CHALLENGE
FREE CENTENARY EDITION
100 YEARS OF THE YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE
1921-2021
WWW.CHALLENGE-MAGAZINE.CO.UK
This weekend, the Young Communist League meets in London for its 50th Congress. More than 100 young men and women from across Britain will be meeting to decide the way forward for an organisation that has more than doubled in size since its last Congress in 2018. It’s set to be the largest YCL Congress for a generation. The growth of the organisation since the turn of the century has been hard fought, and every member of the YCL, both young and old, longstanding and fresh faced, has played a part in this.

Similarly, the success of our Congress this weekend is down, not just to the outgoing executive committee, but to the entire organisation, and every member, whether a delegate or not, should feel proud of that.

Over two days at Ruskin House, the home to the Communist Party of Britain, we will be attempting to tackle the foremost issues of our day. Branches have submitted resolutions on a vast range of issues including the environmental crisis, the role of nationalism, the fight for racial equality and LGBT+ rights.

Over the course of the weekend, comrades, aged between 12 and 29, will come together to discuss these issues and more, and will play their part in the essential direction of our organisation.

As Lenin wrote following the fourth congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party in 1906, “Freedom of discussion, unity of action — this is what we must strive to achieve.” To this day, this fundamental principle of democratic centralism remains at the core of our beliefs, and at the core of hundreds of different Marxist-Leninist organisations around the world.

At this Congress, there will be a wide variety of debate, and each amendment and resolution will be discussed in full and in great detail. There will of course be differences in opinion, this is only natural. But when all is said and done, and our Congress is finished, we will have achieved a unified position which will lead us forward for the next two years. It is only down to this principle of democratic centralism, that we are able to act in the way that we do. There is no time for petty squabbles in the YCL — there are no factions, or plans for personal gain, no underhand organisating or plotting.

This allows us to focus on the task at hand. A lot has changed since Lenin first wrote of the need for democratic centralism, but the core principle, that it allows us to act as a united front, remains just as true today, as it was then.

Birmingham YCLer Georgina Andrews, who has been working as chair of the Congress working committee, said: “I think it’s an important opportunity to bring young communists from all walks of life together to debate and discuss important topics and drive the league forward. “As it’s my first Congress and many others, it’s also great to get fresh ideas and make progress in terms of recruitment and what’s affecting young people today.” This is the first time since refoundation that the YCL has operated with a Congress working committee, with the outgoing executive committee typically organising the events in the past few years.

Such is the growth of the organisation, that this is no longer sustainable. Every branch was requested to nominate someone to sit on this committee and it has been a privilege to meet so many comrades through it. The success of this weekend’s events are down to their hard work.

We are very grateful for the support of the Morning Star in producing this supplement and we are also very privileged for their continued support for our work. Editor Ben Chacko will be joining us over the weekend and I’m sure there will be a report in Monday’s paper. Alongside Chacko, we are also welcoming guests from fraternal organisations, including the RMT and the MML. We will also host international guests from Greece’s KNE and Spain’s UJCE. Dozens of international affiliates have also sent us greetings, some of which have been reproduced in this supplement.
Welcome to this centenary special edition of Challenge, magazine of the Young Communist League, carried by the Morning Star, daily paper of Britain’s left.

It brings me great joy to send comradely greetings to friends, YCLers and Communist Party comrades the length and breadth of Britain. In particular, I would also like to welcome those reading Challenge for the first time.

The Young Communist League is a democratic organisation of young workers and students, fighting for the rights and future of Britain’s youth. Our purpose is to fight for peace, democracy and socialism in accordance with the strategy set out in the Communist Party’s programme Britain’s Road to Socialism, and to build mass support for this strategy among young people. Challenge is and always has been fundamental in this task.

Challenge is the voice of Britain’s young Communists and it has a proud history stretching all the way back to 1935. For all the key struggles of our class over the last century, the YCL and Challenge have been there.

It would be wrong however to think of Challenge simply as a bulletin from and for the YCL. It is, and will increasingly become, so much more. It is a forum for discussion, the exchange of views and experiences, in the spirit of Marxism — to question everything. Challenge is not just for YCLers. It is for the millions of young people in Britain oppressed and exploited under capitalism. It is for the united and democratic broad movement which will be necessary to sweep working people to power in Britain.

The many thousands of struggles of working people taking place across Britain do not occur in isolation. Challenge works to report on and unite these struggles and to strengthen the broad campaigns and movements leading them. Nor does the struggle for socialism in Britain take place apart from the world. Challenge provides news from our sister communist youth organisations on every continent and peoples movements across the planet.

Challenge aims to represent and celebrate the full spectrum of Britain’s working class youth, our culture and our history.

Communists are determined to take the offensive in the battle of ideas which is occurring around us today on every front. It is part of the daily struggle against capitalism. For there must be no mistake — Britain’s ruling class does not neglect the weapon of propaganda.

