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How shall we fight the oppressor?

The British Left & the Anti-Apartheid Movement

With the monthly pressure of trying to present the barest outline of some Southern African struggle, *Big Flame* usually concentrates on reporting rather than engaging in political debate. But, as activists will know, a debate is raging in and around the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM). Here, Greg Dropkin comments on the arguments of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP), the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG), and the AAM Executive.

In the March issue of the SWP's *Socialist Review*, Neil Faulkner attacked the AAM's "Sanctions Now!" campaign on two fronts: that it aims hopelessly at petitioning Thatcher rather than mobilising workers in Britain, and that sanctions would be a disaster for the S. African working class and therefore for the S. African revolution. "The demand for 'disinvestment' and 'isolation' — that the whole process of imperialist capital accumulation in Southern Africa be reversed — is at the same time a demand for the proletarianisation of black workers." He then called for the AAM to redirect its energy into educational work aimed at the rank and file in multinational companies "building up local shopfloor contacts, arranging meetings with TU branches, ensuring regular leafletting at the factory gates, organising AA collections, encouraging the formation of direct links with black trade unionists in S. Africa..."

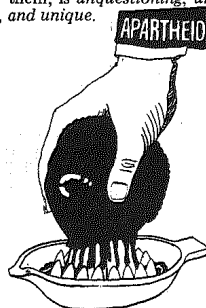
But Neil's second argument, against sanctions themselves, is crap. He effectively tells black S. African workers that they are not yet ready to make the revolution — they need to develop, under the guidance of British imperialism, into a fully organised proletariat. What arrogance! Black S. Africans are, despite the SWP, calling for sanctions against their employers and the Apartheid State. The sacked Wilson Rowntree workers (see Feb. BF) are screaming for a boycott of their company. The leader of the trade union representing BL workers sacked last summer (see July '81 BF) told the company to negotiate or get out of S. Africa. Workers at the Rosing uranium mine have repeatedly demanded that Britain cancel its contracts, despite James Callaghan's belief that they were good for the Namibian people.

EFFECT OF SANCTIONS

Suppose, by some miracle, sanctions were actually applied. Would it "break up the black industrial working class" as Neil claims? If BL workers in Britain last summer had boycotted all S. African trade or begun a solidarity strike, the company would have made a faster, better offer of reinstatement. If a mass movement in Britain pushed Leyland into withdrawing capital from S. Africa, the SA government would probably finance a takeover. If a whole range of companies ceased to be subsidiaries of multinationals and if bank loans to S. Africa dried up, the burden of repressing black workers would fall entirely on the S. African ruling class. Without the complex networks of international capitalist support for apartheid, the waves of black struggle would be enough to smash the system. Neil believes that sanctions mean unemployment for black workers. Their current rate of unemployment is 25%. I see sanctions as a step towards the only possible guarantee of full employment — a socialist revolution.

WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT?

The RCG, in the March issue of "Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism!", makes some of these points against Neil's article, while ignoring its better side. But in their usual tirade against the SWP and other "middle-class socialists", the RCG makes a different kind of error. To them, the main issue is to support the African National Congress (ANC), because the ANC is fighting British imperialism. But support, for them, is unquestioning, uncritical, and unique.



In general, *Big Flame* rejects this version of solidarity. We believe that it is our right and responsibility to find ways to support and learn from national liberation movements while continuing a debate with them on issues of women's liberation, popular power...

The ANC is carrying out an armed struggle against the S. African State, which is a vital part of the coming revolution and which demands our support. But there is more to the story. To take one example:

One front of the independent trade union movement, created since 1973, is FOSATU — the Federation of S. African Trade Unions. While some FOSATU officials have a limited, economic view of the role of trade unions, it's clear that FOSATU unions are fighting and winning recognition struggles in

many companies including UK-based multinationals. A FOSATU union organises at Leyland SA.

SACTU

Sadly, the ANC proclaim that the trade union struggle is being led by SACTU — the S. African Congress of Trade Unions (part of the ANC). This was true in the 1950s. It cannot be true today. SACTU is a banned organisation but the independent trade unions are legal. It would in fact be extremely dangerous for any union to align itself openly with SACTU. The coming series of mass trials of trade unionists will be aimed at proving that union militants are "tools of SACTU and the ANC".

