

COMMUNIST WORKERS ORGANISATION



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FACTORY GROUPS



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WORKERS VOICE

PREAMBLE

All over the world workers are faced with the fiercest attacks on their living standards since the 2nd World War. From Poland to Peru, from South Africa to Sweden, unemployment, real wage cuts, speed-ups and cuts in social services are the order of the day. The world economy is in crisis. It is the crisis of capitalism and the world's rulers have no solution. Tomorrow they will try to make us forget about the crisis by ordering us to massacre one another in defence of "the national interest".

Ever-increasing austerity and a 3rd World War are all the present system can offer us. The only way to escape this senseless round of temporary boom followed by economic crisis and then world war is for capitalism to be destroyed once and for all. Only the working class has the strength to do this. Once organised collectively in workers' councils and led by its own international party, the working class will be able to create a new society where goods are produced to satisfy human needs and not for profit.

But if workers are going to use the power which together they hold in their hands they must be aware of the stakes for which we are fighting today. This means that those workers who already see the need for a revolutionary struggle must organise politically to agitate for a real fight against the bosses in the workplaces. These organisations we call Factory Groups (though this name covers all workplaces: mines, railways, hospitals, etc.).

The Factory Groups are an arm of the Communist Workers' Organisation (CWO) within the working class. During the daily struggle with the bosses they put forward communist positions and fight to transform the defensive struggle into the revolutionary struggle for communism. The Factory Groups act as a means of winning workers to the revolutionary struggle and of strengthening the CWO. The CWO is one of the forerunners of a future international communist party. In a revolutionary period the Factory Groups will fight for the views of this party to be taken up by the mass class organisations: the workers' councils.

The Factory Groups of international communists possess the two weapons essential to the working class in its struggle - class consciousness and organisation. We call on those workers who agree with this platform to join us in the fight to establish and spread a network of factory groups within the working class.

Communist Workers' Organisation

November 1981

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CAPITALISM IN CRISIS

Everywhere today workers face lower living standards and tougher working conditions. As the relentless march of inflation eats away at what we can buy, productivity deals and 'rationalisation' schemes are producing intolerable working conditions. Even if isolated groups of workers manage to keep up with price increases they find themselves suffering like the rest from cuts in the "social wage" (schools, hospitals, transport, etc.). Behind all this, acting as a threat to keep workers in line, looms unemployment, which is already affecting millions worldwide. Workers must face up to the causes and seek the cures for what is happening, for one thing is certain: inflation, the dole and speed-ups will NOT "blow over". The crisis is here to stay!

The attack on living standards is not just happening in Britain, and it is not an accident. It is the inevitable result of the economic crisis. This crisis does not halt at the Iron Curtain, but is hitting the Eastern bloc very hard, as events in Poland in 1980-81 show. Inflation, slowing economic growth and increasing shortages of consumer goods are evidence of this. The crisis in the Eastern bloc demonstrates that these countries are NOT socialist but state capitalist. The workers in the Russian bloc are in the same position as workers in the West.

CAPITALISTS HAVE NO SOLUTION

As the crisis gets worse the least profitable industries go bankrupt. Usually these are the ones which are vital to each national economy (e.g. mining, railways, steel, cars). Throughout the world the ruling class has kept these vital industries going by nationalisations or vast injections of state funds. This has meant organising capitalism on a national scale

to divert profits from those industries which are still making profits into essential areas which otherwise would be bankrupt. These measures slow down the speed of development of the crisis, but they cannot prevent it from growing steadily worse.

Nowhere have the bosses an answer to the crisis, except to attack the working class and prepare for war. Here in the West one faction of them argues that cutting government spending and state control of the economy is the way towards economic recovery. But it was precisely policies like these which led to the great crisis of 1929! All that such policies do is slow down the rate of inflation at the cost of massive rises in unemployment, without stimulating economic recovery. The experience of governments like those of Thatcher in the U.K. are evidence of the utter bankruptcy of policies like these.

While the Right-wing of the bosses wants to reduce state spending, the Left-wing calls for an extension of state control, more nationalisations and more government spending. Such policies were dreamed up by Keynes in order to avoid another 1929-style slump, but all they have led to is massive inflation and the present crisis, which is the worst the world has ever seen. The government prints money and uses this to modernise and take over bankrupt industries. But printing money is no answer to the crisis. It simply means that money is worth less and less so that more is needed to buy goods. The so-called 'solution' of the Left is no solution at all. Their policies lead only to inflation and lower living standards.

