

# Revolutionary Perspectives

**Palestine's Workers  
Die for  
Bourgeois  
Nationalism**

Series 3 number 20



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**Vauxhall/Corus Job Losses  
Postal Workers Strikes  
Zero Tolerance • Byker Incinerator Fight  
US Capitalism and Elections  
Why Socialists Don't Vote  
Scottish Socialist Party/Socialist Alliance  
Rebellion in Bolivia • French Pensions Struggle**



# *Revolutionary Perspectives*

*Quarterly Magazine of the Communist Workers' Organisation  
British Affiliate of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party*

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For correspondence write to:

**CWO**

**P.O. Box 338**

**Sheffield S3 9YX, UK;**

email: **cwo@ibrp.org**

Or visit our websites: **http://www.ibrp.org**

and **www.internationalist.net**

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# The Class War Isn't Over ...

## More Job Losses

As we go to press Corus, the successor firm to British Steel, have just announced 7,000 redundancies throughout Britain. Ebbw Vale is to be closed completely and Llanwern, one of the biggest steel plants in Britain is to be reduced to a rolling mill. This is on top of the 3000 sacked last year. It comes only a week after BAe announced 2000 redundancies in Yorkshire plus all those in the car industry (see article on Vauxhall in this issue). The decline of manufacturing jobs, of which Vauxhall is a symptom, has continued in other sectors of the British economy but it is a world wide feature of capitalism in the advanced countries. Thousands of textile workers in Derbyshire have lost their jobs, together with shipyard workers at Cammell Laird on Merseyside. Since the Labour government came to power over 250,000 jobs in manufacturing have disappeared. This is not simply a problem with the sterling/Euro currency rate. There is a problem of world overcapacity in cars and heavy industries like steel making. In the USA 11 steelmaking firms have filed for bankruptcy in the last 12 months.

But it is only five years since we were told that all the job cuts of the 1980s had brought these industries back to profitability. Corus made £1 billion in profit in 1998. But then the steel price collapsed from the \$500 per tonne for hot rolled coil in 1995 to today's figure of around \$200. Steelworkers in Britain had felt the loss of 90% of their jobs since 1970, had achieved the highest growth in productivity in the advanced capitalist world and were then told that this was not enough. On the day the latest job losses were announced Corus' share price rose almost 10%. And for workers the agony is not over. Corus will sack more in the months or years ahead. In 1970 the Brit-

ish steel industry provided 95% of the steel used in British factories. Today that market has shrunk by 40% and half of the steel used comes from outside the UK.

## Whatever happened to the Capitalist Boom?

The sackings at Corus are part of a long-term trend which is visible in all the advanced capitalist countries. The industrial working class is suffering a relative decline while the parasitic industries such as banking and insurance have recruited 2.44 million additional workers. The relative decline of the industrial working class has, of course, been accompanied by massive increases in exploitation. In *RP 17* we showed the enormous increase in productivity which had taken place in the car industry. The same could be said for mining. In 1947 787 tonnes per miner was produced by over 700,000 miners but by 1999 13,000 miners produced 2723 tonnes per miner.

Yet workers in Britain can be the most exploited in the world in real terms but if what they produce still costs more than that produced by those on starvation levels in Asia and Russia they don't stand a chance. Whilst steel making was cut in the advanced countries both these areas increased steel production last year. The truth is that wherever workers are working the capitalist system in this era of globalisation simply offers different versions of misery.

Some have blamed the high rate of sterling but the problem is wider than this. It is the problem of what we can call financialisation, itself the product of the crisis of capital accumulation of the last thirty years. The high rate of sterling might cause problems for manufacturing but it has helped to swell the balance sheets of the financial companies in the City and these are the biggest earners of capital for the British state (so-called "invisible exports"). Financialisation also affects the manufacturing sector. Now it is no longer enough to make profits but profits which match those of other activities. British Steel was shunned by shareholders because it paid no dividends. Corus was formed by giving out £700 millions to shareholders and the new Chairman, Sir Brian Moffat was only brought in last December to balance the books when Corus had made losses for three years. He was famously quoted as saying that "I am interested in making money not steel".

And whilst the City fatcats and the financial sector could talk of a boom in the late 1990s the rest of us have been facing greater exploitation and great absolute poverty. The Thatcher and Major years saw the gulf between the wealthiest and poorest widen dramatically but the Government's own annual survey *Social Trends* confirmed that the rate of increase in income of the richest 10% of the population rose by twice that of the poorest 10%. The 90s capitalist "boom" has been a paper boom funded by speculation, debt and parasitism - but this in itself holds dangers for the system.

## Fighting Back

One of the factors in the increase of our exploitation has been the hammering that workers took in the 1980s. Every year since the miners' strike new records in days without strikes seem to

For further analysis of today's capitalist reality read the following texts in *Internationalist Communist*, central theoretical journal of the IBRP

- IC14 Capitalism's Global Crisis
- IC15 Globalisation of the World Economy and the State
- IC16 Globalisation and Imperialism
- IC18 US Control of Oil
- IC19 US Boom Triumph of the Paper Economy

have been set. But the last few months have been different. The signs are that workers are not so ready to roll over and accept what is being dished out. The strikes at the post office which we discuss in this issue are still continuing as we go to press. These strikes together with those on the railways and proposed strikes on the London Underground, show that Britain's position as the haven of industrial peace may be changing. Teachers and health workers, amongst many others, are also beginning to take localised action. They show that the class struggle is not a relic of a distant past, as the government and unions would like us to believe, but an inevitable result of capitalist exploitation. The working class simply will not go away...

### Unions and Elections - Against the Working Class

Which is why they give us capitalist elections. The election in Britain will once again give the ruling class the opportunity to draw the working class into its pseudo-debates. The absurdity of participating in bourgeois elections is taken up in the article on the "Socialist Alliance". The general truth about capitalist society is that it is the capitalist class, which holds power, and other classes live under their dictatorship. This is no less true for bourgeois democracy than it is for military or fascist regimes. If elections could ever challenge this dictatorship they would simply not be held. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union bourgeois democracy is capitalism's ideal form of government worldwide. Dictators, like Pinochet, who waded in blood and whom the bourgeoisie previously backed to the hilt are now being brought to book and the mystification of the democratic regime placed in their presidential palaces. As is stated in the text on the "Socialist Alliance", formal political equality means nothing when massive social inequality is the reality of capitalist society. A vote is quite worthless compared with donations of millions of pounds. The stories, which have filled the bourgeois

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press of massive donations to the parties, show how the reality in the UK is not that different to that in the US. The so-called "democracy" of bourgeois society is a great deception. It is the fig leaf, which hides the dictatorship under which we live. Voting only gives credibility to this wretched fraud. Instead of encouraging workers to participate in elections the job of real socialists and revolutionaries is to encourage workers to organise on their own behalf on a completely different basis to any of the existing parties or unions.

For it is only when workers actually struggle that we can see the real dictatorship of capital. The bourgeoisie talk long and glibly about "human rights" in places like Turkey or China but when workers go on strike here we suddenly find that they have absolutely none. Workers at Sheffield Hallam University have been told that they will be sacked if they refuse to do overtime! When RMT workers on the underground voted for a strike the unions followed High Court orders that it was illegal and called it off. The unions fall over backwards to stay within the law. If workers go against the law they begin to question the legality of the capitalist state and this is something the unions want to avoid because they are part of the system, not part of the solution. As the Liverpool postal workers showed the solution to this is class solidarity and a refusal to accept the rules that are drawn up by the bosses.

### International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

The struggle to crush workers by ever greater exploitation is the one factor which ensures that the class struggle will never go away. But, as Marx wrote 150 years ago, the class struggle can have two possible outcomes. The "common ruin of the contending classes" would see us all plunged back to the kind of barbarism that already exists in much of the world (or even worse face another global imperialist war), or a working class victory which will see the establishment of a new world in which the workers control and run production for themselves (See article on Newcastle incinerator fight). To achieve this, though, the working class has to organise internationally and this is why we in the CWO are affiliated to the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party. We are happy to announce a modest strengthening of the IBRP in this issue. Indication of this strengthening are the consolidation of the North American comrades and particularly the formation of a nucleus of sympathisers in France, *Bilan et Perspectives*. We also reproduce a leaflet celebrating the 73rd anniversary of the October Revolution, which was distributed by sympathisers of the IBRP in Ukraine who agree with us about the lessons of the Russian Revolution for today.

#### Prometeo 2, VIth Series

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[see translation in this issue]

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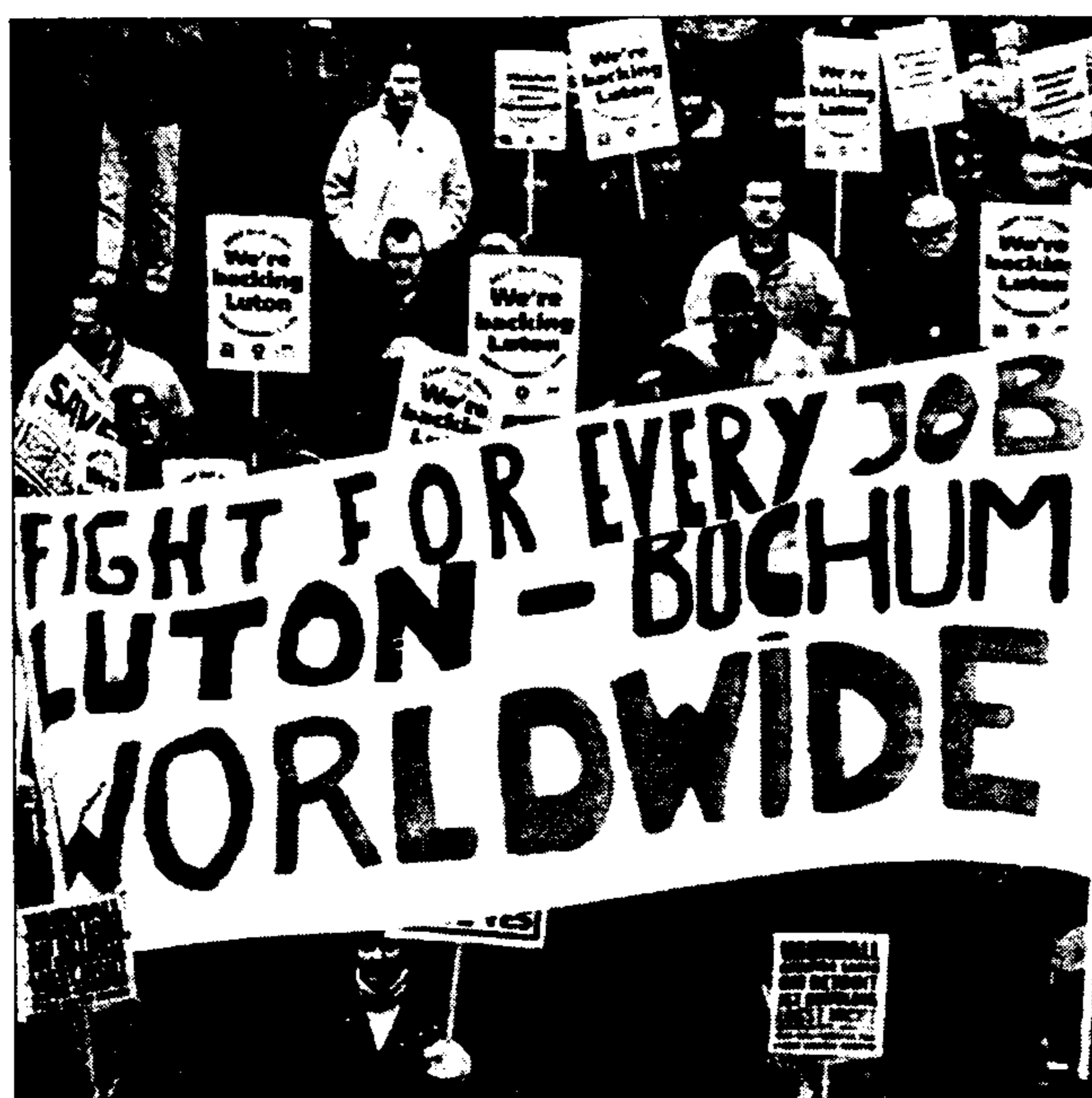
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# Vauxhall — Another Casualty of the Capitalist Crisis

In mid December General Motors (GM) announced that it was to end car production at Luton in 2002. This will come with the phasing out of the Vectra model and will end 95 years of vehicle production at the factory. It will also bring 2000 redundancies at the plant and approximately 5000 in the



*A contrast in slogans  
The unions fight for Luton, the workers fight for the world*

supply industries. This closure is part of GM's worldwide programme of restructuring which will lead to 10 000 job losses in the US and 5000 in Europe and reduce production of vehicles by 400 000 units per year. After the 2000 job losses at Luton the next largest cut in Europe is at the Bochum plant in Germany where 1000 jobs are to go. Recent announcements in the press have also made it clear that the future of Ellesmere Port plant is far from secure.

This closure is a complete reversal of the earlier promises of secure jobs and investment in the plant, which the bosses and the unions made at the last

pay negotiations. In 1998 Vauxhall workers were threatened with closure of both the Luton and Ellesmere Port factories unless they accepted a 3 year deal which was cooked up, without their participation, in secret talks between the unions, namely the AEEU, TGWU and MSF, and the GM bosses. This

deal included annual wage increases below the rate of inflation, new workers being taken on at lower rates of pay, only 82% of existing rates, and with less holiday, productivity increases and flexibility of labour and outsourcing of components. It was also agreed that the bosses could increase the working

week by 5 hours if they felt like it or could introduce 3 shift working if demand for cars increased. The bosses in return promised £185 million investment in the UK with £32 million going to Luton. At the time these concessions were accepted the T&GWU negotiator, Tom Woodley, hailed the workers' agreement as

*a victory for common sense which lifts the threat of closure and commits the company to a programme of investment in the plants and safeguards British jobs.*

The closure shows all this was a complete lie. It shows too that no matter

how many concessions workers make, no matter what productivity increases they achieve the bosses will still shut plants if they are not profitable. The threats of closure are simply a means of getting workers to submit to massive increases in exploitation. If this increased exploitation fails to deliver sufficient profit the bosses will shut the plant anyway. These events also clearly illustrate how the unions help the bosses in forcing through their plans. The agreement of 1998 was pushed through by the unions when they issued assurances to their members that flexibility, hard work and low pay rises would secure their jobs. Their reaction to the closure has been predictably feeble.

The only way workers can fight this closure is to struggle outside the unions and unite their struggle with other GM workers in Europe and the US who are all facing similar threats.

## Car crisis — mirror of capitalist crisis

The closure at Luton is part of a more general crisis in the car industry and in capitalism itself. The car industry is suffering from what capitalist economists call over-capacity. This means that the market cannot absorb the number of cars, which the new factories can produce. This means that insufficient cars can be sold to generate the profits required to sustain capitalist production. GM expects to lose over £450 million on its European operations in 2000. Its German section, Opel, has recently reported a £320 million loss for 2000. These losses come after modest profits in 1999 and reflect the savage competition in the motor industry. Although massive increases in productivity have been achieved in the UK plants greater increases have been achieved at Volkswagen, Renault



etc. The response of the bosses is to restructure, rationalise and increase productivity once again. This means closing loss making or marginal plants and making further investments in the remaining ones. The position of the UK plants is made worse by the strength of sterling against the Euro, which has made large sections of UK manufacturing uncompetitive. Carlos Ghosn, the Nissan boss, for example, stated that it was

*almost impossible to make a profit manufacturing outside the Euro zone.*

Production costs in Europe are approximately 25% less than in the UK and this puts the UK factories first on the lists for closure.

All the major car companies in the UK are currently making losses and the closure at Luton follows the closure of Ford's Dagenham plant. However, many of these losses are derived from the fact that Europe is the main export market for UK car production and sterling has appreciated 25% against the Euro since its launch at the start of 2000. The price of UK manufactured cars should therefore be increased 25% but as this is impossible they are being sold at a loss.

The high Sterling/Euro exchange rate is, however, essentially a short problem and the exchange rate is now starting to fall. Capitalists in the industry are not abandoning their UK production, on the contrary they are positioning themselves for the next round of competition when Sterling is in the Euro and the UK becomes competitive again. Evidence for this is the continuing investment, which all the major manufacturers are continuing to make in the UK. Nissan, for example, is to build the new Micra at its Sunderland factory; Toyota is planning to invest in its Burnaston plant to enable production to be increased by 30%. Honda is similarly planning to invest £450 million at its Swindon plant, Ford is to invest £400 million to convert Dagenham into a diesel engine plant and even GM has earmarked £180 million to upgrade its remaining UK facilities.

Whereas 2000 was a bad year for the car industry 1999 was a good one with

UK car production at a 20-year record and most manufacturers making profits. The violent swings from profit to loss can be accounted for by superficial factors such as exchange rates but the continual consolidation of the industry and concentration of capital cannot. These are part of a competitive war waged between the major producers and indicate, in a dramatic way the deeper long-term problems which capitalists in general face. The closures at Luton and Dagenham are part of this war. The reasons why capitalism acts in this way have been discussed in previous texts, and we refer readers to "The Death of Rover — a Model of Modern Capitalism" in RP17, for an explanation. Here we will simply restate the main problems, which face capitalism.

Capitalist production gives rise to a tendency for the rate of profit to fall and if this fall is unchecked the capitalist system will collapse. Capitalism is always forced to improve its machinery of production and to squeeze workers out of the production process to cheapen its costs in order to compete. However, since workers are the only source of profit, capitalists are continually reducing the source of their profits. The ratio of the profit to the constant capital (machines, buildings etc.) and variable capital (wages) tends to fall as the workers become fewer and the machinery becomes more numerous and its value increases. In the short term capitalists can survive this if they are able to expand the market for their products. However, in the longer term, increasing profit rates means either increasing the productivity of the remaining workers or devaluing or destroying constant capital. Increasing productivity is achieved through use of new machinery, flexibility, or longer hours while devaluation is achieved through writing off fixed assets, bankruptcies etc. Destruction, capitalism's last resort, is brought about by general war such as the first and second world wars. Increases in productivity were tried in the deal imposed in 1998 and have been insufficient. The writing off of plants at Luton and Dagenham (which are older and therefore more costly to modernise) are part of the process of devaluing capital to restore profit rates.

