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## Tessa van Geldern

# R.S.S.F. Conference Report

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### RSSF CONFERENCE REPORT. by Tessa van Geldern.

Another Conference of RSSF is over. There are many criticisms to be made of the conference (and they will be made in this article) but it is important to state that for all its faults, there was one qualitative difference that emerged at this conference which was absent from previous ones:- RSSF can be said to be, however tentatively, a viable organisation. It has proved itself because of its initiative over LSE. This is not to blow up out of all proportion the role RSSF played in the LSE crisis. Rather, the action taken by RSSF indicated the exact position the student movement has arrived at in Britain today, and to a large extent this was reflected at the conference. (It is very important for RSSF completely to come to terms with itself and not think it can reach the position the German SDS is in, overnight. This can only be done by proving itself in action, and the mood of the conference indicated that this is gradually being realised by the members.)

Most of the political discussion centred around the strategy of red bases and LSE. Unfortunately, these two subjects "overlapped" rather than being part of what of what was essentially the same topic - (LSE) being a specific example - or at least a potential example - of a general strategy. From the discussion that took place it seems that no lessons are to be drawn from the LSE experience; only criticisms of IS's behaviour during the crisis that we all knew about previously. Not that valid criticism should not be made against any group or individual, but it should be constructive criticism. That is, in this situation, we should all be able to learn from the mistakes made at LSE (as well as the successes, of course). Not enough - if any - discussion is forthcoming along these lines.



The overall discussion on red bases did not really resolve anything. The concept itself is still there in the manifesto, but its interpretation is still open to discussion. At this stage in the development of RSSF this is how it should be. But it must be emphasised here that future discussion on this subject must not be a rehash of the arguments put forward at this and previous conferences. It must come out of the experiences that RSSF, nationally and locally, has been through. A resolution from York RSSF, which was passed, stated that during the May Day strike, the universities and colleges should, wherever possible, be used as red bases - not simply by boycotting lectures in solidarity, but by providing facilities within the colleges themselves (such as duplicating and telephoning facilities) and lecture rooms for discussions, teach-ins etc. If comrades attempt to do this, they will come a long way to understanding what, at this stage in our development, the concept of red bases is. In a capitalist society it can never be a permanent institution, an island of socialism (a theory some comrades raised as an Aunt Sally, simply to be able to knock it down). But on certain specific occasions, where there is a red base in operation, students can be mobilised and facilities provided to whoever needs them./over.

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Resolutions passed on Northern Ireland and Anguilla can also be carried out in the same way. We can work with Irish and West Indian organisations and offer the facilities and time that we have available; in this relations will no longer be just words on paper, as they have tended to be in the past. No matter how sincere our declarations of solidarity are, we must now be prepared to carry them out by actions and deeds (never forgetting however that our first place of struggle lies in the institute of education where we are situated). It follows logically however that, until we have had some victory in the struggle we will never be in a position to turn over the administrative building, even for one day, to strikes, without victimisation.

The conference itself was badly organised, and this resulted in the more "well-known" speakers dominating most of the discussions. This was not deliberate as such, but simply because the three chairmen, wanting to be "fair to all tendencies", did not take speakers in sequential order, but chose those they knew as representatives of certain tendencies, so that a balance could be maintained. Towards the end of the conference this was amended, and it is to be hoped that next time, with the introduction of a Standing Orders committee things will be run more smoothly, and democratically, so that the "ordinary members" (as Comrade Manchanda puts it) will have a chance to speak.

Talking of Comrade Manchanda, if he and his "team" do not start conducting themselves as comrades, then the other members of RSSF will have to start throwing them out of future conferences. The agenda cannot be held up simply because someone refuses to accept a majority decision. Their behaviour is unconradely, to say the least, and while the Macists act as they do, they cannot be taken seriously (except perhaps as a danger to the movement as a whole). If they think that everyone else is revisionist and/or fascist etc. then they should not be prepared to work in such an unholy alliance.



It was a disappointment that conference was still dominated by the Universities. If, and I think it is, this is a reflection of RSSF generally, then it could run into some severe trouble in the near future. Delegates were present from other colleges (such as teacher training and technical colleges) but their presence was not really felt. This was partly due to the dominance of speakers from the New Left Review, Maoist, I.S. etc. But more emphasis must be placed on these crucial areas of education. Some comrades were still talking in terms of "going to the workers", but we cannot even consider this aspect while we still have such a large potential to tap in our own area of work. Comrades from the secondary schools made a couple of good speeches and very important point made by one of them, that more emphasis be given to this movement (since it incorporates all future workers, students etc.) must be taken up immediately. But more emphasis generally must also be given to the other areas in higher education if RSSF is ever to become a real revolutionary force (and the comrade who stated at the conference that revolutionaries only come from the working class should read up on his Marx and Lenin).

Subsequent conferences will be over a three day period, one day being given over to a workshop. This form of group discussion may help to develop those areas of work which RSSF has been neglecting.

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such as in colleges other than universities. This type of discussion should also go a long way to providing a fruitful exchange on base activity. Once again, (and it cannot be stressed too often), this must result in learning from one's own and others' experience and it must not just be a narrative account of what is happening in the various areas. At this last conference, although a lot of time was given to local reports, there was no real discussion on the reports, nor were any lessons derived from them.

During the conference, bases in the regions came together and held discussions as to how they can help each other and not work in isolation (For example on April 26th, Midland bases are holding their own regional conference). This is a very good sign, and it gives emphasis to local base work and not to activity and policy being derived centrally, which would probably lead to the break-up of RSSF (a feeling shared by most delegates to the Conference).

Women comrades also met together and have formed a women's Liberation Movement within RSSF itself (This too will be meeting on May 17th, the evening before the Equal Rights Rally in Trafalgar Square). Women, although present in large numbers as delegates, participated relatively little at the conference (again partly because the "names" dominated the scene) but with this new movement it is to be hoped that this may be changed by next conference. But of course the Liberation Movement itself covers a much wider field in women's fight for equal rights (a fight that must take place now, not after the revolution as suggested by one comrade).

Generally speaking then, the last RSSF conference was a relative success. All comrades who were present at the November Conference at the Round House will know what I mean. But we must continue to be self-critical. We must fight out our political differences at the Conference (and we could do with a bit more politics), but when we leave we should be prepared to go back to our bases, where the real work lies, to carry out conference decisions etc. together. Only in this way will RSSF grow from a sickly child into a healthy revolutionist.