

CLASS STRUGGLE

POLITICAL PAPER OF THE REVOLUTIONARY COMMUNIST LEAGUE OF BRITAIN

Vol.3 No.25 December 13th to December 26th 1979

fortnightly 8p

MECCANO: WORKERS FIGHT BACK



At 4 o'clock on Friday the 30th of November workers at Meccano in Liverpool were bluntly told that the factory was closed and moving out lock, stock and barrel. Not even the statutory notice of 90 days was given. A failure which even arch-reactionary Thatcher had to speak out against. The part-timers who finished at 3 o'clock didn't even get the luxury of this 40 minutes notice.

The object of the summary closure seems to have been one of preventing the workers from organising to fight the closure. But it had the completely opposite effect. Workers immediately organised a sit-in rota and shop-stewards called upon the workforce of 940 men and women to report for work normally on the Monday morning. At a mass meeting the workers unanimously supported the shop-stewards' call to fight the closure and "work-in".

NEW MANAGEMENT

In its race to compete with other toy manufacturers Air-Fix (Meccano's parent company) installed a new managing director Ray McNeice. On his arrival about 8 months ago, he laid on coaches to ferry workers to a meeting hall where he introduced himself. Being the kind of "go-ahead" management Meccano needed, McNeice promptly had his office re-carpetted. The dullness of the office decor offended him so much he allocated £30 to each office for indoor plants. And while McNeice and his associates were in Liverpool "putting Meccano on its feet" they made sure they lived in style. £30 a night was paid out to managers lodging at the Holiday Inn. Only recently four new company cars had been bought and there is talk of some expensive presents being given.

While pleading poverty the management were constantly threatening redundancy. But the closure was a complete bombshell. In the week previously 10 new

staff were taken on. Work was going out and targets being met.

HARDSHIP

Wages were low at Meccano. The basic take home pay for operators was £40 per week. With bonus achieved on an individual basis, take home pay could be £50. Meccano was one of the first to settle in the engineers recent national dispute.

The factory closure can only bring increased hardship to the 940 workers. Liverpool's unemployment level of approx. 12% is already much higher than the national average. In some areas of Liverpool such as Speke and Kirby, unemployment stands at 20% and even 30%. In the case of Meccano *Class Struggle* was told of one whole family working there and being hit by the closure.

FIGHT BACK

The workers are taking the only course open to them and that is to fight. The stocks of toys and machines the workers are holding are said to be worth £2,000,000. This puts them in a relatively strong position. But the Air-Fix bosses will use any amount of guile or state violence to get hold of their assets. And these arrogant capitalists know that in the final analysis the workers are dependant on another capitalist or the state taking over the factory if any jobs are to be saved. But support for the workers' struggle on Merseyside is high. The dockers have offered not to handle Air-Fix exports. In the course of the struggle the workers will learn many lessons. Most importantly that only the socialist revolution can give the working class the power to re-organise production according to a socialist plan, giving full employment and ending capitalist waste.

Make the bosses pay for their crisis.

Send financial aid to: 'Meccano Fighting Fund'
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PRICE INFLATION BRINGS MORE POVERTY

After the fanfare sent up to announce the measly Tory income-tax cuts, Chancellor Sir Geoffrey Howe announced recently:

"If public sector spending and pay expand out of control then the alternative of higher taxation is one of the things that will have to be faced."

Not surprisingly this announcement was directed at workers considering strike action to secure a just wage claim - the miners in particular. Although such increased taxation shifts more of the burden of capitalism's economic crisis onto the backs of the working class, the Labour leaders will no doubt gloat over the statement. It vindicates their "solution" for capitalism's ills. Roy Hattersley stated to the demonstration against the cuts that public expenditure must be funded through higher taxes.

PRICES ROCKET

Hardly a day passes without price rises on staple foods, necessities and services being announced. Mortgages up to 15%. Rates to go up by a quarter or more. Local councils in England and Wales are likely to charge rate-payers £600 million more than the government is allowing for. National Insurance contributions are going up while the Health Service

is cut almost to the bone. And to be sure, the Tories have not given up their dream of introducing charges for hospital beds. The cost of gas is due to go up by a little under a third. This after the gas Board has made a record profit of £365 million. So much for the benefits of North Sea gas. There are benefits, but not for the working class masses. Bread rose by another 2½p on December 3rd. The list is endless. And still bourgeois politicians and propagandists refer to the crisis "we" are facing and call upon the working class and trade unions "...to set aside outstanding differences in pursuit of common objectives." What "common objectives"? The working class and oppressed peoples are being forced into increased poverty and misery while fabulous wealth is falling into fewer hands.

