

REPORT ON THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST LEAGUE OF BRITAIN

In Britain, young black and white people took on the forces of the state in the streets; in Ireland the hunger strike campaign demonstrated the vitality of the Republican movement and showed more starkly than ever the futility of Britain's rulers trying to crush the resistance of the people of Ireland. This was the context in which the RCLB's 2nd Congress took place, a Congress which took important decisions which have a direct bearing on the effectiveness of the League's work in the next few years.

The main business of this Congress was to carry forward the RCLB's programmatic work. This work is aimed at developing strong policies, strategy and tactics for the carrying through of a successful socialist revolution in Britain. It is necessarily ongoing; we can't do everything at once, and as we test any decisions in practice, we're bound to find that some things we were wrong about, others we got right, and a whole lot of changes and modifications will be necessary. But in the whole process of our programmatic work, we will make ourselves a stronger, more effective organisation, which will have a growing impact in the class struggle in Britain.

The Congress took place following a period of debate and struggle in the League around the questions this document goes on to deal with. The main decisions were:

We re-affirmed that British Marxist-Leninists are at the first historical stage of party building, when the task is "to win the class conscious vanguard of the proletariat to a conviction in the necessity for revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat." This will open up the way to the second stage, that of leading the masses in practical activity towards the revolution.

The Congress re-affirmed and deepened the League's strong stand against opportunism.

It re-affirmed the League's strategic orientation of building a firm base in the industrial working class and establishing factory cells of the League.

The Congress identified people who come to Britain from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean as national minorities, recognised that they are at present in the vanguard of the struggle against the British state, and affirmed that the British revolution will be won by a strategic alliance of the working class and

national minorities.

By an overwhelming majority the Congress voted to give unconditional support to the armed struggle in Ireland and to its Republican leadership.

Through our decisions, through our work, runs a strong anti-imperialist thread. We have grasped the imperialist character of Britain, and that the whole of British society has been influenced by this. The bourgeois and opportunist parties stand for the defence of British imperialism and for attempts to rejuvenate it; the opportunists basically only seek to run the imperialist system in a different way. Revolutionary communists, on the contrary, must fight for the overthrow of the imperialist system and the establishment of a socialist order in which exploitation is abolished and national and women's oppression can finally be ended. For the working class,

CLASS ★
STRUGGLE
Special Supplement

oppressed nations and national minorities and women, there is no solution, short, or long term, to their problems within the imperialist system. That system has to be overthrown, and our Congress made some small steps towards working out the policies and means for doing this.

Opportunism and party - building in Britain

The 2nd Congress did not make any fundamental changes in the League's stand on opportunism, on industrial base-building, on the trade unions or on the present stage of party-building. All the same, we made some important changes and shifts of emphasis on these questions as a result of experience of struggle.

The Congress recognised that we are working under conditions of imperialist crisis, and that the effect of the crisis on Britain has been more serious than that on most other imperialist countries, because of the ground it has lost in the Third World and its decline relative to other imperialist powers. The ruling class is trying to shift the burden of its crisis onto the working people, particularly the working class. There are important instances of resistance to this - in particular, the risings in a number of cities in the summer, and industrial struggles such as Lee Jeans and Lawrence Scotts - but overall, it is still limited and fragmented.

What the working class most needs in these circumstances is its own party which will serve as a centre of leadership for its struggles and guide it in making a successful revolution; without that, it cannot get anywhere in the long term in the struggle against capital. For this reason, building the revolutionary communist party is the central task in Britain today.

THE FIRST HISTORICAL TASK OF REVOLUTION

The revolutionary party cannot be created out of thin air or by a small group separated from the working class proclaiming itself to be a party - or rather, the party! The party has to be built politically, ideologically and organisationally. It is essential for British communists to grasp the stage our movement is at if they are to keep their bearings and get their priorities straight. In the present situation where there is no party, and there is still much theoretical confusion, we must apply ourselves to the first historical task of revolution, that of winning the class conscious vanguard to a conviction in the necessity for revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat (working class state power). In the course of rallying the vanguard, we will develop and test the lines and policies of our organisation, and prepare to go over to the second historical task, that of leading the masses in practical activity towards the revolution. The 2nd Congress recognised these things and rejected the watering down of the League's position on the two historical tasks. To blur or confuse the two stages would only hold us back from any real development and expansion of our forces and lead us to dissipate our meagre resources in trying to accomplish things which are still beyond us.

