



Statement on Resignations from the British Section of the League

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The League for the Fifth International regrets the resignation of 16 comrades, most of them members of our British section, Workers Power, but also members from our Austrian and Czech sections.

Three of them - Simon Hardy, Roman Riedl and Martin Mikula - have been members of the League for the last decade or more and were members of our international leadership.

In this role they performed valuable work, seeking out new members and groups, writing on revolutionary situations in South Asia and the Middle East, visiting these countries and building sections of the League. We are sorry that their participation in our collective work over the last five years, which has seen the League more than double in size internationally, did not weigh more heavily in their decision to leave.

We acknowledge the important role the British comrades played in the 2010 student movement against the Tory-Lib Dem education reforms.

Splits are not to be courted or welcomed, but neither can they always be avoided. For a Leninist, they are not entirely negative if the differences prove to be serious questions of programme and, for the time being at least, irreconcilable.

The majority, both in WP and internationally, did everything possible to persuade the comrades not to leave. Everything, that is, except compromise our principles. In the end, a revolutionary organisation remains a voluntary one and when comrades are no longer willing to fight for its programme and principles then withdrawal becomes inevitable.

In the course of the internal discussion, which lasted eight months, the minority deepened their differences with the majority. Their resignation statement makes this clear:

‘We no longer believe, however, that the type of organisation advocated by the League - highly homogenous Leninist-Trotskyist cadre groups with a very strict notion of democratic centralism - is capable of winning broader forces to this programme. In short, the League in its current form is not fit for purpose.’

Instead, they propose to create ‘a nationally organised network to co-ordinate the work of autonomous local groups, building from the bottom up.’

Differences focused around a proposal that Workers Power should initiate a process of discussion and common action aimed at creating an anticapitalist party in Britain.

It soon became clear that the majority regarded this as a tactic aimed at forwarding the struggle for a revolutionary party as part of a new International. While it was recognised that this might initially involve the building of a ‘transitional organisation’, the objective would be to win that organisation to a fully revolutionary programme through a process of discussion and common action. For the minority, however, such a transitional organisation was an end in itself, a replacement for Workers Power in its present form and with its present politics.

The comrades increasingly expressed the view that Workers Power constituted an obstacle to this project because it is

based around a programme and because of its democratic centralist form of organisation. To overcome this 'obstacle', they proposed that WP members should not maintain any organisational continuity, either as a faction or tendency, within the 'transitional organisation', that WP should cease publication of its paper and that WP members should be under no obligation to argue the political line of the organisation within this project. The majority correctly characterised these proposals as liquidationist, both in the political sense, in terms of dissolving our programme and principles, and the organisational sense, in terms of dissolving our tendency.

This led the minority into opposition to the League's views of the stages of party building, challenging our analysis of the history of Bolshevism in the 1903-1916 period and rejecting Trotsky's writings and practice on this question in the 1930s. In particular, the minority attacked our conception of the early stage of party building, the 'programmatically defined propaganda society' or 'fighting propaganda group'.

Their argument was simply copied wholesale from the quasi-libertarian critiques of Leninism and Trotskyism presently fashionable on the English-speaking left: Pham Binh, Louis Proyect and the Weekly Worker. Since our views on this issue were fundamental to the origins of our tendency in the 1970s and 1980s, this constituted a break with the political tradition of WP and the League. The overwhelming majority of the League's members considered that there was no substance to this critique.

An important demand for the minority was the 'right' to express their criticisms of the organisation's policies and principles in public. Our view is that what is, or is not, made public is determined by the organisation collectively, by the demands of the fight for the revolutionary programme, not the absolute rights of individuals to do as they please.

The public discussion of internal disputes is not a general principle of communist organisation. It is of course unavoidable in a mass party, whose internal life will be reported in its mass press. There is no abstract 'right', however, for an individual party member, or for minorities, to criticise the party in public. Our words, like our actions, are under the democratically agreed discipline of the party, something we accept as a condition of membership. Particularly in the early stages of party building, when the main task is to combat the influence of bourgeois ideology within the advanced strata of the movement and to advance a revolutionary policy against reformism and the many intermediate centrist trends, such discipline has to apply to the presentation of theory and methodology, just as much as to 'practical' activity.

Heterogeneity, or a plurality of views, is not a goal to be fought for but an inevitable consequence of recruitment of a membership subject to the contradictions of capitalist society. As such, it is a feature of party building at all stages of development. The danger of succumbing to bourgeois ideology or being torn apart by internal differences, has to be fought by the homogenising ('unifying?') principles of democratic centralism. These are; a vibrant inner party democracy, including the right to form factions and tendencies, a membership educated in the party's strategy and tactics and committed to putting its policies into practice in a disciplined way, the commitment of minorities to accept majority decisions (something especially painful for intellectuals) and constant review and assessment of experience and results through democratic discussion.

Even within a mass party, Lenin emphasised in 1906 that public criticism must be exercised only within the principles of the party programme and where it does not disrupt the unity of a given action or campaign. We believe that, as the historic crisis of capitalism continues to develop in the years ahead, it will prove to ever greater numbers the vital importance of a revolutionary programme as a strategy, a guide to action. Equally, they will recognise democratic centralism as the necessary organisational principle for building a party that can carry that programme into the mass struggles of the working class.

