How shall we fight the oppressor?

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 Drophkin comments for the Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP) and the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG), and the AAM Executive.

In the March issue of the SWP’s Socialist Worker, Neil Faithful attacked the AAM’s ‘Sanctions Must Work’ campaign, saying that it aimed 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 absurdity of the SWP’s ‘Sanctions Movement’—that the whole process of imperialism capital accumulation in Southern Africa be resisted—is at one and the same time a demonstration of the dehumanisation of black workers,” he continued. The SWP thus redin its energy into educational work aimed at the rank and file in multi-military forces as ‘hearkening up local shopfloor contacts, ensuring ongoing and sustained pressure, as with the Continuous Action in South Africa, encouraging the formation of direct links between black trade unionists in S. Africa…’

The British Left & the Anti-Apartheid Movement

In his first point is correct — the AAM has had, and has had with Thatcher. Petitioning a Labour Government didn’t work either, and in France the “Solidarity” campaign plans to cut off trade with S. Africa. The ANC is the only viable alternative. It is possible to say that at least one and many of these ideas have been the working practice of activists in Coventry, Manchester, Preston, and more recently in Rochdale Town Hall. Rank and file solidarity work has been focussed on British Leyland, ECL, British Nuclear Fuel Ltd., Rowntree, Mackintosh. Strangely enough, the RCG are involved in G.B. as well, but have not played any role in this or other forms of anti-apartheid work over the last 4 years.

In general, Big Flame rejects this version of solidarity. We believe that it is sails right and responsibility to find ways to support and learn from national liberation movement 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 imperialist world system and which demands our support. But there is more to the story. To take one example:

One of the front line of the trade union movement, created since 1973, is FOSATU — the Federation of S. African Trade Unions. While some FOSATU officials have been accused of economic view of the role of trade unions, it’s clear that FOSATU unions are Fighting and winning economic victories.

Rios Montt stood as the Christian Democrat candidate and by all accounts won. But, as the official military-backed candidate who actually became President, Rios Montt was an anti-communist, a Christian monarchist. It was during his time on the board that he was approached by the officials and asked to take part in the government. Although the fraudulent election, the apparent motive, the middle-ranking left had been on the forefright of the war against the increasingly strong left-wing guerilla. Midway through last year, a group of dissident officers complained to the Guatemalan newspaper of the Generals’ failing strategy against the guerrillas, high level corruption and inefficiency against the economy.

MOLETTY ALLIANCE

It is an odd alliance for a coup in Guatemala: the civilian right has rocked the political establishment and the CIA helped it stage a coup against the only democratic government ever known in Guatemala. One of the parties involved in the coup was the Nationalist Party, which supported the army candidate which deposed Rios Montt on the president’s behalf in 1974.

Rios Montt is himself something of a liberal in the extremes right wing climate of Guatemalan politics and although the new junta speaks of ‘peace’ and the development of the market economy well 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 restructure the war effort, but the depth of much squad 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 coherently to be stabilized. In this confusion the left wing guerrillas could happily be the winners. Their popular support and militancy is highly increased over the last years and any contradictions in the ruling class could open up more possibilities for them.

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