More and more, however, it doesn't matter whether the ruling class follows its Right-wing or its Left-wing policies since both are leading to inflation and unemployment and neither can make much impact on the crisis.

One measure put forward by both Right and Left-wing bosses is for the government to control imports, but this is no solution either. Some industries depend on cheap imports for their survival. What's more, controls on foreign imports in one country would lead inevitably to retaliation by other countries, as happened in the 1930s, so many bosses are reluctant to take this step. For the working class, government restriction of imports means more inflation, by forcing us to buy more expensive local goods instead of cheaper ones from abroad. More

importantly, the demand for import controls divides the working class because it encourages the idea that jobs are being saved when all that happens is that unemployment is exported to workers in other countries. The workers' solution to the capitalist crisis can only be an international one.

Attempts to form workers' co-operatives are another response to the effects of the crisis which lead nowhere for the working class. Such schemes are often supported by capitalism's Left-wing fringe groups who see workers' self-management as a step towards socialism. But nothing could be further from the truth. Self-management is an ATTACK on the working class, dividing workers up against each other in competing units instead of uniting the class to fight the capitalist system. And co-operatives cannot escape the crisis: they still have to compete on the market, to increase work-loads, hold down wages and lay off workers to survive, as the experiences of the Meriden, Kirby and numerous other Co-ops in Britain prove. Persuading workers to sink their redundancy pay into such schemes is a diversion from the real task of extending the fight against lay-offs to the rest of the working class by sympathy action.

None of the capitalist parties, whether Conservative, Labour, or any other, has a solution to the economic crisis other than a further drop in living standards. And when even this fails, none of them will be a barrier to capitalism's "final solution" - World War. The only way to prevent this and to abolish crises once and for all, is for the international workingclass to unite and overthrow capitalism, replacing it with communism.

WHY IS CAPITALISM A SYSTEM OF CRISIS?

The capitalist system is a system of production based on the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class in which goods are produced for profit. Karl Marx long ago argued, and the events of the last 100 years have only confirmed what he wrote, that this system inevitably produces economic crisis. Competition between capitalists forces them to invest in new machinery in order to produce cheaper products and outsell their competitors. This new machinery involves increased productivity, or in other words, more output from fewer workers. But the source of

the profit the capitalist makes is the exploitation of the labour power of his workers.

In any working week the output of the working class is far greater than what they receive back from the bosses in the form of wages. This difference between the value of the workers' wages and the value of what they have produced is what Marx called "surplus value". It is from this that the capitalists get their profits. With the increasing "automation" which results from the cut-throat competition amongst firms and industries an ever-smaller part of the production process is made up of workers, and an ever-greater part by machinery. Thus, the surplus value and therefore the bosses' profits, become a gradually smaller part of output. Marx called this the law of the "falling rate of profit", and showed that eventually the capitalists do not have enough profits to re-equip the means of production. When this happens the least profitable firms go under in the face of competition from their fellow capitalists. As Marx put it, "One capitalist kills many".

In the early part of capitalism's development, roughly up to the 1st World War, crises generally lasted a couple of years while the bosses waited for "business to get back on its feet again". During these periodic crises many workers were sacked and wages in general were lowered, while the unprofitable firms would be put out of business or be taken over by their stronger rivals. Once the strongest firms had knocked out or taken over their competitors another period of economic expansion would begin, each time with a lower rate of profit than the last and each time followed by a slump.

In capitalism's hey-day the bosses could make up for this gradual fall in the rate of profit by further expansion. First British capitalists, and then firms from all advanced countries offset their falling profit rates by buying cheap raw materials from abroad and by setting up overseas firms in countries where workers would accept starvation wages.

By the beginning of this century this process of capitalist expansion and concentration led to the situation where competition was no longer just a matter of individual firms struggling against each other. Now the major capitalist states (In 1914, Britain, U.S.A., Germany, France, Russia, Italy, Japan) were pitted against one another on the world market. In the 20th

century purely economic competition has given way to imperialist rivalry. Capitalism's crises are now world crises and the old methods of overcoming the "business slump" are not enough. The only way capitalism can solve its periodic crises is by WORLD WAR. By 1914 the amount of accumulated capital (or machinery) was so high and the rate of profit so low that the wholesale destruction of machinery and plant as well as millions of workers via global warfare was the only way capitalism could create the basis for another 'boom' period. But, just as in the 19th century, capitalism's crises won't go away and its 'solutions' to them are ever more horrific. The great crisis of 1929 was eventually only 'solved' by a new world war. This war, which was more destructive than the First, laid the basis for the recovery of the whole capitalist system.

What is happening today is therefore no accident. The vicious attacks on the working class aren't happening because the bosses have suddenly become more vicious or more greedy, but because they HAVE TO attack the workers in order not to be the first to go under. As in 1929, there is NO WAY capitalism can get out of its present crisis EXCEPT by waging another war. And the preparation signs for this are all around us. Russia's invasion of Afghanistan, U.S.A. military involvement in Central America, Cruise and Trident missiles, are all steps down the road to another world war - a war which both sides now believe they can win. We must destroy their system before it destroys us.

ONLY ONE SOLUTION TO THE CRISIS

Crises, unemployment, starvation and war can only be got rid of by destroying capitalism itself and replacing it with communism. Under communism (which has nothing to do with the state capitalism of Russia or China) production will be for need. The whole world economy will be organised as a single unit. Everyone will be integrated into useful work and there will be no more classes. Everyone will be a worker in a world-wide community of producers, working for the needs of the human race and its planned development. Communism will be controlled by workers through a world network of workers' councils. Workers will themselves decide their needs and produce, plan and develop the world's resources for the satisfaction of these needs. The construction of communism, however, can only begin once the capitalists have been overthrown. To overthrow the capitalists and their state with which they protect their system requires revolution.

BARRIERS TO THE WORKERS' STRUGGLE

The fight for communism begins now, in the struggle against the attacks of the bosses on the working class. The trade unions have no answer to these attacks, in fact they are the bosses' accomplices in carrying them out. Unions were created by the working class to defend itself within the capitalist system. Although never revolutionary, they did win reforms and wage increases in the days when capitalism was capable of granting worthwhile concessions to the people it exploits. In their early days the trade unions also worked as training centres for the class struggle. However, accustomed to working within the framework of capitalism, once the system no longer had any real concessions to give, the unions could only argue that it is in the workers' best interests to accept austerity.

With the outbreak of War in 1914 the trade unions proved they had abandoned the cause of the working class by supporting the capitalists in their war plans. Not only did they help to recruit workers into the armies, they also declared a "social peace" (i.e. they agreed to abolish strikes) and helped the bosses wipe out all the gains the working class had won in the last 60 years. By co-operating with the bosses' militarisation of labour schemes, even such basic 'rights' as the 8 hour day and the right to change jobs disappeared. After the war the unions helped the bosses defeat workers' attempts at revolution throughout Europe. In Britain they were responsible for the defeat of the 1926 General Strike, calling it off while it was still solid and spreading so that the workers became split and demoralised.

Fearing nothing more than revolution, the unions try to deflect all class struggle into dead ends and prevent it from confronting the state. The role of the unions in the mass strikes in France (1968), Italy (1969), Portugal and Spain (1974-76) and Poland today verifies this. Today unions are the bosses' policemen on the shop floor. They sabotage the class struggle from within and break strikes. They do this by dividing strikes between sections of industry. (For example in the steel strike in Britain in 1980 they called out state sector workers and left workers in private steel firms to scab.) They demoralise workers with token 1 hour or 1 day stoppages; by insisting on separate negotiations for different plants or branches; by holding secret meetings with the bosses and making agreements behind the workers' backs; by preventing mass meetings; by going to bosses' tribunals; by telling workers to vote for the bosses' proposals in factory ballots (such as the unions at BL

co-operating with the "re-organisation" plan of Edwardes and sacking of 50,000 workers). They help the bosses' governments draw up pay policies which hold down wages; they help the same governments write laws to break the class struggle (such as anti-picketing laws); and they help the police put these laws into effect. Whenever the unions put on a show of militancy it is to regain control of the class struggle and strangle it by leading it into harmless channels, such as campaigns for the election of a Left-wing bosses' party (e.g. Labour or the so-called "Communist" Party). They do all this because their interests are tied to capitalism. In a society without wage labour the unions would be out of a job, so when workers put forward demands which threaten capitalism's existence the unions defend the bosses' system against the workers.

Along with the unions goes the shop stewards' movement. This started as a reaction to the betrayals of the unions at the time of the First World War. They were re-born during and after World War Two, when capitalism was rebuilding itself after the greatest destruction in history. In this short-lived period of "money militancy" the stewards could pose as rivals to the unions and win gains for some sections of workers. But the unions and bosses soon gained control of the stewards by carefully supervising their training, by procedure agreements, and so on, and with the development of the crisis the stewards have been as much a barrier to the working class as the unions as a whole. In the present period the shop stewards have been the advocates of "realism" in the crisis, proposing "moderate" wage deals and selling lay-offs. At Singers and Talbot on Clydeside, for example, they recommended low wage claims and then acceptance of closure! We are not saying that all shop stewards set out with the intention of selling-out their fellow workers. What we are saying is that, no matter how militant someone is, once they become a shop steward they are forced to become tied up in union/management control procedures and inevitably find themselves acting in the same way as their predecessors.

It is impossible to change the anti-working class character of the unions from below because this character is a result of their function as wage brokers in bankrupt capitalism. Attempts to pressurise the unions through rank and file movements, to democratise them or capture them are a sheer waste of time. Sincere and militant workers who go into the unions and try to do this are always corrupted and used by the unions to impose austerity and wage restraint. They become tools of the unions and are used against the working class. The unions are littered with left-wing

officials who soon act as brakes on the class struggle. Unions are obstacles to the class struggle and must be outflanked by the working class and eventually destroyed along with capitalism itself.

Some workers see the answer to the trade unions' integration into the capitalist state as the setting-up of breakaway unions - ones which will be really militant and democratic; which will represent the rank and file and avoid the bureaucratic structure and compromises of the existing unions. But such a scheme can never work in practice. Today the basis for mass, trade union-type organisations which will really fight the bosses no longer exists. Because 20th century capitalism cannot provide permanent gains in living standards any organisation which spends its time trying to wring reforms out of the ruling class is only preparing the way for defeat. More and more such an organisation would have to duplicate the official union structures in order to survive. If such a movement ever got off the ground it would very quickly find itself integrated into capitalism or else be destroyed.

But workers can't just accept the bosses' attacks. They must struggle and they must organise, so how do they do this?

FACTORY GROUPS OF INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISTS.

In this period of permanent crisis the only way the working class can win even short-term concessions from the bosses is by waging mass strikes outside of the control of the unions and linked up across the boundaries of factory and industry. Outside of periods of open class struggle it is not the task of the militant minority of workers to squander their energies by trying to set up alternative trade unions or by trying to make the existing unions more democratic. The only way for workers in this position to advance the interests of the working class is to organise on a revolutionary political basis in their own workplace. The best way of doing this is for the militant minority of workers to organise themselves on the basis of agreement over fundamental political positions.

The following positions are the basis for joining a CWO Factory Group:

- a) All countries in the world are capitalist.
- b) Capitalism is a crisis-ridden system whose only alternatives are World War or working class revolution and the building of communism.
- c) The struggle for communism requires the worldwide destruction of the

capitalist state and a regime of workers' councils.

- d) For this an international communist party (of which the CWO is a fore-runner) is necessary.
- e) The unions, Labour and Communist Parties are defenders of the capitalist system, and cannot be used by the working class.
- f) Workers have no common interests with their exploiters and oppose all attempts to stimulate these by nationalism. Their only common interests are with the workers of the rest of the world.

The Factory Groups have two aims. First, they help to lead the class struggle. However, they are not trying to become trade unions or any other kind of mass organisation so they avoid the traps laid for these. Second, the Factory Groups help to develop political understanding amongst the workers and to win them to communist politics and the communist party. The groups are linked to the CWO, which is working towards the formation of an international communist party. However, the Factory Groups are not limited to CWO or party members. They allow for the involvement of sympathisers and class militants who can thus become practically involved in the revolutionary struggle.

THE WORK OF THE FACTORY GROUPS

1. During Open Confrontation with the Bosses

In every struggle the Factory Groups must take the lead in framing tactics for the working class, taking into account the level of the struggle and the general balance of forces between the workers and the capitalists.

Where a struggle leads to attempts to form a breakaway trade union the Factory Groups have to argue against this but at the same time they must work within them during this initial period to win as many of their supporters as possible over to our politics.

In all struggles the Factory Groups call for the wresting of control from the hands of the unions and shop stewards and the election of STRIKE COMMITTEES for running the strike. They argue that the delegates to these committees should be RECALLABLE at short notice, and that MASS MEETINGS be held in order to control the committee from the base.

Members of Factory Groups should try to gain election to such committees, and if elected they are answerable to the Factory Groups and the CWO, whose politics they put forward. Their first task will be to call for the UNIFICATION of strike committees of different strikes. (As CWO

members did in leaflets during the mass strikes on Clydeside in 1974.) Arguing for the CWO's politics may mean that the Factory Group delegates are recalled by the class. If so, an opportunity for political propaganda exists, for explaining to the rest of the workers why certain tactics are harmful to the struggle.

As well as trying to divert the struggle from union control, the Factory Groups should argue for the best means of waging it. They point out, for example, the necessity for mass picketing, and the use of self-defence in pickets appropriate to the balance of class forces. (As in the miners' strikes in 1972, 1974.) They have to argue for the extension of the struggle - to firms in the same company, in the same industry, and eventually throughout the class, as the only way to defeat the onslaught of the bosses. (For example, as the CWO said in the steel strike in 1980.)

The Factory Groups also cannot be silent about the concrete demands of the struggle, since these, just as much as weak tactics, help to hamstring the fight. It is true that in some situations the Factory Groups will have little to say about the demands put forward because they will have been thrust into the background by the force of the struggle itself. In such mass, class-wide battles which reach a high point of solidarity and in which actual demands are very much to the rear (e.g. the mass strikes in France and Italy in 1968 and 1969 and Spain in 1976) communists do not deflect them back on to limited economic grounds. And in the pre-revolutionary struggle itself the demands of the Factory Groups will be posed in relation to the tasks of the struggle for power; that is, the formation of militias, soviets and the introduction of equal rations for all.

However, outside these highpoints the class struggle goes on and communists on the shop floor have to make their standpoint clear. The general framework for Factory Groups in relation to demands is that they favour, support and raise, demands which have the potential of UNIFYING the class and of leading to a wider struggle against the state and its agencies. The Factory Groups criticise demands which do not have such potential and outrightly oppose those which help to divide the class and lead it to the path of collaboration with the bosses. The concrete details need to be worked out in practice but this means, for example, struggles for import controls will be opposed; struggles for wage differentials criticised; and struggles for flat rate wage increases generally supported by the Factory

Groups who will try to make them the demands of the class in struggle. This was our policy in the steel strike of 1980, where the unions divided the class with a percentage demand.

2. Education and Propaganda

One of the main aims of the Factory Groups is the political education of their members so that they will be able to take a leading part in the class struggle. Education will be carried out in close liaison with the CWO and its publications. Class fighters must be trained in the arguments which will show the rest of the working class the causes and solution to the crisis. Factory Group members are expected to spread these lessons to the rest of the workforce via leafletting, factory gate meetings and so on. In this they will have the material help of the CWO.

The Factory Groups will also organise discussion amongst workers and will explain the dangers of war and its causes. Communists point out that war cannot be prevented by pacifist means. Only a successful revolution can finally put an end to capitalist warfare. The Factory Groups will therefore oppose all moralistic schemes to stop war by trying to persuade workers involved in military production to boycott the manufacture of weapons. Such efforts wrongly assume that war can be abolished without first of all abolishing the system which causes wars. Instead, the Factory Groups will continue their fight to politicise the struggle of the whole working class. In the arms factories and naval dockyards, as elsewhere, they will lead the struggle over wages and working conditions out of which will develop the greater struggle for communism.

However, when there is imminent danger of war breaking out, the Factory Groups will join with the international communist party to agitate for political strikes against war preparations. And if world war does break out before the revolution is victorious the Factory Groups will refuse to abandon the class struggle in favour of "social peace" and "the national interest". Instead they will support the communists' call for mass strikes and insurrection and oppose all agreements between the unions and bosses to end the right to strike and undermine working conditions.

WORKERS! The Factory Groups of the CWO offer clear positions to fight for. They are the basis for work with fellow workers and a road towards strengthening the political organisation of the working class. If you agree with this Platform, join us and help us build and strengthen a network of internationalist factory groups. WORKERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE!