

Crisis in the CWI: For a Marxist Way Out!

A proposal to all current members and former members of the CWI to discuss the way forward in these tumultuous times

Open Letter from the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), 29 June 2019, www.thecommunists.net

Dear comrades,

As you are obviously aware, the CWI has entered a period of deep crisis that will most likely end in a split. Understandably, many comrades are confused how such a sudden collapse could have happened. Many will view this as a disappointing experience.

However, important revolutionary currents have previously emerged out of splits. This includes the early Christians; Hus, Luther and Müntzer in the Middle Ages; and the Bolsheviks, the Communist International, and the Trotskyist movement in the modern era. But the precondition for a progressive outcome of a split is the making of a proper assessment of the causes of the crisis and the drawing of appropriate conclusions for the way forward.

For some it might seem that the deep crisis of the CWI has occurred because of the bureaucratic methods of the Taaffe-led International Secretariat or because of the opportunist adaption to so-called "identity politics" of the "Coordination" (also called "Non-Faction Faction"). As a matter of fact, neither bureaucratic leadership methods nor opportunism to petty-bourgeois currents are new phenomena in the CWI. The real impulse is lodged in the fact that these methods can no longer be reconciled with the changed reality – a world situation characterized by sharply accelerating contradictions between classes and states.

In the following paragraphs, we will summarize what we in the RCIT consider as the main issues that need to be addressed in order to find a revolutionary way out of the crisis. ¹

1. Authentic Marxism rejects the petty-bourgeois illusion of the peaceful transformation of capitalism. One of the basic pillars of the CWI (as well as Alan Woods' IMT) has always been the thesis that capitalism can be overthrown by peaceful means or even via the parliamentary road. As the RCIT has explained many times, such a position has been proven wrong by history and is in full contradiction to the views of Lenin and Trotsky. Consider the October Revolution. There was very little loss of life in the initial uprisings. The response of world imperialism was to drench the Russian Revolution in three bloody years of Civil War. Comrades of the CWI need to understand that capitalism can only be overthrown (and the revolution defended) by an armed uprising of the working class and the popular masses. Related to this, Marxists must oppose the classic CWI position that police forces are part of the working class and that their unions should be part of the labour movement. ² The police are not exploited by the bourgeoisie but are the guardians of the system of capitalist exploitation and oppression.

2. Authentic Marxism is anti-imperialist or it is not Marxism. Throughout its whole history the CWI leadership has failed to side with semi-colonial countries in wars with imperialist powers (e.g.

Malvinas War of Britain against Argentina 1982, U.S. wars against Iraq in 1991 and 2003, NATO war against Afghanistan in 2001). As a result, it took an openly or disguised pacifist neutral position. Marxists must base themselves on the teachings of Lenin and Trotsky who advocated “*active, unequivocal support to the oppressed colonial peoples in their struggles and wars against imperialism. A ‘neutral’ position is tantamount to support of imperialism.*”³

3. Marxists consistently support the struggle of oppressed nations. While the CWI nowadays supports the national struggle of the Catalan people (a position probably accepted due to the pressure of their former comrades in Spain), it failed to do the same in crucial liberation struggles in other countries. In Ireland, it consistently refused to side with the nationalists fighting against British occupation in the North. The Irish section’s leadership even went so far as to reject implementing the united front tactic towards Sinn Fein in any mass struggle. In Israel the CWI calls for a “socialist” Israeli-Jewish state instead of a single state with the right of all Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland. This is effectively support for the continued existence of a colonial, settler state on historic Palestinian territory.⁴ Likewise, we consider the CWI’s opposition to open borders for migrants and refugees and its support for capitalist immigration control as a fundamental violation of the Marxist principle of internationalism.⁵

4. Revolutionary opposition instead of adaption to the labour bureaucracy and labor aristocracy. The above-mentioned anti-Marxist positions of the CWI leadership are not accidental but the result of its long-term opportunistic adaption to sectors of the labour bureaucracy and to the prejudices of the most privileged sectors of the working class. For decades it worked inside British Labour and other social democratic parties. It opposed the understanding that these parties have become “*bourgeois workers parties*” (Lenin and Trotsky) and claimed instead that these parties could be transformed into “socialist parties” without ruptures. Then, in the early 1990s, the majority made a 180-degree turn (the minority which became Alan Woods’ IMT upheld the old position.) The leadership now claimed that these parties were no longer any kind of “workers parties”. As a result, the CWI in Britain has been totally surprised and confused by the left-reformist shift in the Labour Party under Corbyn. Marxists have to recognize the character of reformist parties as “*bourgeois workers parties*”. At the same time, however, they should apply the united front tactic to such forces including, when merited, critical electoral support. Under certain conditions, a short-term entryism tactic is legitimate. However, the consistent strategic goal must be to break the workers away from the bureaucracy (both left-wing and right-wing).⁶

Throughout the whole time, the CWI leadership continued the same opportunist approach within the trade union bureaucracy. Instead of building a revolutionary rank and file movement and opposing all sectors of the bureaucracy, they entrenched themselves within the left-reformist bureaucracy. As a result, CWI cadres developed, in a number of cases, close links with that bureaucracy and even entered its ranks as well-paid subordinates (see e.g. the 15 year long close alliance with the Serwotka leadership of the PCS union in Britain which recently ended in collapse and the desertion of many CWI cadres.)

The opportunism of the CWI leadership is not limited to the trade unions. It applies the same methods to other, alien class forces. Take for example the alliance of the US section of the CWI with Senator Bernie Sanders. In 2016 and now again, it is supporting Sanders’ campaign to become the Presidential candidate of the Democrats, one of the two parties of the U.S. monopoly bourgeoisie.⁷ Another expression of this extreme, opportunist adaption to bourgeois forces is the vote of CWI US leader

Kshama Sawant on 13.08.2018 at the Seattle City Council to confirm the Chief of the Police Department. ⁸

5. Marxists must understand the political nature of the current historic period. This period is characterized by a massive acceleration of the contradictions between classes and between states. As a result, this period is now marked by important waves of class struggle. The CWI leadership has failed, however, to grasp the nature of these political convulsions. It claims that the class consciousness is still marked “by the defeat of Stalinism” instead of recognizing the insurgent radicalization of workers and the oppressed around the globe. As a result of such “pessimism”, it failed to understand the nature of the Arab Revolution (since 2011) and dropped its support for the ongoing popular struggles against dictatorships and imperialist aggression in Syria, Yemen, etc. because the masses have continued their struggles under a non-socialist leadership. ⁹ In contrast, the CWI leadership had no such hesitance when it comes to the truly reactionary, imperialist forces leading the Brexit campaign. ¹⁰ Likewise, the CWI leadership has failed to grasp the emergence of China and Russia as imperialist Great Powers and, as a result, can’t see the nature of current events (like the Global Trade War) as *inter-imperialist* conflicts. Hence, they lack a theoretical perspective to apply the Leninist program of *revolutionary defeatism*, i.e. intransigent opposition against all Great Powers and the advocacy of their defeat. ¹¹

Comrades, these are some of the most crucial issues on which the CWI leadership has completely failed the international working class. That is why the CWI is now experiencing serious splits similar to a host of other organizations in the recent past which also lack a consistent Marxist method (e.g. SWP/IST, PSTU/LIT, IMT, the Lambertists or the American ISO).

There are numerous, well-intended people sympathetic to the socialist project in the ranks of the CWI. We appeal to them to rethink the fundamental principles on which the CWI has based its politics for decades. Only overcoming these basic shortcomings will allow the construction of a healthy new international based on authentic, revolutionary methods.

We are convinced of the following formula: the foundation of any revolutionary organization is a revolutionary perspective. As Lenin clearly explained, “*There can be no revolutionary practice without revolutionary theory.*” Achieving this is only possible if one rethinks the old positions and overcomes mistakes. As mentioned in the beginning, splits have occurred various times in history but they are not doomed to be failures. The Taborite and Müntzerite revolutionary movements which split with the moderates were of historic importance as Engels pointed out. The Bolsheviks’ split in 1903 and the foundation of the Trotskyist movement were crucial for the further development of revolutionary Marxism as a vivid antagonist against both Tsarism and bourgeois liberalism as well as against Stalinist degeneration. But such positive outcomes of splits need the courage for change of methods of the past. Such positive outcomes need an open mind that looks at each and every key position with the readiness to question its correctness.