## Expansion of the Market

At the end of a cycle of accumulation like today's the market cannot be expanded indefinitely. In general, increased sales of (for example) cars can only be achieved at the expense of other producers. It was precisely the failure of the market to expand which precipitated GM's problems. The 1998-pay agreement had clauses written into it allowing for extra hours and extra shifts to meet increased demand, which the bosses were clearly counting on. In fact other producers such as Volkswagen, with its new eastern European plants, Renault, Peugeot etc. have taken part of GM's market share. Hence GM's need to rationalise increase competitiveness etc. and get back into a position from which they can undercut their rivals and begin to expand their share of the market at the expense of their rivals. In general this process leads to the elimination of the weaker capitalists and massive concentration of capital in an ever-smaller number of enormous global enterprises. The massive amalgamations, which we described in RP17, such as the Daimler Benz, Chrysler, Mitsubishi, are the result. These amalgamations represent attempts to restore profit rates through writing off of massive quantities of capital, as duplication of facilities or old plant are eliminated. The ratio of profit to the remaining plant and wages is, in this way, increased.

## Globalisation

The globalisation of production, which has occurred in the last 2 decades, has increased the pace of the cycle described above. This is because there are now no longer protected markets, such as the home market, on which producers can rely in the way they could in the period from World War 2 to the 1980's. The unrestricted movement of capital around the world coupled with the lack of import tariffs or import quotas within trading blocs such as the EU or NAFTA, or much reduced tariffs in the World Trade Organisation countries, means producers are subject to immediate global competition. This is taking place on a

scale never seen before. Production can be stopped in one country and started in another to gain advantage of cheaper labour rates or to gain advantage from currency exchange rates. Redundancies can be made in countries where labour laws make them less expensive. New production plants can be sited where regional grants are available or where trade unions will sign no-strike agreements. National governments and trade unions are brought into the process as agents of the multinationals and compete with other countries to offer the best incentives in a sort of Dutch auction. Research, development and design can be done globally at the cheapest rates and applied to factories worldwide, producing vast economies of scale.

GM is the largest carmaker and one of the largest multinationals in the world. It has sections in 64 countries and employs 388 000 workers and in 1999 its turnover was £130 bn with a profit of £5 bn. This turnover is larger than the gross national product of all the world's countries apart from the top 24! GM is, of course, a leader in the type of global competition described above. The decision to close the Luton works rather than the German plant at Bochum, was, no doubt, based on the Sterling/Euro exchange rate and the consideration that redundancy costs were lower in the UK than in Germany.

Globalisation of production has brought the capitalist class great power and flexibility in their struggle with the working class. It has, however, brought into existence a global working class whose conditions of life and common subjection to global capital are factors unifying it economically and potentially politically. The capitalist class has, through its development of industry on a global scale, created the basis for global unification of the working class. The battle cry of the communist manifesto,

*Workers of the world unite* is becoming ever more possible as globalisation proceeds. As Marx says in the *Communist Manifesto*

*What the bourgeoisie produces, therefore, above all are its own grave diggers.*

The capitalist class, however, retains their ideological grip on the working class and is able to exploit the divisions, which exist and play one section of workers off against the other. The immediate division to be exploited is the national one. For example, when Vauxhall workers were, in 1998, offered secure jobs, no mention was made of German or US workers and the implication was that if the British workers pulled their socks up and did whatever the bosses wanted then the axe would fall on the German or US factories.

## Nationalisation

A demand which was put forward during the Rover fiasco last year and is now being voiced in regard to the railways and other privatised sectors, is that of nationalisation. As the struggle at Vauxhall develops it will, no doubt, be put forward again. This is a demand voiced by capitalism's left wing who see rebuilding a section of state controlled capitalism as the solution to capitalism's problems. Some sections, e.g. the Trotskyists and Stalinists, see it as a step towards socialism. In fact, this is a reactionary demand. This demand is today a form of nationalism, which can only reinforce the nationalist divisions in the working class and spread illusions about state capitalism. The more capitalism's problems are internationalised the greater the possibility of an effective fightback.

Nationalisation of production is not a step towards socialism as the Trotskyist organisations maintain. Nationalisation of production creates state capitalism not socialism. The fact that the state holds the capital does not in the least effect the nature of production. This was clearly shown in the Soviet Union where the state held all the capital yet workers remained wage labourers and capitalist relations of production were never abolished.

Widespread stratification of the capitalist economy in Europe and the peripheral countries following the second world war must be understood in its historical context. This was a strategy of capitalists to rationalise and rebuild capitalism following the war. In this period the state was the only

agency able to provide the capital and organisation for restructuring and reorganising capitalism and it was therefore carried out on a national scale. It was never a policy that aimed at benefiting the working class who suffered massive redundancies and hardship in the early years of the reconstruction period. Apologists for the Soviet Union saw the similarity between Russian state capitalism, which they baptised as socialist, and that of the European state sector and the peripheral countries. Hence they saw European state capitalism as progressive and even proto-socialist.

This reorganisation of production on a national basis by the state was never progressive, nor was it able to prevent the fall in the rate of profit, which brought on a fresh capitalist crisis, in the early 70's. Since the return of the crisis the strategy of capitalism has been reversed. The state is now no longer able to control the national economy as the capital required is beyond its means. Instead the state has withdrawn from its position as the holder of national capital, and the state-owned sector has been privatised and the doors thrown open to international capital. This is a process which has occurred worldwide even in the former eastern bloc countries where all the capital was held by the state, such as Russia. As the minister for Industry, Stephen Byers, said,

*The state's role is not to rescue lame duck industries. It is to provide economic stability and allow companies to restructure and adjust to the global market.*

(Telegraph 14/12/00)

Globalisation has provided capitalism with a means of restoring profit rates and allowed 2 decades of new accumulation to occur. However, capitalism's problems persist and are now being reproduced on a global scale with the potential for even greater explosive power.

The call for nationalisation is an attempt to roll back the wheel of history. It only sows illusions in the working class about the nature of socialism and reinforce nationalist divisions between workers. This reactionary demand should be vigorously opposed.

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# Post Office — Unions Divide, Bosses Rule

## Workers under attack

For years now, Post Office workers have been under attack. This attack has been carried out by a management which is keen to impose flexibility and low wages, but without a confrontation on a national level, which it fears would result in too much disruption. Instead, it has kept up a guerrilla war on the local level, victimising militants and breaking agreements on overtime and other issues.

Management, with the help of the union, has also prevented a unified workers' fight on one issue which can't be localised: basic pay. As a result, post workers have a basic of just over £12 000 for a six-day week.

Recently, the management have stepped up their assault on the post workers' conditions. Workers have been sacked for taking "too much" sick leave, more efficiency (i.e., speed-ups) has been imposed, arbitrary discipline against militants has been employed and agreed Christmas overtime was slashed through the employment of casual workers.

## Con-signia

These attacks are partially in preparation for the "relaunching" of the Post Office as a wholly government-owned plc in March. This, in turn, is to get ready for the new Europe-wide operating régime for postal services, to be introduced

in 3 years time. Under this "liberalisation", the PO will face competition from other companies, including other national Postal Services. Although the PO now has a record demand for its services, it manages to lose 1 million items every week, according to the Post Office National Users' Council, and delivers 9% of first class items late. It is therefore, hardly able to defend its "own" national patch, let alone invade other country's.

But international competition is clearly the plan, as evidenced by the new name that the PO will use after its conversion: Consignia. This invention of the public relations "industry" is to be used in its international operations, while the Royal Mail and

## Vauxhall [Continued from previous page]

### A Real Fightback

The only fightback which can have any chance of success is an international one. The material basis for this fightback exists with workers in Germany and the US all facing the same problems, redundancy or increased exploitation. An international strike could hurt GM and force it to reverse the Luton closure, but an isolated national strike could not.

The trade unions are partners of the bosses and their quiet acceptance of the closure of Ford's plant at Dagenham, with the loss of 1300 jobs, indicates how they will act at Luton. Their first proposal, which was to challenge the closure in the capitalist courts was simply ridiculous. It is an ideal delaying tactic, which could take years of legal argument but would ensure a verdict in favour of the bosses. The recent suggestion of a strike ballot is recognition of the anger of the workers and an attempt to take control of this anger and dissipate it. The last thing the unions want is a strike since that

could embarrass the government in the run up to the election. They will manoeuvre to prevent this. We have already seen this with the "stay away" of Vauxhall workers on January 23rd. Here was an opportunity for direct action in solidarity with the other GM workers in Belgium and Germany. But as a strike without a ballot would be illegal in the UK the unions told everyone to copy the BA workers and phone in sick. Sounds clever until you realise it all fragments solidarity and is less embarrassing to the Labour Government than Ken Jackson, Bill Morris and the rest support, for all their weasel words of warning to Tony Blair. And there are plenty of illegal strikes going on around the country today which the government has not been able to stop (see article on postal workers in this issue). The TGWU shafted the dockers, the AEUU shafted the electricians and they will similarly try to prevent any international solidarity or co-ordination of strikes in the car industry.

Any effective fightback has to be organised by workers themselves,

outside of and against the trade unions. Mass meetings should be held to elect revocable delegates to strike committees in order to contact US and German workers and to prepare a strike. An international strike should be run by these committees and should give itself the aim of halting GM's production. Such a fightback could be the first step in a more general international fightback against the defeats workers have suffered for the last 20 years.

In the longer term these problems cannot be solved within capitalism and any victory will be a temporary one. The capitalist system of production needs to be overthrown and replaced with the communist one. To achieve this the working class needs to forge its most important weapon, its international political party. This party is an indispensable agent in the internationalisation of class struggle and the overthrow of the capitalist class.

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Parcelforce will be reserved for the "domestic" parts of its business. Stronger evidence for this is the fact that the PO already owns nearly 20 international companies in Europe, the US and Canada, some with links to the Far East, according to the PO chairman, Bain (quoted in the *Financial Times*, 10th January 2001).

And how will Consignia compete? By squeezing as much as possible out of its workers, demanding more work for the same or less pay. The present actions of the management are the start of this, and they are backed up by a media campaign against militancy in "the last unreformed industry".

### Privatisation and nationalisation

There are rumours that the conversion of the form of nationalisation contained in the change to a plc is just preliminary to a full privatisation, and these are probably correct. However, the PO will be just as much at the service of the bourgeoisie whether it is owned by the state or by the "private sector". The

state does not hover above society as a neutral institution but is a tool of the ruling class. Communists do not fight privatisation *per se*, nor do they fight for nationalisation. In the past, "rationalisations" (the bosses' name for redundancies, speed-ups, etc.) have accompanied nationalisations (e.g., the British coal industry) as well as privatisations, and it is against these direct attacks on the working class that communists **do** fight.

Of course, although the way that the bourgeois holds property is a matter of indifference to us, the **fact** that it holds property is not. The abolition of bourgeois property, and the bourgeoisie itself, is the pre-condition for the further development of humanity.

### Unions and class struggle

Of course, the PO workers are not passively accepting the attacks on them.

Over the past year strikes by PO workers resulted in over 22 000 working days being lost, and represented nearly

half of the 195 recorded industrial disputes in Britain.

Before Christmas, thousands of workers struck, over the withdrawal of overtime and victimisation issues. After the management brought in casuals in Cardiff, the workers struck there, and the management tried to use the Bristol, Oxford and Swindon offices to sort Cardiff mail. This undermined the usual tactic of isolating strikes and the Bristol, Oxford and Swindon workers came out in solidarity. As a result, the management backed down.

It is clear that there is a growing spirit of militancy among the PO workers, but it is also evident that they are being held back by the Communication Workers' Union. The CWU has always said that trades unions sabotage rather than facilitate class struggle, because they exist to sell workers' labour power to the capitalist class. The CWU hides behind the so-called anti-union legislation, which means that strikes held without a secret ballot leave the CWU and the strikers open to legal action. This makes it easier for the CWU to argue against immediate action, giving the bosses time to dampen down

the struggle. When this does not work, and a secret ballot is actually held, the workers are atomised and less likely to vote for collective solutions to their problems, than they are in mass meetings. But, even when there was a vote in favour of action, as there was in the London area of PO Network — i.e., counters — (by 80% to 20%!), the CWU was able to call off the action when PON threatened court proceedings over irregularities. And all this despite the fact that none of those who have actually struck, unofficially, have been prosecuted, because such a prosecution would damage the bosses' tactic of isolating each strike!

It might be argued that the top level of the CWU sabotages struggle, but that the lowest level is essential for workers to fight back at all. At first



*Liverpool postal workers' picket, January 2001  
"Illegal" strikes show others the way.*



## The fight against the Byker Incinerator

# What Labour Really Means by “Transparency of Government”

In RP17 we wrote about the Byker community in Newcastle's fight against the Labour council's plans to expand an existing incineration plant so it would burn 80 000 tonnes of rubbish and 15 000 tonnes of car tyres as fuel. This plant is in the middle of a working class area, one of the poorest in the North. When local people discovered the secret plans of the council to expand the plant they formed CAIR, the Campaign Against Incinerated Refuse, in which one of our militants has been active. This experience has been an extremely valuable one in that it reinforces once again how Marxism is not merely an abstract theory, but a living tool to use

in all aspects of class struggle, whether workbased or territorial.

### The CAIR Struggle

In becoming a communist Marx saw clearly that the state was not an independent entity which stood above society but was in fact the principal organ of class rule used by the bourgeoisie for the continued domination and exploitation of the working class. [See for example *The German Ideology* of 1845-6]. Although this sounds to all Marxists like common sense, to those groups which claim to be Marxist, such as the Trotskyists in all their various shades, it is not. The example of the fight against the incinerator in Byker may be a very small one, nevertheless it shows that although Trotskyists pay lip service to fighting the state, in practice they collude with it against the interests of the working class.

In taking on the local council it was obvious to most people that we would be taking on a large bureaucratic organisation with capital behind it and years of propaganda experience. The local state as represented by Newcastle council proved to be very good at manipulating the situation and shifted between telling outright lies about the campaign and the incinerator to trying to incorporate CAIR into its orbit. The council kept its plans to expand the plant secret and was on the verge of signing a long term contract worth millions of pounds when CAIR was formed. Our aim in joining the campaign was twofold:

1. to stop the council expanding the incinerator. As with all incinerators the plant at Byker had for years spewed out a whole range of toxins damaging to health, and an upgraded plant would have meant

massively increased doses of copper, mercury, lead, zinc, nitrogen, oxides, cadmium, carbon monoxide, thallium, arsenic, furans and dioxin, the most dangerous chemical there is. The health results would be devastating. The area already suffers from abnormally high sickness rates, but the increase of cancers, lung and kidney disease, diseases of the immune system, birth defects, lowered intelligence and behavioural problems would have certainly resulted.

2. to open up the campaign and get local workers involved. Workers in the area were not only suffering physically from the old plant and would suffer even more from an expanded one, but financially too they had been ripped off for years in inflated heating charges. Since this was an issue which affected everyone it was a good basis on which to get people involved.

At a mass meeting held in January 2000, local people expressed their anger at the council's denial there were any health risks from the existing plant and their denial that there would be any health risks from an expanded one. The council were clearly shaken by the hostility they received and decided to change their tactics. Overnight they suddenly became in favour of open consultation. They suggested setting up a joint Working Group to discuss the future of the plant. The group consisted of council officers, Councillors, members of CAIR, local people and people from around the city worried about the effects of the plant. CAIR fought to open the meeting to everyone who was interested and the council conceded. However it quickly became apparent that the role of the Working Group was not one of joint decision making but an empty talking shop, and locals quickly deserted it.

## Post Office Strikes

*Continued from previous page*

sight, this seems plausible, especially as many of those victimised by the management are, in fact, union representatives. But these representatives, through their presence in the union are giving credibility to the leadership and supporting the position argued by *Socialist Worker*, that "Union leaders should be coordinating and building the resistance, uniting the fightback" (SW 1726). Sowing illusions in the possibility of a union leadership which can resist the demands of capital, and which can allowed to "coordinate" and "build" that resistance is equivalent to suicide. Workers have to take charge of their own struggle, and take it to other workers, and not just in their own sector. They cannot wait for the union to make the strike official, which it will do only if it needs as tactic to regain control of a movement going beyond its reach. EDL



By April the results of tests on the ash were revealed. CAIR had argued from the very beginning that the council were grossly irresponsible for spreading 2 000 tonnes of toxic ash over the city, especially on allotments where people grew food, and over numerous other public areas, including near children's playgrounds. The council always denied the ash was hazardous and denounced CAIR as scaremongers. However when the ash was independently tested in Germany, the results were far worse than even CAIR had imagined. In effect the council had contaminated vast areas of public land with a whole range of extremely dangerous toxins, including dioxin. Since dioxin is so dangerous there is no safe level for it, but 5 nanogrammes is taken as the safety baseline. A sample taken from Byker showed dioxin contamination at 4,224 nanogrammes. The report concluded there was 'massive contamination'. The council had spread the ash for 6 years, and those bodies meant to be independent, such as the Environment Agency, did absolutely nothing about it until the outcry was so great they were forced to prosecute.

### Council Manoeuvres

Our comrade argued in CAIR meetings on numerous occasions against the Working Group. It was clear from an early stage that this was a strategy by the council to isolate the most militant sections of the community by drawing them into the orbit of the council. CAIR members were quickly sucked in to the agenda of the Working Group and parcelled off into various sub groups. This was not only exhausting and time consuming, but increasingly it became obvious that the council were using CAIR as an unpaid consultancy firm. They were asked to fulfil impossible tasks such as draw up Newcastle City's waste strategy plan. The council set the agenda, they had the resources behind them that local people did not. They could exhaust people with frequent meetings discussing 'the process' whilst ensuring nothing changed. In other words the council quite quickly worked to get CAIR to see the problem from their point of view. And despite all their talk of a new approach, the

council continued to hold secret meetings with the Environment Agency, the Director of Health and various other departments and organisations to discuss damage limitation options following the ash report. They stopped people asking questions when the results of the ash were announced and people were told they could not speak but would have to wait for the results of a press conference the next day. They refused to answer written questions put forward by the group, and tried to swear sub groups to secrecy. On numerous occasions they withheld information or misled the group. Despite their attempt to overrule the resistance from the people whose lives were affected, they portrayed the Working Group as a revolutionary concept in consultation and partnership, which won them credibility in the propaganda war.

During this time the council was also coming under attack in the city's West End after it had launched its rather inappropriately named 'Going for Growth' strategy, under which it proposed the demolition of vast amounts of social housing — some 6600 homes, and their replacement with fewer homes, including luxury homes for sale, thus forcing everyone out of the area. One local resident described the policy as Newcastle's answer to ethnic cleansing on a social basis. Mass meetings were held all over the area, and, in one which was attended by 1000 people understandably upset at the prospect of seeing their homes demolished, the council told locals that if they didn't stop crying they'd be asked to leave! Newcastle council quickly stopped holding meetings after that.

As a result of this we argued in CAIR meetings for the following

1. linking up with the West End, to undertake joint work against the council;
2. turning our attention away from the Working Group, which was increasingly stopping CAIR carrying on its own work on the estate and in the city as a whole, and was in fact acting as a barrier to getting people involved;
3. putting forward clear demands around which people could organ-

ise and fight, for example, the issue of heating charges.

### Trotskyist Reformism Supports the Capitalist State

Although most people saw through the Council manoeuvre of "the Working Group", and realised it had a political dimension of trying to neutralise the campaign of resistance by drawing it into an official dead-end, they were reluctant to leave it. They argued that it gave them some say in the council's final decision making. Although CAIR was made up of lots of various types of people, political and non-political, the only other presence in it who claimed to belong to a Marxist organisation was a Trotskyist, who was one of the most vigorous defenders of the Working Group, arguing that we should be treating the campaign as though it were a strike and that negotiations were the only sensible way forward. In other words, like Trotskyists everywhere, the aim wasn't to spread the campaign or unite with other workers to fight the council, or to raise political awareness about the issues around the campaign and the role of the state. Instead this Trotskyist, like all others, was anxious to 'work within the process,' to carve out a niche in local government, and to continue the illusion that the state could be fully open and accountable to workers and could be moulded to workers' needs. As the Working Group descended into ever more technical meetings over council policy and the workings of local government, the more the Trotskyist argued that what was needed was not mass meetings for everyone to have their say but that specialist representatives like themselves were necessary to attend all the meetings and play the bureaucratic games of the council. In the West End the fight of local people was hijacked by Trotskyist groups, trades unions and the church, none of whom were interested in getting the wider working class involved, nor of uniting those workers who were fighting or politicising the fight. Instead they did exactly what the Trotskyist in CAIR did and concentrated on the legal and technical issues around 'Going for



# The Discrete Tolerance of the Bourgeoisie

**T**he most sweeping extension of police powers since Michael Howard's infamous 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act was yesterday unveiled by the Home Secretary Jack Straw, under the banner of tackling "drunken yobs...." May Cunneen, associate director of Liberty said the powers in the bill amounted to "the most serious erosion of rights in the criminal justice system that we have seen for years"

*Guardian*, 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2001

As the bourgeois circus rolls towards the next election the ideological outpourings are stepped up to appeal to and reinforce all manner of reactionary prejudice.

Picking up the language of their mentors from the USA, the Labour Government and Jack Straw, its Home Secretary (and former radical leader of the National Union of Students), have

highlighted "zero tolerance" as a theme for the strengthening of the police and the other directly repressive layers of the state. Not to be outdone, Ann Widdecombe, his Tory counterpart, received rapturous applause from last year's party conference as she extended the boundaries of "the enemy within" to include smokers of cannabis – the subsequent backtracking and confusion merely highlighting the extreme boundaries to which the new maxim is being extended.

What can we make of the bourgeoisie's public advocacy of "zero tolerance" i.e. maximum intolerance, as one of the high virtues of their contemporary politics?

## **Bourgeois toleration — myth and reality**

**F**or much of their history the British bourgeoisie has cloaked their

class dictatorship with the wrappings of "toleration". As far back as the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Utilitarians were providing an ideological framework for bourgeois class rule. By the 1850's John Stuart Mill advised the dominant class of industrial capitalists to advocate *liberty of tastes and pursuits; of framing the plan of our own life to suit our own character; of doing as we like, subject to such consequences as may follow: without impediment from our fellow-creatures, so long as what we do does not harm them, even though they should think our conduct foolish, perverse, or wrong* (J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter 1).

The themes of toleration and liberty have recurred in the lexicon of British bourgeois thought at regular intervals in the century and a half since Mill wrote the above words. Such liberalism featured prominently in the anti-fascist ideology that helped lead British workers into the Second

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## What Labour Really Means by "Transparency"

Continued from previous page

Growth'. Again the message for workers was 'don't bother fighting, we'll do it for you, we have the expertise, but we'll do it legally, of course.'

### **What Needs to be Done**

**T**he fight in CAIR against political elements who want to exclude the working class from class struggle is still going on. We will continue to argue for an extension of the fight as the only way forward. The real power of CAIR does not lie with individuals who know how to play the system but with the working class. This is the only way forward — the council know they can always get round individuals, but the wider involvement of workers is their worst fear. If CAIR does not act on this, then

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it will either dissolve or be assimilated into the state, as many working class organisations have been before it.

In the longer term this episode starkly reveals the complete difference between capitalist "democracy" and a system that really represents workers. The workers councils or "soviets" set up in several countries at the height of the last revolutionary wave after the Russian Revolution of 1917 showed what workers can rally do when they actually control power and are not begging for favours from a manipulating state. Although the revolution ultimately failed (and we can say that 80 years ago they had died as real workers bodies) they gave a brief glimpse of how society can be run for the benefit of the people who produce its

wealth. In the workers councils delegates were elected who could be instantly recalled if they failed to carry out what they said. There was no secrecy. Compare this with today where an MP is elected for 5 years to do what he or she likes and where they are prey to the pressure and corruption of the big capitalists. Capitalist "democracy" (which 30% of the adult population don't take part in even now) depends on making sure that we do not participate in running our own affairs. This is a far cry from a communist society where everyone will have to be involved. If they aren't it will be just another form of class rule and thus it will be impossible to establish a communist society of "freely associated producers". This is what internationalists are fighting for.



World War. Similar slogans have been used as a cover for numerous other military and diplomatic actions "against the tyrants" such as Nasser, Saddam Hussein and, more recently, Slobodan Milosevic.

Unsurprisingly, the historical balance sheet shows a massive gap between the verbal commitment to liberalism and the reality of bourgeois class rule. By the first decade of the 20th century the British state had drawn up laws to restrict the immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe and had introduced concentration camps to the world during their colonial wars in Southern Africa, setting a new standard for the imprisoning and punishment of "enemy" civilians. Recent immigrants were submitted to state-sponsored harassment during the First World War. With the support of the anti-fascist left, the state gave themselves more legal controls over political activities during the 1930's. Immigrants, including Jewish refugees from the supposed arch-enemy, were again systematically harassed and imprisoned during the Second World War.

During the post-war boom tolerance could again become part of the official bourgeois ideology. Afro-Caribbean and Asian workers were welcomed in to boost the numbers of the proletariat to increase domestic profits. "Youth culture", superficially in contrast to established behaviour, was allowed to co-exist with minimal legal interference. On the other hand, of course, even this temporary and superficial liberalism was never displayed in numerous other parts of the world (Malaya, Cyprus, Kenya, Aden etc.) as the British state ensured that direct political control was safely transformed into equivalent post-colonial economic and political domination.

As capitalism cut over from its post-war expansion to enter thirty years of recurring and deepening crisis, the room for liberalism in ideology or legislation has been squeezed out of the system, in a consistent, if not linear, process. The latest commitment to "maximum intolerance" by both the major political parties as they jockey prior to the General Election marks a new high point in the ruling class's abandonment of the liberal mask.

## The enemy within

The ruling bourgeoisie can never forget that, despite all their declarations to the opposite, their domination of society is not fixed or permanent. Always, they are instinctively haunted by the presence of a working class whose labour produces the capitalist's profits and who always have the potential to be capitalism's gravediggers. The more wedges that can be driven into the unity of the working class, the more secure is the bourgeois ruling class, at least temporarily. The British ruling class are past masters at exploiting and reinforcing divisions along lines such as gender or race.

The latest attempts at stigmatising whole groups and stirring up the mentality of the pogrom is a new overlay on the usual practice of dividing the working class. As well as reinforcing their basic ideological platform these ruses to stigmatise and/or criminalise the "enemy within" is used to corrode solidarity within working class communities. In the absence of major class struggles the working class permanently suffers domination by bourgeois ideology reinforced at every turn by the mass media. The pernicious ideas around "the enemy within" and the call for "zero tolerance" are used to turn neighbour against neighbour.

In the face of collapsing social provision, massive funds are spent urging individuals to report those they suspect might be fiddling the dole. Most acts of violence against children occurs within the family but vigilante actions have been encouraged against suspected "child abusers". The capitalist conglomerates which own the breweries make millions of pounds of profits but the young people who over-indulge in response to the targeted advertising are shown as anti-social elements to be fined and criminalised. Attention is again turned to immigrants with displaced workers from Central Europe the fashionable targets for the vilest racism, in the best British bourgeois tradition. There is further "maximum intolerance" for unemployed workers who are forced onto lowly paid schemes or face benefit cuts. The

most marginalised and traumatised victims of the system are portrayed as aggressive beggars. Giant posters have appeared on our streets to highlight the individuals who may have not paid their television licences. Police and local councils can apply general curfews against young people in specified areas. The list continues to grow with the bosses' think tanks, focus groups and research machines forever digging in their own filth for more themes that will hit the lowest common denominator.

Applauded and reinforced by the media barons sickening, and sometimes nightmarish, campaigns have been developed and built up consistently over recent years. No gap remains between the left and right of the political establishment as these monstrous calls for witch-hunt after witch-hunt aim at the destruction of the most basic cohesion within the working class.

The issue is not about abstract moral values. Distinct patterns can be identified which show the class basis of this poison. The contrast in attitude between the "drunken yobs" and the firms whose profits come from their over-indulgence has already been mentioned. The same difference applies in other instances.

Capitalist corporations make enormous profits from producing legal drugs, often addictive and many with recognised severe side effects. The British state effectively underwrites their profitability with massive guaranteed purchases from the National Health Service. On the other hand, growers of marijuana for their own use and those in possession of even small quantities are liable to legal penalties. The profitable advertising sector widely and increasingly uses sexual imagery to promote sales of everything from motor cars to chocolate. Indeed, the use of sexual imagery as a commodity has permeated to the degree that "sexy" is common business parlance for a successful and/or saleable proposal. However, teenage sex is frowned on, gay and lesbian sex suffers social and legal constraints and young single mothers are portrayed as a social ill.



In the "leisure industry" (recreation distorted into a commodity to be bought and sold) a number of similar observations quickly spring to mind. The massive profits of the media corporations accompany efforts to legally restrict the availability of music at no cost via the Internet. Popular and youth music is encouraged when produced in a way and at venues are controlled by the state and capitalist entrepreneurs. The attitude to non-profit generating music is very different as highlighted, for example by the "Right to Rave" campaign.

This approach is not simply a reflection of self-evident gross hypocrisy. The root can be simply understood. In all the cases just mentioned, that part of the activity which is directly controlled by capital and capable of generating profit is applauded and encouraged. The resultant behaviour which is not totally controlled by the bosses and their state is vilified. The bourgeoisie, as always, are not simply hypocritical but are aware of, and prepared to promote, their own class interest.

## The collapse of "progressive liberalism"

Looking back over the last thirty years it is possible to identify numerous landmarks in the strengthening of the state apparatus which has led to the catalogue of blatantly repressive measures. The successive immigration acts, the straight-jacketing of "legal strikes" through safe Trade Union channels, the increasing role of the police as an open player in class struggle starting from the role of ACPO in the Miners' strike, the successive attacks on the unemployed through the tightening of the Social Security legislation, the Criminal Justice Act are all parts of that process.

Last, but by no means least, there is the existing and proposed "anti-terrorist" legislation much of which has flowed directly from the experiences of the British state and its supporters in Northern Ireland.

No twist or turn of emphasis in bourgeois ideology is unchangeable. As conditions change and new needs arise, ideological schemas can be al-

tered, old formulas rehabilitated or new elements adopted.

It cannot be ruled out that liberal tolerance may be put back on the bourgeois agenda at some stage. This could be in the shape of a softer "New" Labour working with their Liberal Democrat allies. Alternatively, Portillo and his followers could make a play for a "caring Conservatism" coupled with rhetoric about the "rolling back of the state". In any event, such a change of tack would mean only a change in appearance, with the increasing domination of the capitalist state in all aspects of life remaining unchallenged.

For now, the parties see no need to mask their strengthening of the repressive apparatus. Indeed, their whipping up of the "zero tolerance" message with all its connotations has been so successful that their contest to be the "most intolerant" looks certain to be a theme in the next twelve months.

## Zero tolerance for the bosses and their ideologues

*Maximum intolerance*, then, is the order of the day for our ruling class. For workers, the way that the bourgeoisie wrap up their package is of no importance. The contents remain the same. In the current epoch the prospects for workers across the globe can only be increasing hardship, and festering misery and war as the capitalist crisis broadens and deepens.

Communists do not take as good coin even the most thoroughgoing or consistent bourgeois liberalism. At best it represents breathing space within the stifling constraints of an oppressive and decadent class system whose progressive nature lies long in the past.

Against the bourgeois ideologues, whether of liberal or authoritarian persuasion, we argue for human liberation through the permanent dissolution of class society. It is only through Communist revolution that we truly arrive at a liberated human community, or one in Marx's phrases that we print regularly in RP, where "The free development of each is the condition for the free development of all".

**Internationalist Communist**  
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**Towards the New International**

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 The Working Class and Elections in Iran



# The Socialist Alliance — A Stale Act in the Same Old Capitalist Circus

The Capitalist Parliamentary Election Circus is once again preparing its show for the road. The media, spin doctors and publicity managers are going to have to work hard to whip up some interest and get voters along to the polls. The trouble is circuses are pretty dull these days. The top acts are virtually identical: over-rehearsed and full of the same unconvincing pledges and predictable gimmicks. Truth to say the whole thing is not only irrelevant to

working people's lives, it doesn't even provide a temporary diversion. Some blame this on Labour's new-style performance. They used to love the old act (many were part of it) and hate the idea that working class folk are becoming so disillusioned with the 'democratic process' that they don't turn out to vote at all. This time round a bunch of them have got together and set up an act of their own which they hope will stop the "fall into apathy or worse" [i.e. vote for the Tories — ed.].

The quote is from *Socialist Worker* [6th January], weekly paper of the SWP (Socialist Workers Party). The SWP is playing an enthusiastic part in the new act which, though small and destined to remain very much on the fringe of the larger show, brings together a novel mix of players who've managed to sink their petty differences and rivalries to present us with the *Socialist Alliance!* Since last year they've been rehearsing together by putting up candidates in England and Wales, most notably during the elections for the

Greater London Assembly, but also in last summer's Euro MP elections and several by-elections in old Labour constituencies. As the name implies, anyone who calls themselves 'socialist' can join in the act. Just about all the Trotskyists have done so as well as ex-Labour Party members who've re-

Socialist Alliance programme is *Stop Privatisation*, followed by *Renationalisation of the Railways*, both of which the organisers calculate will be popular in the present climate. The rest of the programme is also modelled round the old Labour Left routine: the totally fantastic *Decent Pensions*

*Linked to Wages*; the pretty tame one of *Tax the Rich*; a fairly feeble new effort called *Improved Minimum Wage*; and the old chestnut, *Trade Union Rights*. So at least some of us who feel "totally excluded" will now have — in the words of *Socialist Worker* again —

A lot of the arguments on Labour and elections have of necessity been short-circuited in the text. Apart from the article in RP6 mentioned there, the following are some of the titles in the current series of RP dealing with aspects of an issue which is central to the development of a revolutionary movement in Britain.

**RP 3: Elections Against the Working Class**

**RP 7: New Labour, Same Old Attacks**

**RP 8: Five Years' Hard Labour**

**RP 9: Parliamentarism and Communism**

**RP 16: Nationalisation and Privatisation: Twin Pillars of Capitalism**

**RP 18: Our Anti-Capitalism and Theirs**

signed or been kicked out as so-called New Labour tightened up its act. But you can still be in the Labour Party and take part in the Socialist Alliance. In fact you don't really need to bother about the socialist part — you can simply be a Green, a 'community activist' or any manner of 'anti-capitalist'. The important thing is that you don't like the way the new Labour impresario, Tony Blair, and his entourage are managing the show. This is the basis for the Socialist Alliance joining up with a similar troupe in Scotland currently appearing under the name of *Scottish Socialist Party*. [Mainly the creation of the Trotskyist group Militant which used to work inside the Labour Party until they were kicked out. See article in this issue.] Together they aim to field candidates in 120 or so parliamentary seats and even though they are without big financial sponsors and thus can never become a star turn in the parliamentary circus itself they've nobly pledged themselves to provide a show for "those who feel totally excluded by New Labour". Top of the bill in the

"the chance to vote for socialists who are challenging the pro-market consensus of the main parties."

But, wait a minute. This is getting beyond a joke. In a single sentence the party which proclaims in its paper every week that "there is no parliamentary road" to socialism, that capitalism "cannot be reformed or patched up as the established Labour and trade union leaders say" and that state capitalism is not socialism, reveals what the SWP and the Socialist Alliance as a whole is really about.

First, its clearly about trying to revive workers' flagging participation in elections and inspiring confidence in 'parliamentary democracy'. Second, by the same token, it's reformist as well as reactionary. Third, and possibly worst of all, it betrays a complete lack of understanding of what socialism is. Moreover, by peddling the myth that Labour used to be socialist and that we need to "fight for the socialist principles that New Labour has abandoned" the Socialist Alliance is



giving us warning that they aim to step into the political space Labour has vacated — with all the disastrous consequences that would have if the working class were to take it seriously.

### The make-believe of capitalist elections

**O**n the first point, we can imagine diehard social democrats (which is what most participants in the Socialist Alliance are) wincing at our suggestion that it's a waste of time workers participating in elections. They'll argue we're making light of the democratic gains that our forefathers fought for. Our reply is that we are living in a completely different historical epoch, and have been since the early years of last century. It is important to take account of changed historical circumstances. During the infancy of industrial capitalism workers were only beginning to identify themselves as part of a distinct social class with separate political and economic interests of their own. The Chartist movement played a significant part in the development of this self awareness. But since the days of struggle for the People's Charter the working class has experienced the Paris Commune (from which revolutionaries draw the indelible lesson first articulated by Karl Marx, that the working class cannot reach political power by simply **taking over** the existing state); in Europe workers helped build large social democratic parties and the British equivalent, the Labour Party. The majority of social democrats thought that once the working class had enough electoral clout capitalism could be reformed out of existence, that democratising the capitalist state was the answer, but it turned out that all those parties had done was entangle the working class itself in the defence of the capitalist state against the very interests of the class it was supposed to represent. This enormous betrayal of the working class first hit revolutionaries when the

social democratic parties used all their weight to get workers to fight and die for capitalist imperialism in the 1st World War. That betrayal was confirmed by social democracy's cynical and ruthless role in opposing the revolutionary movement of workers, particularly in Germany and central Europe, but echoed by the Labour Party in Britain. By the time the majority of British working men (not women) were granted the vote — 1918 — Chartism was long dead and the extension of the franchise was just one of the weapons used in capitalism's armoury to inhibit the development of a more threatening, revolutionary movement.