But the ANC — and therefore the Anti-Apartheid Executive — insists that SACTU is the only vehicle for trade union solidarity work. So when the FOSATU union at Leyland makes direct contact with TGWU officials, the AAM Executive has to pretend that SACTU has made the contacts. And when AAM members call for a policy of encouraging direct links factory-to-factory between British workers and black S. African trade unionists, the Exec calls on a SACTU speaker to denounce them. We are told that to advocate visits by rank-and-file delegates at the invitation of independent black trade unions is the same as supporting Bill Sirs and Terry Duffy in their personal plans to tour S. Africa, uninvited by any independent trade union.

The RCG position of uncritical support leaves them no choice but to side with the Executive against the one force — independent working class solidarity — which is actually capable of imposing sanctions against apartheid.



IMPERIALIST ARROGANCE

Neil's first point is correct — the AAM has no clout with Thatcher. Petitioning a Labour Government didn't work either, and in France the "Socialist" government has no plans to cut off trade with S. Africa. I also support Neil's third point — and many of these ideas have been the working practice of activists in Coventry, Manchester, Preston, and more recently York and Leicester. Rank and file solidarity work has been focused on British Leyland, ICL, British Nuclear Fuels Ltd., Rowntree Mackintosh... Strangely enough, few SWP members have played any role in this or other forms of anti-apartheid work over the last 4 years.

While over in Uncle Sam's crumbling backyard... GUATEMALA'S MOTLEY COUP

The Reagan administration's cherished dream to see elections held in Central America so it can be seen to be supporting democratic, rather than dictatorial, friends in power, is crumbling. In Guatemala, just five days before El Salvador's elections, the March 7th election result was annulled in a young officers' military coup.

On election day, the official, military backed candidate ex-Minister of Defence, Anibal Guevara, was joined by three other right wing candidates in the election. These elections had been sponsored by the US as a condition for re-opening military and economic aid channels to Guatemala, closed in 1977 due to the regime's appalling human rights record. The security and para-military forces are estimated to be killing about 100 people a day in their determination to hold onto power and defeat the left-wing guerrillas active throughout the country.

The elections were widely held to be fraudulent as Anibal Guevara was quickly declared the winner and the ballot papers burnt. The other, losing candidates and their parties were surprisingly vocal in their condemnation of the quite usual electoral fraud. The bizarre sight of right wing extremists, some of whom are involved in the death squads, publicly demonstrating and being arrested by their supposed allies shows the extent to which the army has fallen down on the job.

BLOODLESS COUP

Such was the opposition that these parties, usually split by their various allegiances to economic and other interests, united in agreeing to back middle-rank officers in a bloodless coup on March 23rd. The coup leaders — all military men — chose as their front man General Rios Montt. In the 1974 elections,



Rios Montt stood as the Christian Democrat candidate and by all accounts won. But, it was the official military-backed candidate who actually became President. Rios Montt went off to become an Evangelical Christian Minister. It was during a bible class on the 23rd that he was approached by the officers and asked to take part in the government.

Although the fraudulent elections were the apparent motive, the middle rank officers have been in the forefront of the war against the increasingly strong left wing guerrillas. Midway through last year a group of dissident officers complained to a Mexican newspaper of the Generals' failing strategy against the guerrillas, high level corruption and inability to control the economy.

MOTLEY ALLIANCE

It is an odd alliance for a coup in Guatemala; the civilian right has not been so united since 1954 when the CIA helped it stage a coup against the only democratic government ever known in Guatemala. One of the parties involved in the coup — the MLN — was the running mate for the army candidate which deprived Rios Montt of the presidency in 1974.

Rios Montt is himself something of a liberal in the extreme right

wing climate of Guatemalan politics and although the new junta speaks of 'peace and the development of the homeland' there will clearly be no let up in the war against the guerrillas and its accompanying civilian deaths. The new officers do appear to acknowledge a need to restrict the worst excesses of the death squads and to open up channels to the US.

In all a coup of contradictions made up of a motley alliance which is unlikely to maintain a coherence

to bring stability. In this confusion the left wing guerrillas could happily be the winners. Their popular support and military strength has increased enormously over the last years and any contradictions in the ruling clique can only open up more possibilities for them.

For further information, speakers and publications please contact: Guatemala Working Group, c/o LAB, 1 Amwell Street, London N1

Arms

You have a gun
And I am hungry.
You have a gun
because
I am hungry.
You have a gun
Therefore
I am hungry.
You can have a gun
you can have a thousand bullets and even another
thousand
you can waste them all on my poor body,
you can kill me one, two, three, two thousand,
seven thousand times
but in the long run
I will always be better armed than you
if you have a gun
and I
only hunger.

M. J. Arce
Guatemala, 1970