

Revolutionary Perspectives 3

Quarterly Magazine of the Communist Workers Organisation



This is the "Peace" of the Middle East

**The Spanish War 1936
Capitalism's Disasters
The Revival of Class Struggle
Germany's Crisis
Capitalist Barbarism in Russia
Elections against the Working Class
Italian Elections**

Revolutionary Perspectives
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Capitalism's Crisis and Disasters

Everyone who doesn't read the *Sun* is fully aware that the current crisis of British agriculture (strangely enough no-one calls it a health crisis) is the result of the wanton negligence of an irresponsible ruling class. It is not as if there have not been warnings for years of the consequence of including sheep and cattle carcasses in animal feed. When the first suspicions arose a decade ago that BSE and its human form, CJD, were connected, the Government trotted out its tame scientists to assure us that this was a scientific impossibility. British beef was safe.

Now we know that it was a cover-up and it is not difficult to say why. The profits from British beef exports are significant and the Government, which subsidises agricultural production enormously cannot accept the undermining of this strategically important product. This explains the virulence of the campaign against "the Europeans" for insisting that meat production should actually conform to known safety standards. You would think that the first aim of the Government would be to actually take the steps to ensure that beef eating was no longer a lottery. Instead they have simply repeated "British beef is safe" ad nauseam without even beginning a policy of slaughtering known infected herds, as the government have been doing in France. In fact they have left the problem so long that they cannot safely know which herds have been infected and which not. This is because farmers with infected cattle have been selling them on, often to farms which specialise in getting compensation, so that the original herd can be declared BSE-free. But then the national self-image of the British bourgeoisie is that rackets are only carried out by foreign mafiosi. Meanwhile the state operates along more sinister lines.

Farmers and scientists who tried to blow the whistle on these disgusting practices over the years have been victimised by the secret police (oh yes, it does happen here). One farmer has been shot at and had his farm burned down for trying to raise awareness of the dangers of intensive methods, and several scientists, some eminent in their fields (no joke intended), have had funding cut, lost their posts and, in one case, his right of residence in the UK. There are no lengths to which the state would not go to defend its national interest and the farming issue is central to that national interest. Of course, it is also useful for a decrepit administration to have a good jingoistic issue to buck up flagging poll returns but the Labour Party has shown its fundamental nature as the loyal opposition in the state. Its reluctance to go against the jingoists is not because it fears loss of electoral support but because it shares the fundamental idea of defending "UK Ltd".

But BSE is only one symptom of a degenerate social, economic and political system. Wherever we look the numbers of disasters around the planet are multiplying. These are not usually the results of "Acts of God" or mere unfortunate coincidences. They are brought about by fundamental transformations of life caused by the ravages of a decadent social system hell-bent on increasing exploitation. Whether it is in the rain forests of the Amazon or South East Asia where hardwood timber is being cut down at an unsustainable rate, for export to the metropolitan countries of Japan, Europe and America, or in the areas just to the south of the Sahara, where desertification is expanding due to the overcropping of local economies destroyed by the demands of imperialist agriculture, the consequences are dire. The loss of agricultural land everywhere is having a knock-on effect by forcing more and more of those living on the margins of existence towards the towns. In China alone there are 200 millions out of work, wandering the country, of which some 80 millions are living homeless on the edges of the larger cities. According to the World Bank over 10 million people a year are being forced out of their homes by huge governmental public works (40% of these being dams for hydro-electric power). All told the world's homeless "or those living in life-threatening urban conditions" (*The Guardian* 1.6.96) now comes to some 600 millions (or more than 10% of the world's population). In addition the same report tells us that more than a billion lack any form of sanitation and 250 millions have no access to safe drinking water. It is no surprise that all the diseases which were once either thought to be eradicated, or easily eradicable, are once again on the increase. Cholera, which costs only 50p. per person to cure is rising, and TB, ever thought of as the disease of the poor, is back in swelling numbers. The forecasts of all

the international agencies and banks are for this number to increase.

None of these things are accidental but the responsibility of a crisis-racked system. You don't just have to take our word for it. Even the Red Cross concludes that it is the political and social interference of the capitalist system (even if they cannot actually bring themselves to utter the word capitalist!) that is the direct cause of these human tragedies. *The Guardian* recently summarised a Red Cross report as follows

Disasters are more political and complex. They are increasingly man-made and technological, linked with conflict, the result of increased competition for scarce resources and international economic policies. (29.5.96)

The same report estimates that by the year 2000 300-500 million people could be affected by disasters. All this is indicative of the fact that we are at the end of a cycle of capitalist accumulation. This in turn has exacerbated the permanent internecine imperialist conflict of modern capitalism. Within state boundaries the picture is equally bleak. All those old enough to remember the post-war boom will be able to

recall how we were told that "you have never had it so good" and how Marxism's crisis theory was widely ridiculed because the Keynesian revolution had found out how to manage capitalism's "business cycle". When Keynesianism failed the monetarists were trotted out to advocate spending cuts but they too have had no real answers. The decline in the rate of profit has undermined the ability of capitalists to sustain the tax payments to maintain the post-war infrastructure and the result is mounting debt and unemployment. Now the validity of Marxism as a method for explaining the real movement of events is once again obvious. With the social fabric in the so-called "Third World" visibly disintegrating before our eyes, and the capitalists unable to sustain the welfare states that were set up in the leading capitalist countries during the post-war boom, we need no further evidence that we are not so much looking at the end of history but the end of the capitalist accumulation cycle. The old revolutionary slogan that we are faced with either socialism or barbarism has never been more valid that it is today. And only the working class by its united international action can rescue the world from the relentless, daily increase in capitalist barbarism.

The Difficult Path to the Revival of Working Class Struggle

The last few months have seen a series of strikes and other class actions throughout the leading capitalist nations. Most dramatically we have had the French strikes (see *Revolutionary Perspectives 1* and *Internationalist Communist 14*) of last November and December, then long but isolated struggles, such as the lockout of Merseyside dockers, as well as the strikes called by the German engineering unions IG Metall (see article in this issue). They all show the difficulties for the working class of mounting a coordinated resistance to further attempts by the capitalists and their states to increase exploitation and insecurity for the working class. Obviously a brief article can only outline the main problems but these are the same throughout the world. In the first place the crisis is becoming more and more uniform. Globally the capitalists are fully conscious that they have to manage that crisis carefully (at the recent Davos summit Jacques Santer, the head of the EU, openly talked about his fears of "social unrest" if the restructuring of the world economy was not conducted with an eye to the worsening situation of the working class). For the moment he need not worry since the ruling classes everywhere have shown that they are really aware of the stakes when they carry out their cuts programmes. This is why they usually

attack one sector at a time. In a sense this was also true in the French strikes where, having already imposed the main conditions of the Juppe Plan on the private sector workers the state thought it would be easy to turn on the public sector (relying on the usual gigantic propaganda campaign to win over "the nation"). As we now know this almost backfired when there was greater support (if largely passive) for the public sector workers. Indeed it was only because the unions (who had their own agenda of preserving their role as controllers of patronage in the pension system) came to the rescue of the capitalist class. For the first time in living memory they supported the setting up of strike committees, mass assemblies open to all and the uniting of one set of workers with workers from another sector. They were forced to do this to gain any credibility amongst a class which was already angry and suspicious. It was the only way they could get some control of the struggle. It was a dangerous game but the unions got away with it. In the end workers let the union apparatuses do their negotiating for them. Thus the unions were able to proclaim the workers as victorious when all that had happened was that at best the Government had postponed most of the cuts. The union bosses achieved their aim of proving to the Government that they were still

able to control millions of workers despite the low level of official unionisation in France. It was a similar story in Belgium and in Germany though in neither country was the movement so widespread as that in France.

Liverpool Dockers

The problem is that workers still see the unions, despite years of sell-outs and betrayal, as a means through which to express their united action. But these they are not. In fact the opposite is the case. Whilst a hundred or more years ago unions were the elemental form of working class unity against the encroachments of capital, the unions today operate in the interest of the preservation of that very capitalist class rule. After all their very existence is tied up with brokering the rate of exploitation. If workers ran society and worked in association directly distributing the collective wealth produced there would be no need for unions. But the unions ability to manipulate has increased in sophistication over the years as the depth of class anger amongst a minority of workers has increased. A case in point is the Liverpool dock lock-out. This was a provocation by the Merseyside Docks Harbour Company who sacked 80 striking workers last summer. All 500 workers on the Dock came out in solidarity and were then locked out. Since then the union - the TGWU - has allowed the shop stewards committee to use its offices as campaign headquarters whilst at the same time has actually helped the MDHC recruit the scab labour which is now working in the place of the locked-out dockers! No wonder the MDHC has recently proclaimed that they favour trades unions

We have worked successfully for 15 years with the T and G in Liverpool in improving efficiency and modernising working practices.

Financial Times 21.5.96

In other words, thank you very much to the TGWU which has been negotiating thousands of jobs away in the docks for years. For some naive souls the unions may be bad but the shop stewards represent the real interests of the workers. This idea has been severely knocked on the head by recent events too. In the French strikes the running was made by union activists usually linked to one or other Trotskyist or Stalinist group. For the Trotskyists the unions are not by nature anti-working class and require only a change of leadership (i.e. a Trotskyist leadership) to become revolutionary. They fail to see that the unions are a bulwark of the system of exploitation and even act in the interests of the preservation of the capitalist state. So when our pseudo-revolutionary Trotskyists act within the framework of those organisations they are constantly forced to justify them and thus take part

in the dividing of the working class into sections. Today if it was not for the leftist activists in the unions they would be so much weaker in the working class and this would mean that more ad hoc struggle committees could arise without being confined inside the bourgeois framework. In short, these Leftists who sow illusions that the unions can be made more responsible to the rank and file constantly undermine the thrust of the working class towards independent struggle.

In Liverpool there was much talk about the "solidarity" that the shop stewards tried to win internationally but this was only via other trades unions who coughed up financial support for the locked out workers. They could not manage to get a single solidarity action of any significance. It must not have helped that the Liverpool shop stewards slogan was "Liverpool Dockers the best in Europe". This was even worse than the other great corporatist slogan "Coal not Dole" which helped to isolate miners in 1984-5. In fact it sounded more like an advert to entice capital to Merseyside than to extend a living struggle! Now the isolation has worked its course the shipping companies which initially had abandoned Merseyside are coming back and the best the workers can now hope for is the supposed "improved offer" that they will receive in terms of redundancy money with possibly a few re-instatements on the bosses terms.

However the unions and the shop stewards can only undermine the struggle so long as they are allowed to by the working class. In the end the issue is one of consciousness. If workers understand what they are as a class and that the only permanent solution to their misery lies in the overthrow of capitalism (and no pandering to state capitalist ideas of reform) then these institutional obstacles thrown up by capitalism's development will cease to be significant. This is of course easy to say but much more difficult to achieve. Collective action which develops consciousness cannot come about overnight. As that consciousness develops we will see steady increase not only in the numbers of revolutionary workers but also in their influence within the different struggles of the working class. After a decade and a half of retreat (despite the odd struggle which has punctuated the retreat by the advanced nature of its organisational forms) the present situation is not easy for us to escape from. On the one hand workers are rightly cautious about taking all-out action as this can actually weaken their situation, on the other hand the capitalists are so confident at the moment that their attacks cannot be met in any other way than by an instant response of the working class. Workers will, as they always have been in history, forced to struggle in immediate terms and on conditions not of their own choosing (see the current postal workers struggles).

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Germany, the Crisis Bites...

Workers Pay the Costs

German Capital

It was once commonplace for the press to use the word 'miracle' when talking of the German economy. It is still the largest European economy but the miracle is over. For the past six months the German economy has been contracting – the usual term for this in capitalist economics is recession! For marxists this situation is nothing other than the reality of the world capitalist crisis being brought home to German capital. As the German economy falters (slowdown in GDP growth accompanied by a growing budget deficit) workers, as usual, are being blamed and told they can't go on living in the old way.

It is a familiar refrain. Wages are too high and "uncompetitive", labour is not "flexible" enough and welfare spending is eating up a greater and greater portion of the state budget. Indeed, from the standpoint of the government and bosses all this is true. Faced with declining growth as a result of the diminishing rate of profit capitalism worldwide is obliged to find all means possible to reduce costs and increase the amount of surplus value extracted from each worker. (They call it "increased productivity", Marx showed scientifically that what it really means is increased exploitation.) Thus the Kohl government has announced a so-called reform package, including measures similar to those put forward in France and Italy – a 'restructuring' of the welfare state, tax changes and new employment rules. In addition the government and the BDA, the German employers organisation (as well as the BAVC, the chemical employers federation), have been attempting to do a series of deals with a variety of industrial sectors to sort out new pay, productivity and employment deals. The other major bodies involved in these talks, the unions, have managed to restrain the working class response with a series of token strikes that have been going on for nearly a year now. True to their task of guarding over the 'national interest' the unions pretend there can be a reconciliation between the fundamentally contradictory interests of capital and labour. Like everywhere else they are presenting wage and job cuts as victories, or "the best that can be done" in the present economic climate. There has been plenty of strike action but so far there have been no widescale outbursts to threaten the unions' stranglehold over the struggle as witnessed in France over the Juppé plan and Italy over the attempted pension cuts in 1994.¹

Giants of German capital once thought of as virtually impregnable are recording increasing problems. In *Workers Voice* 69 we noted the problems being suffered then by VW, Dasa and Mercedes. Now we hear that Daimler-Benz, the largest German conglomerate, has lost at least DM5.7 billion (£2.5 billion). AEG, the kitchen equipment giant, has been broken up following its bankruptcy. Grundig had DM500 million losses, Bremer Vulkan, the shipbuilder, DM1 billion (£440 million) and has subsequently suspended trading in its shares and gone bust. (Workers there protested but their anger was typically directed at what they perceived as capitalist mismanagement and implicitly at low-paid workers in the east. The slogan "We want our millions back" – a reference to the diversion of DM600 million in subsidies to yards acquired in the east by the EU was never going to be a platform for unifying the working class.) The building and engineering industries have seen increasing problems. Probably the only sectors still producing adequate profits are the chemical and banking sectors.