The RCIT is ready to discuss these issues and to listen to your experiences, insights, and arguments. You can contact us at rcit@thecommunists.net. We are committed to working hand-in-hand with you in the construction of a healthy, revolutionary international based on authentic Marxist principles.

¹ We urge comrades to read the following document which summarizes the view of the RCIT on the crucial tasks in the current period: *Open Letter: Great Tasks demand Great Initiative! A Call to All Revolutionary Organizations and Activists to Fulfil Our Responsibility in this Historic Time!* 7 January 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/rcit/open-letter-great-tasks-demand-great-initiative/>.

² See on this e.g. *Five days that shook Britain but didn't wake up the left. The bankruptcy of the left during the August uprising of the oppressed in Britain: Its features, its roots and the way forward*, September 2011, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/britain-left-and-the-uprising/sp-and-committee-for-a-workers-international>. In order to avoid an overblown footnote apparatus we provide in the following footnotes only a few selected publications of the RCIT. They usually contain numerous quotes both from the CWI as well as from the Marxist classics on the issues involved. They also provide links to many other RCIT publications dealing with these issues.

³ See on this e.g. our book *The Great Robbery of the South. Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*, RCIT Books, 2013, Chapter 12 and 13, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/great-robbery-of-the-south/>

⁴ See on this e.g. The CWI's "Socialist" Zionism and the Palestinian Liberation Struggle, 15.9.2014, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/cwi-and-israel/>

⁵ See on this e.g. The Slogan of "Workers'" Immigration Control: A Concession to Social-Chauvinism, 27.3.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/workers-immigration-control/>

⁶ See on this e.g. See on this e.g. Marxism and the United Front Tactic Today. The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony in the Liberation Movement in Semi-Colonial and Imperialist Countries in the present Period, RCIT Books, Vienna 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/book-united-front/>; RCIT-Theses on Revolutionary Trade Union Policy, January 2014, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/theses-trade-union/>

⁷ See on this e.g. The CWI and the U.S.-China Cold War. Some Notes on Centrists' Confusion about the Character of the Global Trade War, 27 May 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/the-cwi-and-the-u-s-china-cold-war/>; Why Not to Vote for the Democratic Party in the Forthcoming US Elections Or At Any Other Time, 2.3.2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/northamerica/no-vote-sanders/>; Once Again: Opportunism of US Left Exposed. An Analysis of the US 2016 Elections Campaign, 14 August 2016, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/north-america/left-and-us-election/>.

⁸ See on this e.g. <https://www.leftvoice.org/open-letter-to-kshama-sawant-don-t-support-the-police>

⁹ See on this e.g. Syria and Great Power Rivalry: The Failure of the „Left“, 21 April 2018, Part III, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/syria-great-power-rivalry-and-the-failure-of-the-left/>

¹⁰ See on this e.g. The British Left and the EU-Referendum: The Many Faces of pro-UK or pro-EU Social-Imperialism, August 2015, see in particular chapter II.2., <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/british-left-and-eu-referendum/>

¹¹ See on this e.g. The CWI and the U.S.-China Cold War. Some Notes on Centrists' Confusion about the Character of the Global Trade War, 27 May 2019, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/the-cwi-and-the-u-s-china-cold-war/>; see also our book *Anti-Imperialism in the Age of Great Power Rivalry. The Factors behind the Accelerating Rivalry between the U.S., China, Russia, EU and Japan. A Critique of the Left's Analysis and an Outline of the Marxist Perspective*, RCIT Books, Vienna 2019. See in particular chapter XI and XXVIII. The book can be read online or downloaded for free here: <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/anti-imperialism-in-the-age-of-great-power-rivalry/>