

The 2nd Congress of the RCLB took place in July last year: a year marked by great movements of oppressed people against British imperialism, in the form of the Hunger Strikes by H-block prisoners in Ireland and the struggles of black people in Britain. It is on these two questions relating to our stand against British imperialism, that the RCL changed its position at the July Congress. The adoption of a principled stand of unconditional support for the Republican Movement in Ireland and a self-criticism for the previous social-chauvinist line are dealt with elsewhere. But it is important to link this change with the adoption of a position of the revolutionary alliance between the working class and the oppressed national minorities within Britain. Whilst our present stand marks some progress from our previous position, outlined in the RCLB Manifesto, the line is still being developed and we have much to learn. The aim of the first part of this article is to show what progress we have made. But the second part is an important qualification: it points out serious contradictions and weaknesses which have yet to be resolved.

## I

The history of black people's resistance to oppression is long and varied and in the past we have often ignored these struggles. Whilst not attempting an all-round analysis, we would like to highlight some of the key struggles against the British state which we have ignored or underplayed in the past.

Over recent years, much of the struggle against racist oppression has been focussed against immigration controls and laws. The Asian communities in particular have mounted well organised resistance. The immigration laws racist at their inception, have been made increasingly oppressive by both Labour and Tory governments, in a way which amounts to a wholesale attack on black people. The enshrining of the racist concepts of the immigration laws into the new Nationality Bill last year gave rise to a massive demonstration in protest. Thousands of national minority people marched, uniting old and young Asian and Caribbean, political and religious organisations. 1981 was also a watershed for another, newer aspect of struggles against immigration laws - the individual campaigns against deportation of split families. Anwar Ditta's 6 year struggle to be united with her children has inspired many others, such as Nasira Begum, Cynthia Gordon and Jaswinder Kaur. These campaigns were also important in marking the rising resistance of black women.

The Day of Action organised by the New Cross Massacre Committee marked an important step forward in black resistance and organised demonstration of anger. Ten thousand black youths, mainly Caribbean, marched in protest at the racist murder of 13 black children. This was not just a protest against the individual murderers, but against the police who have failed to give any protection against racist attacks, against the courts who uphold the actions of the police against black people and against the main political parties who ignore the deaths of 13 black youngsters. The massive power of this particular demonstration did not arise suddenly, but comes from many years of resistance and organisation within the black community.

The Uprisings were a new stage in black resistance, focussing on a section entering the struggle in force, the dispossessed, the workless and criminalised youth. Black youth in Bristol and Southall confronted the police. During the summer, black youth in all main cities, rose up against

the police, the most immediate target and symbol of racist oppression. In some places, such as Toxteth, other sections of society were united behind their leadership. As forms of rebellion spread from one city to another, the State could no longer treat each as an isolated and particular incident.

These three examples illustrate the mass resistance to racism by black people, but there are other important areas of struggle, such as calls for self defence in response to the physical attacks on black communities and the organised response of black people to these attacks, as in Brick Lane in 1977. Another area is at the work place where black workers have consistently fought for basic democratic rights, often without the support of their fellow white workers and often against the official union. We have to do much more work to learn from the rich experience of national minority people here.

The state has made a dual response to black people's resistance culminating in the events of last summer. On the one hand, direct repression by the police, armed to the teeth with counter revolutionary gear, backed up by the courts and the legal system. On the other "buying off", "official inquiries" "community policing" etc. 2 approaches complement and re-inforce each other.

During the summer, 3,500 people were arrested. Many were denied any semblance of democratic rights by being held in remand until the trial, forced by the police to make statements, refused access to solicitors or friends and family and pressured to plead guilty under threat of no bail. In some cases where there has been an organised defence committee, police frame ups have been exposed, as in Southall, where a notorious P.C. Webb had claimed to be arresting two different individuals for throwing petrol bombs in two different places at the same time.

One of the most significant trials arising from the summer is that of the Bradford 12. These 12 black youth were all arrested in Bradford last year and charged with making an explosive substance with intent to endanger life or property, and conspiracy to make explosive substance. However, there were no major disturbances in Bradford last year and no petrol bombs were thrown. This is clearly a political trial, an attack not just on the 12 youths but an attack on the whole black community. The state is using this trial as a means of revenge and repression against the whole black community, particularly the youth who challenged the state in the uprisings: and the real reason why these 12 were arrested is that they were nearly all members or supporters of the United Black Youth League, some of them with a long history of struggle to defend the black community. The Bradford 12 are part of a new trend arising from the young people who have grown up in this country, who are taking up struggles in a militant way and building mass support in their communities. The UBYL took a consciously anti-imperialist stand, shown by their struggles against the state in Britain and their support for the Republican movement in Ireland. The fact that the Bradford 12 trial is a political trial is further shown by the use of conspiracy charges, which the British state has consistently used against political activists. On such charges their political beliefs can be used as evidence. The political nature of the trial is also shown by the bail conditions which effectively "gag" the 12 and prevent them from taking part in the campaign for their own defence. The real aim of the trial is not only to get the 12 sent down and to silence them, but to intimidate all those within the black community who take a stand in defence of their community. The aim is to make criminals of those who take a political stand against the British state, along with the criminalisation of black youth in general.

At its 2nd Congress in July 1981 the RCL took the first step away from its previous political statement in the Manifesto of 1977 and its resulting practice. We do not claim to have a full understanding or analysis but we have recognised the importance of the struggles such as those mentioned above and for communists to give priority to building support for those struggles.

The RCL Manifesto of 1977 only paid lip service to the fact that Britain is an imperialist country, once the most powerful imperialist state in the world. It adopted a social chauvinist line on the struggle in Ireland and the struggle of national minority peoples in Britain.

In Section C of the Manifesto, dealing with the Class Struggle in Britain the struggle against racist oppression merits only four short paragraphs, which shows the low priority and lack of importance attached to that area of struggle by the RCL at that time. Some correct points are made in these paragraphs: the term national minorities is used - a term which we would still defend. The struggle against the immigration laws and for self-defence organizations are pin-pointed as important. But the points are sketchy at best and also contradictory. The most important contradiction is the statement that "we should fight racial discrimination, particularly at the place of work." This requires some explanation.

At this time in our history the RCL held a dogmatic view on where we should work as communists. Because we rightly believed that party-building was the central task in Britain and that the party should be built among the working class, we decided to concentrate exclusively on work in industry and ruled out any other form of mass work. In practice this meant that we did no anti-racist work and dismissed as secondary and therefore unimportant, struggles that were not based on the work place.

This is not simply an organisational point. It derives from our line on British imperialism and reflects a dogmatic assumption that the struggles of the working class in industry are the highest form of struggle. This ignored the whole national question in the history of British imperialism, the importance of national struggles against British imperialism abroad, the struggles of national minorities in Britain and the national question in Wales and Scotland. We still held that the working class in Britain is objectively a revolutionary class, but at the time of the Manifesto we ignored many different factors relating to the internal effects of opportunism on the struggles and consciousness of the working class. We did not understand the complexity of the different forces who will carry out the revolution in Britain. In particular we did not understand the revolutionary essence of the struggles of national minority peoples, the most oppressed sections within the British State, whose understanding of imperialism both here and in the Third World is far greater than that of most white workers, and whose struggles against British imperialism directly confront the power of the state.

Racism was dealt with in the Manifesto in 5 paragraphs on opportunism. The importance of the ideology of racism and its origins in imperialism were correctly pointed out! However it limited the question to one of building unity between black and white workers, thus ignoring the specificity of the struggle of national minority people, both workers and non-workers. It failed to support the specific struggle of the most oppressed and relegated that struggle to a role subordinate to that of the working class at the point of production. In paragraph 21 it implies the economist view that the oppression of black workers is simply a question of equal pay and conditions, and paragraph 22 talks about "working at it (the working class) from both sides", meaning that "attitudes of white racism and white superiority" and of "narrow black nationalism" were equally important targets for communists. For an organisation of mainly white comrades, to target narrow nationalism clearly demonstrated our chauvinism. We had an incorrect understanding of the struggle against racist oppression, we negated the whole Black Power movement and demanded that the oppressed change their attitudes towards their oppressors.

The practice of the RCL at that time was to concentrate on industrial work. With no understanding of the struggle against national oppression, much of this work was inevitably economist and failed to take up the question of British imperialism. One major example of our chauvinism at the time was our reply to an invitation to take part in the demonstration against racialism organised by the Anti-Racialism National Demonstration Committee in 1976:

"...We warmly support the aims of the demonstration. We would therefore have very much wanted to be present on July 11th. However in order to make progress on what is the central task in Britain today, building the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party, it is necessary to concentrate our limited resources on certain particular tasks in order to do them well. We have made some progress already and hope to make more until we are able to contribute effectively to the struggle against racialism and fascism as part of the overall struggle for the proletarian revolution in Britain..."

During this whole period when attacks by the state and by fascists were intensifying, we effectively did nothing to support the struggles of national minorities and justified this with our dogmatic line on party building. Struggles in the real world went on, and with increasing repression from the state and fascists, resistance grew. Comrades within the RCL began to recognise the errors in our position and comrades from the CWM and BCA joined the organisation. These two organisations had consistently taken part in anti-racist work, as in fact had one newer branch of the RCL. We recognised the importance of anti-racist work and agreed to reverse the decision of the Manifesto on this. We began to develop an analysis of national minorities in Britain and their struggle against the British state and their special position in relation to British imperialism. The theoretical basis of this position was argued in an article "The Roots of Resistance". The second Congress marked a first step forward in changing our old chauvinist position and began the process of developing our understanding between the relation between national and class struggle in Britain.

The key concepts in the new position adopted by the RCL\* is the revolutionary alliance between the working class and the national minority peoples. This concept recognises that British imperialism depends both on the class exploitation of the proletariat as a whole and on the national oppression of nations and national minorities. Resistance, aimed, in the last analysis, at the overthrow of imperialism, also takes distinct, though essentially complementary forms. The struggle of the working class against their exploitation and the struggle of the oppressed national minorities against their oppression are twin streams of resistance. The strategy for Communists should be to forge an alliance between these forces, as the only means by which British imperialism can be defeated.

This strategy rests on an analysis of a specific form of oppression directed against black people in Britain - national minority oppression. This oppression derives from the imperialist exploitation and oppression of the nations from which the black people have come. Imperialism itself perfected the ideology of racism, which originated in the slave trade of developing capitalism. The resistance of the national minority people consequently takes a specific form, which must be recognised and supported in its own right. More than this, Communists must actively fight for full democratic rights for national minorities and against all national oppression, and must aim to draw the working class into this struggle.

A sincere and militant implementation of this strategy can enable British communists to begin the task of eliminating their social chauvinism. It can enable us to avoid attitudes, current in the past, which denied reality and were patronising, cynical or critical towards the black resistance. It is fundamentally wrong to attempt to force a mould onto history which suits the short term interests of the white working class in the metropolitan countries. As the Congress correctly decided: "Coming from the Third World, which is the main force against imperialism, black and Asian people are in the vanguard of the fight against imperialism in Britain".

\* The position is set out in the "Rights of National Minorities" at the end of the article.

The Contradictions in the Line of the Second Congress of RCL

The Congress Document clearly incorporates 2 lines of analysis and strategy, most clearly seen in contrasting the section on democratic rights paras 62-69 with the section of rights of national minorities paras 70-78.\* But apart from this obvious contrast, the previous sections demonstrate some of the elements of the difference, and some attempts to bring them together, which seem to say the least, unsatisfactory.

Thus in para 17:

*"The essential political task of the revolutionary movement in the first historical stage of party building is to rally the advanced elements to Marxism-Leninism through building a real working class anti-imperialist mass movement. ...The advanced elements are those who grasp the true nature of imperialism and its state and have begun to fight it, . These are the elements with whom we will work openly as communists..."*

Here we have a definition of the advanced and a prescription for work. We are also told where to look for the advanced elements:

*"...At this stage of the struggle, the advanced trend is overwhelmingly located amongst black people and Welsh, Scottish and Irish workers because of the varying forms of double oppression suffered by them."*

This is repeated in para 22:

*"...National minority people are in the vanguard of the struggle against the British State..."* And in slightly differently in para 43:

*"...The black and national minority workers will provide a large number of advanced workers from their ranks..."*

This clearly raised two questions. Firstly, what is the analysis of national minorities which makes them in this vanguard position? This can only be answered in the "Rights of National Minorities" section. (A problem is also raised by conflicting terminology of "workers" and "people"). Secondly, why is it that from the relatively larger proportion of the population with revolutionary potential, so relatively small a proportion of the advanced should come? This is answered, although not necessarily in satisfactory manner, in para 31:

*"Despite the relative decline of British Imperialism this century, particularly during the last 30 years, the superprofits entering Britain are still very high, and continue to provide the material base for opportunism. These superprofits have enabled the bourgeoisie, under pressure from the working class, to concede to them a much higher standard of living than is found for the mass of the peoples of the Third World, most of whom continue to suffer bitterly under neo-colonial exploitation. This has established the conditions for the influence of opportunism within the working class as a whole, though it remains a revolutionary class and is not bought off by imperialism." and para 51:*

*"British imperialism's plunder of the Third World has provided workers in the metropolitan country with a higher standard of living than their colonial and neo-colonial brothers and sisters, and is the material reason why opportunism is so influential in the working class. The reformism and economism arising from this has allowed the opportunist trade union leaders to firmly entrench themselves at all levels of leadership. This development has been particularly marked over the last 30 years or so- although the basic conditions for it have existed much longer- and has created the situation where the top trade union leaders, particularly the TUC General Council, are not just conciliators of the monopoly bourgeoisie but in essence form part of the monopoly bourgeois state machine."*

A possible contradiction is found with this trend of analysis and strategy, and is indicated in para 23:

*"...Building factory cells must be the focus of our party building work in the first historical stage..."*

The reasons why this may be contradictory are:

1. because it indicated that we will work mainly among the section who are, by previous description, more backward;
2. because reasons why we should do this are not given in a way which relates this to the previous description;
3. because the contradiction of workers and people is not faced up to.

Nonetheless, the context of this statement appears to be one which attempts to resolve this problem. Two contrasts are drawn first between anti-imperialist work and industrial and factory cell building work, second between community work and factory work. On the surface, these would not seem to be the same contrasts, but the context indicates that they are probably meant to be, and it will be useful to put them together, Thus para 23 says:

*"Anti-imperialist politics and building a working class anti-imperialist mass movement are not antithetical to industrial work, and building factory cells. Factory work and work in the community are mutually re-inforcing..."*

Para 26:

*"Work in industry and in the community are complementary and inter-related, and can fuel each other's development..."*

Para 25 indicates that anti-imperialist community work includes the question of the oppression of national minorities.

The difficulties with this attempted reconciliation are i) even if these areas of work are complementary and mutually re-inforcing, why should one be the focus and the other, presumably, peripheral? ii) why should the peripheral one be the one which includes the issues (understanding of imperialism, double oppression etc) which seem to make the difference, according to the previous description, between those who are largely represented in the vanguard and those who are not? iii) if they are complementary what is the relationship between them - how do they complement one another? iv) How does the focal point (building factory cells) serve the task of working openly as communists etc, with the advanced elements who are overwhelmingly located among black people, Scottish, Welsh and Irish workers? (See para 17)

There are several possible interpretations of this attempted reconciliation. One is that it mainly wishes to sweep under the carpet the previous description, and provide grounds for replacing it with the view that the real vanguard are the working class in general, now and at the present historical stage, because this is what orthodox Marxism seems to tell us should be the situation. Another is that it's a fudge, an attempt to be all things to all comrades, and sweep the real contradiction under the carpet. A third view is that it represents the result of an unstated thought process - the national minorities are in the vanguard, but we have the main responsibility of working among the white working class, although, and because, they are more backward, so our focus must be on the factories where they are. Within this preferable view, there are two possible analyses also:

i) That through developing an advanced worker movement in the factories we can eventually come to lead both the majority and minority workers in the same struggle against imperialism.

ii) that the struggle of the working class in the factories must be developed as a particular stream against British imperialism, while the national minority people must develop their particular stream of the struggle

against imperialism along their own lines and with their own leadership.

These 2 contrasting analyses appear to represent the main underlying difference between the sections on Democratic Rights and National Minority rights. It is inevitable that there will be contradictions between these sections, because each is product of one of the main lines on the question competing at the Congress.

There are great difficulties in contrasting them. For a start, their relationship, as seen by their titles, should be, essentially the relationship of the part to the whole. And this is reflected to some extent, by the way they proceed. The Democratic Rights section, which is based on the Reactionary Strategy for Survival concept, does work essentially from an analysis of the whole to the analysis of the parts, and the National Minority Rights section, based essentially on the strategic alliance concept, works from the part to the whole. The difficulty, of course, is that the parts towards which "Democratic Rights" works do not include what is expressed in "National Minority Rights", nor is the whole envisaged by "National Minority Rights" that expressed in "Democratic Rights". More important each analysis makes a number of assumptions, in the course of trying to explain the facts none of which are thoroughly explained and argued. In each case the assumptions tend not to contradict the assumptions of the other section directly because they are not working on the same ground, but they certainly involve indirect contradictions.

From this there would appear to be questions of 3 different orders.

1) How to resolve the major difference between them. 2) How to test the assumptions made in each section and find out if they are valid 3) How to approach the more specific contradictions.

In relation to 1) the connection should be noticed between these 2 sections and the contradictions already noted in the earlier part of the document. On a general level, "National Minority Rights" does attempt to analyse the reasons why national minorities are in a vanguard position. "Democratic Rights" on the other hand, seems to give strength to the strategy of putting emphasis on factory work, in that it treats the question of the struggle against racism as part and parcel of a more fundamental struggle of the whole of the working people against fascism. More particularly, "National Minority Rights" relates to previous and subsequent sections on the Welsh, Scottish and Irish questions whereas "Democratic Rights" does not take them into account in its overall analysis of the struggle for democratic rights.

Question 2 is a question of investigation and analysis - and it seems that the assumptions thrown up by the two sections should be the main subject matter of the theoretical and factual questions that comrades concerned with developing anti-racist work should investigate.

On question 3 the main difficulties alone will be pointed out. They are i) the analysis of racism ii) the relationship between racism and fascism iii) the strategy for resistance.

#### Analysis of racism

"Democratic Rights" section says the aim of racism is to divide the working class (para 64) and that the most far sighted section of the ruling class see the day when racism will no longer do this (para 65 precis). There is an inconsistency between these sections but more importantly there is a clear difference with "National Minority Rights" which says the division results from the oppression of national minorities (para 75) and that racism which is a total ideology becoming fully defined with imperialism and having a specific economic base (para 70) is used to promote and exacerbate this existing division (para 75). The fundamental difference is the view on the one hand that racism is based on a fundamental historical development and is used to perpetuate an existing division and the view on the other that it is a method used to create a division. The ramifications are widespread.

## Relationship between racism and fascism

"Democratic Rights" section says that racism is the main weapon to prepare for fascism (para 67) whereas "National Minority Rights" says the development of state racism is linked with the development of fascism (para 76). This suggests a difference between whether we must fight racism because it leads to fascism, or because it oppresses national minorities, recognising that fascism is both a result of racism's development, among other things, and that fascism is a means by which racist oppression becomes more intense.

### Strategy for resistance

"Democratic Rights" poses the analysis Reactionary Strategy for Survival leads to mass resistance, which leads to erosion of civil rights of black and white workers and therefore we must play active part in mass resistance. (para 67). "National Minority Rights" poses analysis National Minorities are already fighting back (para 73). We should work toward revolutionary alliance (para 74) drawing the working class into struggle for national minorities rights and in support of the fight of national minorities.

These 2 lines derive from differing analyses of imperialism and the subsequent development of racism.

Analysing the document in this way indicates a large amount of confusion and inconsistency within it. It is essential that detailed work be done to investigate the concrete historical and present facts on which the various conflicting assumptions are based. Specific statements and arguments which contradict one another must be isolated and their meaning spelt out thoroughly in order to discover to what extent they are reconcilable and to what extent they represent positions which cannot stand together. Above all the two major lines represented in the document must be developed and clarified, so that a principled struggle may be conducted over clear lines of demarcation. No theoretical clarity, concrete leadership nor practical guidance for work can be given by a vague and opportunist compromise. The question is of the utmost importance, because different positions on the meaning of imperialism are reflected in the document, and a failure to develop a correct position on this could reverse the progress which the 2nd Congress undoubtedly represents.