One of the biggest problems for German capital, as highlighted by the economists and boardrooms, is the high cost of German labour power. Average German manufacturing labour costs are DM44 per hour (£19.50), in Britain it is DM22 (£9.50), France DM29 (£12.80), USA DM28 (£12.40). Non-wage labour costs, pensions, social security, health contributions are also high – 82% of wage costs in Germany, whereas in Britain they are only 40%. These are the factors which German capitalists argue are behind the failure to attract as much foreign investment into Germany in comparison with Britain. (It is also why firms like BMW continue to invest in more plant outside German borders.) The solution provided is to move in what has been seen as the British direction, looking at personal and corporate tax cuts – simplifying the maze of German tax law, cutting welfare costs wherever possible. The post-war boom that provided the basis for paying increasingly higher wages is well and truly over.

Model Germany is history. The politicians know it, the unions know it, the employers' associations... know it. And the political parties know it.

Süddeutsche Zeitung

Only the working class, it seems, is still misled

into thinking there can be good times round the corner.

While Chancellor Kohl has been arguing consistently for greater European economic union, for which read greater hegemony for German capital over the European economy in both finance and manufacturing terms, Germany has been losing ground in most key areas. The state accounts for over 50% of GDP, at over 4% its budget deficit is too high to meet the criteria for monetary union, inflation is too high and even the vaunted DMark is suffering fluctuations. These problems are common throughout Europe, as has been said in recent European Union meetings. Higher growth rates are to be pursued by 'reduced wage costs', greater 'flexibility' in working conditions, reduced social security costs to lower the burden on employers, moves towards shorter hour employment (ie., more part-time work), etc. Hence the recent talks between Jacques Santer, the President of the Eu-

ment'.

Faced with the ongoing problem of declining profitability in manufacturing industry, financial speculation is the order of the day. Hence the German government has recognised that it has to expand its stock exchange and derivatives markets which are small in comparison to London, New York, Chicago, Tokyo and so on. Germany has become something of a victim of its post-war success. Its economic institutions are largely geared to the economic model created to serve what had been successful after the war but which now are an encumbrance. Traditionally German industry has borrowed from banks so there has been a lack of share culture in the German economy which is changing in the present crisis as the big firms seek fast capital for investment. So we see Deutsche Telekom doing what is unusual for a German state-owned enterprise, putting shares up for sale. As it looks to compete with the privatised British Telecom it



A sectional struggle in action. The girder blocking the road says "We want our millions back". This is a slogan of the unions (and the bosses) to divide West and East German workers.

ropean Commission, and employers and unions in order to establish a consensus for such plans to improve general European competitiveness but which can only exacerbate unemployment. No wonder Santer is worried.

We cannot go on as we are. If unemployment remains at its current levels with about 18 million people out of work, we will undermine the very foundations of our democracy.

At bottom the bourgeoisie is afraid, it knows that it has to try to pass on the costs of the failures of its own system to the working class. There is going to be no return to 'full employ-

ment'.

hopes the share issue will bring in much needed capital to offset its large borrowings and future costs (digitalising the network), then to pursue such things as the purchase of Cable & Wireless, the ailing American firm. Moreover, the German bourgeoisie is recognising that it has fallen behind in those esoteric areas of finance pioneered by Britain and the US - derivatives, options, futures, venture and risk capital - all means others use to hedge against losses, to protect trading and make a quick buck.

Welfare Spending Cuts

German unemployment is growing. The engi-

neering sector has shed jobs at a steady rate for some years now. Deutsche Telekom is planning to lose 60-90,000 jobs as part of its 'rationalisation' programme. The building industry is making thousands redundant. In total the government admits to 4.3 million unemployed, the real figure is between 5.5 and 6 million. Such large numbers put a great strain on the social security budget. As a consequence Theo Waigel, the finance minister, has announced a series of welfare changes, aimed at cutting the state budget. The government hopes to cut £22 billion from central and regional government spending, £11 billion to be saved by freezing welfare benefits such as pensions, unemployment payments, child benefit, another £11 billion to come through a public sector pay-freeze, around £9 billion is to be saved through reform of health insurance and pensions.

Workers' Response

There is no doubt that workers are angry but, as we said above, their response has mainly been channelled into token actions by the unions who, true to their capitalist function, are pedalling the myth that there can be a solution to satisfy both capital and labour. For instance IG Metall, the big engineering union, had the bright idea that its members forego a wage increase from next year in return for the creation of 300,000 jobs over three years. (The so-called 'alliance for jobs' which the government went along with). It was the bosses who realised this was a non-starter but both union and bosses have agreed that anyone who gets a job after being on the dole a long time should get 10% lower wages! At Volkswagen IG Metall claimed a victory for the workers but the truth was rather different.

At Volkswagen the workers avoided 10,000 lay-offs for the time being with "work less, everyone works" agreement but with the little detail that they now work practically the same hours as before but for 15% lower wages, thus allowing the productivity and the profits of the firm to rise enormously.

Battaglia Comunista 5 (May 1996)

This is how the unions defend the working class!

Not surprisingly, with leaders like this the workers' response has been confined to a well-orchestrated display of demonstrations, usually one-day affairs, which have done nothing to pose the real issue: the struggle between capital and labour, not a dispute about how much workers can or cannot sacrifice in the interests of capital. Why should we be sacrificing anything? Behind it all, of course, there is real anger. Throughout May the public sector was hit by a series of short stoppages, transport

and postal services were particularly affected. Characteristically the public sector unions called off the action for three weeks in compliance with the government's labour laws! The building sector is ready to experience a similar series of token strikes as IG Bau the construction union has been unable to negotiate a minimum wage level aiming to price foreign workers out of the jobs market! Instead of blaming the capitalist system where each state is competing against all the others to lower the cost of labour power the unions blame wage cuts on immigrant workers! This only emphasises which class the unions really solidarise with – their own national branch of the capitalist class.

The Outlook

German workers are going to have to face much the same punishment as has been dished out to British, French and Italian workers over the past couple of years. The unions will continue to attempt to sell their negotiated wage and welfare cuts to the workforce but if workers are going to really defend themselves they will have to take a different path outside of and against these bodies who daily undermine a serious fightback. This is the path of serious struggle which cannot be fought according to the bosses' legal rules or limited to a day here or a half-day there. In no way does it mean one sector seeking to gain at the expense of another. So long as workers rely on the trades unions to defend them they will find themselves being dragooned into mock battles that are no real threat to capital and can be easily contained. German capital and its governmental agents may see the need for belt-tightening on behalf of workers, with *Gastarbeiters* (foreign workers) being sacrificed on the altar of cuts (the three R's, restructuring, restraint and reform) – it can only be hoped that German workers see things somewhat differently. They have been relatively quiet, when compared to French and Italian workers faced with similar sorts of welfare cuts (although not necessarily the same levels). Workers throughout Europe have to understand that what is happening is that capital, and the capitalist class, is trying to save itself at the expense of the opposite side of the class divide, the working class. Workers have to realise that there is only one thing to lose, **the idea that they have something to lose.** Whatever capital does to stave off the effects of the crisis, whether it is cutting the welfare state or increasing its capacity to engage in speculation – standing behind it is the tendency of the rate of profit to fall – the contradiction at the heart of capitalism itself. It remains for workers throughout Europe to begin the process of organising themselves, outside of the unions which will only try to keep workers safely tucked up in bed with capital. Independent action is what's needed.

CDE

Middle East: If This is Peace, Who Needs War!

Events of the past few months have demonstrated what peace really means in the context of imperialism. Following Israel's murder of Hamas bomb maker Ayyash "The Engineer", 63 Israeli civilians were murdered in a series of suicide bomb attacks in February. The Israelis retaliated in traditional style by sealing off the West Bank and Gaza, an action which forces tens of thousands of Palestinians, dependant on the Israeli labour market into destitution. Further troop withdrawals from the occupied territories were then suspended, and tanks sent into the West Bank. Just like in the days before "peace" thousands of Palestinians were arrested and the homes of suspected terrorist's families were raised to the ground. Yet the terror had only just begun.

"Grapes of Wrath"

Since 1982 Hizbollah's primitive Katyusha rockets have killed 12 civilians in northern Israel. This of course is tragic for those concerned and used as a pretext by the Israeli government for a retaliatory massacre of Lebanese civilians and the shattering of Lebanon's fragile economy. Of course the actual reason for the vicious Israeli bombardment which killed hundreds of civilians and forced 400,000 to flee their homes in April, had little to do with minor security problems on Israel's northern border and everything to do with bourgeois political manoeuvring and imperialist objectives. Facing re-election Israeli prime minister Shimon Peres came under fire from the rightist opposition Likud party for being soft on security and giving too much away to the PLO. Peres needed his own "Falklands factor" and knew that the exercise of military might in Lebanon has traditionally been popular with significant sectors of the Israeli electorate. Giving Hizbollah a good thrashing might have boosted Peres' credibility especially if it could be achieved with minimal Israeli casualties. Moreover Israel could demonstrate it's traditional role as America's policeman in the Middle East by moving against the Iranian-backed Hizbollah.

An Imperialist Chessboard

Conflict in the Middle East is a microcosm of modern imperialism. Situated at the confluence of Europe, Asia and Africa the Middle East

has been of prime strategic importance for centuries. In the late 19th century Britain and France competed over the spoils of the crumbling Ottoman Empire in Egypt, the Arabian peninsular and north Africa. In Iran Russia competed for influence with Britain and France whilst Germany sought to expand its interests in Turkey. In the early part of this century the discovery of vast oil reserves in the Gulf region gave the Middle East the crucial economic significance it has today. Following the First World War Britain and France emerged as the major imperialist powers in the Middle East and were granted "mandates" by the League of Nations. Britain got Palestine, Jordan and Iraq whilst France was handed Lebanon and Syria. Neither, despite their decline, has completely abandoned their interests in the area. The British had posed as both the friends of the Jews (by issuing the Balfour Declaration calling for a Jewish homeland in 1917) and the Arabs (since the Anglo-French Sykes-Picot Agreement had promised support for independent Arab states in return for Arab help in the fight against Turkey). In the inter-war period both groups were to be disappointed as the French and British clung on to their control. This manoeuvring was simply a foretaste of what still goes on today.

At the end of the Second World War it was clear that the enfeebled and indebted British imperialism must give way to the dominance of the USA. Whilst the British vacillated over their previous promise to grant the Zionists their own state, the USA supported the various Zionist terror gangs (the Haganah and the Irgun, respectively the precursors of the Israeli Labour Party and the Likud) who would establish the state of Israel in 1948. As Itzak Rabin freely admitted in his memoirs, this soon set about getting the Palestinians out of the territory assigned to it by the UN by the first post-war example of "ethnic cleansing". At this time Israel had no enemy amongst any of the major imperialist powers whilst the Arabs had few friends.

Whilst the USSR initially supported the creation of Israel it then swapped sides when it realised that it had more chance of exerting its influence through Arab states such as Egypt and Syria. Thus the Israel/Arab conflict, engendered by imperialism became the conduit through which East-West imperialist rivalry was played out throughout the duration of the Cold War. In an

historical context it is clear that the struggle popularly portrayed as that between Jew and Arab is merely the surface appearance through which the imperialist ambitions of the great powers has been conducted. This is borne out by events since 1982.

From Cold War To Chaos

In that year, when the Israelis invaded Lebanon up to Beirut and the Beqaa Valley it became obvious to all the USSR's former clients that they could achieve little fighting against the US.. The collapse of Russian imperialism in 1989 followed its earlier withdrawal from the Middle East and left the USA as the predominant imperialist power in the region.

However the New World Order has not been easy for the USA to manage. America has tried to bring the region into line but this policy has been impeded through the re-emergence of old

only of Israel but of US imperialism which is fearful of Islamic fundamentalism as a serious destabilizing factor in the region. At the same time Syria and Israel are under pressure from the US to reach agreement over the Israeli occupied Golan Heights. Being the only power capable of reining in Hizbollah, Syria will only do so on condition of securing the most favourable deal possible over the Golan, which apart from strategic advantage, affords crucial water supplies. Hizbollah can therefore be seen as the joker in Assad's pack. Whilst the recent "Grapes of Wrath" adventure has been unsuccessful in a military sense from Israel's angle, the lack of any serious condemnation from the US is a warning to Syria that it must not play its Hizbollah card too often.

