where the parliament concentrates all power within itself, where anything one pleases can be done constitutionally once the majority of the people is behind one; in democratic republics like France and America, in monarchies like England where the impending buying out of the dynasty is spoken of every day in the press and where this dynasty is powerless in face of the will of the people."

(*Works of Marx and Engels*, Volume
22, German edition, Dietz Verlag,
Berlin, 1963, p. 234.)

On March 6th, almost on the eve of his death in 1895, Engels wrote his famous Preface to Marx's *Class Struggles in France*. He dealt with the future of the revolutionary struggle in the condition of advanced capitalism, where the movement has been building up working-class strength through legal forms. Again he analysed the two aspects of the revolutionary struggle, peaceful and non-peaceful. He showed how the old style of 1848 barricade insurrection was out of date:

"The newly built quarters of the large cities, erected since 1848, have been laid out in long, straight, wide streets, as if made for the effective use of cannons and rifles. The revolutionary would be mad who would of himself select the new working-class districts of the north and east of Berlin for barricade struggle."

Immediately after this, he added:

"Does this mean that in the future the street struggle has no role to play? Not at all. It only means that the conditions since 1848 are far more unfavourable for the insurrectionaries, far more favourable for the military. Accordingly, a street struggle can only be victorious if this unfavourable nature of the situation is compensated for by other factors. Therefore, it will more seldom come in the beginning of a great

revolution than in its later developments, and must be undertaken with greater forces. These, however, will then probably, as in the great French Revolution, on September 4th and on October 3rd in Paris, prefer the method of open attack to the passive barricade tactics."

His prediction was brilliantly proved correct in the actual conditions of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.

The German Social Democratic leadership, confronted with this Preface, carefully suppressed the key revolutionary passages in it, so that in the published version the balanced picture of the relationship of peaceful and non-peaceful forms of struggle was distorted into the preaching of legality at all costs as the only future path. On April 3rd, 1895, Engels wrote in fury to Lafargue to express his anger that the extracts from his Preface had been used to make him appear "in support of peaceful, anti-violent tactics at any price" whereas "I preach those tactics only for the Germany of today and even then, with many reservations. For France, Belgium, Italy, Austria, such tactics could not be followed as a whole, and for Germany they could become inapplicable tomorrow."

One can sum up, therefore, on the position of Marx and Engels in the last century when the working-class movement was still weak and when no socialist countries existed. They did not say that armed struggle was a universal law to be applied irrespective of conditions. There were two possibilities, peaceful and non-peaceful, depending on the actual circumstances and relation of forces in each country. Special regard had to be paid to the political institutions, the customs and traditions in each country, including the powers or otherwise of parliament. The outcome largely depended on whether the ruling class resorted to violence or whether the conditions could be developed which could prevent violence on their part. Theirs was a non-dogmatic position.

The Chinese comrades, of course, know all this. Their answer is to quote Lenin's conclusion that the exception allowed for by Marx in England and elsewhere had become outdated by history.

Lenin on the Road to Socialism

Lenin's treatment is important. Before he engaged in his polemic with Kautsky, he dealt with the matter in *State and Revolution*, written in 1917. Commenting on the Letter to Kugelmann which we have quoted above, Lenin remarks that Marx confined his conclusions to the continent, and continues:

"This was natural in 1871, when England was still the model of a purely capitalist country, but

without militarism, and, to a considerable degree, without a bureaucracy. Hence, Marx excluded England, where a revolution, even a people's revolution, could be conceived of and was then possible, *without* the condition of first destroying the 'ready-made state machinery'.

"Today in 1917, in the epoch of the first great imperialist war, Marx's exception is no longer valid. . . . Today both in England and America, the 'essential' thing for 'every real people's revolution' is the *smashing*, the *destruction* of the 'ready-made state machinery' (brought in these countries between 1914 and 1917 to general 'European' imperialist perfection)."

(*Selected Works*, Vol. 7, p. 37.)

Similarly, commenting on Engels' reflections on the Erfurt Programme, Lenin wrote:

"Engels declares that precisely because there was no republic and no freedom in Germany, the dreams of a 'peaceful' path were absolutely absurd. Engels is sufficiently careful not to tie his hands. He admits that in republican or very free countries 'one can conceive' (only 'conceive!') of a peaceful development towards socialism. . . ."

(*ibid.*)

This, of course, is characteristic of Lenin. Working in conditions of Tsarist absolutism and illegality (which only ended with the February Revolution), writing at the height of the First World War, one could understand if he had brushed aside all these considerations of Marx and Engels as now irrelevant. But he did not. He accepted that in the historical conditions Marx and Engels were dealing with, the possibility of peaceful transition was there.

Exceptionally interesting was Lenin's treatment of this issue in the period of the argument with the "Left" Communists in Russia in 1918 (see *Selected Works*, Vol. 7, pp. 368-70). Bukharin recalled that Marx thought it advantageous in certain circumstances for the working class to "buy off" the capitalists. Lenin argued that what Marx wrote did not apply to the conditions of Soviet Russia in May 1918. But his comments are instructive. He said that at the time Marx wrote, England was still a country where militarism and bureaucracy were less pronounced.

"A country in which there was the greatest possibility of a 'peaceful' victory for socialism by the workers 'buying off' the bourgeoisie. And Marx says: under certain conditions the workers certainly will not refuse to buy off the bourgeoisie. Marx did not commit himself—or the future leaders of the socialist revolution—to matters of form, to methods and ways of bringing about the revolution; for he understood perfectly well that a vast number of new problems would arise, that the whole situation would

change in the process of the revolution, and that the situation would change *radically* and *often* in the process of revolution."

Lenin's attitude, therefore, was clear. No principle was involved for Marxism on the issue of peaceful or violent revolution, and indeed, no revolutionary leader would tie the hands of future revolutionary leaders. Marx had stressed the possibility of peaceful change as an exception, and now the historical conditions which made Britain an exception had changed, especially with the development of the state and the growth of militarism.

It is not surprising that in the circumstances of his times the great bulk of Lenin's writings teach the necessity of violent revolution.

Russian Revolution—February to August

But it is instructive to examine his treatment of the possibility of the peaceful development of the Russian Revolution over the whole period from February to November 1917. Even in the appalling conditions of the First World War, with a developing revolutionary situation over a great part of Europe, Lenin allowed for this possibility, slight though it was, and tried to bring it about.

The Chinese, in their argument, say it is sophistry to refer to these thoughts of Lenin, that they have no validity for the modern situation. They agree that, for some time after February 1917, Lenin allowed for this as an exception because of the special circumstances existing then, but that "in July 1917 the counter-revolutionary bourgeois government suppressed the masses by force of arms. . . . After this incident Lenin declared that 'all hopes for a peaceful development of the Russian Revolution have vanished'." (p. 20)

Lenin was concerned to win over the masses, to win a majority in the Soviets, to win over the army, and if possible achieve a peaceful development of the revolution. Putschism was alien to him.

