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SUMMING UP

Millions of youth are at the moment taking up the fight against capital. If some get a chance to read this book and by so doing recognise the danger of putting too much trust in self-appointed leaders, it will give me a great deal of pleasure. My life has shown me the dangers of putting too much trust in organisations which claim to be the only leadership that will free the masses from the very real and imminent risks of starvation, poverty and war.

We have to move on from this kind of 'vanguardism'. These organisations claim to be the leadership that will lead the working class to power. 'Join us and build this leadership so that we will be ready for the time when the masses need us,' they say. In fact these organisations are riddled with the twin fatal diseases of working-class leadership: opportunism and sectarianism.

The Workers Revolutionary Party had both of these in our attitude towards the nationalist leaders in the Middle East. During the 1984-1985 miners' strike, we members were not allowed to work with the rank-and-file support groups while Healy snuggled up to the union bureaucracy, opportunistically. The opportunist Healy sang the praises of Saddam Hussein, while the sectarian Healy betrayed Iraqi trade unionists to the same regime. Likewise we had an opportunist relationship with Ken Livingstone during the struggle against Margaret Thatcher's closure of the Greater London Council. Our opportunist/sectarian vacillations, along with the Party's brutal and anti-democratic internal regime, destroyed layer after layer of devoted communist members, especially youth, over many years.

Since we challenged the WRP leadership in 1985, many comrades have been struggling to understand what it was really all about. Was it a simple case of the king is dead, long live the king? Was it just a job of replacing a bad leadership with a more understanding one? Or did we have to examine where the leadership and our policies came from? Over the following years I have struggled with these questions. The principle of building an elite leadership 'for' (rather than 'of') the working class – and the corruption and abuse for which that concept provided fertile ground – was the primary cause of the downfall of the WRP. To have said anything like this to G Healy would have brought a tirade of abuse and the accusation of being a social democrat and a reactionary or, more probably, an agent.

No doubt some people think that to suggest a re-examination of old methods is selling out to the ruling class and liquidating ourselves into the quagmire. But this is wrong. In fact it is the prerequisite for pulling ourselves out of the quagmire and getting back on to solid land.

One of the earliest problems for human beings was to secure heat and light. Fire brought about the hearth that humans sat round for heat and security. Then came the fire torch that enabled people to venture further into their cave or into the surrounding area at night. Fire remained the only form of heat and illumination for a very long time. As society and social relations changed so did the methods of heat and light: candles for home and workplace, then gas lamps. These were not adequate for the factory, and soon came the use of electricity. The fight for heat and illumination was not 'betrayed' because there were changes in the methods of achieving them.

There have been great changes in society the world over, especially over the past 50 years. For what has still to be done, it is essential that we study the implications of these changes. The freeing of the world from starvation, disease and war demands it.

It is only through this that we can win back the moral force of the word communism.