WHO ARE THE ADVANCED?

While before the 2nd Congress, we had referred to "winning the advanced workers", we hadn't put forward any very precise view on who they were. The Congress identified them as those who grasp the true nature of British imperialism and its state and who have begun to fight it. This stratum is relatively small, but winning it is crucial to winning the middle level workers and bringing forward the backward elements. At the present stage of struggle, the Congress considered, the advanced trend is overwhelmingly located among the national minority workers and Welsh, Scottish and Irish workers.

It is necessary to grasp that the advanced will only be found by Marxist-Leninists going deeper into the working class, to its most oppressed sections; it would be quite wrong to orientate the revolutionary movement too much towards the present activists in the official trade union movement, where trade union politics and opportunism are strongest.

The "middle" workers are a broad section of the working class; they desire socialism and have begun to break with opportunism. Some are active on particular fronts of struggle and often constitute the relatively advanced element there. The more backward elements are those most influenced by imperialist ideology.

THE FIGHT AGAINST OPPORTUNISM

The Congress re-affirmed the RCL's strong stand against opportunism, while providing for greater tactical flexibility in relation to opportunism. It rejected the watering down of the League's strategic stand against opportunism, however, in the name of tactical flexibility.

Opportunism is an organised system of bourgeois thinking; it sacrifices the long term interests of the working class as a whole for short term gains for a minority; it is a social-chauvinist ideology which seeks to create common cause between the working class and monopoly capitalist class on the basis of the maintenance of the imperialist order. It is intimately linked with imperialism. Its historic roots go back to when Britain's colonial and industrial monopoly provided the material basis for the creation of a labour aristocracy, an element of the working class bought off by the ruling class. The opportunists are the main enemy within the workers' movement.

Through struggle, the mass of the working class has been able to obtain much better living standards than exist for the people of the Third World, and that provides a basis for the influence of reformist illusions and opportunism. But the crisis of British imperialism is undermining this; it will become a crisis of opportunism too. The crisis has made it far more difficult to wage struggle on the economic front and is making the working class begin turning towards political action and come into increasing confrontation with the state. This is exposing the bankruptcy of reformism and of opportunism, which is incapable of offering any way out for the working class; while the advanced elements are standing up to state repression,

rejecting corporatism and recognising the imperialist character of the Labour Party, the opportunists cover up for the state, defend corporatism in one form or another, and cuddle up to the Labour Party. The present situation confronts us with a lot of problems in common with other working people, but it also presents communists with new opportunities to expand the influence of revolutionary politics.

Though the influence of opportunism has spread throughout the working class the working class remains a revolutionary class and today it is the most oppressed elements, the least influenced by opportunism, who are readiest to face up to the imperialist state and who thus emphasise the continuing revolutionary nature of their class.



Police protecting the TGWU offices during the 1974 Imperial Typewriters strike. The local TGWU district secretary had attacked his Asian members who were on strike, saying they had "ideas above their station". To the strikers he said "You are ill-led and have done nothing but harm to the company, the union and yourselves." The national TGWU leadership (considered 'left' in Labour Party terms at that time) refused strike benefit.

THE LABOUR PARTY.

The Labour Party grew as the main political expression of opportunism in Britain. It manages the imperialist system; its quarrel with the Tories is not over the defence or destruction of that system, but over how best to sustain it. Their quarrels also express the contradictions between the different elements within the ruling class, with the Labour Party tending to represent state monopoly capital. In particular, the Labour "left" is the most overt political representative of state monopoly capital.

Labour and opportunist trade union leaders are now part of the imperialist state, with definite vested interests in its maintenance.

As to the "extra-parliamentary left", even at its most radical, its strategy turns around struggles within the Labour Party, not around the development of an independent working class mass movement. Where we can co-operate with rank-and-file trotskyites for the purpose of strengthening the overall movement against capital, we will do, but we can't let ourselves be side-tracked from our own priorities.

THE FIGHT AGAINST THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

The Congress basically adopted a brief statement on this, pointing out how women are doubly oppressed under capitalism, stating that the basis of their oppression lies in the economic unit of the family and that the fight for women's equality is an essential part of the fight for socialism. The main part of the League's programmatic work on the oppression of women will take place in the next year, following the presentation of recommendations from our Commission on Women's Oppression.

WHERE DO WE DO OUR POLITICAL WORK

Capitalist large scale industry has concentrated workers together for the purpose of exploiting them. It is essential for the League to hold to its orientation of building a firm base in industry, among the industrial workers. This will give communism in Britain a strong base, with long-term stability. This was why we re-affirmed industrial base building as our priority in mass work. An important part of our industrial work is the struggle to turn the trade unions into fighting class organisations - organisations which really stand for working class interests, and break with opportunist adaptation to the imperialist system and class collaboration.

Earlier in the League's history, however, we made some dogmatist errors about our orientation to the industrial working class; we ignored or played down the fact that these workers live in communities where they suffer various forms of oppression by the ruling class and its state. We also didn't pay sufficient attention to national minority workers and now we must also give deeper consideration to work among the unemployed, a growing section of the proletariat.

We have to continue to develop work in the community, through organising on a number of issues against the imperialist state; in particular, by taking up the struggles of national minorities and anti-imperialist solidarity work.

The exact relationship between work in industry and work in the community still needs to be determined properly, and there are a number of problems we still have to solve, particularly ones connected with how to best use the forces we have. But we have grasped that these areas of work are inter-related and complementary, not opposed. Each will help the others forward, and this is already being confirmed in practice, though as yet still in small ways. What must be held to in all our mass work is that, wherever it takes place, its essence at this stage is communist party-building work.

IRELAND:

FIRM SUPPORT FOR THE REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT

The 2nd Congress adopted the policy of giving unconditional support to the armed struggle of the Irish people and to its Republican leadership. This marked the successful culmination of a two-line struggle in the League, in the course of which its old line was sharply criticised and overturned. This had already begun by the time of the Unity Conference of the RCL and Communist Workers Movement last year. The 2nd Congress completed the overthrow of the old line and replaced it with a clear and principled line of solidarity with the Irish people.

The former line of the League held that British Marxist-Leninists had to build a section of the revolutionary party in the north of Ireland, attacked the Republican movement as a terrorist force isolated from the people, and even went so far as to state that it objectively served British imperialism! Our organisation now considers that this line, though "justified" by "socialist" arguments, was actually thoroughly reactionary - it was social-chauvinist. Before and since the Congress, we have not only made self-criticisms for our previous stand but have also tried to show by our practice that we have broken with it.

The old line dogmatically insisted on the principle of "a single party for a single state". This ignored the realities of Ireland, where the revolutionary Republican movement is organised on a 32-county basis, has an unbroken tradition of hundreds of years of resistance and deep roots among the oppressed people. It ignored the national demands of the Irish people, who have never accepted the incorporation of their land or any part of it within the British state and who have never given their support to any British political party.

By stating that the situation isn't ripe for armed struggle in Ireland the old line swept aside the fact that an armed struggle exists whether revolutionaries in Britain like it or not; it can only be supported or opposed, but not wished out of existence. Slandering the Republican movement as terrorists isolated from the people ignored the fact that it could not have sustained its struggle without the mass support of the nationalist people; even a secret British Army report estimated the popular support for the Republicans more accurately than our old line did and it certainly didn't betray any suspicion that the Republicans might be serving British imperialism! To the extent that the previous position of the League was known, it tarnished the image of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought amongst the people of Ireland and the world.

On the basis of the Marxist-Leninist standpoint on the national liberation movements, and of what we can see for ourselves, the League now regards the Republican movement as a revolutionary movement against British imperialism. The election this year of Bobby Sands and Owen Carron to Westminster and of Kieran Doherty and Paddy Agnew to the Free State Dail serves to underline the fact that the Republican movement is one which enjoys great popular support from the nationalist people.

Communists do not make their support for a national liberation movement dependent on it being under communist leadership. The movement is revolutionary in character if it weakens and undermines imperialism. That, the Republican movement clearly does, and it is our job to give it anti-imperialist support and solidarity.

But we believe that the Republican movement has many positive features beyond its basic anti-imperialist character. It has mobilised the masses to take up and support the struggle. It has linked the cause of national liberation with that of the emancipation of the working class; it is developing its work in the trade unions and on social and economic questions. It is based solidly in the proletariat and small farming community. It is waging a protracted war against our main enemy, British imperialism. It supports other just national liberation struggles around the world. It is opposed to the two superpowers and supports the non-aligned movement. On the question of political prisoners, it has developed a style of work of uniting all who can be united. Of course, like any other movement in the real world, the Republican movement has its shortcomings and mistakes, but these are very much a secondary aspect. Our solidarity with the Republican movement is not based on it adopting policies which we feel would be correct, but is extended to the movement purely and simply as one fighting imperialism.

We also uphold the Republican movement because its struggle can teach the working and oppressed people of Britain a lot about what they need to do to carry through a successful revolution. Some of the national minority youth who rose up this summer, as well as elements of the working class youth in Wales and Scotland, have clearly begun to draw lessons from Ireland. This is a further direct contribution to our revolutionary work in Britain from the Irish freedom fighters.

In the coming period, our organisation hopes to make a modest but useful contribution to building the Ireland solidarity movement in Britain.

DEMOCRATIC CENTRALISM THE INTERNAL LIFE OF THE RCLB

As well as these crucial questions of political line, the Congress also considered the internal life of the League over the past 4 years and in particular the work of the Central Committee. The latter was summed up and a new Central Committee was elected.

Many strong criticisms were made of the outgoing one. This was not before time, since no such overall discussion had taken place since the first Congress of the RCL in 1977. That period of 4 years had seen a number of sharp internal struggles - over the faction expelled in 1978, the League's Rectification Campaign of 1978/9 and more recently over the way forward in programmatic work. At the same time the unity between the RCL and CWM (and also the smaller East London Marxist Leninist Association in 1977 and Birmingham Communist Association in 1981) had increased the size of the Central Committee. As a result the old Central Committee had outrun its mandate and had become cumbersome and largely ineffective.

The discussion on the work of the Central Committee was hard-hitting, but not divisive. In particular the leadership was criticised for its arrogant and bureaucratic style of work in the early years of the League's life - a style of leadership which had stifled necessary debate over burning political questions and held back the development of the League. More recently there had been a struggle against this bad leadership - mainly from comrades in the rank and file of the organisation but also on the Central Committee itself - but the leadership had lapsed into liberalism and failed in its responsibility to give effective leadership to the organisation.

Although these criticisms of the leadership were very strong ones, they did not weaken our conviction in the central importance of democratic centralism. On the contrary. Such criticisms were made in order to strengthen our internal organisation and develop effective leadership for the demands of the class struggle.

A number of Central Committee members made significant self-criticisms for their past record as leading comrades. A good number were not re-elected to the new Central Committee, and in every case these comrades agreed to work as ordinary rank and file members and to accept the supervision of their comrades. The overall size of the Central Committee was reduced by almost a half and a number of new comrades were brought on to the new Committee. The new leadership of the League now has the clear support of the membership and is committed to developing an open and lively democratic centralist organisation.

NATIONAL MINORITIES-

A major force for revolution

Most black people in Britain today come from former British colonies in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. They hoped to get a decent living here, but the aim of the British ruling class was to super-exploit them as cheap labour, as it super-exploited their original homelands (though the degree of super-exploitation might be less, or necessity). With a situation where it is going into deeper crisis, British imperialism has virtually put a stop to immigration, and has started to force thousands of national minority people to leave through deportations and state harassment.

The Congress recognised that those people who left their own oppressed countries to come to Britain where they have continued to suffer national oppression, are national minorities. They are oppressed as such, whether they are workers, intellectuals, or petty bourgeois. Thus, as national minorities, they share a common interest in fighting British imperialism, and constitute an important revolutionary force in their own right. At present, they are in the vanguard of the struggle against the state; in fact, the Congress considered that the advanced elements in Britain are now overwhelmingly located among the national minority, Welsh, Scottish and Irish workers.

The importance of the national minority workers is that they suffer double oppression - class and national; they will make a big contribution to the fight for socialism and the work of building the revolutionary party. The road to revolution in Britain lies through the establishment of a strategic alliance of the working class and national minorities, with the unity of the multi-national working class at its core.

With the present imperialist crisis the ruling class has gone on the offensive against working people. It is using racism to divide the working class and to attempt to hold down black people. The RCL reaffirmed the necessity of fighting state racism and laid stress on this, in contrast to most of the opportunist organisations, who focus their attention on the openly fascist organisations which actually operate with police protection.

Racism is an ideology which orig-

inated in the period of the slave trade, but which was only systematised under imperialism; it is no accident that it is being whipped up in a most vicious way at a time when British imperialism is in a severe crisis. Fighting racist ideology is an essential part of communist work in Britain. The 2nd Congress held that the national minorities must have their full democratic rights. Recognition of this by the white working class must be fought for in the League's industrial and other mass work - otherwise the strategic alliance cannot be realised.