Thus, democratic demands — which are essentially based on the bourgeois notion of the individual citizen with rights and responsibilities (i.e. property) — and calls for this or that piece of legislation intended to improve the present system are no longer part of the socialist programme. It's true that whatever democratic rights are enjoyed by working class citizens in the advanced capitalist states today are the legacy of history but how far they **actually** hold for members of the working class also depends on the economic prosperity of the state in question. With the ineluctable deepening of capitalism's global economic crisis the number of states in the world that can even minimally pretend to treat their 'citizens' equally is diminishing, which only shows that formal, political equality means nothing when it is

unaccompanied by economic equality. Any 'rights' currently enjoyed by workers when they are isolated as individual citizens are liable to be thrown out of the window by the bourgeois state once they fight solidly together for their interests as a class. (All that's needed is a declaration of a state of emergency.) The lesson we draw from our Chartist forebears is not the need to defend parliamentary democracy but rather the need for the working class to form an independent **political** organisation. Today that means an organisation which understands what the communist programme is about and which is able to defend that programme clearly inside the working class.

### What is Socialism?

**T**his brings us to the third aspect we question about the Socialist Alliance, and that is its claim to be socialist at all. If the term 'socialism' means anything at all then it has to refer to an entirely different mode of production from capitalism. Socialism is not about the redistribution of wealth in existing society (a completely utopian goal), it is about abolishing money and the commodity economy altogether. Instead of goods being produced according to whether they'll make a profit for a select few, in a socialist world the producers themselves will decide what is produced to directly meet social needs. In other words, socialism is about the socialisation of the



January 1947. Striking meat porters at Smithfield market watch soldiers taking over. The saying was, 'Join the army and see Smithfield'.



whole economy, something which can only be undertaken once the capitalist state has been overthrown. Socialisation has nothing to do with nationalisation and state control. For a start, in the transition to socialist society the state will not be an organ outside of the working class. It will be a temporary body, run on the basis of proletarian direct democracy through councils of directly revocable delegates and their offshoot organs. In socialism itself, the administration of things with replacement the government of people and the state will be abolished.

When it has suited it, the Labour Party has always presented state ownership and nationalisation of industry by the present state — i.e. the British capitalist state — as socialism and many Labour supporters believe this. However, that doesn't make it true. Historically Labour has put forward nationalisation as a socialist goal, both to divert workers from extending their struggle along very different lines that could threaten the capitalist state (as with the 1918 adoption of Clause 4 and to a lesser extent in 1945) and to try to solve the profitability problems of British capitalism (again, as in the post-war period and later on in the 1970's). In short, Labour's claim to be socialist has always been false. Despite its working class origins, Labour has never hesitated to defend the interests of British capitalism (including, when it needs to, strikebreaking). It has got away with this more than the Tories because of the illusion workers have had that somehow a Labour government is acting in their interests. But, as Churchill is reported as saying after losing in the '45 Labour landslide election

*I do not feel down at all; I'm not sure the Conservative Party could have dealt with the Labour troubles that are coming.<sup>1</sup>*

Labour certainly knew how to. After reaching an agreement with the unions to prevent strikes and declaring most strikes illegal under a 1940 Act, the new government sent troops to strike break “on at least 14 occasions” [ibid] between July 1945 and October 1951.

A lot of left-wingers who've joined the Socialist Alliance will accept this view of Labour in theory but they always see Labour as a “lesser evil” because

they share some of Labour's fundamental social democratic ideas, not least that nationalisation = socialism (or is somehow a step towards it). Most of them have a history of operating inside the Labour Party itself and/or the trades union apparatus (which today functions to manage class conflict in the interest of capital). While for revolutionary Marxists the need to smash the state is a fundamental task of working class revolution, our leftists see the state in Social Democratic terms as something neutral that they can use for themselves. This is why they have a common practice of participating in elections and, of course, even as recently as 1997, of campaigning on behalf of Labour in general elections.

### A programme based on Social Democratic nostalgia

In this context it's not really surprising that the Socialist Alliance has come up with the idea that the way to revive the class struggle is to go backwards, to the days of 'old Labour'. This is not only politically dishonest on the part of some, it is a complete self-delusion for anyone who seriously wants to see the revival of a working class movement heading towards socialism. Part of the delusion is also due to confused reasoning, at least if the pages of *Socialist Worker* are anything to go by. There is a widespread assumption amongst this social-democratic left that the high level of working class combativity in the 1970's — a decade when workers fought back hard against the first blows of the capitalist crisis and the state was seriously worried about strikes “getting out of control” — was somehow connected to the presence of 'old Labour'. The reasoning seems to be that if only we can get back old Labour, then we'll get back to the same level of class struggle as in the 1970's. This is absurd. Instead of focussing on the time when the number of strike days “lost” reached a new record every year, when a Conservative government was forced to introduce a three day week and a Labour one had to deal with a “winter of discontent” as some kind of working class Golden Age to which we

should return, the question must be asked, “How did the working class reach its present situation of subservience and quiescence?” It would be idiotic to reply that this is due to Tony Blair. The answer can only be found if the period is looked at in its wider historical and economic context.

In reality the '70's marked the beginning of the downswing in global capitalism's accumulation cycle. In the advanced states the working class were facing attacks from a capitalist class whose declining profit rates led them to challenge the cosy relationship that had been built up between the biggest employers and the unions in the post-war years. (Regular pay rises and job security in return for the class struggle the unions reigning in the class struggle.) At the time Keynesian thinking held sway over the capitalist class (including Labour and the unions) and the initial response of the state was to pump money into the economy and nationalise unprofitable firms. Not surprisingly, when inflation began to turn the regular pay rise into a wage cut there was an angry response from workers and the unions had to run to keep up with the rising tide of unofficial strikes. From now on there was to be no let-up in the crisis. Workers, though, were still fighting for a restoration of the old conditions. However, as job losses mounted (by 1971 unemployment was the highest in the post-war period and in 1975 — under a Labour government — official unemployment had passed the historic million mark) the position of the working class was being gradually weakened, even though militancy remained high.

It was time for workers to recognise that they were in a totally new ball game and that there were no longer any rules of fair play with the bosses. Organisationally it would have meant extending unofficial actions on to the level of mass worker activity, with the whole of the working class involved in the co-ordination of the struggle through their own elected assemblies. Politically it would have meant a significant core of militants taking on a revolutionary communist perspective. Instead, however, the working class remained dominated by Labourism, both tradi-



tional style — calls for nationalisation and protectionist measures for loss-making industries — and a more radical-sounding version which included dead-end struggles for workers’ control and self-management (i.e. self-managed capitalism) led by left-wingers who today would no doubt be part of the Socialist Alliance. The newly-formed communist groups in Britain (the CWO was formed in 1975) were in no position to influence the course of events. By the end of the decade the working class were in a much worse position than they might have been, thanks to Labour and its unions and their left-wing hangers-on. During the Labour government of ’74-9 especially, the ground had been pulled from under the feet of the working class by the TUC’s acceptance of Labour’s income policies (pay cuts); Labour’s strikebreaking (including the use of troops on several occasions during public sector strikes); and Labour’s general message that belt-tightening and sacrifices had to be made to get the economy on its feet again. From a capitalist standpoint there was no other choice but to up the stakes in the class struggle. A bankrupt UK had already been cap in hand for an IMF loan (’76) and the policy of nationalisation was only making the crisis worse. Before the Thatcher’s Conservatives took on responsibility for managing the crisis the Labour Prime Minister, Callaghan,

warned it was no longer possible for governments “to spend their way out of crisis”. This spelled the end of Keynesianism. As we had to remind readers at the time of the last election,

*In 1977 the Labour government of Jim Callaghan began the monetarist policies later taken up with so much zeal by the Tories. In 1979 spending cuts were implemented in housing, health and education and during this period unemployment tripled to 1.5 million.<sup>2</sup>*

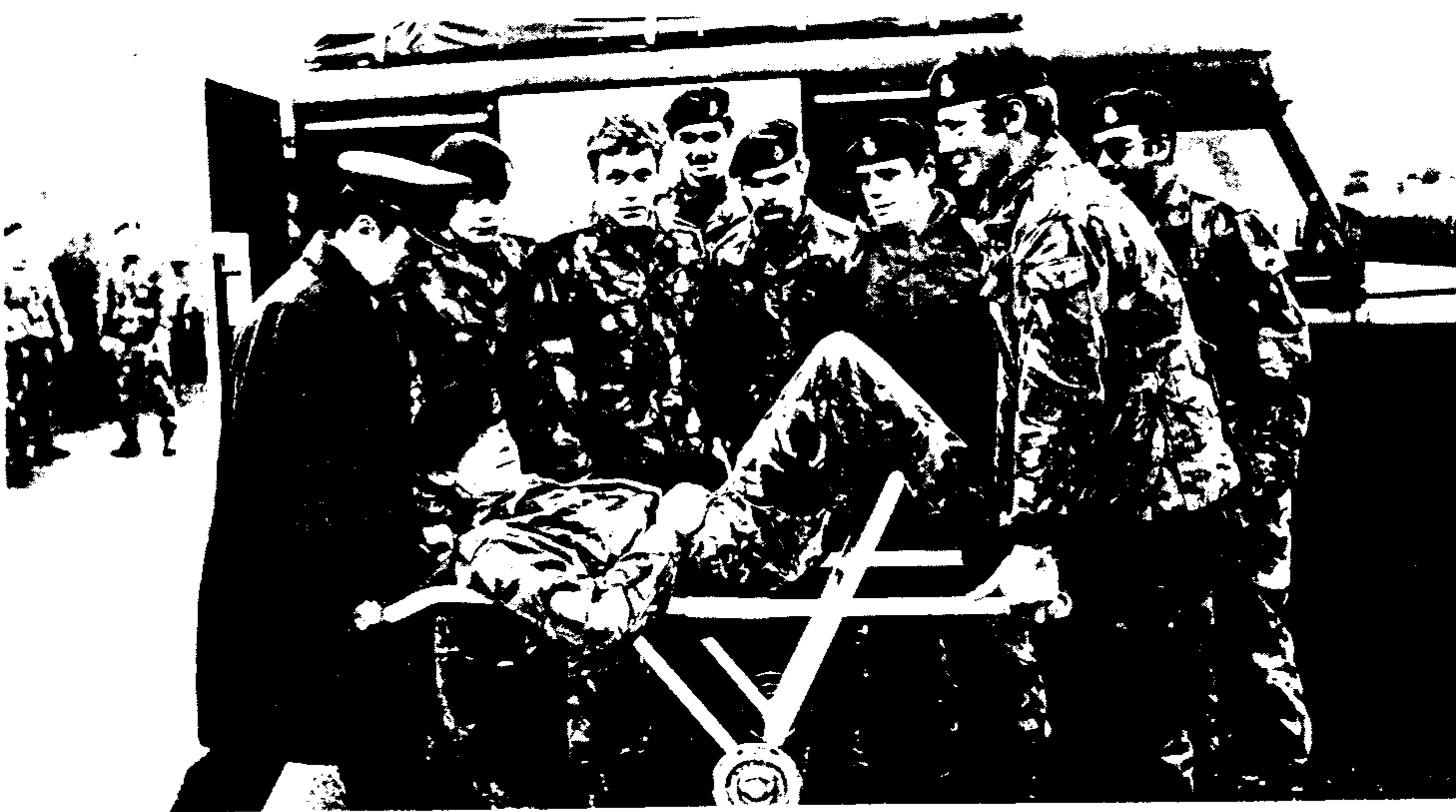
Although Labour lost the 1979 election the unions had strengthened their control over the workforce (the public sector workers’ “winter of discontent” was ended by the unions signing an agreement with the government) and the scene was set for capital to launch an even more vicious attack, confident that the unions would contain any response to manageable, single industry, single firm or even single factory struggles. British capitalists now realised that a complete restructuring of the economy could not be avoided. The Eighties opened with the steelworkers hamstrung by their union, fighting a battle against plant closures and 50,000 redundancies on their own. They lost. So did the miners, despite their valiant fight which was confined by the NUM for over a year (’84-5) to a single industrial workforce fighting for the survival of “their” industry. — This at

a time when the whole working class was being attacked and when there was no shortage of workers’ struggles. What was needed was a mass fight by a united working class, organised on its own account — i.e. without the unions and Labour warning workers to “keep to the rule of law”<sup>3</sup> and without being divided up sector by sector.

In other words, to cut this painful story short, when today’s Socialist Alliance calls for a return to the principles New Labour has abandoned, they are calling for the working class to blindly cling on to all the old illusions and repeat the mistakes which got them to the situation they are in today. Fortunately perhaps, no matter how much these social democrats want to turn the clock back politically, there is no going back economically to the days when a few nationalised industries dominated the economy.

Not just in the UK but throughout the world, including the USSR and its bloc, capitalist states were faced with and continue to face — the crisis of profitability which marks the downswing in the post-war accumulation cycle. All have been obliged to restructure their economies, open them up to foreign investment, introduce new technology, search for the cheapest labour power and loosen up financial markets in order to get their hands on as much financial revenue by whatever means

they can. This is the reason for the universal trend towards privatisation, state spending cuts, financial speculation, and the whole tendency known as globalisation. The fact that Labour has played a full part in all this only proves how much it is a capitalist party whose policies are determined by capitalism’s needs. Globalisation is not a particularly nasty policy dreamt up by free marketeers who have happened to get into power in just about every state in the world; it is not something that can be reversed and reintroduced at will like nationalisation of the railways; it is part of a historical tendency which



*1970’s strikebreaking: ’74-’79 Labour government’s public sector policy: cut wages and bring in the army. Here soldiers prepare to break the ’79 ambulance strike — as they had done with the air traffic control strike (’77), the ’77-’78 fire brigade strike and the ’78 naval dock strike.*

began at the start of the last century but which is being accelerated by the world economic crisis and capitalism's dearth of surplus value (the source of capitalist profit which originates in the exploitation of workers' labour power).

The reason for Labour's apparent ditching of the working class and appealing instead to “people” (especially “sensible” and “ordinary” people), for its side-lining of the unions and adoption of American-style party-management and government practices accompanied by spin doctoring rather than political argument is that the core industrial working class base it once depended on has gone. This is certainly not the same as saying that the working class itself has disappeared out of existence (the majority of people are still obliged to work for a wage in order to live and are therefore socially working class). What we recognise and what the likes of the Socialist Alliance don't is that, given the changed structure of the working class and the impact of the current propaganda that it no longer exists, it will take time for class identity to be re-established. This identity will only be re-formed through struggle. Initially these will be in small and separate battles but gradually they will be forced to become more united. And this is what is necessary before workers can once again fight back en masse as a class.

## The real way forward

Participating in elections on the other hand simply sucks workers back into the capitalist debate about who is best to manage our exploitation. Many workers have in any case already “voted with their feet” on this issue. Since the late '70's abstention levels have risen amongst the workers (one reason Labour has become the party of “middle class England”). As revolutionaries we will be campaigning for workers not to vote in the next elections but our abstention is not a mark of apathy or sigh of despair. We're not for sitting back and accepting every blow that capital hurls at us. Because we don't advocate renationalisation, doesn't mean that we accept cuts in jobs, wages, and the worse working conditions that go with capitalist restructuring (nationalised or privatised); because we don't demand a minimum wage doesn't mean that we accept any miserable wage the bosses care to decide. Clearly not; but this is not the issue here. What is at issue is that someone raises the banner of what socialism or communism really is. When the working class goes back on to the offensive there has to be a political organisation pointing the struggle in a communist direction, calling for the working class to take independent action. This will not only have to be a fight outside of Labour,

the trades unions, and — it has to be said — the likes of the Socialist Alliance but also **against** them. The role of the Socialist Alliance is to restore confidence in capitalist elections and get workers to dissipate their energies in trying to revive old Labour. More than an exercise in nostalgia, it is trying to re-run an already appalling social democratic history which rescued capitalism throughout the last century.

The continuation of the capitalist crisis means that the world is today facing barbarism. Only one force in society has the potential to reverse the tide of history, and that is the working class whom modern (or should we say ‘post-modern’ pundits have written off. However it can only do this if it is organised worldwide and armed with a **revolutionary programme**, based on the lessons of its own revolutionary past. This is what the CWO and the IBRP are dedicated to reviving.

E Rayner

## Notes

1 In Steve Peak, *Troops in Strikes, Military Intervention in Industrial Disputes*, Cobden Trust p.83.

2 See ‘Vote Labour? 50% of Bosses Can't Be Wrong’ in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 6, Spring 1997.

3 For example, the law against “secondary picketing” was brought in in 1980.

## Revolutionary Perspectives Back Issues

*Magazine of the Communist Workers' Organisation*

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## Review of Tommy Sheridan's : 'Imagine. A Socialist Vision for the 21st Century.'

The following review was sent to us by a Scottish sympathiser. Its arrival is timely as it is an apt

complement for the article on the "Socialist" Alliance in this issue.

**T**ommy Sheridan came to prominence in Scotland during the poll-tax campaign. He was later jailed for demonstrating against warrant sales to punish poll tax defaulters (inside, he was feted by both prisoners and warders), was then elected to the new Scottish Parliament as a Scottish Socialist Party candidate, and has lately spent 5 days in jail after being arrested at an anti-nuclear demonstration at the Holy Loch. He is fast becoming a media celebrity in Scotland and it is, becoming common to hear him hailed as, at last; a real socialist politician. He has now published *Imagine as a statement of his political beliefs*.

The title comes from the John Lennon song written, according to Sheridan, when "he was going through an intensely political phase" and is used as a motif throughout the book. And it must be said, the songs cheesy sentimentality and smug hypocrisy ( a multimillionaire whining at us to "imagine no possessions") makes for a very apt motif. For anyone with much interest in politics, Sheridan cuts an all too familiar figure; the populist posturing, the readiness to leap on any moving band-wagon, the delight in media attention, all wrapped up in the banalities of leftism. Who can forget silk-shirted Derek Hatton of Liverpool Council, for example, that other 'principled socialist' of recent memory who is now a "successful businessman".

Reading this book, it's clear Sheridan is a Trotskyist of some hue or other, and readers should note that the CWO's latest pamphlet *Trotsky. Trotskyism. and Trotskyists* provides a good overview of this faction of capitalism's left wing. And while capital today, given the general passivity of the working class in the face of its at-

tacks, has no pressing need for a programme along the lines of Sheridan's, such "men of principle" are always useful to lend legitimacy to the state, and emasculate militants moving towards a political critique. It's thus useful to look at his ideas.

"Ideas" is somewhat of an overstatement. The book is banal in the extreme with, even within the parameters of leftism, little or no attempt at rigour or analysis. Whether this accurately reflects on Sheridan, or whether it reflects the classic Trotskyist belief that the working class has to be shepherded over hurdles bit by bit until they're ready for the big picture, who knows. But the essence of Sheridan's book is

*The poor are poor and growing poorer because the rich are rich and are growing richer.*

(p39).

**There is much detail, in the book on fat cats and what they spend on their yachts, or a bottle of wine. And much on the poverty and misery facing workers throughout the world. Communists recognise that such injustice is intrinsic to capitalism, and it's a recognition that drives every communist militant. But our analysis of where this injustice comes from and how it can be ended is a world apart, a class apart, from Sheridan's.**

### Sheridan's capitalist crisis

**S**heridan's analysis of the development of capitalism seems to rest on some hazy notion that there was some kind of general social progress up until the 1970's economic crisis when, and no explanation is of-

fered, unbridled capitalist greed took over.

*From 1870 until 1970, living standards doubled every 35 years. Each generation was approximately twice as well off as the preceding generation. In Britain there was a similar sense of eternal progress, especially after the post-war years. The NHS was founded... Huge resources were ploughed into education... Slums were torn down... "You've never had it so good", said Tory Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, with some justification.*

(p24)

But since the mid-'70's

*instead of crawling towards socialism, Labour governments have since galloped backwards towards classical free-market Toryism.*

(p118)

In classic Trotskyist tradition, Labour Governments attacked the working class and the wonders of the welfare state because them nasty Gnomes of Zurich and them horrible IMF bankers made them do it. And if they're not being threatened by the big boys, the poor dears are being bribed and bought off, which apparently is what's happened with the latest Labour government. Alistair Darling is a "former left-wing socialist" and Gordon Brown who "was a socialist" is now "25 years older and 25 times richer". Still, men of principle can still be found. Tony Benn, who puffs on the front and back cover that

*Imagine is one of the very best books I have read on the subject of Socialism,*

is, we are told “a veteran socialist fire-brand”. Curious how on page 95 we are told

*The “Labourite” governments of the 1960’s and 1970’s certainly were not socialists...*

and there was us thinking Benn was a cabinet minister in the ’70’s, giving *carte blanche* to the oil companies in their employment practices while energy minister. Shurely shome mishtake.

No. No bloody mistake. Benn was and is a loyal servant of British capital no matter how hard he and the media try to repackage him as a “real socialist” just as Sheridan is with his benign view of capitalist history. Any gains made by the working class, a class which is international, in the 20th century were localised and transient. And even then they were predicated on the slaughter of tens of millions of workers in two world wars and countless other localised imperialist killing fields (surreally, Sheridan believes the period from the mid 19th Century to 1914 “marked the heyday of military imperialism”). And this without factoring in the enormous increase in exploitation of the working class and the visitation of barbarism on hundreds of millions of third world workers and peasants. For Sheridan of course, like all Trotskyists, World War Two was about the defence of democracy against fascism. “Fascism”, we are told, “came from nowhere to conquer power in one country after another” (p9). In your dreams, pal. Fascism came from capitalism’s attempts to deal with its crisis, just like Stalin’s Five Year Plans and Roosevelt’s New Deal. The Nazi Party grew out of the Freikorps who were transformed from low-life petit-bourgeois thugs when the German version of the Labour Party armed them and sent them out onto the streets of Germany to shoot hundreds of militant workers in 1919.

### Capitalism and the law of value today

**V**iolence, whether Fascist violence or democratic violence (which of course included Stalinist violence in World War Two) is intrinsic to capitalism, an economic system whose very existence is based on the violent expropriation of the

wealth created by the world’s working class. The fact that this relationship is more transparent in a third world sweat shop than in, say, a British call center, is a reflection of the level of sophistication needed to be employed by the bourgeoisie because of local conjunctural needs. A Coca Cola bottling plant in Swindon might appear to operate in a different world from one in Taipei but they both operate by forcing workers (though the element of compulsion is so much better disguised in Swindon) to sell their labour power, and create a surplus value that is taken from them. This is what Marx defined as the essence of capitalism, an essence that he showed was fundamentally based on violence no matter how hidden the violence was. And as Engels pointed out, the relationship is the same whether the expropriator is a private capitalist or the state. (Sheridan wants it both ways. He wants a Scottish republic controlling most large scale employment, but “some larger companies may even stay in private hands on grounds of expediency. For example ... Scottish call centres”. p192)

This understanding of how the law of value operates, how workers sell their labour power and have the surplus value they create expropriated by a ruling class, and how this determines all forms of capitalist domination from Fascism to Democracy to Stalinism, is what distinguishes the communist camp from leftism. We attack leftists such as Sheridan not through sectarianism but because they defend Capital. The fact that Sheridan’s book is full of instances of injustice or waste or the obvious irrationalities of Capitalism does not make us fellow-travellers (the Fascist parties in Germany and Italy won widespread support in the 20’s and 30’s using just such radical “critiques”). For him, the USSR was “neither socialist nor capitalist” (again see the CWO pamphlet on *Trotsky, Trotskyism, Trotskyists* for a critique of this reactionary nonsense), and hails the “successful struggles against oppression that have been waged internationally over the past two decades”, citing the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, Somosa in Nicaragua, Marcos in the Phillipines, and Suharto in Indonesia. It must be a great comfort to workers and peasants in these areas to

know, as they bury their dead and stare barbarism in the face, that they have successfully struggled against oppression. The writer of this review vividly remembers being frog-marched out of two SWP meetings twenty years ago for attacking SWP claims that the coming to power of Khomeini in Iran and Mugabe in Zimbabwe were victories for social progress. The history of leftism is writ large with its support for an endless list of such butchers, but nowhere will you find acknowledgement that, as the blood drips from these bastards, there was something flawed in hailing their appearance. No, if yesterday’s heroes of progress turned out somewhat flawed then it was because them bad guys in the US or IMF or World Bank forced them to be nasty (sound familiar?). Leftism has always sought to bind workers to the ‘progressive’ wing of its oppressors, to blind them to the fact that under a decaying capitalist system, all bourgeois factions are murderous.

### Nationalism or Socialism

And of course, if nationalist struggles in the likes of Iran or Nicaragua are “progressive”, then for Sheridan they are “progressive” in Scotland too.

*It is a paradox of our times that in the age of global capitalism, when the ruling powers of the planet seek desperately to break down national boundaries ...the impulse from below is in the opposite direction.*

(p181).

It would be nice to be able to say that the real paradox of our times is that a bonehead like Sheridan could spout such bollocks and get an audience, but that would be to ignore the depth and scale of capitalist mystification in which he has a career to carve out peddling tartan radicalism. Nationalism is not “an impulse from below”, but a weapon used by the bourgeoisie against workers. The World War One slogan of militant workers in Scotland “Fight the Hun in your own Back Yard” reflected the internationalism of workers throughout the world whenever they have fought on their own terrain.



Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the class divide:

*Socialists should battle to reclaim the best of their national traditions ..... in the past, Scotland's native cultural traditions were brutally suppressed by London governments.*

writes Sheridan, loyal to the traditions of nationalism in his use of metaphysical claptrap.

There is no bourgeois faction with any great interest in playing the nationalist card in Scotland. The Scottish parliament was set up by the British state to facilitate its ever increasing central control. There is a petit-bourgeois swamp that tries to whip up a fervour of nationalism, but the main weapon for the state in its attack on workers is democracy. Faced with growing disgust with bourgeois politics (masked by the media as “apathy” or “cynicism”), “devolution” was spun as a way of rekindling support for the myth of democracy. And it's here the likes of Sheridan play their part. Any belief that a Scottish parliament would be any different, any more “democratic” has evaporated fast. But never mind, what we need is “a real grown up parliament” (p123) now, and the internet means we can have real control over politicians. Apparently “the internet is transforming the balance of forces between the powerful and the powerless” and “electronic voting, electronic consultation, and electronic referenda could bring about the most sweeping, democratic revolution in the history of the world” (p75). Oh brave new world that has such creatures in it! The reality, for all who care to look, is that democracy is a sham. The ruling class has no need for it apart from as a tool for mystification. The executive rarely even uses the cabinet in its deliberations, far less the pantomime of jobsworths and lickspittles who call themselves M.P.s. In Sheridan's fevered imagination “rather than the hereditary monarch being accountable to the elected government, the elected government is accountable to the hereditary monarch”. The reality is that the executive uses the figleaf of Royal Prerogative to do whatever it feels necessary without any reference to parliament. Democracy disarms workers by rob-

bing them of their class identity, offering them the chance to turn out every few years as atomised, privatised individuals (if it were feasible, the state would no doubt love Sheridan's vision of workers isolated in their homes, voting by keyboard) because this way they are mere individuals, prey to media lies and distortions. This is the antithesis of workers' democracy, expressed in mass meetings, assemblies and soviets in which the class recognises its power as a class through solidarity.

The value to the ruling class of Sheridan and his like lies precisely in the way they peddle the lie that with the right leadership, the right democratic control we can live in a fair and equitable world.

*Socialist government in Scotland would require to create its own central bank....a new socialist financial system could provide low-interest credit, attractive savings terms, and cheap insurance....the fact that publicly owned banks and mutual insurance companies exist and thrive even in the heartlands of free-market capitalism is an answer to those who argue that public ownership of finance is impractical.*

(pp194-196)

How remiss of the bourgeoisie not to realise that the likes of the Nationwide Building Society are actually vipers at their breasts, harbingers of a bright new tomorrow. What all this radical sounding twaddle does is to mask the reality of capitalist relations that Marx first exposed. The expropriation of the working class determines all social relations under capitalism, and those relationships are determined ultimately by violent oppression regardless of whether they are overseen by fat financiers or the bureaucrats of a planned economy. Only a bourgeois simpleton like Sheridan can believe that justice and equality can spring from relations that are their absolute and utter antithesis, because even the bourgeoisie are capable of a more sophisticated analysis. Sheridan quotes from *False Dawn* by LSE Professor of Economics, John Gray, and yet obviously has not read the book, since Gray shows quite

clearly that even the caricature of social provision that was the Welfare State of the '50's and '60's is dead and gone for ever, as witness the dismantling of the Scandinavian model at the end of the 80's when capital threatened to withdraw its international bonds if the screws weren't put on the working class with sufficient vigour.

Sheridan ends his book by writing: “Some of the detailed arguments (sic) set out here will no doubt be picked over like fishbones and criticised. But the key question is this: Which side are you on?” There can be only one answer. Not yours, pal.

GM

## Who Counts and Who Doesn't in the United States

Continued from page 24

overthrow of this miserable and rotting system. In this task the workers of the USA, the most powerful state in history, will have a vital role to play.

Jock

### Notes

1 See Gerard Baker, *Financial Times* March 11th 1998

2 In *Capitalism 2000: Is the End Nigh?*

3 Quoted in N. Chomsky *Rogue States* p.189. The quotes from Chomsky which follow are taken from the same passage. All spellings have been Anglicised.

4 Quoted in N. Chomsky *Rogue States* p.200-1

5 See, for example, No.247 December 2000 p.13

6 See *Socialist Worker* 23 December 2000 p.4

7 See *Financial Times* January 8th 2001 p.25 It seems that the news of this “exposure” hastened the panic-stricken cut in US interest rates by the Federal Reserve on January 1st.

# What Counts and What Doesn't in the United States

As we go to press George W. Bush is being sworn in as the 43rd President of the United States of America. Bourgeois commentators have talked of his election as a tarnished victory since it was only courtesy of the Supreme Court (and that by one vote) that he got to the White House at all. Much has been made of the electronic rejection of 19,000 "chads" [punched voting cards] in Florida in areas where Gore was expected to do well. What is less well known is that almost half a million denizens of Florida were denied even the right to vote because they have at some time been to prison (some simply for smoking dope). In all 13 US states deny the right to vote to 3.9 million ex-offenders in the "land of the free". That the figure is today so large is down to the Clinton-Gore policies. The Crime Bill of 1994 (remember "three strikes and you're out") made a third offence a mandatory life sentence. On top of that is the all-pervading racism of the police in the USA. African-American men make up 7% of the population but 55% of the prison population. This is a continuation of the systematic attempts to disenfranchise blacks ever since the Emancipation of Slaves became valid at the end of the Civil War in 1865. Once the Southern ruling class had recovered its breath from the defeat the blacks were disenfranchised in a series of ways (for example, literacy was made a voter requirement – under slavery blacks were forbidden to learn to read or write — and black schools in the 1870s were consistently burned down or their teachers murdered). 37 years after the Civil Rights Act we can see the futility of trying to reform a rotten system. And this assumes that the US democratic system offered a real political choice – an issue we'll return to below.

## The "Men of Gold"

The real winners of the US elections were the 0.1% of American citizens who run the corporations which contribute to the election coffers of the candidates. In a country where half the adult population never vote in Presidential elections (51.4% in 2000), where half the population don't know whether their Representative in Congress is a Democrat or a Republican (and who is to blame them given that it makes no difference), the power of the almighty dollar decides all. In both the Democratic and Republican parties the candidates who won the nomination were the ones who gained the biggest financial support. The same "golden law of oligarchy" went for the Congressional elections where 92% of representatives and 88% of the senators elected were the ones who raised the most money. One, Joe Corzine, who has just retired as head of Goldman Sachs, the investment bank (which supports Labour in Britain), literally bought himself a seat as Democrat Senator of New Jersey for the tidy sum of \$61 million dollars, paid for out of his own pocket.

The spending in US Presidential elections has outgrown all other inflation indices. In the 1992 election the candidates spent \$1 billion, by 1996 it had doubled and in 2000 it reached somewhere between \$3 and \$4 billions. The corporations regard this as an essential expenditure. As one commentator for AOL-Time-Warner put it

*Washington repeatedly favoured those who pay at the expense of those who do not.*

*Time* magazine 7 February 2000

This is presumably why some like Bill Gates gives generously to **both** parties or why the Citygroup banks announced that they could not make up their mind so gave \$567,000 to the Republicans and \$552,000 to the

Democrats. This is not to say that some corporations do not gamble or see one or other candidate as more favourable to their interests. Gore and Bush promoted almost identical policies throughout the campaign. Both support capital punishment, both believe in welfare cuts (Gore pointed to the 1996 Welfare Bill which saw 11 million families (including 8 million with children denied benefits because they had been on welfare for 5 years). Both also believe in low taxes for the wealthy. Differences are so marginal as to be invisible. Gore is pro-Israeli, Bush probably doesn't know where Israel is but his Secretary of State Colin Powell (whose career was launched in Vietnam when he hushed up the massacre at My Lai in 1968) has some "unfinished business" with Iraq which will mean support for Israel's continued flaunting of UN resolutions. What tends to be different is the overall shape of the interests backing them. Gore was especially favoured by Occidental Petroleum, Bell South and Hollywood studios whilst Bush is the favourite of the military industries lobby as well as the real estate sector which his Daddy, George, helped to rescue with state money in the 1980s (the Savings and Loan bailout is already reckoned to be costing the US taxpayers \$500 billion). The Democrats also got about 60% of the financial outlays of the media industry. This was no doubt in gratitude for the 1996 Congressional handover of digital broadcasting rights worth \$70 billion for nothing. The other 40% went to Republicans who eased the bill for digital broadcasting through Congress, especially Senate majority leader Trent Lott whose friend is head of the National Association of Broadcasters.

But none of this is new. As Ralph Nader, the third candidate in last November's election points out in his booklet *Cutting Corporate Welfare* [Seven Stories Press, 2000], the 1872 Mining Act which gave "Federal land"



(i.e. what was stolen from the indigent people) to mining companies at the derisory price of \$5 an acre has led to continuous political support for the major parties. Between 1987 and 1994 these mining companies gave political donations worth \$17 million for the right to extract duty free \$26 billion of minerals. This is nothing compared though with the way in which the state and corporations are inter-twined in the defence sector. Since the Second World War the Pentagon has coordinated the defence budget spending in the so-called private corporate sector. The use of government funds for Research and Development have cost the US taxpayers billions. Since the crisis began in the early 1970s the Pentagon has also assisted in mergers and restructuring in the defence industries. When Lockheed merged with Martin Marietta for example \$30 million was earmarked simply for executive redundancy payments. Today to bail out Lockheed-Martin every individual in the USA pays a \$200 annual per capita tax<sup>1</sup>. There are an endless stream of examples of this "corporate welfare" (as Senator Proxmire originally dubbed it) we could give, but it is clear that the real distor-

tion in the US political system is not the confusions of elderly voters in Palm Beach County but the fact that US democracy works exactly as it is intended to do – to safeguard the interests of those who actually dominate the country. And what actually dominates America is state monopoly capitalism. Again this is nothing new. As we showed in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 16<sup>2</sup> US monopolies have controlled the state since the late nineteenth century. Woodrow Wilson, U.S. President during the First World War, noted that apart from their

*power and control over the wealth and business opportunities of the country... they are becoming rivals of the government itself.*<sup>3</sup>

As the influential linguistics scholar Noam Chomsky points out here

*...the word "capitalist" doesn't mean capitalist. Rather what it refers to are state-subsidised and protected private power centres...*

Or as Marxists would say, we have moved from the *laissez-faire* system of classical capitalism of the nineteenth century to the stage of state monopoly capitalism today. Chomsky even gives us a coherent historical explanation for the origin

*The corporatisation was in large part a reaction to great market failures of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it was the shift from something you might call proprietary capitalism to administration of markets by collectivist legal entities – mergers, cartels, corporate alliances – in association with powerful states and by now international bureaucracies, which regulate and support private power. The primary task of the states – bear in mind that*

*with all the talk about minimising the state, in the OECD countries the state continues to grow relative to GNP, notably in the 1980's and 1990's – is essentially to socialise risk and cost and to privatise power and profit. These are tendencies that have moved forward under Reaganite, Thatcherite and New Democrat doctrines.*

It may be unfashionable to say it but Chomsky's analysis is what Marx and then Lenin argued was inherent in capitalist development. The process of concentration of capital increases its extent after every crisis ("one capitalist kills many" Marx) and this leads to the increased centralisation of capital or the development of monopolies, which in Lenin's time fought to influence state policy. In our time these monopolies have become so intertwined with the state that we can safely say that it only acts in their interests. This is why the US Presidential election is simply a game for the rich. Those who back the winner get the most pork out of the barrel of the US state. The individual "losers" from each political party don't lost they simply retire into the world of private (i.e. state subsidised) industry to await their next political summons. The real losers are those who lose every time – the working class.