Challenge has always been an educational tool for youth working to develop their understanding of society today and to change it for the better. We work to provide these tools and to provide a class and anti-imperialist analysis of domestic and international developments. Marxism-Leninism is humanity’s scientific method in this essential task.

The task of the youth is to learn. The task of young communists is to combine it with action. You can do both with Challenge.

This special edition of Challenge celebrates the YCL’s centenary year — 100 years of glorious struggle for the working class, the youth and humanity. For Britain’s Young Communists our history is fundamentally important but we’re not custodians of an exciting but bygone past. It’s a living legacy, our past and our future. And there isn’t another youth organisation in Britain which can lay claim to such an inspirational past.

One hundred years ago today, young communists from across Britain met in Birmingham to found a youth organisation of a new type. Those young workers and students didn’t just agree to condemn the ills and excesses of capitalism.

They shared the realisation that another world is possible, a new, superior form of society, free from the exploitation of human by human: socialism.

And they were united in a common determination to give the best years of their lives, their hope, their energy and their enthusiasm to do everything in their power to advance that world historic struggle.

One hundred years later, Young Communists from across Britain come together in London this weekend for our historic 50th Congress. Special greetings go to the scores of delegates there representing hundreds of young Communists from across Britain.

Your democratic debate and discussion and the strategy which follows from it will continue to chart a proud course for the YCL and the youth of the world in the fight for peace, democracy and socialism in our lifetimes.

Our Congress, our struggle, our future! The youth are the future; the future is Socialism!

Long live the Young Communist League of Britain!

Yours in Comradeship,

Johnnie Hunter
A Challenge to capitalism since 1935

KATE WOOLFORD explores the history of the voice of Britain’s young communists

CHALLENGE’S HISTORY DATES all the way back to 1935, when it was first published as the magazine of the Young Communist League. The YCL journal was originally called the Young Worker and later the Young Communist, which was selling 6,500 copies by the mid-1920s, before becoming Challenge in March 1935.

It was sold outside factories, schools and on Saturdays at a pitch in the centre of many towns alongside the Daily Worker.

By 1971, Challenge was selling 9,000 copies per issue. 17,000 copies of a special summer edition were also produced that same year.

Since its foundation, Challenge has stood in solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the world. It demanded that the government send food and arms to the elected Spanish government fighting a fascist rebellion.

It consistently called for an end to the racist apartheid regime in South Africa.

Challenge protested against hostility towards socialist countries such as the Soviet Union and Cuba and has supported countless national liberation struggles such as the ones in Vietnam and the Congo.

And Challenge has represented the men and women of Britain by demanding better housing, higher wages, and an end to capitalist exploitation throughout the entirety of its lifetime. From its first editions, Challenge has been a genuine voice for working class youth.

There have also been some iconic features, most notably the Beatles in 1963 reproduced on page 12.

Today, Challenge continues to function as a voice for the working class youth in Britain – and encourages all those determined to build a better future to join the YCL.

Challenge upholds the same principles that it has done so historically - principles of Marxism-Leninism and anti-imperialism.

We stand against the conservative-liberal mainstream which, if it even acknowledges the existence of class, refuses to recognise the existence of classes with diametrically opposed interests and therefore the necessity of struggle between them.

Challenge is still going strong today, with an online magazine able to reach readers around the world – and we’re always on the lookout for new contributors.

With such a rich history, why not get involved?

Want to help Challenge keep going strong for the next 85 years? Visit the Challenge website.

KEEN READERS: A few members of a Manchester Challenge Club with their paper in 1937 and (above) the first edition from March 1935, a more recent one from 2009 and Challenge today

ROBIN TALBOTT recalls some of the highlights of the last century
SINCE 1921, OUR LEAGUE has been unique. An organisation that represents and fights for the interests and needs of young workers in Britain, and struggles for their aspirations and hopes for a better future.

We were founded at a special unity conference held from 20 to 26 August 1921 in Birmingham, uniting branches of the Young Workers League and the International Communist School Movement. Our present Congress takes place on the same date 100 years later.

We were founded in response to the calls of the international communist movement, which sought to organise the youth under the Communist Party in each nation, but also because of the recognition of the need for a body with the interests and needs of young people in Britain at its core.

We organised young workers in Britain’s industrial centres, not just concentrating on workplace demands but organising our own sports and cultural activities, previously inaccessible to many workers in dirty and overcrowded cities.

We played an instrumental role in the British Workers Sports Federation up to the 1940s.

YCLers led thousands of people on mass trespasses of the English countryside in the 1930s, fighting for the right of British workers to be able to enjoy the outside, leading to the “right to roam” — under threat from the Tory government today.

We marched against unemployment and for decent jobs. The Wall Street Crash in 1929 had led to misery in Britain. Young people joined the YCL in considerable numbers after that capitalist disaster.