The March Revolution was only the first stage, was his theme. "Only when the largest possible masses of the population are enlightened, only when they are organised, can complete victory of the next stage of the revolution and the conquest of power by a workers' government be secured." (*Collected Works*, Part I, Vol. XX, p. 26.) The Soviets existing alongside the Provisional Government constituted a dual power although as yet weak and embryonic. The task, he wrote on April 22nd: "to become a power, the class-conscious workers must win the majority over to their side. So long as no violence is committed against the masses, there is no other road to power. We are not Blanquists, we are not for the seizure of

power by a minority" (p. 117). Three days later, on April 25th, he was repeating, "While you, Messrs. Capitalists, who are in control of the army command, have not yet begun practising violence, we, the Pravdists, we of the Party, confine ourselves to the struggle for influence among the proletarian masses, the struggle for influence among the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. . . ." (p. 172)

In May he was writing that in Russia there was now such a degree of freedom "that enables us to ascertain the will of the majority by the composition of the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Therefore, the proletarian party, if it seriously wishes to gain power (not Blanquist fashion) must fight for influence within the Soviets." (p. 260)

On May 18th, 1917, as a result of the Provisional Government's Declaration of May 1st that it would continue the imperialist war to a decisive victory, and the growing opposition, a decided shift to the right took place. A second Provisional Government was formed—this time a Coalition Government, including representatives of the Soviet; Tseretelli and Skobelev of the Mensheviks; Kerensky and Chernov of the Socialist-Revolutionists; and two of the People's Socialists. That is, six from the Soviet out of 14, the others being Cadets or other bourgeois groups from the previous Provisional Government. An attack was launched on all the liberties won by the revolution, the question was being asked, had dual power disappeared, and Lenin answered: "No, dual power is still here. The basic question of state power is still in an indefinite, unstable and transitory state." In a speech on June 17th, he said:

"It is one thing or the other: either we have an ordinary bourgeois government—then there is no need for peasants', workers', soldiers', or any other kind of Soviets, then they will be dispersed by the generals . . . or we have a real government of the Soviets. . . . Friction, Party struggle for power within the All-Russian Soviets are inevitable."

(*Collected Works*, Vol. XX, Part II, p. 196.)

The developments of June and July were critical. Having prohibited the Bolshevik demonstration of June 23rd, the Soviet Congress was itself compelled by pressure to call a demonstration for July 1st, when 400,000 soldiers and workers came out, most of the banners bearing the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" and other Bolshevik slogans.

On that same day the Provisional Government's long-planned offensive on the Western front began, which was completely defeated two days

later. The defeat at the front, and sabotage by the capitalists, increased the economic difficulties. On July 15th, 1917, the Cadets in the Provisional Government resigned, and a few days later a second Coalition Government was formed, headed by Kerensky, with seven other representatives of the Soviets, and seven Cadets.

On July 16th and 17th, spontaneous demonstrations developed, the Bolsheviks calling for a peaceful demonstration. The demonstrators were fired on, and returned the fire. On July 18th, counter-revolutionary troops brought in by Kerensky and military cadets suppressed the movement and made arrests. The *Pravda* buildings were destroyed.

It was then, July 23rd, that Lenin wrote his article on *The Political Situation*, to which the Chinese refer. "The counter-revolution has become organised and consolidated, and has actually taken state power into its hands. . . . All hopes for a peaceful development of the Russian Revolution have definitely vanished." (*Collected Works*, Vol. XXI, Part I, pp. 36-7.)

He explained the whole position in detail in his article *On Slogans*:

"During that period of our revolution, now past, there prevailed in the state the so-called 'dual power' which both materially and formally expressed the indefinite and transitory character of state power. . . . At that time, power was in a state of flux. It was shared, under a voluntary agreement, by the Provisional Government and the Soviets. The Soviets represented delegations from the mass of free workers and soldiers, i.e. such as are not subject to any force from without. The workers and soldiers were armed. Arms in the hands of the people, and the absence of an outside force over the people—this is what the situation was *in essence*. This is what opened and guaranteed a peaceful road of development for the whole revolution. The slogan 'All Power Passing to the Soviets' was the slogan of the next step which could be immediately made along this peaceful road of development. . . . We say peaceful, not only because nobody, no class, no single force of importance, was then . . . able to resist or to prohibit the transfer of power to the Soviets. This alone is not the whole story. Peaceful development would then have been possible even in the sense that the struggle of classes and parties *within* the Soviets could—provided full state power had passed to the latter in due time—have taken the most peaceful and painless forms. . . . Had they had full power, then the main short-comings of the petty-bourgeois circles, their main fault, namely, their confidence in the capitalists, would have been overcome in practice. . . . The classes and parties which had power could have succeeded each other peacefully inside the Soviets as the only body possess-

ing all power; the contact between all the Soviet parties and all the masses could have followed this course had power in due time passed to the Soviets. It would have been most easy, most advantageous for the people. Such a course would have been the most painless, and it was, therefore, necessary to fight for it. . . ."

(*Collected Works*, Vol. XXI, Part I, pp. 43-4.)

September and October

On September 8th, following a secret agreement with the Provisional Government, Kornilov moved some Cossack detachments to the capital. Then he demanded the creation of a new government able to smother the revolution, with himself as dictator. Kerensky was forced to declare him a traitor. The Petrograd and Moscow Soviets joined in the defence, and the Bolsheviks sent agitators to meet the Kornilov detachments and succeeded in disintegrating them. Throughout September, Lenin was continually stressing the need for a new revolution. He suggested on September 14th-16th that the Party should offer a voluntary compromise to the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks:

"The compromise on our part is our return to the pre-July demand of All Power to the Soviets, a government of S.R.s and Mensheviks responsible to the Soviets.

"Now, and only now, perhaps *only for a few days*, or for a week or two, such a government could be created and established in a perfectly peaceful way. In all probability it could secure a peaceful *forward* march of the whole Russian Revolution, and unusually good chances for big strides forward by the world movement towards peace and towards the victory of socialism.

"Only for the sake of this peaceful development of the revolution—a possibility that is *extremely* rare in history and *extremely* valuable, a possibility to be found only in exceptional cases—can and must the Bolsheviks, partisans of a world revolution, partisans of revolutionary methods, agree to such a compromise, in my opinion. . . .

" . . . really full freedom of propaganda and the immediate realisation of a new democracy in the composition of the Soviets (new elections to them) and in their functioning would in themselves secure a peaceful forward movement of the revolution, a *peaceful outcome* of the Party strife within the Soviets.

"Perhaps this is *already* impossible? But even if there is one chance in a hundred, the attempt at realising such a possibility would still be worth while." (pp. 153-4)

The compromise was rejected. But on September 29th, Lenin again returned to the theme of the possibility of peaceful transition:

"If there is an absolutely undisputed lesson of

the revolution, one absolutely proven by facts, it is that only a union of the Bolsheviks with the S.R.s and Mensheviks, only an immediate passing of all power to the Soviets would make civil war in Russia impossible. For no civil war begun by the bourgeoisie against such a union, against the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies is thinkable; such a war would not even live to see one battle. . . .

"The peaceful development of any revolution is, generally speaking, an extremely rare and difficult thing, for the revolution is the maximum sharpening of the sharpest class contradictions; but in a peasant country . . . a peaceful development of the revolution is *possible* and *probable* if all power passes to the Soviets. . . .

"Against Soviets that have given all the land to the peasants without compensation and offer a just peace to all the peoples, against such Soviets a union of the English and French with the Russian bourgeoisie . . . presents no dangers at all: it is completely impotent." (pp. 237-8)

He added that if it was possible to get a union of the city workers with the poorest peasantry by the passing of power to the Soviets, so much the better. "The Bolsheviks will do *everything* to secure this *peaceful* course of the development of the revolution."

Almost on the eve of the seizure of power on October 9th-10th, in his article, *The Tasks of the Revolution*, he again returned to this theme:

"The Kornilov affair is instructive. The Kornilov affair has proved very instructive.

"It is impossible to know whether the Soviets will be able to go further than the leaders of the S.R.s and Mensheviks, and thus secure a peaceful development of the revolution, or whether they will continue to mark time, thus making a proletarian revolution inevitable.

"We cannot know this.

"Our business is to help to do everything possible to secure the 'last' chance for a peaceful development of the revolution, to help this by presenting our programme, by making clear its general, national character, its absolute harmony with the interests and demands of an enormous majority of the population. . . ." (p. 257)

"Before the democracy of Russia, before the Soviets, before the S.R. and Menshevik Parties, there opens now a possibility very seldom to be met with in the history of revolutions, namely, a possibility of securing the convocation of the Constituent Assembly at the appointed date without new delays, a possibility of securing the country against a military and economic catastrophe, a possibility of securing a peaceful development of the revolution.

"If the Soviets now take state power into their hands, fully and exclusively, with the purpose of carrying out the programme set forth above,

they will secure not only the support of nine-tenths of the population of Russia. . . .

