

Chapter I

STANDING FIRMLY ON OUR OWN FEET

The Party Comes to its Third Congress

Comrades and Friends,
The Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist) comes to its Third Congress as the culmination of the period of its work which began on January 2, 1994. It is a period when the crucial question has been one of formulating an agenda for the Party in the new circumstances. This agenda has been one of elaborating a line, programme and tasks for the Party and the working class in this period. The circumstances which characterise this period are that it is a period of the retreat of revolution. But the work since the beginning of 1994 also takes us to the threshold of the new millennium. The challenge of history is to move forward into the 21st century on a new basis and to prepare for the revolutionary transformation of society. We are confident that this Congress will put the Party in a strong position to take up this challenge.

In January 1994, at the International Seminar held in Coventry, our beloved comrade Hardial Bains, whose sad passing still grieves us, on behalf of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist), put forward the now well-known analysis on the character of this period and the tasks of the communist and workers' movement.

When we lost Comrade Bains in 1997, we said that he had been and remained our dearest friend, our mentor and guide. The analysis put forward at the Coventry Seminar in 1994 was an example of his and his Party's proletarian internationalism, of co-operation and exchanges between those engaged in a common work and cause. Throughout the developments since 1994 until his untimely passing, Comrade Bains continued to afford us unstinting assistance and guidance. And even now, nearly two years after his death, his writings and the records of discussions with him continue to be invaluable. It is surely a measure of the man that such advances have been made by his own Party in the last years, as well as by those other Parties he influenced such as ours, however modest our own developments.

The developments since January 1994 are now well known to all our comrades. Exactly five years ago on March 19, the Central Committee published for discussion the Party's draft general line *There Is a Way Out of the Crisis*. Following two Consultative Conferences in 1994, the Central Committee in January 1995 published the Party's *Draft Programme for the Working Class*. From February 1996 onwards, the Party set as its main task that it should further build and strengthen its central organ *Workers' Weekly* under the slogan *Improve the Content, Extend the Readership*. In 1997 at the time of the General Election, it put forward as an immediate programme for the working class the call to *Stop Paying the Rich – Increase Investments in Social Programmes*. With all these elements, work has been and is being carried out to elaborate and implement them.

The importance of this clear agenda, developed stage by stage, over these five years cannot be stressed too highly. It has been a programme developed over a sustained period, with all the activists knowing clearly at each stage what has been the main task, what problem the Party has been trying to overcome. This programme has not been carried without struggle. In this period of retreat of revolution, the reactionary offensive against communism and against everything progressive has been stepped up, as has the pressure within the movement to divert from the main tasks. In such circumstances, to have put in place a general line, a programme and call for the class, in the draft form which has been the necessary initial stage, to have set clear tasks for the Party and made advances, whether they be great or small, is an achievement of which to be immensely proud. At this Congress, we can undeniably claim that the Party and its cadres are in place. The Party's Third Congress will set the seal on all this work.

The Themes and Agenda

Comrades and friends,

The Party and its cadres come to this Congress with the experience and deliberations of the two National Consultative Conferences of 1998 behind them. These Conferences have represented the most thoroughgoing preparation for setting the themes and agenda of the Congress. The preparation is reflected in the form of the Congress and in the content of the material provided. It reflects that it is the delegates to the Congress who are in control of the Congress, its agenda and discussions. The Congress is the highest decision-making body of the Party, through which the membership expresses its collective will. The delegates have themselves been involved in deciding on the content of the Congress, not simply by presenting amendments to or views on a previously prepared report. Having participated in setting the agenda, all the delegates will participate together in arriving at the decisions on the work of the Party. This will ensure we take joint responsibility for the implementation of the decisions. The main issue in these decisions is to assess, in looking at the stage of the Party's work, and what the objective and subjective conditions are pointing towards, what must be done to rise to the occasion, to meet the challenge of the demands of the times. The agenda that has been set is orientated to taking those decisions. The aim of the agenda is to ensure that the perspective for leading the way out of the crisis is set, and within this perspective what the work should be.

The Congress is taking place at a crucial time for the working class and people. It is taking place at a time when the capitalist system is in all-round crisis, both in Britain and world-wide. This crisis is extremely acute and is deepening in every sphere, with economic crisis at the base. In this situation, in Britain, Tony Blair has been brought to power to carry out the agenda of the bourgeoisie and has been carrying out this agenda. This has led to illusions about Tony Blair being shattered, and to growing dissatisfaction with the Labour government. The working class is being drawn into the struggle and the requirement is that they must take centre stage.

In this situation, the Party must sum up, on the basis of its own thinking and guided by Contemporary Marxist-Leninist Thought, the problems that require solution in society. It must work out the modern arrangements that require to be made to advance the communist and workers' movement in the conditions of retreat of revolution. These arrangements, although they are to be made in the conditions of the retreat of revolution, must also take

into account the coming revolutionary storms, the revolutionary class battles which will inevitably break out, the necessity to prepare for going on the offensive when the conditions for launching an assault exist, as well as the fact that such conditions may come into being sooner rather than later. The Party must formulate the immediate as well as the strategic political tasks that the working class needs to elaborate to lead all of society out of the crisis. It must set the immediate tasks which the Party itself must undertake and the aims it must set for itself. It must articulate the vision of the new society and the way forward into the 21st century, to give confidence to the workers' movement, and imbue it with the revolutionary theory based on settling scores with the old philosophic conscience and as part of the summing up of the workers' and communist movement world-wide in the 20th century. Such a revolutionary theory will give an invincible quality to the proletarian movement for emancipation. These are the themes of this Congress.

The Change in the World Situation since the Party's Second Congress

Comrades and friends,

The Second Congress of the Party in 1987 set as the key tasks to build committees among the workers and to mobilise the youth in the cause of communism. It defined these as key to advance on every front, and that the ongoing work of the Party must be centred around solving these key tasks. In the context of these tasks it called on the Party to pay attention to developing its work among the masses of the people, particularly the vital work among women. As we reach the Third Congress, the first task remains to be accomplished, while work among the youth is beginning to bear fruit, and women have undeniably come to the forefront of the Party's work, both within the Party and on the broader front. It must be recognised, however, that in this intervening period the world has gone through a historic turning point. While still in the era of imperialism and proletarian revolution, these twelve years have seen flow of revolution change to ebb, and the circumstances in which the working class and its parties wage their struggles has altered dramatically.

The year 1991 saw the final collapse of the Soviet Union and the pseudo-socialism which had arisen there and in other countries of Eastern Europe some thirty years before. This signalled an offensive of unprecedented proportions on the part of imperialism and reaction not only on communism but on everything progressive, in the attempt to turn back the clock to medievalism both domestically and internationally. The big powers cast aside all international norms and began to impose on the peoples of the entire world their so-called "free-market" economy, political pluralism, and conception of "human rights" based on private property.

In the face of such an offensive, some communist parties, including some in power, were simply swept away virtually without trace. None escaped the pressures, neither of the anti-communist offensive nor of liquidationism within the movement. In these severe circumstances, all communist parties were called upon to find their bearings in the new situation, to elaborate a line, a programme and tasks for the Party and the class, in the particular circumstances of their own country. In other words, as never before, each Party had to stand on its own feet.

Our Party certainly did not escape the pressures which the historic shift brought about in which no force could act in the old way. The Party at first found difficulty in grasping this issue. It must be said that there are many forces who still do not grasp this point.

The main and crucial aspect of the Party's and the Central Committee's role during this period is that the Party of John Buckle, Cornelius Cardew and the many other comrades who worked to the utmost to build the Party and to give it life not only survived, but is here today holding its Third Congress.

These have been testing times for the whole communist and workers' movement. The liquidationist pressure in such circumstances was the pressure to abandon the principles of democratic centralism, to abandon communist principles, to personalise issues and to succumb to the pressure of ultra-democracy and dogmatism. The leadership of the Party refused to succumb to such pressures. The Party did not split or abandon the name communist. It was never reconciled to the situation where it had difficulty finding its bearings or to a situation which could be described as "groping in the dark". It was this factor of not being reconciled to the situation, a determination that the Party should live, and a realisation that only the work of the Party itself could ultimately transform the situation that were the basis for the Party to once again make its own history.

The Party stuck to the task of finding its bearings in the new circumstances. It did so by refusing to accept the passivity and liquidationist pressure that the bourgeoisie wanted to impose on the whole communist movement as the period of the retreat of revolution came into being, and beginning from the principle that if the communist party does not use its own head it is nothing. As well as making, as it did in 1993, various developments to strengthen the technical base as the precursor to strengthening the Party's organ *Workers' Weekly*, the Party reached the conclusion that the guideline to start afresh, for the Party to revolutionise itself anew, during this period of retreat of revolution was one which it was essential to follow, and it put its words into deeds. Once it reached this conclusion and began its own work in earnest to elaborate a general line, a programme and tasks for the Party and the class, it did indeed establish its bearings in the new circumstances.

The Central Committee did not become a co-ordinating centre. It reaffirmed that it must lead in practice between the Congresses, the highest body of the Party. It also continued to insist that its role cannot be restricted to that of giving guidelines but that it is one of standing at the forefront of all the work and solving the problems that occur in the objective world, the real world. It could be said that there is no place to hide in this situation. All there is is the real world and our own work within this situation. Posturing, giving a so-called "politically correct line", or simply juggling with categories of ideas have no place in the communist party. This leadership, this stand, this work is not a matter of individuals but of the collective, of the body itself. Lessons drawn and guidelines given are not for the purpose of settling scores with any individuals.

The Political Work of the Central Committee and the Significance of the Third Congress in Setting the Seal on this Work

Comrades and friends,

The Coventry International Seminar of January 2-3, 1994, initiated this period of the Party's work in every sense. The Coventry Seminar was of historic importance not only because of the positions presented for discussion by Comrade Bains but also because there the Party set its present line of march.

Throughout, anyone who wished to join in the Party's line of march has been organised, and the line of march has not been made dependent on attempting to

accommodate anyone who was not concerned with its implementation. At the same time, throughout this whole period, the struggle has been carried against liquidationism. It has been carried against the line that the Party should worship spontaneity, bow down in front of the workers' struggles and tail behind them, and should cease or divert from the project of building and strengthening the Party and its plan of improving the content, extending the readership of its newspaper.

The May 1997 general election provided a very important juncture in this work. In the course of it, the Party put forward the slogan which sums up the fighting programme of the working class for democratic renewal and against the anti-social offensive: *Stop Paying the Rich – Increase Investments in Social Programmes!* This fighting programme is at the same time a political programme and an economic programme. It is a programme which embodies the political unity of the working class and people, in which the individual interest of the members of society is harmonised with the interests of the collective, and in which the collective interests are harmonised with the general interests of the society. It is a slogan formulated to begin the work to put the Party at the head of the working class and people in their struggles, so that they take up the fight for the victory of a pro-social programme and for political empowerment. It does the same on the economic front, so as to ensure that the working class and people have the financial resources in their own hands to plan and build the economic foundation of a new, socialist society. In short, it is the slogan for the working class to rally and unite the people around its independent programme.

In the course of the work to formulate this programme and other work, the Party learnt to distinguish between ideological and political considerations. This concerns the need for the Party actually to carry out work to formulate and place political tasks before society, before the whole of the polity, and then carry out the work to mobilise the sections of the people to accomplish those tasks. This ensures that political considerations are not dealt with as abstractions, that the formulated tasks are not left merely as policy objectives, but that the emphasis is put on implementation, the working out and fighting for the success of each practical political step. It ensures that once the general line and the general programme are formulated, priority is put on political considerations. Placing priority on political considerations means that the plan and line of march are set, not on the basis of ideological considerations, that mobilisation should take place on the basis of "agreement" or "disagreement" and long hours spent winning the sections of the people over to an ideological position, but that mobilisation takes place on the basis of practical politics, along a line of march. In particular, the practical politics has the aim of bringing the working class to the centre of political life, ending its marginalisation and taking up its independent programme, and beginning to open up the road to a new society, a socialist Britain. At the same time, ideological considerations are of utmost importance to the Marxist-Leninist party. In essence, the ideological struggle that it wages is for the defence of the purity of Marxism-Leninism and the road of the Great October Revolution. In striving for modern definitions in accordance with contemporary conditions and circumstances, it does not depart from the principled positions of Marxism-Leninism. In particular, it is resolutely opposed to all neo-liberal and social democratic illusions, and recognises that such illusions are used to ideologically disarm the working class movement and divert it, so that the working class holds back from fighting for its own emancipation. Thus the ideological considerations which inform the working out of the independent

programme for the working class are, for example, that there can be no illusions that this system can of itself give rise to socialism, that there can be no illusions that any other force but the working class can lead society out of the present crisis and open up the way to a new socialist society, that the notion should be rejected that the working class must confine itself to the industrial and economic struggle and not become political themselves, and that there can be no illusions that change will come about spontaneously. In the course of the work during the May 1997 election period, the Party also further learnt not to abrogate the responsibilities of the vanguard to provide the working class with its fighting programme and its weapons in the class struggle, its battle plans, its strategic aims and its orientation – while the responsibility of the broad masses of the people themselves is to engage in these battles and trials of strength with the bourgeoisie, thus bringing into play the human factor/social consciousness. Particularly at that time, it rejected the pressure to view the whole election process as nothing but a popularity contest between the parliamentary parties, which was how the bourgeoisie demanded that the whole of the electorate view it. In these circumstances, in its response to the electoral coup, the Party rose to the occasion. It did so by on the one hand utilising the occasion to analyse the objective problems in society and the tactics of the bourgeoisie within this situation, tactics designed to ensure that the programme of the rich that the whole society pay tribute to it continued to get implemented. From this it formulated the slogan which embodied the fighting programme of the working class to move forward from this situation. And it rose to the occasion by on the other hand refusing to depart from a proletarian position and succumb to the pressure of conciliating with social democratic illusions. It raised the issue that no force which calls itself Marxist-Leninist can conciliate in any way with the ideology of New Labour. At the same time, the Party reached the conclusion that the issue for the working class and people is not to have ideological positions or calls imposed on them, but remains how to lift society out of the crisis. The Party analysed that in fact the bourgeoisie was in particular using New Labour to split and fool the people by calling on the “left” to unite with the “centre”, thereby miring them in the conditions of the very same crisis, under the guise that both the “left” and the “centre” should get together to oppose what now the Labour Party has come to refer to as the “forces of conservatism”. Chiefly, the Party rose to the occasion by consciously taking the decision to overcome all the incoherence and trivia which come from the old and which were hurled in a concentrated form not only against the people but particularly against the progressive forces, including the Party, at this time of the election campaign and the coming to power of Tony Blair. This decision has stood the Party in good stead in its preparations for the Third Congress.

These were decisive times for the Party. As the work intensified and the responsibility of the vanguard increased and stood in sharper relief, so did the Party get tested. It responded by refusing to be diverted from its line of march and pursuing its own course, and resisted the liquidationist pressure to abandon its revolutionary social forms. Instead, its organisation was strengthened and consolidated, the Party consolidated *Workers' Weekly* as a broadsheet and took steps to strengthen the technical base further, as well as developing Party journalism in the course of actual practice. It reaffirmed the central position of *Workers' Weekly* as the organiser, the scaffolding which enables the Party to be built in every detail.

This work and these stands gave rise to the conditions where the two 1998 National Consultative Conferences could be held. The holding of these Conferences was extremely

timely. Not only had one year of Tony Blair in power provided objective verification of the character of New Labour and its role in administering state power, heading off the people's opposition to the anti-social offensive and making suitable new arrangements to ensure that it is the claims of the rich on society which are met and take priority in the conditions of globalisation and neo-liberalism. Most importantly, the National Consultative Conferences were arrangements whereby the whole Party was drawn into the deliberations on the stage of the Party's work, and what should be the way forward. This was crucial to the further advance of the Party's work, to building RCPB(ML) as a modern communist party and, specifically, to the success of the project *Improve the Content, Extend the Readership*. They themselves gave rise to the collective will to work for the success of the Third Congress.

The Third Congress therefore presents itself as the greatest milestone in the forward march of the Party. The work of the entire period is taken stock of, the seal is put on the entire work of this period, and new, timely and extremely necessary tasks are put forward to take Britain into the new millennium on a new basis, a socialist basis.

The thesis of this Congress is that the work of the Party and its Central Committee which has brought us thus far enables us to stand on our own feet. In order to rise to the occasion in the period which lies ahead into the 21st century and carry out the new tasks, its plan of practical politics, required to lift society out of the crisis and open the door to a socialist Britain, what is necessary is that RCPB(ML) must be consolidated on the new historical basis. Now is the time for this consolidation, the issue being the consolidation of the Party as the most important subjective force in the preparation for the coming revolutionary storms.

This issue of preparation is fundamental. The consolidation of RCPB(ML) as the most decisive conscious force, the building of the unity of the Marxist-Leninists on the new historical basis, ensures that the work to take Britain forward into the 21st century on a new basis can be accomplished and takes place in the course of the elaboration and implementation of this work. This consolidation is what will characterise this whole coming period we are embarking on which leads into the new millennium, up to the next Congress. It is the foremost aim of the Party in this period. The 21st century will bring with it the most profound revolutionary developments. It is a time which the working class must claim as its own. As the vanguard of the working class, the communist party must fight to place the working class as the leader of society, take hold of what belongs to it, and place itself in the positions of political power as well as placing the resources of society in its own hands. The Marxist-Leninist party is both in theoretical and in practical terms the most decisive subjective factor in bringing about this revolutionary transformation of society in Britain to socialism, as well as contributing to this same cause internationally. Furthermore, when Britain leads the world in backwardness, and the contention about what is progressive and what is reactionary is particularly being fought out in this country, this strategic objective assumes unparalleled importance. It is a trial of strength as to whether the door to progress and a socialist society is opened up or kept shut.

The Meaning of Standing on Our Own Feet

This period of work from the beginning of 1994 has shown how crucial and necessary it is for each Party to formulate its general line in this period when the world is going through a historic shift, to set its work both according to the concrete conditions in the country and

also the experience of the communist and workers' movement taken as a whole nationally and internationally.

As fraternal parties have done, we also take up the principle that "we are our own models", and we take this opportunity to affirm that this is so. With this Third Congress we proclaim that we are standing firmly on our own feet. This can only be done if at the same time we reject any theory of exceptionalism. This is not the meaning of being our own models or standing on our own feet. We do not hold that there is a peculiarly British road to socialism, or that the issue is to build socialism with peculiarly British characteristics. Standing on our own feet means that we are capable of dealing with the world as it is and not as a category of ideas. We reject the notion that we should only see the part and reject the whole, which is the characteristic of Eurocentrism, and reject that we should take our lead from the neo-liberal and colonialist outlook of the English bourgeoisie.

The holding of the Third Congress is therefore something which is quite momentous. Although the Party is quite modest about the advances which have been made, nevertheless it cherishes every step forward. It recognises its shortcomings, but strives to the utmost to overcome them. It is justly proud of the advances it has made, which have only been achieved by the hard work and the sacrifices which all our comrades have made over the years.