Imperialist war is total war which does not limit itself to military conflict. It is also economic war carried on against whole populations. The struggle in the Middle east conforms to this

pattern as can be seen by recent events. It has been estimated that the Israeli bombardment of Lebanon has caused \$300 million worth of damage creating a major set back to Lebanon's post civil war reconstruction. Since the end of the Civil war in 1990 the Lebanese economy has grown apace as evidenced by investment of \$6.5bn. in 1995, mainly from Lebanese émigrés abroad. Whilst attempting to take out Hizbollah the Israelis have also taken the opportunity to damage an economic rival. It is difficult to see why in strictly military terms, the Israelis would have needed, for example, to bomb the electricity generating station which serves Beirut. It does however send out a message that Lebanon is not a safe financial

bet and further undermines the revival of the former "Switzerland of the Middle East".

The "Grapes of Wrath" affair has also revealed cracks within the edifice of western imperialism. Both the USA and France manoeuvred to control the situation by putting forward rival cease-fire plans, the Americans seeking the disarming of Hizbollah whereas the French plan merely sought to prevent Israel and Hizbollah from attacking civilians. In other words the French backed the Syrians and tried to prevent any agreement that would lead to the disarming of Hizbollah, the main target of the US plan. This manoeuvring also underlines the hypocrisy of the West vis-a-vis the so-called threat of Islamic fundamentalism. Whilst the US backs the FIS, the Islamic fundamentalists in Algeria in



The "accidental" massacre of Palestinians in the UN refugee camp at Qana demonstrated the hollowness of all talk of "peace" in the Middle East

imperialist rivalries and, the lesser imperialist ambitions of the local powers as illustrated by the recent events in the Lebanon where Syria, Israel and Iran all vie for power. Lebanon is once again essentially a puppet state of Syria where the writ of 35,000 Syrian troops runs large with the exception of the extreme south which is effectively occupied by Israel. The Iranian-backed Hizbollah is the only militia not disbanded by Syria and can only operate with the tacit agreement of Damascus. In fact it is a tool of the Syrian-Iranian alliance in its struggle to force the Israelis to withdraw from Lebanon and make peace by ceding the Golan Heights back to Israel.

Syrian president Assad is conscious of the fact that Hizbollah is a major thorn in the flesh not

order to bring down the French-backed government there, in Lebanon the boot is on the other foot. As evidenced by its covert support for the Syrian and Iranian positions, the French ruling class regards Hizbollah as a potential vehicle for promoting its interests in the Arab world against the interests of the US.

The Palestinians Marginalised

Which brings us to the Palestinians. Having accepted US tutelage after the collapse of its last hopes in the Gulf War the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) is now paralysed. It can only try to continue its policy of showing how it can control Palestinian anger (as it did last November by shooting down Arab demonstrators). Only days after the Israeli massacre of Palestinian refugees at Qana in southern Lebanon the PLO's governing body, the Palestine National Council voted to revoke the clause in its constitution calling for the abolition of the state of Israel. Whilst the PLO never had any real prospect of taking on the military might of Israel which is backed by billions of US dollars, the recent vote symbolises the marginalisation of the Palestinians in Middle East Affairs and the limitation of Palestinian national aspirations to the Gaza-West Bank mini-statelet. This has come about as a consequence of the reluctance of the PLO's former Arab backers to continue to bankroll the Palestinian struggle and the end of the Cold War. With the collapse of Russian imperialism and the confirmation of American hegemony after the Gulf War, the imperialist rationale for the Israeli/Palestinian conflict has disappeared. However this has not abolished imperialist conflict in the Middle East, rather, as we have seen above, the focus of that conflict has shifted elsewhere.

Whatever the final status of the Palestinian entity may be the impoverishment and exploitation of the Palestinian proletariat continues unabated. It is an exploitation that is all the more tragic because the Palestinian working class, under the bourgeois slogan of national liberation has literally paid for its support for the PLO down the years. Whilst the fat cats of the PLO bourgeoisie have lived apart from the horrors of the refugee camps in Gaza etc. in their apartments in London, New York and Paris the workers of the Palestinian diaspora were paying 5% of their wages into PLO coffers. When Arafat supported Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War it was these same workers who were attacked, tortured or expelled from the Gulf States as victims of Arafat's power politics. It was also the working class which bore the brunt of the nearly 1200 deaths during the "intifada", a struggle which began spontaneously but which soon became a weapon in the hands of the PLO (and Hamas) leadership. Today the conditions

in Gaza are worse than ever with economic warfare being conducted against the refugees. Unemployment and overcrowding may now be leading the young into discontent with the PLO but the beneficiary is Hamas and the religious fanatics. The workers of this area, both Jew and Arab will only be released from the coils of this murderous conflict once they stop following the lead of their "own" national bourgeoisies. This is unlikely until the imperialist motives which nurture this conflict are themselves destroyed. Only the international working class can end the misery in the Middle East.

Israeli Elections

Naturally none of this surfaced in the recent election campaign in Israel. The issue of Israeli national security and the future of the "peace process" dominated and the Israeli bourgeoisie is divided only in its timing. Although the rhetoric of Netanyahu is much more bellicose in tone than that of Peres his position is not substantially different. The closer Likud got to power the more he committed them to continuing "the peace process", and especially to talks with Syria which is now the most pressing question of the day (rather than that of the Palestinians). It won't be in the change of government inside Israel that obstacles to peace will be found. Likud cannot afford many of their more racist policies (more immigration of Jews, more settlements in the West Bank) unless supported by the US. It is in the international situation, in the nature of imperialism that new rivalries will arise just as old ones seem to be settled or becoming obsolete. If Syria makes any kind of deal it can only do so by abandoning its alliance with Iran and that would probably mean that Tehran would step up its aid to the Islamic groups like Hamas. There is thus enough material to make for greater combustion since the imperialist rivalries that have fanned the flames of war for the last six decades have not gone away. As we have already said there will be no peace in the Middle East until the imperialist system which depends on national rivalry continues to exist. Workers have to remain outside all national conflicts and fight for their own programme - that of international revolution.

PBD

Internationalist Communist

Review of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

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Russia: Another Case of Capitalist Barbarism



Moscow today: East and West capitalism's crisis spells the end of state welfare

For the capitalist press and television the only newsworthy item coming from Russia at the moment is the presidential election. In particular they are worried about the revival in popularity of the Communist Party since Yeltsin's ban on it was overturned three years ago. The possibility of Gennady Zyuganov, the CP leader, beating Yeltsin at the polls is filling them with apprehension. This has nothing to do with fear about a "return to communism" in Russia. Leaving aside the fact that journalists here still propagate the myth that communism means Stalinism, and a 'command economy' they know very well (or at least the more serious of them) that what Zyuganov stands for has nothing to do with communism. Above all else Zyuganov represents those sectors of the Russian ruling class (all of them old CP apparatchiks) who are most disillusioned with the opening up of their economy to the West. For many it is a personal disillusion. Amongst those in the Yeltsin camp and its satellites are the millionaires, even billionaires, whose fortunes have come from the financial scams and profiteering made possible by their key positions in the economy: Directors of newly-created banks who hived off subsidies that were supposed to boost crumbling agricultural and industrial output in the early days of the USSR's economic collapse; old CP apparatchiks involved in the export of raw materials, principally oil, gas and various metals, who have been able to amass personal fortunes by buying commodities at subsidised domestic

prices and selling them on the world market "for their own profit".¹ Finally, there are those who did very well by profiteering on subsidised essential imports, largely financed out of Western commodity credits and intended to stave off social unrest. The trick was to sell these mainly food commodities at the going market price inside Russia while "the subsidy was siphoned off by a few traders in Moscow". Altogether, these import subsidies amounted to 15 per cent of GDP in 1992. The same FT source tells us that these three groups of "newly rich" Russians as a whole received 75% of total GDP in 1992! No matter that subsidised credits and import subsidies were abolished the following year. For those with the right connections the 'free market' has proved its worth.

However, when it comes to other elements from the top ranks of the old CP hierarchy this is far from being the case. In the regions the old local party bosses have seen their power bases disintegrate with the collapse of the industrial infrastructure, especially the heavy industries geared to military production — the so-called military-industrial complex. Instead of overseeing a programme of economic restructuring and regeneration these old CP politicians and administrators have found themselves responsible for dealing with the social problems associated with the wholesale shutdown of obsolete industrial plant and the privatisation of unprofitable factories. And these problems are enormous. Under the Stalinist system it was the local indus-

tries which provided funds for housing, schools, creches, medical care, even entertainment facilities. In practice, of course, many of these firms were not generating enough surplus value to support the facilities they were providing but the extent of their bankruptcy was disguised by the system of accounting which channelled everything through the state. This was why the economic crisis in Russia hit directly at the state itself and caused the whole politico-economic set-up to collapse. In the process there has been a massive devaluation of existing constant capital (not to mention of workers' wages). According to the *Financial Times* the stock market value of Russia's top two hundred companies, which include several big oil companies, is about \$22bn — more or less the same as a single Western company such as Smith-Kline Beecham pharmaceuticals. Even so, there are so few profitable areas in the economy that the huge amount of surplus value required to invest in new technology cannot be generated from the domestic economy alone.

Asset prices remain depressed as investors continue to shy away from Russia despite a surge of interest in other emerging markets this year. [*Financial Times*, 29.2.96]

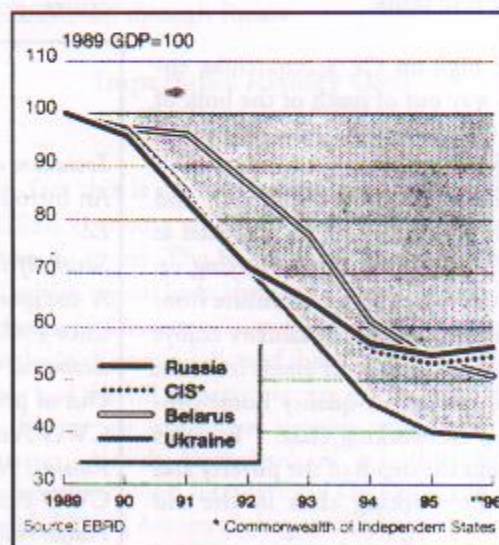
Without foreign investment there can be no regeneration of manufacturing industry and shares in the newly privatised enterprises will continue to be worth next to nothing. This is exactly what workers have been finding with the share vouchers that have been doled out to them as a ruse to get them involved in the privatisation process. It's like being given shares in a bankrupt John Lewis's. (Except that in Russia, John Lewis often runs the whole town.) But the same thing holds for the managers who have awarded themselves substantial share holdings only to find that without investment funds this is no way to get rich quick.² On top of all this is the bitterness and frustration amongst the top ranks of the Russian military. Not only are they faced with the prospect of the ex-Warsaw Pact countries of eastern Europe being absorbed into NATO but what is left of the army is so ill-equipped that Russian soldiers fighting in Chechnya have been reduced to stealing the boots from the feet of Chechen

fighters they have killed. In addition Russian imperialism's once powerful means of influencing client states as well as a valuable source of foreign exchange — arms exports — have dramatically fallen in the wake of the USSR's collapse and the USA's imposition of its 'new world order'.³

The 'Communist' Revival

Zyuganov's particular blend of anti-Western nationalism reflects the feelings of these sectors of the Russian ruling class who have lost much and gained little from the USSR's collapse. The amalgamation of the word 'communism' with nationalism is nothing new. After all, millions of Russian proletarians died during the 2nd World War fighting for the "socialist motherland". What is different is the ditching of any sort of lip-service to the original ideals of the October Revolution. Zyuganov's particular distortion of history leads him to praise Lenin and the October Revolution because they preserved the integrity of the Russian state after the Tsarist state's collapse during the 1st World War! Less surprisingly, Stalin is praised for uniting the country against the Nazi invaders. Perhaps what should come as no surprise from this out-and-out anti-Western nationalist is his attack on the Bolsheviks' 'cosmopolitanism' — the traditional euphemism for anti-Semitism which is even more vile because it is directed at the values of proletarian internationalism. But then, Zyuganov's reactionary melange includes courting the Orthodox Church and in general harking back to the 'good old days', whether it be under Tsarism or Stalinism, when Russia was a 'great' power with a strong and highly centralised state. Clearly this has nothing to do with communism, i.e. the abolition of exploitation and the creation of a world community of associated producers. Neither has it much to do with the resurrection of the old closed economy with its centralised planning system and direct state control over industry. Zyuganov and his supporters — who now include disillusioned renegades from the Yeltsin camp — recognise the need for Russian capitalism to revitalise itself and are not proposing renationalisation of industry. However, after five years of bowing to the behest of Western economic advisers ('shock therapy', opening up to the market etc.) without seeing any significant injection of foreign capital there is increasing sympathy within the bourgeoisie for a specifically Russian solution. Whether or not Yeltsin is re-elected the days of slavishly following the advice of IMF officials and other Western economic 'advisers' are over. Indeed, now that it is clear that there is not going to be any financing of new technology for domestic manufacturing from the West there is no alternative for Russian capital but to depend more and more on the sale of energy and raw

GDP has plummeted in the former USSR



materials on the world market. Somehow or other the profits generated here will have to be redirected to other areas of the economy. At the same time Yuri Maslukov — once chairman of Gosplan, now sympathiser of Zyuganov and chairman of the economic committee of the Duma (parliament) — is proposing reintroduction of energy and raw material subsidies as well as selective import controls to protect domestic manufacturing industry. As he put it in a recent interview with *The Guardian*:

Compared to the West, Russian industry is low-quality, more energy and material consuming, and needs more labour, and the product is more expensive. The only way to save it is to lower the prices for energy and raw materials. [1.6.96]

According to the Almaty daily newspaper *Caravan-Blitz*, approximately thirty cities of Kazakhstan will soon become extinct. This report is based on the conclusions of a scientific conference which was held on the problems of small and medium sized cities of Kazakhstan (up to 50,000 and 100,000 inhabitants, respectively).