"There could be no question of any resistance to the Soviets if there were no vacillations on their part. . . .

"Having seized power, the Soviets could still at present—and this is probably their last chance—secure a peaceful development of the revolution, peaceful elections of the deputies by the people, a peaceful struggle of parties inside the Soviets, a testing of the programmes of various parties in practice, a peaceful passing of power from one party to another." (p. 263-4)

With the successive rejection of Lenin's proposals by the Mensheviks and the S.R.s, the chance of a peaceful development of the revolution was finally lost.

From then on all Lenin's writings, mainly in the form of letters, were insistently directed to the preparation of insurrection. (See *Collected Works*, Vol. XXI, Part II.) On October 14th, in a letter to the Central Committee, the Moscow Committee, Petrograd Committee and the Bolshevik members of the Soviet, he insisted power must be taken immediately, to hesitate would be a crime.

Yet even then he wrote:

"If power cannot be obtained without insurrection, we must *resort to insurrection at once*. It may very well be that right now power can be obtained without an insurrection, for example, if the Moscow Soviet took power at once, immediately, and proclaimed itself (together with the Petrograd Soviet) the government."

(Lenin's *Selected Works* in 3 volumes, Vol. 2, pp. 466-467, Lawrence and Wishart, 1964.)

On October 23rd came the resolution of the Central Committee on the uprising—That the C.C. . . .

"recognises that the international situation of the Russian revolution (the mutiny in the navy in Germany as the extreme manifestation of the growth in all of Europe of the world-wide socialist revolution; the threat of a peace between the imperialists with the aim of crushing the Revolution in Russia) as well as the military situation (the undoubted decision of the Russian bourgeoisie and Kerensky and Co. to surrender Petrograd to the Germans) and the fact that the proletarian parties have gained a majority in the Soviets; all this, coupled with the peasant uprising and with a shift of the people's confidence towards our party (elections in Moscow); finally the obvious preparation for a second Kornilov affair (the withdrawal of troops from Petrograd; the bringing of Cossacks to Petrograd; the surrounding of Minsk by Cossacks, etc.)—places the armed uprising on the order of the day."

(*Collected Works*, Vol. XXI, Part II, p. 107.)

Finally, the famous letter to Members of the Central Committee of November 6th—to delay action is the same as death.

What is the conclusion of all this? The February Revolution won new conditions of liberty and organisation in Russia. The Soviets, democratic representative bodies, had been thrown up in the struggle (no democratic representative institutions existed) alongside the Provisional Government headed by Kerensky and the bourgeois parties. The army was disorganised by defeats in the war, the desire for peace was overwhelming, a revolutionary situation existed, sections of the workers were armed, the question was which would prevail, the Provisional Government or the Soviets. For eight months the struggle went on, a mass political struggle to win the masses, to win the army. At the first Congress of Soviets in June 1917, the Bolsheviks accounted for 13 per cent of the deputies; at the Second on November 1st, 51 per cent, and not until June 1918 had they won 61 per cent. Lenin continually stressed that with the balance of power the Soviets could take over without bloodshed and the future course of the revolution would be decided by the political struggle of the parties within the Soviets and among the masses. In the event the peaceful transformation did not take place. Power was seized with arms on November 7th. But everything possible was done to take advantage of the possibility of a peaceful development.

Lenin's Conclusions

If this was the case in Tsarist Russia in the conditions of 1917, surely the general line of Lenin's approach is significant for the conditions of 1964 in Britain. Here democratic institutions, that is assemblies elected by universal suffrage, the product of a long struggle for liberty do exist. The task is to win a majority in these institutions by mass political work, to isolate the monopolies and their Party, to seek allies between the Communists and all democratic forces, and to battle out in our democratic institutions, as well as in mass struggle outside, the problems of power and the advance to socialism.

In 1918, in the aftermath of the war, almost the whole of defeated Europe was confronted with a revolutionary situation. The idea of Soviets and social revolution was sweeping Central Europe. Social Democracy became the agents of counter-revolution, counterposing slogans of parliamentarianism to the actual realisation of the revolution. It is in this setting that Lenin waged his polemic with the renegade Kautsky. It is not surprising that Lenin stressed that the developing counter-revolution had to be met with force for

this corresponded with the actual situation. With German defeat and the abdication of the Kaiser, power was put into the hands of the working class in the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. Ebert, Scheideman and Noske, the Social Democratic leaders, forming the German Provisional Government, entered into active alliance with Hindenberg and the General Staffs to use force to save German capitalism and crush the working class and the German Revolution of 1918.

It is against this historic background that Lenin returned to Marx's references on the exceptional condition of England. When Kautsky used Marx on the possibility of a democratic transition it was to oppose the fact of the German revolution and of revolution in Europe. In defending the so-called parliamentary position, he was defending the bourgeois state machine. So Lenin concluded:

"Kautsky, the 'historian', so shamelessly falsifies history that he forgets the fundamental fact that pre-monopoly capitalism, which reached its zenith in the seventies of the nineteenth century, was, by virtue of its fundamental *economic* traits (which were most typical in England and America) distinguished by its relative attachment to peace and freedom. Imperialism, i.e. monopoly capitalism, which finally matured only in the twentieth century, is by virtue of its fundamental *economic* traits, distinguished by the least attachment to peace and freedom, and by the greatest and universal development of militarism everywhere. To 'fail to notice this' in discussing the extent to which a peaceful or violent revolution is typical or probable, is to stoop to the position of a common or garden lackey of the bourgeoisie."

(*Selected Works*, Vol. VII, pp. 125-6.)

So the general position of Lenin was that in the circumstances of his time the non-peaceful way was being forced on the working class by the development of imperialism and counter-revolution. Lenin was above all a creative Marxist. He insisted on studying every new development thoroughly. He refused to be shackled by what had previously been said about totally different circumstances. Lenin would have been the first, had he lived, to have looked at everything afresh in the light of the colossal world changes and the changes in particular countries.

Historical Changes

The question is—have further historical changes during these 40 years made the road to peaceful change in some countries more or less possible? Or, in brief, are the Chinese leaders correct that armed struggle is now universal for all places and all time?

Our case is that in the 40 years since Lenin

wrote, and particularly in the last 20 years, circumstances have changed in such a way as to make a peaceful transition possible in some countries. There is no argument that in other countries, perhaps the majority, the working class and national liberation movement have no alternative but to take the violent road. This has never been in dispute by any Communist.

Our Party has always defended, and, to the best of our ability, has assisted any subject people in the British Empire in their struggles. We have exposed and fought against the intolerable imperialist dictatorial rule, the reason for national revolt. So today, for example, we fully support the South African national liberation forces in their just revolt against the hated rule of apartheid. Our long record of principle in relation to the struggles in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanganyika, India, Ceylon, Burma, Malaya, and in support of whatever forms the movements there have considered justified, is well known.

The question for us is the line of strategy, the road to social revolution in advanced capitalist countries like ours where we have won a large degree of political liberty.

Put briefly, our general case is this:

The issue is not whether Communists would prefer the peaceful advance. We would all prefer it. Nor is the issue whether force used by the bourgeoisie should be answered by force. We all agree it should.

The issue is—are there more favourable possibilities for the advance to socialism on which we should base our strategy?

As we have seen our position is not contrary to Marx, Engels and Lenin—it is a development of their ideas in the light of historical changes since their time and applying their principles to the analysis of these changes and the conclusions to be drawn.

Our opinion is that, because of the changes of the past 40 years, peaceful transition is, in a number of countries, now a *real* opportunity.

Both external and internal factors make possible a new approach. Externally, the strength of the socialist forces, the enormous attractive power of socialist ideas, the superiority of socialism in the fight for victory in peaceful competition, the victories of the national liberation forces, the possibility of preventing imperialist attempts to export counter-revolution, and the perspective of preventing world war, are the factors which facilitate a peaceful transition.

It goes without saying that the economic, political and moral superiority of the socialist sector of the world will grow. At present rates of economic development, by 1980 the socialist world will

be producing twice as much as the whole capitalist world put together. If the power of socialism can do so much to aid new governments and stop the export of revolution now, how much more important these powers will become with each succeeding year.

Perspective for Britain

But, of course, social revolution does not come from without whatever the power of the socialist world. Our case is that the basic social contradictions are growing in Britain and the working class and democratic forces are increasing.

Internally the concentration of economic and political power more and more in the hands of the monopolists, the squeezing out of the small people, the fact that imperialism and monopoly attack not only the working class but the petty-bourgeoisie, the different sections of the middle class and even the small shopkeeper, opens up the possibility and the need to unite all sections of the people—the vast majority—against the monopolists. This can only take place successfully under the leadership of the working class

As far as Britain is concerned, it is a country whose working class in industry and agriculture makes up the great majority of the population. We agree there is a powerful military, bureaucratic state machine. But we also see the working class as a highly organised working class with a long tradition of struggle and civil liberties. In addition considerable sections of people employed by the state machine are being drawn into the class struggle through their trade unions.

The problem is that the grip of the right-wing Social Democrats on the Labour movement to a large extent paralyses it and prevents its power from being used.

Once that grip is broken the potential power of the British working class will be overwhelming. As Engels said: "There is no power in the world which could for a day resist the British working class organised as a body." In view of the monopoly attacks on all middle sections, with unity, the working class could rally the vast majority of the population.

Of course, we are not Utopian Socialists. We do not expect the capitalists to be converted to socialism because of the example of the socialist countries. The aim must be to confront the capitalists with such overwhelming strength that they are compelled to accept the democratic verdict of the people.

At the same time we warn the people that the capitalists may stake everything on a desperate resistance, and that the working-class forces must be prepared to rebuff force with force.

It is obvious that we do not consider that *only* parliamentary methods should be used. That would be a ludicrous misrepresentation of our position. We have fought reformists for years on this issue, always stressing the necessity for mass struggle outside Parliament.

The Chinese comrades, of course, subscribe to the changes in the world situation, which are patent and obvious—the enormous growth of the socialist camp, the vast sweep of national liberation, which have changed the world balance of power in favour of socialism, peace and progress.

One would think it is clear that in such circumstances more favourable conditions arise of the possibilities of peaceful transition in countries like Britain. The Chinese argue the opposite, namely, what was considered a rare or exceptional possibility in the time of Marx, Engels and Lenin, when there was no socialist world and imperialism was supreme, is now absolutely impossible despite the change in the balance of world forces.

Here the Chinese will claim that they are following Lenin. That just as he pointed out that the growth of militarism and the state bureaucracy removed Marx's famous exception in the period of the First World War, so the even greater growth of militarism in the U.S. and Britain since the Second World War rules out the exception now.

They write:

"Two outstanding facts since World War II are that the imperialists and the reactionaries are everywhere reinforcing their apparatus of violence for cruelly suppressing the masses and that imperialism, headed by the United States, is conducting counter-revolutionary armed intervention in all parts of the world." (pp. 28-9)

New Possibilities

This, of course, is a powerful argument and the Chinese leaders are right to stress it (so did the 1960 Statement). But, of course, it is the *one* side of the picture. The other side is the tremendous growth of the socialist and progressive forces. The issue is—who will beat whom?

In answer to the statement that the changed balance of power can stop imperialist intervention and lessen the possibility of the bourgeoisie unleashing civil war, they instance U.S. intervention on the side of Chiang, in Greece, Korea, the Lebanon, Laos, U.N. intervention in the Congo, the attacks on Cuba, the war on South Vietnam, Panama and Cyprus. And they draw the conclusion:

"Facts have demonstrated that nowadays in order to make revolutions and achieve liberation all oppressed peoples and nations not only have

to cope with violent suppression by the domestic reactionary ruling classes, but must prepare themselves fully against armed intervention by imperialism, and especially U.S. imperialism." (p. 35)

With the exception of Greece, all these were and are national liberation struggles.

The fact is, however, that despite the enormous growth of militarism and intervention and attempted intervention, the victories of the national liberation struggles have far outweighed any defeats.

Since the Second World War, over fifty countries have won political freedom from imperialist rule. In all of them there was the most bitter struggle of the most varied kinds; in some of them, long, bitter national liberation wars, in some partial armed struggle, in yet others no armed struggle.

The attempts at armed intervention by imperialism have more often been prevented and defeated than they have been successful. Why? First of all because of the united national character of the movements; second, because of the aid and strength of the socialist world, and third, because of the solidarity struggle of the working class and democratic movement in the imperialist countries.

The matter was put very well by Castro in his speech in Moscow on April 28th, 1963:

"Without the existence of the Soviet Union, the Socialist revolution in Cuba would not have been possible. This, however, does not at all mean that the Cuban revolution was carried out by the Soviet Union. Notwithstanding the whole stream of slander and lies, the enemies of the Soviet Union have not gone to the length of asserting that. It means that without the existence of the Soviet Union, the imperialists would have strangled any national liberation revolution in Latin America."

Or, as Ben Bella put it after the negotiations with the Soviet Union in May this year, the agreement reached "makes it possible to protect Algeria from the forces which are trying to throw it off its chosen path". There is no doubt, too, that despite all problems and difficulties the movement will triumph in South Vietnam, Korea, Laos and Cyprus.

In Greece, the Karamanlis Government has been defeated by the electoral victory of the left and centre forces. Tony Ambatielos and the Greek democratic leaders imprisoned for 17 years have been released. New possibilities of democratic advance are opening up in Greece.

The question of the path of development to socialism after the anti-imperialist revolution is a complex one. What are the Chinese comrades

trying to argue? That these countries should resort to self-defence if imperialism attacks them is obvious. Here the socialist world has played the major role in providing the means for such self-defence, and also in many cases of preventing attempts at intervention. But within these countries—is it to be armed struggle as the path to socialism? In some cases maybe. But is it not more likely that there will be a non-violent path of non-capitalist development as suggested in the 1960 Statement? Are not Algeria and other countries showing this?

The Fight for Democracy

However, for us in our political conditions all this misses the issue. Our problem, as we have said, is the path of social revolution in the countries where a large field of democratic freedoms has been won.

How do the Chinese comrades put the issue of the working-class struggle in such countries? They write:

“We have always held that the proletarian parties in the capitalist countries must actively lead the working class and the working people in struggle to oppose monopoly capital, to defend democratic rights, to improve living conditions, to oppose imperialist arms expenditure and war preparations, to defend world peace and to give vigorous support to the revolutionary struggles of the oppressed nations.” (p. 40)

But to the argument that the fight for socialism and the struggle for democracy in the capitalist countries are intertwined, they say this is to substitute immediate for long-range struggles and reformism for proletarian revolution. And they quote Lenin “every democratic demand . . . is for the class-conscious workers subordinated to the higher interests of socialism”.

So it is. But for the Chinese to quote Lenin in this way simply begs the question.

Our political struggle takes place in the actual political conditions of Britain and Western Europe. What are they? The growth of monopoly capitalism and the state threatens every democratic right. The monopolists seek to undermine all parliamentary institutions, to shackle the trade unions and the right to strike, and oppose the broad masses of the people.

The November 1959 meeting of the Communist Parties of capitalist Europe pointed to the existence of fascist dictatorships in Spain and Portugal, the de Gaulle regime in France, the general movement of the monopolists to circumscribe and hamstring democratic life. While we expose all the limitations of bourgeois democracy and our Party has carried on a basic and sys-

tematic critique for years, what are the tasks of Communists in such a situation—to remain indifferent? No, even the Chinese comrades are agreed here.

In such conditions the task of the Communist Parties is to develop the broadest mass movements and struggle to defeat the monopolists, for the fullest extension of democracy, for resistance to unjust electoral laws, and for representative parliaments.

But what is the conclusion to all this and the determining factor in our strategy? It is the ruling class which is out to destroy and limit democracy. Our task is to defend and extend it and to show that the full flowering of democracy is bound up with the battle for socialism. In other words, we have to present a democratic advance to socialism.

In this we are guided by two important thoughts of Lenin. Discussing the relationship between socialism and democracy, Lenin wrote:

“It would be a fundamental mistake to suppose that the struggle for democracy can divert the proletariat from the socialist revolution, or obscure it, or overshadow it, etc. On the contrary, just as socialism cannot be victorious unless it introduces complete democracy, so the proletariat will be unable to prepare for victory over the bourgeoisie unless it wages a many-sided, consistent and revolutionary struggle for democracy.”

(*Selected Works*, Vol. V, p. 268.)

Our approach, therefore, is a Leninist approach.

Forms of Transition

But in addition Lenin asked us to focus our attention on “searching out forms of *transition* or *approach* to the proletarian revolution”.

For us, a country in which the tradition of struggle for democracy is strong and a dominant force in our history, the issue of our attitude to Parliament arose.

Again Lenin’s thoughts here are of the greatest interest, for Lenin understood British conditions well.

In the famous discussion with the “left” in May 1918, when Bukharin referred to Marx’s remark that under certain conditions, it would be more expedient for the working class to “buy off this gang” (the capitalists), Lenin discussed the basic relationship of forces in Britain which made this possible.

“(i) the absolute preponderance of workers, i.e. proletarians, owing to the absence of a peasantry . . . (ii) the excellent organisation of the proletariat in trade unions (England was at that time the leading country in the world in this respect); (iii) the comparatively high level of culture of the proletariat which had been

trained by centuries of political liberty; (iv) the old habit of the well-organised English capitalists of settling political and economic questions by compromise. . . . These were the circumstances which at that time gave rise to the idea that the peaceful subjugation of the English capitalists by the workers was possible."

(*Selected Works*, Vol. VII, p. 369.)

The absolute preponderance of the workers in the population has not only risen since 1918, particularly since the war a community of interests between the working class and the middle sections of the population has grown as monopoly capitalism has grown. All this creates important new political possibilities of alliance between the working class and the middle sections. Trade union organisation, particularly in the workshops, is stronger, Communist influence higher and an important new post-1945 phenomenon is the growth of *white-collar* trade unionism, again creating rich new anti-monopoly possibilities. As for our centuries of political liberties the developments since 1918, whatever the problems, have been to strengthen democratic institutions and particularly over recent years the criticism of the "establishment" has grown.

As for Lenin's fourth point, the English ruling class, of course, will compromise only to the extent that they are forced to compromise, no more: our case rests not on compromise but on strength.

But, of course, on the other side, we are also clear that the growth of militarism and the power of the state bureaucracy are an outstanding development in Britain since 1918.

These thoughts plus the changes in the total world situation gave rise to our fundamental presentation in *The British Road to Socialism*. The main ideas are well known and can be summarised.

British Road to Socialism

First, our Programme clearly stated the issue was that of political state power. "Political power must be taken from the hands of the capitalist minority and firmly grasped by the majority of the people, led by the working class."

The people of different countries had taken power into their hands in different ways according to conditions in their countries and in the world as a whole.

We then argued that whatever the different conditions, there were certain essential requirements for the advance to socialism in every country including Britain:

"These are: that power must be taken by the working class supported by other progressive

sections of the people; that there must be a Party based on Marxism and the principles of democratic centralism, capable of giving leadership in the struggle against capitalism and in the building of socialism. A Socialist Government, backed up by the working class and the people, must take over the basic means of production, carry through the measures necessary to end exploitation, develop a planned socialist economy, raise living standards, prevent obstruction and sabotage by the capitalists and landlords, abolish national oppression, and consistently apply the principles of working-class internationalism."

Pointing out that more than a third of the world's population had taken the socialist road and the vast advance of national liberation, countries that now took the socialist path would have powerful allies and would no longer have to face single-handed a hostile capitalist encirclement, the Programme declared:

"On this background, and with the increasing strength of the working class and progressive movement throughout the world, a transition to socialism without armed conflict is possible today in many countries.

"This is particularly true of our country, whose powerful Labour movement embodies the British workers' fighting ability and experience of struggle, and where there is a strong tradition of democratic institutions. At a time of mounting class struggle, when the entire working class is brought into action and is supported by other sections of the population, a general election fought on the issue of a socialist solution to Britain's problems could bring decisive results. It could return to Parliament a Socialist Labour and Communist majority and establish a Socialist Government which, with the backing of the people, would begin to carry through a fundamental social change.

"In this way, using our traditional institutions and rights, we can transform Parliament into the effective instrument of the people's will, through which the major legislative measures of the change to socialism will be carried. Using the rights already won in the Labour movement's historic struggle for democracy, we can change capitalist democracy, dominated by wealth and privilege, into socialist democracy, where only the interests of the people count."

It is clear from all this that our argumentation was following Marx, Engels and Lenin. Working in our circumstances we must present the struggle to defend and extend democracy. It is along these lines that our path to socialism lies. This is the only realistic strategy which corresponds to our actual political circumstances.

Either the bourgeoisie wins the battle and destroys democracy, in which case violence will

prevail, or the people win the battle, in which case it will transform the bourgeois democracy into socialist democracy by peaceful means, imposing its will on the ruling class.

For the strategy of peaceful transition, for democratic advance to socialism, the question of alliances and the attitude to other parties, particularly the Labour Party, is of the greatest importance. Here arises, too, the connection between the present political situation in Britain and the future advance to socialism.

The characteristic of the present position in Britain is that the movement against the Tory Government is on a very wide scale. The economic policy of the monopolies, wage restraint and so on is directed not only against the working class, but affects the professional and middle sections, the small shopkeepers, the farmers and the pensioners. There is growing concern about mergers and monopoly concentration and the threat to democratic rights. The imperialist foreign policy has brought into being wide movements going far beyond the working class, such as C.N.D. and the Anti-Apartheid Movement, wide cultural movements, united action on educational advance, etc. Politically all this is expressed in the widespread swing to Labour, the (still modest) advance of the Communist Party, and the Liberal revival.

In the immediate situation as we have argued at our 28th National Congress, the aim is a Labour and Communist majority in Parliament. We have pointed out that the battle for a socialist policy must be waged alongside the struggle to defeat the Tories. Our tactics now and the important political developments which can flow from them have a great bearing in creating the necessary political conditions for the alliance of forces required for an advance to socialism in Britain. On this what did our Programme say?

It pointed out that the working class constituted fully two-thirds of the population. In addition, the professional sections, small businessmen and working farmers were hit by the monopolists and had a community of interests with the working class. A united working class could rally these sections into a broad anti-monopoly front on wages, peace and democratic rights:

“An alliance must be built up between the working class and these sections of the population in the fight for peace and social progress, and against all attempts to maintain capitalism at the expense of the national interests. Such an alliance, headed by the working class, is an essential condition for the establishment of a real Socialist Government to build a Socialist Britain.”

Attitude to the Labour Party

It is clear that the realisation of this aim depends on the progressive development of the present political position in Britain and above all on the development of working-class unity. A key question here for the Communist Party is its attitude to the Labour Party.

On this, the Chinese position is as follows:

“The social democratic parties are not parties of socialism. With the exception of certain left wings, they are parties serving the bourgeoisie and capitalism. They are a variety of bourgeois political parties. On the question of socialist revolution, our position is fundamentally different from that of the social democratic parties. This distinction must not be obscured. To obscure this distinction only helps the leaders of the social democratic parties to deceive the masses and hinders us from winning the masses away from the influence of the social democratic parties.

“However, it is unquestionably very important to strengthen our work with respect to the social democratic parties and strive to establish a united front with their left and middle groups.”

(*On the Origin and Development of the Differences*, p. 61.)

This quotation, however, really begs the question. The Labour Party, as at present led and constituted, is certainly not a party of socialism. It does serve the bourgeoisie and capitalism; for 40 years we have been pointing this out. But this does not make it just “a variety of bourgeois political parties”. Why have the Labour Parties a left wing with which the aim of Communists should be to unite? There is no aim to unite with any section of the Tory or Liberal Parties.

Social democracy is essentially a product of the countries of Western capitalism. The imperialist conditions bred the conditions of social reformism which it expresses. It hardly exists in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. But it is a central problem for the advance of social revolution in the major capitalist countries.

This matter, which has been of profound concern to us over these past 40 years, was thoroughly dealt with at our 27th Party Congress.

The right-wing - left-wing conflict in the Labour Party is inherent in its structure and its mass affiliated trade union membership. While formed to win independent working-class representation in Parliament, its dominant leadership from MacDonalld onwards has in practice carried out typical reformist capitalist policies. The predominantly petty-bourgeois leadership plus the right-wing trade union bureaucracy over the years have maintained their grip over the mass working-class trade union membership by the trade union

bloc vote. In its origin it was a federal union of the working class, bringing together the trade unions, the co-operatives, and the socialist societies. The British Socialist Party, a founding organisation of the Communist Party, was affiliated to the Labour Party. The aim of the continued campaigns of the Communist Party between 1920 and 1946 was to have the organised party of socialism, the Communist Party, inside the broad Labour Party to transform its character from reformist and capitalist policies to independent working-class politics and socialism. Equally, right-wing strategy in refusing affiliation, imposing bans and proscriptions, discipline and expulsions, was to transform it into a rigid Social Democratic party on continental lines.

In 1946 the Labour Party Constitution was changed to rule out the affiliation of the Communist Party. Yet the trade unions remain the main mass membership of the Labour Party. The trade unions are united class bodies of the workers with different political views, whose elementary class interests conflict with the political aims of the right-wing Labour leaders.

The whole history of the Labour Party has been the history of the right-wing - left-wing struggle within it; the battle between the capitalist policies of the dominant right wing and the socialist strivings and anti-capitalist militancy of the left-wing forces. In all of this the Communist Party has played a leading part.

With a single mass trade union movement in Britain (and in the majority of trade unions the Communists enjoy equal rights), it is perfectly possible to change the balance of forces within the unions, to establish left progressive and Communist majorities. This can have a decisive influence on the future of the Labour Party and on its policies because of the decisive power of the trade union vote.

At the same time we see as an even more important issue the development of a *mass* Communist Party in Britain as the decisive socialist force in the Labour movement. We must not and cannot be satisfied with influencing the trade union movement only. We must win through to Parliament with Communist M.P.s, and to the councils with Communist Councillors becoming a mass influence in British political life. It was a great achievement of our 27th National Congress that it ended all conceptions of a "ginger group" role for the Communist Party and both charted the course for a mass party and correctly stated the relations between the Party and the left in the Labour Party and put as one of our main aims the development of unity in the Labour movement.

But this perspective, too, also raises the question of future long-term aims. To this our 27th Congress gave an equally clear answer:

"The Communist Party has always striven and always will strive for unity and agreement with the Labour Party, not only in the day-to-day struggle, but for the achievement of political power and socialism. The obstacle to this unity has always been the right wing and its policies. Today it is becoming increasingly clear that the struggle opened up by Scarborough must be carried forward to the final elimination of right-wing capitalist influence and leadership in the Labour Party. This could bring about the victory of a united Labour movement in which the Communist Party, as the political class party of the working-class struggle for power and socialism, will fulfil its role in comradeship, partnership and agreement with all the advancing sections of the organised working class. For our part we look forward to a future when we shall be able to see the fulfilment of a united working-class party based on Marxism."

(*Report of 27th National Congress*, p. 21.)

From this follows our proposals regarding the nature of the Socialist Government put in *The British Road to Socialism*, of returning to Parliament "a socialist Labour and Communist majority and establish a Socialist Government which, with the backing of the people, would begin to carry through a fundamental social change".

This is not an easy path. It bristles with problems, but it is the only realist political line for Britain. The actual situation cannot be treated by formulas. This is a policy which has grown out of our political experience and the reality of the position in the British Labour movement. Any other position would be mere revolutionary phrasemongering, the uttering of sectarian platitudes to cover up political bankruptcy, empty words to hide real isolation.

Communist Perspectives in Western Europe

Broadly speaking it is a position which has been taken up by all the Communist Parties in Western Europe in the light of their experience. It corresponds with the call in the 1960 Statement to overcome the split in the working-class movement and establish some kind of working unity with the Social Democratic forces.

In their attack on the possibility of a peaceful transition, the Chinese single out Khrushchov for attack. It is denounced as "Khrushchov's revisionism".

The fact that Khrushchov and the C.P.S.U. boldly outlined these new possibilities at the 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U. was a great service to

Marxism. It was part and parcel of the great historic role of the 20th Congress in removing the bane of the cult of the individual, rooting out the evils which had obtruded into our socialist system and opening out a great new period of creative development for our international movement.

But we are sure that the Soviet comrades will not take it amiss if we point out that many Communist Parties in Western Europe were already arriving at this position on the basis of their own political experience. And they were doing this, not because they were afraid of armed struggle. The French and Italian Communist Parties have an heroic record of armed struggle in the war against fascism in which they gained national stature among their peoples. So have the Yugoslavs and the Greeks. Even small parties like the Danish and the Norwegian in the most difficult circumstances, have an heroic record.

Our own Party first adopted *The British Road to Socialism* in 1951, two years before Stalin died and five years before the 20th Congress of the C.P.S.U. A number of Communist Parties at the time, including the C.P.S.U., showed considerable interest in what we were thinking when we were drafting *The British Road*. The main ideas advanced in the Programme, particularly that of the possibility of peaceful transition in Britain, were discussed in detail in conversations Harry Pollitt had with Stalin at the time, who approved fully of our approach.

Following the adoption of the Programme by our Executive Committee in January 1951, it was published in full in *Pravda*, again with Stalin's approval. The Soviet Communists have always given it general support since then. If Khrushchov is a "revisionist" on this matter, then so, too, was Stalin.

Above all, this line is being applied with increasing success by the Communist Party of France. The establishment of a wide alliance to defeat de Gaulle and re-establish a democratic regime in France is a task of the greatest importance, not only for France but for the whole of Europe. All the efforts to isolate and destroy the French Communist Party have failed. Communist-Socialist unity has already scored important successes. New perspectives are opening up. But the Chinese comrades simply dismiss this political reality with the cheap and ignorant sneer . . .

"Certain leaders of the Communist Party of France of whom Thorez is representative, have long been pursuing a revisionist line, have publicised the 'parliamentary road' in response to Khrushchov's baton, and have actually reduced

the Communist Party to the level of a social democratic party. They have ceased to give active support to the revolutionary aspirations of the people and rolled up the national banner of opposition to U.S. imperialism. The result of their pursuit of this revisionist line is that the Communist Party, which once had great influence among the people, has become increasingly isolated from the masses and has deteriorated more and more." (p. 50)

For anyone to claim that the French Communist Party is becoming increasingly isolated is either to display incredible ignorance or equally incredible spite.

The Italian Party likewise has won important gains for a similar line. And both French and Italian Parties make clear that they want to establish a united front with the Socialist parties, not only for immediate demands, but also for the advance to socialism. The issue is to defeat and break the right-wing domination in the Labour movement, and win the battle for the left Socialist and Communist forces.

Attitude to Bourgeois Parties

This strategy also raises the question of the attitude of the Communist Party to the bourgeois parties. We are the inveterate opponents of Tory and Liberal Parties. But we are out to defeat them by mass political means and not as our opponents allege by administrative means.

Even in the height of the controversy with Kautsky, Lenin wrote regarding the question of the restriction of the franchise to the bourgeoisie:

"One must study the question of restricting the franchise in the light of the *specific conditions* of the Russian Revolution and the *specific path* of its development. . . . It would be a mistake, however, to guarantee in advance that the impending proletarian revolutions in Europe will all, or for the most part, be necessarily accompanied by the restrictions of the franchise for the bourgeoisie."

(*Selected Works*, Vol. VII, p. 143.)

A socialist government will deprive the monopolists of their economic and social power, but will not deprive them of their votes. As we say in our Programme, "the right of other political parties to maintain their organisations, party publications and propaganda, and to take part in elections will be maintained providing that these parties will conform to the law". As we deprive the monopolists of their power, the economic and social mass basis of the Tory and Liberal Parties will disappear. The battle to destroy the mass political influence of the capitalist parties will be long and fierce. The more resolutely a Socialist government acts against

capitalism, the fiercer it will resist. But the point is, we will fight and defeat them politically and not by administrative action. It is not we who threaten democratic rights, it is the Tory Party and the monopolists.

Parliament

All this raises as a central issue our attitude to Parliament. It was a major development of our Party position in 1951 that we clarified our ideas of Parliament. The development of Soviets was an indigenous Russian development arising out of Russian conditions. Between the wars, the Communist International put the issue of Soviets as the expression of the aim of working-class power to the forefront. But already at the famous 7th World Congress of the Communist International, fascist dictatorships gave rise in life to the task of the defence and extension of bourgeois democracy, of united front governments which, in Dimitrov's words, would be "governments of struggle against fascism and reaction". After the Second World War with the extension of socialism in Eastern Europe and in China, these countries in the event developed their own governmental form, and not the Soviet form.

The Chinese comrades dismiss Parliament contemptuously in these words:

"Parliament is only an ornament and screen for bourgeois rule. To adopt or discard the parliamentary system, to grant parliament greater or less power, to adopt one kind of electoral law or another—the choice between these alternatives is always dictated by the needs and interests of bourgeois rule." (pp. 33-4)

The point they make is that the chief component of the state machine is armed force and not Parliament. We will deal with this aspect later, but first, let us deal with Parliament in Britain, which is our concern.

Far be it from me to defend the present parliamentary and state set-up in Britain. Our Party has consistently exposed bourgeois rule in Britain.³ We have shown the actual domination of the monopolies in Parliament and exposed the role of the Lords and the Monarchy. We have shown that every government, be it Tory or Labour, has served the monopolies. We have shown the decline of Parliament *vis-à-vis* the Cabinet. We have denounced the undemocratic weighting of the electoral system. We have shown the complete capitalist class domination of the state machine and the judiciary, and that bourgeois democracy, like any other form of government, is based on

force. Usually peaceful, in times of acute crisis, particularly strikes, the whole apparatus of Emergency Powers comes into use. Far from softening our critique since 1951 when we adopted *The British Road*, we have deepened and extended it because of the need to create the understanding of the nature of the problems involved in the strategy of *The British Road*.

But again, of course, this is only one side of the picture. Parliament in Britain is the product of a centuries' old struggle for liberty. That struggle was increasingly fought over the issue of the sovereign power of Parliament. Today the constitutional position is that Parliament is sovereign, it has power to pass what laws it likes. As we explain, it is the monopolies and the Tories who are attacking and seeking to limit parliamentary power. Of course, these powers of Parliament are at the moment, dominated by the bourgeoisie and the fact that economic and social power is in the hands of the monopolies.

But is it not correct for us to defend and uphold the sovereign power of Parliament and make our declared aim the democratic use of that power to legislate for the people and not for the monopolists? With the working class and its allies comprising 90 per cent, the overwhelming bulk of the population, and with universal suffrage, it is a standing political challenge to the working class and the Communist Party and the Labour Party to win the overwhelming majority of the votes for a socialist majority, and isolate the Tories and the monopolists. This is the reality of the stage of political development in Britain. The fact is that even the Labour Party has never won the overwhelming majority of votes in Britain, such is the grip and power of monopoly capitalism over the organs of public opinion and the bourgeois politics of the Labour Party.

We in Britain have no written Constitution. The Constitutional convention is the sovereignty of Parliament. Of course, these days it is almost considered political treason in some quarters to refer to any constitutional position, that by doing so one automatically becomes a revisionist. Why should we not refer to the sovereign constitutional position of Parliament? It was not the gift of a ruling class, but the product of the battle for civil rights in which the struggle of the people was the deciding factor.

Now the issue is—will the monopolists strip Parliament of its powers or will the working class fight to extend democracy and transform its content. Therefore, *The British Road* makes clear our stand for the Commons to become the sole national authority, the abolition of the Lords and the monarchy, and the democratic transformation

³ See John Gollan *British Political System*, James Harvey and Katherine Hood *The British State*, etc.

of the electoral system, the abolition of the press monopoly, democratic control of broadcasting, television, etc.

Equally clearly *The British Road* prefaces all these measures by the need to break the economic power of the monopolies by the socialist nationalisation of large-scale industry, banks, insurance companies, big distributive monopolies and the land of the big landowners.

The next stage in the Chinese argument is that as long as the bourgeoisie controls the state machine, the army and the police, the winning of a "stable majority in Parliament by the proletariat is impossible or this stable majority is undependable"; and further that with all the unfair restrictions of the bourgeois system and electoral laws "it is very difficult for them to win a majority of votes under bourgeois rule. And even if they win a majority of the votes, the bourgeoisie can prevent them from winning a majority of seats in Parliament by revising the electoral laws and by other means." The manipulation of the electoral laws in France is given as an example of this.

The Chinese comrades here are attempting to get us all ways, but throughout their arguments there is this air of inevitable defeat—it is always what the bourgeoisie will do. The mass movement and the mass struggle is never mentioned. But it is the mass struggle and the mass movement which is the essence of the question.

It is appropriate to recall here the way the 1960 Statement puts the issue:

"Today in a number of capitalist countries the working class, headed by its vanguard, has the opportunity, given a united working class and popular front or other workable forms of agreement and political co-operation between the different parties and public organisations, to unite a majority of the people, win state power without civil war and ensure the transfer of the basic means of production to the hands of the people. Relying on the majority of the people and resolutely rebuffing the opportunist elements incapable of relinquishing the policy of compromise with the capitalists and landlords, the working class can defeat the reactionary, anti-popular forces, secure a firm majority in parliament, transform parliament into an instrument serving the working people, launch an extra-parliamentary mass struggle, smash the resistance of the reactionary forces and create the necessary conditions for peaceful realisation of the socialist revolution. All this will be possible only by broad and ceaseless development of the class struggle of the workers, peasant masses and the urban middle strata against big monopoly capital, against reaction, for profound social reforms, for peace and socialism."

The Mass Struggle

The whole emphasis here, correctly, is on the mass struggle. That struggle exists and is developing on peace, wages, housing, pensions, social issues and democratic rights. The point is that in the main it is an *extra-parliamentary* mass struggle of demonstrations, sit-downs, strikes, agitation, etc. This struggle has developed in spite of the right-wing grip. Once that grip is removed the democratic mass organisations and the popular struggle and initiative of the people will play an ever increasing role in our political life. The next stage in that mass movement is the defeat of the Tories and a Labour Government with Communist M.P.s. It must and can express itself in mass pressure on Parliament for progressive policies. Its further development, especially with the deepening of the crisis of British imperialism, will result in further political differentiation within the movement, the growth of the Communist Party and the left in the Labour movement with the aim of increasingly challenging and breaking the right-wing grip on the movement, leading to the stage of a Communist and Socialist majority in Parliament. Difficult? Yes. But impossible, No. The stability of the majority will depend on the power of the mass movement to break the right-wing grip. There is no magic short cut, only patient, systematic mass political work and struggle. It is legitimate to ask—if this cannot be done where is the perspective of an armed struggle, which is not empty words or putchism?