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The most common age of these volunteers was just 23. Many of these comrades had fought fascism in street battles in Britain. They came to the conclusion that they had to go to Spain to stop the fascist march across Europe dead in its tracks. Many of them made the ultimate sacrifice. Later, over 10,000 YCL members participated in the second world war against nazi-fascism, whether they were defending our homes or abroad as soldiers and ambulance drivers.

With the significant threats of fascist and racist organisations after the second world war, in addition to those of the Cold War and nuclear weapons, the League played a huge role in the struggles against imperialism and racism.

We fought for the unity of young workers in Britain, for peace and for freedom for the subjugated British colonies and other people of the world.

Our League launched the Medical Aid for Vietnam appeal in 1965, which was hugely successful and joined the global campaign led by the World Federation of Democratic Youth.

In 1967, we held an international youth festival with thousands of visitors and ran holiday camps, football teams and student groups throughout the next decade.

Members of the League from all over Britain formed the bulk of the so-called London Recruits, hand-picked white volunteers who went to apartheid South Africa on behalf of the ANC and the South African Communist Party to help in their fight for liberation.

In the 1980s, our general secretary Mark Ashton helped to found Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners (LGSM), commemorated in the 2014 film Pride, which joined the struggle against the Thatcher government in the miners’ strike of 1984-5 — a confrontation for which the British ruling class had carefully prepared.

Since our refoundation in the 1990s, our League has brought new generations of labour movement activists and campaigners into battle, such as in the student movement that followed the 2008 financial crash.

Today, the YCL is proud to count within its ranks young people who are at the forefront of struggles led by community and renters organisations, trade unions and students, in addition to many other campaigns for justice and working class solidarity. Of course, we fight alongside many other young people.

We need to know where you come from if you want to know where you are going.

YCL100 is not only an exercise in celebrating the achievements of young people in our past. Inspiring new struggles in the present and the future, developing new generations of young Communist leaders and taking our ideas into the communities, campuses and workplaces of many more young people than ever before, is what our centenary celebrations are about.

The youth need to fight now more than ever for a decent life, one where they have access to education, work, shelter — a future worth fighting for.

YCL100 is a time to realise what we can achieve when we get organised and fight. It is a time to celebrate and fight for the dreams of young people in Britain.

We’re particularly eager to hear stories from the Young Communists who came before as we celebrate our history. Please visit ycl100.org.uk to tell us about your time in the YCL.

You can also donate to our YCL100 special appeal, and join us throughout 2021 and into 2022 as we draw inspiration from our glorious past and call on the youth of Britain to step forward and conquer our even more glorious future.
Solidarity to Spanish trenches

From British streets to Spanish trenches

IN FEBRUARY 1936 A POPULAR Front government was narrowly elected by the people of Spain. It began to enact a programme of social and economic reforms in the country which horrified the established elites.

The military revolted, but its coup did not successfully capture all of Spain; the elected government kept control of two-thirds of the country thanks to the support of the people and the majority of the navy and air force.

Coup leader General Franco called upon the assistance of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy, and within days the military balance of forces had been transformed, as had the conflict from civil war to a miniature world war.

It was clear that the militia-based government forces were badly outgunned and lacked the military experience to beat the fascists. The government turned to the Soviet Union for aid, with the Communist International establishing the Union for aid, with the Communist Party and fascist Italy, and within days the military balance of forces had been transformed, as had the conflict from civil war to a miniature world war.

It was clear that the militia-based government forces were badly outgunned and lacked the military experience to beat the fascists. The government turned to the Soviet Union for aid, with the Communist International establishing the international brigades to help defend the Spanish Republic.

Between 1936 and 1939 more than 35,000 men and women from more than 50 countries left their homes and volunteered for the republican forces in Spain. An estimated 2,500 went from Britain and Ireland, with as many as 80 per cent of them being members of the Communist Party and Young Communist League. Their average age was 29, although the most common age was 23, and they came from overwhelming working class backgrounds, with large numbers hailing from cities such as London, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow.

Many of them had already fought the British Union of Fascists at their meetings and marches here and realised that direct action was a highly effective way to confront the threat of fascism.

One of the volunteers from the YCL, Wally Togwell, said: “Wherever the fascists were, our group of the YCL was there also. I was thrown out of the Albert Hall, I took part in anti-Mosley demos at Olympia and Hyde Park. I was at Cable Street helping to erect barricades.”

One of the most well known volunteers from the Young Communist League was John Cornford, a young poet and student from Cambridge who happened to be the great-grandson of Charles Darwin, and who was the first Englishman to enlist against Franco. On 27 December 1936, Cornford turned 21. The next day he was killed in action near the town of Lopera in the south of Spain.

A lesser known volunteer was Charlie Hutchison, chair of the YCL branch in Fulham and the only Black British volunteer to join the International Brigades. He was barely 18 when he became one of the first volunteers. His reason for going was simple: “I am half black, I grew up in the National Children’s Home and Orphanage. Fascism meant hunger and war.”