The so-called 'New Left' ideas of pluralism as a principle, of heterogeneity as a good thing in itself, are as old as the hills and have put in an appearance in the early phases of every mass movement of resistance from the 1840s, to the 1960s and the turn of this century. Today, we see a renewed emphasis on the instantaneous spread of ideas via the social media, the creation of online communities, decentralised, leaderless movements and forms of organisation that seek to prefigure a de-centred and non-hierarchical world. Despite their dependence on new technologies, these are old

ideas, older than scientific socialism, in essence they are utopian.

Such anarchist-libertarian-liberal ideas will prove to be just as useless and harmful now as they have been over the last 150 years. They cannot form the basis of a struggle against the (state) repressive power of the capitalist class and for the power of the working class. Any concession to them will lead to disorientation, frustration and ultimately an exit from revolutionary politics. It is the 'New Left' that will prove itself 'unfit for purpose' if that purpose is to transform the world rather than just to create a minor celebrity culture from handfuls of intellectuals.

We stand by our self-understanding as a group whose principal task is to defend and develop the revolutionary programme and to address the major questions of strategy and tactics facing the working class in its living struggles. However, we have never had the ridiculous idea that either we or any other small left group could simply grow into a mass party by a process of individual recruitment.

In our Theses on Reformism, our Thesis on Organisation and on the Early Stages of Party Building, we outline a series of tactics for transcending the stage of a fighting propaganda group - a new workers' party, with unions playing a key founding role, revolutionary unity between groups that can agree on a common programme, affiliation or full entry into mass reformist or centrist parties.

We have implemented these tactics many times; our comrades in France joined the NPA soon after its foundation, our German comrades joined the WASG, in Britain Workers Power joined the Socialist Alliance and before that the Socialist Labour Party. Our Czech section initiated the New Anticapitalist Left in 2009. In recent months, we have been discussing with our Pakistan and Sri Lankan comrades tactics to fight for the formation of a new mass workers' party in the context of recent developments in their countries.

Of course, we did not succeed in creating a revolutionary party but, more than any failures on our part, this reflects the scale of the obstacles to be overcome, in particular, the strength of reformist forces, and the failure of far bigger centrist organisations to overcome the influence of reformism. Despite the huge opportunities today, the anticapitalist party tactic, itself a variant of revolutionary unity rather than a wholly new tactic as such, has no more guarantee of success than previous initiatives.

We have always emphasised the need to look outward to new generations of activists, workers and youth. In the mid and late 1990s, we responded earlier than the centrist organisations to the growth of what became the anticapitalist movement. We founded and built the youth group Revolution in response. We worked constructively with the populists (white overall movement), libertarians and ecologist forces that initiated the anticapitalist movement, without for a minute accepting their horizontalist organisational prejudices. On the contrary, we criticised and opposed these ideas as obstacles to clarifying objectives and to reaching clear decisions on tactics. We are proud of the approach we took and have no intention of renouncing it.

In most of the world today, and certainly in western Europe, the political terrain is cluttered not only with electorally powerful reformist and Stalinist parties and sizeable centrist propaganda groups but also with the wreckage of three or four generations of attempts to create revolutionary parties. There is no point in wringing our hands over this. The founders of Marxism never promised us an easy ride to the destruction of capitalism. Revolutionaries have to develop and defend the revolutionary programme to the best of their ability and use appropriate tactics to take it into the political and trade union struggle.

Today, the question being discussed in Britain is the possibility of forming a new political organisation. The key questions are: what programme should we fight for, what tactics should we use, what sort of organisation should we build and what is the optimal objective of the tactic?

We want any new political organisation to be revolutionary, to be capable of leading the way to the seizure of power by the working class. For that reason we want to win it to our full programme because, by definition, we see that programme as nothing other than a distillation of the way to win, as a series of measures that link the resistance to

austerity and war to the fight for revolution and power.

We do not present our programme as an ultimatum, in a take it or leave it, all or nothing, way. We are clear, however, that without it the new organisation would not be a fully revolutionary organisation; it would be some sort of intermediate centrist organisation. If its transition were blocked at this stage then sooner or later it would be wrecked by the demands and development of the class struggle, as so many such initiatives have been before.

The predominant postwar ,far left organisations; the Fourth International (USFI), the IST, the Morenoites, the Lambertists and the Healyites, have a long record of forming faux reformist or deliberately centrist organisations, what we have called ?halfway houses? (halfway between reform and revolution). We can mention the Argentine Movement towards Socialism (MAS), the Scottish Socialist Party, the Socialist Alliance in England and Wales, and Respect, all of which ended on the rocks. Today, we are witnessing the crisis of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA) caused by its lovingly preserved plurality and heterogeneity.

All of them believed there was a quick and easy route to mass organisations. Simply by shedding the ballast of a revolutionary programme and a democratic centralist national and international organisation, the voyage would be swifter and surer. With a naiveté that simply refuses to believe the evidence either of scientific prognosis or repeated experience, they threw overboard not only their political compasses but their charts, too. Life proved in every case, without exception, that such voyages end in shipwreck.

We can only hope that our former comrades draw this lesson from their own experience quickly, and return to our ranks to build a disciplined international organisation with a clear programme ? something which is not an obstacle to the formation of a mass revolutionary party, but a precondition for it.

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