We have to start from where the people are. Developing the mass struggle is a question of convincing people, of changing their ideas. It is playing into the hands of our enemies to be indifferent to democratic struggles and to the question of Parliament. In practice this would mean, under the cover of revolutionary phrases, to surrender the initiative to the ruling class and the right-wing social democrats.

Of course, the bourgeoisie may try to force a change of the electoral laws through Parliament or invoke emergency power. If they do it will be an expression of their political isolation which the mass movement will face and, we believe, can defeat. The Chinese comrades quote France. They do not quote Italy where the mass movement has successfully defeated all attempts to change the electoral laws. And in France the political possibilities based on a united mass movement are developing to defeat de Gaulle, end authoritarian rule and restore democratic life to France.

Parliament and State Power

The Chinese comrades then resort to a caricature of the position of the Parties adopting the

line of the 1960 Statement. "Khrushchov maintains," they write, "that if the proletariat can win a majority in Parliament, this in itself will amount to a seizure of state power and the smashing of the bourgeois state machinery." And further:

"Even if in certain circumstances a Communist Party should win a majority of seats in parliament or participate in the government as a result of an electoral victory, it would not change the bourgeois nature of parliament or government still less would it mean the smashing of the old and the establishment of a new state machine. It is absolutely impossible to bring about a fundamental social change by relying on bourgeois parliaments or governments. With the state machine under its control the reactionary bourgeoisie can nullify elections, dissolve parliament, expel Communists from the government, outlaw the Communist Party and resort to brute force to suppress the masses and the progressive forces." (p. 35)

Let us examine these arguments stage by stage. Neither Khrushchov nor any other Communists in their right senses have ever equated a parliamentary majority with state power. Our Party, in particular, year in and year out argued with the Labour masses just the opposite. We have shown that successive Labour majorities in Britain have governed for the capitalist class and have left untouched the complete domination of the state apparatus by the capitalist class. This has been our major criticism of reformism, our justification for our position of social revolution, and that social revolution not only meant the ending of the *economic*, but also the *state* power of the ruling class. We do not require to be reminded of Bernstein and Kautsky. We have had our own Bernsteins and Kautskys, from MacDonald onwards, preaching the "non class" character of British state power. The Chinese comrades may now think that we have succumbed to right-wing Labour ideology. That is their privilege. But they can only do so by "overlooking" our 40 years of teaching on the nature of the capitalist state which has earned us the inveterate hostility of the right-wing and the capitalist parties.

It is the same with the argument that a majority would not change the nature of Parliament or the state machine, and that it is impossible to win fundamental social change by relying on bourgeois Parliaments or governments. A Communist-Socialist majority in Parliament would be a product of mass struggle, would be supported by powerful mass organisation and would act to change the whole bourgeois framework. It would be a government of the working class and the masses of the people determined to legislate for social change. More, it would be a government

backed by a powerful mass movement outside Parliament, by the organised working class in the factories, railway depots, ports and airports, in the power stations, towns and villages. It would be a government which had won many of the rank and file of the army, large sections of progressive civil servants and lawyers. It would be a government which, in the words of *The British Road*, would take steps to consolidate "the political power of the working people by ensuring that those in commanding positions in the armed forces and police, the civil service and diplomatic services are loyal to the socialist government and increasingly representative of the people".

As for the final Chinese argument that the bourgeoisie, outvoted by the people, would resort to forcible suppression, again there is the note of finality and inevitability.

Our strategy of peaceful transition cannot guarantee peaceful transition. Both the 1960 Statement and our *British Road* follow Marx and Lenin in this respect.

The 1960 Statement declared:

"In the event of the exploiting classes resorting to violence against the people, the possibility of non-peaceful transition to socialism should be borne in mind. Leninism teaches, and experience confirms, that the ruling classes never relinquish power voluntarily. In this case the degree of bitterness and the forms of the class struggle will depend not so much on the proletariat as on the resistance put up by the reactionary circles to the will of the overwhelming majority of the people, on these circles using force at one or other stage of the struggle for socialism."

In the same way *The British Road* also made clear:

"But the capitalist class cannot be expected to surrender its wealth and power without a struggle. The big capitalists, whose interests are threatened by the advance to socialism, are likely to strive by every means in their power, constitutional and unconstitutional, to hold back the movement. At all stages in the struggle for progressive policies and for socialism, therefore, the working class and progressive movement needs to be vigilant, and if necessary to use its political and industrial strength to defeat any attempts by the big capitalists to restrict democratic rights or block the road to democratic advance.

"This will be of particular importance when the Socialist Government is established and begins to carry through measures to break the economic and political power of the big capitalists. The extent to which the working class is alert and prepared to use its strength in support of the Government's measures will determine whether the big capitalists accept the democratic

verdict of the people or attempt to resist by force.

"But headed by the working class, a Labour and Progressive movement which has been built up in struggle and inspired by the goal of socialism will have the strength and spirit to overcome all obstacles and ensure that the Socialist Government carries through its programme, opening up a new and glorious future for our country."

If the capitalist class, defying the electoral will of the people, resort to force, they can only be answered by force. But this is not the argument. Our aim is to confront the capitalists with such overwhelming strength in all key factories, in transport, in the towns, villages and ports, and among the working-class forces comprising the bulk of the army, that they are compelled to accept the democratic verdict of the people. We are confident that these conditions can develop.

Create the Necessary Conditions

Lenin argued that a social revolution is impossible without a revolutionary situation. He wrote: "Only when the 'lower classes' do not want the old way, and when the 'upper classes' cannot carry on in the old way—only then can revolution triumph." (Lenin, *Left-Wing Communism—An Infantile Disorder*, Chap. IX.) In another passage (Chap. X) Lenin develops this, stressing that the conditions for successful revolution are that (1) the hostile class forces have sufficiently weakened themselves in a struggle which is beyond their strength; (2) the vacillating intermediate elements have sufficiently shown their practical bankruptcy; (3) there is a mass sentiment for revolutionary action among the proletariat.

What are the likely conditions for the development of such a situation in Britain? In Lenin's time such a situation coincided with the aftermath of world war. This was the case, too, in the position in China and Eastern Europe. Because of this our enemies argue that socialist revolution is bound up with world war and is the by-product of war. We utterly reject such an idea. Social revolution is the outcome of intolerable class tension and contradictions in capitalist society. The fact that these contradictions finally found their revolutionary solution in the aftermath of the war, was due to the fact that the war in these countries deepened these contradictions to breaking point. The war did not create these conditions.

Are we to await fatalistically for a third world war to bring about a new revolutionary situation

in the countries of Western Europe? We say No. Apart from the fact that such a war would be a nuclear war which in Britain would mean virtually an end to social existence, our whole strategy is aimed to prevent a third world war. We are convinced that the forces exist which can prevent world war. We aim to advance to socialism in conditions of peace. To prevent war means politically to defeat the war plans of British capitalism, to end conditions of the cold war, to impose policies of peaceful coexistence and disarmament, which in turn politically weakens the monopolists and reduces the militarisation of the state. This creates more favourable conditions for the peaceful transition. The conditions making for a socialist revolution in Britain will arise out of the deepening of the social contradictions associated with capitalism and the crisis of British imperialism, the bankruptcy of bourgeois and right-wing politics, the growing contradictions of automation, the need for fundamental solutions to the social problems of our times. It is impossible to be schematic or dogmatic; there is no exact historical parallel to the period opening before us. We will work with Lenin's advice in mind to seek fresh new forms of transition or approach to social revolution.

But one thing is clear. We have to work to create the new possibilities by mass action, agitation and work for our socialist aims. The 1960 Statement did not put the issue as one of academic debate. It called upon us to "create the necessary conditions for the peaceful realisation of the socialist revolution".

As we have said before, this is the line of our strategy and we should refuse to be deflected from it. To adopt any other would be wrong, would be to substitute revolutionary phrases for the real political mass struggle to build unity, win the Labour movement and the masses and rout the monopolists.

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