He served two years until the end of the war, and after suffering injuries he refused to be repatriated because of this young age, so instead was reassigned as an ambulance driver for the republican army.

Charlie did not die in Spain and continued his fight against fascism in the British army during the second world war, serving in north Africa, Iran, Italy, France and Germany.

In April 1945, he was among those who liberated Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp. He died in 1993, after living a long life, and remained a Communist throughout.

British volunteers continued to be involved in many of the major battles, right up until the last desperate republican assault across the River Ebro in July 1938.

Their casualties in Spain were high, with as many as 626 killed, many others suffering life-changing injuries or ending up in fascist prison camps until just after the war. The last of the brigaders were withdrawn at the end of 1938 and returned to Britain in December after a farewell parade in Barcelona.

Upon their return to Britain they were greeted with massive celebrations and an emotional welcome at Victoria Station in London, before returning back to their somewhat normal working lives for a brief period of time until the outbreak of World War II.

Although the Republic fell and victory did not come to Spain, it influenced the knowledge and opinion of the British public, created thousands of new activists, drawing them into the anti-fascist struggle, and contributed massively to the long term defeat of fascism later on in 1945.

As the Young Communist League celebrates its 100-year anniversary, we will reflect on the struggles waged by those who came before us, learning about their sacrifices and victories, and holding firmly on to our past as we stride forward into our future.

PROUD HISTORY: CP leader Harry Pollitt presents the British Battalion banner and (above) British International Brigaders in Spain

JOE WEAVER on the finest hour of anti-fascism
Risking our lives to fight South Africa’s apartheid government

STEVE MARSLING helped remind people the ANC was still there

IN THE LATE 1960S AND EARLY 70S, it is fair to say that the South African apartheid regime held the whip hand. Nelson Mandela and many of his African National Congress (ANC) comrades were serving life sentences. Many other leading members were either murdered or in exile. The regime was boasting apartheid would last for a thousand years and that the ANC had been crushed.

ANC exiles in London knew that they had to do something to prove that they had not disappeared and were carrying on with the struggle.

Oliver Tambo and Ronnie Kasrils devised a plan – to send in white “tourists” to carry out agitational work. White people in South Africa had the freedom to move around as they pleased.

The YCL was approached for help. Could it supply comrades willing to undertake this dangerous yet vital work? Other groups were involved, but some 70 per cent of the recruits were from the YCL.

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The YCL obtained a large lorry loaded with solidarity goods were taken to Bulgaria where we met the Vietnamese youth in a very moving event.

The communists had a three-pronged strategy. The main strategic aim of the campaign in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos was to put pressure on the British government sending a full contingent of troops to fight with the US. This entailed building the widest alliance to put pressure on the government.

This was successful, not that it changed the imperialist character of Britain’s foreign policy which still entailed vicious colonial wars.

The second element was the practical solidarity in which the YCL excelled.

The third was propaganda of word and deed in which the Morning Star and the public campaigning was so important and reached a pitch during 1968 with three demonstrations one in March, largely organised by the Trotskyite-led solidarity campaign, one in July organised by Communist student leader Digby Jacks and the broader movement and the October 27 demonstration which brought the various strands together.

A new film, London Recruits, will be released later this year and an education pack for teachers and pupils will start going to secondary schools soon.

Practical solidarity with the people of Vietnam

NICK WRIGHT on YCL support for the Viet Cong

HEADLINES: A report on the pamphlet bombs and (right) Steve Marsling

Agitational work included smuggling in explosives, leaflets and detonators to set up leaflet bombs — not designed to harm anyone. These would explode in rush hour so that the black majority could pick the flyers up and take them back to the townships.

Other work included playing taped messages in the street urging people to continue the struggle. If anyone from the YCL was caught they would be tortured and expect a five-year prison sentence with no remission, indeed that was the fate of ex-YCLer Sean Hosey.

The solidarity work that the YCL took part in showed its commitment to internationalism and class struggle all over the world. Don’t forget the YCL at this time was also involved in solidarity work with the peoples of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos.

When the call arose the YCL was not found wanting. A courageous part of your history and in this centenary year something of which all YCL comrades can be proud.

Of the people that went on missions to South Africa two-thirds were from the YCL, a record of which young communists should be proud. The African working class liberated South Africa. But at a time when the leaders were either in prison or exile, we kept the flame alive.

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African working class liberat...
Section name

www.ycl.org.uk

YCLBritain

@yclbritain

@yclbritain
Global greetings

We are honoured to receive these centenary greetings from our comrades around the world.

World Federation of Democratic Youth
Fraternal greetings on behalf of the World Federation of Democratic Youth! Britain always brings back great memories for all the progressive youth of the world.

We must highlight that on 10 November 1945, 75 years ago, London was the place where our glorious World Federation of Democratic Youth was founded. Our best wishes for 2021 and for your Centenary!

Let’s continue struggling until we have built the world we have dreamed of and fought for!