There are 60 such cities throughout the country, in which some two million people live. The problem is that almost all of the enterprises that have been primarily responsible for the livelihoods of their residents have been shut down. In 30 of the 60 cities, the government intends to carry out rehabilitation measures with respect to the inactive enterprises, while finance from the state budget for those enterprises that are unprofitable is to be terminated. The remaining cities are to be simply left to extinction.

This is a sign of the desperation of Russian capitalism, not a recipe for its regeneration. The tragedy is that the party which holds out this prospect of working for a pittance (Russian wages are now amongst the lowest in the world) in return for the shoddiest of consumer goods is actually attracting working class support.

The collapse of the USSR did not simply mean political disintegration. Underlying the political collapse was the acute economic crisis which had followed the years of stagnation under Brezhnev and which Gorbachev's belated restructuring policies [*perestroika*] only exposed further. Essentially the crisis was one of a massive dearth of surplus value for reinvestment. Soviet accounting may have ignored the distinction between profit and loss but the economy was no less subject to the law of value for that. The economic collapse of the USSR has given the lie to the Trotskyist argument that the relations of production were somehow 'socialist' even though the state was politically degenerate. Just as in the West, the working class were exploited under Stalinism and just as in the West, it is the working class who today suffer and pay when capitalism is in crisis.

In the past the high-up CP apparatchiks enjoyed privileges way out of reach of the bulk of the population (country dachas, shopping with hard currency for Western goods). Not much has changed even if the gap between 'rich' and 'poor', exploiters and exploited, has widened as in the West. Today Yeltsin is busy buying up eighteenth century reproduction furniture from Italy for his official residence, Maslukov enjoys the benefit of 'luxury' consumer goods from the West while advocating low-quality home-produced goods for the working class. But this says nothing about the depth of the poverty and misery facing the working class in the old USSR.

What About the Workers?

Unemployment is now officially recognised but figures are difficult to obtain and in any case its real extent is still disguised. As in the West lay-offs come quickly on the heels of privatisation as the old 'conditions of service' are removed and new working practices are introduced to "increase efficiency" — i.e. to increase the rate of exploitation per worker. Even now, however, there is official refusal to recognise mass unemployment. For instance, in the trade union survey quoted earlier 70% of privatisations were followed by lay-offs of between 20-59% of the workforce but, bizarrely, "Those enterprises where there were significant employee lay-offs most often used the practice of sending their personnel on compulsory leave." And that's not so that the bosses avoid paying redundancy money because there is no such thing in Russia. Like capitalist left-wingers here Russian trade unions tend to blame unemployment on privatisation but privatisation is the response of the state to economic crisis, not its cause. In Russia and the twelve CIS countries that once made up the USSR (along with Belarus and Ukraine) privatised and state firms alike are languishing without funds to invest and without order books. In his *Guardian* interview Maslukov gives the example of Iz mash "a giant city state of a plant" where he was once chief engineer and which has laid-off 20,000 of its former 60,000 workers but which only produces 3% of previous output.

This means that the factory is almost at a standstill, and 80 per cent of the workers should by rights be dismissed. Therefore the real level of unemployment is really much higher than the official level.

He doesn't mention whether the workers, who should by right be paid, have actually received any wages. Throughout Russia and beyond strikes for back payment of wages are a regular occurrence. When they do eventually get paid

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workers receive a pittance. The IMF is currently pleased with the Yeltsin regime for getting inflation down to about 2% per month. However, between 1990 and 1995 consumer prices rose 3,900 times and until recently annual inflation was well over 100%. This, coupled with the 'opening up' of the Russian market to Western consumer goods and withdrawal of price subsidies on domestic commodities, has put the majority of everyday goods out of reach of the working class. The miracle is that the working class survives at all.

Often they don't survive. Behind the graphs and statistics of declining life expectancy (the average Russian male can now expect to survive 57 years), increased suicide rate, increased incidence of alcoholism, and heart disease, increasing rate of infant mortality (24 per 1,000 in the ex-USSR compared to 7 per 1,000 in the European Union) lies the horror story of daily life for the working class in the old Soviet Union. In Moscow and other cities old people whose pensions are now worthless beg for food or try to sell personal belongings. Homeless and abandoned children roam the streets. Protection rackets abound. Diseases which had supposedly been wiped out have returned. For example, diphtheria has now reached epidemic proportions, encouraged by the wave of migrations which have followed the USSR's collapse. (Almost 9 million people have moved between the CIS states since 1989.)⁴ The biggest group of 'migrants' are the victims of "armed conflicts" in the Caucasus: that between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno Karabakh; the Abkhazian revolt in Georgia; the war between the Ingouche minority and Ossetians; and now the war between Russia and Chechnya which has already cost 30,000 lives. This is a war which Russia's demoralised and decrepit conscript army cannot win but which Russia cannot afford to lose because whoever controls Chechnya controls the oil pipeline from Baku in Azerbaijan through Russia to the Black Sea as well as a further pipeline from Kazakhstan through Russia.

Imperialist Rivalry Over the Former USSR

"The security of the world's oil and gas supplies remain a vital interest of the United States and its major allies ... (which) now move north, to include the Caucasus, Siberia and Kazakhstan. Our forward military presence and diplomacy need adjusting."
[Robert Dole, US Presidential candidate, October 1995.]

In fact this is one of the few areas of the old USSR economy where Western companies are keen to invest. The lucrative oil deposits of the Caspian region have attracted a veritable rush of the giant Western oil companies eager to get a stake in the exploitation of the oil reserves. Britain and the US in particular are vying with each other to get control of supplies and pipeline routes. Already Azerbaijan's oil is in the hands of the 'Azerbaijan International Oil Consortium' with BP and Amoco as the principal players, in a deal which awards them 19% of returns and the Republic of Azerbaijan 30%. (The rest is divided

up amongst various Western companies from the US to Norway and Turkey with the US predictably having the largest overall share - 39%.) When it comes to oil the economic interests of the 'great powers' overlap with their strategic needs. The US has insisted that an additional southern pipeline be built from Baku (through Georgia, Armenia and Turkey) to bypass Russia and prevent a Russian stranglehold over transport and \$50bn of Western investment has been made available for this, \$10bn. of it immediately.⁵ Compare this with the IMF's annual total of \$10bn. for the whole of Russia which it will only release monthly so long as strict 'anti-inflationary' conditions are complied with.

It is this sort of blatant pursuit of their imperialist interests by the West, that has brought home to the Russian ruling class that there is going to be no kind of Marshall Plan for the vanquished of the Cold War. Yeltsin, with his monopoly of the media, a patched-up ceasefire with the Chechens, and an initiative to reunite Russia and Belarus, may yet steal the Zyuganov's thunder but the West knows that whoever resides in the Kremlin at the end of June will be a more difficult person "to do business with". The tragedy is that the working class should be conned into identifying with the politicians' universal theme of "making Russia great again". It will be on their backs that Russian imperialism attempts to revive itself.

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Footnotes

- 1 Anders Aslund, 'How Some Russians Got Rich' in *Financial Times* 31.5.96
- 2 According to a recent survey by the Russian Federation of Independent Trade Unions 83.6 % of privatised firms in Russia are unable to attract foreign investments. Our thanks to CV in Kazakhstan for sending us this and other information.
- 3 See 'The Material Basis of Imperialist War' in *Internationalist Communist Review* 13. Available from CWO address.
- 4 According to a report for a conference on migration in the CIS in Geneva quoted in the *Financial Times* 23.5.96.
- 5 Martin Walker 'Battle of the Black Stuff' in *The Guardian* 3.10.95

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Spain 1936: Leftist Legend and Workers' Reality

Every leftist tendency, from the Stalinists, Trotskyists and social democrats to the anarchists has its own mythology about Spain during the thirties. Though there is no great agreement amongst them 'Spain' provides an opportunity for many to theorise and mythologise in a grand way about 'revolution', fascism and anti-fascism, and about the values of bourgeois democracy. None of them, however, provide the clarity shown at the time by the analyses published in the press of the communist left, in particular *Bilan*, the magazine in French of the fraction of the communist left in exile, and *Prometeo*, the magazine in Italian of the left fraction of the Italian Communist Party. The Thirties were years of profound proletarian defeat and there was no way this minority of revolutionaries could provide a magical answer to turn the material situation around for the working class and bring significant sections behind the principles of communism. (Although a minority of them went to Spain imagining that this was possible, their subsequent fate only proved the practical correctness of the majority) The lasting contribution of the Communist Left, however, is that they consistently held out a class analysis, defending communist principles against opportunists and all those who would bring the working class under the umbrella of anti-fascism and democracy, slogans which they recognised at the time were geared to undermine workers' own independent struggle and instead mobilise them behind a section of the bourgeoisie.

Background

Spain had a somewhat different rhythm of history to the rest of Europe. Of the major European nations it alone had not entered the First World War, its bourgeoisie not being able to decide which side to join. Instead it enjoyed a minor boom by selling its wares to both the Entente and the Central Powers. That war allowed Spain to develop its economy. Before 1914 the other major powers had been in a position to block Spain's entry into the wider European and world markets and there had been little chance for Spanish capital to develop its mining and industrial potential. The First World War also saw a large increase in the Spanish working class – and so too in its struggle against the appalling conditions of exploitation. This culminated in the general strike of 1917 where workers were machine gunned by the

army, 70 dying and hundreds being wounded. It was a foretaste of the confused convulsions of Spain in the thirties since the Government provoked the strike and the workers were not just fighting for their own cause but also partially supporting a demand for a bourgeois parliament.

After the prosperity of the First World War a relative decline set in. Although supported by an influx of foreign capital into mining, heavy industry and the infrastructure (in particular the telephone system), the burgeoning crisis of the inter-war years fell heavily on Spanish capital. The Spanish bourgeoisie began more and more to diverge between the arch conservatives based around the large and inefficient estates of the south and the rising industrial capitalists of the eastern seaboard and the north. In amongst all of this the working class suffered terribly from the extremes of poverty. Rural workers were unemployed for long periods, often starving, whilst underemployment was the norm for industrial workers in the cities.

The republic ("a rebellion on the part of industrial interests in Spain against government by landowners" — Gerald Brenan) was declared in 1931 after the period of the dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera. He had ruled using a combination of repression, keeping workers' organisations illegal, and cooption, using social democratic ministers and various 'benefits' for workers. Eventually, though, he could stem the tide of the crisis no longer and left, closely followed by the king. What followed were governments of both left and right, both repressive of any movement which attempted to act on economic or political demands posed by organisations of workers. 1933 witnessed risings in Casas Viejas and Arnedo declaring for the anarchist ideal of 'libertarian communism', both brutally put down by troops. In 1934, as part of the manoeuvres of the left wing of capital personified by the leader of the socialists, Largo Caballero (1), the Asturias, a northern region of mining and heavy industry, rose in insurrection. The heroism of the miners was mirrored by the speed of retreat of the leaders of the left. However, it was not a prototypical attempt at revolution. Rather than the stuff of legend as many would have us believe, it was a lesson in how to have workers slaughtered on the altar of the ambitions of the capitalist left. The 'Workers' Alliance' of the Asturias rising was the first

step on the road to the Popular Front of 1936.

By February 1936 Spain had another leftist government. The 'Popular Front' gained office through the grace and favour of the CNT (see the glossary at the end). This largely anarcho-syndicalist union did not call for its customary abstention at the polls, thus *Cenetistas* (CNT militants) were able to lend their electoral weight to return a left government.

We gave power to the left parties, convinced that in the circumstances, they represented a lesser evil.

(Diego Abad de Santillan, FAI leader, militia commander, minister in the Catalan government, *Por qué Perdimos la Guerra*, 1940)

For years the Spanish working class had been thoroughly infused with either the glories of 'democracy' and social democracy or the millenarian suicidalism and confused reformism of the anarchists. For all their so-called abstentionism, the anarchists had played with the electoral system, openly calling for either a vote or abstention depending upon the thinking of the leadership of the CNT and FAI. The election victories of the left government of 1931 and then the right government of 1933 were a direct result of their intervention. (Peiró and Peirats, anarchist leaders, both bearing witness to behind the scenes negotiations between 'antipolitical' anarchists and leaders of left parties.) For its part the PCE, the Spanish Communist Party, numbered only around 400 throughout all of Spain in 1936 and was recognised as the most slavish to Moscow, even in the Comintern itself.⁽²⁾ It was to fit in well with the Stalinist defence of the interests of the USSR as an imperialist player. It certainly had not busied itself with any preparation within the working class for the conquest of power, not even with the barest notion of a revolutionary programme.

The Popular Front

Far from being a victory, enrolment within the Popular Front alongside the supporters of bourgeois democracy was another step in the defeat of the working class. From the so-called 'radicalised' parties of democracy, the anarchists, the socialists, the 'left socialists', to the Stalinised social democrats, the pursuit of the holy grail of democracy (or variously the social revolution) against the rise of 'fascism' was the landscape on which the coming imperialist war was to be set. The second cycle of capitalist accumulation this century had faltered. The only hope for capital was to be the destruction visited by the coming war, the huge production of arms by the fast hardening imperialist blocs, and so the slaughter and further defeat of the international working class. The agenda for the left, however, was to

rush headlong into the arms of the bourgeoisie and pursue variations of the united front policy as in the Popular Front in both Spain and France. The Stalinists and Trotskyists both agreed with this policy to a greater or lesser extent, the Comintern actually framing it at its 1935 Seventh Congress. Its aim was nothing to do with revolution but was a means to ensure its own position within a rapidly forming series of imperialist blocs. In 1934 the USSR had entered what Lenin had called "the robbers' League", the League of Nations, so openly announcing its membership of the roll of imperialist states. In 1935 the Comintern had overseen the rapprochement between the French socialist and communist parties against the backdrop of the rise of the French rightist organisations, the *Croix de Feu*, *Solidarité Française*, *Jeunesse Patriotes*, *Action Française*. This was the model for Spain. The Spanish right was officially but inaccurately dubbed "fascist". Franco's *pronunciamiento* of July 1936 was more a traditional military coup than a fascist plot. The real fascist organisation, the *Falange*, with its blueshirted thugs, was absorbed into Franco's rightist morass and told to shut up.

As Abad de Santillan was to say, the new left government did not fulfil the hopes workers had of it. Just as the Blum Popular Front government in France had failed to do.

The left-wing parties having been returned to power, thanks to us, we then watched them carry on with that same lack of understanding and the same blindness towards us. Neither the workers in industry nor the peasants had any reason to feel more satisfied than before. The real power remained in the hands of a rebellious capitalism, of the church and the military caste. (op.cit.)

Despite the obvious, that the right was preparing for war, the Minister of War dismissed all such notions as 'rumours', as 'false and without foundation', calculated to foment

public anxiety, to sow ill-feeling against the military and to undermine, if not destroy, the discipline which is fundamental to the Army. The minister...is honoured to be able to declare publicly that all ranks of the Spanish Army, from the highest to the lowest are keeping within the limits of strictest discipline.

(quoted in V. Richards, *The Lessons of the Spanish Revolution*)

By July 19th the Republic was at war, the army split between pro- and anti-republicans, the left seeking weapons for its militants. Between February and July there had been 113 general strikes and 228 local strikes. Many were injured and killed in this period of unrest. By July the pris-

ons were filled with workers from these actions.

With the Spanish Popular Front under attack the Blum government of France, the other Popular Front, bit its collective lip. It had hoped to send arms to aid the republican defence but it backed down under the influence of the British and of the 'radicals' in the French Popular Front. The USSR, however, soon began the supply of arms through the PCE, which was to gain huge influence and grow inestimably as it controlled that flow and the military machinery associated with it. Franco, once landed from Morocco at the head of the Foreign Legion of

republican leader who had promised them arms. Although a few arms were gained by such means as storming ships in Barcelona harbour, workers only acquired weapons slowly as the republican government of Giral issued them via the unions.

Only in these early days — when there were some armed workers working for revolution and a general strike was underway (particularly in Catalonia) — can we talk of a revolution. Once the republic and its bourgeois government had recovered its wits and the strike movement had been abandoned, the question of revolution had flown out of the window under cover of the clamour of anti-fascism. Although there was a great deal of spontaneous activity there was no real consciousness of the need to destroy the bourgeois state on the republican side. Above all, as our comrades in the Communist Left said at the time, there was no class party to encapsulate that consciousness in its programme. How then did the various forces that existed in Spain react?

The Anarchists

On July 18th the CNT declared a general strike in response to the situation. However, instead of continuing the strike and attempting to spread it throughout the land as the first step in the assault on capitalism it was called off. So five days later the workers returned to work in an orderly fashion. The justification was that wages had been marginally increased and hours had been reduced. In May the CNT had held its Congress in Zaragoza, the main item on the agenda being 'libertarian communism', supposedly being an apt area for discussion in such 'revolutionary' times. As Juan Gómez Casas says in his history of the FAI

A proclamation of libertarian communism would mean a break with the small parties that had contributed to the struggle and would inhibit their freedom of expression. It would hurt small property owners, small farmers, and merchants, possibly pushing them into a united opposition against the CNT. An implacable dictatorship against part of the population would not only go against their own principles but would also mean committing suicide morally.

(Juan Gómez Casas, *Anarchist Organisation: the history of the FAI*, 1986)

The anarcho-sindicalists soon came to a largely unified opinion that 'libertarian communism' should only be discussed once Spain was reunified (the decision of the CNT plenum of July). But this begs the question of their statements that the social revolution was 'on the cards', also the question of the 'collectivisations'. The myth is that the workers seized arms and in



The turning point of the revolution. Men and women of the Peoples' militias going off to fight the fascists ... and abandoning their strikes against the bourgeoisie in the cities.

Moroccan troops and other elements of the Spanish Army, was soon supplied and assisted by the Germans and Italians. The Italians in particular sent over 50,000 troops and huge quantities of equipment in a failed attempt to begin an Italian-led Mediterranean bloc.

The legend of the left about the first shots of the war would have us believe that it was workers seizing arms from garrisons who repulsed the attacks of the right-wing insurgents. It was far more complex than that. On July 11th rightists had seized Valencia radio station announcing that they were on the march. By July 17th Morocco was ablaze as the generals rampaged, killing leftists as they went. In this situation of extreme tension Casares Quiroga, the Prime Minister, announced that he was going to bed! Quiroga and the others of the key governmental figures discussed the question of arming the workers, but did not do so. On July 19th the Army rebelled in Barcelona (and elsewhere), Quiroga resigned. Here, the Assault Guards (formed by the republic), the Civil Guards and a few workers put down the rebellion. In Zaragoza the workers were cut down by the

part in a spontaneous manner marched off to wherever the front was, to fight the enemy, while at home began the process of the 'social revolution' through the collectivisation of the land and industry. The reality was that the CNT, the anarcho-syndicalist union (now reunited with its syndicalist wing, the *Treintistas*), took over the management of various enterprises under a continued capitalist regime. This was self-management, capitalist production with an anarchist flavour. The sum total of the strategy of the anarcho-syndicalists was to act in concert with the leftists, republicans and separatists around them leaving the ideals of 'libertarian communism' until another day. This was a continuation of the policy of the previous years, to talk about the ideals while acting as one among many of the left and centre. So the Central Anti-Fascist Militias Committee had this composition in July- CNT, 3; UGT, 3; FAI, 2; PSUC, 1; POUM, 1; Esquerra, 3; Rabassaires Union, 1; Accion Catalan, 1 (see end for glossary). A mixture of Stalinist, left socialist, social democratic, regionalists, conservative nationalists, and peasant proprietors. On November 4th the self-styled anti-governmental anarchists entered the central government — Juan Lopez, Minister of Commerce; Juan Peiró, Minister of Industry; Federica Montseny, Health Minister; Garcia Oliver, Justice Minister.

This was the leadership of a political tendency organising within the working class which had railed against the use of government because they were "anti-authoritarian". The FAI plenum of January 1936 had confirmed this stance. Now the anarchist daily *Solidaridad Obrera* was saying this was

the most transcendental day in the history of our country
and that

the government in this hour, as a regulating instrument of the organisms of the State, has ceased to be an oppressive force against the working class, just as the State no longer represents the organism which divides society into classes. And both will tend even less to oppress the people as a result of the intervention of the CNT [in the government]

whereas two months earlier

The existence of a Popular Front government, far from being an indispensable element in the anti-fascist struggle, is qualitatively a cheap imitation of this very struggle.... It is not a question, therefore of Marxism seizing power, nor of the self-limitation of popular action for reasons of political opportunism. The 'Workers' State' is the end result of a revolutionary activity and the beginning of a new political slavery.

Here, we should point out that the positions and

analyses of the internationalist communist left, through *Bilan* and *Prometeo*, were familiar to the leading militants of the anarchists. The Communist Left were arguing that rather than compromise with capitalism through entry into its governments what was needed was a move towards the destruction of that power. The anarchists were not unaware of the argument. They deliberately rejected it. These were after all the same anarchists who had consistently played the electoral game since 1931, making deals with the left parties along the way. If in theory they denied the need for political power, even a proletarian one, in practice they helped to organise the bourgeoisie in government, giving them 'left cover'. Their slogans on the inseparability of war and revolution gave an alibi for the Popular Front in its war of the bourgeois factions, and their entry into government (both the Cortés and the Generalitat, the central and Catalan governments) belied their declared principles. By this alone they can be correctly labelled as being within the camp of the counter-revolution rather than a revolutionary force.

Similarly on the economic front, as the communist left said,

historic experience has shown us that there can be no question of collectivisation, of workers' control, of socialist revolution before the abolition of the political power of the bourgeoisie (*Bilan*, *The War in Spain*, January 1937)

The reality of the so-called collectivisations was thus,

In some factories all the workers drew a fixed weekly wage, but in others the profits or income were shared out among the workers, an arrangement which is more equitable than that the factory owner should put them in his pocket, but which nevertheless was not compatible with the spirit of the revolution which was to do away with bosses and shareholders and not increase their number by a kind of collective capitalism [our emphasis]

(Vernon Richards, *Lessons of the Spanish Revolution*, p. 107)

This was nothing more than the Proudhonist vision of the worker and smallholder enjoying the full fruits of their labour under what was in reality still capitalism. Peirats, the anarchist historian, relates that anarchist newspapers carried many complaints of the surplus produced by these enterprises being consumed by the members of the collectives and not used for society as a whole. So it was that collectives on richer land remained rich, those on poor land remained poor. Factories abandoned by Francoist supporters were taken over by a joint UGT-CNT body, but not one of those belonging to Popular Front capitalists. Can we really call this an 'economic revolution'? Certainly not! It was merely a situation in which capital could allow the working

class to take over and possibly develop productive means until it was thoroughly defeated and then take it back. Whatever gains workers thought they were achieving could be rolled back when it suited the forces of capitalism — precisely because the working class had not set out to destroy the political power of the capitalist class but instead allied with one faction of it. Thus Companys (the nationalist head of the Catalan government) could say of the CNT

it has assumed the role, abandoned by the rebellious army, of controlling and protecting society and has become an instrument in the hands of the democratic government.

This was hardly the stuff of a revolutionary organisation. The CNT was policing the working class for the bourgeois state, eventually to lead it on to physical defeat.

The POUM

In 1935 two smaller organisations came together to form the POUM. It receives a fond reception from many of the left today (3), something it ill deserves. It combined the *Bloc Obrer i Camperol*, the 'Workers' and Peasants Bloc' of Joaquin Maurin, and the *Izquierda Comunista*, of Andres Nin, both had once been militants of the CNT and the PCE. Each had followed a slightly different trajectory. Maurin had broken with the Comintern on the question of Catalan nationalism, seeing the Madrid government as imperialist, the domination of a backward centre over a progressive periphery. He looked for a republic based upon the unity of workers and peasants. In practice he advocated a variety of class collaboration dressed in left rhetoric but effectively anti-soviet. Nin had once been Trotsky's secretary but they had fallen out seemingly over both personal matters and the question of entry into the PSOE in 1934. Both were to be murdered, Nin at the hands of the Stalinist SIM (secret police), Maurin at the hands of the Francoists.

The POUM was hated by the Stalinists not only because of the connection with Trotsky but because of its opposition to the Comintern and to Stalin and its espousal of a distinct (although confused) line against the PCE. This has made the POUM attractive to many modern leftists but in practice it offered up only a slightly rehashed version of popular frontism. Although it acquired some popularity with workers through its demand for a 36-hour week and wage rises in 1936, it did not back this up with anything more radical, being equally part of the militias committees. Trotsky denounced the POUM for its support for the Popular Front, its alliances with bourgeois liberal forces and its accommodation with social democracy, valid

criticisms, only to follow close on the heels of the POUM into the same radical support for the 'democratic' republic and the 'anti-fascist' war (4). In and around the POUM was the tiny group of Trotsky-loyalists, the Spanish Bolshevik-Leninists (BLE), but these raised a ripple only in the Trotskyist press and nowhere else. Some of the worst nonsense came from the pen of Andres Nin, thus:

The workers defeated fascism and were fighting for socialism....

In Catalonia the dictatorship of the proletariat already exists....

We were part of a profound social revolution in Spain; our revolution was more deep than that which swept through Russia in 1917....

(quoted in Bilan, *The War in Spain*, January 1937)(5)

It is these sort of fundamental misconceptions that modern leftists echo today in the name of Marxism, and which betray their own lack of understanding about the nature of revolution, proletarian dictatorship and socialism.

In 1937 the POUM was destroyed at the hands and the behest of the Stalinists. It was done under the pretext that the leadership had collaborated with Franco. The real reason was that they opposed the Stalinist order to abolish the militias and create a Popular Army.

The Stalinists and the 1937 May Days

In Barcelona, May 1937, the Stalinist PSUC and the nationalist Estat Catala took on the most active militants of the CNT/FAI, the POUM and others. Both the Trotskyists and anarchists call these events the last real act of defence of the revolution. For us, tragically, they were nothing more than a final realisation of the counter-revolutionary nature of the Spanish war. The event began as a faction fight between the CNT and the PSUC over control of the Barcelona telephone exchange. The local CNT called for a general strike but all of those involved agreed that it should not affect the war industries and general support for the Popular Front continued. The call was for the 'defence of the revolution', not the start of the revolution. Nowhere did any of the participants opposing the PSUC and its allies mention taking on the power of the bourgeoisie as a whole, republican and Francoist.

The Stalinist position on the nature of events since July 1936 was clear. On the 19th July Dolores 'La Pasionaria' Ibarurri launched her famous speech on "No pasaran!" (They shall not pass) with the following appeal:

Workers! Peasants! Antifascists! Spanish patriots! Stand up to the fascist military rebellion!

Defend the Republic! Defend popular liberty and the democratic conquests of the people!

Not much idea of proletarian revolution here but plenty about patriotism and support for the bourgeois republic. A month later this was re-emphasised in the Stalinist press.

It is absolutely false that the present workers movement has for its object the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship after the war has terminated. It cannot be said we have a social motive for our participation in the war. We communists are the first to repudiate this supposition. We are motivated exclusively by a desire to defend the democratic republic.

(Mundo Obrero, Communist Party daily, August 6th 1936)

There was no chance of a struggle for the destruction of political power and establishing the working class on its historic course, not if the Stalinists could help it. José Díaz in 1937 could state that all of this came about through a misunderstanding of the situation, because the bourgeoisie had deserted their posts it was up to the Popular Front to continue capitalist production, socialisation of production was impermissible. The lack of commitment of the PCE to communism was clearly shown by its organisation of smallholders, in the GEPCI, the most committed opponents of collectivisation. As Mundo Obrero was to say



"La Pasionaria" in 1936 – "Passionate" in defence of Stalinism and capitalist democracy.

In a capitalist society, the small tradesmen and manufacturers constitute a class on the side of the democratic republic...it is everybody's duty to respect the property of these small tradesmen and manufacturers....

We therefore strongly urge the members of our party and the militia in general, to demand, and if need be, to enforce respect for these middle class citizens...

The events of May 1937 ended when the CNT/FAI ordered the laying down of arms. The eventual outcome was the banning of the POUM, the incorporation of the militias into the Popular Army largely under Stalinist control. Opponents of the PCE/PSUC were murdered. Stalin could then safely control the situation, quietly spiriting the gold reserves of the Spanish state away, while currying favour with the soon-to-be Allied powers of Britain and France. As a foreign policy to win friends for the USSR it failed (and Stalin later turned to Hitler to sign the Nazi-Soviet Pact in 1939) but it was resurrected in 1941 when anti-fascism became the slogan for mobilisation of the working class for imperialist war.

Revolution or Counter-revolution?

Such a simple question might demand a simple answer, but in this case it cannot be given. The

Spanish working class had not been completely defeated by 1936. The next years were to provide a physical defeat to those workers who died heroically, ultimately in the service of their class enemy. It was to move on to that defeat that the Spanish generals, in the service of one faction of the bourgeoisie, took on the republic militarily. It was not a struggle of democracy against fascism. Franco's forces were rather more Carlist (royalist) and conservative than fascist. That conservative right then provided an opportunity for the German Nazi and the Italian fascist governments to test out, not only their weapons, but also the resolve of their imperialist rivals. The forces of democracy can be judged on their adherence to that 'ideal' by the secret funding of Franco by the British ruling class (via the NatWest Bank's predecessors) and the French 'radicals' fear of encouraging social experiments (the so-called collectivisations).

Was there a revolution in Spain in 1936? For just a few days in July 1936 the question was posed. We make no apologies for quoting once again from *Bilan* in 1937:

The facts speak clearly in this respect. It was precisely after July 19th that the proletariat, by joining its armed struggle with the general strike, succeeded in advancing furthest on the revolutionary road. It thus acquired the highest political consciousness that was compatible with its ideological immaturity and carried the social struggle to its highest point ... The general strike immediately took on a political and insurrectionary character while the workers were putting forward their own demands: the 36 hour week, wage increases, tentative moves towards appropriation of the factories, without, however — in the absence of a class party — grasping the necessity for the destruction of the bourgeois state. Even so, this understanding could have been reached subsequently, in the course of the process of formation of a party, if the workers had kept the struggle on the terrain of their own class interests. (op.cit.)

This, they did not do. Once the strike was over the power of the republic went not only unchallenged but was reinforced by the backing of the forces of the left. The republican state always controlled the supply of arms, using the unions and others as proxies. At no time was the conquest of the bourgeois state, and its replacement by a proletarian order, seriously voiced. The anarchists took up ministries in the government, the POUM took up positions within the militias committees. Soviets, or workers' councils, were expressly opposed by all the forces of the republic

We did not support the formation of the sovi-

ets: there were no grounds in Spain for calling such. We stood for 'all power to the trades unions'. In no way were we politically oriented. The junta was simply a way out...

(Balius, editor of the Friends of Durutti paper *Friend of the People*)

Political power was channelled through the central government (first in Madrid, then in Valencia), through the Central Militia Committee, and to a lesser extent the Generalitat (the Catalan government). That power was controlled by parties committed to the defence of the capitalist order and its bourgeois democratic expression. The only programme on offer was the democratic programme of the bourgeoisie which was to ultimately lead to imperialist conflict. As we said ten years ago,

... despite the heroism and the class consciousness of the Spanish workers the events in Spain could not have reached a successful conclusion for the working class for two fundamental reasons. The first was the fact that the struggle for socialism has to be made on an international front which paralyses the capacity of imperialism to use the turmoil to its own advantage. In Spain the converse occurred — a potential proletarian revolution was from its earliest days converted into both a training ground for new techniques of warfare (which Picasso's *Guernica* graphically illustrates) and a pawn in the game of international diplomacy towards the second generalised imperialist war of the century. The defeat of the workers in Germany, Russia, Britain and Italy in the 1920s meant that the only possible support the Spanish workers might have counted on would have been from the French working class. Surely it is no accident therefore that the only other working class which was fully under the influence of the ideology of Popular Frontism was that in France where the workers were not physically defeated but were dominated by the same bourgeois ideology in the guise of socialism as in Spain.

(*Workers Voice* 30, August 1986)

It is a tragedy of our class history that so many brave Spanish workers were sacrificed under the banners of democracy. It is our task to try to make sure such a tragedy is not repeated and this is why we are fundamentally opposed to all the anti-fascist supporters of the democratic state today.

Clastre

Notes

1. After 1934 he was called, and he thought of himself as a sort of Spanish 'Lenin'. He was a lifelong reformist who had also accepted a ministry under the dictatorship. For an analysis of the 1934 Asturias Rising see *In Commemoration of the Asturias Soviet* in

Workers Voice 19

2. This was the judgement of Manuilsky, one of the Comintern higher-ups, so said because of the slavish pro-Moscow attitude of the PCE.

3. As in Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom*. For our review of this film see *Revolutionary Perspectives 1 (Third series)*

4. Originally Trotsky only supported the notion of the united front, but then became rather more confused and confusing on the question of support for democracy and the pursuit of anti-fascism.

5. Much of this nonsense on the so-called superiority of the Spanish Revolution over the Russian is also found in the book of the then Trotskyist (Bolshevik-Leninist), Grandizo Munis, *Jalones de derrota, promesa de victoria* (Remnants of Defeat, Promise of Victory, Mexico 1948). It is a position constantly asserted, but never proved, by eco-anarchists like Murray Bookchin who also aver that proletarian revolution is a thing of the past.

Glossary

CNT, National Confederation of Workers, anarcho-syndicalist union confederation.

FAI, Iberian Anarchist Federation, anarchist organisation organising within the CNT attempting to keep it within the ideological bounds of anarchism.

POUM, Workers' Party of Marxist Unification, left socialist party variously described as Trotskyist, closer to such social democratic parties as the British ILP and the German SAP, formed in September 1935, their main strongholds were Lerida and Barcelona.

PSUC, Catalan Party of Socialist Unification, formed as the Catalan Stalinists absorbed local socialists into a larger and wider party, established in July 1936.

Esquerra, Catalan bourgeois liberal party, led by Companys.

Rabassaires Union, union of peasant smallholders in Catalonia.

PCE, Spanish Communist Party led by Dolores Ibarruri and Jose Diaz.

PSOE, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, the socialist party of Largo Caballero and Indalecio Prieto. Its youth section led by Santiago Carrillo went over en masse to the PCE at the start of the Civil War.

UGT, the socialist-led union confederation.

Further Reading

Workers Voice 19 In Commemoration of the Asturias Soviet

Workers Voice 30 The Spanish Civil War And The Myth Of Anarchism

Revolutionary Perspectives 1 (First Series) Tear Down the Barricades (document on May 1937 from International Council Correspondence 1937)

Revolutionary Perspectives 5 (First series) The War in Spain (from Bilan 1936) This will soon be republished as pamphlet with a fresh introduction and other documents from the Communist Left

Revolutionary Perspectives 1 (3rd Series) Lessons of the Spanish Civil War

Internationalist Communist 12 The events in Spain - a Trotskyist Lesson

A Year of Capitalist Elections

1996 has been a virtual festival of democracy. Already we have had major elections in India ("the world's largest democracy"), Italy (see leaflet on p.23 in this issue), Israel (see p.7) Spain, Poland, Albania and Taiwan. Coming up are the US and Russian Presidential elections and given the precarious parliamentary situation of the Tories it could be a General Election year in Britain. What attitude should revolutionaries adopt to the coming campaign? The article which follows focuses on Britain but its perspectives are general and can be applied globally.

'At last we can get them (the Tories) out!' you hear at work, the pub or in the supermarket. In the coming months the mass media will induce 'election fever' in the minds of millions of workers. Peter Snow will pirouette in front of a giant screen displaying swings to the right, swings to the left and numerous pundits will share their vision of what it all means. Here is the chance for us to exercise our democratic right to elect "our" representative in Parliament. On the fringes the Trotskyists and other leftists will also play the participation game whether it is by putting up their own candidates, calling for votes for Scargill's SLP (see *RP2*) or simply for Blair's New Labour. The Socialist Workers' Party which told us to "Vote Labour for the Last Time" ... in 1974 (!) will probably simply confine itself to calling for "Get the Tories Out!" without telling us that means putting another capitalist party, Labour, in. In truth, we have more chance of changing the conditions of our existence by winning the lottery than by taking part in an election to choose another capitalist party to govern us.

It is evidence of just how anti-revolutionary the Left are that they see any significance in capitalist elections other than as part of the attack on the working class' own struggle against a system which daily increases its misery. One of their arguments is that in the past the working class fought to get the vote in order to change society. Two hundred years ago "democracy" was an even dirtier word than "communism" is today. This was because it called for voting rights for those who owned no property. Working class radicals were transported to Australia simply for discussing the idea in the 1790s. Workers did have to fight (most notably in the Chartist movement) and even die in the struggle against the intransigence of the aristocracy and their new allies the bourgeoisie. Workers even came up with further ideas intended to protect the validity of voting such as the secret ballot. This was supposed to

stop landowners and factory owners from threatening workers into voting for their candidates. Whilst the ruling class was prepared to widen its own class base by granting lesser property owners the vote in 1832 and 1867 it tenaciously held out against the working class.

In fact, before the First World War few workers in Europe had the vote. Where they did have the vote, as in Germany, the parliament (Reichstag) was simply a democratic fig leaf stuck over a monarchical military dictatorship. What did cause the bourgeoisie to grant the vote to the working class was not the direct struggles of the working class in the past, where the workers had (as at Peterloo in 1819) paid with their lives to win the vote, but a much more immediate threat in the post-war world. It was the Russian Revolution which, by threatening to spark off a revolutionary wave in Europe at the end of the First World War struck terror into the propertied ruling classes everywhere. In Britain universal male suffrage was granted three months after the Revolution, alongside votes for women over 30.

By this time however the bourgeoisie was more confident that the vote and the secret ballot (which had been introduced by the Liberals in 1872) could be turned to their advantage to actually contain the class struggle. In the first place they now had a fully fledged capitalist workers party in the Parliamentary Labour Party which had had MPs since 1906. This Party refurbished its image by hastily adopting Clause 4 (the nationalisation clause) in order to appear more radical to a working class in 1918 which still looked to the Russian experience. Second, the First World War had given rise to a technologically advanced new popular press (including the Daily Mirror, Daily Express and Daily Mail). The ease with which they had been able to misinform the public during the war convinced the bourgeoisie that they could do the same in the class war after the war. The modern media were already upon us. Third, the old Chartist demand for a secret ballot was now turned into a weapon against the working class. Whilst workers democracy is collective through open meetings and show of hands the secret ballot fragmented workers into individuals. In such circumstances capitalist propaganda is more powerful and class solidarity is weaker. This is something that the bourgeoisie still well understands (the secret ballot before strikes imposed in the 1980s is the classic example). Instead the workers have an illusion of choice. In a society where even £12 millions are not enough to

launch a paper (remember the death of the *Sunday Correspondent* or the bankruptcy of Eddie Shah's *Today*?) and where a billionaire like Sir James Goldsmith can launch his own political party capable of putting up candidates because he has £20 millions of loose change to throw away, it is an impossibility for the working class to compete in the capitalist electoral arena. It is however a perfect mystification for pretending that workers do have a choice and that as long as they do there is no justification for them using any other means such as strikes and protests to change the system. Elections are often used, as they were in 1974 and 1979 to defeat the workers struggles and to legitimate more attacks by the bourgeoisie "in the national interest".

Rock the Vote - Don't Rock the Boat

So much for history. Today, the bourgeoisie, in a bid to encourage participation in an exercise that more and more people are beginning to feel is pointless are reduced to the level of gathering together celebrities of film, television and the music world as a way of kindling some interest. Although the 1992 general election saw a turnout of around 78% which was higher than the previous two there was a 43% abstention rate among 18-24 year olds. In many inner cities is down to nearly half the eligible voters (e.g. Sheffield Central was 54%). In the last council elections in May only 1 in 6 bothered to turn out. That almost half of those people eligible to vote see nothing in the electoral system or Parliament for them has prompted all the main political parties to give their support for a 'Rock the Vote' campaign similar to the one which supposedly helped Bill Clinton to the White House. According to the campaign the aim is to encourage young people to take part in the process of parliamentary democracy. However something must have gone badly wrong in the US for the wave of cynicism was so great that only about 1 in 4 voted in the November 1994 Congressional elections. However the more workers joining in the fun on election day the more the ruling class can crow about 'democracy being a wonderful thing'.

Elections and the Leftists

And the faithful followers of these capitalist election games will once again call on us to join in the charade. The regular call to the working class of the Socialist Workers Party et al. to 'Vote Labour Without Illusions' has become even more ridiculous. The Labour Party has never been socialist so why does the working class and the membership of the SWP need to support it? To the question 'How come you tell the working class to vote Labour when you always slag them off in the paper?' they usually respond

with two arguments. The first of these is to say that there exists a 'labour movement' which includes the Labour Party, unions, the SWP, etc. As this movement is full of workers then any victory by part of it is a good thing. But as Labour has proved itself to be a bosses' party on countless occasions (see below) what 'good thing' comes out of a worker being connected with her/his class enemy? Surely the rapid demise of a movement which weakens the class would not just be a 'good thing' but a positive step for the working class. Here, of course the Left have a problem. The collapse of state capitalism in the Eastern bloc has meant that the state capitalists in the West really have no programme (the SWP, despite claiming to see Stalinism as state capitalism actually shares the Labour/Stalinist vision that nationalisation is a step towards socialism). Their last hope is to support "democracy" and this means clinging to the coat-tails of an ever more reactionary social democracy and its support for capitalism.

The second argument is that the Labour Party is supported by many workers - whether that is quite so true today is questionable - and that a Labour victory would increase their confidence. This is, however, an illusion. The Labour Party wins the election so workers think 'Labour are better than the Tories'. Are workers really that much better prepared to face the struggle under an equally bourgeois government? No - in fact the working class is going to be even more disarmed by having a supposedly "Left" government in power than any other. The capitalist class are well aware of this. For months the ultra-capitalist *Financial Times* has been preparing its readers for a Labour Government as something positive and this is why the *Guardian* can inform us that

According to Finsbury Asset Management, most of the fears about a Labour government will be discounted by election day. It is advising clients that equities might actually benefit from a shift to the left. Finsbury points to recent experience in the US, where the Dow Jones has risen nearly 70% since Bill Clinton's election; the FTSE 100 has risen just over 30% over the same period. (Guardian 11.5.96.)

Of course many workers are already demoralised because they see the Labour Party as the only way to fight back and it obviously isn't. But to debate on this level is to pander to the illusions of the Left. The real task is to fight honestly and openly for a revolutionary consciousness inside the working class. This Trotskyism as a tendency has never done. Ever since Trotsky ordered his followers to enter Labour-type parties in 1935 they have turned their backs on the creation of a really independent working class party based on

the revolutionary history of the working class. In its opportunism and immediatism, chasing every bourgeois trend imaginable Trotskyism (and its unorthodox varieties) has become simply an appendage of social democracy.

New Labour, New Britain, Same Old Capitalism

Most readers over the age of 5 are well aware of life under capitalism so before we are accused of being unkind to the Labour Party it is worth just reminding ourselves of what the working class's experience under a 'socialist government' in Britain has been like in the past.

The Labour Government of 1945 actually sang the 'Red Flag' in the House of Commons which was followed five days later by the use of lock-outs and troops to break a London dockers 'go slow'. A week after this example of class solidarity it approved the bombing of Hiroshima. The list goes on and it isn't very encouraging. Between 1945 and 1951, before it was replaced, the 'Left' Labour government used troops, conscripts and sailors on a dozen occasions against workers. Its creation of the welfare state was not an act of kindness to the working class but an absolutely necessary policy in order to try to calm the class anger of the working class in the years following the war. The fact that the workers paid for this through contributions and taxation (and without any fund being set up by the capitalists) shows how "generous" the Labour Party was. Even the much lauded nationalisations were done at the workers' expense as they paid the taxes which compensated the owner of the railways and coal mines so that they could go invest in more profitable enterprises. Today's privatisations are in some ways mirror images of the nationalisations 50 years ago. Both used the surplus value of the working class to free capital for the British and international capitalist class. Who needs enemies when you have friends like these?

The most recent experience we have of an 'alternative' to the Tories is the Labour government of 1974 - 1979. Capitalism then, as now, was in crisis although in slightly better shape. Labour's way out was to print money and borrow from the IMF in an attempt to keep key sectors like coal and steel going. Unfortunately it was once again the working class which picked up the bill with unemployment reaching 1.5 million, inflation at 10% and wage cuts in real terms. It came to an end in 1979 with the unions showing their militancy - defusing any real struggle by accepting 'codes of conduct' on picketing - and cuts in housing, transport, NHS, education, etc. This was Labour taking the side of the bosses and actually inventing many of the policies which later were to be known as Thatcherism.

'Ah, but it will be different this time.' Labour will invest in industry, jobs, training, education. They will take the 1.5 million young people off the scrap heap and create a New Britain. This sounds great! But if it is so simple then why don't the Tories do it. They don't do it because they cannot find sectors where the profit rate is high enough. As a consequence revenue from tax returns is falling and further expenditure cuts are on the cards. The truth is that we are in for some more of the same medicine - the increasing exploitation of the working class. Labour (even New Labour) are better placed to get workers to accept that exploitation as wage levels decline and job insecurity increases. This is their real function under capitalism. The Observer gave a hint of this when it told its readers

...it seems to be Labour's historical role to pick up the pieces ... the next Labour Government, like previous ones will inherit an unholy mess.

William Keegan (May 5th 1996)

This shows that the alibis are already being trotted out and we have not even had the election yet! Workers who have been battered for years may hope for something slightly better from the Labour Party but this is a desperate illusion. We have to break with the idea that there are better or worse capitalist parties and also with the idea that elections give us a real choice.

In fact elections are usually manipulated to get the results the bourgeoisie wants. This is obvious enough in Britain where Labour is currently favoured as governing team to prevent "social unrest". It is even more obvious in Russia. Yeltsin wanted to scrap the elections when he thought he would lose but the IMF (i.e. Western imperialism) stepped in. They explained the rules of the game to him then they loaned him the cash to print money in order to bribe the voters with aid to state industry and payment of back wages. Another triumph for democracy!

Is There an Alternative?

Workers cannot hope to defend themselves by acting as individual citizens and putting a cross on a ballot paper every five years. They must organise collectively in a way which challenges the existence of the present system. In the last 130 years we have been shown a way of doing this. Some call it "workers democracy". We have the experiences of the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Russian Revolution of 1917. The Commune was based on 'delegatory' democracy. Whereas workers today are asked to vote for representatives who they leave to "get on with politics", the Communards elected delegates who were directly responsible to the Commune and recallable at any time. Even the workers' militia was responsible to the Commune and could be recalled immediately. This tradition

was revived in 1905 and 1917 when the Russian working class created workers' councils as an alternative to capitalist state power. Instantly recallable delegates were elected by mass assemblies. This created a real basis upon which the workers could wield their own state power. The council delegates were there to act only in the interests of the working class organised in its factory councils and committees. Unfortunately this experiment did not extend far and the isolation of the Russian workers ended any hope for the first workers state and, in the early 1920s, it was superseded by a party state. The myth that the Stalinist U.S.S.R. was a workers state was one of the weapons of propaganda used by the bourgeoisie, and still is, in its desire to prove that parliamentary democracy is preferable to a 'communist' dictatorship. Russia could be described as a dictatorship but it certainly wasn't communist or a workers state. Like all capitalist countries it had and still has today a ruling class which lives on the exploitation of its working

class.

The working class cannot win political power by electing a majority in parliament and to suppose that the ruling class will peacefully allow socialism to be legislated for is naive. The real powers in capitalist society lie outside parliament with its security forces and the controllers of the means of production. Parliament gives the working class only an illusion that elections provide a choice. It is not the task of communists to compromise the political independence of the working class by urging workers to participate in bourgeois elections and support bourgeois parties. To try and revitalise the proletarian credentials of a bourgeois party which is mistakenly seen as a force for socialism is also not on the agenda. The destruction of capitalism comes through the revolutionary efforts of the working class itself and our programme is to fight for that. **SP**

Italy: The Left in Power to Step up the Attacks on the Workers

The Italian elections took place in April and to no-one's surprise the Olive Coalition which includes the former Communist Party (the Party of the Democratic Left or PDS) gained a majority in Parliament, (with a bit of help from the Stalinists of Rifondazione Comunista). For the Italian ruling class struggling to balance its budget (which has the highest deficit in the world after the United States) and to reduce its enormous debts the result is a good one. Who would be the best outfit for getting the workers to accept more sacrifices in terms of pension cuts, wage cuts and longer hours? With the traditional Right totally discredited - one ex-PM is arraigned for Mafia killings and two others for massive corruption - a Left, which has never been in power in Italy, is the answer. As a stunt it is likely to work, at least in the short term. The new Prime Minister, Prodi, has told Parliament in his opening address that "the workers have sacrificed enough" and, for the moment many workers believe him. There is huge excitement that, after more than 50 years in opposition "the Left" has finally made it. But what Left is this except the one which perfectly fits in with the needs of Italian capital (just as New Labour today best represents the needs of British capital). As our Italian comrades wrote

...one could say that the entry of the PDS into the driving seat of Italian politics has occurred at a time when, with a changed international scene, Italian capital needs to attack as never before working conditions and labour costs whilst at the same time it worries about maintaining the lowest possible level of class response. Thus the PDS and its fellow-travelers are the ideal conservative instrument for this period of delicate adjustment to the mechanism of capital valorisation. This is why, even if they were not sure about it, the victory of the PDS was anticipated, if not strongly desired, by the dominant playmakers in the Italian economy. It is this "Left" which capitalism likes, a Left which at the moment shows it more likely to keep things as they are and keep the workers sweet rather than the Right of Berlusconi who, when in power, had the distinction, rare these days, of filling the streets with one and half million workers furious at pension cuts...

Battaglia Comunista 5 (May 1996)

Against this orgy of parliamentary expectations our comrades campaigned for an active abstention from all the bourgeois manoeuvres. The text of the leaflet they distributed is reproduced opposite.

This is the abstentionism of the internationalist communists

Communists have always seen the democratic voting mechanism of the bourgeois order as the "best" system to bar the way to proletarian emancipation by discouraging and corrupting the workers.

The history of the last fifty years shows parliamentary democracy to have been the cause of the passivity and defeat of the working class in the most critical and difficult moments of its existence as a class. In terms of corruption of the masses democracy is on the same level as fascism.

Masses of "citizen electors" are drawn into the impossible choice between the different policies of parties which are not seriously competing in terms of programmes, ideas or principles but are just a sordid succession of swindlers searching for as much power as their monetary investment in the electoral campaign allows them to gain. The boycott of pseudo-democratic electoral methods and parliamentarism are fundamental to communist political action. This position is even more valid today against the periodic sham of electoral consultation which hypocritically appeals to the solidarity of the voters in order to "legalise" a policy of attacks on the working class. All this is at a time when capitalism openly demonstrates the constant explosion of its internal contradictions, the signs, that is, of its fatal and tragic descent into decadence.

The present abstentionist position of internationalist communists is the principal basis for the creation of the class organisation of the proletariat. Not to vote means not accepting the legitimacy of bourgeois power, or at least the bourgeoisie's right to manage that power through its administration of the exploitation of the working class in order that capitalism can survive.

Internationalist communists aim to break down prejudice and electoral mystification in order to deepen the class divide. They aren't concerned about asking for votes to get into parliament but only to spread amongst the most aware sections of the class vanguard the class truth: the working class will only rediscover itself when it has the consciousness and the strength to sweep away the corruption of the ballot and parliament. The vote is a weapon of the bourgeoisie to delude and deceive the proletariat in decisions about its own future.

Even the most immediate and partial solutions to the problems of the exploited and impoverished masses can never spring from elections. But to abstain is not enough. A further step is required - that of the struggle against the exercise of bourgeois power, against capitalism, in ways and means which are appropriate to the defence of working class independent interests in the objective situation. The growth of the so-called "abstentionist party" is, yes, a sign that something is changing, but objectively this can also mean a renunciation of politics, and this then leaves the door open for the professional bourgeois politicians and their shady clients. It is not enough to abstain from the vote convinced that you are "punishing" this or that corrupt or treacherous party, or to give vent to apathy and dislike of politics in general.

To abstain isn't to fight. The militants of the class party are not formed through simple contemplation of facts or through being able to exhibit a capacity for theoretical abstraction. Active participation in all the struggles of the class, thought and carried out with class methods and class conviction means to work as effectively as possible towards a precise and concrete objective; arousing the consciousness and strength of the workers for a deep rooted struggle against the stupefaction provoked by the trap of bourgeois electoralism and parliamentarism. And it is only in the perspective of a generalised revival of class struggle that we will be able to give substance to a strategy which starts from hard daily activity in the workplaces, in the communities, or wherever it is possible to raise and wave the banner of communism. Internationalist communists don't vote. We leave the voting booths empty in order to fight for a revival of class struggle.

Translated from *Battaglia Comunista* 4 (April 1996)

Readers' Letters

Revolutionary Perspectives and the French Strikes

Comrades

I am a sympathiser of the ICC* and I have been reading your press for some years. I would like to take issue with three topical points concerning the end of publishing your newspaper Workers' Voice, the strikes in France and your positions about trades unions.

First point: I don't think it is a good thing to stop publishing a newspaper which aims to spread amongst the working class workers' positions concerning their own life. It must be very hard to go on publishing revolutionary positions; so I am sure that if you have stopped publishing this revolutionary tool it is because you no longer have the strength to go on. And so why don't you admit it instead of lying and pretending the period is to reflections and not to diffusion? Workers can hear that.

Second point: I don't think it is correct to laugh at the ICC's positions about the November/December strikes in France. It is very easy to laugh. It prevents you from thinking about what people really say and it presents the ICC to the working class as not serious as an organisation. Do you really think so?

I think it would be a victory for the bourgeoisie if a proletarian organisation like yours disappeared, so I hope it will not happen without a clear discussion amongst the militants who compose your organisation, in order to understand what is happening to you and why... I hope that you will not disappear as a proletarian organised group, and that discussion will go on with you. I am sorry for my bad English and I give you my communist greetings.
MJ(?)

*International Communist Current whose French section is *Révolution Internationale*

Our Reply

Dear Comrade

As you did not include your address (nor approach our delegation when it was in Paris where it held a public forum in the Fete of Lutte Ouvriere as well as meetings with the ICC) we have taken the liberty of correcting your English without consultation in order to make it more understandable. Your last point on trades unions was so obscurely worded however, that we had to omit it and would ask you to send it again in French and we will translate it.

As to your other two points, thanks for your concern about our health but we can assure you we are not in danger of going away! On the contrary we see ourselves in a phase of modest expansion. There could have been nothing easier for us than to go on producing our old paper for ever, but it's sales were stagnant, so we have taken the plunge into producing a magazine. As you will see from the two first issues, this not only carries on the tradition of topical comment of the old paper but adds some analytical elements which it previously lacked. Incidentally, producing a magazine of this quality costs a lot more than the paper so we would welcome any donations to help it succeed!

As to "lying" we leave that to the ICC (See their accusations that we have regrouped with an organisation with which we have had no contact for three years). We have made it quite clear what we aim to do. This is not an easy time for revolutionaries but, rest assured, that we in the CWO have never had any illusions that it was anything else. We actually wrote to the British section of the ICC in February

We have not liquidated our paper but adopted a new publications strategy which we think will allow us to reach more potential communists. The CWO has not

abandoned any organisational existence "seemingly" or otherwise. On the contrary 1996 has opened with our organisational strengthening.

In fact, oddly enough, we are concerned about the events surrounding the ICC since its Eleventh Congress which appears not only to have led to the exclusion of long-time militants who played an important role in building up the ICC as a tendency, but also to a new level of paranoia which sees almost all its external political opponents as "parasites" and all its internal dissidents as agents of the state. This worries us because such attitudes (which we have argued for years are politically mistaken) discredit the entire communist left. However we are expecting to be involved in direct discussions with the ICC over this so we cannot dwell on it here. We are deeply concerned that their current attitude, stemming from their own failings are a threat to the whole proletarian camp.

As to the French strikes where did you get your idea that our critique of the ICC over its intervention was simply to laugh at it? On the contrary revolutionaries have to be very careful when criticising other tendencies' propaganda in a strike where they themselves are not present. Criticism is cheap whilst correct political intervention is not easy. Our criticisms made in *Internationalist Communist 14* were carefully considered. We will

To our Readers

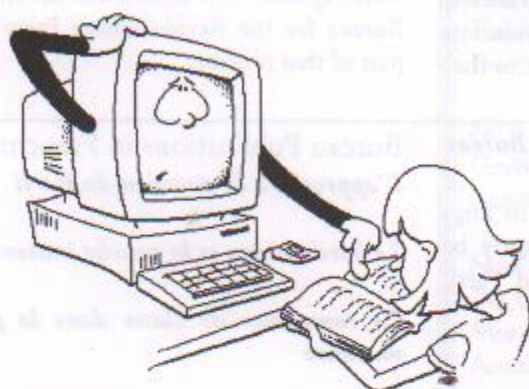
Thanks to all those who have written over the last few weeks and apologies if we have not included your letter in this issue. We have always maintained that a dialogue with readers is essential for the development of revolutionary theory and we will be expanding our readers' pages in future issues.

In the meantime this publication takes a large number of our resources to produce and we ask readers to support us financially. Why not take out a supporters sub? Rates are to be found on the inside front cover.

say more on this in *Internationalist Communist 15* but briefly the task of revolutionaries are to push the struggle on - not stand aside and denounce what the leftists in the unions were doing as simply fake militancy. The way to destroy fake militants who, after years of manoeuvring, suddenly call for the extension of the struggle and support strike committees and mass assemblies to control the struggle, is to call their bluff and posit the next step. Then, whatever happened, the working class would have had an icon for the future and, if you like, an insight into the manoeuvres of the ruling class (including the unions) that the ICC put at the head of their concerns. As we said to them in Paris the problem was that they told the workers that what they were doing was useless (a negative message on which no-one can act). The problem is to say how to struggle and that is not always so easy.

Anyway thanks for your concern and for writing. We hope you read this response and will send us the second part of your letter again ... but in French.

Internationalist greetings
AD



Party (*Battaglia Comunista*) in Italian and some French texts from our bulletin *Bureau-inform*. There is also a welcome page for the IBRP listing all our current publications as well as the full text of the Bureau Platform which currently appears in our two main languages but others are being prepared. The articles from the current issues of our main publications, *Battaglia Comunista*, *Prometeo*, *Revolutionary Perspectives* and *Internationalist Communist* are all available and these will be constantly up-dated, as well as the latest leaflets and Bureau statements. The form of page will change as readers request. A further site is also being developed in Italy which will include historical documents of the Italian Left. This address will be available shortly and will be published in our next edition of *Revolutionary Perspectives*. Internet users wishing to contact us by e-mail should write to our postbox for an e-mail address of one of our comrades who has taken responsibility for this work.

Our Basic Positions

1. We aim to become part of the future world working class party which will guide the class struggle towards the establishment of a stateless, classless, moneyless society without exploitation, national frontiers or standing armies and in which *the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all* (Marx): COMMUNISM.

2. Such a society will need a revolutionary state for its introduction. This state will be run by workers' councils, consisting of instantly recallable delegates from every section of the working class. Their rule is called the dictatorship of the proletariat because it cannot exist without the forcible overthrow and keeping down of the capitalist class worldwide.

3. The first stage in this is the political organisation of class-conscious workers and their eventual union into an international political party for the

promotion of world revolution.

4. The Russian October Revolution of 1917 remains a brilliant inspiration for us. It showed that workers could overthrow the capitalist class. Only the isolation and decimation of the Russian working class destroyed their revolutionary vision of 1917. What was set up in Russia in the 1920's and after was not communism but centrally planned state capitalism. There have as yet been no communist states anywhere in the world.

5. The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party was founded by the heirs of the Italian Left who tried to fight the political degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern in the 1920's. We are continuing the task which the Russian Revolution promised but failed to achieve - the freeing of the workers of the world and the establishment of communism. Join us!

Find Us on the Internet

<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/3303>

The above is the address of the Homepage of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party. Readers with access to the Internet can read the main documents of the Communist Workers' Organisation in English, those of the Internationalist Communist

The Difficult Path to the Revival of Class Struggle

continued from page 3

They will have to however learn that sectional struggles like those at Timex or in Liverpool are eventually doomed to defeat however much the workers maintain their solidarity. Solidarity has to be sought elsewhere and support has to go beyond financial donations. The French strikes showed that workers acting together and bringing out neighbouring sectors can put the class struggle on to a higher level. Ultimately though all strikes which are only asking for this or that cut to be rescinded will not solve any of the problems of growing misery and unemployment of our class. The next step on is for that struggle to be wide enough to question the very right of the capitalists to rule.

The Proletarian Party

This brings us back to the question of organisation. If permanent economic organs of workers inevitably end up back on capitalist terrain how are workers ever to break free from capitalist domination? The answer lies in a world proletarian party. We have to have an organisation that is both political (to lead the way to destroy the capitalist state) and international (there can be no isolated victory of socialism in any one country). Such a proposal usually evokes derision from anarchist, councilists and others enticed by bourgeois (both Stalinist and right wing) versions of our history. The failure of the Russian Revolution has led many to conclude that "all political parties are counter-revolutionary". The more ignorant even proclaim that the Bolsheviks had all along got an agenda to destroy the workers revolution in 1917. This is music to the ears of the bourgeoisie who are well aware that the post-First World War revolutionary wave was the biggest challenge yet to their

continued rule. They forget how inspiring the Bolsheviks leadership (in the programmatic sense) was. It was the Bolshevik Party which first saw that imperialist war should be turned into civil war, it was the Bolsheviks who alone of all parties unambiguously supported and defended the power of workers councils. The Bolsheviks had the support of 80% of the Russian working class - the only working class party ever to achieve this. But when the counter-revolution first triumphed in Central Europe the revolutionary wave ended. It was not long before the Russian workers and their political party and soviets were victims of that counter-revolution. Factions were banned and soviets neutered ... but not because of the existence of the party. Today, of course, we have had more than seventy years of counter-revolution and in that time the dishonest and programmatically anti-working class activity of the Stalinists and Trotskyists, those bastard creations of the Russian Revolution, have further undermined the validity of the most class conscious workers uniting in a party to return to the working class its own revolutionary programme. Such a party is not a general staff hierarchically above the working class but, through its militants, is a part of the living struggle of the working class. Its influence will only grow as those militants become the ones who are seen to be the most capable of understanding the clear line of march. This only comes through the collective discussion and debate that such a party can provide on an international scale. In the long and difficult road to the revival of class struggle the party will grow as a reflection of a growing communist consciousness amongst the working class. The affiliates of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party aim to be part of that process.

Other Publications

The Platform of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

Now available, in an updated version in English, French and Italian, and will shortly be translated into Spanish, German and Farsi. Each price £1.

Internationalist Notes

in Farsi (write to either address for other Farsi pamphlets)

Prometeo

Theoretical journal of the Internationalist Communist Party (Italy)

Battaglia Comunista

Monthly paper of the PCInt (Italy)

The International Bureau also has publications in Bengali, Slovene, Czech, and Serbo-Croat.

Please write to the (Milan address for all these publications)

Bureau Publications in French:

L'approche à la question du Parti

Le bordiguisme et la gauche italienne

La conscience de classe dans la perspective marxiste

Les origines du trotskysme

All pamphlets 15FF (postage included) or £1.50 from the Sheffield address.

Also in French:

Plateforme du Bureau Internationale pour le Parti Revolutionnaire 10FF or equivalent from our Milan address.

Bureau Inform No.2 (May 1996)

containing articles on

Les greves en France

Bosnie

1 Franc/20p (plus postage)

Internationalist Communist

Review of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

Back copies of most issues are available. Price £2.00 for any single copy. [Plus 50p postage in UK or £1.00 elsewhere.] Please enquire for cost of a bulk order and, where necessary, photocopies of articles from out of print issues.

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Internationalist Communist

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Revolutionary Perspectives is £10 for four issues in the UK (£16 in Europe and £20 elsewhere).

Prometeo is Lire 5,000 per issue.
Battaglia Comunista is Lire 10,000 for 12 issues.

