In the summer of 1989, the RCL held its Fourth Congress. The main questioner or discussion was relating to women’s liberation and the struggle for socialism. The RCL also resolved some long-standing questions about the relationship between class and national struggle within England and the need to build a multinational 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 was 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 life in China and the effects of the country’s ‘door’ policy within China.

We also need to study the situation in the Third World and Eastern Europe. As Class Struggle goes to press, we are seeing a ‘Solidarity’ government born to take power in Poland. The events in that country are just one aspect of important questions that are taking place in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which it is important that we look at in some detail.

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

The twentieth century has seen the tide of history turned back after four centuries of colonial expansion, robbery and exploitation. It is a result of all the setbacks, zigzags and problems faced by particular movements at particular times; this is still the main trend in the world. We have seen new phases in different liberation struggles around the world: Ethiopia and Tigray, Palestine, Occupied Territories, 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 worldwide 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 Marxist-Leninism in the world 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 consistent way, with a good style of work.

Having resolved these major differences over line and removed our commitment to work together to develop a detailed policy, we are revising our practical experience as well as studying theoretically, we think that the Fourth Congress must be able to define a point for us.

The next few issues of Class Struggle, will carry more women and nationalism content, and decisions made at the Congress.

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 there was a real turning point in the League’s struggle for women’s oppression and their path to liberation. Discussions and decisions on the major issue where progress has been made in the last five years.

1. All women are oppressed under imperialism, in different ways. Working class women suffer class exploitation and oppression; women of national minority and Third World women suffer gender oppression. Women of all stripes suffer from imperialist oppression, as well as from national minority and Third World oppression. Women are oppressed by means of their role in the family, domestic work, and discrimination in employment, violence, and ideological and social attitudes. Women in different classes, ages, and ethnic backgrounds are affected in different ways.

2. The women’s movement has been generally progressive. It is a spontaneous movement (i.e. no Marxist-Leninist) and the class background of many women who are involved in the movement is not decisive in itself. It does not make it reactionary.

3. In Britain, the main aspect of the nuclear family is the women’s oppression. 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 is a particular time of age, 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 reproduction and maintaining the unpaid labour force. Even in those families where women do take part in paid work, the ideology of a ‘woman’s place is in the home’ is deeply entrenched.

4. 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.

5. We support the right of women to organise separately. Experience in other countries and historically in this country, shows the necessity for distinct organisations to fight their specific oppression.

We need to use the Marxist method of dialectical materialism as a framework for the analytical study of the question of women’s oppression, as on other subjects. We need to apply Marxism to conditions today, and take a political and ideological analysis of capitalism and patriarchy, in the light 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 comments from our readers.