United Democratic Youth Organisation (Cyprus)

On behalf of the Central Council of EDON, our members and the struggling youth of Cyprus, we wish to send you our warmest greetings.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of your organisation. A whole century of struggle, sacrifices and of course victories and achievements for your people.

On the anniversary of your 100 years, we feel confident that with you, loyal to the socialist ideas, and next to the international anti-imperialist movement, only better days are coming for your country, for your people and your youth.

Socialist German Workers Youth

I hereby bring you the warmest congratulations from your German class comrades on the occasion of your 100th anniversary.

We look back with pride on a long tradition and a common history — even in the early days, the links between the British communists and their German comrades were close. Here’s to another 100 years of common struggle and to another 100 years of YCL and SDAJ! Long live the YCL!

All India Students Federation

Fraternal greetings from India! Completing a journey of 100 years is always very special for any organisation, so when you are going to reach that milestone, from India we wish revolutionary greetings and best wishes to each and every member and leader of the YCL.

Red Salute!

Young Communist League of Israel

We send you our warmest regards on the 100th anniversary of the founding of your organisation.

We look forward to building bridges and strengthening the relationship between the two organisations in order to fight together against occupation in all its forms, especially the Israeli Zionist occupation of Palestine.

Soviet Union

On behalf of the Leninist Communist Youth Union of the Russian Federation, congratulations to all members of the Young Communist League of Britain on the 100 years since the foundation of your organisation.

We are united by the same goal: to put an end to the exploitation of man by man, to fight for socialism, to fight and to struggle for the interests of the working youth and for the students of Russia and Great Britain.

Please accept our warmest congratulations, and we as the Leninist Communist Youth Union of the Russian Federation are ready to strengthen our work, bilateral relations of friendship and comradeship.

Socialist Students Union (Sri Lanka)

Congratulations for the 100th Anniversary!

In a highly capitalist society struggling through 100 years with determination for the communist cause must be highly appreciated and recognized. Such dedication stands exemplary to the world communist youth as well.

We feel privileged to send our greetings towards the 100th Anniversary and 50th Congress of the Young Communist League of Britain. We comradely wish strength and courage to face the challenges in the pandemic period, and also for all the future progressive activities of the Young Communist League of Britain.

Long live the Young Communist League of Britain!

Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union (Vietnam)

On behalf of the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, we wish to congratulate you on your upcoming 100th anniversary and affirm our solidarity with the YCL.

See more on our website.
A bright spot in a dark sky

Communist Party general secretary ROB GRIFFITHS sends a message of solidarity

THE RESURGENCE of Britain’s Young Communist League is one of the brightest spots in today’s rather overcast political landscape. While there are encouraging signs that people are stirring after a period of electoral defeat and Covid depression, the challenges facing our society are immense.

They cry out for a militant yet intelligent response from workers and their trade unions, from movements concerned about everything from property and housing to global warming and world peace, from education and women’s rights to racism, democratic liberties and solidarity with Third World countries.

Many of these problems are as old as capitalism itself, some even older. They ebb and flow with the changing conditions of each society. Others are comparatively new or reaching a critical stage, such as the despoliation of the planet and its impact on scarce resources, biodiversity and weather.

Over the past 100 years, the YCL has made an outstanding contribution to the struggle against all forms of exploitation and oppression. In doing so, it has reared generations of future leaders not only of the Communist Party but of the labour movement, anti-racist, anti-fascist, peace and international solidarity movements as well.

Among the highlights of YCL history have been its contributions on the industrial front. On the eve of the 1926 General Strike, YCL general secretary Bill Rust, later to be an outstanding editor of the Daily Worker — was among the Communist leaders jailed “under suspicion.” During the lock-out which followed, thousands of unemployed young miners flocked to the YCL and trebled its membership.

In later decades, young communists organised waves of strikes in shipyards and engineering works in support of the Apprentices Charter, charming the mass media and right-wing labour movement leaders alike.

During the 1984-85 miners’ strike, Mark Ashton co-founded Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners before the YCL sent scores of members to South Africa to carry out clandestine activities on behalf of the African National Congress. Young communist Sean Hoxey was among those captured and imprisoned.

More recently, YCL members have played a prominent part in student occupations and food bank collections, in addition to mobilising large, colourful contingents on regional and national demonstrations.

There have been low points, too. The disintegration of the YCL in the early 1980s reflected the baleful influence of Eurocommunist revisionism on the communist and labour movement in Britain.

Re-establishing the YCL on the basis of the Communist Party’s youth section in 1991 was a vital if belated step. Since then, despite some setbacks in the early period, it has gone from strength to strength by combining Marxist-Leninist education with activity in local communities, colleges and workplaces.

Over the past two years, an influx of YCL members has helped boost CP activity on several fronts and transformed the party’s communications work. Our two organisations are on the rise together.

At its forthcoming 56th congress, the Communist Party will be discussing the impact of Covid on young people and the crisis they face in employment, education, housing and health. The YCL’s Youth Charter proposes many of the policies needed to mobilise young workers, students and the unemployed in support of their own interests.

Britain’s Communists must use our influence and alliances to support the demands of today’s younger generations.

Only socialism based on social ownership and democratic planning of the economy can guarantee rights, opportunities, employment and housing for all. Only socialism can save the planet and create a peaceful world.

But there will be no socialist revolution without a powerful Communist Party — and no powerful Communist Party without a dynamic, thriving and militant “shock force,” as Lenin once described Russia’s own YCL.

IF ANYONE APPROACHES the global history of the anti-imperialist and anti-fascist youth movement, it would be difficult — if not impossible — to overlook the British contribution, especially that of the YCL and the Communist Party, bothimmered in the celebration of their centenaries.

For me, the first example that comes to mind — because it is an example of the links between the youth and the working class of our countries, I guess — is the glorious International Brigades which stood against fascism in Spain.

Thousands of Britons, mostly from the YCL and the CP, joined one of the greatest examples of internationalism ever seen.

Of course, the relation with the anti-imperialist and anti-fascist youth movement goes further than this historic event: Britain was the cradle of one of the greatest tools the world’s youth ever had.

It was in London where, on 10 November 1945, delegates representing millions of young people heeded the call of the World Youth Council to create a new international organisation to struggle for youth unity, against fascism and imperialism and for lasting peace: the World Federation of Democratic Youth (WFDY).

Throughout the 75-year history of WFDY, the contributions of British youth have been crucial. We could go back to when the World Festival of Youth and Students served as a platform for solidarity between British and Vietnamese youth in the face of the Vietnam War, we could mention more recent examples such as the third European Social Forum in London where the North American and European region of WFDY came together to contribute to the important work of other popular sectors, or the celebration of the 65th anniversary of WFDY in the city of its birth.

In the context we are currently facing, the contributions of British youth and the necessary internationalist links between them and the whole of European and world youth become especially relevant.

Britain has become one of the centres of inter-imperialist tensions, especially since finally leaving the European Union last year.

With the failure of a “People’s” Brexit and the British bourgeoisie’s desire to improve its position in the imperialist pyramid outside the EU, the struggle between Britain and the EU has been summarised in the contradictory intentions of the European bourgeoisie: both trying to secure an agreement that does no harm to the monopolies while still “sobering” all the remaining member states.

“Sobering” in that it presents the “abyss,” the “chaos” and the “regression” that any country choosing to exit this imperialist alliance once faced.

We are not only facing this situation of tensions between the European Union and Britain, but also, as the whole of WFDY, the challenge of confronting the offensive that the ruling classes are carrying out with the excuse of the Covid-19 pandemic, intending to make us pay for their economic and health crisis.

The youth and the working class on both sides, far from being captivated by the speeches of our ruling classes, must be fully aware of the imperialist interests that characterise both the ruling class in Britain and the EU we have nothing to gain nor do they care the least about us in their struggles.

That is why the 50th Congress of the Young Communist League of Britain is given as a fundamental event, not only for British youth but for the whole of European and world youth.

The crisis that the European Union is going through — which it is trying to resolve through its umpteenth “refounding” through the Conference on the Future of Europe — raises hopes for the possibility of finally ending one of the main imperialist alliances of the world.

The balance that our British comrades can give us on the errors and successes committed in this struggle for the exit of the imperialist and unfreeable alliance that is the European Union and for a People’s Brexit can be a fundamental contribution for the whole of the European organisations in our struggle against this imperialist alliance.

The unity between the British, European and world anti-imperialist youth will be crucial not only to confront the global economic and health crisis, but also to advance in our struggle against the number-one enemy of the peoples, imperialism, and its alliances such as the European Union.

GREETINGS

DELEGATES TO THE 65TH ANNIVERSARY OF WFDY CELEBRATIONS AT MARSHALL’S HALL, LONDON
MEAN HOW WOULD you feel if a couple of thousand girls said they fancied you? You’d just be knocked out,” said Paul McCartney speaking, giving a Beatle’s view of Beatlemania. “It’s all talk, that about being frightened. It’s just great.”

George Harrison, John Lennon and Ringo Starr nodded their approval. They like it; the screaming and near riots which have accompanied their tour of British cinemas and theatres. They come from Liverpool, a city of cobbled streets and slums. They sing to the natural release of youthful exuberance: their answer always lies between these two.

A priest, speaking in Liverpool recently, perhaps got nearest to an answer along these lines when he said: “We have a great deal to learn from the Beatles about young people today. Young people have got to have a hero. Beatlemania is a form of escapism. But why criticise them for it? Our whole society is based on escapism.”

Tackle the question from another angle; the answer is with the Beatles themselves. They come from Liverpool, a city of cobbled streets and slums. They sing with a Mersey accent, a thick attractive sound which is hard to throw off the strangle-hold of pseudo-Americanisms which have plagued the British “pop” scene for countless years.

When I asked about this divide between [the board] and the supporters, they fancied you? You’d just be knocked out. Jeanette told me: “There is a disconnect that can be won. There’s incompetence there of course there is, but there’s also a lack of care.”

Despite all this, Findlay remained optimistic about what Celtic can be in terms of a force for good in Scottish society. He’s a community person who understands it, and how it felt him about.

Take their attitude to film making. “We could have made dozens of films,” said John. “But we wanted to be in something more than a package show.”

“You know,” said Paul. “A young lad goes to the recording studios and someone says: ‘Now look in this room and who do we see? Why it’s Craig’. And Craig sings a song.”

“Not only Craig,” said George. “Lots of groups. These are films used as vehicles for pop stars.”

To do a film Paul again: “We don’t want to be in a vehicle, We’ve signed up now to do a film being written by Alun Owen. It will give a good story, probably about us in some way. But it will be true to life.”

Ringo leafed through a copy of Challenge and Paul cracked a joke about a Daily Worker headline. John was strumming on a guitar and outside fans were shouting about jellybabies.

Their road manager told me there was no more time for questions. The second house had started and the Beatles were on stage again soon.

One final question. Since I had interviewed them last they had soared in popularity, their latest LP, then unissued, had already topped the quarter-million mark in sales. Had it changed them?

John looked up from his guitar, smiled and shook his head. A final “See you” and they began to get ready for the second performance.

Men were guarding every door leading to the underground dressing rooms’ on stage the Vernon Girls were singing and the audience were squealing their delight.

Outside the police were still holding back the fans and the spivs were selling Beatles pictures like hot cakes.

...and from today:

Tom Flanagan talks to Celtic Trust’s Jeanette Findlay in an edited piece from our website
This year has seen some of the biggest waves in the student movement in a decade. With the pandemic throwing the higher education sector into chaos, university bosses’ sight of the opportunity to make a fat pile of cash clouded any thought of prioritising the wellbeing of their students and staff.

Nowhere was this more apparent than at the University of Manchester. Students were understandably angry, after uni management lied to our faces: promising in-person teaching, only to put all learning online only a few days before classes started.

Despite Sage scientists’ warning that sending students from their homes around the country would pose a massive health risk to students and the wider community, we were back on campus in September for the sake of university and landlords’ profits.

In Manchester, we took the direct action one step further, occupying a university building in November. After two weeks of occupation and having to isolate with next to no medical or mental health support, we are justified in our anger at the use of Covid as an excuse to cut staff pay and push for staff redundancies, all while Manchester vice-chancellor Nancy Rothwell increases her own salary — now standing at £260,000.

We are right to demand better, and the victories of this year showed what can happen when we do.

Students are keen to engage in transient and often surface-level politics, but when it comes to translating that energy into the wider struggle, student politics can often fall short. This is one lesson that can be taken from the events of the past year.

In forming groups to push for long-term and wider change off the back of the energy of a protest, and perhaps there always will be, but future student organisers need to stay vigilant in maintaining a class analysis in their struggles to come.

Another of the greatest lessons I’ve learnt from this year is the value of working with other groups. We found this at a national level, with the rent strike network across Britain, the variable usefulness of the National Union of Students — and the deafening silence of the Labour Party.

But collaboration was also essential locally within the Manchester movement. Although I’m a communist myself, the fact that I was locked in a building with anarchists and liberals need not be cause for conflict, but instead a chance to educate, to share skills and to put sectarianism aside for the good of the struggle.

This collaboration is at its most important when it comes to staff and teaching unions. A student movement that fails to include and fight for the demands of staff will never get very far. In Manchester we formed a solidarity coalition with lecturers’ union UCU, banding together to reject the false narrative that uni management is always trying to push: that the interests of staff and students are opposed.

This is one lesson that can be taken from the events of the past year. Despite the shortfalls of student organising, this year has filled me with a lot of hope. Direct action works, and students are seeing that it takes more than signing an online petition to make change.

Students are recognising the deep injustices in an education system that is run like a business and now must continue the struggle to combat it.
The YCL is on the march – join us!

Now's the time to get active for socialism, says BEN UGHETTI

SINCE IT WAS FOUNDED in 1921, the YCL has been at the forefront of Britain’s class struggle.

The Kinder Scout mass trespass, the International Brigades fighting fascism in Spain, Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners, supplying the Vietnamese people with food, medical supplies and bicycles while they faced imperialist invasion, and much more.

No other political youth organisation in Britain can lay claim to such a rich history as the YCL.

But what about today? The YCL is still the leading Marxist-Leninist youth organisation in Britain. With a membership that is growing and growing there has never been a better time to join the fight for socialism with the YCL.

Young Communists campaign on current issues that affect the youth across Britain.

The climate crisis is becoming worse than ever.

The YCL was one of the first groups to campaign about the risks of climate change with YCL and Communist Party pamphlets on the issue dating back to the 1970s.

Today the YCL carries on the fight against the climate crisis — with more than one million species facing extinction and temperatures rising year on year, the time to fight is now.

The league is involved with numerous campaigns against climate change and YCL banners demanding genuine anti-capitalist action on the issue have appeared nationwide.

Trade unionism is also at the heart of the YCL. Each branch has its own industrial officer, there to offer advice and support to fellow members about issues in their workplace or union.

We constantly campaign for more young people to join and become active in unions. Our members support industrial action, most recently joining Glasgow McVities workers on the picket lines.

YCLers are also active fighting against the poor treatment meted out by many universities. In Manchester, Sheffield, Brighton and elsewhere, YCL members were active in organising rent strikes and even occupying buildings to win rent reductions. In Manchester, YCL members were on national television supporting students through the Covid-19 pandemic.

Political education is also key to the YCL — we have various reading groups studying the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and others to further our understanding of Marxism-Leninism.

We also publish articles on current events, theory, art, music and sports in Challenge, which is written and edited entirely by YCL members.

The YCL is a member of the World Federation of Democratic Youth, giving us close ties with millions of other communist and anti-imperialist young people around the world, including groups in Cuba, Russia, China, Vietnam and and Venezuela.

But this isn't just about talking, we're also actively engaged in international solidarity. Most recently joining the campaign to prevent the Polish government from outlawing the Communist Party, as well as fighting for international solidarity.

And we're also fighting to make things better for workers in our communities. In a country with more food-banks than McDonalds, we regularly work with local foodbanks to boost food security. It is now not an uncommon sight to see YCL members in city and town centres across Britain organising food drives.

As Labour falls into obscurity and the rest follow suit, the time to join the YCL is now. With emerging and active branches across Britain, it is the YCL that is truly leading the struggle for socialism.

Convinced? Join the YCL today.
A climate crisis is unfolding before our eyes that threatens to destroy the world during our lifetimes and leave it unable to sustain human society as we know it. The lives of young people in Britain are characterised by insecurity, uncertainty and poverty, regardless of the path we choose or are forced into. A decade of austerity has left our public services, our education system and our NHS stripped to the bone. There is no longer any pretence of providing access to quality public education and cultural and leisure facilities for working class youth.

The options for most of those in work are low-paid, precarious and unfulfilling jobs with little chance of progression; poverty-pay apprenticeships; or complete uncertainty in the gig economy. College and university students are forced to place additional financial pressure on their already strained families and jeopardise their studies by working long hours to support themselves. Education has been reduced to a product to be bought and sold for a questionable financial gain. We are living through a mental-health epidemic among young people. Violent crime and anti-social behaviour are escalating across our society, with a disproportionate impact on the youth.

Throughout the pandemic, the priority for Britain’s capitalist class has been private profit — creating opportunities for the major monopolies and corrupt Tory Party associates and handing public money to incompetent private firms. As we emerge from the pandemic, they tell us they want a return to “normal.” But their normal wasn’t working for working people or the youth. And the normal they are seeking will be even worse than the decade of austerity we’ve already endured. After causing so much preventable pain and misery, the ruling class and their political representatives want us to pay the cost for their mismanagement of the pandemic and to foot the bill for the corrupt contracts they’ve handed out to their friends. They will extract their price through more cuts and austerity, more privatisation of our services and more attacks of living standards and employment rights.

We can see that the crisis faced by the youth in Britain is only set to escalate. Capitalism in Britain has presented us with two options: accept the system as it is and a life without dignity, or to fight back and live life with a purpose. Britain’s young communists are clear on our choice. Where working people are prepared to struggle there is always hope and the youth have always led from the front. Our Youth Charter is a set of policies to combat the immediate crisis faced by Britain’s youth and to offer some relief. The Charter isn’t a recipe for socialism. These policies can’t cure the underlying problems of capitalism but these demands and the struggle to achieve them ask fundamental questions about economic ownership and democratic control in our country. They would make a massive difference to the lives of the millions of young people in Britain today and as we fight for a people’s recovery from the pandemic.

These aren’t just policies for the YCL. These are demands for the broad working class and student movements which can be translated into the thousands of struggles taking place every day in our schools, campuses, communities and workplaces. Build the fight for the Youth Charter and build the fight for a dignified life.

JOHNNIE HUNTER

Youth charter

1. A real living wage and an end to casualisation and age discrimination in pay

2. A new apprenticeship system and real jobs with trade union and employment rights

3. More council housing and private sector rent controls

4. Public transport network cards for young people with capped, affordable prices

5. Free college and university education

6. Free access to government and council cultural, leisure and sports facilities

7. Free access to all NHS healthcare and improved mental and sexual health services

8. The right to vote at 16

9. An end to all forms of discrimination

10. Fight to prevent climate change

Fight for the youth charter!
DARE TO BUILD A BETTER FUTURE!

JOIN THE YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE!