

CLASS STRUGGLE



Political Paper of the Revolutionary Communist League of Britain

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30P

RCL Congress

WOMEN TOP OF THE AGENDA

● REPORT - P4



'Jobs in the pipeline'

More like jobs down the drain



While the government claims that unemployment is decreasing, the dire queue is the reality faced by workers in many parts of Britain. South Wales is being hit by pit closures and this has been accompanied by a further contraction of the Hoover plant in Merthyr Tydfil.

Merthyr Tydfil, in the heart of the industrial valleys of South Wales, lost a third of its manufacturing jobs between 1979 and 1985 and has an unemployment rate well above the national average. Hoover is now the biggest employer, with 1950 workers. The workforce has already shrunk from nearly 6,000 fifteen years ago. Another 125 redundancies have been announced, with more on the way.

The area has been harder hit because just down the road in Aberfan, the Merthyr Vale pit is to close with a loss of 526 jobs. 28 years ago, 116 children died in Aberfan when a slag tip collapsed on the school. The mine which took the lives of the children of Aberfan is now to close, taking away the livelihoods of its people.

"JOBS IN THE PIPELINE"?

Two other collieries are closing in the South Wales Coalfield, Trelewis Drift and Oakdale, with a combined loss of 1050 jobs. Welsh Secretary, Peter

Walker, who claims to be a saviour bringing employment to the valleys, has reacted to criticism by saying: "There are masses of jobs in the pipeline." Merthyr workers are unlikely to draw much comfort from this when they find the average factory wage outside Hoovers is £70 a week. In Merthyr, Walker's Development Agency has spent money on a ski-run and is building a golf course, a business park and new hotels. None of these projects are likely to employ many redundant miners and engineering workers.

1984-85 MINERS' STRIKE

Outside Wales, British Coal in particular leads the way in destroying jobs. This is the implementation of the strategy which the miners fought

in the strike of 1984-85, eventually crushed by the combined forces of the state. The NUM rightly saw what the government intended. Of 220,000 employed in 1984, only 90,000 miners now remain.

British Coal have determined to close Betteshanger Colliery in Kent. Once there were 7,500 miners there. In 1985, there were 1,200 and that has already been reduced to 600. All 600 now face redundancy following manoeuvring by British Coal to avoid an appeal to the review procedure.

In the strike, the Kent miners, like the Welsh, were among the most militant. More miners were sacked at Betteshanger than from any other pit. Like the miners as a whole, the Kent miners were defeated as much by the changing world economy as by the power of the bosses. That does not mean that their fight was in vain, or that they were wrong to fight. Far from it. The industrial struggle for jobs and wages must continue. But it must be combined with a clear political objective of the eventual overthrow of the present economic system.

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Beirut in ruins...



IN THE DOCKS, IN THE NURSERIES

rising tide of anger...

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SOLIDARNOSC

SOLIDARITY TAKES POWER

Twenty one years after Soviet tanks rolled into Czechoslovakia to put an end to 'liberal reforms' there, the first 'non-Communist' government in Eastern Europe since the Second World War, was officially inaugurated when Tadeusz Mazowiecki was elected Prime Minister of Poland in August.

Only eight years ago, in 1981, martial law was imposed in Poland, to crack down on Solidarity, which was only founded nine years ago in the shipyards of Gdansk.

Tadeusz Mazowiecki has been adviser to Lech Walesa since the early days of Solidarity and editor of its paper. Under martial law, he was imprisoned for one year. But he has been active in Catholic opposition circles since the fifties.

FAST-MOVING EVENTS

Events have moved fast. Adam Michnik, leading member of Solidarity, wrote in July: "... Solidarity faces decisions which at the beginning of June did not cross anybody's mind. And no-one knows what is still to come."

The so-called 'Communist Party' - the Polish United Workers' Party (PUWP) - that has ruled Poland for forty years planned to incorporate Solidarity into the government after the June elections, with the aim of giving the government a popular face, but without giving Solidarity real power. However, its plans went adrift as a result of its overwhelming defeat at the polls, and more recently because of the defection to Solidarity of its traditional allies of the United Peasant Party and Democratic Party. It is also clear that important consultations have taken place with both the Soviet Union and Catholic Church. The Soviet Union has indicated that, within certain limits, it will not interfere in events in Poland. The unpopular PUWP has been left high and dry.

The dramatic new political alliances and possibilities opening up in Poland are happening against a backdrop of a deepening economic crisis.

ECONOMIC CRISIS

The last act of the Rakowski (PUWP) government was to scrap food subsidies, leading to a three- or four-fold increase in prices in August. One Western journalist calculated that a rough comparison relating earnings and prices would mean that a worker here would be paying £20 for a pound of pork chops and £40 for a pound of steak.

Inflation was already running at over 100 per cent and Solidarity economists have predicted that it may rise as high as 400 per cent next year.

Rising prices had led to numerous strikes throughout the country this summer, demanding a Solidarity-led government.

The price of food is only one, though important, sign of Poland's economic crisis. One of the major questions to be tackled will be Poland's massive foreign debt of \$39 billion.

A change of government will do little to change these harsh economic realities overnight. In addition, the powers of the new government are circumscribed by Solidarity's commitment not to challenge the status quo as far as the Warsaw Pact is concerned and to leave the ministries of defence and of the interior in the hands of the PUWP.

What are Marxist-Leninists to make of these events, which are clearly inter-related with a complex pattern of change both in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union itself? What are we to make of Solidarity itself, for which there is no neat definition in a Marxist textbook?

Adam Michnik described the complex nature of Solidarity as: "Solidarity is a movement of struggle for national identity, but also for the emancipation of the working world.... Solidarity is an attempt to provide a Polish answer to the challenge of the last decade of our century. It is a trade union but also a citizens' movement which will be the lever of democratic change.... Solidarity is neither right-wing nor left-wing. Perhaps it is on both the right and the left. For Solidarity is new."

It is difficult to predict how Solidarity in power will carry on the traditions of Solidarity in opposition, or even whether it will remain one organisation.

But it is clear that we should not mourn the passing of the old revisionist order as the end of socialism in Poland. What has ended was a repressive regime that operated under the banner of socialism. The new order in Poland may not be socialist either. But it opens the way for change in a situation where bourgeois democracy represents progress, compared with the long-discredited reign of the PUWP.



LETTERS

Dear Editor,

I am writing to make some comments on last issue's article 'We Stand by the Chinese People's Revolution'.

Like many others who have in the past been inspired by the Chinese Revolution, the suppression of the democracy movement came as a terrible shock. As a friend of China since 1949, and for most of the time an admirer of the Chinese Communist Party, the gunning down of unarmed civilians was all but unbelievable. Never in all the troubles of the Cultural Revolution did the state and the party leadership use tanks against the people. It was too much. For some time I have had doubts about the competence and direction of the Deng leadership. Now these doubts have been changed into the certainty that Deng and Li Peng have betrayed the Chinese revolution.

CONTRADICTIONS UNDER SOCIALISM

Since at no time did the students, workers and intellectuals demand the overthrow of the socialist system, why was the leadership so terrified by demands for open debate, for accountability, for an end to corruption by top officials? Had they got too much to hide? A free press was demanded but not a capitalist-owned press. Why was that so frightening to the leadership? It seems to me that the movement started basically as a contradiction among the people. But the leadership saw it as a contradiction between enemies. Perhaps the whole episode is yet another example of the Chinese leadership's failure to emerge from the ancient Chinese authoritarian principle, where you have one leader who is virtually infallible. This was suggested in the very interesting statement made by the four student leaders, which was printed in 'The Independent' in June.

Anything less counter-revolutionary than this statement would be hard to imagine. In it, the students pleaded for a new relationship between the people and the government based not on the need to "smash" the other side into dust, but on an open admission that the government had made serious mistakes and was willing to resign to allow others to take their place. Discussion, honest debate, conciliation were advocated. The ruthless exercise of power over others was a feudal trait no longer relevant to the co-operative tasks of building socialism. Mao discussed the dangers of "commandism" but this is seldom mentioned today.

I agree with nearly all of the article 'We Stand by the Chinese People's Revolution' and think it is an excellent contribution.

One can be certain that if the students, workers and intellectuals had been demanding the overthrow of the Chinese Communist Party, the Western media who were roaming all over the place, would have made the most of it. But, with a few exceptions, they could not find these demands. The demand was for a dialogue, for a free press and for open discussion of major issues.

MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM?

My only disagreement with the article is for a remark right at the end, advocating the right to establish "new parties". The Chinese students themselves rarely mentioned this as a demand. They did ask for the right of the masses to form their own grassroots organisations, e.g. an elected student union, elected trade unions, societies concerned with the environment, etc. The establishment of political parties would, in my view, exacerbate divisions in society. They usually reflect different class interests. Is this necessary

or desirable? Pressure groups - Yes. But parties trying to get elected to power? Who would set them up? Who would decide access to the media? The masses should be encouraged to supervise the Communist Party and to press it to reform itself. Of course, if the Party has totally degenerated, that is another story. For a socialist society where the long-term and basic interests of all the people should be one, starting separate parties could be very hazardous, in my view.

SANCTIONS AGAINST CHINA?

The events in China are terrible enough, especially as we expect so much more from China. All the same, one needs to keep a sense of proportion. In many parts of the world there are murderous regimes where far worse massacres take place but where media interest is small. For example, the British government has given huge credits to Iraq, which is busy murdering the Kurds with poison gas. The Soviet Union has given vast amounts of military aid, including napalm, which is being used against civilians in Eritrea. Mrs Thatcher is preparing a red carpet welcome to the President of El Salvador - representing a regime that has murdered thousands of its civilians as part of a deliberate campaign of terror. According to 'The Observer' on 23rd July, 1989: "D'Aubisson has been told that Conservative Party headquarters will promote ARENA's entry to the Conservative International Democratic Union".

A demand that sanctions should be applied against China only is curiously lop-sided. And while the British government gives aid and credits to such regimes, it is in no position to lecture China about human rights.

A Brighton Reader

HUEY P. NEWTON - A BLACK HERO (1942 - 1989)

On 22nd August, 1989, Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the Black Panther Party, died of gunshot wounds in Oakland, California, aged 47.

Huey Newton was the self-taught son of a Louisiana sharecropper. At college in Oakland, he and Bobby Seale drew up the famous 10-Point Programme of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence. The main focus of their practice was community control of the police through defence of the black community from police brutality. Panther patrols went on the streets of Oakland, among them Huey with a shotgun in one hand and a law book in the other, and they combined surveillance of the police with education of the people about their rights.

In October 1967, the police

framed Huey on a charge of murdering a cop. A massive campaign to 'Free Huey' was launched. A conviction of voluntary manslaughter was overturned on appeal and, after two re-trials ended in hung juries, Huey was eventually released.

But during his years in jail, the Black Panther Party had been smashed by a massive FBI operation during which many Panthers were murdered. Years later, Huey exposed this FBI campaign thoroughly in his doctoral thesis 'War Against the Panthers'.

Huey Newton was one of the foremost heroes of the Black Liberation Struggle, an exponent of Black Power ideology in the tradition of Malcolm X. The 10-Point Programme contained

demands to fulfil the needs of the black people, for employment, housing, education, exemption from military service, and end to police brutality, freedom for black prisoners, trial by black juries. But its revolutionary essence is summed up in its first and last points:

"1. We want freedom. We want power to determine the destiny of our black community."

"10. We want land, bread, housing, education, clothing, justice and peace. And as our major political objective, a United Nations supervised plebiscite to be held throughout the black colony in which only black colonial subjects will be able to participate, for the purpose of determining the will of the black people as to their national destiny."

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'STANDING OUR GROUND'

THE SUMMER OF DISCONTENT

CLASS STRUGGLE CORRESPONDENT

A recent survey by the journal *Labour Research* showed that nearly 2,000 directors in Britain were paid over £100,000 a year. The figures include one director who received over £2 million a year; five who were paid between £1 million and £2 million; thirty six who were paid between £500,000 and £1 million and 441 who were paid between £200,000 and £500,000.

Some directors have been getting pay rises in six figure sums. 41 executives got a pay increase of £100,000 or more in their last annual pay packet.

Labour Research also reports that: "Chancellor Lawson has been very generous to top executives. His taxation charges increased directors' take-home pay by 26% last year.. In his latest Budget there was again a plus for the top paid in the way bonuses are taxed.."

ON STRIKE

Meanwhile, the summer has seen several disputes over pay and conditions by workers who are not so well-paid. Some groups did not have to go on strike. The government announced a pay award to police of 9.2% and engineers at British Airways won a 15% increase due to a shortage of skilled labour.

Over the last two months, one important industrial struggle has been lost and two others won.

In July, the abolition of the Dock Labour Scheme went through Parliament and the dock strike, long delayed by legal wrangles, finally began. The dockers were defeated by a combination of the legal delays, redundancy payments which were accepted

by over a third of the registered workforce and sackings of key stewards at militant ports such as Tilbury.

Dockers at Southampton have predicted the return of casual labour on the docks:

"Men used to fight each other for work when the Queen Mary docked. It was like a dog kennel," said one Southampton docker, describing the old system. Another predicted: "They'll get them through the agency and pay them peanuts."

Employment Minister, Norman Fowler, had not surprisingly, a different view. He said: "With the abolition of the Dock Labour Scheme, the most important obstacle to modernisation of our ports has been removed."

GAME, SET AND MATCH

The government is not so happy about the outcome of the railway strike. One senior minister commented: "It's game, set and match to Jimmy Knapp."

British Rail attempted to launch a MacGregor-type propaganda campaign to persuade railwaymen to break the strike so that scab trains could be filmed running "as normal". Although some men crossed picket lines, the campaign failed to break the strike. More importantly, all the polls showed public sympathy to be with the strikers.

After the series of one-day strikes, the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) accepted the 8.8% offer. It was agreed that negotiations would take place later over national pay bargaining, which had been the other issue in the strike.

The other rail unions, ASLEF



AND TSSA, and the drivers on London Underground have also settled their dispute with the employers.

The third important dispute was between the local authority employers and NALGO, the union representing a varied group of mainly white-collar staff working in local government. As in the rail dispute, the strike was over the issue of national terms and conditions as much as a pay rise to match inflation and help the low-paid. After a series of one-, two- and three-day strikes in July, NALGO adopted a strategy of pulling out key staff only in August. We include below an interview with a NALGO member from Bradford.

AUTUMN OF DISCONTENT?

While the employers and government had carefully planned to

take on the dockers, they were clearly not prepared for the determination and unity of local government and railway workers.

With inflation running at over 8% and two clear victories having been won, the autumn will see more industrial trouble. One million manual workers in local government are due for talks over pay in September and the CFSEU which represents 14 unions in engineering is putting in a claim for a 35-hour week. It is preparing to hold a ballot and is already raising a levy from its members. Ambulance drivers have already turned down an offer of 6.5%.

In the meantime, toxic waste has become an issue of concern. Both workers and employers at Tilbury and Liverpool have refused to handle cargoes of toxic PCB's destined for "re-

cycling" by ReChem at Pontypool. Residents of the area joined with dockers to make sure that the poisonous chemicals were not unloaded at Liverpool. Two cargoes, both from Canada, have now been turned back.

On 16th August, men at a rail depot in Leeds stopped work when they found that drums labelled "non-dangerous slurry" contained highly toxic waste which came from a firm, FMC, in Baltimore for "recycling" here.

It is clear that on a wide range of issues, from pay and conditions to health matters, workers are no longer prepared to let things go on. There is a rising tide of anger and fightback.

'It's been good to all work together with a common aim'

Local government workers deserve a fair deal for the work we do. Join our fight for -
£1200 or 12% - and NO STRINGS!

CS: Were you surprised at the announcement on 11th August that NALGO had won the strike?

NALGO Member: There was a bit of movement early on, after the first one-day strike, in the northern councils who wanted to withdraw the strings and offer about 8% as the pay rise.