The debate at the Congress carried us forward, but we are not yet certain of all the implications of our line on the national minorities. Further examination of the relationship between class and national oppression is still needed; furthermore we need to get a good grasp of how to apply our line, so that we can test it in practice and develop it further.

THE THREAT OF FASCISM

The capitalist offensive against the working class overall takes the form of a trend towards fascism. Coupled with the holding down of wages and living standards there is a political and ideological offensive. Racist ideology is being promoted and so are fascist organisations; the state machine is being strengthened, partly with the benefit of the experience of repression in Ireland. Immigration laws, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, restrictions on picketing, the arming of the police, etc., all form part of the trend towards fascism.

While we must expose the true character of bourgeois democracy the 2nd Congress recognised that democratic rights must be defended. A broad movement is needed for this. The opportunists cannot build such a movement because they're soaked through with influence of their service to British imperialism and they shy away from taking up the question of the state. What can they offer in a field where the crucial issues are those of imperialism and the state?

Small though its resources are at present, the League will firmly oppose the trend towards fascism and support the building of a broad movement against it.

are nations. As nations, they have national rights and cannot be treated as "regions".

The right of Wales and Scotland to self-determination was affirmed by the Congress, but it was decided that, without further investigation, it would be wrong to adopt any policy advocating the direction in which that right should be exercised - complete independence and separation from England, co-operation within a federal republic or some other solution to the national question. The Congress recognised that "a co-ordinated struggle, based on equality, in the three nations of the present British state is necessary for a revolutionary overthrow of imperialism".

TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Before the 2nd Congress the League was in a bad state. It was poorly led, it lacked clarity or real direction. Many comrades frankly feared that the Congress would be a divisive occasion (like the RCL/CWM Conference) which would entrench the organisation in irrelevance.

In fact this did not happen. The struggle was hard - at times extremely so - but at the end of the 3 days the League was more united and optimistic than it had been for a number of years.

Despite the poor leadership given in preparing the Congress, the RCL had successfully united against a rightist line on opportunism. It had re-affirmed certain key principles of Marxism-Leninism against an attempt to water them down in the name of tactical flexibility. More than this it had for the first time affirmed the central importance of the anti-imperialist struggle - a line which gives a clear orientation for the coming period. It had overturned a chauvinist line on the Irish struggle and made significant inroads into understanding the significance of the struggle of the national minority peoples and its relationship to the struggle for socialism.

All of these are important gains which will directly effect our theoretical work and our practice.

At the same time there is no room for false optimism. We have a definite orientation, we have a better internal democracy, we have begun to build real links with the mass movement in various parts of the country. But this is only the beginning. We are still small and quite isolated. There are many difficult questions which demand resolution - in theory and in practice.

Our job now is to consolidate the gains of the Congress - to give life to our "anti-imperialist line", to deepen our understanding of the revolutionary forces in Britain, and the relation between the struggle in Britain and the world-wide struggle against hegemonism.

Over the next 2 years we aim to consolidate the line of the 2nd Congress - and at the same time to develop a clear line on the international situation and on the class forces in Britain. We will do this not in isolation from practice, but by ensuring that our theoretical work is closely related to the actual class struggle in which we take part.

In our work in the future, we want to avoid the sectarianism of which we were once guilty. We do not set ourselves up as the sole revolutionary standard bearers in Britain, nor do we believe that the building of the revolutionary party is just a matter of expanding the League. There are a lot of strong anti-imperialist and revolutionary activists around, from whom we have learned and hope to learn in the years ahead. For those activists with whom we already have contact we hope the explanations we have given about the decisions of our 2nd Congress have been useful and that they will help us to develop stronger links in the future.

For further details and information about the RCL and its policies, please contact: RCL, c/o 203 Seven Sisters Road, London, N.4.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN BRITAIN

The old Manifesto of the RCL did not recognise Wales and Scotland as nations, but only referred to their "peoples". It stated that these peoples must have the right to self-determination and it supported "regional autonomy" for them but stated "we ... do not advocate separation for them".

The League had not done enough investigation before the Congress to adopt a detailed policy on Wales and Scotland and recognised it had to do that, but it did make significant changes in its line to correct positions which were clearly wrong. Firstly, it recognised that Wales and Scotland