# On the Dissolution of "Red Fightback"

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As 2022 came to a close and the new year promised greater and more open class struggle in Britain than in the previous year, there was a group whose voice fell silent.

Red Fightback, with little fanfare, dissolved. Now, Communists must ask, what happened? What were the internal ideological and organisational currents which caused this up-and-coming group to shoot up above most other active groups of the country's Marxist Left, and to die out just as suddenly as it appeared?

Politsturm has been analyzing the self-described communist groups in Britain for some time making particular note of the groups' stances on particular important questions. The downfall of Red Fightback (RFB) proves such investigations are pertinent to the most important issues of a world in which imperialism drives hastily towards apocalyptic global war. There must be lessons learned from the wreckage of these groups to build a disciplined, confident and effective proletarian vanguard of the future to confront the bourgeoisie and its cataclysmic leadership.

At the time of our last articles publication, Red Fightback was a relatively new group, formed in 2018 after a split in the RCG over a sexual abuse case, and cited by some as signalling a new stage of Left activity in Britain. It was propelled by disaffected students deserting the Labour Party after the failure of Corbyn to win the general election and the failure of his alleged plan for a transformation of the Labour Party into a viable alternative for the working-class.

Our brief analyses of their policies, composition and theoretical lines turn out well in the light of Alfie Hancox's article in Ebb detailing the squabbling and dysfunction hidden below its surface of youthful zeal.

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The problems faced by RFB were numerous and interconnected; a dissection of only what seem to be the main issues will be done for the sake of brevity and cogency. Our observation that RFB formed and was growing due to the rising support for socialism among students disillusioned with Labour and the anti-proletarian nature of social-democracy was correct; the youthfulness of its membership was also an initial problem for the group as Hancox revealed:

> *'Most of Red Fightback had little if any experience in organising, and were very young... The group was informed by various shades of Maoism, or anti-revisionist Marxism-Leninism. Our politics in the early days were encapsulated by what New Socialist editor Tom Gann has referred to as 'the "national nihilism" of "Rainy Fascism Island" ideas on the left', entailing an aloof attitude to the British labour tradition, which was viewed as fundamentally bourgeois. Colonialism and imperialism have undoubtedly left their corrupting imprint on metropolitan class formation, but à la the RCG this was understood in a mechanical way which wrote off the entirety of the organised working class as a reactionary labour aristocracy.'*[1]

The radicalism of RFB's members allowed it to attract many students also swayed by their passionate disgust of the nature of bourgeois society, but radicalism can also be a symptom of theoretical and tactical immaturity. The group, for all its radical zeal, had to learn how to organise and reach out to the masses by trial and error, not necessarily a bad thing, but undoubtedly this fiery passion was tempered over the course of their development as sheer force of will cannot build a proletarian

movement.

His mention of the Maoist inspiration is also interesting as it perfectly explains the theoretical issues that RFB faced. As mentioned in the passage above, the students joining the group were influenced by various Maoist interpretations; the influence of Mao's political ideology had a detrimental effect on the ability of the group to analyse modern British finance capital, class society and, therefore, formulate a coherent strategy to grow a worker's movement. This can be gleaned from the group's own publications.

In its 'Class Analysis of the Current Material Conditions in Britain and Our Strategy for Revolution' Red Fightback talks at length of class formation in Britain, naming three classes: the bourgeoisie (split into monopolist and non-monopolist sections), the petite bourgeoisie (itself split into three sections) and the proletariat.[2]

The publication explains at length the futility of attempting to reform capitalism by way of the social-democratic Labour Party, as well as the inevitability of periodic crises under capitalism, leading to the accumulation of capital into fewer hands and driving sections of the petite bourgeoisie into the working class and the working class into further deprivation. All well and good. But RFB reveals a fundamental 'Maoist' error in its conclusions; it believes that in the imperialist countries the labour aristocracy, petite bourgeoisie (both bribed by super-profits) and the bourgeoisie form a unified and implacable alliance against the revolution:

> *'The "labour aristocracy" emerged as a result of Britain's imperialism and combines with the petite-bourgeoisie... to form a potent force in society. Since their position depends on the ruling class and its imperialism, the labour aristocracy is ideologically and materially in alliance with the ruling class.'*[3]

This may be correct… for the 20th century. Dialectical materialism, the tool by which Marxist-Leninists study and interpret the developments in society and, consequently, the best course of action on how to progress the proletarian movement requires that all aspects of class society be studied and understood intimately. Dialectics teaches that matter is in constant motion,[4] as such so too is society constantly moving and developing.[5] The triumph of the Soviet Union over the forces of fascism led to a flourishing of proletarian governments in Europe and Asia. World imperialism was shaken and the old colonial empires began dissolving as they could no longer maintain the class dominance required by colonialism.

Even in the imperialist nations, the workers had won extraordinary power, the Communist Parties of France and Italy for instance being included in coalition governments. But, the bourgeoisie, fearful that proletarian forces would soon be strong enough to overthrow them in their current weakened position, led a counterattack against the Communist Parties. It did not do this by way of overt reaction, illusioning the public of its real nature to avoid a popular rebuff and the revolution to threaten the position of bourgeois class-rule. Social-democracy was the most appropriate weapon; the possibility of revolution was averted as the proletariat was satiated by a number of measures that materially improved their lives.

The world has since changed extraordinarily. Counter-revolution has triumphed and the bourgeoisie, seeing no need to maintain the numerous social benefits previously afforded to the working-class as well as to open up new avenues of profit-making, has rolled back the welfare state.

Yet RFB explicitly maintained a Maoist position that within the large imperialist states the working-class is too content to mount resistance against the bourgeoisie which operates in alliance with the labour aristocracy and petite-bourgeoisie. However, this Maoist ideological influence later leads them to make an incorrect analysis of the British working-class, leading to contradictory statements and

ultimately self-defeating strategies towards organising the working masses into a fighting force.

RFB's contradictory position can be seen in its analysis of British imperialism post-Brexit. They correctly conclude that 'it would not be possible for Britain to be an independent imperialist power,'[6] but does not elaborate on what this means for British finance-capital. To do so would lead to conclusions which undermine its erroneous left position towards the country's working class. Britain, as we have, frequently reported as of late[7], is facing an acute surge of trade union activity amid the crisis; the scale of which submerges the UK's position in the imperialist hierarchy and accelerating its dive into semi-dependency. This development, unforeseen by RFB due to its vulgar interpretation of the objective laws that govern capitalist society, is not in the offing: it is already in motion.

This development is already showing symptoms of profound crisis: acute and rising class struggle, a paralysed government and sharpening contradictions. The tripartite alliance of the labour aristocracy, the petite-bourgeoisie and the imperialists has long been moribund. The industrial action seen throughout 2022 in Britain confirms this.

In such an important moment, when the organised sections of the working class are struggling against bourgeois exploitation, Red Fightback concludes that the trade union movement should be disregarded because 'British Trade Unions exist to encourage faith in bourgeois institutions and to divert radical resistance back into such channels.'[8] This is a gross error and reveals the immaturity of RFB as a political organisation. Lenin (who shall be quoted in full so as to avoid misinterpretation) specifically warns of this mentality among Communists, even in the more developed imperialist nations:

> *'We are waging a struggle against the "labour aristocracy'' in the name of the masses of the workers and in order to win them over to our side; we are waging the struggle against the opportunist and social-chauvinist leaders in order to win the working class over to our side. It would be absurd to forget this most elementary and most self-evident truth. Yet it is this very absurdity that the German "Left" Communists perpetrate when, because of the reactionary and counter-revolutionary character of the trade union top leadership, they jump to the conclusion that... we must withdraw from the trade unions, refuse to work in them, and create new and artificial forms of labour organisation! This is so unpardonable a blunder that it is tantamount to the greatest service Communists could render the bourgeoisie. Like all the opportunist, social-chauvinist, and Kautskyite trade union leaders, our Mensheviks are nothing but "agents of the bourgeoisie in the working-class movement" (as we have always said the Mensheviks are), or "labour lieutenants of the capitalist class", to use the splendid and profoundly true expression of the followers of Daniel De Leon in America. To refuse to work in the reactionary trade unions means leaving the insufficiently developed or backward masses of workers under the influence of the reactionary leaders, the agents of the bourgeoisie, the labour aristocrats, or "workers who have become completely bourgeois"*[9]

(cf. Engels's letter to Marx in 1858 about the British workers).

> *This ridiculous "theory" that Communists should not work in reactionary trade unions reveals with the utmost clarity the frivolous attitude of the "Left" Communists towards the question of influencing the "masses", and their misuse of clamour about the "masses". If you want to help the "masses" and win the sympathy and support of the "masses", you should not fear difficulties, or pinpricks, chicanery, insults and persecution from the "leaders" (who, being opportunists and social-chauvinists, are in most cases directly or indirectly connected with the bourgeoisie and the police), but must absolutely work wherever the masses are to be found. You must be capable of any sacrifice, of overcoming the greatest obstacles, in order to carry on agitation*

> *and propaganda systematically, perseveringly, persistently and patiently in those institutions, societies and associations—even the most reactionary—in which proletarian or semi-proletarian masses are to be found. The trade unions and the workers' co-operatives (the latter sometimes, at least) are the very organisations in which the masses are to be found.'*[9]

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Broad Left, ultra-radical and liberal petty-bourgeois ideologies remaining in the consciousness of the members of RFB led to grave theoretical and analytical mistakes. These mistaken thoughts formulate incorrect policies and strategies which in turn, as we will explain, lead to an ill-advised program of activity and an organisation tearing itself apart.

As noted, early members of the group had no experience in organising nor had they any in running a political organisation. As such, the group began focusing more on the structural format and adoption of numerous lines, positions and policies in order to have the "perfect" vision and political structure in lieu of formulating a strategy to first build a party then to develop ties to the working class. So devoted was this early group to the endeavour, it led to the creation of 'a wordy party constitution which someone pointed out exceeded the length of the Fundamental Law of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.'[10]

This obsession on having the correct line to 'impart to the masses' is another expression of the attitude we seek to detail. Instead of developing its lines and strategy based on the actual conditions of the working class in Britain, (as Marxist-Leninists armed with the dialectical method should,) RFB shirked this revolutionary duty, focusing on its zealous purity as their mechanical, incorrect theoretical framework elided the issue of the working class of Britain as reactionary and drunk on the stupefying super-profits of imperialism to mount a campaign against bourgeois class-rule.

Whilst this perhaps was more the case early-on in the group's life-span and changes in attitude were implemented, the course set in this critical period would undoubtedly have a leading influence on the organisation.

One of these was its lack of centralisation.

RFB, much like 'the '68-era revolutionary groups' similarly formed by a radical wave among idealistic students 'did not preclude a healthy respect for libertarian impulses which soon led to a rethinking of sectarian vanguardism.' Deeming democratic centralism as incompatible with Britain's modern situation and a by-product of 'siege communism'[11] as well as seeing the issues within Trot and social-chauvinist organisations in Britain concluded that centralisation and bureaucratism were their fatal flaws (not the vile opportunism of their leaders!) As such, RFB gave its branches a large amount of autonomy and the group itself was actually a collection of caucuses working in tandem with the central offices of the party to formulate political lines and strategy.

This emphasis on autonomy of branches and caucuses meant 'members lacked initiative, and frequently complained that there wasn't enough centralism or national direction.'[12] Compounding this was the belief among 'particularly newer members' that the leadership of the party comprised a 'bureaucratised clique with which they were principally in contradiction was compounded by a lingering reluctance to air political debates out in the open. Instead there remained a vicious cycle of intensive criticism – often in the form of bombing the party headquarters – and overcorrection that was unhealthy and unresolvable,'[13] as there was an organisational weakness and lack of ability for cadres to be able to debate and inform the central leadership of any issues: the overly decentralised nature made coordination extraordinarily difficult.

It goes without saying that this is why a vanguard party is necessary, the bourgeoisie have in the past, and will inevitably, take advantage of any rupture and weakness within a proletarian party, to disrupt the development of a workers movement.

This decentralisation and libertarian mentality against “sectarianism” led to the group allowing itself to cooperate with anarchists and trotskyite groups: a fundamental error.

With all this in mind: erroneous maoist tendencies; ill-thought out strategies; overly decentralised structures and the infiltration of anti-proletarian and counter-revolutionary ideas, is it any wonder that the groups internal squabbles and divisions eventually led to a sudden, fatal rupture?

This can be seen in the group’s attempts at preventing expressions of chauvinism in its ranks, especially white chauvinism. RFB operating off the shaky theoretical roots that informed their current outlook had no effective method of combating this pernicious ill; though they should be lauded for their attempts, few groups in Britain commit themselves to actually combating reactionary ideology within their ranks.

But without an effective process or strong executive to weed this out, how effective can this struggle be? The Caucus of Racially Oppressed Peoples was one such internal organisation that was set up to ensure that white members did not suppress the voices of minority members as so often occurs in other associations. However, because the caucuses operated relatively independently, there was little oversight and no mechanism to resolve disputes between different structures. This led to the platforming of Afro-Pessimism (an idealist, bourgeois outlook on race under capitalism) in an attempt to fight white chauvinism.

But it is the lack of internal discipline and lack of ability to resolve any internal disputes that was the true Achilles’ heel of the group. Over the course of its existence, tensions began to develop and grow between different sections. The group was revolutionary in its approach of rectifying chauvinism by not attempting to ignore it and fighting the “wait for the Revolution, comrade, then we can focus on racism/misogyny” attitude common among many groups nor was it too supportive of deference politics: the approach of ending chauvinism by suppressing the expressions of it, dissecting the “implicit bias” and the “internalised/subconscious racism” of members as is in vogue among certain strands of liberal thought.

Hancox notes, though, ‘there was at times an inquisitional [sic] atmosphere and an element of performative confessionalism.’ Allegedly, a Black member of the Racially Oppressed Caucus ‘who viewed the approach as overly individualist’[14] was accused of perpetuating whiteness(!)

It was this acidic environment, wherein not even Black comrades could be safe from accusations of white supremacy, that brought the group to an acrimonious end. According to Hancox, there were ‘competing’ accusations of anti-Blackness and sexual assault between leading members of RFB, all of whom were queer and had been members of the Theoretical Development Committee and the Central Committee. As mentioned, there was a tendency to attempt to resolve issues informally despite there being a mechanism (the Welfare Forum) that was formally in place to handle these problems leading to a ‘lack of transparency.’

> *‘When the anti-Blackness charges were presented to the leadership in the summer of 2022, an informal agreement was reached with the aggrieved party whereby all but one member of the CC stepped down prior to the 2022 Congress. None of the reasons behind this were known to the wider membership, including myself. Rather than resolving the issue, the conflict festered.’*[15]

Only a few months later, in January of 2023, did the party implode. The immediate cause of this was the new CC expelling a black member after allegations of sexual assault were brought against him and he refused to take part in a reconciliation process. The group, being formed in the aftermath of an assault scandal in the RCG, took a strong approach against individuals that had been accused of sexual misconduct. The Racially Oppressed Caucus' secretary though felt slighted that they were not properly consulted and involved in this case. The ROC felt that 'the "utilisation of the privacy of a personal relationship" (i.e., the request of the survivor of sexual assault for anonymity) was used to shut out a systematic investigation into racism.'[16]

To clarify, there were no formal procedures that required the Caucuses of RFB to be consulted in these situations. However, the lack of formal procedure does not necessarily mean anything; considering that the Caucuses were incredibly autonomous there was not a clear division of power or subordination of structures meaning that ROC (as well as the others) could feasibly make a complaint that the CC had (somehow) encroached into its sphere and was abusing its authority.

Considering the acrimonious atmosphere that had been building for years (as there was little coordination or dialogue within the organisation), this situation could and did rapidly spiral out of control. The ROC then issued a statement concluding that 'Red Fighback is a white interest group.' The CC's ability to respond to this was hampered by 'the rapid loss of communication and existing political tensions within and around the Central Committee.'[17] Soon the situation devolved into 'mud-slinging' as the leadership began airing out their grievances with each other as the barely restrained factionalism was unleashed, with different groups and members voicing their opposition to the perceived direction they believed the party was heading in.

The decisions and policies made from an unsound theoretical basis had now reached their inevitable conclusion. The group rapidly dissolved and what seemed to be a fairly impressive and vibrantly young group disappeared into the ether.

## What can we learn from this case?

The issues faced by Red Fightback reveal several lessons that dedicated Marxist-Leninists must heed in order to successfully build a communist movement among the working-class. One of the most important is that theoretical knowledge and practical work are inseparable.

RFB, having little knowledge of traditional methods of organising, was hampered from the outset on the importance of tactical methodology. In order to compensate for this, overemphasis was placed on creating "the perfect party" with the "perfect policies" to (presumably) ensure that mistakes made in the early days could be rectified by application of the "correct theory." However, this overemphasis on theoretical work led to issues that would unsurprisingly hinder the development of RFB and make little headway among the workers.

The theoretical basis of the group, Maoism, led to deviationist mistakes that would have a ripple effect. The deficiencies of Maoism and Mao Zedong Thought is not within the scope of this report, however, it should be clear to those familiar with the works of Mao how his ideas had a decided impact on RFB's analysis of contemporary British capitalism. Its incorrect conclusions on these subjects supported policies with fatal errors, namely refusing to engage with already existing proletarian organisations such as (but not limited to) trade unions. RFB therefore was unprepared when the United Kingdom lurched into its current, ongoing crisis.

Once this is realised, it is clear how this pernicious feedback loop develops: a lack of knowledge on praxis led to incorrect, dogmatic and even idealist policies being formulated: hampered the practical work of the party, reinforcing the problems of theoretical deficiencies; making further practical work and rectification even more difficult.

The consequences of bad material analyses could be seen in RFB's rejection of Lenin's formulation of a Party of a New Type: a political vanguard of the proletariat. RFB made an absurdly incorrect conclusion that an organised party operating in a democratically centralised manner is anachronistic and that to avoid the mistakes and instances of abuse in other communist groups the RFB must be decentralised and its different organs should be highly autonomous. This autonomy, as discussed, led to intense friction within RFB and served as a catalyst for its eventual demise. The bourgeoisie will never willingly abdicate its power to the proletariat; it will always fight to maintain its class dictatorship over the workers, to the point of unleashing the most vile, intense reaction and fascism. Such a scenario has tragically played out numerous times in the past. Had the stars miraculously aligned and RFB somehow became a potent force threatening the capitalists: would not such a decentralised group inevitably be easy to crush due to its disorganised nature?

This decentralised and liberal nature of RFB also created instances of cooperation with anti-proletarian forces, namely anarchists and Trotskyites. The attempt at justifying this policy as "anti-sectarianism" further demonstrates the group's failure to adequately grasp the importance of Marxist-Leninist ideology and methodology. The situation revealed the petty-bourgeois direction of RFB, its theoretical framework and outlook having more in common with Anarchists than with Marxism-Leninism, leading to a fiery and passionate anti-capitalist rhetoric but with little genuine class-analyses to back this up and to direct them correctly: like a candle that burns twice as bright, RFB burnt itself out extraordinarily quickly.

The purpose of their "Open Leninism" was ostensibly to combat oppression by collaborating with other groups as well as to combat Eurocentrism. As we have seen this was an abysmal failure; an eclectic mix of theories from a variety of sources without an informed class-based analysis leads to the infiltration of idealist and bourgeois thinking and disrupts the development of a pro-proletarian direction, coupled with the disorganised structure of the party, it very quickly leads to the organisation and members being rudderless and needlessly generates and aggravates tensions within the party.

Is it such a surprise, therefore, that such a situation would lead to an outcome like Red Fightback's dissolution?

If there are lessons derived by the British Communists from the problems faced by Red Fightback, they are so valuable because the endemic presence of those problems means Marxist-Leninists now have a warning to turn them away from similar perils which new organisations inevitably face. Lessons can be learned also in the light of RFB's successes, unleashing the energy of the students' movement aligned with the young proletariat to organise in new and active ways. Traditional communist groups in the UK (and in many other places) have grown stale, with some still relying on selling newspapers to anyone that is willing to listen and read. The world has developed greatly since the days that newspapers, journals and brochures were the premier method of propaganda work. Internet use is near ubiquitous, to not utilise this great method of propagation is to attempt to fight the class struggle handcuffed. RFB's dynamic and innovative use of the internet, social media and art made it stand out from the groups still shackled to the 20th century. So too was its policy of weekly food stalls and engagement with localised movements (for instance the campaign for decent, sanitary public lavatories or demonstrating against the deportation of workers by the police). The statement that 'rather than only appearing in a community whenever there is a protest and then

leaving again, not to be seen until the next protest, we need to forge solid connections with the people of our communities, offering advice and support and creating organisations to challenge the horrors of capitalism that we are experiencing'[16] is a positive one.

Future Marxist-Leninists can indeed learn much from the experiences of Red Fightback, both the successful manifestation of energy as well as the negative dispersion and misuse of that energy.

We suggest our readers join Politsturm and help the fight for a strong vanguard party based on Marxist-Leninist principles in the UK and other countries.

Sources: 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7

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