What surprised me was that once an offer had been made, the union accepted it straight away. I was quite disappointed that they didn't hold out for another week or so, because all this is going to happen again next year. We should have tried to get some guarantee from the employers that they wouldn't try it again.

But it is a definite victory. It shows that the NALGO strategy of pulling out strategic workers, like those in finance and the Poll Tax, worked.

CS: Do you think this was a key to the victory?

NALGO Member: Poll Tax would have been in a right mess if the action had continued. It would have also affected the

payment of wages to the manual workers in the council, which could've caused a lot of disruption.

CS: What sort of support was there for the strike at the beginning of the action?

NALGO Member: From what I could gauge, support in Bradford for the strike actually grew as the action progressed. I expected it to die off initially. In my sector, we had to work really hard to get people out for the first day. Some people actually left the union. That being said, about 60% of the workers were out on the first day and it grew, and in the end, some of the most stubborn places were actually out.

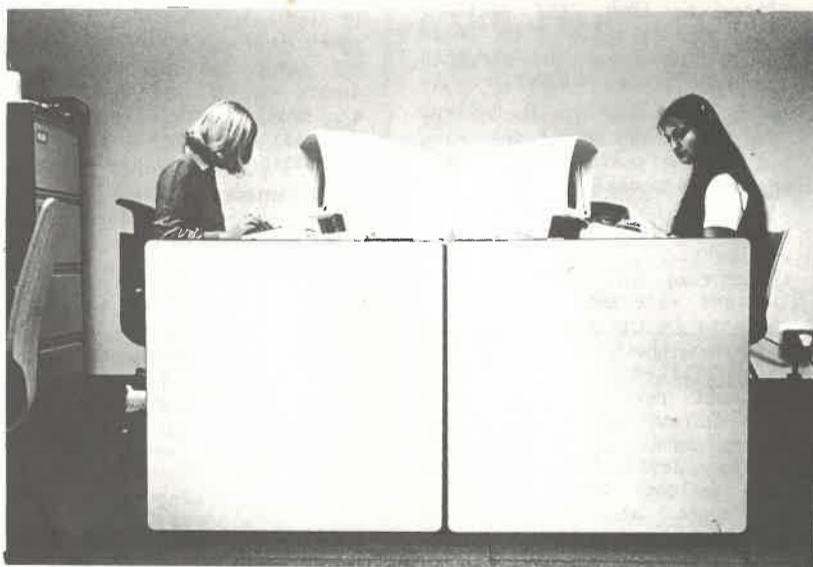
CS: When I went around picket lines, many had the 'low pay, no way' posters up. Some of the pickets said "We shouldn't highlight pay, it's the conditions which are more important". What did you feel?

NALGO Member: I think in general that was true. But the issue of low pay has been boiling for a few years. The union has been trying to get the 12% or £1200 rise for a number of years now.

This offer does do something, though not enough, for the low-paid members of NALGO.

I think low pay was an issue, and a lot of people were angry about it. But I think they felt that if the issue of conditions of work and of decentralised bargaining were not tackled now, there was no way that the issue of low pay would be addressed in the future.

CS: Talking specifically about Bradford, do you think the



action against Bradford Council last October strengthened the basis for this latest action?

NALGO Member: Yes, I think so. One of the things we stressed at workplace meetings was that if we lost centralised bargaining, we would have to bargain directly with the council, and there is no way we'd get anything out of the Bradford Tories. Probably not out of Labour either, because their past record isn't very good! So we had to win as Bradford people, as well as nationally.

Also, a lot of people had taken action for the first time on October 25th. Many learnt from that action and they saw that they won then, and they could win again.

CS: Do you think there will be problems in the future with job cuts because NALGO workers have not been "flexible" as

the management wanted?

NALGO Member: The Tories will use it as an excuse, and will say they will have to make x number of redundancies. They have already said in Bradford that they want to make 5,000 job cuts in five years. So, they'll probably just try to bring those cuts forward a bit. This might be more difficult for NALGO. We might have problems if we had to try and get strategic workers out again.

But then we can say "We won in October. We won this summer. If we stand our ground, we can win again!" If we think ahead, there are local elections next May and the Tories wouldn't want problems around that time. It's quite likely that they could lose in those elections, because they're not exactly popular at the moment! If the Tories win, we could see problems again.

CS: What about the wider issues of this strike, as it was part of the "summer of discontent"?

NALGO Member: It was a point we were making during meetings, for example, we had speakers from the NUR, who were fighting for similar things in terms of work conditions and pay. We tried to stress that this was an overall strategy by the government, not just aimed at us. I think it gave people a bit of a boost when the railwaymen won halfway through our campaign.

CS: Do you think NALGO has to be more vigilant now as the government will obviously keep chipping away at terms and conditions?

NALGO Member: I hope that NALGO doesn't get wrapped up in this 'wait and see', new realist type of approach. You know, "Let's wait and see what happens when Labour get into power!"

We definitely didn't push that line, because Labour has a lot to answer for in terms of the position many workers find themselves in now.

CS: Do you feel the positive aspect of this action has been that many people have seen that they can win, even in a hostile climate, if they stick together?

NALGO Member: It's been positive because people in NALGO work in many different sectors, in computers, education, field work, etc. and it's been good to all work together with a common aim. It has continued to build a unity that began with the October action. That is, perhaps, the most positive impact of this strike.

Women top of the agenda...

In the summer of 1989, the RCL held its Fourth Congress. The main questions for discussion were relating to work in this country, in particular the question of women's liberation and the struggle for socialism. We also resolved some long-standing questions about the relation between class and national struggle within England and the need to build a multi-national communist party based in both the working class and the national minority people.

The Congress also discussed the question of recent events in the People's Republic of China. A resolution was passed condemning the actions of the army and government in suppressing with armed violence, the student movement for democracy and against corruption.

The RCL is already committed to giving priority to study and struggle over some international questions in the next period. In particular, we need to look at recent events in China in the context of the changes in economic and political lines over the last ten years, and the effects of the 'open door' policy within China.

We also need to study the situation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. As 'Class Struggle' goes to press, we are seeing a 'Solidarity' government about to take power in Poland. Events in Poland are just one aspect of important changes that are taking place in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which it is urgent that we look at in some detail.

The Congress did not cover the international situation in detail. But it is vital that in looking at our specific tasks in this country, we have an internationalist perspective. This cannot simply be a token gesture of international solidarity but should inform all our work, here at the centre of British imperialism, where the whole of society has been profoundly affected, both on the economic, political and ideological level, by its history of exploitation of peoples and nations around the world.

The twentieth century has seen the tide of history turned back after four hundred years of colonial expansion, robbery and exploitation. In spite of all the setbacks, zigzags and problems faced by particular movements at particular times, this is still the main trend in the world. Recent years, have seen new phases in different liberation struggles around the world: Eritrea and



Tigray; Palestine; Azania; the Philippines and Afghanistan. Closer to home, the national liberation struggle of the Irish people has grown in strength and in political support.

It is still the peoples of the Third World who are at the sharp end of the world-wide struggle against imperialism. But we also, even though we are a small and inexperienced organisation, are part of this trend. Even though many others are questioning the relevance of Marxism-Leninism in the world of today, we affirm that its basic principles still hold true and that we must persist in applying them to our specific revolutionary tasks in this country today. Certainly, we need to take a long view. There are no magic answers or quick solutions.

Over the last five years since our previous Congress, the RCL

has not made much progress. Over this time, we have been divided on major issues of line and to a large extent, have not worked together in a communist way, with a good style of work.

Having resolved these major differences over line and renewed our commitment to work together to develop more detailed policies, summing up practical experience as well as studying theoretically, we think that the Fourth Congress can be a turning point for us.

The next few issues of 'Class Struggle', will carry more detailed information about decisions made at the Congress. In this issue, we concentrate on the major issue where progress has been made in the last few years.

TOP OF THE AGENDA: WOMEN

For too long, the Marxist-Leninist movement in Britain has patronised women, relegating their struggle to a secondary position. The history of the RCL has, until recently, reflected that orientation. But the recent Congress marked a turning point in the League's whole understanding of women's oppression and their path to liberation. Discussion and decisions on the women's question were top of the agenda.

