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

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

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

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

The 2nd Congress re-affirmed and deepened the League's strong stand against opportunism. It re-affirmed the League's strategic orientation of building a firm base in the industrial working class and establishing factory cells of the League. The Congress identified people who come to Britain from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean as national minorities, recognised that they are at present in the vanguard of the struggle against the British state, and affirmed that the British revolution will be won by a strategic alliance of the working class and national minorities.

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

Through our decisions, through our work, runs a strong anti-imperialist thread. We have grasped the imperialist character of Britain, and that the whole of British society has been influenced by this. The bourgeoisie and opportunist parties stand for the defence of British imperialism and for attempts to rejuvenate it; the opportunists basically only seek to run the imperialist system in a different way. Revolutionary communists on the contrary must fight for the overthrow of the imperialist system and the establishment of a socialist order in which exploitation is abolished and national and women's oppression can finally be ended. For the working class, oppressed nations and national minorities and women, there is no solution, short, or long term, to their problems within the imperialist system. That system has to be overthrown, and our Congress made some small steps towards working out the policies and means for doing this.

Opportunism and party - building in Britain

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE FIGHT AGAINST OPPORTUISM

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

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

Through struggle, the mass of the working class has been able to obtain much better living standards than exist for the people of the Third World, and this forms a basis for the influence of reformist illusions and opportunism. But the crisis of British imperialism is undermining this; it is a direct threat of opportunism too. The crisis has made it far more difficult to wage struggle on the economic front and is making the working class begin turning towards political action and come into increasing confrontation with the state. This is not only a threat of reformism and of opportunism, which is incapable of offering any way out for the working class; while the advanced elements are standing up to state repression, rejecting corporatism and recognising the imperialist character of the Labour Party, the opportunists cover up for the state, defend corporatism in one form or another, and cuddle up to the Labour Party. The present situation confronts us with a lot of problems in common with other working people, but it also presents communists with new opportunities to expand the influence of revolutionary politics.

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

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

THE FIGHT AGAINST THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

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

WHERE DO WE DO OUR POLITICAL WORK

Capitalist large scale industry has concentrated workers together for the purpose of exploiting them. It is essential for the League to hold to its orientation of building a firm base in industry, among the industrial working class.

This Congress will give opportunity in Britain a strong base, with long-term stability. This was why we reaffirmed industrial work as our priority in mass work. An important part of our industrial work is the struggle to turn the trade unions into fighting class organisations - organisations which really stand for working class interests, and break with opportunist adaptation to the imperialist system and class collaboration.

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

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

The exact relationship between work in industry and work in the community still needs to be determined properly, and there are a number of problems we still have to solve, particularly ones connected with how to best use the forces we have. But we have grasped that these areas of work are inter-related and complementary, not optional. Each will help the others forward, and this is already being confirmed in practice, though as yet still in small ways. We will be held to it in all our mass work is that, wherever it takes place, its essence at this stage is communist party-building work.
The 2nd Congress adopted the policy of giving unconditional support to the armed struggle of the Irish people and the people of the world. This marked the successful culmination of a two-line struggle in the League. The Congress of Solidarity with the Irish People held in February of this year, gave the League the necessary impetus to overthrow the old line. The Congress was a summing-up that objectively sharpened the conflict and became a sharp contradiction that the old line was not in existence. The Congress also marked the triumph and the success of the two-line struggle. The Congress was a revolutionary meeting that summarised the experience of the League over the past 3 years and in particular the work of the Central Committee. The latter was summed up and a new Central Committee was elected.

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

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

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

A number of Central Committee members made significant self-criticisms for their past record as leading comrades. A good number were not re-elected to the new Central Committee, and in every case these comrades agreed to work as ordinary rank and file members and to draw lessons from Ireland. This is a further direct contribution to our revolutionary work in Britain from the Irish freedom fighters.

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

As well as these crucial questions of political line, the Congress also considered the internal life of the League over the past 3 years and in particular the work of the Central Committee. The latter was summed up and a new Central Committee was elected.

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The old line dogmatically insisted on "a single party for a single state". This ignored the realities of Ireland, where the revolutionary Republican movement, on a popular basis, has an unbroken tradition of hundreds of years of resistance and deep roots among the oppressed people. It ignored the national demands of the Irish people, who have never accepted the incorporation of their land and part of the workers, it has developed a style of leadership which had stifled necessary debate over burning political questions and held back the development of the League. More recently there had been an struggle against this leadership - mainly from comrades in the rank and file of the organisation but also on the executive committee itself - but the leadership had lapsed into liberalism and failed in its responsibility to give effective leadership to the organisation.

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NATIONAL MINORITIES - A major force for revolution

Most black people in Britain today come from former British colonies in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. They hoped to get a decent living here, but the aim of the British ruling class was to super-exploit them as cheap labour, as lean. They hoped to get a decent living through deportations and state harassment. The Congress recognised that those people who left their own oppressed countries to come to Britain where they have continued to suffer national oppression, are national minorities. They are oppressed in such way, that whether they are workers, intellectuals, or petty bourgeois. Thus, as national minorities, they have a common interest in fighting British imperialism, and constitute an important revolutionary force in their own right. At present, they are on the vanguard of the struggle against the state; in fact, the Congress considered that the advanced elements in Britain are now overwhelmingly located among the national minority, Welsh, Scottish and Irish workers.

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

With the present imperialist crisis the ruling class has gone on the offensive against working people. It is using racism to divide the working class and to attempt to hold down black people. The RCL reaffirmed the necessity of fighting state racism and laid stress on this, in contrast to most of the opportunist organisations, who focus their attention on so-called fascist organisations which actually operate with police protection. Racism is an ideology which originates in the period of the slave trade, but which was only systematised and exploited in a super-exploitation. It is no accident that it is being whipped up in a most vicious way at a time when British imperialism is in a new crisis. Fighting racist ideology is an essential part of communist work in Britain. The 2nd Congress held that the national minorities must have their full democratic rights. Recognition of this by the white working class must be fought for in the factories, industrial and other mass work - otherwise the strategic alliance cannot be realised.

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

THE THREAT OF FASCISM

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

While we must expose the true character of the bourgeois democracy, the 2nd Congress recognised that democratic rights must be defended. A broad movement is needed for this. The opportunists cannot build such a movement because they have no confidence in the working class and so have not put the benefit of the experience of repression in Ireland. Immigration laws, the Prevention of Terrorism Act, restrictions of the right to vote, the arming of the police, etc., all form part of the trend towards fascism.

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

Towards the Future

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

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

Despite the poor leadership given in preparing the Congress, the RCL put a stop to the imperialist and rightist line on opportunity. It had re-affirmed certain key principles of Marxism-Leninism against an attempt to water them down in the name of tactical flexibility. More than this it had for the first time affirmed the central importance of the anti-imperialist line on the Irish struggle. We are now in a position to develop the line on the Irish struggle and make significant inroads into understanding the significance of the struggle of the national minority peoples and its relationship to the struggle for socialism.

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

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

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

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

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

For further details and informaton about the RCL and its policies, please contact: RCL, c/o 203 Seven Sisters Road, London, N4.