

Newspaper of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain (Marxist-Leninist)

Salute Women Everywhere Taking Up the Challenges Facing Humanity!

- Statement of RCPB(ML), March 8, 2007 -

On International Women's Day 2007, the Revolutionary Communist Party of Britain

(Marxist-Leninist) sends its militant revolutionary greetings to women in England, Scotland and Wales,

and around the world. RCPB(ML) salutes women everywhere who are playing a leading role in the struggle to

take up the urgent challenges facing humanity and for the affirmation of rights,

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IT IS A MATTER OF HUMANITY

Opposing Disinformation on Enslavement and Abolition



Over 100,000 slaves prepared to launch the Haitian Revolution in 1791

This month large-scale commemorative events are planned to mark the bicentenary of the Parliamentary Act to abolish the trans-Atlantic slave trade, an anniversary which falls on

March 25. Indeed, it is difficult to avoid this unprecedented commemoration of a historical event, in which the government itself is playing a leading role. Events include a service in Westminster

Abbey, the issuing of postage stamps, media frenzy, speeches by politicians, meetings and exhibitions throughout the country and the release of a new film *Amazing Grace*, made with the active sup-

port of the government, and promoting the well-established myth that abolition was largely due to the efforts of William Wilberforce, the MP for Hull.

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No One Is Illegal, Defend the Rights of All!

Gordon Brown's Proposals for New Form of Slavery are Unconscionable

GORDON BROWN AT A SEMINAR ON "BRITISHNESS" at the Commonwealth club in London has said that language texts and citizenship ceremonies do not go far enough. He recommended that immigrants carry out community work before receiving full citizenship.

Gordon Brown's speech on February 27 does not just embody proposals which seek to humiliate immigrants and treat them as criminals. It expresses the existing attitude and programme of the state which demands that the

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IT IS A MATTER OF HUMANITY:

Opposing Disinformation on Enslavement and Abolition

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It might be hoped that in the course of these events, and owing to the vast amount of coverage by the government, in the media and through academic institutions and charitable trusts, everyone would be disabused of such views. One might hope that people would be enabled to place both the so-called abolition and the centuries of trafficking of human flesh from Africa into historical perspective. The commemorative events certainly provide the opportunity for broad and in-depth discussion of Britain's history and the crimes against humanity committed over many centuries. But within this, the fact is that a variety of disinformation is being spread, so as to prevent people understanding the magnitude of these crimes and drawing the appropriate lessons from the past.

One of the greatest of the crimes in history was the so-called trans-Atlantic slave trade, in which British ships carried about 3.5 million kidnapped and enslaved Africans across the Atlantic, using the most barbaric methods. In total, this "trade" led to the forced removal of some 15 million Africans, transported to the colonies of the European powers in the Americas. Many millions more were killed in the process of enslavement and transportation, so that historians now estimate that Africa's population actually declined over four centuries or remained stagnant until the early 20th century.

Britain was involved in the trafficking of kidnapped and enslaved Africans from the mid 16th century when this enterprise was pioneered

by John Hawkins and Elizabeth Tudor until the early 1930s when legislation was still being passed outlawing slavery in Britain's African colonies. In the 18th century Britain was the world's leading slave trading power, transporting about half of all enslaved Africans not only to its own colonies but also to those of other major powers such as the Spanish and French. In 1713 the British government, having developed the Bank of England and

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the National Debt for this purpose, was militarily victorious against its rivals in Europe and by the Treaty of Utrecht (the same treaty by which Britain lays claim to Gibraltar) it gained the lucrative contract to supply Spain's American colonies with enslaved Africans. The government promptly sold the contract for £7.3 million to the South Sea company, whose first governor happened to also be the Chancellor. Indeed the trafficking of Africans was the business of the rich and powerful from the outset. The monarchy was a zealous supporter and beneficiary as was

the Church of England.

The "slave trade" was Britain's trade in the 18th century. The British Prime Minister William Pitt declared that 80% of all British trade was generated in this way. It contributed to the development of banking and insurance, shipbuilding and several manufacturing industries. Most of the inhabitants of Manchester were engaged in producing goods to be exchanged for enslaved Africans and their trafficking led to the development of the major ports of London, Bristol and Liverpool. Today it is difficult to find any major stately home or major cultural or financial institution which is not connected with the profits generated by this "trade" and the luxury items associated with it such as sugar, tobacco and coffee.

It might be wondered therefore why an enterprise that was so economically important to the rich and powerful in Britain in the 18th century should be ended in the first decade of the 19th century? The answer to this question requires the shattering of various myths and disinformation peddled from the 19th century to the present. One such myth is that abolition was largely the work of one man – William Wilberforce – and carried out largely for humanitarian reasons. The aim of such disinformation is not only to obscure the truth but also to make it impossible to draw the appropriate lessons from history. In particular, such myths ignore both the role of the masses of the people in Britain and elsewhere in the shaping of history. They also disregard who was represented in Parliament in 1807 and what their interests were.

It is a matter of historical fact

that the struggle to end the enslavement and trafficking of Africans was initiated and pursued primarily by Africans themselves. The facts speak of a two-centuries-long war of resistance in the Caribbean. But this resistance struggle also took place throughout the American continent, wherever enslaved Africans were to be found. There were also significant acts of resistance within Africa and on many ships engaged in the human trafficking, most famously on the *Amistad*. Such acts of resistance also took place in

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Britain, where enslaved Africans who liberated themselves were the subjects of court cases contesting the legality of slavery in the country throughout the 18th century. It was as a result of this self-liberation of Africans that some leading abolitionists, such as Granville Sharp, were drawn into the abolitionist movement in the late 18th century, while the resistance acts of Africans culminated in the famous legal judgment of 1772 which declared illegal the re-enslavement of self-liberated Africans in Britain, to be taken out of the country against their will.

African resistance to enslave-

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IT IS A MATTER OF HUMANITY: Opposing Disinformation on Enslavement and Abolition

ment and kidnapping contributed to growing public support and opposition to slave trafficking in Britain and elsewhere. In Britain, a popular movement in opposition to “the trade” began in the 1780s and soon became a broad mass movement of enormous proportions, possibly the biggest, certainly one of the first, mass political movements in Britain’s history, and one conveniently ignored in most historical accounts. This abolitionist movement coincided with a more general concern with and struggle for the “Rights of Man”, and its more advanced elements consciously promoted the view that the rights of Africans were indeed part of this struggle and that therefore what was required was a struggle for and defence of the rights of all. Africans themselves played a leading role in this movement both as propagandist and activists, the most notable being Olaudah Equiano, formerly enslaved, whose autobiography became a best-seller.

But African resistance in the Caribbean and elsewhere was an even more important factor in the abolitionist struggle, since it had the tendency to make slavery both less profitable and more dangerous for the slave owners. Uprisings by enslaved Africans threatened not just the profits of individual owners but also the control of entire colonies and the fate of Europe’s economies. The most important of these liberation struggles, the revolution in St Domingue, the largest and most prosperous French colony in the Caribbean, broke out in 1791 not long after the revolution in France.

In Britain, the popular mass abolitionist movement coincided with wider demands for political change, at a time when the vast majority were denied the vote. It also coincided with crucial economic changes, the industrial revolution and the emergence of the working class, but at a time when the bourgeoisie was consolidating its economic and political domination. Mass petitioning of Parliament against “the trade”, the only means open to the disenfranchised, was

often strong in manufacturing towns such as Manchester, where perhaps a third of the entire population signed, and was viewed with alarm by the ruling class. However, their representatives, such as the Prime Minister William Pitt, recognised that popular sentiment might be used to persuade Parliament to abolish Britain’s exports of enslaved Africans to its main economic rival, France. It was Pitt who encouraged Wilberforce to bring an abolition Bill before Parliament.

Wilberforce’s Bill was first introduced in 1791 and was defeated as were several similar Bills during the next 15 years. But during this period several significant changes took place. First, the French Revolution and Britain’s declaration of war against revolutionary France allowed the suppression of the political activity of the people at home. The revolutionaries in St Domingue successfully defended their revolution against the French army and then against invasions by both Spain and Britain. In 1804 St Domingue declared its independence and was renamed Haiti. The revolution in Haiti contributed to other major insurrections across the Caribbean and severely threatened the entire colonial system. Toussaint L’Ouverture and some of the other leaders of the revolution became nationally known figures in Britain. Abolition came to be viewed by some as both a means to press home a naval and economic advantage over France and its allies, as well as a means to limit the numbers of Africans imported into British colonies and thereby prevent the likelihood of further revolutions and maintain the slave system.

It was with these aims in mind that Parliament passed the Foreign Slave Act in 1806, banning the export of enslaved Africans to Britain’s economic rivals, a measure that effectively ended around 60% of Britain’s trafficking, but which is now hardly remembered and certainly not commemorated. The following year Parliament was persuaded to pass the Abolition Act, partly on the grounds that most of



NHS Together demonstration in Bristol, one of many on March 3 to demand an end to the dismantling and privatisation of the NHS and to safeguard its future. Many are campaigning against closure of services and against the fraud of budget “deficits”.

“the trade” had ended already, partly on the basis that limiting the importation of enslaved Africans would tend to preserve slavery throughout the Caribbean colonies, and partly it seems because it was seen as a way of diverting attention away from an unpopular war against France and its allies and persuading the people that such a war was being fought in the interests of abolition. Even some of the major established Caribbean planters were in favour of abolition since this worked against the interests of their commercial rivals, both foreigners as well as those who acquired newly captured territory from Britain’s enemies. They reasoned that this might be especially advantageous if abolition could be forced upon other countries as a consequence of Britain’s military and naval supremacy. Other representatives of the bourgeoisie supported the measure as a means to limit the economic and political power of those who had hitherto retarded the development of industrial capitalism and prevented its representatives dominating Parliament.

The 1807 Act was subsequently used as the representatives of the rich envisaged, not least as a means of interfering in shipping across the Atlantic. But it did not end British citizens’ involvement in the trafficking of Africans nor slavery itself. Indeed following other major insurrections in the Caribbean and similar economic and political forces, slavery was only made illegal in 1838, but continued in some areas of the British empire for another century. The trafficking of Africans in general increased during the 19th century and many British slavers sailed under foreign

flags of convenience. Nor did the 1807 Act end Britain’s dependence on slave-produced goods such as cotton, the mainstay of the industrial revolution. Even the so-called “legitimate commerce” subsequently developed with Africa, such as the extraction of palm oil, was largely produced with slave labour. The Act increased rather than diminished Britain’s interference in Africa which culminated in the so-called “scramble” for Africa at the end of the 19th century and the imposition of colonial rule. Britain’s first colony in Africa, Sierra Leone, established allegedly as a haven for liberated Africans, has been under Britain’s domination for the last 200 years, much of that time occupied by British troops. Today the government is demanding that even its basic utilities, such as water, should be privatised for the benefit of British multinationals, and Britain’s interference has produced a country that manages to be one of the world’s poorest and at the same time the world’s leading producer of diamonds.

The trafficking of Africans over many centuries was one of the greatest crimes against humanity. The current commemorative events, which are organised for all kinds of purposes, provide the opportunity for widespread discussion. What is vital is that myths are shattered and disinformation is combated. The people themselves must draw the appropriate lessons from history and organise themselves to become the decision-makers, and ensure that reparation is made for slavery, colonialism and all crimes against humanity.

Next week: Settling Scores with the Old Conscience

No One Is Illegal, Defend the Rights of All!

Gordon Brown's Proposals for New Form of Slavery are Unconscionable

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people should submit to the values and aims of a "Great Britain" or be actually treated outcasts, people who cannot be said to exist as members of civil society. This official state ideology is then used, as with Gordon Brown's speech, to justify proposals on citizenship which impact on the whole of society. They are racist proposals which treat as subhuman all those which do not uphold as advanced what is in fact the backwardness and chauvinism of this state-manufactured notion of "Britishness". They are of a piece with the agenda of the "war on terror", which seeks to eradicate those states and peoples which will not agree to be submissive to the Anglo-American model of political institutions, way of life and economic model. In other words, Gordon Brown's scenario is imbued with the doctrine of the "white man's burden" which sought to bring "civilisation" to barbarous peoples and went hand in hand with the practice of slavery, the slave trade and all its justifications.

Unconscionable proposals

Brown's speech seeks to erase the identity of different peoples and cultures in the name of "citizenship" and constructing a "British identity", in the context of re-writing the history of slavery and colonialism, and grotesquely reinstating the profile of the British empire as a positive chapter in human history. It seeks to justify the forced assimilation of national minorities into a "British" society and identity decreed by the government on behalf of the ruling interests, and must be met by the affirmation that all are united in defence of their humanity, irrespective of belief, life style, wealth or any other discriminatory criterion.

Gordon Brown's proposals are unconscionable. As the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants has pointed out, they would put immigrants in the same category as criminals. They are especially repugnant

coming at a time when the government is preening itself on being the heirs of those who fought to abolish the Atlantic slave trade. It is not surprising that the government has refused to make a full apology for this crime against humanity of such enormity and to make reparations. Far from the Union flag being the hated symbol of empire, to Gordon Brown and the Labour government it represents a symbol of tolerance and working together! This is a criminal misrepresentation of history and an outrage and an insult to all human beings. But this is the chauvinism which informs the proposals for immigrants to perform "voluntary" community service.

It must not pass!

We call on the working class and all democratic forces to make a radical break with the retrogressive programme of the state which treats immigrants as criminals and national minorities as second class citizens who have to prove to the so-called "host" community that they are worthy because they accept "British values". We call on everyone to defend the dignity of all human beings and work together to ensure that all cultures, with their languages, values and outlooks, are treated as equals and given encouragement to flourish within Britain, as well as internationally.

The sentiment of the people is to stand as one against the state's attempts to criminalise and humiliate immigrants and the national minority communities, as well as those of Muslim faith and outlook. These attempts embodied in the programme of Gordon Brown and the Labour government are designed to extinguish the identity of communities and cultures, and, just as with colonialism and slavery, to treat them as less than human, unworthy to be a British citizen. This chauvinist programme embodies the ideology of enslavement. It must not pass!

No One Is Illegal!

Stand Together in Defence of the Rights of All!

Salute Women Everywhere Taking Up the Challenges Facing Humanity!

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including the right to be and to affirm one's identity.

At a time when the British state is playing the most reactionary role nationally and internationally, occupying and subjugating nations and peoples, and attacking and attempting to ghettoise whole sections of society, including women, at the forefront in resisting and planting the alternative have been women.

Women are in the front ranks of the movement to put a stop to the Anglo-US imperialist wars of aggression and occupation and to seek justice for all countries suffering as a result of imperialist blockades, dictate and occupation.

Women take the lead

It is crucial that women, who bear the brunt of the neo-liberal, anti-social offensive worldwide and for whom there is no future under the dictate of the monopolies, take the lead in the movement to change society. Women are taking initiatives for people's empowerment and the right to decide the future of society. They are extremely active in the struggle against increasing impoverishment, and opposing all the social inequalities which make women, especially immigrant women, "fair game" at work and in all aspects of life. They are affirming that there is a way out of the crisis and that this lies in taking up

the project of the working class to end the government's programme of paying the rich and cutting social investments.

The origins and history of International Women's Day demonstrate the truth that the emancipation of women is inescapably linked to the emancipation of the working class and stamping on society its values based on abolishing exploitation and oppression and taking up social responsibility.

Second to none

Women in struggling against the present arrangements are seeking to plant the alternative to the party-dominated system which continues to attack their rights and interests. By fighting to bring about the new arrangements, women are taking up the struggle to ensure their emancipation as human beings and unite all sections of society in solving the problems it is facing.

On this International Women's Day, we call on women in Britain to strengthen and consolidate their role as second to none in championing progress, enlightenment and a new society. We salute women around the world who are everywhere showing the way in taking up the challenges facing humanity.

No to war and aggression against the peoples of the world!

There is an alternative and we will create it!

Long Live International Women's Day!

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