The Manifesto of the RCL (1977) gave little space to women and put forward an economist line, seeing women only as workers, and putting forward the demand for equal pay.

Previous to the Manifesto, women members were involved in women's groups, particularly in the Women and Socialism trend in the women's movement. But this was stopped at the time when the RCL decided to put all its resources into industrial work.

It is only over the last few years that study and discussion has been pushed forward by women, which has resulted in a draft line on women's oppression, currently under discussion in the League.

We recognise that there is still a long way to go before we have a clear idea of the relationships between the revolutionary struggles of women, the working class and the national minority people. In particular, how alliances can be forged between them to defeat imperialism and establish a society where there is a basis to go on to abolish all forms of exploitation and oppression.

The Congress concentrated on certain questions where we now think we took a wrong stand in the past. But within the League, there is an ongoing

process of discussion and struggle over the draft line as a whole. There was also discussion of the wider context of the struggle for women's liberation, both in this country and worldwide. It was generally accepted that the struggle for women's liberation had to be put on an equal footing with other struggles; that women's oppression existed before imperialism, but that it continues and is adapted in new conditions and new forms under imperialism; and that both in theory and practice, the revolutionary movement needed to address the question of women's liberation.

World-wide, it was noted that national liberation struggles nearing victory, especially that in Eritrea and Tigray, were experiencing leadership by women. Women are a leading force who see national liberation as a massive, but first, step in the long struggle for true communism and that women had to a certain extent wrested power and equality during the struggle so far.

Throughout the Congress, it was emphasised that an internationalist view was vital, and that the experience and objective situation of national minority women in this country was important and often very different from white women. However, at our stage of development, we have to learn how to mobilise the majority of women in this country.

Some self-critical points that were overwhelmingly agreed are set out below. They in no way represent a line as such, but points of self-criticism of previous positions and a start in adopting an all-round line on women in the near future.

1. All women are oppressed under imperialism, in different ways. Working class women suffer class exploitation and oppression; women of oppressed nations suffer national oppression. Women suffer gender oppression at the hands of men. It is no accident that the wealth of the ruling class is predominantly owned and controlled by the male members thereof. Women are oppressed by means of their role in the family, domestic labour, childcare; discrimination in employment; violence including rape; ideological and social attitudes. Women of different classes are affected in different degrees.

The RCL was wrong in the past to see the oppression of working class women as the only women's oppression of any significance.

2. The women's movement is generally progressive. It is a spontaneous movement (i.e. not Marxist-Leninist) and the class background of many women who have been active within it does not make it reactionary.

We were wrong to dismiss the movement in the past. We should generally support it.

It was wrong to characterise the movement as bourgeois, both because it is not bourgeois and because the class background of activists is not the deciding factor in relation to the struggle against the oppression of women. It was wrong to criticise the movement for being feminist because feminism is a progressive ideology which we must unite with, not disparage.

3. In Britain, the main aspect of the nuclear family for women is that it is oppressive. It is a structure which meets the needs of imperialism and is built on the isolation, oppression and exploitation of women, and on violence towards them.

The specific form taken by the family at any time or place is linked to the mode of production. It is a creation of a particular economic and social system and will reflect its culture.

In Britain, the nuclear family developed as the economic unit under capitalism, based on the unpaid labour of women in reproducing and maintaining the labour force. Even in those families where women take part in paid work, the ideology of 'A woman's place is in the home' is still strong.

5. It is important that white women struggling for their liberation do so in solidarity with national minority and Third World women. We must support the struggles of women in the Third World and the struggles of national minority women in Britain.

6. We support the right of women to organise separately.

Experience in other countries and historically in this country, show the necessity for women to form separate mass organisations to fight their specific oppression.

We need to use the Marxist method of dialectical materialism as a basic tool in theoretical analysis on the question of women's oppression, as on other subjects. We need to apply Marxism to conditions today and to look at the original analysis of capitalism critically from the point of view of its analysis of women's position.

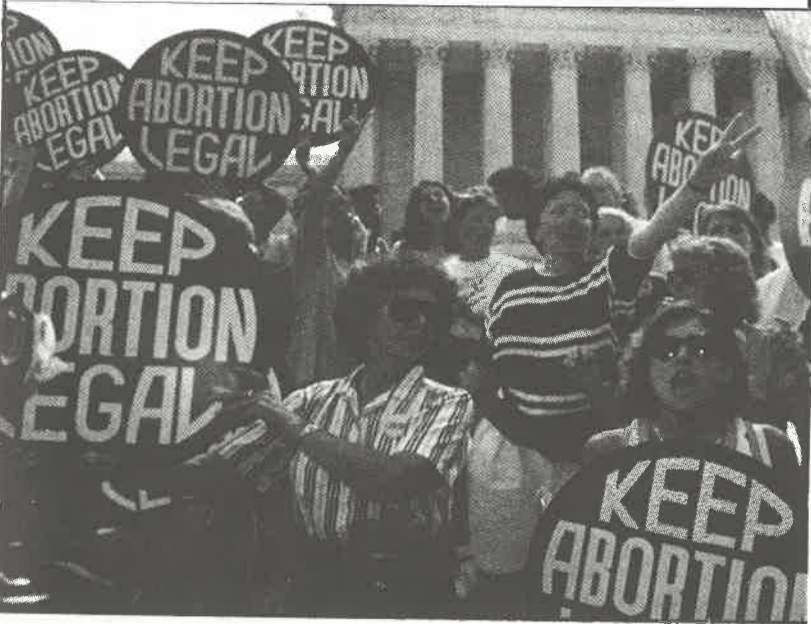
In future issues of 'Class Struggle', we hope to cover these points in detail, relating them to concrete conditions facing us.

We welcome discussion, criticism or comment from our readers.



RCL CONGRESS

A WOMAN'S RIGHT



C.S. CORRESPONDENT TO CHOOSE

In Britain, the 1967 Abortion Act made it legal for a woman to have an abortion, for specific health reasons, on the authority of two doctors. Since then, it has been easier than before for women to get a legal abortion under a liberal interpretation of "risk to the woman's health". Access to abortion facilities is however still limited, for many women, particularly poor and working class women. About half of abortions are still done privately.

Since the passing of the 1967 Act, the women's movement has had to mobilise five times in defence of the Act, most recently when David Alton's bill passed two readings in the House of Commons in Spring 1988. It was finally thrown out.

It is likely that there will be further attempts to restrict women's right to an abortion. The first major anti-abortion bill was presented in Parliament in 1975 (the James White bill). Since then, no less than 15 further bills were laid before Parliament, all aiming to restrict abortion rights.

The so-called "pro-life" lobby is having considerable success in other countries and will no doubt turn its attentions here. Already, the video film, *Silent Screams*, which purports to show a foetus screaming in pain during an abortion, is being shown in British schools, even though it has been proven to be full of false assertions and doctored visuals.

In the USA, on July 3rd of this year, the Supreme Court upheld Missouri law which restricts women's right to abortion. Although this did not overturn the historic 1973, *Roe v. Wade* decision that legalised abortion, it opened the way for each state to pass its own laws.

Unity commented in its issue of June 30th: "By upholding such a law, the Supreme Court showed callous disregard for those women who live it most effects. Wealthy women will still be able to obtain abortions, but poor women will be forced to return to the days of back-alley abortionists and self-abortion. And is poor and working women for whom the choice of having children is most acute...."

A massive anti-abortion campaign has been waged over the last few years in the USA. It won the support of President Reagan, and George Bush, who changed his position just in time for the election. One section of the anti-abortion lobby has been organising 'Operation Rescue' which blocks abortion clinics and intimidates women attending them. Others have bombed abortion clinics.

The campaign will now attempt to use their influence on a state by state basis to get women's right to an abortion taken off the statute books.

Women in the USA have also been organising to fight for women's rights. In March of this year, over 600,000 took part in a march for 'Women's Equality/Women's Lives'. Loretta Ross, director of the 'Women of Color program' of the march organisers National Organisation for Women, said:

"It is clear that women want control over their reproductive life, so that they can fully participate in the labour force and society as a whole. The fight for safe and affordable abortion is key in the overall struggle for women's equality."

In Canada, a recent court judgement denied a woman's right to have an abortion (see *Mandy's Diary*). A higher court later overturned this judgement. The woman concerned had already had an abortion in the US, by this time and may now be prosecuted for contempt of court.

FAMILY VALUES

It is not clear what form the next attack on women's right to abortion will take in Britain. It could well be as part of a campaign to uphold and defend family values, backed by a "moral majority", as in the US with strong right-wing church support. Some Tory party analysts have calculated that there are two million floating votes to be won by such a campaign.

It is important that women mobilise to defend our rights against any such attack. It is also important that the particular issue of abortion is put in the context of women's control over her reproductive rights, in general.

We can learn from history, as well as the present, that issues of family planning and population control have been used in a class and imperialist way. Women in Third World countries and national minority and working class women in Britain face attempts to "limit their fertility" by such means as dangerous contraceptives such as DepoProvera and by forced sterilisations.

There are also some who will defend the need for legalised abortions on the grounds that it is better that "the lower social classes" restrict their family size.

We have to take a stand in support of the right to abortion from a position of supporting the rights of all women, including working class and national minority women, to control their own lives, including decisions about whether to have children or not.

Mandy's Diary

July 1st: I made an interesting discovery today. Blind people can get a reduction on their TV license fee. If they present proof of their identity and proof of their blindness to the appropriate authorities, they can get a reduction of £1.25 out of £66.00. The bus fare alone might cost them £1.25. Generous, isn't it? Especially when you consider what blind people can get out of watching television at all!



July 4th: I'm in NALGO, and I'm on strike. I went down to the picket line after taking my daughter to school. The boss and a few others had gone into work early so that they wouldn't have to face us. While I was there, one of my colleagues, also a NALGO member, pushed her way through the picket line to the door.

"What are you doing going into work?" I asked her. "The strike was a majority decision. Why belong to an organisation if you're not going to abide by its decisions?"

"I don't belong to it any more," she said. "I resign as of today. I don't believe it is right to strike."

Somebody else chimed in: "You won't turn down the pay rise, though, will you? We're out here fighting for that on your behalf. We're losing money for people like you."

"It's not only that," I said. "The bosses want the right to change our contracts. They want to make us work different hours if it suits them. They want to put us on a different grading system. And they want to negotiate locally, not nationally. Basically, they want to destroy the power of the union."

"I don't care if they do," she said. "I'm not in the union any more. The employers have always treated me fairly and I'm sure they will continue to do so."

"Scab," shouted somebody.

There were several others like her. Some of them didn't even bother to answer us when we spoke to them, and they're people we work with.

Afterwards there was a rally in the town centre. Some interesting facts came out. Like 10% of NALGO members are so poorly paid that they are eligible for Social Security benefits. And that doesn't include all the married women, because married women aren't entitled to benefits. Their husbands are supposed to "keep" them.

We've been offered 7%. It's below the rate of inflation, which is 8 point something. So, in effect, it's a pay cut. Actually, it wouldn't make a lot of difference to me whether I get 7% or 8%. On my low part-time wage, it would mean about an extra 50% a week. That's why I'm glad that NALGO has started to question the whole business of percentage increases. They mean more for the rich and less for the poor.

One of my colleagues is a single parent. "I hope they don't call for an all-out strike," she said. "I couldn't afford it. I don't know what I would do."

I asked our shop steward about the hardship fund, like whether there is one. It's the third time I've asked him.

"Can't afford it," he said. "Some of us can't afford to strike without it," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders. "We could organise our own."

"What do we pay our union dues for?" I thought.

July 20th: The last day of the NALGO strike for us. We've been on strike six days altogether.

My daughter broke up from school yesterday. Either I pay the childminder £10 a day to look after her or I take her with me to the picket line.

I must start looking for a cheaper childminder. This is getting ridiculous! For two children I pay her more than I earn.

We had been on the picket line ten minutes and it was:

"Mum, I'm fed up. Mum, let's go home. Mum, how much longer? Mum, I don't like this picket line. Mum...."

July 24th: Summer holiday time again. Some mothers are thinking: "How can I keep the children occupied for the next six weeks?"

Others, like me, are trying to get it all planned out: How can I avoid using up all my annual leave? I shall need some for Christmas. The childminder is away for a month. Who will look after them while I work? My mother wants to visit us. She's 70. Can she manage the journey from London by herself? Will I have to go and get her, taking both children with me? Next weekend we're going away for a fortnight. When will I ever find time to do all the packing?

Why does this sort of thing end up being my problem?

He works, he says. Does he think I don't?

July 30th: There's a woman in Canada who is 21 weeks pregnant and wants an abortion. She is not married to the baby's father and they are now living

apart. He has abused her both physically and verbally.

He obtained an injunction to prevent the abortion. Quebec's highest court ruled by a 3 to 2 majority that a foetus is a human being with a "right to life and protection by those who conceived him. The rule of nature is that pregnancy must lead to birth."

In this particular case, the man does not even intend to bring the child up himself. He is using the child as a pawn to control the woman.

"Either she comes back to me or my parents are going to keep the child," he said. What woman in her right mind would go back to a man who uses people like that? He hasn't even seen his mother to ask her if she will look after the baby. It is not clear whether he has asked his father. What is clear is that the child is definitely not wanted by either of its parents. People who have no stake in its future are forcing a woman to bear a child she does not want. What sort of future will it have?

This ruling has serious implications for other women. Meanwhile, in other parts of the world, women are forcibly sterilized, again to suit the needs of men who play no part in bringing children up.

Women must have the right to decide for themselves whether or not they wish to have a child. In most cases, it is the mother who changes her nappy, feeds her, winds her, cuddles her, washes her clothes, gets up to her when she cries in the night. Where are those judges at three o'clock in the morning? When they do the work, they can have a say in making the decisions.

Looking after young children is no joke. I have a friend called Dawn who has five children under 8. She is happily married to a caring husband. But he does shift work from 2 pm to 10 pm.

"There is just too much work to do," she said. "Sometimes I am just so tired I'd rather put the kids in the front room and close the door. If they wreck it, they wreck it."

"Recently, I was ill for three days. He had to work, so I had to manage. I don't know how."

Central America

EL SALVADOR

FIGHTING FOR PEACE

In El Salvador US policy has run into difficulties.

Reagan's policy in El Salvador was based on a "partnership" with the Christian Democratic Party and the Duarte government. The policy was, of course, aimed at defeating the revolutionary forces in El Salvador, led by the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN). The US has been propping up the Duarte government to the tune of \$1.2 million a day and with US aid accounting for 105 per cent of the national budget.

An essential feature of this policy was the need for a democratic facade provided by elections and the CDP, together with agrarian reform (of a kind) combined with a military policy of "low-intensity warfare". This was a move away from support for the extreme right-wing forces led by D'Aubuisson, who was openly associated with the death squads and violation of human rights. He is also widely believed to have ordered the assassination of Archbishop Romero in 1980.

Over the last period however, the revolutionary forces have grown in strength, both militarily and politically. According to an article in 'World Policy Journal' in Spring 1989: "The US-designed counter-insurgency strategy of low-intensity warfare has failed to contain the FMLN. To the contrary, the FMLN has successfully spread into 13 of El Salvador's 14 provinces, has built a militia that numbers as many as 40,000 and has established a growing presence in the nation's capital, San Salvador. The FMLN's use of mines has killed or wounded more than 3,000 soldiers a year, according to government statistics...."

BUILDING ALLIANCES

Equally important, the revolutionary forces have been able to build some broad alliances



to isolate the anti-democratic, anti-nationalist forces. Before the recent elections held in March of this year, the FMLN offered to participate in the elections given certain guarantees for their genuine participation. A meeting was held in Mexico, to discuss the proposals; the first such meeting between the other political parties and the FMLN.

In the end, the FMLN did not get the guarantees they needed and boycotted the elections, with the result that 69 per cent of the people did not take part. But the political impact has been great not only within El Salvador, but also internationally.

In the event, the elections were "won" by the ARENA party, widely recognised as a far-right party, closely associated with the death squads, disappearances and open repression. ARENA is headed by the President, Alfredo Cristiani but it is widely acknowledged that the real power lies with the notorious D'Aubuisson.

Few people saw the inauguration of the new President on 1st June as the FMLN called for

a strike in transport and electricity. Most TV's were cut off. But the policies of the new government soon became clear: by the beginning of July, Radio Venceremos (controlled by FMLN) reported that according to the non-governmental Salvadoran Human Rights Commission, 517 people had been murdered, 56 disappeared and 375 arrested in the government's first month in power. New "anti-terrorist" laws have been proposed which will make illegal virtually any form of opposition to the government. Different factions within ARENA have also been at work, assassinating their rivals. In June, Presidential Minister Porth was murdered and at the end of the month it was the turn of Edgar Chacon, another right-winger, so extreme that he had accused Bush of "communist sentiments".

SEEKING A POLITICAL SOLUTION

The response of the FMLN has been to intensify their strategy of building alliances to isolate ARENA. In a recent interview, Salvador Samayoa, member of the Political Diplomatic Commission of the FMLN said: "The current political opening moves us in an-

other direction, towards broadening the internal and international consensus in favour of a political solution to the war.

"Although we have the military potential for an insurrection, we are going to play politically."

THATCHER'S INVITATION

As in Nicaragua, the people of El Salvador need peace to solve the economic and political crisis in their country. The British government seems to be doing what it can to put off that day. The Conservative Party is reported to be taking the lead in a drive to win international acceptance for ARENA.

D'Aubuisson was, invited to the Queen's birthday celebrations and it is likely that President Cristiani will meet Mrs Thatcher in the autumn.

Ian Murray, British chargé d'affaires in San Salvador, commented on the birthday invitation: "D'Aubuisson was delighted at the news. ARENA has been boycotted by the other international political groups because of its horrific human rights record."

NICARAGUA

THE RIGHT TO LIVE IN PEACE

The people of Nicaragua are celebrating ten years of victory over the Somoza regime and its backers, the USA. They have been ten difficult years, in which it has been hard to re-build the country on the basis of the people's needs because of the economic blockade and military campaign waged by the USA, through the infamous "Contras".

As the Director of OXFAM wrote recently: "Although the Contras are no longer a credible fighting force, and the war seems set to fizzle out, the suffering they caused has been enormous and the damage immense. The spiralling costs of the war have devastated the economy."

DEMOBILISING THE CONTRAS

US policy in relation to Nicaragua received a decisive boost at the beginning of August when the five Central American Presidents signed detailed demobilisation plans for the Contras, at a summit meeting held in Tela, in Honduras.

In spite of personal pleas by Bush and a series of exasperated phone calls, even the closest allies of the US in the area, signed the agreement.

The Presidents of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica and Nicaragua agreed that the Contras should be demobilised and would have to surrender their arms by December. The UN and the Organisation of American States have been asked to oversee the process.

The agreement was described by a Contra spokesman in Washington, USA, as "the collapse of US support of the resistance". For the people of Nicaragua, it is a step forward to the peace essential to true independence and prosperity.

International Notes

U.S.A.

MINERS ON STRIKE

In 1984-85, British miners fought a year-long strike to keep their pits open. Earlier this year, Belgian miners fought a similar battle to try and stop the last pits in Belgium from closing.

In the USA, miners have been on strike since April in the South West Virginia coalfield.

The strike started when the Pittston Coal Company tried to impose cuts in job security and safety measures, at the same time as taking away health benefits from retired miners.

Although the immediate issues are important, many see the moves by the company as an attempt to get the union, the United Mine Workers of America, out of the coalfield.

The miners, their families, members of the local community and supporters from elsewhere have mobilised in to defend the community against the company. Shops have donated goods. Preachers have preached in support of the strike and students have walked out of school. Unofficial sympathy strikes have taken place in every unionised coalfield in the eastern US.

The courts and the police have been called into action in support of the company. In one week alone, in April, there were 1,100 arrests. The miners' mass pickets have been made illegal by the courts and huge fines imposed on the union.

In response, the miners and their supporters have developed a drive-in picket line, which blocks traffic from going in and out of the coalfields. It is now an offence in Virginia "to drive too slowly".

Latest reports say that the UMWA is trying to call off the strike, faced with the danger of losing all its assets to the courts. But it will take more than this to break the spirit of the mining community.

A woman miner, Yolanda Hall, told 'Unity': "Sure, it's hard. But the life of a miner is hard. I'm part Indian, part Mexican and part Spanish. And I'm a woman miner. So I know what struggle is This is the most united we've ever been."

The statement identified three burning issues to be addressed: a programme of united mass action to end apartheid; the attitude to negotiations and a call to the international community about their role in ending apartheid.

The general aim would be "to map out the most effective, shortest path to the ending of oppression and exploitation and the creation of a democratic country."

The proposed conference is to be organised by an important new alliance which includes both the United Democratic Front and the Azanian People's Organisation, together with progressive church organisations and was announced at a meeting held on 16th August, supported by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Albertina Sisulu, among others.



AZANIA

NEW MASS DEFIANCE

"While the racist elections will be mapping out the minority's plans to cling onto minority rule and privilege, the conference will be an assembly of the people of our country truly democratic in its character and objectives..."

This extract is from a statement announcing a conference to be held in Johannesburg on 7th October, around the theme, one person, one vote.

The new alliance has already started a campaign of mass defiance and is an important threat to the South African regime. The regime has many internal contradictions, as shown by the recent resignation of P.W.Botha and is under pressure from all sides.

There is rising protest in the country against the forthcoming minority elections and the South African economy is in deep trouble. Interest rates are 20% and unlikely to fall; the foreign debt is \$20 billion



and the price of gold is relatively low. Disinvestment, particularly by US companies, continues, albeit slowly.

Pressure on the regime is growing. The newly-formed mass alliance will move forward the pressure for revolutionary change in Azania.

HORN OF AFRICA

TALKS WITH THE DERGUE

Massive military defeats within the liberated areas of Eritrea and Tigray, dissession within its own ranks and political and economic bankruptcy have forced the Ethiopian regime, the Dergue, to the negotiating table. Moscow, Addis Ababa's closest ally and biggest arms supplier, is also putting on pressure to end the war.

In March of this year, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) put forward an eight-point peace plan and agreed with talks to the Dergue, as announced at a press conference in London on 15th June.

The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) has also more recently agreed to talks, to take place in the USA, with the unlikely mediator of Jimmy Carter, ex-President.

The liberation forces and people of Eritrea and Tigray know that they can continue the war and continue to defeat the Dergue if talks fail. For the Dergue, however, time is running out.

THE DEVASTATION OF BEIRUT

Beirut's people have known a lot of suffering since the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975. But the months since March of this year have been the worst.

Indiscriminate shelling means that nowhere out in the open or above ground is safe. A city which was home to over a million people has seen most of its richer citizens flee abroad, and many of its poorer ones stream out to safer regions of the country, carrying with them such belongings as they can. Under 150,000 remain in the capital.

The Maronite Christians of the eastern city, who can leave, have gone into the heartlands of their corner of Lebanon, or taken the ferry from Jounieh to Cyprus, to seek refuge elsewhere, while refugees from the mainly Muslim west of the city have headed south. For the Shi'ites among the latter, there is a bitter irony about this situation. In the 1970's, they came in their tens of thousands to Beirut from the south, to escape poverty and incessant Israeli raids and bombardments of their villages. Now, the areas which they originally left, are among those to which they go to seek safety.

The violence has been compounded by the economic situation. For ten years after the eruption of the Civil War, the economy held up surprisingly well. Tourists no longer came to ski in the mountains, lounge on the beaches and take in Beirut's varied nightlife. Yet, there was still money around, whether from the drug trade, remittances from relations living overseas or whatever. Then the economy crashed. The value of Lebanon's currency plummeted as the accumulated ills of the economy finally struck the country a body blow. Not only had the tourists gone, but the major banks and most of the publishing houses, too. Beirut had been the business and publishing centre of the Arab

world. But those interests have found safer havens today.

