

Irish Communist Group

Obituary on Micheal McCreery

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Michael McCreery, the founder and Secretary of the Committee to Defeat revisionism for Communist Unity, a group formed in part in the Communist Party of Great Britain and expelled from the Party following a public declaration of support for the Communist Party of China in the Sino-Soviet ideological debate in October, 1963, die during the month. He was 36.

In the last 18 months Comrade McCreery established a monthly periodical, Vanguard, and published five pamphlets: Destroy the Old to Build the New; Organising at the Place of Work; The Patriots; The way Forward; and Notes on the Lower Middle Class and Semi-Proletariat in Britain. (Available from Flat 3, 33 Ansom Road, N.7.) His writing in the main was on the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state and revolution, which he reasserted against the reformist theories of the leadership of the Communist Party of Great Britain; and on the building of a Marxist-Leninist Party in Britain. He made important mistakes on both matters; the more serious concerned the Party.

In this matter he wrote: "... the CPGB has been built up, at least over the last 20 years, around a group of men whose political philosophy is Left-Social democratic, not Marxist"; and, : "The present leadership has built up the party around itself and in its own image." On the building of a new revolutionary party; "It is necessary to begin by pulling together an alternative leadership to the social democrats who have captured the party organisation": "... A Marxist Party can

only be built up around a Marxist leadership”; “... the growth of a Marxist Party can only follow the establishment of a leadership, it cannot precede it”: and “The need for an alternative Party built around an alternative leadership.” (All quotes from ‘Destroy the Old to Build the New” pp.9-12)

Comrade McCreery’s great weakness shows itself here. His understanding of the Party was basically idealistic. He saw it as originating in the mind of a leaders instead of developing in the course of a revolutionary struggle by the working class. He saw the Party leadership as an elite of wise men who created the party on the basis of their own ideas, instead of being composed of people who served the needs of the developing party and whose ideas developed and reached correct ideas through the experience of work in the new organisation. His view established an opposition between the Party leadership and the rest of the Party, which exists in a corrupt, reformist Party, but which could not exist in a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist Party without damaging it. His great mistake was his attempt to build a new party in the same way as he maintained that the old one had been built – around a leadership. This produced a series of splits within his small Committee within 12 months that reduced it to a negligible, and sometimes negative, influence on the Marxist-Leninist movement of the British workers.

He wrote: “The British Road is like one of those medieval paintings, produced before the laws of perspective had been fully grasped. The foreground, our decaying capitalist society, is seen in all its ugliness. In the background a Socialist Britain stands out in full glory. But in the middle distance, the intervening ground which links the two, and should give coherence to the whole picture, is somewhat blurred. The perspective is false.” This was largely true of himself.

When he came to analyse the classes in British society (in “Notes on the Lower Middle Class and Semi-Proletariat in Britain”), the idealist outlook which had already led him astray in his writings on the Party and leadership once again asserted itself and once again led him into grave theoretical errors. On this question his major error was to confuse ideological position with class position. Some non-manual workers in British society believe, under pressure of bourgeois propaganda, that they belong to a different class from the manual workers (when of course they do not) and identify themselves with the bourgeoisie. Comrade McCreery instead of seeing that the objective position of these non-manual workers was that of wage-labourers, and of exposing their subjective illusions that they were now part of the bourgeoisie and classified them as petty-bourgeois. He

thus abandoned the objective economic definition of class in favour of a subjective definition.

His strength, lay in his ability to express the revolutionary ideas of the workers, in his ability to express their hostility to the system of imperialism which was keeping them in subjection and their sympathy with the masses in the colonies who were being murdered by the same imperialist system. His style as an orator was plain and unvarnished but the intensity of his feelings gave it a power that is not often experienced. There can be no doubt of his sincere and total hatred of the system of capitalism and imperialism and his determination to end it. His blunders were the outcome of a theoretical inadequacy and failure to understand dialectical relationships and place himself in a dialectical position with the weak but developing movement in which he found himself so that he could learn from it and help it by putting what he had learned from it at its disposal, which made him incapable of dealing correctly with the situation in which he found himself. Whether or not he could have corrected his mistakes so as to allow his real abilities to assert themselves to the full will not be known.

Angela Clifford

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