### And those who do not count...

The political pundits of the US ruling class have naturally insisted that the Florida fiasco was "healthy" because the citizens could "see the process unfolding" (Wolf Blitzer on CNN 15th November 2000). Or that it shows that "our country is so free and democratic that the entire presidency is hinging on a few hundred votes", as former State Department spokesman, James Rubin boasted. Pity then that the Supreme Court didn't let those votes get counted. Few seem to have noticed that Rubin's successor, Richard Boucher pronounced that elections in Azerbaijan, Zanzibar and Kyrgyzstan were either "marred by numerous irregularities" or "flawed" all in the same November week that revealed the flaws

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**The Euro**

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in the US system but then the US ruling class is not noted for its sense of irony.

From the very beginning the US Constitution was designed to protect only the rich, who actually had already alienated property for their own private use. In the words of one of the Founding Fathers, James Madison the aim of the constitution was "to protect the minority of the opulent from the majority and to make sure in the words of the first ever chief justice of the US Supreme Court that "the country is governed by those who own it"<sup>4</sup>. It was why these gentlemen created a system of indirect election by inventing the electoral college. Originally it was designed to give the Southern states greater weight than their populations allowed (which is why slaves were calculated as worth two thirds of a free man). Little wonder that eight out of the first nine US Presidents were slave-owners from Virginia. Today the electoral college has an equally conservative reactionary purpose in giving smaller, predominantly white, rural states a disproportionately greater number of representatives in the electoral college. Or to put it another way it takes 602,000 Californians to elect a member of the electoral college but only 175,000 voters in Wisconsin. In short one citizen in Wisconsin is worth 3.44 citizens in California. Is it any wonder that half the population still don't vote despite the billions spent on propaganda and the undivided attention of the media?

Traditionally. Like Labour in Britain, it was the role of the Democratic Party to get workers to participate in the system (usually via the highly corrupt unions). But the onset of the end of the present cycle of accumulation in the early 1970's and the consequent massive layoffs in traditional industries has upset this calculation. In the 1980's the Democrats first re-packaged themselves as "rainbow coalition" aimed at uniting the industrial workers, the blacks and the Hispanics but this had only limited success. Without abandoning the rhetoric of the Party of the minorities increasingly the Democratic Party became a mirror-image of the Republicans. As we have already shown they too became a party of the mo-

nopoly corporations (the only difference being that they are sometimes backed by different business groups). No wonder the Chief Executive of Amoco Petroleum could say

*We very much welcome a victory by either party.*

He might have added since it is of no importance for the running of US capitalism. So what alternative for US workers in the electoral system? The supporters of Gore from trades unions, black groups, women's rights organisations and even environmentalists showered Nader, the third candidate, with vituperation as he had "cost Gore the election" and thus had betrayed the more vulnerable members of American society. But Gore has been vice-President for the past 8 years during which the Democratic Party has increased by 50 the number of crimes that are now eligible for the death penalty. We have already seen how they have cut welfare. As a result the US has the highest level of child poverty in the metropolitan countries where 20% of all children live in houses where they don't know where the next meal will come from. Something like 8 million Americans are homeless. 44 million Americans have no healthcare and 46 million live below the poverty line. And of course in the counting of votes these people don't count. Their income (of 38% of the population is equal to that of the richest 1% who stand in receipt of "corporate welfare". These Democratic "achievements" were what Gore was defending. As in every country so-called "progressive movements" which accept the rules of the capitalist game ("you have to be realistic") are in fact sucked further and further into the swamp of bourgeois politics. In the Presidential election the Democratic activists were precisely those leftists who told people not "to waste a vote" by voting for Nader and the Greens as if voting for increasing criminalisation of workers and more wage cuts was anything but a wasted vote.

### **Nader – last resort of the petty bourgeoisie**

**H**owever if the Democrats are now too obviously capitalist and the system is so corrupt

that abstention is the only rational alternative there is always the Green Party campaign orchestrated around Ralph Nader. Nader we are told by all kinds of so-called revolutionary papers (including Socialist Workers Party's *Socialist Review*<sup>5</sup>) stands "for real democracy" or represents "the spirit of Seattle"<sup>6</sup>. This may be true but he is also trying to save capitalist democracy.

He may have been the only candidate to campaign against "corporate welfare", or a rise in real wages, to end the death penalty and corruption in the system but he is not the siren of real change. His programme is actually completely utopian. Calls to cut tax breaks and state subsidies to the mega-corporations would strike at the current operation of US state monopoly capitalism which, as we have shown above, cannot exist without this vast injection of state aid. Nader however has come up with the eternal cry of the petty bourgeois "cut big government and out taxes". At the end of his manifesto after all his tax-cutting measures he states his aim.

*Transcending liberal-conservative divisions [right wing militia men will find some comfort here – CWO], there is a nascent national movement of consumer, taxpayer, environmentalist, labor, and small business groups that is waiting to be consolidated to stop corporate welfare. If these forces are united they can form a powerful political force that can rescue our political democracy.*

*ests that dominate it.*

*Cutting Corporate Welfare p.125-6*

So the Nader project is to unite workers and small businesses to save US democracy. But isn't this the same US democracy that has seen the increased exploitation of the US population and the immiseration of millions over the last two centuries? And, as we have tried to illustrate this misery and exploitation isn't the actual consequences of the system but the very purpose for which it has been constructed. For Nader the US state is somehow a neutral body which needs only to be reconquered by the people for it to be cleansed and democratic. But the US state represents the ruling



class of monopoly capital which owns the media and the means of coercion to enforce its will. His final aim to "rescue our political democracy" is turning the problem on its head. What needs to be expropriated first is the wealth of the expropriators. Only by paralysing their control of the means of production (including the means of production of media lies) can we begin to talk of a society in which human beings can debate on an equal footing. The bourgeois idea that we are all "equal before the law" conveniently forgets that some (who can afford more lawyers) are more equal than others. The same goes for our participation in civil society. Capitalist democracy demands our non-participation. In the squalid election for the 43rd Presidency of the USA the only consolation the partisans of bourgeois democracy can have taken is from the Nader campaign which insisted that the US today is democratic if we only voted for the Green Party.

### The working class holds the key

Nader's Popular Frontism represents no threat to the system because it does not begin with its central feature. The wealth that the corporations hold as the source of their power is produced by the working class. In the last decade the USA has claimed that it is going through a boom. It has been a boom based on the ever more intense exploitation of the US working class and the dismantling of the reforms that were put in place during the New Deal. One in every five children in the "land of the free" is brought up in poverty (and that is only the official figure). On top of that healthcare has been cut so that 44 million Americans have none at all. More children are immunised in Jamaica than in Florida where infant mortality is higher than cash-strapped Cuba.

But these statistics are all part of the general retreat of the US working class. Today the minimum wage in the US is a round \$9500 which is 30% of its value, in real terms, 30 years ago. And yet, in financial terms at least the economy is 50 times more productive than it was then. In short the working class have created and paid for the huge accumu-

lation of wealth of the US corporations. The Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Alan Greenspan acknowledged as much to the Senate Banking Committee in February 1997. When asked to account for the "sustainable economic expansion" of the US he replied "greater worker insecurity" which had prevented workers from fighting for wage rises to match increased productivity. This "worker insecurity" was one of the "happy" consequences of the increase in unemployment in the 1980s throughout the OECD countries. On top of that the restructuring of manufacturing industry has led to the collapse of traditional methods of defence for the working class. It is one thing to fight for a living wage when the capitalists are experiencing a boom (as in the 1960's) it is quite another to fight for a job when the capitalists are ready to write off their investments (as in the 1980's). Little wonder that strike levels fell to record lows. But twenty years of retreat do not mean that the working class has disappeared. Capitalism remains capitalism and for all the financial boom there has been little real expansion of capitalism in all that time. The crisis of the end of the cycle of accumulation which ended in 1971-3 has not gone away.

The year 2000 was the first bad year on the stock exchanges since 1991 but the signs are that 2001 could not only be worse but could lead to another slump in output. Even as this issue goes to press the Bank of America (based in N. Carolina) is technically bankrupt due to its overlending to the corrupt, deregulated power companies of California. It is only kept in business because the US Government maintains the fiction that it is solvent<sup>6</sup>. If another slump is in the offing the US workers will be asked to pay and in the short term it is their response to further attacks that will determine the shape of the class struggle in the years ahead. Just because the US working class has been quiet for a long time it does not mean that it will remain so. The whole history of capitalism in fact suggests otherwise. Whether it responds in the short-term or the long-term is not predictable but in any event revolutionaries need to prepare. The capitalist class have not remained in power so far due to a lack of class in-

stinct and will use every means it can to divert the class struggle. It might be to bring back welfare (unlikely), it might be to pretend that it is becoming more "accountable" with more democratic gimmicks. It might even create new leftist parties which support capitalism so that they can begin the cycle of fooling us to vote for capitalism all over again.

Our alternative is not to call for tax reform, not to pull off stunts at international conferences of the world's governing bodies, even less to enter electoral fronts to demonstrate the power of capitalist "democracy". Our aim has to be to take part in as many arenas of the class struggle as possible. The aim would not be to take the leadership but to unite as many class conscious workers as possible in organisations which understand that we cannot reform capitalism but must overthrow it. Overthrowing it means socialising production and abolishing wage labour and commodity production. It also means smashing the capitalist state and replacing it with a much more accountable system of organisation based on the recall of delegates. These are the lesson that 150 years of class struggle have taught us. What we have to do is speak up for that programme and not engage in frontist or parliamentary campaigns which pretend that it never existed. As Marx wrote 150 years ago

*The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of the existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communist revolution*

The Communist Manifesto

By linking this historic programme based on the experiences of workers in the past to the everyday experience of fighting capitalism in workplaces and neighbourhoods today we can build an international party not as a future government but as a revolutionary instrument to bring the collective strength of the working class to the

*Continued on page 20*

# His Fraudulency George W. Bush — President Select

*We are reproducing here an article from US Internationalist Notes which complements our previous article.*

**T**he G. W. Bush regime takes the helm on January 20th. His “victory” the result of hundreds of millions of dollars in corporate loot and promotion by a mass media, TV, radio, newspapers, magazines, etc. And in the end, it also took a brazen and corrupt power grab sanctioned by the Supreme Court, ever a den of robed reactionaries. Bush was not even the majority choice of those who voted, never mind the 50%+ that did not vote, mainly from distrust and disillusionment, knowing that their votes never really meant anything. If the largest corporate rulers and owners of capital feel they actually prefer the political hack who lost, than the choice of millions of atomized workers will be legally voided. Doesn't this election show that these boss-controlled elections are a mammoth fraud? Is this not more clear proof that ordinary working people have been politically disenfranchised whether they decide to drop little ballot papers into a box or not on election day? Does not this brazen political power grab show that this “democracy” is in reality the rule of a plutocracy?

The corporate-owned media is choreographing a huge cover-up to hide the truth from the workers. They now say it doesn't really matter if there were tens of thousands of registered voters just in Florida alone that were not allowed to vote or who had their votes disappeared, or who by some technicality, did not have their ballots counted. The millionaire TV news lackeys from Peter Jennings to Dan Rather to Sam Donaldson, etc. say that what is most

important is that the “rule of law” be followed, meaning that the robed reactionaries on the Supreme Court are the only votes that should **really** count in the end! Their final decision effectively ensured Florida's 25 electoral college votes went to GW Bush, giving the Republicans control over the executive branch of government for the next 4 years.

The Democrats may not have a happy face over the decision. After all, there are the huge spoils in the power of ruling for capital. There are the thousands of political jobs to be gained, or lost! There are hundreds of billions of dollars in Federal Government contracts for various projects to be handed out, mainly to the “preferred” clients (campaign contributors) of the winning Party. But the Democrats, like the Republicans, support the capitalists rule and also do the bidding of the corporations. So when the Supreme Court decided the election on December 12, Al Gore was on the air on December 13 to accept the verdict, support GW Bush, and praising the wonders of the American “democracy” in an election where he and his party had been legally robbed of victory! To Gore and the Democrats, providing political damage control and “uniting the people behind our nation” (read — uniting the masses behind the capitalists rule) is far more important than even seriously contesting an election that was so corrupt and even rigged.

The real business of governance will proceed apace. “Bi-partisanism” is the

order of the day for the bosses' Demopublicans. They will “unite” yet again to ruthlessly attack the working masses. Energy costs due to corporate hoarding of supplies are soaring through the roof. Ditto for the prices on medicine and housing. Welfare is cut to the bone for the workers, but corporate welfare, welfare for the rich is booming! The reformist Ralph Nader says the US Government handouts to the rich are over \$250 Billion a year in free research and development projects, special tax breaks and loopholes, etc. Government and the AFL unions unite to make sure any strikes and other actions of workers are tightly controlled by law and prevented from spreading by using the carrot and stick approach. That way the bosses are always assured they come out on top. Our rulers have put us on notice! The working class has no rights that the capitalist class is bound to respect!

We workers need to get ourselves organized to fight for our interests. We need to build up **new** political and industrial-territorial organizations based on the struggle of wage slaves vs. bosses' and their government. We cannot let nationality divide us. A workers society based on socialization of the means of production and production for human needs is materially possible. We must be involved in and build effective workers collective resistance/defense against the bosses' attacks, then eventually we can ourselves go on the offensive!

IBRP sympathisers in North America:  
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**Los Angeles Workers Voice**  
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Montreal, QC, Canada.



## More Massacres in Palestine

*In our last issue we gave an analysis of the machinations behind the Oslo Accords in which we predicted a further degeneration of the so-called "peace process". The impending departure of Clinton from the White House and the election campaign in Israel have not halted the spiral of murder and revenge in the Palestinian territories. Our position remains the internationalist one that the working classes in both Israel and Palestine have a material common interest against both sets of exploiters. We also know that there*

*can be no lasting peace until the capitalist mode of production is overthrown and the resources not only of that area but the entire world can be shared. In this issue we are focussing on the Palestinian working class and the reasons why so many workers are being sucked into the Islamic fundamentalist and terrorist movements. The article that follows originally appeared in Prometeo 2 (Sixth Series), theoretical review of our sister organisation Battaglia Comunista.*

# The Palestine Proletariat is Spilling its Blood for A Bourgeois State

(Translated from *Prometeo* Series VI No.1 December 2000)

Thanks to US support Israeli mini-imperialism has always enjoyed a certain degree of impunity. There hasn't been a single episode (including the birth of the Israeli state itself), of violation of international law or of human rights, which has not seen the US government of the day working to defend its own creature, both inside the UN and elsewhere.

Israel has been allowed the luxury of invading territories which no international law could sanction and to furiously attack the Palestinian population by repression and ethnic cleansing at will. Despite a series of international resolutions, it has avoided a single note of condemnation, thanks to the US use of its veto rights. All this is part of the logic of US imperialism in the Middle East, both before and after the Cold War. By the same logic, but with opposite results, the route to a Palestinian state on Palestinian soil has always been blocked until the farce of the Oslo Accords. For Arafat's Palestinian nationalist bourgeoisie a much more uneven course has been drawn up. Though they have the same nationalistic objective, the various actors amongst them have chosen different routes, due to their differing economic situations, ways of life, perspectives and strategies.

For the most part the "big" Palestinian bourgeoisie lives abroad, in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and the other Middle Eastern countries. Socially it is mainly composed of merchants and bankers who gain advantage from their refugee status in the diaspora. They live on non-productive economic activities, i.e., not linked to the compelling necessity to have a "fatherland" in which to geographically exist. Their nationalism is thus posed in moderate and realistic terms. And though it is true that even they would like to have a territory in which to organise their own affairs it might be better for them if they continue to beg a precarious existence as guests of their "brother" countries. The nationalist cause is not so immediately vital that it must in any way interfere with the balance in the area, with the US strategy linked to control of oil, because that would also be risking not only a future Palestinian state but also the network of interests which support their small economic and social privileges. The request for a Palestinian mini-state is easier to achieve

and less of an obstacle, both on the geographical and political level for these beggars. Though it is insignificant from a nationalist point of view it would be enough to guarantee control of those activities which they are currently forced to practice abroad with greater costs and risks than they would have in their own home.

From them, therefore, come all the negotiated solutions which abandon the radical programme for the destruction of the state of Israel and for the total reconquest of the whole of Palestine, to fall back on the restitution of the territories occupied in 1967 as in Resolutions 181, 242, and 338 of the UN. At worst, they would settle for the Gaza Strip plus the

17.2% of the West Bank currently under the management of the Palestinian Authority. Their interests are linked to the financial management of the Arab Bank which has its offices in every Middle Eastern country, in Europe and in the USA. It doesn't have a large amount of business but it is sufficiently developed to allow Palestinian speculators to operate in the world of Arab finance close to oil and all types of speculation. They have offices in Cairo,



Amman and Damascus but also in Paris, New York and London. Transnational financial business as imposed by globalisation is the route any bourgeoisie worthy of the name has to take.

The same can be said on the commercial side. The volume and range of business is certainly not great but it takes in a slice of the transactions in foodstuffs, machine tools and consumer goods between the various Middle Eastern countries and Europe, and *vice-versa*. Before the Gulf War and the total embargo against Iraq, the Palestinian bourgeoisie collaborated with the Jordanians, albeit as junior partners, in the overland provisioning network satisfying the needs of the Saddam Hussein regime. The service — which involved the transportation of everything the Iraqi economy needed from the port of Aqaba to Baghdad — was equal to 75% of Jordan's GDP and had the full participation of the Palestinian commercial bourgeoisie. Today the embargo against the Saddam Hussein regime has reduced any form of official exchange to zero. By way of compensation illegal trade through smuggling to Iran and Iraq has increased. Even for this sector we can say the same as for the financial world since, in many cases, the two forms of capital coincide and overlap. Arafat's programme of giving up land therefore suits the logic of this commercial and parasitic bourgeoisie.

For his part the Palestinian leader, that faithful interpreter of the economic and political demands of this bourgeoisie, has elaborated a nationalist strategy which aims to establish a state but with the clear tactic of maintaining the strategic balance in the area so that it doesn't penalise his own bourgeois supporters. Thus came the acceptance, in both word and deed, of the state of Israel, the cancellation of the article from the PLO's old statutes which called for the destruction of the Zionist state, and the acceptance of any compromise which might lead to the future birth of a Palestinian state, even if only in a single part of the occupied territories. The old nationalist programme was overturned and a transitory path to a temporary administrative autonomy without any

guarantee for the future, was accepted. Moreover, as the Oslo Accords stated, this made no provision for the birth of any state.