The impact of the economic collapse has been such that Lebanese trade unions have succeeded in winning nation-wide support for protests over the hardships of the working class, even if marchers had to make their feelings known divided from each other by barricades and guns. But the current fighting has brought a halt to such protests.

MILITIAS

Most Lebanese do not belong to any militia force. But thousands of young men do. The term "militia" is used to cover a wide range of armed groups, from the big, sectarian ones to smaller secular groupings, and from those whose motivation is mainly political to those for whom politics simply provides a cover for rackets, which include the kidnapping of individuals for the sake of obtaining a ransom. Militias may stand up for the interests of a specific community, or see themselves as representing higher ideals.

The militias also fulfil roles that are less readily recognised by the outside world. They provide companionship for young men, and usually, an income of some kind. This comes from a range of sources. Some run illegal ports, and tax the goods that pass through them. The Druze Progressive Socialist Party runs one port, south of Beirut, while the Maronite Christian Phalangists have their own, north of the capital.

There are rake-offs from the drugs trade. Opium is produced in East Lebanon's Beqa'a Valley by poor Shi'ite peasants who cannot make a living any other way at present, and then processed into heroin by buyers who then arrange its transportation to the next link in a chain that leads to Europe and America. Payoffs have to be made to whoever controls the areas through which the



shipments travel, whether Syrian troops or militia forces, mainly those of north Lebanon.

Some militias impose their own taxes and foreign support is also a source of income for certain groups. Hizbollah has Iranian financial support, for example.

The people of Lebanon want peace badly and would like to see an end to fighting between the militias. But there are major obstacles to them achieving this.

The major obstacle is Lebanon's political structure. Since the foundation of the state, Maronite Christians have been given a privileged place within the Lebanese political system, being guaranteed the presidency and domination of parliament. (Christians, among whom the largest group are the Maronites, hold a 6:5 ratio of parliamentary seats.) In theory, this arrangement merely reflected the size of the Maronite population in Lebanon. But even at the time when Lebanon became independent in 1943, this was a fiction. The entire Lebanese power structure was sectarian, and much of Lebanon's history for the past thirty or so years, has been taken up with attempts to transform it, either into a non-sectarian system, as the secular left and nationalists wanted; or into one where a new sectarian structure, based on the changes in the relative strengths of the different communities, came into being. The latter "solution" was, by and large, favoured by the established leading families of the different communities.

Foreign interference has complicated the picture. Historically, Israel has had close ties with the Phalangists and has also set up its own puppet militia, the South Lebanon Army, in the border areas which it has controlled since 1978. Syria has had military forces in Lebanon since 1976 and has sought to dominate the country. It regards Lebanon as properly belonging to a "Greater Syria" and its role there as part of an effort to control the Palestinians and to use its presence to put pressure on Israel to withdraw from the Syrian Golan Heights, occupied by Israel in 1967. Syria's alliances have shifted over the years. But its goals remained constant.

ANOTHER ROUND

The latest fighting erupted following the break up of the existing Lebanese government

and the formation of two rival ones. That of General Aoun, based in East Beirut, presents itself as standing for Lebanese independence against the foreign armies, primarily Syria's, on Lebanon's soil. That in West Beirut is supported by nearly all the nationalist and Muslim forces, and backed by Syria. Many people in the areas under the nominal control of the latter government, want to see the back of the Syrian and Israeli armies. But they do not accept Aoun's claims about wanting Lebanese independence. They believe that his main concern is the preservation of the Maronite domination of the power structure. So they are not prepared to back his regime.

In March, Aoun launched attacks on the Syrians with the undeclared aim of provoking a conflict which would lead to the western powers intervening to support his government against Syria. He hoped for a modern-day crusade to expel the Syrians in the name of defending Lebanon's Christians, which would leave his regime firmly in control. Up until mid-August, all he managed to get from the West was some political support: both France and the USA, the main potential interventionists, have already burned their fingers badly in Lebanon in the past and were in no hurry to risk repeating the experience.

Aoun's main material support came from Iraq, whose regime's rivalry with Syria has normally led it to support anything which would harm that state.

No-one is sure how the current conflict will end, whether in a decisive win for one side or in another stalemate. The latter seems more likely. Syria and its allies are much stronger militarily than Aoun's army. But it is very unlikely that Israel and the western powers would allow Aoun's forces to be crushed.

After all the bloodshed and destruction of the last six months, Lebanon is likely to be left in worse shape than before this particular conflict started, and with every prospect of further warfare erupting. It may be that only in the context of changes in the region as a whole, will Lebanon be able to secure the creation of a non-sectarian, democratic, political system and the exclusion of the Israeli and Syrian armies.



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This pamphlet includes letters that Fredrich Engels wrote in the later years of his life on historical materialism. They give an idea of the more important aspects of the materialist concept of history as worked out by the founders of Marxism. In arguing against the vulgarisers of Marxist philosophy in his day, Engels' work still provides ideological ammunition today. 33pp.

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JUSTICE DENIED

A Nation Resists

Conference on the rights of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation.



The reaction of the Israeli authorities to the Palestinian uprising which began in December, 1987, has highlighted some of the repressive measures by which it maintains its hold on the territories which it occupied in 1967. Very few of these measures are new. They only form part of a system of laws, regulations and practices which touches every aspect of the lives of the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, restricting freedom of speech and movement, imposing severe restraints on political and trade union organisation and placing major obstacles in the way of the economic development of the two areas.

"Justice Denied" is a chance to find out about the rights which the Palestinians are denied, and those which they say they want respected. There will be speakers from the Palestinian Human Rights Information Centre (Jerusalem) and Al-Haq (West Bank affiliate of the International Commission of Jurists) and Palestinian legal expert, Musa Mazzawi will also speak. Workshops will take place on: Collective punishment, Freedom of speech and publication, Prisons and prisoners, Deportation, Trade union rights, and the Right to education.

Time: 10am, Saturday October 14th, 1989.

Venue: Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1 (Opposite Euston railway station)

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FREEDOM FOR IRELAND



OPINION

Solidarity not squabbling

WHICH WAY FORWARD FOR THE SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT

After attending both the Irish solidarity marches in August, I was struck by the thought that what characterises the withdrawal movement in Britain was stagnation and sectarianism.

The Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) may be pleased that nearly one thousand marched with the Irish Freedom Movement on August 8th. But this was achieved in the context of boycotting the following week's march and carnival organised by Time To Go (TTG). The August 12th events, while nurtured by members of the Labour Party, needed the Socialist Workers Party contingent to boost the attendance to between four to five thousand.

As both the marches were in the same area of North London, some consistent propaganda work was achieved. But the very size of the consecutive marches illustrated the weaknesses of the withdrawal organisations.

After 20 years, the vast majority of people in Britain can



Five years later the British left has still to build an effective solidarity movement.

still live with the war in Ireland. It is evident that there can be no short cuts to making Ireland a priority on the political agenda, let alone a popular issue.

After a year of action, culminating in the march, TTG failed to match the numbers - around

occupied six counties.

RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION

There remains the task of building a significant movement of opposition to British occupation. Given the divisions amongst those now active in solidarity work, it is unlikely that there will be a unified withdrawal movement. There is, and will continue to be, many threads to that movement, including those who provide a supportive infra-structure for visiting POW relatives or "material aid and comfort".

What guides communist activity - at whatever level of solidarity they are engaged - should be principled support for Irish self-determination. Communists defend the right of the Irish people to exercise that right in whatever manner they choose.

To date, the emphasis for those challenging the rabidly pro-British line that dominates the left on Ireland, has been on the defence of the armed struggle waged by Republican forces.

In real terms, it also means supporting the right to exercise that self-determination through a negotiated settlement to remove partition. Those who would only glorify the armed struggle are in danger of militarism, forgetting that the armed struggle is a means to an end: Republicans are fighting for a thirty two county Ireland.

There are still those who raise the question of "What kind of united Ireland?" to deflect from any commitment to supporting those forces who are facing up to British imperialist forces in the north.

Others use the gulf in political positions between themselves and others active on Ireland, to justify attacking other activists' platform, and devote time, energy and resources to this task to the detriment of expanding the audience for a withdrawal argument. Such gutter-sniping does little to enhance the reputation of the British left.

Communists' unconditional support is given to the cause of national liberation in Ireland and not to any particular organisation. There are different Republican forces active in the struggle against Britain's armed agents. Some elements have a Marxist perspective, others do not. But it is not up to the British left organisations to fight

the Irish revolution. Our own is not very advanced.

Respect for Irish self-determination should preclude taking sides in the internal politics of, and between, organisations.

THE WAR CONTINUES

The war will go on. After 20 years of trying, retired army generals now appear on our television to state that there is no possible military solution. The army tells its masters: "We can contain but not defeat the IRA." That is an admission of defeat.

The consensus at the heart of the political establishment precludes any attempt to tackle the underlying cause of the nationalist resistance: partition. The Labour Party is content to parrot the Tories in terms of "security" and "terrorism". "Stability" is seen in terms of an acceptable "level of violence".

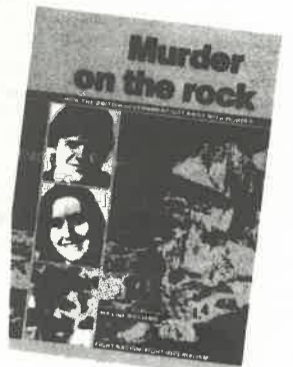
Labour's allegiance to its imperialist duty has never been successfully challenged in its history. It has never acted decisively on its own long-held "socialist" principles. Why will its actions on Ireland be any different? Solidarity work cannot be narrowed down to lobbying the Labour Party for change. There is a passive, ill-informed working class to be won to supporting the right to self-determination.

Britain has negotiated withdrawal from most of its previous colonial commitments. Withdrawal from Ireland involves the dismantling of part of the structure of the British state. That alone would make it a "difficult issue" to work on.

Communists in Britain have a responsibility to hasten the day of what will still be a long drawn-out process. Once again, Britain will be forced to negotiate with Irish Republicans.

Constant displays of petty sectarian spite only serve to hold back the contribution that can be made, and should be developed, to that end. Attention should not be focused on attacking those who are active on the issues around the Irish war, but directed against Britain's continuation of that war. In that campaign, Irish self-determination remains the key demand that should inform the activity of those engaged in Irish solidarity work.

IN PRINT



Book Review of 'Murder on the Rock' by M. Williams and 'Rock Bottom' by Private Eye.

"It all started with a lie," begins 'Rock Bottom', Private Eye's account of the events in Gibraltar on March 6th, 1988. That day, three unarmed IRA volunteers were killed. The SAS ambush gang's use of "minimum force" saw Mairead Farrell shot twice in the head, and three times in her body from behind; Daniel McCann shot twice in the head and twice in the back; and Sean Savage shot at least sixteen times. The killings were no accident. No prisoners were expected.

There was no car bomb. All three volunteers were unarmed. Spanish surveillance had informed the British when they entered Gibraltar. The outcome of the ambush was never in doubt in official circles.

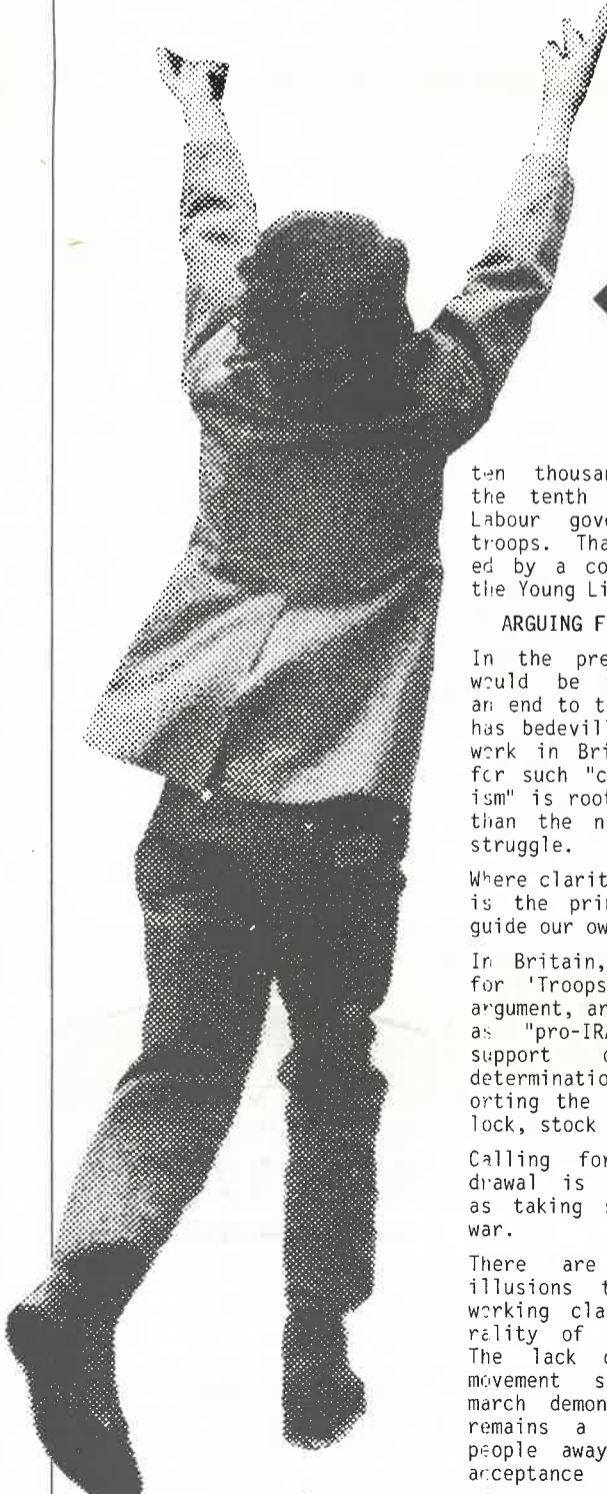
Private Eye has questioned the official version of events from a government it describes as "obsessed with secrecy and censorship". 'Rock Bottom' analyses the killings and subsequent campaign of disinformation. It is "not an apology for terrorism", the editor reassures his readers. It is written out of a liberal concern about a government that so publicly kills its opponents.

'Murder on the Rock' does not shy away from the political issues the Gibraltar killings raise. In a more comprehensive account, the events of March 6th are placed within the context of resistance to British occupation of Ireland.

'Murder on the Rock' is relentless in driving home the point that the British government got away with murder. It takes the reader through the various stages of the killings and subsequent events in a clearly written and detailed examination that strips away the false stories woven by the British authorities.

From the events on that fateful day, through the intimidation of witnesses and their trial by the media, to the flawed inquest, the difficulties placed in the way of a truthful account are recounted. While fact upon fact are drawn out in both publications, 'Murder on the Rock' is greater in scope and detail. It recalls that even with the media propaganda offensive, and the well-rehearsed lies of the SAS murder gang, there was a split jury on the verdict of "lawful killing".

'Murder on the Rock' asks what comes out of all these facts, and answers: "You have this: a carefully planned ambush, sanctioned by the British government and prepared for four months. You have murder, plain and simple."



the British left's traditional attitude to calls for unity

ten thousand - mobilised on the tenth anniversary of the Labour government sending in troops. That march was organised by a coalition convened by the Young Liberals in 1979.

ARGUING FOR BASIC PRINCIPLES

In the present situation, it would be foolish to predict an end to the factionalism that has bedevilled Irish solidarity work in Britain. The reasons for such "collective sectarianism" is rooted in factors other than the nature of the Irish struggle.

Where clarity can be established is the principles that should guide our own activity.

In Britain, marches that call for 'Troops Out', on whatever argument, are regularly attacked as "pro-IRA". Standing in support of Irish self-determination is seen as supporting the Republican position, lock, stock and barrel.

Calling for a British withdrawal is implicitly regarded as taking sides in the Irish war.

There are many deep-rooted illusions that exist in the working class about the neutrality of the British state. The lack of official Labour movement support for either march demonstrates that there remains a hard slog to win people away from the passive acceptance of events in the