REALITY OF POVERTY

Poverty in the United Kingdom, an extensive household survey in 1967/68 written by Peter Townsend, was published recently. It is of course already out of date. But the survey shows that 10 years ago the level of poverty according to official minimum standards was inaccurate. According to these standards - that is at or below the Supplementary Benefit Level - 5 million people were living in poverty. Peter Townsend's survey revealed that the various

LABOUR HIJACKS MASS ANTI-CUTS FIGHT

Over 50,000 workers took part in a massive demonstration through London on November 28th against public spending cuts. The demonstration was reported in the bourgeois press to have been the largest since the marches against the Industrial Relations Act. It began at 1-30pm from Hyde Park and contingents were still leaving at 4pm.

Banners reading: **BLOODY BIG TAX HANDOUTS FOR THE RICH IS ROBBERY** and another showing a worker trying to behead Thatcher as an "acceptable cut" expressed the mood of workers' anger. Huge numbers of miners from nearly every coal field turned up showing the magnificent spirit of class unity among this advanced section of the working class. 7,000 students from around 60 colleges, universities and polytechnics also took part along with public service workers, engineers and transport workers.

The focus of the demonstrators' anger was Margaret Thatcher, who was ridiculed as "Queen Maggie" by one old-aged pensioner. This kind of bitter hatred for the Tories pervaded the whole mood of the demonstration. And the Labour Party which lead the march hi-jacked this anger for its own deceitful purposes.

CALLAGHAN DROWNED WITH HECKLING

As is usual with workers' demonstrations lead by the Labourites and the revisionist "Communist" Party of Great Britain (C'PGB), the bulk of this march was led to Parliament. The purpose? - to lobby MPs who busily get to work diffusing the workers' anger and militancy with pro-Labour and electioneering speeches. For them, the whole question of opposing Tory cuts is a matter of bringing down the Government and returning Labour. Labour MP Eric Heffer told reporters that the demonstration was magnificent and "should be the beginning of a gigantic campaign to bring down the Government." Only to return Labour of course.

However, at a meeting in Central Hall, Westminster, after the demonstration, Callaghan faced a barrage of booing and heckling. Showing

how much Callaghan's brand of treachery to the working class has become exposed, the booing drowned the cheers as he took his seat on the platform. But this does not mean that social democracy is not capable of winning another breath and convincing enough workers for Labour to win another election. This is where Benn comes in. He won applause when he rose to his feet to speak. And fine words he spoke, describing the demonstration as a protest against "...the power of those who have over a long period of years dominated British politics - landowners, bankers, industrialists and the mass media, which tries to confuse and divide us..."

But what of the confusion spread by such as Benn who use ringing phrases to hide facts. Facts such as those published in the December issue of the NUPE journal *Public Service*. Here it is revealed that in the last five years, local government spending has been cut by 14%. Two thirds of this results from cuts carried out by Labour.

Benn is no friend of the working class. He has given up a title connecting him with an old dying aristocracy. Now his sights are on a title which has more power in the modern world. He has decided to use the talisman of "socialism" to gain this power and prestige for himself. But for Benn, socialism is the strengthening of the power of the bourgeois state and more or total state intervention in the capitalist economy. This is not socialism. It is the strengthening of the bourgeois state and the domination of state monopoly capitalism. If this is "socialism" it is the brand practiced by "national socialists", Hitler and Mussolini and in the modern world, Brezhnev.

It was left to a heckler to remind treacherous hypocrits and opportunists that a party of the working class does not operate racist immigration laws. Nor does it maintain an imperialist army of occupation in northern Ireland or shift the burden of the capitalist crisis onto the working class. ■

types of deprivation discovered pointed to the government's standards being too low, especially for families with children. Relatively, 14 million people could be said to be living in poverty.

Today, the situation must be worse and despite gutter press propaganda to the contrary, the Supplementary Benefits Commission was forced to admit recently that benefits are "too low to escape poverty".

Peter Townsend's book reveals concrete examples of poverty among the old, unemployed and one-parent families over ten years ago. It has taken this long for his findings to be printed. Do we have to wait another decade or more before such facts of the now greater burden of capitalism for the masses are known?

Down with anti-union and anti-worker laws

The Government has published its completely mis-named "Employment Bill". If the Government thinks that by giving the Bill a neutral title, its aims can be obscured they are kidding themselves. The aims of the Bill are well known:

- *Effective picketing attacked with a ban on so-called secondary picketing.
- *State funds for the imposing of secret ballots.
- *State interference in closed shop agreements.
- *Powers to a state supremo (Employment Secretary) to decide how the workers should conduct their struggle, and organisation through the publication of a "code of conduct" on picketing and the closed shop.
- *Protection of scab labour in the name of opposing so-called union bullying.

For the smug Tory leaders the issue is one of "fairness" and "reason". Listen to the words of Employment Secretary Prior: "The Bill will help to prevent extreme behaviour which goes beyond all reason, including a repetition of those picketing excesses that so distressed the nation last winter!"

Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. And while Prior tries to lull us all to sleep with such soothing innocuous words, the reality of the new laws is expressed by police chiefs. Manchester Chief Constable Anderton declared a few days before the Bill was published, "Picketing is a highly organised phenomenon, a force to reckoned with". It is a "powerful political weapon which can be used with greater vigour as time goes on unless proper measures are taken to control it," he said. The man who gave National Front fascist Martin Webster the privilege of a police escort of 7,000 through Manchester said picketing "is a privilege not a right".

Picketing and other trade union rights have never been "privileges". They were won through bitter struggle by the working class. Equally these rights have had to be defended through struggle against repeated attacks by Labour and Tory Governments. "In Place of Strife" came out of the late 60's Wilson Government and had to be dropped because of trade union opposition. "The Industrial Relations Act" sparked off mass struggle culminating in a demonstration through London of a quarter of a million. And now the Employment Act which must be fought again through mass struggle.

DOWN WITH ANTI-UNION LAWS!

■ COMMANDER JOHN CASS, THE HEAD OF SCOTLAND Yard's Complaints Investigation Bureau has re-opened the enquiry into the death of Blair Peach. This follows information being supplied to the Southall Rights Centre by a person wishing to remain anonymous. The person has named two SPG officers who have since resigned from the Metropolitan Police Force.

■ IN A RECENT EDITION OF THE *SUNDAY TIMES*, IT WAS revealed that during the past 16 months a team of provincial police officers have been investigating a series of allegations made against detectives of the Metropolitan and City of London police forces. They range from bribery and corruption to robbery and even murder. It is the largest investigation of its kind ever mounted in Britain. The allegations of murder have no connections with the events surrounding the death of Blair Peach, nor with the recent spate of deaths of people who died "mysteriously" whilst being arrested - but stem from the payroll robbery at the *Daily Mirror* on May 31st last year when a security guard was shot and killed. More than 100 officers are under suspicion.

■ IN TIMES OF CAPITALIST CRISIS WHAT IS LEAST important to the state is the health of the working class. For example, at the Prince of Wales Hospital, Tottenham, a whole ward has been closed down because, according to a Haringey Health District spokesman, "£80,000 had to be saved in nurses' salaries by next April". The closure of the accident and casualty department was done in semi-secret and with no prior notice given to either the nurses or the staff of the hospital - all of whom refused to co-operate with the closure.

■ THE *DAILY TELEGRAPH* DISCLOSED RECENTLY THAT 13 brand leaders, among the most widely prescribed drugs, accounted for at least £60 million of last year's NHS drugs bill. Three of these are the tranquillisers Valium and Librium and the sleeping tablet Mogadon widely prescribed to women complaining of depression. But this is not all. Not only do such drugs take up a relatively large portion of the NHS drugs bill but they are supplied at inflated prices paid to the drug companies. At least £25 million of the £60 million was "excess cost" compared with unbranded names. All the above three are products of the giant monopoly Roche which was supposedly ordered by the Government in 1973 to cut the prices of these drugs. Two other "anti-depressants", Tofranil and Tryptizol were ten times and twice the price of their unbranded equivalents. From this it is clear that while hospital facilities are axed, the super-profits of such respectable dope pedlars are protected.

■ OVER 300 PEOPLE TOOK PART IN A MARCH AGAINST racism in Halifax on 24th November. The main theme was against the Government's immigration policy and for the disbanding of the SPG (Special Patrol Group).

Over 50 children from the Halifax Central Mosque also took part, calling for opposition to the proposed deportation of their Chief Imam (religious leader). At the meeting after the march one speaker explained how the Government was trying to blame the immigrants for all the present troubles in the economy.

"Not many years ago they welcomed immigrants as cheap labour to work in hospitals, factories and on public transport. But now we have helped to improve the country's standard of living the Government is saying it does not want us any more. We have contributed to the prosperity of this country and now we are asking for our rightful share of it" he concluded.

JOSEPH STALIN: GREAT REVOLUTIONARY

Joseph Stalin was born 100 years ago on December 21st, 1879. Today, his very name conjures up an immediate response of respect, of love of hatred or of confusion. Why do communists hold up his name as a great communist? In this article we have the space only to give an outline of some aspects of life, but the basis of our respect will be made clear.

Stalin was born in the Georgian town of Gori. His parents were very poor. In 1894, he entered the Theological Seminary at Tiflis, the capital of Transcaucasia.

At this time socialist and marxist ideas were developing rapidly among workers living under the jackboot of the Tsarist Empire.

In the seminary, Stalin was punished many times for "subversive" activities from reading Darwin, Marx and Shakespeare to making contact with the workers' movement and helping in the Tiflis railway strike. In 1899, he was expelled as "politically unreliable" and from then on devoted himself entirely to the revolutionary movement.

Local socialists thought that because of intense police repression and surveillance it was impossible to organise on a mass scale. Stalin disagreed. Influenced by Lenin's paper *Iskra*, he urged the need for an illegal local paper and mass agitation. In Batum, under his leadership, most workers were organised by 1902. In 1903 he was arrested and a printing press discovered in his bedroom. In January, 1904, he escaped. By 1917, he had been arrested 6 times and escaped 5 times, being released by the February 1917 revolution from his last imprisonment.

"THIS WONDERFUL GEORGIAN": LENIN 1905

Stalin was widely respected for his leadership and courage and attended a number of Party congresses as a delegate. In 1912 he was elected to the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party and placed in charge of its important Russian Bureau. He ran the new daily communist paper *Pravda*. Stalin worked underground inside Russia more than any other Bolshevik leader.

In 1917, the February revolution released him from his final imprisonment. At this vital moment many prominent communists, including Lenin, were still abroad or making their way back from exile. It fell to Stalin to rally the Central Committee and the Party. In April, Lenin made a triumphant return. In July, the Menshevik Government clamped down on the communists. In the Autumn, with the mass of the workers rallying to the communists, Stalin was appointed to direct the uprising. Leading party members, Kamenev and Zinoviev, betrayed the date of the revolution and government troops were sent to occupy the party press and headquarters. They were dispersed by Red Guards and revolutionary soldiers acting under Stalin's command. At midday, the party paper came out with the lead article by Stalin called "What do we need?" It called on the masses to overthrow the government and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat - the rule of the working class. The next day, the Second Congress of Soviets (Worker Councils) took power.

DEFEATING THE COUNTER-REVOLUTION

In 1918, a bloody counter-revolution was unleashed. 14 countries, including Britain, America and Japan invaded. The land of the Soviets was in danger.

The invasion cut off many food supplies for the cities. As starvation increased, Stalin was sent south to restore the railway link and obtain grain.

He arrived at Tsaritsyn in June 1918 with a detachment of workers to find a disastrous situation. The Red forces were in disarray; the town surrounded and infiltrated by White forces. Stalin moved decisively. He went over the head of the furious Trotsky, who had joined the party in 1917, and took command of the party and army and led a successful defence. A few years later the citizens elected to rename their town Stalingrad.

At the end of the year, Stalin was appointed to take command of the Eastern Front which was of the verge of collapse. Again he took over from the incompetent Trotsky. Within months, Kolhach's whiteguards were retreating from the Red Army.

"At the moment of grave danger when surrounded on all sides by a solid ring of enemies...J V Stalin succeeded by his energy and tireless work in rallying the Red Army troops who had wavered. Himself present in the front line and under fire, Stalin by his personal example inspired the ranks of those fighting for the socialist revolution." So read the first Order of the Red Banner awarded to Stalin.

DEFENDING LENINISM

Lenin had been badly wounded in 1918, and never fully recovered. Stalin increasingly was given the tasks of leadership. He was appointed General Secretary of the Central Committee and played the prime part in drafting the Constitution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which was founded in 1922.

In 1924, the great Lenin passed away. The gigantic task of overcoming the devastation of war had barely begun. The anti-Leninist opposition within the party had been sniping at the party's correct line for years. Stalin led the fight to defend Leninism - writing for example, *The Foundations of Leninism*. The opposition fluctuated from ultra-left to right, grouping itself mainly around Trotsky, who formed alliances with Kamenev and Zinoviev. It had one common feature however - lack of confidence in the revolution and the people.

Against the opposition, Stalin argued that even though there had been no world revolution it was still possible and indeed an essential internationalist duty to build socialism in the USSR by relying on the enthusiasm of the workers and peasants, and their ability.

Of course, Stalin's proposals and general line were overwhelmingly endorsed by the party and the Communist International. The defeat of Trotskyism paved the way for what became known as the "Russian Miracle".

By 1933, socialist production was dominant. Great new industrial complexes existed everywhere. Culture, education and the most advanced medical system anywhere replaced poverty, ignorance and oppression. The exploitation of man by man had been eliminated.

By 1945, Stalin was known throughout the world both as a great socialist leader and as the leader of the country which had taken the main road in smashing the military machine of fascist Germany.

Today, the USSR is no longer socialist. Revisionists have revised the revolutionary essence out of marxism. A new state monopoly capitalist class rules.

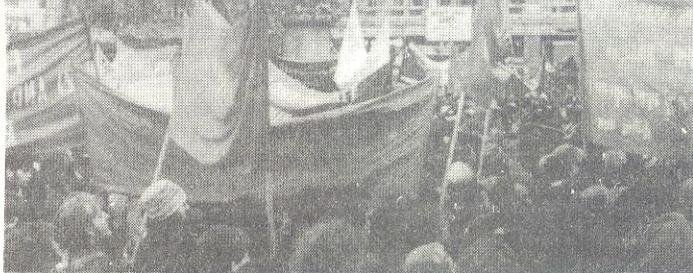
This counter-revolution did not come out of a vacuum. Some serious errors were made under Stalin's leadership, which will have to be summed up properly and learnt from. One example, was that in dealing with counter-revolutionary forces in the

Y AND MARXIST

thirties, people who had just make mistakes were also punished rather than educated. As Stalin himself said, "It cannot be said that the purge was not accompanied by grave mistakes."

But unlike the capitalists and the Trotskyites and revisionists who want to smear socialism, workers should look at errors in the context of the whole contribution. There can be no doubt that Stalin was a great revolutionary who played a heroic and leading role in the revolution, led the defence of Leninism and the construction and defence of socialism in the USSR - the first and only socialist country up to 1945 - and helped to build a country which really was a bastion of revolution and a beacon for workers throughout the world.

The mass demonstration against the Tories immigration and nationality proposals was estimated as 20,000 by the organisers. This may well have been an underestimate. But as part of the struggle against racist laws, and deportation and for basic rights of national minorities it was an overwhelming success. Enough of a success to help



cause splits among the Tories when the new Bill came up in Parliament. Their consciences seem to have been pricked over the rights of women to bring foreign husbands into Britain. These splits among the MPs are a good thing and result from the mass struggle of national minorities against the racist state and its vicious laws.

FORD WORKERS SETTLE

The 56,000 Ford production workers in Britain settled their pay claim last month in what must be a record time. The deal, which is over 21% was agreed by the union negotiators only one week after the first offer. Most production workers will get a £15 increase on their basic rate, making it now £89.52. The supplementary payment, which still has the various penalty clauses tagged to it, is increased from £3.48 to £5.

Very few workers were dissatisfied with the money, as such, but many were disappointed that no progress was made with any other items of the union claim, in particular a reduction in working time. At Halewood, for instance, this is considered a big issue, as shown by the fact that about one-fifth of the workers voted against the deal. During next

summer a new model will be launched from Halewood, to replace the Escort, and already in the Body Plant robots and multiwelds litter the factory floor, in the process of being installed. The jobs that will be lost will be in the hundreds. While in the transmission plant next door, because of the introduction of new technology there have been no new workers taken on for 12 months, and the jobs lost through natural wastage total around 10%.

Fords' agreement to set up a joint committee to look into a reduction of hours for next year's deal, means nothing. It contains no commitment at all. They've made it quite clear that the benefits of new technology will go to the bosses and not to the workers. They want more cars from less workers. ■

LEYLAND: ROBINSON SACKING UNJUST

The sacking of Derek Robinson, Convenor at the British Leyland (BL), Longbridge plant, is a blatant attack on basic trade union and workers' rights. Few would disagree with that. But what was the reaction of Robinson's own union the AUEW? When tens of thousands of BL workers went on strike after the sacking, with the T&GWU having called an all-out official strike, the AUEW told their members to go back to work while a special committee sits to hold an inquiry into the incident.

The BL bosses are claiming this as a victory. "Sir Michael (Edwardes) has stood firm," said one BL boss. "He has averted a massive strike without giving an inch!"

During October, the bosses at BL held a ballot to get a "yes" or "no" vote for Sir Michael Edwardes' plan to "save" BL. In the last year or so 18,000 jobs have been cut. Under the threat of total closure if a "no" vote was returned, two-thirds of BL's workers voted in favour of Edwardes' rationalisation and modernisation plan which will axe a further 25,000 jobs. This was despite the advice of the unions to reject the plan, and showed how the workers had been intimidated by the threats of total shutdown.

It is in this situation that Robinson was sacked for putting his signature to a document calling for action against the Edwardes plan. BL claim that because a "yes" vote was returned by their ballot,

this prevents anyone from speaking out against it or calling for opposition to it. So for exercising his basic democratic right of free speech, Robinson has been sacked! If BL get away with this it could have very dangerous repercussions for all other trade unionists in this country.

From the beginning, BL, and the bosses' media, have posed the sacking in the context of the "yes" for Edwardes' plan, implying that if you supported the plan you support the sacking. Nothing could be further from the truth. The numbers of workers who quite spontaneously walked out when they heard of the decision shows that it is not one issue, though they maybe connected. Workers may have been intimidated into accepting the plan, but they're not going to sit back while BL victimise individuals for totally unjust reasons.

Robinson, as a shop floor leader, does not normally enjoy total support from the workers at Longbridge, or in BL generally. Take for example the abortive toolmakers dispute last year. He is a member of the phoney "Communist" Party of Great Britain. But even opportunists like Robinson must be supported over issues like this; even BL workers with doubts about him have showed that they understand the main issue.

The unions now must be made to fight to the end to get Robinson reinstated. ■

VISITOR TO CHINA GIVES PERSONAL VIEW

At the beginning of the year, a visit of workers to China was organised by the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding. Below we print some comments made to Class Struggle during a conversation with a woman worker who went on that tour.

WOMEN

In the big factories we saw that women are just as skilled as men and are working on most jobs. And the big factories have kindergartens where the children of the workers are looked after. Mothers can go and see their children in the mornings and at lunchtime. If a kiddie is sick, the mother is sent for. So women are able to work. We met one woman who was a widow with two children - she was able to go on working instead of being in difficulty as she would be here. It was good to see women working like they did here in the 39-45 war.

THE FACTORIES

The atmosphere in the factories is marvellous. If there is a problem with a machine they will stop and discuss it. They are concerned about people's lives. You cannot imagine the same thing happening here. When we went into factories, as soon as word got round that we were there, workers would come over and talk with us and ask us questions. They were very friendly.



A commune's chemical fertilizer plant

The trade unions are very good. Their job is to see to the workers' well-being and to see that the factories are run right. They make sure that accidents are reported. We visited a railworkers' convalescent home. They had their own hospital and operating theatre. These facilities can be used by workers from other factories for a small fee. If a man is laid up for some time and he is a distance away from home, his family's rail-fare will be paid so they can visit him. They always try to make sure that the family is not broken up. They have some good ideas - we saw them giving fencing lessons & therapy.

MODERNISATION AND CRITICISM AND SELF-CRITICISM

They were sincerely interested in suggestions we had to make. For example, a silk factory in Canton, the spinners have to have a trough of cold water to keep their hands wet. But the water goes on the floor and makes it cold and slippery. We suggested they should have duckboards and showed them what we meant. Another machine there had needles sticking out of it without any guards. It was dangerous and keeping your hand out of it was a dangerous job. We said that it ought to have a guard. They thanked us

for our criticisms genuinely - it was not like a PR job. In Britain you've got to fight tooth and nail for any improvement.

We also had a talk about bonuses. In a big dynamo factory we talked with the toolmakers. There was a big board up in the factory showing who had worked hardest and got the biggest bonus. In our group there were some toolmakers from Manchester and Sheffield and we disagreed with the bonuses. We said that in our society bonuses are a capitalist trick to divide the workers. Good workers should be respected but it should not be like a race. They listened to us and said they would bear what we had said in mind.

GANG OF FOUR

We came across examples of the work of the Gang of Four. People in factories and communes had their work affected. How was this? Well, there are not just four of them so to speak. They spread a set of ideas that lots of people swallowed. They had a sort of super-pure line. For example, on the one hand they said that workers in the factories were worked too hard and should get more time off. But at one place where we saw a new skating rink we were told that Gang of Four supporters had held up its building because it was decadent! So they would want people to get time off, but not to enjoy themselves.

Their method was to get at young people in charge at a local level. Old comrades were not so affected - they did not try to get on with them. Some of the young people we spoke to said that the Gang of Four had a lot of influence on the 20-27 age group - people who were in their teens when the Cultural Revolution was on. At one agricultural commune outside Shanghai there was a lot of trouble. The women there retire at 50. After the Gang of Four were thrown out a lot of them wanted to go back to work to get things straight again.

HOMES AND LIVING CONDITIONS

We went into some homes. They were not elaborate but they were well-kept and very clean. In the places we went into, the families living in them paid no rent and only a little bit for water and electricity. This was on a commune. In the cities the people pay rent, but it is progressively reduced and then

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LONDON DISCUSSION MEETING

THE FIGHT AGAINST BRITISH IMPERIALISM

January 11th...BRITISH IMPERIALISM, THE SUPERPOWERS
& THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

Time: 7.30pm

Place: THE ROEBUCK PUB, TOTTENHAM COURT RD. LONDON, W1
Organised by the Revolutionary Communist League of
Britain c/o New Era Books, 203 Seven Sisters Rd, N4



Retired timbermen, down-trodden in old China, live a happy life at a home for the aged.

abolished once a building is paid for. Old people pay no rent. One family I remember with a father, mother, daughter and son-in-law and two other children, - three wage earners - earned £32 per week. Well, they pay no rent and food is very cheap in the markets. They have big Friendly Stores in the cities, but otherwise it is mostly markets and shops. Prices are fixed, and if shopkeepers go over certain prices, they get pulled up. In the house I just spoke of they had a record player and a radio.

Old people get very well looked after. You still see some old women who are bowed over because in the old society they had to drag stones with chains tied to them. We met an old couple like that living in a bungalow. They said they sometimes get fed up because of all the fuss that is made of them nowadays!

Young people were friendly. They said that in the past among young people there had been an unfriendly attitude to foreigners. This suspicion was spread by the Gang of Four. One member of our tour who had been before said this was a big change - now you talk to anyone and they are pleased to talk to you. They said that if the Gang of Four had got their way the young would have had no pleasure. We said they should watch out about TV getting widespread as it destroys unity. They agreed with that.

GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

In the countryside they took us to some Buddhist temples. In one they were burning incense. We asked if people still believe and we were told that in the more out of the way places, old things die hard. It was handed down and I did not expect to see it.

They have had a revolution. Now they want to feed the people, give them their rights and a share of the fruits of their labour. Before they worked and lived in terrible poverty. At school in Britain we were taught a pack of lies about history including China. The imperialists, including the British, were robbing them night and day. They had workers shot when they did not work hard enough. It was the British who introduced opium into Hong Kong. Things were so terrible that women had to sell their children. China's got a lot to be proud of - healthy children, clean streets and healthy and friendly people. ■

PATRIOTIC FRONT DEMANDS THIRD WORLD TROOPS

At the time of writing, the Lancaster House Constitutional Conference on Zimbabwe is deadlocked yet again.

The disputes between the Patriotic Front and the Carrington-Smith-Muzorewa alliance remains the same as always. They centre around the correct demand of the Patriotic Front for an outside peace-keeping force so that the racist forces are not the official forces at the disposal of the British-appointed Governor; around the composition of the outside forces and around the demand for equal treatment of the Patriotic Front forces and the racist troops.

Although the PF agreed to the ceasefire proposals in general, these issues were left to be settled during detailed discussion on implementing the ceasefire. This follows a similar situation when they were left over from the discussions on the transitional period itself to be discussed during the ceasefire talks. So the issues at the centre of the Conference have not been settled, but have been put off till now. This is a result of Lord Carrington's constant "take it or leave it" approach to the PF at every stage of the negotiations. As ex-Chairman of Rio Tinto Zinc, one of the biggest imperialist concerns in southern Africa, and as a representative of British imperialists in general, Carrington's partiality is hardly surprising.

PF DEMANDS LARGER FORCE INCLUDING THIRD WORLD

The Patriotic Front objects to the British proposal for a 1,200 strong peacekeeping force. Firstly, Carrington wants 600 of the force to be British, and the rest to come mainly from Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The PF wants a strong contingent of third world troops. It also demands a bigger force, and points out that such a small force could not be effective in a peacekeeping role. Inevitably, the racist troops and police would therefore be used as official forces.

The PF also refuses the British demand to gather the guerrillas at 15 assembly points, unless the Rhodesian troops are also confined to barracks and the airforce grounded. Carrington has not yet accepted these conditions. Without them he is in effect demanding the surrender of the Patriotic Front.

Carrington has also avoided discussing directly the removal of several hundred South African troops from Zimbabwe.

The Patriotic Front has made it clear that it is willing to discuss a ceasefire - it has also made it clear that a ceasefire does not mean surrender. If Carrington will not negotiate a just settlement the war will go on.

SOAMES AND ACLAND APPOINTED

Clearly the British imperialists cannot be trusted. They claim to be a neutral force, but they have their own interests. They have been forced to negotiate by the success of the liberation war. This is good. But the PF will be well aware of the dangers even if negotiations are concluded satisfactorily. The appointments of Lord Soames (Tory cabinet member - ex-Etonian - Sandhurst-trained - and son-in-law of Winston Churchill) and Major General Acland - whose main experience is mainly in fighting national liberation movements in Malaya, Kenya, Aden and Ireland, as Governor and military "advisor" show just how "neutral" British imperialism is. The Labour Party showed that when it comes to imperialism they are heartily united with the Tories by warmly welcoming the appointments.

WORLD KAMPUCHEA CONFERENCE A GREAT SUCCESS

The two day International Conference of Solidarity with Kampuchea held on November 17th-18th ended with a commitment to build a powerful world-wide movement which "will not rest until the last Vietnamese soldier is removed from Kampuchea and the independence of the Kampuchean people and nation is once again secured".

The Conference was attended by some 250 delegates and observers from 35 countries, and presided over by Ms Marita Wikander, Chairman of the Swedish-Kampuchean Friendship Association. Mr Jan Myrdal, the outstanding Swedish writer who had toured the Kampuchean guerrilla base areas a few months ago, made an extremely important speech. (See Report in the last issue of *Class Struggle*.)

The highlight of the Conference was the statement by Madame Ieng Thirith, Minister of Social Affairs of the Democratic Kampuchean Government. Madame Thirith described the plight of her people in moving terms and called for a halt to Vietnam's genocidal war of aggression against Kampuchea.

She traced the historical background to the war, laying particular emphasis on Vietnam's unholy alliance with Russia.

"History and events show that the root cause of Vietnamese aggression against Kampuchea is the policy of expansion, domination and blocks of the Hanoi authorities... An independent Kampuchea refusing to align herself with the block of the so-called 'natural allies of the non-aligned countries' represents a major obstacle to the strategic aims of the Hanoi authorities". She described these aims as "regional expansionism and world expansionism, which seek both dominance in south-east Asia and control of the strategic maritime waterways, particularly the Straits of Malacca, which link Asia with Europe and Africa".

Referring to the present situation in her country Madame Thirith said, "The Le Duan clique has failed completely in its attempts to establish a puppet army. 220,000 Vietnamese soldiers are forced to continue fighting on Kampuchean battlefields". She added, "as for the puppet regime in Phnom Penh, imported lock stock and barrel from Vietnam, it has no roots in our society and is but the shadowy reflection cast by 220,000 soldiers of occupation". She noted, "more than ten months have already passed since the Vietnamese invasion, but the People's War of National Resistance, far from being extinguished, intensifies daily. The Revolutionary Army of Kampuchea, reorganised into a large number of guerrilla units, attacks the Vietnamese occupiers throughout the country".

Condemning the brutal atrocities perpetrated against the people she said, "The Vietnamese aggressors are now using chemical weapons such as toxic gas and toxic chemicals spread by aeroplanes over the areas their infantry cannot reach in order to exterminate the Kampuchean people".

On the solution to the war, she said, "The Government of Democratic Kampuchea calls on all countries, governments, political and mass organisations and all personages who cherish peace, justice and independence the world over, to pool their efforts in order: first, to exert adequate economic and diplomatic measures to compel Vietnam to withdraw immediately, totally and unconditionally its troops of aggression and its people's settlements from Kampuchea. Second, to let the Kampuchean people use their sovereign right to decide by themselves their own destiny free from

foreign interference. The internal problem of Kampuchea will then be solved in accordance with the Political Programme of the Patriotic and Democratic Front of Great National Union of Kampuchea, which means that the social and political regime of Kampuchea will be decided by the people of Kampuchea themselves through general and free elections, by direct and secret ballot, elections to be supervised by the United Nation's Secretary General; third, to send their humanitarian aids directly to the Government of Democratic Kampuchea and not to the Vietnamese aggressors through their puppets in Phnom Penh". Madame Ieng Thirith stressed, "that is the one and only solution to the problem of war in Kampuchea."

Dr Pierre Forcier, a Quebec Government Official and geographer gave a detailed historical analysis of the Vietnam-Kampuchea border question.

Representatives of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania reaffirmed their determination to fight shoulder to shoulder with the Kampuchean people against imperialism and social imperialism. PAC had sent thirty of its members to train in Kampuchea after the 1976 Soweto uprising. They were trapped by the Vietnamese invasion and had spent eight months with the guerrillas fighting their way out of encirclement by the aggressors.

George Hildebrand, the American scholar on south east Asia made a spirited and detailed speech which tore to threads the lies about the Kampuchean-Vietnam war that emanate from the Russian lie machine. He pointed out that Laos and Mongolia, one occupied by Vietnam and the other by Russia are the only Asian countries to openly support the Vietnamese invasion. T. Dastidar, of the Bangladesh Gano Front spoke with great authority on the unity of the Asian peoples in the struggle against imperialism and in support of Kampuchea. Samuel Noumoff of McGill University, Canada examined Soviet aid to Vietnamese expansionism. And the distinguished professor Tokumatsu Sakamoto described the large scale Kampuchean solidarity campaign in Japan. In addition to adopting a general resolution of support for the Kampuchean people, the conference adopted a specific resolution on humanitarian aid, calling for international efforts to particularly aid the Red Cross of Democratic Kampuchea. In Bangkok, Thailand, an office has been set up by the Red Cross and it is now possible to send money directly for this purpose. The conference stressed that this type of aid could be assured of really reaching the Kampuchean people unlike much of the aid that is being delivered to the Phnom Penh puppet authorities who are then diverting it to feed the Vietnamese troops.

The Conference ended on a high point of unity, agreeing to appoint Jan Myrdal, Japanese Professor Sakamoto; Count Petersen; Indian lawyer Gobinda Mukhoty; Marita Wikander of the Swedish Organising Committee of the Conference, and Dan Burstein of the USA - all of whom were co-Chairmen of the conference - as an interim international secretariat to ensure the publication of the conference documents and the implementation of its decisions.

A great many statements of support for the conference were received ranging from Vasco da Gama Fernandes, the former Portuguese Vice-President, British Young Conservatives and folksinger Joan Baez, to Khieu Samphan, President of Democratic Kampuchea and the Chinese Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.