The second component of Palestinian nationalism is an interclass hybrid which represents the interests of the middle and petty bourgeoisie, followed by a proletarian fringe. This is the indigenous bourgeoisie which have never moved from the territories where they were born and brought up since the birth of the Israeli state. Economically they are the small entrepreneurs, skilled craftsmen and peasants who work in the Gaza Strip, and above all, on the West Bank. They have suffered the full weight of the Zionist settlement. They feel it daily breathing down their necks in every economic initiative they take. They suffer the humiliation of discrimination in every aspect of life under the iron repression of the settlers and Israeli army. A thousand frustrations and the impossibility of developing their own economic activity have driven them to violence. Craftsmen and small entrepreneurs are boycotted in both production and consumption by the provocative nationalism of the Jewish community. Their market is reduced to their own community which doesn't seem to represent a big enough demand in terms of sales and profits. Agricultural enterprises, besides being pushed onto the most geographically marginal and unproductive land, don't have access to water. 90% of water resources are in the monopoly control of the Israeli settlers. When they do allow them access they make them pay the equivalent of the price of oil or gas. This adds enormously to the costs of production of foodstuffs and thus to the price which ends up being uncompetitive with those charged by the settlers themselves. In this situation, such is the anger, the desire for revenge, the hatred towards those responsible for their economic condition and living standards that political radicalisation and nationalist revanchism pours out of every segment of the Palestinian petty bourgeoisie, flooding in streams out of the Gaza Strip and West Bank until it has become an uncontrollable river even for Arafat.

The local small and middling bourgeoisie don't accept the compromising

attitude of the PLO. They don't recognise Arafat as the representative of their interests nor do they accept the abandonment of the old PLO programme. They see the PLO as a treacherous political structure which has sold out the Palestinian cause for a morsel of land, useful perhaps for the big bourgeoisie but certainly not for them who have to daily submit to the oppression of the hated Zionist enemy. For them the old programme holds good; destruction of the state of Israel, reconquest of all Palestine, and a rejection of any negotiated agreement for a total solution by force. In contrast to the financial and commercial bourgeoisie which operates mainly abroad, their relationship with Israeli control, with the land, with the small manufacturing firms and with the labour force demands that they own their own territory, control resources and an available indigenous working class outside Israeli control. It is normal in such situations for radical organisations to exist which lend themselves better to the interpretation of petty bourgeois anger and economic interests.

Political radicalism, Islamic fundamentalism, the military approach and terrorism are nationalist insignias distinct from those of the "big" bourgeoisie. It is inevitable that the middle and small strata of the bourgeoisie form a thick broth in which they can gain a hold.

Fully representing these political tensions and economic aspirations, organisations like Hamas, the Tanzim, and Ezzedim al Kassam are the military components which fight in Palestine and for Palestine in a petty bourgeois nationalist vision which not only is opposed to the Zionist enemy but also against Arafat's PLO. They hope for the support of their own proletariat and that of the surrounding Arab countries, a hope which has been partially realised by exploiting the anger and the inhumane living conditions of the Palestinian masses.

Unemployment is chronic in both the occupied territories and those run by the PLO. 50% have no work, the others have seasonal jobs with contracts for 4-6 months, though some are for a few weeks or even days. On average a Pal-



estinian who works in a factory, for a transport firm or in agriculture expects to earn 30% less than an Israeli worker doing the same job. In order to be able to work s/he must have a work permit issued by the Israeli authorities which certifies that s/he has no links to any of the organisations which struggle for the liberation of Palestine. Generally hours of work are not regulated by contract and can vary from 8 hours to a maximum of 12-14 according to the needs of the firm. There are no welfare services. Employed and unemployed live in barrack blocks and in the refugee camps, without services and drinking water. Drains, where they exist, are open to the sky. Illness is normal and health care non-existent. The lucky ones have houses and those who have running water feel the need to thank Allah five times a day, every day, for every moment snatched from hunger and despair.

In such conditions, the recruitment of the proletariat and the sub-proletariat by the Islamic fundamentalist petty bourgeoisie is almost automatic. The illusion of fighting to live a better life under an indigenous bourgeoisie, which speaks the same language and which grasps the same flag, is strong and inevitable when there is nothing and no-one capable of denouncing the class limitations of such support or of producing a political alternative.

Besides the weight of submitting to Israeli mini-imperialism, the political tragedy of the Palestinian proletariat is the false choice it faces between the two bourgeois nationalist options. Arafat's PLO uses the anger and despair of the masses to play the negotiating card in the name of a future state under the control of the financial and commercial interests of the "big" bourgeoisie. The Islamic fundamentalists demand sacrifices from the masses in the name of a radical nationalism which would change the juridical and geographic status of Palestine. This would allow the petty and middle bourgeoisie to organise their own production better but not change by one iota the exploitation or the living conditions of the workers and unemployed. A hypothetical Palestinian state, either in the PLO or Hamas version, would only strengthen the

bourgeoisie. It would breathe life into the corrupt tertiarisation of the state administration, already scandalously begun in the autonomous zone. For the Palestinian proletariat, however, unemployment would continue as usual. The same necessity to emigrate to Israel or some other state in the area would remain in order to scrape together a miserable wage in the very same conditions of exploitation as today if not worse. This poverty-stricken bourgeoisie has neither the time nor the ambition to allow a neo-state to develop the productive forces, to unify the internal market and to allow a few crumbs from all this to its proletariat. The only possible option in the era of globalised markets is that of finding and conquering the labour market. Productive activity is displaced from the centre towards the periphery where the cost of labour is low or very low. The mass of dispossessed moves from the periphery to the centre chasing the often vain mirage of any kind of job at any wage. The usual poverty and desperation is all that is on offer and it certainly will not be the Palestinian bourgeoisie who will overturn the course of history.

The problem therefore is to rescue the Palestinian proletariat from the Caudine yoke of Israel and the attraction of both Palestinian bourgeois factions. We're not talking about an immediate and improbable revolutionary solution as too many elements — from the party to a minimum of class consciousness — are missing, but that the experience of a struggle fought with weapons and with loss of life doesn't exhaust itself in one of the many nationalist episodes without at least sowing the seeds of a revival of revolutionary class consciousness. And because these conditions don't really exist, the first subjective premises of a future revolutionary situation have to be created. The certain fact is that we will not get near the revolution if all that exists are calls for the Palestinian masses to fight against the state of Israel. This is simply a dirty trick to lead them back to nationalism without actually saying so. It is an underhand way of following a bourgeois programme without mentioning it or, worse still, it is a deliberate attempt to make nationalism the only pursuable goal in the current situation.

The struggle against the Israeli state, against the exploitation it perpetrates, has to base itself on an attempt to link itself with the proletariat there. This means more than stressing the community of class interests in the different and separate national realities but also a common struggle against capital and the bourgeois unity of the respective nationalisms. At the same time the perspective of distinguishing between the different class interests of the "big" and small to medium bourgeoisie has to be shunned. Acquiring class consciousness, even embryonically, cannot be achieved through support for any of the bourgeois programmes which can only achieve their aims by means of the sacrifices of the proletariat in arms. Only by beginning to pose the idea of class against class, and of the incompatibility of following the same strategy as the bourgeoisie and thus the necessity of taking opposite paths, can class consciousness be reached. If this seed isn't sown there will be no harvest in the form of a revived revolutionary class. Instead the door will be opened to all kinds of nationalism. This will reinforce the bourgeoisie's domination over the proletariat without even posing the conditions in which today's weapon of criticism transforms itself into tomorrow's criticism of weapons against nationalist bourgeois plans.

Another element in the growth of revolutionary consciousness which needs emphasising is the diaspora which the Palestinian proletariat still lives in. Of the 6 million which make up the Palestinian population almost 4 million live, work and survive in other Middle Eastern countries. They find a welcome in Egypt and Saudi Arabia but also in Oman and Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Lebanon. In this social reality their position is next to that of the workers and unemployed of the area. If the nationalism, which currently has captured them and drags them in the wake of the bourgeoisie, was denounced for what it is; and the communist programme began to peep out once again in that southern latitude, it would favour the beginning of revolutionary consciousness and the formation of the first groups of the class vanguard. These would function

# BOLIVIA: The Rebellion Continues

*We are publishing a further text translated from the work of Bureau sympathisers in South America. Regular readers will already have seen articles by these comrades on Brazil, Ecuador, and Colombia in virtually every issue since RP13 [see list on p17. of this issue]. This article deals with the resistance to the government of Hugo Banzer which is attempting to carry out the*

*policies of the USA which would create even more barbarism and poverty in the region. It is a story typical of our time, intertwining the themes of rapacious imperialism and globalisation of capitalism. What makes it different is the heroic and spontaneous resistance of the local population ...*

## The revolt of the masses

A few months ago, during a meeting of the ten most important capitalist enterprises of the United States and Europe, under the auspices of CITIBANK, the President of Bolivia, Hugo Banzer took up the challenge to deepen and accelerate the changes demanded by the multinationals. He sent unmistakable signals to

international capital that in his country they are taking measures to perfect the legal and regulatory framework which will ensure clear rules for investors, "whose presence", according to Banzer's speech to that meeting, "we wish to motivate and grow". Amongst these signals are to be found

*the new organisation of Executive Power, the Stock Exchange Law, the completion of the processes of capitalisation and privatisation of public enterprises, the Concessions for the construction of the Road System and Public Works Law, the Insurance Law, the Popular Property and Credit Law, the Water Law and the Administrative Procedures Law.*

The first consequence of these policies has been the uprising of the masses. The general uprising began in the city of Cochabamba. It has spread to Chapare and the high valley with blockades and demonstrations, finally becoming strong on the altiplano and in the capital, La Paz. The proclamation of the state of siege by the Banzer government has not stopped those who have risen in revolt, who remain solid in their efforts to reverse the projects of international capital. The revolt of the Latin American slaves has, therefore, no reason to stop. Today it has acquired the character of a social hurricane which is moving in many directions.

In spite of, and in contrast to, the lack of development of the local capital's productive forces, in Bolivia the masses have shown themselves to possess a level of consciousness in advance of that of workers of other countries in the region. This phenomenon is explained as much by the fact that the penetration of bourgeois ideology is still only at the initial stages,

(in fact opposed to the egotistical ideology of consumerism and the market which capital tries to implant, there survives, based on an enormous surplus population which is incapable of being integrated into the formal economy, variations of culture and thought of the tribal and peasant community where co-operation and strong collective bonds of solidarity still exist), as by Bolivia's constituting part of the weak link of the imperialist chain towards which international capitalism is directing the sharp and extreme consequences of its crisis.

The events over the last two years in capitalism's periphery where the effects are more dramatic and immediate, show that the economic crisis tends to transform itself into political crisis. The first episodes of such a transformation were given life in Asia, then they became endemic in Latin America. Bourgeois expectations, jubilantly proclaimed following the Russian collapse, today suffer under the harsh criticism of history.

Although the media haven't reported it, the mass movement in Bolivia has clearly shown its qualitative superiority over the "Ecuadorian" "Peruvian" and "Colombian" revolts. Their demands express both the immediate interests of the most badly-hit sectors of the working class with slogans which encompass the whole of the class. On the one hand their demands flow from their concrete situation and as a reaction to privatisations, without subordinating themselves to the national movement (as is the case in Colombia, Ecuador and Perú); on the other hand, unity and co-ordination have been achieved in the struggle to defeat the policy of the bosses and the government. Whilst the peasants basically demand the "total" annulment

## Palestine

*Continued from previous page*

as political vehicles across the entire area. The slogan is to favour the birth of small communist vanguards on Palestinian soil against the ruling nationalism, of exporting it to other countries in the region through the Palestinian proletariat themselves, and to seek links with other proletarian vanguards. Promoting the birth and growth of them is today the only course for communists. To minimise this task, to support by whatever name (whether a historically obsolete call for self-determination of peoples, through an equally antiquated support for economic and political "progress" or because in the absence of a revolutionary party that is all there is to do) means falling into the trap of bourgeois nationalism. It means to choose one side in an imperialist war and, above all, to give up creating the conditions for the future revolutionary vanguard which will never be born through spontaneous germination, nor even less from the biblical export of a rib of the bourgeoisie which at the most will thank us and then carry on with its own way of exploitation and oppression.

**Fabio Damen**



of the Waters Law and an end to the eradication of the coca leaf, the popular Co-ordinator has as its principal demand the withdrawal of the contract to transnational enterprise "Tunari Waters", the elimination of law 2,029 relating to the water regime, and the ownership of communal lands. As for the teachers, they have opted for wage rises. Despite the tendency to unify the struggle of all exploited sectors, the support of the dispossessed urban

population for the movement is precarious. Although in certain aspects a growing polarisation of the masses can be seen, the poor of the cities, who suffer a terrible lack of provisions due to agricultural blockades could turn to reaction, and be used by their enemies. It has even been suggested that the majority of the urban sector workers are against the mobilisation. The danger of nationalism amongst the indigenous peoples also persists. In

their anxiety for social and cultural redemption they harbour the romantic hope of obtaining historic revenge by returning to the past. In the event of this happening, they will under pressure to break the mass united front, won in struggle, on which rests the possibility of at least partially overcoming the bourgeoisie's policies. On the other hand there is the reactionary and racist spirit of the middle class, which limits itself to taking out its social frustrations on the rebels, demanding a "firm hand" from the government to end the "Indian" outburst.

### Self-organisation of the struggle

The masses cannot express themselves nor organise via the democratic organs or the State. Their dynamic and the degree of mobilisation achieved do

not fit into the corporate and unionist structures of today. They tend to go beyond these forms to create struggle organisations which unite the greatest number of sectors under a common flag. In this way the unleashing of the class struggle questions all the bourgeoisie's mechanisms for mediation between the subordinate classes and the State. Rather than individual members of the class dissolving into the political abstract "citizen", the struggle bonds them together, making them conscious of their class interests. Attracted by the necessity of fighting for their common interests, the masses advance through self organisation and direct action without allowing any sort of "vanguard" or state mechanism to replace their actions. They use the assembly system. Their delegates are directly elected. For example, during negotiations with governmental authority they obey the mandate conferred by the popular assemblies or town councils. To guarantee their autonomy, they use representatives which are revocable at any moment and answer to mass meetings, which demonstrate their sovereignty, giving themselves the right to repudiate any attempt to do away with their ability to reject the conclusions stemming from the rounds of negotiation with a government they consider alien to their interests. In many cases they have even adopted the features of organs of political power by boycotting Banzer's official orders in order to issue and have carried out their own counter-measures.

The capacity of the traditional channels to control the mass movement is limited by the fact that there is nothing to divert the current demands. Nevertheless the "cocalero" conflict, with its dangers and opportunities, weighs heavily on the current scene of social conflict. The coca problem is connected to the search for new ways of life by the masses who have become surplus to requirements, facing the impossibility of integration within the service economy due to the local features of capital accumulation. The destiny of the coca rebellion — which exploded following the colossal disaster of "alternative" crops of pineapples and bananas which were supposed to replace the coca plantations — allows the plantation day workers, the poor

## Publications

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*CWO Pamphlet No. 1* [Out of print]

**Russia 1917**

*CWO Pamphlet No. 2* £2

**Platform of the Committee of Intesa 1925**

*CWO Pamphlet No. 3* £2

peasants and the indigenous communities to express themselves independently of the narcotic dealing lumpen-bourgeoisie, and fight for their own interests alongside the other exploited. This in turn depends on the political disposition of the urban proletariat, and a communist current arising amongst them.

Both the rebellion of the poor of the countryside, as well as the official policy dictated by the IMF and the USA, demonstrate the incompatibility between capitalism — whose market declares the “alternative” products as well as their producers to be superfluous — and the survival of the masses. Before deciding to negotiate, Banzer and his government were forced to understand the impotence of the armed forces in suffocating the rebellion. Following the directives of the U.S. Embassy, they limited the scope of the negotiations by announcing there would be no increase for the teachers, and that the eradication of the coca plantations and the construction of barracks in Chapare (against which the cocaleros rose up) is “not negotiable”. This means Bolivia is suffering the impact of imperialism’s regional plan, conceived and financed by the USA to monopolise the drugs business and impose its version of economic globalisation, which means the suffocation of the workers condemned to pay for its crisis.

### A history of resistance

The memory of previous struggle has stimulated the worker’s cunning. Faced with the surge of the rural workers and the impact of the effects of the crisis, eventually the mining and industrial proletariat must take the lead in the movement. In 1952, in a politically extraordinary situation on a world level, during which Trotskyism was at the head of the social movement, the miners defeated the army and founded the COB as an expression of its revolutionary offensive<sup>1</sup>. In 1970 there was a tremendous upsurge which culminated in the Popular Assembly. In 1979 there was a general strike which united the workers, peasants and members of the indigenous communities of the entire territory. In March 1985 the miners oc-

cupied the city of La Paz. The sum of these struggles has shown that only the proletariat, inspired by a communist programme, can socially emancipate the peasant and indigenous masses tied to the land owners, the bourgeoisie the State and the money-lenders. Due to its class character, the Democratic State cannot do this. In fact the two groups controlling it, the local bourgeoisie and the landowners, are simply an appendage of imperialism and the metropolitan bourgeoisie. Both have long since been transformed, — through their connection with mining capital, the establishment of the plantation system to exploit wage labour, the use of the income acquired by the State and the financial system — into another fraction of the world bourgeoisie united in a single front against all the exploited.

In some aspects the Bolivian case repeats that of Ecuador, Perú and Colombia. As in those countries — where the bankruptcy of traditional politics is explicit — the incapacity to stem the movement via the usual mechanisms of the parties and the fiasco of forceful means, has forced the bourgeoisie to call upon the institutions of civil society — apparently “neutral” and “above classes” — to contain the masses and get them to return to the fold. In Bolivia, for example, thanks to the mediation of the Church, it was possible to convince the cocaleros, the Coordinadora del Agua de Cochabamba<sup>2</sup> and the teachers to engage in “dialogue” with the government. The only — but very important — exception are the peasants of Cutce. Their psychology is resistant to the priests — who are mortally hated in the indigenous communities — and their needs are too urgent to postpone in exchange for an illusion. On the other hand, the failure of the traditional populist parties to gather the masses and the inability of the State to hold onto the reins of authority — faced with the masses who feel they can stand no more — is inspiring the bourgeoisie to create a left “alternative” which can contain the exploited. There is no reason to be surprised that the dreams today harboured by the right, will tomorrow very likely be materialised by the left. In Europe this is already happening. All these questions determine

the uprising which today puts in centre place, in a sharp manner, the question of the political strategy of the masses. However, the first thing that needs be stated is that, despite their rebellion, they lack reference points to formulate a line of action and a historical perspective which can allow them to substitute the old order of things for a new one. As in all previous situations, mentioned above, today’s reflects a revolutionary dynamic which has not succeeded in crystallising itself in the dictatorship of the proletariat due to the lack of a proletarian party equipped with the programme, the strategy and the tactical leadership to overthrow the bourgeoisie and establish proletarian power. The balance of the rich historical experience of the Bolivian proletariat proves once more that the spontaneous dynamic of the masses, to the extent that it ends up in independent organs of workers’ power, is a necessary, but insufficient condition for revolutionary triumph. It is necessary that communist policies, and the communist programme, are adopted. The other requirement is the constitution of an International which links the action of the local proletariat with that of the working class and its political organisation all over the world.

JAM

### Notes

1. But Trotskyism also led them to their defeat. See our newly published pamphlet *Trotsky, Trotskyism, Trotskyists* p.26

2. Water Coordinating Committee for Cochabamba



# Update on the International Bureau

Regular readers of our press will know that the CWO is part of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party (IBRP) which aims to prepare the political groundwork for the formation of the future world party of the proletariat. In the latest edition of the Bureau's periodical, Internationalist Communist, we report on the progress made by the Bureau last year, notably the consolidation of IBRP supporters in North and South America. We are now pleased to be able to announce that the Bureau's political presence in France has been revived by a group of comrades who share our platform and perspectives. They have taken up the task of working to establish a political nucleus in their area which will become a viable section of the IBRP in its own right. An essential part of this task is the establishment of a regular publication to bring our message and its theoretical framework to a wider political audience. Thus the comrades have entitled the journal they intend to produce twice-yearly, *Bilan et Perspectives*, or Balance Sheet and Perspectives. The first issue is now available from:

***Bilan et Perspectives***  
**BP 378**  
**75626 PARIS CEDEX 13**

(e mail: [bilan.perspectives@laposte.net](mailto:bilan.perspectives@laposte.net))

## Workers!

Today we have come onto the Kiev streets and squares to celebrate the anniversary of the Russian Revolution. In 1917 the working class had the real possibility of making a large step towards a socialist future. This revolution was proletarian, but then the Bolsheviks didn't succeed to keep this line as:

The revolutionary attempts in Germany (1919-1923) failed and Russia remained isolated with its productive apparatus destroyed and the economy substantially still based on capitalist relationships. The Party found itself managing an isolated State where the Soviets had lost their most experienced and conscious workers in the Civil war. That's why it went on to take the side of the counter-revolution.

One of the main lessons of the Russian experience is that even the most class conscious party cannot maintain a revolution in isolation from the soviets (or similar mass organs of the

working class). The soviets are the expression of working class political power (the dictatorship of the proletariat) and their decline and marginalization from political life in Russia symbolised the strangling of the infant soviet state by the capitalist counter-revolution. The power that remained in the hands of the Bolshevik commissars as they became isolated from an exhausted and decimated working class was the power of a capitalist state.

In the future world revolution the international party must aim to lead the class movement exclusively through the mass class organs which it encourages to come into being. However, there are no formal guarantees of victory and the revolutionary party cannot tie its hands in advance by erecting mechanistic barriers based on the fear of defeat. Neither the party nor the soviets are in themselves insurance against counter-revolution. The only guarantee of victory is the class con-

sciousness of the working masses themselves.

On the next page we produce a translation of a leaflet from our comrades in France. Alongside these encouraging steps, there has also been a growing interest in the IBRP from around the world. In particular the political ferment which accompanied the collapse of the USSR is now leading to a growing number of correspondents from individuals and groups who are re-examining the basis of revolutionary Marxism and becoming more aware of the existence of the communist left tradition. Again, in the last issue of IC [no.19], we reported on the appearance of the group Radical Communists of the Ukraine which has announced its sympathy for the IBRP platform. We are publishing here a translation of the leaflet the RCU distributed in Kiev on the occasion of the anniversary of the Russian October Revolution. We received it too late for publication in the last RP but it is so plainly in the spirit and framework of what we defend as the lessons of the Russian Revolution that we present it to our readers as a poignant indication of how the flame of revolutionary Marxism has not been totally extinguished by over 60 years of state capitalism and Stalinist dictatorship.

sciousness of the working masses themselves.

These are the positions of our organization – Radical Communists of Ukraine (RCU). But we are not alone in the world. The International Bureau For Revolutionary Party (IBRP) is the organization which has already stood on these clear Marxist positions for a long time.

It has united class conscious workers from different countries. The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party aims to be the focus for coordination and unification of various 'national' organisations which have worked together and are in agreement about the platform and programme for revolution. It's the reason, why we, RCU, join IBRP positions.

If you agree with us – join us!

Long live the proletarian Revolution!

**Radical Communists of Ukraine**  
**7/11/00**

## The Struggle Against Pension Cuts in France

The employers' federation, MEDEF's, demands to the Jospin Government (which was ready to accept these demands) to cut the contributions of firms to the pensions fund threatened 15 million French workers with reduced pensions and the loss of the right to retire at 60. Hundreds of thousands of them struck on Thursday January 25th. On the 26th the employers

withdrew their demands for "more consultations with the unions". As our comrades in France make clear in the first leaflet they have issued together [translated and published below] this is a dangerous development and workers in France, as elsewhere should prepare for the unions to try to sell them a deal which will still cut their rights.

# A New Episode of Globalisation

Since the end of the post-war boom and the arrival of the crisis of capital accumulation in the 1970s the leaders of the main industrialised countries and their multinationals have put in place the policy of "globalisation". By this we mean the huge concentration of capital in which 5 or 6 industrial-financial centres control 75% of world production. This allows them to spread the manufacture of parts anywhere they

like and assemble them wherever it suits them. The volume of finance capital has swollen to the point where its daily flows around the world are vastly greater than value of commodities and services exchanged. One of the stakes for which the capitalists are playing is the attempt to re-establish a rate of profit acceptable to the bosses through cutting costs. To put it bluntly raising the rate of exploitation of workers by lowering real wages via the

this domain each bourgeoisie, each government works to its own rhythm depending on local circumstances and the resistance of the classes involved. Amongst the industrialised countries Britain and the USA are advancing quickly, France, Germany and Japan more slowly.

### A New Episode of Struggle between Bosses and Unions

For several months now the bosses, unions and "the workers" have been negotiating about the pension system in France. Their roles are well-defined. The MEDEF is the "baddie" or realistic one, in the name of world competition for asking for their payments to be lowered. On the face of it the different unions with their subtly different opinions represent the "goodies", those who have to work to get a bit of the cake. The government waits in the wings watching negotiations. All claim to represent the interests of France.

And they do! The parties involved are working to make French capitalism cheaper, increasing capital's profit margins, delivering social peace and favouring French firms.

Not one of these "social partners" represents the workers, including nowadays the unions.

### A New Episode of Class Struggle

However it is the workers who first feel these attacks. It is we who face lower wages, benefits, and worse working and living

## Bilan & Perspectives



Bolchéviques à Moscou, 1917

Le Marxisme du XXI<sup>ème</sup> siècle  
Le Moyen-Orient au Bord du Gouffre  
La Classe Ouvrière face aux Attaques de la Bourgeoisie  
Vers la «Nouvelle Internationale»  
Un Grand Renégat à la Queue de Paon, Léon Trotsky  
7 novembre 2000 à Kiev

n° 1, automne 2000

3€  
20 FL, 120 FB, 5 FS



## New Pamphlet from the CWO

**Trotsky, Trotskyism, Trotskyists**

£2 (including postage) from the CWO address (see inside front cover)

The Russian Revolution of 1917 was the only occasion in history when the working class took the reins of power into its own hands. In the form of the soviet or workers council, a directly elected and recallable body, the Russian workers had discovered the political form by which the working class as a whole could run society. However as Rosa Luxemburg wrote at the time "the question of socialism could only be posed in Russia, it could not be solved there". Isolation and imperialist invasion destroyed the high hopes of the Russian proletariat. The soviets became empty shells and the Bolshevik Party became the state. Capitalist relations were never overturned and the adoption of NEP in 1921 signalled the recognition that state capitalism was the outcome of the revolution. Internationally the counter-revolution confirmed its hold with the failure of the March Action in Germany while the Communist International (set up in 1919) to spread world revolution had begun to degen-

erate. The Third Comintern Congress began a process of abandonment of the world revolution when it adopted the policy of united fronts with the same Social Democratic leaders who had murdered Luxemburg, Leibknecht and hundreds of other revolutionary workers. Contrary to Trotskyist mythology it was the Communist Left (above all in the Communist Party of Italy) who fought longest and clearest against this degeneration. It is partly to correct this historical injustice that we have produced this pamphlet.

Perhaps, though, the worst sin of Trotsky and Trotskyism was its distortion of Marxism to claim that the USSR was a workers' state. That Trotsky qualified it as "degenerated" did nothing to mitigate the total breach with Marxist analysis. Trotsky insisted that Stalin's USSR was "a proletarian state" because

*The nationalisation of the land, the means of industrial production, transport and exchange, together with the monopoly of foreign trade constitute the basis of the Soviet social structure. Through these relations, established by the proletarian revolution, the nature*

*of the Soviet Union as a proletarian state is for us basically defined."*

*The Revolution Betrayed, 1936, p235*

Trotsky failed to see that the USSR had all the main characteristics of the capitalist mode of production. Wage labour, exploitation, alienation of the surplus value created by workers by a class which decided how it was to be disposed (whether we call it the bureaucracy or the *nomenklatura* or whatever) even an internal market, all existed in the USSR. But for Trotsky capital could only be capital if it was in private hands. Yet in the era of monopoly capitalism Engels had already warned that

*the transformation into joint-stock companies or into state ownership does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces.*

Anti-Dühring, p.329

Today in the USA (see articles in this issue) the huge corporations collectively use state power to minimise their monopoly risks whilst maximising their profits but no-one would argue they are socialist.

Trotsky in the end came up with a total nonsense which said that the relations of production in the USSR were basically socialist but the political system

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**French Leaflet****A New Episode of Globalisation**

Continued from previous page

conditions after every "victorious" agreement. The bourgeoisie knows how to defend itself in an uncompromising fashion (as the struggles of the haulage bosses showed). They know that the class struggle did not fade away with the Twentieth Century.

It is therefore up to us to organise ourselves to defend our working and living conditions from the attacks of

the bosses. This means going beyond the divisions between nationalities and races, between unemployed and temporary workers and the different laws which are forced on us. Through general assemblies and actions which take into account, not the interest of the country or firm but that of our own class, which is a global class we can strengthen our unity. Beyond that we

will be able to hold this society which has nothing to offer but different types of poverty to account.

We, militants of *Bilan et Perspectives* have come together to take part in the formation of a World Communist party with the objective of establishing a communist society. We are sympathisers of the International Bureau of the Revolutionary Party.

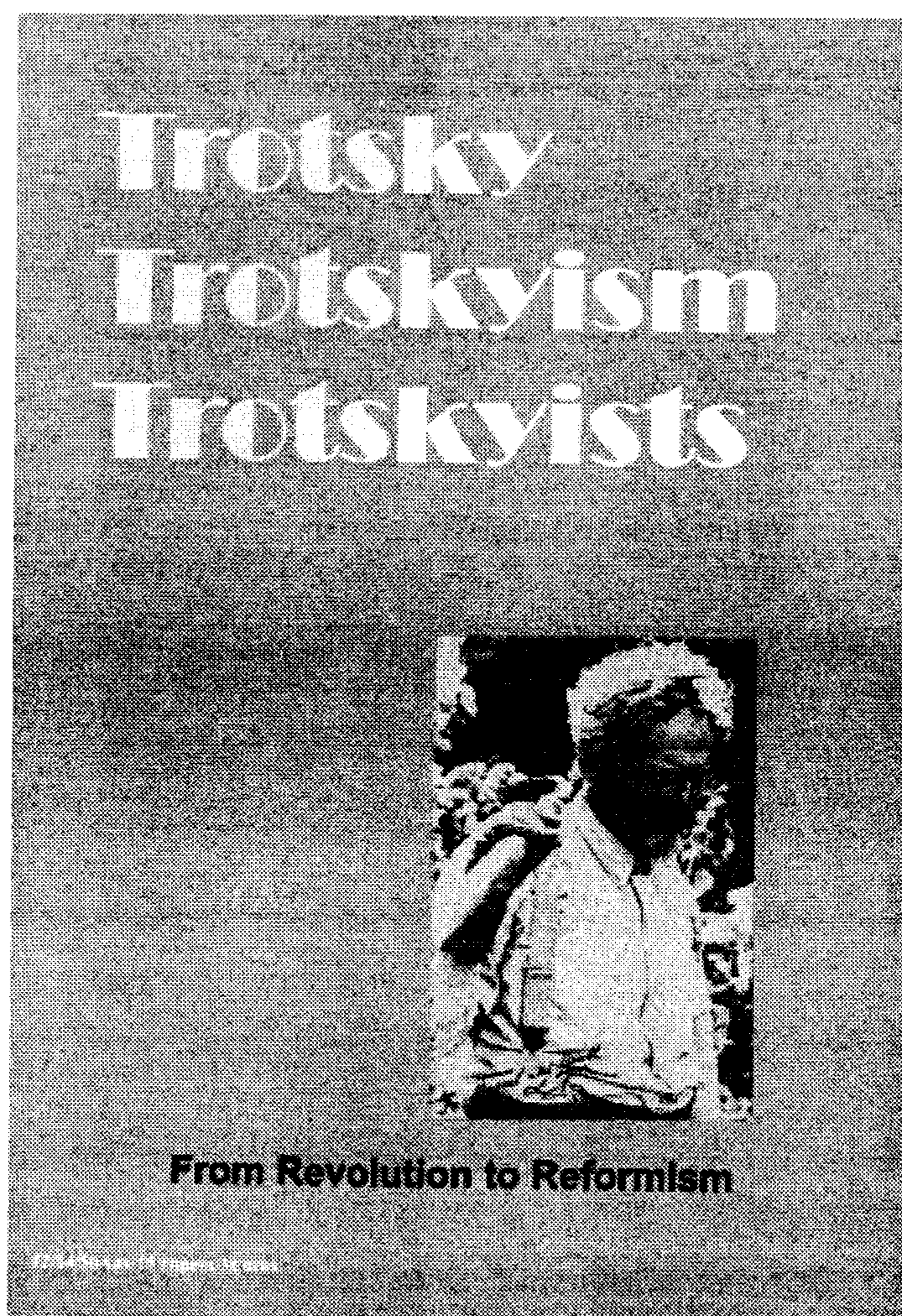
was not. In Marxism the superstructure of society is determined by its economic base and Trotsky's formulae simply ran roughshod over this. What Trotsky really meant was that the USSR was his idea of socialism. All it needed was a political change (Trotsky instead of Stalin at the head) and a bit of democratic liberalisation to make it a proper workers state. In short, the vision of "socialism" Trotsky presented was one of Stalinism with a more human face. How human is a matter of debate since Trotsky himself had called in 1920 for the working class to be put under military discipline so that they could be better kept under control. This was the "degenerated workers' state" theory as presented by Trotsky.

Trotsky himself fell a martyr to Stalinism in 1940 so did not live to see his followers baptising the fruits of the victory of Soviet imperialism — when Russia seized the Baltic and East European states after the war — as "deformed workers states". Here they took the master's method one step further. If "preserving state property in the means of production in the USSR" was the most important outcome of the Second World War (as Trotsky stated in his last work *The USSR in War*, 1939) then the export of the Stalinist system must therefore be supported by Trotskyists as another step in the march towards socialism. So Trotskyism continued to present socialism as simply nationalisation (with a bit of workers control — but not too much). Even those Trotskyists who abandoned the "degenerated workers' state" idea, such as Tony Cliff's SWP, still argued that "the law of value" did not operate in the Soviet Union. But it was the operation of the law of value which brought about the collapse of the Soviet Union. If it had been a socialist economy with resources allocated as to need how do we explain the economic stagnation (which was visible to all from 1982 on)? The declining profits and productivity in the USSR were due to a lack of investment and resources which went back to Khrushchev's era. Under a state capitalist command economy with a totalitarian police structure this could be disguised but it could not be avoided. When the post-war boom came to an end in the West it was obvi-

ous in high inflation and unemployment in the 1970's and 1980's. The USSR's version was underemployment and runaway inflation as the state printed money to try to fund its deficit.

Were there any logic in human affairs the collapse of the USSR should have made Trotskyism die too. However whilst some have renounced the working class for "more important issues" like ecology, others have used the ever widening gap between us and our exploiters to campaign for nationalisation as a step towards socialism. The first time they did this it was tragedy now we have farce. Nationalisation was used after the Second World War to pay off private capitalist debt and then rationalise the industries taken over to make them profitable again or to at least use them to service the rest of the economy by providing as cheap an infrastructure as possible. Workers in coal mining industries were sacked in their thousands. In the 1980s with the new crisis of the end of a cycle of accumulation privatisation (i.e. disposing

of state assets at knock down prices in order to generate capital) had exactly the same effect. This has given our Trotskyists the opportunity to once again say that state capitalism is better than private capitalism. The exploitative process however is the same for workers under either form. This is not a historical or theoretical quibble. To overthrow capitalism we need to know what it is and this the Trotskyists patently do not. This is why we unpick their origins and theory in this pamphlet to demonstrate that Trotskyism is ultra-left all right — the ultra-left of the capitalist class.





# 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 societies 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!

## **Battaglia Comunista 9 January 2001**

from the PCInt address (inside back cover)

Includes articles on

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**La bomba a il Manifesto**

**Sognando California**

**Bilan et Perspectives**

**Una Assemblea Operaia nate male e finita  
peggio**

## **Public Meetings**

**Newcastle  
Is Trotskyism  
Revolutionary?  
2pm, Saturday 24th  
March,  
Seminar Room,  
Newcastle City  
Library,  
John Dobson Street.**

**Sheffield  
Should Socialists Take  
Part in Capitalist  
Elections?  
7:30pm, Wednesday  
14th March,  
SADACCA,  
The Wicker.**

## **Erratum**

The text on the German Communist Left in RP 19 "A Bitter Harvest", contains an error which is reproduced on the cover and in the index of the magazine. The March Action was stated as occurring in 1923 whereas in fact it occurred in 1921. We apologise to our readers for this error.

# **Internationalist Communist**

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